

**The Team Ministry of St. David's, St. Simeon's,
and Misión San Juan Bautista in the South Bronx
seek their next Priest-in-Charge.**

The Position:

This unique opportunity will require a priest with a love of urban ministry and the ability to manage a diversity of projects and people with enthusiasm and respect.

An extroverted and organized person who can multi-task and preach the Good News in a compelling way is what they seek. They dream of more community engagement and outreach, while they long to follow Jesus and his teachings. Their next priest should be someone who loves to be out in the community, because serving the community, especially the local youth, is an important value for all three of these congregations. At the same time, this priest must be able to connect pastorally with an aging population.

The three congregations blend African-American, Afro-Caribbean, and Latinx cultures, with a respect for their distinctiveness. The next Priest-in-Charge will not need to speak Spanish, as the congregation of Misión San Juan Bautista will have the opportunity to worship in their own language with the assistance of Fr. Mario Martinez. Fr. Martinez will report to the Priest-in-Charge in all matters related to his participation in the Team Ministry. The Team Ministry is supported by an administrator, Ms. Bea Price.

St. David's Church, where St. David's and St. Simeon's were worshipping in person before the pandemic, is an historic church in the Black community, having been founded in 1895 by the Rev. Dr. Edward Clifton, a Black priest, in response to the needs of the Black population of Pullman porters, dining car waiters, and railway workers living in the area, who had no place to worship. Responding to local need has been a hallmark of the community since its founding, though the surrounding community has undergone many changes and struggles over the years.

The congregation of St. Simeon's also has a remarkable heritage having begun its life in a barn under the leadership of laity, and growing, by the early 20th century,

into a substantial congregation with their own church building, which stood about one mile northwest of St. David's. Unfortunately, over the years the building declined to such an extent that it had to be deconsecrated and demolished in 2003. But the congregation of St. Simeon's has remained undeterred and strong in faith, even as they have had a somewhat nomadic life for the last eighteen years. Since 2017, the congregation of St. Simeon's has been worshipping at St. David's Church, sharing clergy leadership under the Rev. Bertram Bennett, a faithful Christian, who was an innovative force for good in the neighborhoods of the South Bronx for forty years. Father Bennett retired in 2021.

The congregation of Misión San Juan Bautista have served the Latinx community of the South Bronx for many years. In that time, they have come to collaborate with their sister churches in the South Bronx, and have belonged to the Team Ministry since 2017. Together with the wardens of each of the three vestries, they belong to the South Bronx Inter-Parish Council, which meets regularly to strategize, develop and manage in-house and outreach programs and events.

Each of these congregations have been forged and tempered during the difficult decades when crime, high unemployment and urban blight, and rapid population decline often caused people to say, "the Bronx is on fire". However, the dedication of all these congregations means they have managed to stay an effective presence of the church in these poor communities, and their lights have not dimmed. They remain committed to Social Justice and Community Outreach. Though both St. Simeon's and Misión San Juan Bautista have lost the use of their original worship spaces over the years, their individual identities are strong, and they bring their varied gifts and experiences to the blessing of collaborative ministry. Youth programs, Senior programs, and lay-leadership development are still going strong. They are eager to commence language learning for the adults in their community. In addition, they desire to demonstrate good stewardship of natural resources to the community, actively address social injustices like homelessness, mental disorder and food insecurity. Already, one of their congregations is quite progressive with its openness and acceptance to the LGBTQ community.

The Position

This is a diocesan-supported position for Priest-in-Charge with a three year Letter of Agreement and option to renew. The leadership of all the congregations describe their communities as open and welcoming to anyone. Women and LGBTQ clergy are encouraged to apply. Health Benefits included. Housing not included (housing allowance).

What they say about themselves during the current COVID-19 crisis:

“Whenever a community dilemma arises, as Christians we always knew we had the physical capability of attending church worship services for solace and understanding. This pandemic managed to singlehandedly eradicate this practice. Despite this, we have learned to adapt and (we) have been forced to learn new strategies to navigate and still be relevant, albeit virtually.

Initially, our three congregations – Misión San Juan Bautista (MSJB), St. David’s (SDEC), and St. Simeon’s (SSEC) – held joint Sunday worship utilizing teleconference. Shortly after we managed to make the switch to ZOOM, which we mostly utilize today. Individually, each parish has (seen the return of) former members who had not been attending in person worship because of health, travel, or other familial obligations. The (limitations of ZOOM) do not seem to be a barrier; friendships and bonds were rekindled while we enjoyed worship services in this new fashion. The total average Sunday attendance has been approximately 55+ devices (connected); though we suspect that number to be skewed since we cannot accurately account for quantity within each household.

For the first few months all three congregations worshipped jointly but in respect of the differing cultures there are now two services. SDEC and SSEC meet at 10 am for their primarily English service in which some MSJB members assist with the Spanish reading of Lessons. Their primarily Spanish service is held at 11:30am via teleconference. Collectively we have seen more lay persons assume leadership roles, especially in worship. This Lent, we successfully sponsored lay led Stations of the Cross which was coupled with Prayers of the People.

We noticed amongst our parishioners that this pandemic was causing anxiety, fear, and depression; we needed an outlet where each person could be vulnerable, free, and open to pray and express in his or her native language. We experienced this during that time. Going forward we will be having lay led Evening

Prayer in conjunction with a bible study session. We were deliberate in our conversations on how this would manifest itself especially since we are without a priest in charge at this time.

Prior to this pandemic, we had been developing our youth community. We also realized that the youth could not be overlooked, so we were able to formulate a virtual youth program. This program encompasses community youth including the ones who had been attending regularly with their families. They meet twice a week and during those sessions they watch and discuss various movies which focus on personal life choices. In addition, they play games which provide an outlet for healthy competition.

The pandemic has brought trauma and decline to our congregations as well. MSJB has encountered the most deaths due to COVID. Their congregation's faith has been tested and I dare say it has come out the victor. MSJB proudly shares how they have benefited and demonstrate growth as members of Transfiguration Lutheran Church are now regular attendees. They continue to worship mainly in Spanish with Fr. Martinez. They have always been a spiritual community and this pandemic has only reinforced that; they draw strength from and care for each other. Even though MSJB is part of this collaborative team ministry, they are grateful to Rev. Theodora Brooks for the support and use of St. Margaret's (worship) space. They have been faced with limitations because they have had to share this space, but their spirit of togetherness keeps them.

SDEC, who has had the smallest congregation, now exhibits the greatest increase in attendance from persons who comprised their sick and shut-in list and persons who had moved away from the community. Their stalwart leader, Fr. Bennett, has now retired. This has been a blow for them mostly, an anticipated one, but one, nonetheless. Now they add to their building deterioration (which is a significant concern and will require the Diocese's intervention).

SSEC had been on its way toward congregational growth prior to the pandemic's inception. Graciously, we are maintaining but our balance can be tipped into an unfavorable position at any time. We too ponder our future as that we still have no building of our own.

All congregations report loss of financial support received through pledges and donations. Every Sunday we urge parishioners and attendees to please remember

Their Church in gift giving and upkeep of pledges; the mailing addresses are provided weekly on the bulletin. SSEC has opted to select one Saturday a month as pledge drop off and has instituted the use of ZELLE for online pledge receipt. Outreach to community has been nonexistent. SDEC has been unable to hold its annual Block, Halloween and Christmas Parties and its Seniors Program has come to a halt. All congregations have not been able to fundraise; almost impossible to do socially distanced. Lack of pastoral visitations has been particularly difficult especially for our seniors in nursing homes or rehabilitative centers. Like across our nation, deaths without the benefit of a prior priest's visit have been unimaginable. That human touch or knowledge that you will see someone's face will never be taken for granted again. At SSEC, we initiated a monthly rap session via teleconference in which we call in and simply check in with each other; it serves to replace our fellowship after service. We put it on hold during Lent, but we have plans to resume this season. For the most part, all congregations have done a remarkable job of keeping in contact with their members.

As our city moves forward toward possible new normalcy, many ugly and unfavorable truths have become blatantly obvious - we all need to do better. Long gone are the days of just showing up on Sunday mornings, singing to our heart's content, fellowshiping, and saying see you next week. How do we envision ourselves fulfilling not only our Diocese's mission but fulfilling our civic duties? Our team ministry has begun the process by acknowledging that we ought to be:

1. more mindful of LGBT communities
2. more mindful of social injustices / homelessness / mental health concerns
3. more considerate of food insufficiency/ insecurity
4. more mindful of the space we occupy / God's creation

LGBT presence and welcoming in our parishes; not just lip service. MSJB has demonstrated well its open and welcoming love. When (a parishioner's) partner died from COVID, her loss was deeply felt by the congregation. Attendance at the virtual memorial service spoke volumes. MSJB has surged ahead in its we are all one mentality because the congregation has unanimously elected someone of the LGBT community to serve on its vestry. (We) say this...to demonstrate their willingness to love unconditionally.

Prior to the pandemic, we had begun attempting to encourage our parishioners to enroll in courses which would assist in teaching how to recognize, assist, and facilitate persons exhibiting mental disorder. Homelessness, another of society's ills has increased in our neighborhoods exponentially. As a worship community, we aim to be more deliberate in working with appropriate agencies in giving of time, finances and whatever capacity is necessary. Vulnerable people are still struggling.

Reports inform us that one in five people in NYC is food insecure. While the pandemic has highlighted and further exacerbated inequalities in our society, it has also demonstrated that more help is needed.

When our environment suffers, God's people suffer too. It is imperative that we be more mindful with the huge varieties of waste we create daily. It is our obligation to teach our youth methods of waste reduction, recycle, reuse and love for this space in which we occupy. This spring our youth are planning to plant and care for tree seedlings. This project's aim is to help them learn about ecosystems and the valuable role trees play. We applied to receive seedlings from NY Dept. of Environmental Conservation; they will learn how to plant and care for them; a hands-on way to understand natural systems and observe their environment. The experience can help students make informed decisions about the conservation and use of natural resources.

All these issues take us out of our comfort zones; we have fears and insecurities about becoming involved and following through effectively, but nothing can come to fruition without a start. Looking forward to a better future together no matter the type of worship we may choose to have – in person, virtual, or hybrid.

All our futures are both tenuous and fearful but still we strive to maintain a relevant presence in our community with whatever means is available to us.”