

The Canticle

The newsletter of Santa Maria Urban Ministry, San Jose, CA March 2010

SMUM Honors Volunteers

Santa Maria Urban Ministry could not operate without them—our wonderful volunteers. As an expression of appreciation, a special luncheon honors them each year, and again this year the lunch was held in the parish hall at Trinity Cathedral in downtown San Jose on Saturday, February 28.



SMUM volunteers in Trinity Cathedral's parish hall

Along with SMUM's Executive Director the Rev. Lawrence Robles and cook extraordinaire Carmen Robles, the SMUM Board of Directors were hosts for the event. After a delicious lunch, Lawrence Robles and Board member John Plocher reviewed some procedures and future training events for volunteers and presented each one with a certificate of appreciation and a SMUM t-shirt.



Lawrence Robles and Board member John Plocher present a certificate to STUDIO volunteer Joshua

About 50 volunteers attended, including food warehouse workers, ABC Playtime teachers, STUDIO staff, Welcome Desk clerks, and

Volunteer Income Tax Assistance experts, some of whom came to the luncheon after working all morning at SMUM. Thank you, thank you, to all our volunteers!

Answered Prayers

SMUM has received many generous gifts since the last issue of The Canticle. We are grateful for the following:

- In the first two months of this year, 44 different **individual donors** have made contributions, and 12 of these are "friends"—people who give to SMUM on a monthly basis.
- The generous owners and patrons of **Britannia Arms**, the British pub on Almaden Expressway, once again provided bicycles and gifts for SMUM children—25 bicycles and 250 gifts this time.
- Gale Hazen of **Holy Spirit** Campbell again organized a crew of helpers, and they made 850 stockings for the children of SMUM. (Yes, eight hundred and fifty!)
- **St. Francis'** Willow Glen contributed \$500 and also provided Christmas baskets for six SMUM families, with Safeway and Target gift cards and toys.
- **St. Thomas** Sunnyvale contributed \$488 in December.
- Three churches support SMUM *every month*: the **Episcopal Church in Almaden**, **St. Andrew's** Saratoga, and **Trinity Cathedral** San Jose. A combined total of about \$600 per month, these gifts are especially helpful in developing and monitoring our budgets.

All of these gifts are deeply appreciated.

Wanted: Wider Representation on the SMUM Board of Directors

The SMUM Board of Directors currently consists of seven members representing these Episcopal churches:

- St. Andrew's Saratoga
- St. Jude's Cupertino
- St. Francis' Willow Glen
- St. Mark's Santa Clara

In addition, the Board includes these non-voting members:

- the Rev. David Breuer of St. Luke's Los Gatos, Convener of the Board
- Joanna Shreve of St. Timothy's Mountain View, Treasurer,
- Edy Unthank of St. Stephen's in the Field San Jose, part-time grant writer, and
- the Rev. Lawrence Robles, Executive Director of SMUM.



SMUM Board members at the thank-you luncheon for volunteers

The Board meets at SMUM on the second Thursday night of each month, beginning at 7:00 PM and almost always ending by 8:10 PM. The agenda and reports are sent out in advance so that meeting time is focused and productive.

Note that only four churches have voting members, and we would like to have more groups represented. What about your church or organization? If you—or someone you know—would like to represent your group or organization on the Board, please contact Lawrence Robles.

SMUM Volunteers Provide Valuable Assistance in Preparing Income Tax Returns

For 15 years, SMUM has been a “partner agency” with the Internal Revenue Service in the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program. VITA started with few volunteers, none of whom spoke Spanish. They completed work with paper and calculators. According to Lewis Pollard, team leader for the SMUM VITA program, the program has grown for many reasons, not the least of which was the computer lab at SMUM which has allowed for producing accurate returns with e-file.

Pollard also cites the core of capable volunteers who return each year as a major factor for the program's growth.

The program is open to community members who qualify as low income, elderly, disabled, or limited English speaking.

Over the last five years, many VITA sites in the area have closed. As this happened, SMUM's program grew from a Saturday morning program to assistance being offered also on Monday and Wednesday evening.

This year, VITA has 18 IRS certified volunteer tax preparers, 9 speak Spanish, 4 speak Vietnamese, and one speaks Japanese. During February there were 177 hours of volunteer time to see 122 clients (plus informally helping a few others). As a result of their work claims for over \$135,000 in refunds were filed for people in the local community

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A Client's Story: Dee's Generosity

Dee* is a client of the Emergency Food Pantry at SMUM. She suffers from a variety of medical problems, and most result from her long-term battle with the effects of diabetes. Most months, Dee and her husband receive aid from SMUM once per month. About one month ago, she was in need of medication, yet she did not have sufficient financial resources to pay for the vital insulin she needed. So, SMUM was able to provide assistance through the Director's discretionary fund. This fund is limited, yet, when used, there is no expectation that the client needs to repay the money.

After regaining her health, in about two weeks, Dee and her husband Stan* returned to SMUM to work as volunteers. They were both able to work a complete day in the food pantry warehouse, serving our clients. Dee stated, "It was a pleasure to give back to the community. I was so grateful for your help that I wanted to repay the ministry. Thank you for the chance to serve others."

Most of our community volunteers have received from this ministry, and they often take the opportunity to give back. Even though it is not a prerequisite for receiving services, offering our clients a chance to give back helps them feel responsible and self-sufficient.

Any agency can give food to the poor; it is not really that difficult to organize a way of meeting the basic needs of people in our neighborhood. Yet building trusting relationships in our part of the world does have its challenges. We thank God that SMUM has a safe, trusting environment where people are able to receive support while on their journey of life.

Finally, a big THANK YOU goes to our individual, grant, and local church donors. Without your real financial help, we cannot pass blessings along to others like Dee.

* Names have been changed to honor confidentiality.

Please use the self-addressed envelope to help support SMUM. Remember—no donation is too large or too small, and all donations are greatly appreciated.

Rev. Lawrence A. Robles
Executive Director

Volunteers from St. Jude's Help Organize and Clean SMUM

On Saturday, March 12, a crew of volunteers from St. Jude's Cupertino came to SMUM, ready to work. Soon they were all over the facility, doing everything from scrubbing the floor in the ABC Playtime classroom.



to helping to keep the food warehouse items organized and ready for distribution.



Thank you, St. Jude's!

The Rev. Robles's New Ministry at Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe

Ed. Note: Several months ago, Bishop Mary Gray-Reeves and other representatives of the Diocese of El Camino Real asked the Rev. Lawrence Robles, SMUM's Executive Director, if he would consider a temporary, part-time assignment as priest for the Guadalupe parish at Trinity Cathedral, which was without a priest and had experienced problems in leadership. He felt called to respond to this need but did not want to give up his role at SMUM. The SMUM Board of Directors agreed to support him by hiring Alfonso Mendez as a part-time administrative assistant to handle some of SMUM's office work, and the Rev. Robles began his work at Guadalupe in October. In the article below, he reports on it.

What would you feel, were you suddenly told that you are no longer a victim? Now, what feelings would come up if you were encouraged to change your self-perception, no longer to live as one who is "oppressed"? No longer are you told to blame others for your oppression, or your personal circumstances, or your family situation. And, now you are encouraged to seek and find refuge and support in Jesus Christ as a citizen in his communion and to live in his kingdom. What feelings would you encounter?

The toil and true work of the ministry of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe (NS-Guadalupe: Our Lady of Guadalupe) has been to create a safe place of worship, discipleship, and citizenship. (Actually, there are several "ships" in ministry: we may add fellowship, leadership, and stewardship, among others.) And this work demands time; time to build a trusting friendly environment; time to organize and implement a trusting vision; time to encourage a trusting mission; time to build strong faithful leadership; and time to build trusting relationships.

Over the past few months, our mission at NS-Guadalupe has been to live, trust, and encourage a new ministry grounded in our shared vision:

"To live as Citizens in the Communion of Jesus Christ."

Our hope and prayers are that we begin a new journey in which we "bear much fruit and live as committed disciples of Jesus to the glory of God" (St. John 15.8). In the ministry we are working to learn from the past, create and live in a new present, while dedicating our future to God's kingdom for his glory.

What does this mean in concrete terms of ministry? It means being faithful in worship. We have recruited new acolytes (most from SMUM's STUDIO program), re-established music ministry through Francisco "Paco" Bahena (Guadalupe's long-time guitarist/song leader), and developed new worship missals and song booklets. NS-Guadalupe has recruited new leadership for service on the vestry, and 60 percent of vestry members are new since last October. NS-Guadalupe leadership has actively sought to worship and fellowship in cooperation and coordination with Trinity Cathedral parish by celebrating Christmas and Ash Wednesday services together and planning a bilingual service for the Great Easter Vigil. NS-Guadalupe continues to offer discipleship through its provision of catechism for the Great Communion. Finally, pastoral needs are being met by the development of a pastoral visitation schedule, implemented through Lent.

So, as in all ministry, the work at NS-Guadalupe never ends. We are all experiencing a new sense of discovery, growth and yes, even joy. We are joyful because God's house is safe once again. And, we are joyful because we continue to greet and meet new families and newcomers every Sunday. Again, our hope and prayers are that we begin a new journey in which we "bear much fruit and live as committed disciples of Jesus to the glory of God" through our new vision: "To live as Citizens in the Communion of Jesus Christ."

The Rev. Lawrence A. Robles,
Priest-in-Charge