

The Community of St. Martin
La Comunidad de San Martín
www.comunidaddesanmartin.org

1328 North "G" Street
San Bernardino, CA 92405
1-951-751-2456
cd000161@earthlink.net

Calle Marco Polo 2930
Fraccionamiento 18 de Marzo
C.P. 44960
Guadalajara, Jalisco, MEXICO
info@comunidaddesanmartin.org



The Community of St. Martin

The Community of St. Martin is a **spiritual space** that has grown out of the human services work of Central City Lutheran Mission. Incorporated in the State of California as an “apostolic and Catholic Church,” the Community of St. Martin is in the process of receiving its own 501-C-3 tax exempt status. With its own governing board and pastoral team, a bi-lingual Mass is celebrated Monday—Friday, with a Spanish Mass and English Mass celebrated on Sunday. The English Mass is small, with less than two dozen. The Spanish Mass generally has over 200 persons, reaching as many as 400 on festival Sundays.

The Community of St. Martin operates as an **ecumenical** space where the poor have assumed leadership in developing a rich spirituality linked to their day to day struggle for social justice and identity in the City of San Bernardino. Operating as an **independent worship space** not defined by the doctrine of any denomination, the lay and ordained leadership of the Community of San Martin have worked hard to develop education and formation programs that respond to the needs of the many children, youth, adults, families and single men who worship regularly at the Chapel of St. Martin. Baptisms, First Communions, Confirmations, weddings and Quinceñeras are celebrated regularly responding to the needs of the poor immigrants who come seeking spiritual guidance, but who cannot afford to pay for many of the services they seek.

The worship at the Community of St. Martin is a rich mixture of Mexican and Latino heritage, through the immigrant experience of young and old primarily from Mexico. Mexican festivals and saint days are celebrated. An altar to both the Virgen de Guadalupe and San Martin de Porres are dominant images in the chapel. Saints of importance line the shelves on the side of an old Lutheran sanctuary, where homeless men sleep during winter months, youth dance and neighborhood celebrations are held remembering Martin Luther King and Ceasar Chavez.

Imitating the model of the **Latin American Christian Base Community**, this expression of the *Popular Church*, reflects the work of hundreds of Latin American Christians during the last three decades who have sought to relate the Gospel to the daily struggles of the poor in their efforts to change systems and to survive in hostile environments. From the mountains of El Salvador, to the barrios of Honduras, to the indigenous lands of Guatemala, to the mountains of Bolivia and Peru, to the streets of the central city area of San Bernardino, poor Christians gather to worship, seek health care, eat, study and celebrate. For many of them there is no difference between the human services and the sacramental services as they seek a to complete the spiritual circle in their lives often divided by denominationalism and traditional piety.

The Community of St. Martin is experiencing growing pains and needs to turn to the ecumenical community for spiritual leadership to assist in sustaining what has been created. The Community of St. Martin seeks to establish **ecumenical partnerships** with communities of faith in the apostolic and Christian traditions. Persons to supply preach in a unique ecumenical and sacramental environment are needed. Persons to assist in the preparation of youth for

First Communion and Confirmation are needed. Persons are needed to prepare families for Baptism. Persons are needed to help celebrate festival and feast days.

But more importantly, unique ecumenical partnerships need to be created that can respect the integrity and unique nature of this Christian Base Community operating in San Bernardino. It is not to be “owned” or “controlled.” An ecumenical partnership is an invitation to be in solidarity with people, many of whom are undocumented, and to walk with them in their spiritual journey seeking the freedom of the Exodus and the blood of the Paschal Lamb for a new Life and spiritual moment.

The Taize community in France comes to mind as a universally recognized unique religious experience where spiritual and sacramental considerations have reached new levels in an effort to serve primarily youth, but many adults as well, in their search for the relevance of God in a mystical journey here on earth. In a much smaller and more humble expression, the Community of St. Martin is a local expression of ecumenical solidarity with the poor in their struggle to celebrate the mysteries of God in their lives and journeys.

The work of Dorothy Day and the “Catholic Worker” movement stands as a strong reminder of the combination of faith, mystery, resistance, spirituality and human solidarity with the poor. In some sense, the Community of St. Martin reflects this radical solidarity with the homeless, HIV+ homeless persons, the undocumented, persons with addictions, battered women, homeless youth, victims of foster care and others in our urban world too often on the edge, marginalized by traditional churches and social service agencies.

Partnership can mean many things. Alongside of the Community, an intentional living collective could be established, either by secular or religious men or women. A religious congregation could make a commitment to help provide spiritual and educational leadership to a functionally illiterate community of people. A team of ordained and lay leaders could be assigned to assist in worship and preparation for sacraments. The opportunities for partnership are endless and opportunities are great for entering into solidarity with a handful of the poor seeking religious strength and identity in their journey.

This “concept paper” is an invitation to join in a dialogical process that can lead to new options for understanding ecumenical partnerships in our city for a people in Diaspora. Traditional models of parish and congregation have not worked and will need to be stretched in response to the opportunities this small spiritual village represents.

At this point there are no questions of ownership for the Community of St. Martin. There are only questions of partnership and solidarity as we seek together to celebrate the mysteries of God with a people almost forgotten in our modern world. Displaced by a globalized economy, we need to respond as community of faith to the challenges of faith to give witness to the power of the crucified and risen Jesus the Christ.

Please consider this opportunity for dialogue.

The Rev. David J. Kalke
II Lent, March 8, 2009