

Report for Diocesan Convention
March 7, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As Canon Missioner for Hispanic Ministry, I have overall responsibility for Hispanic ministry in the Diocese. One aspect of this ministry is working with English-speaking congregations that have an interest in starting a Hispanic ministry in their existing church. The planting of a ministry in Spanish in an established English-speaking congregation requires the involvement of many people including the Clergy, Vestry, and Members of the Congregation, and requires integrated leadership, ministry activities, and shared decision making.

All Saints, Lakewood

All Saints was the first congregation to work with me starting in 2012. Currently, All Saints has their Spanish service at 12:30pm with an average attendance is about 60 people. They have Sunday School every Sunday for the children. The Anglo and Hispanic members come together during major festivities. They have bilingual services throughout Holy Week and other Feast Days. All Saints is consistently flourishing, and members look forward to working and participating together.

St. Thomas, Red Bank

In 2013, I moved to St. Thomas. St. Thomas is located in an area where there are Hispanics and African Americans. Originally the church was located in an area predominantly of African Americans but in recent years the demographics have changed. This church is different from the other churches because it is serving two minority groups. This has advantages and disadvantages. An advantage is that both groups know what it is like to be marginalized. The disadvantages come when there are perceived insensitivities and cultural clash or a sense that people, financial and other resources are not being fairly distributed. The Spanish service is held at 11:45am with an average attendance of 40-50 and Sunday school is at 11am. Sunday School is for both the African American children and Hispanic children. The Hispanic community has Home services on Fridays at 7pm and Bible Study on Wednesday at 7pm. The Vestry is made up of 50% Hispanic and 50% African Americans to have equal power in decision making. The Hispanic community is planning fundraisers to raise money for upcoming events. Members come together during Feast Days such as Holy Week with a bilingual service at 10am. On April 28, 2019, Deacon Jose Luzardo was assigned to the Latino community and Deacon Clive Sang was assigned to be the Deacon Administrator of St. Thomas as a whole. St. Thomas has remained a strong community and continues to thrive even as challenges are being addressed in creative ways

Christ Church, Toms River

Christ Church is a congregation that initiated this ministry with me in 2014 and has successfully established a Spanish-speaking congregation. This parish is a model for the Diocese of New Jersey in what it means to be a fully bilingual parish. The Spanish service is held at noon and the attendance ranges from 40-60 people. Although the service is in Spanish, they welcome anyone to attend because the bulletin is in English and Spanish so all can follow along. They have Sunday School for the children and are preparing children for First Holy Communion and Confirmation. Shared power is necessary for a church with two languages and they have Hispanic members on the Vestry. Hispanic members pledge and help support the church financially. Deacon Jose Cantos leads Bible studies, formation classes and a once-a-month Marriage Alpha Course in Spanish to strengthen marriages. They also have a meal the first Sunday of every month at the rectory and this helps everyone get to know each other better. Christ Church has many shared activities. Their most recent one was an All Parish Birthday party. Both groups respect each other's customs and culture when they come together. They honestly enjoy each other and have come to love one another.

Deacon Jose Cantos and Phyllis Long have been a true blessing for this community. They work hard to unite both groups and to bring them together more and more. This work takes time and they have done it beautifully and with patience.

Trinity Church, Asbury Park

Trinity Church has a history of accepting and embracing those who are discriminated against. We began this ministry in 2018, during a difficult time for our Hispanic brothers and sisters. Trinity is a place where they feel safe and welcome, and so our Hispanic community is developing and growing. The service in Spanish is at Noon on Sundays. I am available to the community of Trinity Church throughout the week for pastoral care, education and home services. We do home services at parishioners' homes and invite people from the larger Asbury Park community. This attracts more Hispanic people to the church. As they join the church, they become full members of Trinity Church. Roberto Rojas and Felipe Huamani are Lay Ministers for the Spanish service, and they are in the process of being recognized by the Diocese for their previous ordinations in other denominations. They are a great help and the Hispanic people see other leaders besides me. This will help when I transition out of Trinity. The Hispanic ministry in this church is a work in progress and we ask for your prayers as we develop and continue to grow.

St. John's, Elizabeth

St. John's is a community that caught my attention in a special way. In Elizabeth the population is 64% Latino/Hispanic. After the passing of my dear friend the Rev. Canon Servio Moscoso, I was worried about the Latinos in this area. However, on October 6, 2019, Bishop Stokes assigned Deacon Jorge Antonelli to be in charge of this community. St. John's has their Spanish service at 11:30am. I know that this community is in great hands and I pray for Deacon Jorge and the community during this transition.

St. Mary's, Keyport

For this last year, we have been working with the people of St. Mary's to see if we could get a ministry in Spanish going because Keyport has a large Latino presence. It did not work out in time, and the Bishop needed to close the Church in December 2019. I met with Bishop Stokes on February 4, 2020 along with Canon Phyllis Jones, Fr. Juan Monge, and Ciro de los Reyes about trying something different with the Hispanic community of Keyport. We will host a dinner on February 27th with the Hispanic people of the community to hear their opinions and ideas. We plan to initiate a service in Spanish on February 29th and to hold a service in Spanish once a month. Please keep this in your prayers as it evolves. May the Holy Spirit lead us in the right direction.

Hispanic Coalition

The Hispanic Coalition is comprised of congregations who are currently working with me, or who have worked with me in the past. It is chaired by the Rev. Canon Joan Mason. We gather to share ideas and challenges, and to encourage one another in this important ministry. It is also a resource for congregations exploring a new ministry in Spanish. We met most recently on February 3, 2020, and will meet quarterly (next June 1, 2020).

The Hispanic Commission

The Hispanic Commission is a long standing Commission of the Diocese of New Jersey. It is currently co-chaired by the Rev. Canon Pedro Guzman and Sebastian Vasquez. The Commission works with all Spanish-speaking congregations in the Diocese, including the ones recently planted in English-speaking congregations. They are a resource to these Spanish-speaking congregations, providing training, formation, and spiritual development at the congregational level, the diocesan level, and at the wider Episcopal Church level (for example, encouraging people to attend "Nuevo Amanecer" Conference at Kanuga Conference Center in NC, May 12-15, 2020).

Future Projects/Vision

In November 2018, 29 people at the Clergy Conference expressed interest in opening their church doors to the Hispanic community. Since then, the Hispanic Coalition has developed a Protocol for English-speaking congregations who are interested in beginning ministry in Spanish. We have held two training days on the Protocol. We are currently working with 7 English-speaking congregations who are actively seeking to establish ministry in Spanish (Bound Brook, Bridgeton, Edison, Lambertville, Pleasantville, South River, and Woodbridge). If you are interested in learning more about starting ministry in Spanish in your congregation, please contact me.

As the Canon Missioner for Hispanic Ministries in the Diocese, it is my desire to assist all churches that are interested in beginning a ministry in Spanish. Please contact me with your questions. Each church setting is different. Let's explore the questions and see how we might move forward in your church community. With God's guidance, this ministry will continue to grow across the Diocese. I thank God, I thank Bishop Stokes, and I thank all of you for the privilege and opportunity to serve the Diocese of New Jersey as the Canon Missioner for Hispanic Ministries.

The Rev. Canon Ramon Ubiera Torres+
Canon Missioner for Hispanic Ministries Diocese of New Jersey