

The Center at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church

A Community Service Ministry of the Episcopal Diocese of Northern California

2021 Report to Diocesan Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Northern California

Jim Schaal, Executive Director

Introduction

The Center at St. Matthew's is an innovative community service ministry of the Episcopal Diocese of Northern California. The Center serves neighbors in need in the Arden Arcade area of Sacramento County, one of the most poverty-stricken communities in the state's capital region that is also home to the largest community of Afghan refugees in the nation. On its campus, the Center hosts a large food bank and an adult school offering language and literacy education to refugees and immigrants. Beyond its campus, the Center's leaders are active in collaborative efforts to provide local resources for the homeless and to promote Latino/Hispanic ministries across the diocese. At the spiritual heart of the Center is the Mission at St. Matthew's, a bilingual congregation offering Episcopal worship, fellowship, and pastoral care in both Spanish and English.

Persevering through the Second Year of Pandemic

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Center and its partner programs have persevered in our shared mission. River City Food Bank at St. Matthew's has remained open without interruption, doubling its capacity and re-inventing its operations to feed the hungry. Highlands Community Charter School re-opened for in-person instruction on our campus in May 2021. In January and February 2021, Arden Arcade HART (Homeless Assistance Resource Team) organized eight local faith communities to prepare and deliver meals to our unhoused neighbors in their encampments—a successful interfaith initiative that has now become a permanent year-round program. The Mission at St. Matthew's has grown in virtual community through bilingual worship and fellowship on Facebook Live and Zoom.

Lift Up Hearts: The Mission at St. Matthew's

The Mission at St. Matthew's continues to offer weekly online worship via Facebook Live, enriched by weekly fellowship hours on Zoom and monthly shared home communion. Since January 2021, the Mission congregation and its Phoenix Chapter of the Daughters of the King have distributed meals to the homeless through Arden Arcade HART. In June 2021, the Mission bid a fond farewell to the Rev. Canon Anne Arthur. We continue to be blessed by the volunteer ministry of the Rev. Grant Bakewell (Priest Associate), the Very Rev. Rik Rasmussen (Priest Associate), and the Rev. Babette Haggenjos (Vocational Deacon).

Todos Son Bienvenidos: Diocesan Task Force for Latino/Hispanic Ministries

As home to one of just two congregations in our diocese that currently offer bilingual worship in Spanish and English, the Center at St. Matthew's seeks to foster wider outreach to people of Latinx heritage and culture. Jim Schaal (Executive Director of the Center at St. Matthew's) and the Rev. Grant Bakewell are active on the diocesan Task Force for Latino/Hispanic Ministries, a working group of the Commission for Intercultural Ministries. In 2021, Jim Schaal updated the Congregational Toolkit for El Día de Los Muertos that he

wrote in 2020, while the Rev. Grant Bakewell contributed to the new Congregational Toolkit for Via Crucis. We encourage parishes to avail themselves of these resources.

Feed the Hungry: River City Food Bank at St. Matthew's

After doubling its capacity and moving its food distributions outdoors in 2020, River City Food Bank now serves about 700 households per week at St. Matthew's. Following 19 months of outdoor food distribution, the food bank was able to move its distributions back indoors in October 2021. The food bank feeds a wide variety of guests including the working poor, senior citizens, persons with disabilities, homeless neighbors, and a large number of Afghan refugees as well as recent immigrants from other countries.

Welcome the Refugee: Highlands Community Charter School at St. Matthew's

After 14 months of distance learning supplemented by outdoor outreach events, Highlands Community Charter School re-opened for in-person instruction in May 2021. In preparation for re-opening, the Center at St. Matthew's worked closely with Highlands to renovate two underutilized rooms for use as a new classroom and a new welcome office. The adult language and literacy programs immediately filled to capacity, making St. Matthew's the fastest-growing of Highlands' nearly 40 campuses in the Sacramento region and the leading campus for service to Afghan refugees.

Welcome the Refugee: Diocesan Afghan Refugee Response

Strategically located in the largest Afghan community in the nation, the Center at St. Matthew's has served Afghan newcomers for several years through its partnerships with Highlands Community Charter School and River City Food Bank. Following the 2021 crisis in Afghanistan, the Center has become a focus of diocesan response to the plight of new Afghan evacuees. Several leaders from St. Matthew's serve on the diocesan Afghan response team, and in September 2021 the Center co-hosted a legal assistance clinic for Afghans seeking to re-unite their families under the Humanitarian Parolee program.

Shelter the Homeless: Arden Arcade HART (Homeless Assistance Resource Team)

Launched at the Center at St. Matthew's in January 2019, Arden Arcade HART continues to grow as a nonprofit community organization, joining nine other HART organization in Sacramento County. CeeCee Coleman (Warden of the Mission at St. Matthew's and a Homeless Navigator with Sacramento Self-Help Housing) serves as President. In 2021, Jim Schaal co-organized eight congregations for a new initiative to distribute meals to the homeless in their encampments, while the Rev. Babette Haggenjos coordinated the Mission's meal distribution team.

Thanks to Our Partner Parishes

We are grateful to all the parishes that have provided financial support or shared clergy with the Center and the Mission in 2021: All Saints Episcopal Church, Sacramento; Episcopal Church of St. Martin, Davis; St. Augustine of Canterbury Episcopal Church, Rocklin; St. John's Episcopal Church, Roseville; St. Michael's Episcopal Church, Carmichael, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Sacramento; and Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, Sacramento. To learn more about becoming a partner parish, please email us at:

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