

“Todos Son Bienvenidos” - All Are Welcome at St. Matthew’s, Sacramento



“Todos Son Bienvenidos.” “All Are Welcome,” proclaims a new bilingual sign at the Mission at St. Matthew’s Episcopal Church in the Arden Arcade area of Sacramento County.

The sign invites visitors to Spanish, English, and bilingual Eucharists led by the Rev. Canon Anne Arthur, the Rev. Rik Rasmussen, and the Rev. Lucretia Jevne. On the first, second, and fourth Sundays of each month, the Mission at St. Matthew’s offers the Eucharist in Spanish 9:00 AM, followed by the Eucharist or lay-led Morning Prayer in English at 10:30 AM. On the third Sundays, Spanish-speaking and English-speaking congregants join together for a spirited bilingual Eucharist, followed by the monthly Mission Committee meeting.



The Rev. Canon Arthur, who also serves as Associate and Canon Pastor at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in downtown Sacramento, learned Spanish as a child in Puerto Rico. Arthur often plays guitar to accompany Spanish-language songs. Serving a small congregation has both challenges and rewards, she notes: “We miss members of our congregation when they travel for the harvest season, but it’s also wonderful when families reunite and come to church.”

The Rev. Rasmussen, who also serves as Associate at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in midtown Sacramento, learned Spanish later in life. Rasmussen plays music from an electronic hymnal donated by St. Paul’s. “I don’t usually preach in Spanish,” says

Rasmussen, “but I do preside in Spanish. I especially love the sense of unity in diversity at our bilingual Eucharist.”

Gatherings are commonly small and intimate, with an uncommon blend of traditional liturgy and informal conversation. The Mission congregation worships in the parish hall, having partnered with River City Food Bank to repurpose the former sanctuary as a food distribution center for the Arden Arcade area. While adults enjoy refreshments, children gather for Godly Play under the gentle gaze of the Virgin of Guadalupe. At the intergenerational Maundy Thursday service, the tables were beautifully arranged for an agape meal after the footwashing: abundantly spread with Mexican and Mediterranean foods, graced with candles and rosemary, the scene evoked both family potluck and Passover meal.



More than just a gesture, the sign at Edison Avenue and Bell Street reflects a longstanding commitment to ministry with people of Latinx heritage. St. Matthew’s began to offer worship services in Spanish in September 2002, as the Rev. (Mother) Toni Stuart and parishioners opened their doors to growing numbers of Spanish speakers in the neighborhood. A year later, the Rev. Teri Gilmore joined the clergy staff and served for three years as Curate for Latino Ministries. The first bilingual Eucharist was held in August 2005, at a farewell service for Rev. Gilmore. The Rev. Lucinda Ashby, who was recently elected Bishop of the Diocese of El Camino Real, led both Spanish and bilingual services from 2006 to 2011.



The Center at St. Matthew’s, a ministry of the Episcopal Diocese of Northern California, also serves the Latinx community. In addition to the food bank, the Center partners with Highlands Community Charter Schools to offer English language and literacy classes for adults alongside an onsite preschool for their children. “Many of the adult students are refugees from Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq,” says Jim Schaal, Executive Director of the Center at St. Matthew’s, “but a substantial number are recent arrivals from Mexico and Central America.” Schaal, who learned the language as a missionary kid in Argentina, often greets Latinx visitors in Spanish. “At the elementary school across the street,” Schaal notes, “nearly 30% of students are of Latinx heritage, and more than 16% are English language learners whose first language is Spanish.”

The diocesan Committee on Intercultural Ministries (CIM) recently convened a working group in which representatives from St. Matthew’s, St. Paul’s in Healdsburg, and Grace in St. Helena joined other leaders interested in Latinx ministries. “There are so many ways to engage in ministry with Latinx people,” says the Rev. Lucretia Jevne, president

of Episcopal Community Services of Northern California (ECS). Jevne, who also serves as Priest in Partnership at St. Brigid of Kildare Episcopal Church in Rio Vista, leads English services at St. Matthew's once a month. "I don't speak much Spanish," Jevne says, "but through CIM, ECS, and places like St. Matthew's, anyone can support Latinx ministries in our diocese."

Thank you to Mr. Jim Schaal for contributing this article.