

La Iglesia Fundadora de la Comunidad Metropolitana los Angeles Spring Congregational Report 2023, submitted by Rev. Alejandro Escoto

As the Associate Pastor of Founders Metropolitan Community Church (FMCC) and the Pastor of La Iglesia Fundadora de la Comunidad Metropolitana (ICMF), it is a blessing to share with you our achievements and obstacles since our last Congregational Meeting, in the Spring of 2022:

May 2022 – Workshop presenter for the 2022 National Latinx Conference on HIV/HCV/SUD

- I am an annual speaker at Professor Mark Abelson's undergraduate LGBT sociology classes at Cal State Northridge and Cal State Los Angeles. The topic: ***Homosexuality and the intersection of religion/spirituality***. And the students are in for a treat!
- I was blessed to have been referred by Altamed and was subsequently asked to present a workshop at the 2022 National Latinx Conference on HIV. I was proud to represent ICM Fundadora – Founders MCC with a workshop that was entitled ***“Our Spiritual Narrative within the Latinx Experience”***. I was informed that my workshop was one of the most well attended and highly received.

June 2022 – Celebrating Pride

- Pride kept us busy as we made our presence known at several pride events. It was a blessing to see our diversity as we marched and staffed the booths at a couple of the pride festivals. Many who watched us march by shouted in affirmation of God's love for all people.
- We are also extremely grateful to Lulu Madrid and Toña Luna who recreated a new and more dynamic tshirt design and had them printed. If you didn't get yours last year, we have T-shirts available for sale, just let Rev. Alejandro know and he'll be more than happy to get you one.

June 2022 - 30+ Years of Sharing God's Unconditional Love

- June of 2022 ushered in, rather quietly, the 30th Anniversary of ICM Fundadora. As we slowly began to step out of the pandemic restrictions, we were not completely ready to step into our normal way of celebrating. However, that didn't stop us from taking a glimpse into what the future could have in store for us. We continue to serve as a model for many MCC churches seeking to have a Spanish speaking service and I continue to be sought out as a voice for our Hispanic/Latinx Community especially within our Latin American churches.

September 2022 – Return of Reflexiones Espiritual

- After a summer hiatus, the Spanish Bible Study, Reflexiones Espirituales (Spiritual Reflections) returned with a new format: “Chill and Relaxed” as topics were discussed in an “I” format, allowing participants to reflect inwardly and express outwardly.

October 2022

- ICM Fundadora once again created an **“Ofrenda”** (an altar) for ***Día de los Muertos*** (Day of the Dead) in honor of those who have gone before us and are now part of the Great Cloud of Witnesses. It was a blessing to see how other members of our church, such as Bayanihan, participated and assisted in decorating. A larger Ofrenda was created on the church’s front steps while a smaller Ofrenda, with a repeating video that displayed photos on a television screen, was created for the Sanctuary. The display of such cultural diversity continues to remind us that such displays bring together many other cultures.
- We are extremely grateful to Cesar Maldonado who created wonderful designs for the Ofrendas and Andy Larios who assisted him.

December 2022

Our Lady of Guadalupe, Christmas Services

- We held another incredible event in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe, on Monday evening, December 12, 2022. Mariachi ArcoIris was in the house and as years prior, blessed us with their beautiful music as we honored our Blessed Mother. The altar for this very special celebration was placed upon the back altar.
- We are grateful to Cesar Maldonado and other volunteers who assisted in preparing and arranging the Altar as well as Larry Rodriguez who donated the fragrant roses.
- Christmas Eve was celebrated later in the evening, as is culturally the custom for many Hispanic/Latinx households. The service was live, as was Rev. Alejandro, with the music prerecorded by Voces de Alabanza.

January 2023 – El Milagroso Cristo Negro de Esquipulas – The Miraculous Black Christ

- The Celebratory Mass in honor of The Miraculous Black Christ of Esquipulas was held on January 15, 2023 (the actual feast day) during the 1:30pm mass and included the participation of the **Marimba Maya Migrantes de Los Angeles**. Last year we had to cancel their participation due to an increase in Covid cases.
- We are grateful for Benigno DeMatta, Andy Larios, and other volunteers who created this year’s Altar in honor of **El Milagroso Cristo Negro de Esquipulas**.

Lent and Holy Week

- Ash Wednesday began with Rev. Keith and I offering **“Ashes to Go”** at the corner Prospect and Vermont (in front of Starbucks) and ended the evening with a **Multicultural Ash Wednesday service**.
- It’s important of note that Rev. Keith, myself, and the Creative Worship Team make every effort to make multicultural services as relevant as possible. Challenging? Yes! Possible? Always!
- Lent was incredibly powerful as the church as a whole, focused on Vulnerability.

- **Holy Thursday** was observed with a virtual multicultural service that included members and friends of MCC UCC in the Valley. **Good Friday** was met with the traditional Carrying of the Cross by Rev. Keith and Rev. Alejandro. And that evening we had a multicultural meditative service.
- Palm Sunday was an incredible day for ICM Fundadora as we celebrated the return of **“La Pasión Contemporánea - 2023”** after a 3-year hiatus. **“La Pasión Contemporánea 2023”** took a 2000+ year story and modernize it through the use of contemporary dress styles and adapted scenes that were a reflection of some of the world’s troubles. I believe we were able to recreate the story in such a way that the Passion of Jesus the Christ could be perceived in our world today. Words cannot express the gratitude that continues to fill my heart for all those that made this presentation possible: Reyna M., Cesar M., Alvaro R., Fernando, Benigno D., Martin C., Oyuki G., Gregory T., Brandon J., Peter K., Antonio C., Raul, Maria G., Jose M., Antonio G., Antonia L., Lulu M., Ramiro V..
- Gratitude is expressed for Fernando, a recent attendee, and whose husband, Raul, recently joined Voces de Alabanza, for his creative talent in putting up the tomb within a matter of hours. Other volunteers included: Oyuki G., Benjamin V., Benigno D.
- **Easter Sunday was a Drag at the 1:30 PM Spanish Service.** Literally! Alexis, Rev. Alejandro’s estranged twin sister, was in the house and shared her support for our Community, addressing the importance of rising up and speaking up against hateful legislation. She even gave an Easter message! And for unknown reasons, Rev. Alejandro never showed up for the 1:30 PM service. Although Alexis did say, “I don’t have patience for pastors who walk slow and talk even slower. So, I left him at the Drag March.” That could explain why she showed up in his car, without him.

The Creative Worship Team

- The Creative Worship Team, comprised of Larry Rodriguez, Sandra Contreras, Lucia Chappelle, Norm Cox, Peter Kirkpatrick (a previous member), Louis Ramirez (recent addition), Rev. Keith Mazingo, and me, continues to collaborate and develop wonderful Sunday content for both the 10am and 1:30pm services. We also assist with the editing of and preparation of previously recorded videos and Sunday’s worship elements.
- Members of the Creative Worship Team and other volunteers continue to listen to the bimonthly County of Los Angeles Health Department’s Best Practices for Houses of Worship.

Volunteers

- I continue to supervise and assist Corena Montoya as she empowers a group of incredibly talented and dedicated volunteers who offer their time, talent, and treasures for the 1:30pm service and special events. These volunteers are:

- Corena Montoya, volunteer extraordinaire (handles certain administrative projects for both the 10am and the 1:30pm service as well as the church in general; she assists in the creation and development of the bulletins for the 10am and 1:30pm services, sets-up for the 1:30pm, breaks down and assures everything is closed in the sanctuary after the 1:30pm Sunday service, and so much more...
- Sandra Contreras (cameras and transmission of Sunday services),
- Karina Briceño (a recent addition in operating the cameras and transmission)
- Andy Larios (house sound and hospitality),
- Cesar Maldonado (reader, decorations, and hospitality),
- Benigno DeMatta (reader, decorations, and hospitality),
- Antonio Martinez (Board of Directors - treasurer),
- Maria Antonietta Luna (Choir member, Voces de Alabanza and assists with the compilation of the PowerPoint for the 1:30pm service).
- Peter Kirkpatrick, director of “**Voces de Alabanza**” (“**Voices of Praise**” Spanish speaking choir), continues to provide excellent worship music for the Spanish speaking 1:30pm Sunday Mass. In addition to this, he continues to organize and rotate the members of **Voces de Alabanza** so each one could contribute to the variety and diversity of the Weekly Spanish Sunday Service. The members of **Voces de Alabanza** are dedicated to the mission, vision, and purpose of FMCC-ICMF. These members are:
 - Edgar Cruz
 - Jose Gonzalez
 - Maria Eugenia Zamora Gutierrez
 - Maria Antonieta Luna
 - Lulu Madrid
 - Corena Montoya
 - David Solis
 - Ramiro Vasquez
 - Peter Kirkpatrick, Director, **Voces de Alabanza**

Weekly Programming

- We continue to hold our virtual Spanish Speaking Bible Study via Facebook Chat with co-facilitators Reyna Montoya and Louie Jimenez. We will be resuming a hybrid group, an in house gathering as well as virtual, towards the end of summer.
- I continue to pray the Holy Rosary, bilingually, every Thursday at 7:30pm on Facebook Live.

Important Acknowledgments:

Gratitude to **Peter Kirkpatrick** for his faithfulness in maintaining the unity, high morale, and talent within the Spanish choir, **Voces de Alabanza**. It’s a joy working with Peter and seeing his spiritual creative side express itself.

Gratitude to **Reyna Montoya** whose love for our church motivates her to empower others to volunteer in a variety of capacities.

Gratitude to the core group of volunteers who continue to show up faithfully every Sunday so that the 1:30 pm Mass could be broadcast with minimal interruptions.

Thank you to everyone who continues to support us and I'm excited as we continue to journey forward, inspired by the Holy Spirit who ignites our faith, hope, and love.

Rev. Alejandro