Our Holy Family

The Blessing of Inclusive Catholicism in Austin, Texas

Rev. Dr. Jayme Mathias
Editor

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Preface

Hon. Rev. Dr. Jayme Mathias

Twelve is a significant number in the Judeo-Christian scriptures. There were 12 tribes of Israel (Gen. 49:28), symbolized by the 12 loaves of bread that were placed in the temple each week (Lev. 24:5-6) and by the 12 stones on the high priest's breastplate (Ex. 28:21). The bible contains 12 minor prophets, and Jesus possessed 12 initial apostles (Mk. 3:16-19, Mt. 10:2-4, Lk. 6:13-16). At the end of time, it was believed that Christ's bride would appear with a crown of twelve stars (Rev. 12:1), and those who are saved would number 12 times 12,000, or 144,000 people (Rev. 14:1-3). The heavenly Jerusalem was imagined to possess 12 pearly gates, to contain 12,000 square furlongs, and to be fortified with walls that were 12 times 12 (or 144) cubits high (Rev. 21:16-21). In the ancient world, the number 12 connoted completeness, and we find the number over 200 times in the scriptures!

You can imagine the joy we possess at Holy Family Catholic Church upon completing 12 years as the only inclusive Catholic community in Austin, Texas! For 12 years, we have sought to follow in the footsteps of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, helping all people to grow in their relationship with God and others.

This project has been a long time in the making: We began compiling the 100 stories for this work in late 2022, with the hope of sharing it for our 11th anniversary in March 2023. The act of bringing together so many stories, however, proved to be a formidable task, taking nearly two years, and perhaps it is providential that we are sharing this work during our 12th anniversary as a parish community.

We express our heartfelt gratitude to the many members of our parish family who shared memories and contributed stories to this work. We also thank Carlos Alonso and Daniel Winkler for their assistance in collecting and incorporating edits and preparing this work for publication.

May these stories inspire us to continue being the tremendously welcoming, loving and inclusive family that we are at Holy Family Catholic Church!

A History of Holy Family Catholic Church

Parishioners of Holy Family Catholic Church, the only inclusive Catholic community in our nation's eleventh-largest city, readily speak of the blessing that their church community is to them and to those they love. Those active in the community from its start in 2012 note how the early Holy Family community—like the early communities of the Apostles—was birthed by the Holy Spirit and immediately blessed with growth. From a more objective perspective, Holy Family was a schism within the increasingly right-leaning Roman Catholic Church, which, even in the early 21st century, continued to exclude large groups of faithful from its sacraments and ministries.

Most early parishioners at Holy Family previously self-identified as Roman Catholic, and many were formerly part of Cristo Rey Catholic Church, a long-marginalized Mexican and Mexican-American community whose history is largely documented in Father Jayme Mathias' 400-page work, *¡Viva Cristo Rey: An Oral History of the Roman Catholic Community of the Flats of Lower East Austin*. From 2006 to 2009, the good people of Cristo Rey suffered a less-than-pastoral pastor—a truly evil man, in the estimation of some—who labeled Mexican immigrants as "cockroaches" during a Sunday Mass, and who was known for chasing people from the confessional, often crying, if they lived with another person outside the sacrament of Marriage. After the pastor's untimely murder in Mexico, a truly gruesome event that inspired incredible compassion among the faithful, Bishop Gregory Aymond of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Austin, who did little to defend the community of Cristo Rey from the abuses of its former pastor, named a new pastor to bring healing to a now-divided community. Father Jayme Mathias, who first came to Cristo Rey as "Brother Jayme," a Conventual Franciscan friar in 1995, and who returned to the parish as a deacon and young priest in 2000 to 2006, stepped down from his duties as President of San Juan Diego Catholic High School, "The School That Works," and returned to the community he loved in 2009. Within days of the former pastor's murder, the community rallied 400 volunteers for a spring cleaning day, and two years later Cristo Rey was the

largest Spanish-language congregation in Austin, with 4,000 to 5,000 people weekly attending its nine regular Sunday Masses.

A significant event transpired in March 2010, when John Paul II's "Rottweiler"—the persecutor of liberal theologians and U.S. nuns, now known as Pope Benedict XVI—appointed to Texas' capital city Joe S. Vasquez, a conservative bishop with little chance of ever succeeding in a diocese larger than Austin. Shortly after his arrival, the novice bishop made local headlines for his less-than-compassionate expulsion from a local Roman Catholic parish of a Jewish community whose temple had burned in a fire. Cristo Rey would soon become the target of the bishop's next display of his willingness to side with monied, conservative factions within his diocese, rather than stand with women and the immigrant community of Austin. Under Father Jayme's leadership, Cristo Rey had invited U.S. Congressman Luis Gutierrez of Chicago to speak on comprehensive immigration reform at the church. Three days before the event, the bishop, through his vicar, Monsignor Michael Sis, demanded that the parish disinvite Gutierrez, due to the Roman Catholic congressman's public stance on women's reproductive health. For a number of disenchanted Catholics, this singular event tipped the scales for them, away from the Roman papacracy. It also signaled increasing conflict between Father Jayme's progressive, post-Vatican II stances and Vasquez's right-leaning tendencies to curry the favor of hierarchs and monied interests.

On June 1, 2011, after more than ten years of priestly ministry, Father Jayme took a sabbatical to complete his doctorate and his fourth graduate degree, and to discern what he would do now that he could no longer sing the "Mickey Mouse song" of the Roman Catholic Church. Then came the watershed event that would change the trajectory of Roman Catholicism in Central Texas and Inclusive Catholicism in the United States.

2012

In February 2012, Alberto García, a longtime Austin attorney and former judge who took well over 120,000 photos for *The Cristo Rey Herald* during Father Jayme's leadership of Cristo Rey Catholic Church, invited the former pastor to breakfast at Juan in a Million Mexican Restaurant in East Austin. Alberto shared the dream of his wife, Blanca, that Father Jayme might bring to Austin the American Catholic Church.

Father Jayme asked, "The…what?"

Alberto retrieved a tablet from his bag and pulled up the website of the American Catholic Church in the United States (ACCUS), an Inclusive Catholic jurisdiction under the leadership of Archbishop Lawrence Harms of Frederick, Maryland. Father Jayme's attention immediately went to the images on the website, which included photos of three former Conventual Franciscan friars—Father Christopher Bisett, Father Michael Zocholl and Father Jason Lody—with whom Father Jayme studied in the seminary. Father Jayme contacted Archbishop Harms, who summarized their 45-minute conversation in a single sentence: "It sounds like you're more American Catholic, than Roman Catholic." As it would turn out, many Roman Catholics in Central Texas were more "American"—or Inclusive—Catholic, than Roman Catholic, as well.

On Sunday, February 19, 2012, Father Jayme invited various neighbors and Cristo Rey parishioners to his home at 1614 Willow Street, to announce the next chapter in his life. The bilingual (English/Spanish) announcement for the event read:

> Dear Friends,
>
> I'm immensely enjoying this time of sabbatical, but the questions are becoming more frequent: "How long is your sabbatical?" And "what will you do when you're finished with this sabbatical?" I write to invite you to an announcement of my next ministry this Sunday, February 19!
>
> What: A lovely Sunday morning get-together!
>
> Why: Father Jayme will be breaking the news of his next ministry!

For Whom: Everyone who has prayed for and supported Fr. Jayme and his ministries throughout the years, and who wants to know what he's up to!

Where: Fr. Jayme's home at 1614 Willow Street, 78702 (It's the orange house behind Mission Funeral Home, which is on East César Chávez). Warning: There's not a large amount of seating in his meager home; if you're thinking you might want to sit down, you might bring a lawn chair or folding chair—just in case!

When: Sunday, February 19, 2012

How We'll Celebrate: The announcement in English will be made in the context of an English scripture service at 9:00 a.m. The announcement in Spanish will be made in the context of a Spanish scripture service at 11:00 a.m. In between, from 10:00 to 11:00, we'll enjoy the most delicious breakfast in the neighborhood, prepared in-house by some of the best cooks in our community! We'll also be serenaded by the music of *Mariachi Várgaz de Tecalitlán*, "*El mejor mariachi de Austin*." This bilingual breakfast reception is for the entire community: If you come to the English announcement, you'll want to stay for breakfast, and if you come to the Spanish announcement, you'll want to come at 10:00 a.m. to enjoy breakfast and mariachi!

How you can support: Should you feel moved by Father Jayme's new, intriguing and innovative ministry, a free-will offering will be taken. A part of the proceeds will benefit a member of our community who dreams of attending the International Conference on the Status of Women at the United Nations, and our charity of the month: the Austin House of Prayer (AHOP)! In fact, in addition to the orange juice and coffee that we'll be serving on Sunday morning, we'll share refreshing, oxygen-enriched Cielo water, the proceeds of which also support our friends at AHOP in their ministry of building bridges among congregations and praying for the needs of our city!

Breaking news! Do you remember when Cristo Rey Catholic Church was built, from 1957 to 1959? At this event, we'll also be screening a video containing never-before-seen footage by Ramón Galindo, of the construction of the church! Copies of the DVD will be on sale, and the proceeds will benefit Cristo Rey, a parish we all love!

Thank you in advance for helping us spread word of this event, and for forwarding this message to any interested contacts! And if you wish to opt out of this distribution list, please don't hesitate to let us know. Otherwise, we'll be happy to keep you "in the loop"!

Y'all are SAINTS!

The printed announcements for that day read as follows:

1. If they were to unite, former Catholics would comprise the second-largest church in the U.S. Saddened by this, we commit ourselves to reaching out to those who have left the Church and/or felt alienated by its ministers. As pilgrims on the journey, we commit ourselves to providing a space in which we can build community, break open the Word of God, share our experiences, respectfully ask questions about our Church and religion, and, most importantly, come to a deeper understanding of the presence and activity of God in our lives. Who do you know who has left the Church and/or has experienced alienation at the hands of its ministers? Will you commit yourself to reaching out to them this week? Will you commit to inviting them to join us next Sunday?
2. Our charity of the week: This week, we're assisting a young lady in our community who dreams of attending the "International Conference on the Status of Women" at the United Nations on February 27 to March 9.
3. Our charity of the month: This month, we're supporting the Austin House of Prayer (AHOP), a

ministry that builds bridges between congregations and prays for the needs of our city. Drink Cielo™ water: The proceeds benefit AHOP!

4. Our schedule next Sunday, February 26:
   - 8:00 a.m. – Contemporary Issues in the Roman Church (English)
   - 9:00 a.m. – Breaking Open the Word of God (English)
   - 10:00 a.m. – Breakfast and mariachi!
   - 11:00 a.m. – *Compartiendo la Palabra de Dios* (Spanish)
   - 12:00 p.m. – *Retos de la Iglesia Contemporánea* (Spanish)

An early record notes the names of those in attendance on February 19, 2012: Julio & Guillermina Álvarez, María de la Luz Balcazar, Zelda-Rina Botha, Dottie Chapa, Thomas Cogdell, Diana Coy, Felipe & Adriana Cueva, Louis & Rita Cuevas, Irma Galarza, Bertín García, Zaira García, Guadalupe Benítez García, Roy Gomez, Isabel Gonzales, José Juan & Ana Grimaldo, Monica Guzman, Johnny H. Limon, Yolanda Limon, Jesús José & María Elena Mares, Jesús A. Mares, José Leonardo Mares, Guadalupe Martínez, Herbert C. & Susie Martinez, Inez Mendoza, Pedro Mercado & Lourdes Briones, Melissa Ortiz, Eduardo & Maricela Pérez, Mary Lou Piña, Federico Ruiz, Margarita Salazar, Rene Salazar, Erik Salazar, Gregorio & María Sánchez, Jorge & Anita Ulloa, Margarita Vásquez, Elizabeth Walsh, Carl Webb, and Román & María Zuvieta.

Those present agreed to meet the following Sunday, February 26, to pray and build community. In addition to those present the week before, others came on February 26 for the first time: Irene Leonard Gonzales, Loredo Guerra, Waldine Hernandez, Ignacio Loredo, Rolando Piña and Estela Zavala. Prior to that gathering, Father Jayme shared the following words:

> Dear Friends,
>
> Did you know that 1,000 Mexicans have left the Catholic Church *every day* since 2000? Imagine Chicago's "L" filled with people and pulling away from the station; that's how many Mexicans left the Church yesterday alone!

> Did you know that, if they were to unite, former Catholics would comprise the second-largest religion in the United States, second only to the Roman Catholic Church? According to a Pew report, one-third of respondents who were raised Catholic no longer describe themselves as such, and nearly 10% of Americans are former Catholics.
>
> Saddened by such news, I announced on Sunday a new ministry to questioning, fallen-away and former Catholics….I suspect you can easily call to mind various family members, friends, co-workers and neighbors who've left the Church. If so, would you prayerfully consider forwarding this message to them? Our goal is to provide a welcoming space in which all can build community, break open the Word of God, share their experiences, respectfully ask questions about church and religion, and, most importantly, come to a deeper understanding of the presence and activity of God in their lives.
>
> Thank you in advance for your prayers and support. In yesterday's gospel (Mk 2:1-12), four people helped their friend come closer to the Lord. Will you be one of those people for your friends?
>
> As I'm fond of saying, "Y'all are SAINTS!"

The prayer program for February 26 notes that the "charity of the week" was *Los Hermanos de East Austin*, a ministry by José Velásquez for disadvantaged children and youths in East Austin.

With the desire to continue to build community, they met again the following Sunday, March 4, joined by Paco Medina and Arturo García. Nine people attended in English: Alberto García, Roy Gomez, Mary Lou Piña, VIDES volunteer Maggie Mofletas, Ignacio Loredo, Irene Loredo Guerra, Herbert & Susie Martinez, and Zelda-Rina Botha. Ten people attended in Spanish: Irma Galarza & her mother Irma Martínez, Jesús Mares, Felipe Cueva, Paco Medina, Juan Carlo Silva, and Arturo García with three family members.

On March 11, 2012, the day after his 11th anniversary of priestly ordination, Father Jayme, having incardinated into the ACCUS by

Archbishop Harms, celebrated his first two Masses as an Independent Catholic priest. Longtime Cristo Rey volunteer extraordinaire Roy Gomez, who previously rallied the people of Cristo Rey to stand against the injustices of a cruel pastor and the bishop who defended him, spread word of the event. Mary Lou Piña, who helped organize the efforts of Cristo Rey's St. Francis of Assisi Joy Group, a ministry to the elderly, homebound and bereaved, coordinated a post-Mass taco breakfast, assisted by Joy Group member Inez Mendoza and VIDES volunteer Maggie Mofletas, who lived with Mary Lou.

16 people attended the first English Mass. These pioneers of the English-speaking ACCUS community in Austin included: Alberto García & Blanca Zamora García, Adolfo "Doc" Álvarez, Zelda-Rina Botha, Louis & Rita Cuevas, Roy Gomez, Ignacio Loredo, Irene Loredo Guerra, Herbert & Susie Martinez, Maggie Mofletas, Mary Lou Piña, Ruby Roa, Mary Tolentino and Estela Zavala. 17 people attended the first Spanish Mass. The pioneers of the Spanish-speaking ACCUS community in Austin included: Leonel & Marta Alba and their two children, Julio & Guillermina Álvarez and their two daughters, Irma Galarza & her mother (Irma Martínez), Gregorio & María Sánchez and their son (Andrés), and Margarita Vázquez with her two sons. The courage of these individuals should not be underestimated, as they risked alienation by Roman Catholic family members and friends who would soon begin receiving misleading information on the community from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Austin.

The day was made more special by the music of *Mariachi Cristo Rey*. In 2009, Father Jayme hired *Mariachi México Lindo*, under the direction of Sergio Fuentes, and of Eugenio Hernández of Cristo Rey's 10:00 a.m. Mass, to provide *mariachi* music for the parish for five Sunday Masses. After Father Jayme's departure from Cristo Rey in 2011, though, Bishop Vasquez assigned Spanish-speaking friars from Mexico to the parish, whose lack of English language skills alienated longtime supporters. Like many parish projects that were previously sustained by increased Mass attendance and collections under Father Jayme's leadership, *Mariachi Cristo Rey* was a victim of parish budget cuts and performed its last Masses at Cristo Rey on March 3, 2012. The seamless transition of *Mariachi*

Cristo Rey, from Cristo Rey on March 4, to Holy Family on March 11, was seen as a providential sign, and the *mariachi* provided music for Holy Family during its first months of growth.

The announcements on that first Mass program, on March 11, 2012, were as follows, with a changed schedule for the coming weeks:

1. Fr. Jayme received word from Archbishop Harms, officially giving Fr. Jayme the "faculties" to resume public ministry in Austin. Hurray! Our schedule for the following weeks will be as follows:
   - 9:00 a.m. – Conversation on religion, spirituality & the world (English)
   - 10:00 a.m. – Mass in English (English)
   - 10:45 a.m. – Breakfast and mariachi!
   - 11:15 a.m. – *Misa en español* (Spanish)
   - 12:00 p.m. – *Conversación sobre la religión y espiritualidad* (Spanish)
2. Who do you know who has left the Church and/or has experienced alienation at the hands of its ministers? Will you commit yourself to reaching out to them this week? Will you commit to inviting them to join us next Sunday?
3. Our charity of the month: This month, we're supporting Austin Interfaith, a coalition of churches and schools intent on combating social injustices in our city. Thank you for your generous support of their very important ministry! And don't forget to pick up your copy of "The Economy Furniture Strike"!

When news of these first Masses reached the Roman Catholic Diocese of Austin, Bishop Joe Vasquez responded with a disingenuous letter, suggesting that Father Jayme had excommunicated himself from the Roman Catholic Church and that his sacraments "might be gravely illicit or invalid." Any first-semester student of sacramental theology can instantly see the game the bishop was playing: Though Father Jayme's sacraments might have been "gravely illicit" (or performed without permission of Roman Catholic hierarchs), no one could doubt the

validity of his sacraments as a priest validly ordained by Archbishop Gregory Aymond of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New Orleans. Bishop Vasquez insisted that his disingenuous letter be read at all Roman Catholic churches in Austin, thus increasing the new community's notoriety and drawing to it curious, disenchanted Roman Catholics. To date, that disingenuous 2012 letter was the last public communication regarding Holy Family from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Austin.

During the following weeks, several people visited the nascent community:

- March 11, 2012 – Leonel & Martha Alba, Adolfo "Doc" Álvarez, Mary Tolentino;
- March 18, 2012 – Danny Camacho, Martha & Refugia Camacho, Guadalupe García, Aimee González, Stefanie Guerra, María Head, Leticia Loredo, Carrie Marquez, Diana Y. Perales, Francisco Rodriguez, Carmen & Frank Saldaña;
- March 25, 2012 – Francisco Guzmán, Rosie Herrera, Gloria Morales, Mary Helen Quintero, Patricia & Bernardo Trejo, George & Becky Ybarra.

During its first weeks of life, the new community confronted a crisis: By the end of March, Father Jayme received a letter from Charles Villaseñor of Mission Funeral Home, terminating Father Jayme's monthly lease at 1614 Willow Street, effective March 31, 2012. In 2005, Charles' mother, Lois, told Father Jayme that he could rent her home at 1614 Willow Street for as long as he lived in Austin, so he invested $40,000 in the renovation of the 1930s house. As word of the impending eviction spread, it was rumored that Charles buckled under pressure from his bishop, or that members of *El Concilio*, a Mexican-American neighborhood association led by a former employee whom Father Jayme had fired from Cristo Rey Catholic Church, had pressured Charles to scatter the new community or face a protest and/or boycott of his business. These events caused great distaste by some members of the nascent community for Mission Funeral Home, the business that Charles managed for his mother.

Fortunately, the eviction catapulted the new community to the next chapter of its history: Ignacio and María Elena Loredo stepped

forward, ready to lease their *Los Dos Laredos* reception hall at 8613 Lava Hill Road for church use at $300 per month through the end of 2012. The metal warehouse, without adequate HVAC or insulation, was hardly ideal, but it became the community's spiritual home for over five years, from April 29, 2012 through June 30, 2017.

At the same time, the parish rallied to move Father Jayme's belongings into the Loredo's storage facility in Liberty Hill, and Father Jayme—and his grand piano!—took up residence in Mary Lou Piña's home for six months, until Lidia Perez of *Las Manitas* Mexican Restaurant made her home at 1612 Garden Street available for a parish rectory.

Beginning on April 29, the community began celebrating Sunday Masses in the back room of *Los Dos Laredos*, which was now known also as Holy Family Catholic Church—a name suggested by Rita Cuevas during a meeting of community leaders at El Gallo Restaurant earlier that month.

Soon outgrowing the back room, parishioners began preparing the larger, front room to be their future worship space. Volunteers worked hard to transform the warehouse into a suitable space for worship and community-building, and John H. Limon provided a large sign outside the facility, so that passersby would know that the warehouse was actually a nascent Catholic church. From the beginning, Roy Gomez organized a weekly parish breakfast, an important weekly community-building opportunity, prepared by rotating breakfast groups with the assistance of Mary Lou Piña.

Some parishioners remember those early days, when the reception hall was rented on Saturday evenings, and a corps of committed parish volunteers arrived early on Sunday mornings to clean, organize and set up the space. Mr. Loredo also rented out the facility for Saturday night "raves," which attracted several hundreds of young people to the reception hall on Saturday nights, causing parish volunteers to spend extra time on early Sunday mornings picking up beer cans from the parking lot and used condoms from dark corners of the facility.

On April 28, 2012, tragedy struck the American Catholic Church in the United States: Archbishop Lawrence J. Harms died from a staph infection as a result of a routine surgery, after resigning as

Archbishop and Metropolitan of the ACCUS two days earlier. Father Jayme flew to Frederick, Maryland for his funeral, which was followed by the installation of his successor, Bishop William Johnson, who would make his first visit to the nascent community in October 2012.

During those initial months, the community advertised through a weekly English ad in the *Austin American-Statesman* and a weekly Spanish ad in *El Mundo Newspaper*. The English Mass attendance remained steady through March and April, with 30-40 people weekly attending the English Mass. Spanish Mass attendance peaked at 41 people in March.

Early records note the first-time visitors, many from Cristo Rey, who continued to discover the new community on a weekly basis:

- April 1, 2012 – Christina & Marcos Chapa, Herminia Gomez, Gerardo Herrera, Nora & Alfredo Lopez, Gilbert & Mary Martinez, Sabino & Lori Renteria, Nicole & Marcos Rodela, Lauren Rosales, Teresa San Juan, Marina Valentínez, Angelita Mendoza-Waterhouse;
- April 8, 2012 – María Coto, Eleodoro Herrera, Diana Marivel;
- April 15, 2012 – Thomas Gomez, Celena Mendoza;
- April 22, 2012 – Ana Cabral;
- May 6, 2012 – Dora Luz Cantu, Nellie Castillo, Margarita Fragoso, David Gomez, Esperanza Peña, Larry Waterhouse;
- May 13, 2012 – Karina Castro, Angie Coy, Tony M. Coy, Sr., Cristina Dominguez, Eloisa Fuentes, Guillermina Fuentes, Gloria Osorio, Celia Terry;
- May 20, 2012 – Margaret Arriaga, Dulce, Rosario & Mariela Castillo, Vincent & Vera Cordova, Misty Edwards, Raúl Mendoza, Arthur & Janey Santana, Acacia R. Vigil;
- May 27, 2012 – Connie Aguero-Miralrío, Frances Cuevas, Karla Dimas, Reymundo García, Stephanie García, Diana Miranda.

In May 2012, Father Jayme shared with parish leaders that he had been asked to run for public office, for the Austin Independent School District Board of Trustees, in the November 6, 2012 general election. With their blessing, he did so, bringing attention to the

community and narrowly winning over the incumbent, despite assertions by the *Austin Chronicle* that Bishop Joe Vasquez had attempted to influence the election. Father Jayme served on the school board for eight years, an act of public service that, in the estimation of some, deflected a number of arrows from the parish community, particularly by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Austin.

In May and June, Holy Family initiated its annual traditions of blessing all mothers and mother figures on Mother's Day, and all fathers and father figures on Father's Day. Holy Family also celebrated its first annual Graduation Mass on May 27.

On June 7, Father Jayme convened the first monthly meeting of the parish's new Pastoral Council at the home of Mary Lou Piña. Conversation included Sunday Mass attendance, finances, the creation of a parish website, securing IRS tax-exempt status, the purchase of liability insurance, a sound system, parish seal, sacramental certificates, Mass vessels, vestments, and an ad in the *Austin American-Statesman*. The group also discussed whether to continue using loaves of bread, or to switch to hosts, as used in all Roman Catholic parishes. Concerning the latter, Father Jayme conducted a survey at Masses on the previous Sunday, finding that 23 people preferred hosts, 19 preferred bread, 4 were in favor of bread at present, transitioning to hosts as the parish grew, and 2 were indifferent.

Participants in the Pastoral Council during that first year included Father Jayme, Roy Gomez, Diana and Angie Coy, Margie Cuellar, Louis and Rita Cuevas, Leonard Gonzales and Waldine Hernandez, Ramiro and Mary Alice Guzman, Irene Loredo Guerra, John "Canica" Limon, Benny Lozano, Monica Manzano, Herbert and Susie Martinez, Angelita Mendoza-Waterhouse, Mary Helen "Nena" Quintero, Sandra Quintero, Steve Swanson, and John and Estela Zavala. After that first meeting in June, they met on July 12, August 9, September 14, October 19, November 15 and December 13.

By mid-June, John Zavala was coordinating a mid-summer raffle, the first of many fundraisers that he would lead at Holy Family during the coming years.

By the end of June, the services of *Mariachi Cristo Rey* were discontinued, in an attempt to begin saving for a new church

facility, but the tradition of a free parish breakfast between Masses continued, supported by rotating breakfast groups assisted by Mary Lou Piña.

On July 15, Father Jayme announced the creation of a new parish website: www.HolyFamilyACC.org. The name reflected Holy Family's identification at that time as an American Catholic, rather than Roman Catholic, church. He also invited all to prayerfully discern the possibility of a vocation to the ordained ministries of the Church. He privately spoke with Roy Gomez about this possibility, and Roy, who had been active in the Church for decades, agreed to discern such a possibility.

A July 31 report by Father Jayme to the ACCUS contains the following numbers for Mass attendance that month.

	English	Spanish	TOTAL
July 7	97	41	138
July 14	94	41	135
July 21	94	46	140
July 28	100	68	168
TOTAL	385	196	581

Father Jayme further reported:

> The slight growth that we saw in our community this month was principally in our English Mass, which, for five weeks in a row, has held steady around 95-100 congregants. Our Spanish Mass is growing only slowly, with the end of July seeing a new attendance record of 68 participants in our Spanish Mass. Spanish-speaking congregants are accustomed to more images in their churches, so we plan to bring from Mexico an image of the Holy Family, as well as images of Our Lady of Guadalupe and St. Joseph next month. We will place the Holy Family in our worship space as soon as it arrives, and we'll wait to unveil the other two images until our Archbishop's visit in September. Congregants are generously responding to the needs of our community. We presently have $8,328 in our bank account, and our Pastoral Council approved this month a monthly stipend of $1,000 for our pastor. A parish family also

generously responded in providing our parish a wireless microphone for the presider. On the Sundays of this month, I began inviting congregants to consider the possibility of serving the Church through ordained ministry. To date, three individuals (viz., Roy Gómez, John Limón and Angelita Mendoza Waterhouse) have responded with interest.

It was a quiet month, with no word coming from the Roman church. With the permission of Archbishop Johnson, I filed for elected office on July 28. Our Pastoral Council was largely supportive of the idea, with three members expressing some reservations due to the (sometimes dirty) nature of local politics and the possibility of detractors seeking to defame me. The next three months of being on the campaign trail will likely raise the awareness of our parish community and of the ACCUS within Central Texas. We'll see what happens, and I'll keep Archbishop Johnson apprised in this respect.

Sister [name edited out] with whom I previously worked at [name edited out] brought a very lovely hand-painted icon of the Holy Family to adorn our future worship space. The [name edited out] Sisters continue to be of great support, though "behind the scenes," so as not to upset [names edited out].

Throughout the summer months of 2012, as word continued to spread, newcomers continued to be drawn to Holy Family:

- June 3, 2012 – Rev. Cody Blair, Guadalupe C. Casarez, Gabriel Estrada & Laura Sheridan, Mario Fabian, Jessica Leal, Adriana Luna, Elena Mares, Ruby Roa, Clint & Dana Smith, Janie Sosa;
- June 10, 2012 – Audie Embestro, Rosa Gil, Laura Loredo, Anna María Méndez, Carmen Merchau, Anna Sánchez, Alfredo Santos;
- June 17, 2012 – Paul & María Alcala, Nora & Edward Cabello, Margie Cuellar, Megan García, Elisiana Gomez, Jesse & Norma Gomez, Nora & Michael Gomez, Loretta

Guluzian, Eliza & Trace Kelly, Faustina Limón Sánchez, Dolores Marter, Debbie McCarthy, Elizabeth Ann Smith;

- June 24, 2012 – Robert & Catarina Arredondo, Yadira Cruz, Elisa Figueroa, Rafaela Leal, Diane & John Henry Limon, Dora Lopez, Sonny & Judy Loredo, Rogelio Perez, Paula Rodriguez, Laura Santiago, Will Sehion;
- July 1, 2012 – Jenny Amor DeLeza, Becky García, Cheryl Grossman, Eva Leal, Teresa Martínez, Carmen Williams;
- July 8, 2012 – Kim & Mae Alcala, Valerie Arriaga, Megan Carlin, Cynthia Jackson, Mike & Liliana Nanyes;
- July 15, 2012 – Lucy Cardenas, Mary Helen Castillo, Gloria Estrada, Trinidad S. Estrada, Lynett Martinez, Becky Saenz, Consuelo Saucedo, Lorena Silva, Steve Swanson, Diana, Julio, Irma & Cesar Versalles, Marco Versalles;
- July 22, 2012 – Marta Domínguez, Jason & Sandra Holst, Jaime López, Monica Manzano, Eric R. & Mary L. Núñez, San Juan Vásquez;
- July 29, 2012 – Lori Ana Aguero, Miguel Fuentes & Rita Candelaria González, Janie Lara, Gloria Morales, Zenaida Parra, Liz Piña, María Price, Isaac Ruiz, Nina Zavala;
- August 5, 2012 – Darlene Aldrich, Terry Ann & Jerry Caballero, Alfredo & Norma De La Cruz, Jessica De La Cruz, Teresa C. Estrada, Janie Gomez, Mary Helen Gomez, Ramiro & Mary Guzman, Mr. & Mrs. D. James, Annette Lafuente, Amy Piña, Juan Magallanes, Ruth Salinas;
- August 12, 2012 – Gloria Flores, Juanita Gallegos, Robert García, David & Beatrice Gomez, Brian Messer, Ana & Jesús Mier, Rosa Pérez, Blasita (Lupita) Ruiz, George Ybarra, Jr.;
- August 19, 2012 – Orlando, Susana & Christian De León Arias, Leonel & María Jaimes, Kathleen Legrand, Margaret & Manuel Mendez;
- August 26, 2012 – Nathan Black, Alejandra & Daniel Carrasco, Araceli Hernández-Bravo, Mamie Hughes, Adela & Miguel Mireles, María Murillo Hernández.

Gaps exist in parish records for the Fall months, but newcomers continued to be drawn to Holy Family in large numbers:

- September 2, 2012 – Roberto Aguirre, Clarita Barrientos, Martin & Pat Benavides, Hilaria Cornejo, Cecilia Crossley, Gloria Gutiérrez, Shirley A. Johnson, Brenda Loaeza, Sara & Teresa Méndez, Micaela Morales, Rocío Ochoa, Lilia Pérez, James Rodriguez, Jaime Torres & Rosalina Guerra, Victoria Vega, Mel Villanueva, Sylvia Zuniga;
- September 9, 2012 – Anna Alcala, Isaac Alvarado & Ida Mojica, Nancy Caballero, Elaine Castro, Lisa Calderon, David & Esther Domínguez, Anngelic Flores, Catherine Flores, Shannon Flores, Sylvia Galvez, Angélica Hernández, James Hughes, Eduardo Martínez, Dorothy Medina & Christine Banda, Grace Mojica, Irma & Ramiro Pedraza, Georgia Piña, Joy Reynolds, Michael & Geneva Rocha, Marisela Serrano, Marcos & Virginia Terrazas, María & Manuel Terrazas, Robert Tijerina & Stephanie Tijerina, Tina Trejo, Paula Valencia;
- October 14, 2012 – Erika & David Abarca, Higinio & JoAnn Cardiel, Gabino Quintana, Angélica & Raúl Suárez;
- October 21, 2012 – Elena Navarro, Aurora García, Fausta García, Andrew Cuevas, Librado Torres, Jocelyn Perez, Anthony Escobedo, Francisco & Alondra Medina;
- October 28, 2012 – Catherine Dilger, Jessica A. Escobedo, Toby & Julia Machuca, Debbie Martinez, Sylvia Morales, Mary Helen Raigosa;
- November 4, 2012 – LeAnne Esquivel, Mary Ann Esquivel, Debbie García, Vincent Maldonado, Priscilla Rodriguez, Carlos Torres;
- November 11, 2012 – Alicia Enciso, Alma Martínez, Cynthia Rodriguez, José Sánchez, Jessica J. Serrano, Juana & Catalino Serrano, Rodrigo Soto, Emily & Del Tisinger.

On September 16, Holy Family welcomed two tall images representing the Holy Family—St. Joseph (holding the Christ Child) and Our Lady of Guadalupe—from Mexico.

On September 23, 2012, Bishop Johnson, accompanied by his wife, Audrey, made his first of 20 episcopal visits to Holy Family. Because Holy Family was resolute from the beginning to avoid the heresy of semi-Pelagianism—the ancient Church's condemnation of the idea that the sacraments of the Church could be "earned"—

Holy Family, unlike local Roman Catholic parishes, did not require two years of classes and preparation for the sacrament of Confirmation, resulting in 21 *confirmandi* flocking to Holy Family with their family members for that first celebration of the sacrament of Confirmation. Holy Family thus began its tradition of celebrating the sacrament twice each year, in May and October.

During his visit to Austin, Archbishop Johnson also granted seminarian status to Roy Gomez, acknowledging Roy's desire to one day serve in the ordained ministries of the Church.

On November 13, a Building Committee was convened for the first time at the home of John and Estela Zavala, to consider a long-term plan for parish facilities. By that time, the first $10,000 had been transferred from the parish's checking account to a new "Building Fund," a savings account for a future church facility.

On November 18, Austin hosted its first-ever Formula 1 race at the new Circuit of the Americas on Farm-to-Market Road 812. Anticipating challenges with F1 traffic, Holy Family transferred its Sunday Masses to the chapel of the old St. Mary's Catholic Girls Academy at 4100 Red River in downtown Austin, a property that now belonged to the Presbyterian congregation of New Covenant Fellowship. Feedback on traffic for the afternoon race suggested that Holy Family need not shift Mass locations in future years.

During that first year as a parish community, parishioners generously responded to assist with the purchase of all necessary vestments and Mass supplies. As Advent approached, for instance, parishioners hosted fundraisers to provide new Advent vestments and Communion cups. During that first year, Bishop Robert Darrell Hall of the Ecumenical Catholic Diocese of Texas also donated a few vestments, several books on Old and Independent Catholicism, and the parish's first wooden tabernacle.

Holy Family hosted its first annual celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe on Sunday, December 16, 2012. On Wednesday, December 19, Holy Family hosted its first parish *posada* outside the church, organized by Monica Manzano, followed by a visit from Santa Claus, with new toys donated by parishioners for all kids.

Holy Family concluded its first calendar year with the Church's celebration of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph on December 30.

2013

Holy Family greeted 2013, its first full year, with a celebration of the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord on January 6, complete with its first annual sharing of the *rosca de reyes* (king cake) after Masses.

On January 16, 2013, the Pastoral Council met at Mary Lou Piña's home for its first meeting of the year. Conversation included the use of parish facilities for Zumba classes, the strengthening of liturgical ministries through trainings, and the coming Lenten/Easter season. Father Jayme's "wish list" at that time consisted of a full-length mirror for the sacristy, handrails for the altar platform, a sign on Highway 183 directing people to Holy Family, a processional cross, Communion bowls, Easter vestments, altar server albs, and a new tabernacle and ciborium. The Pastoral Council would also meet on February 6, March 20, April 16, May 16, June 19, July 24, August 28, and November 5, 2013. New Pastoral Council members in 2013 included Terry Ann Caballero, Andres Cantu, Cynthia Rodriguez and Rebecca Saenz.

On Tuesday, January 22, 2013, Monica Manzano hosted her first regular Zumba lesson in the church, which, when the chairs were cleared, was a suitable space for such activity.

On Saturday, January 26, 2013, Holy Family hosted a parish dance party fundraiser, from 7:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m. The following day, Dulce Castillo led the parish's first Children's Liturgy of the Word during the Spanish Mass.

During those first years, Diana and Angie Coy, who brought great experience from their work at the Cristo Rey parish office, volunteered their time to coordinate all parish office business in a former corner bar space of the reception hall. They received applications for sacraments, printed and shared sacramental certificates, printed Mass programs, and shared end-of-year tax statements each January. Mary Helen "Nena" Quintero volunteered her time as Holy Family's bookkeeper for the parish's first ten years, making payments, logging all income and expenses, paying necessary taxes, and creating financial reports. Roy Gomez volunteered his time for the weekly bank deposit of all collections and parish income. Susie Martinez and Irene Loredo Guerra

coordinated teams of collection counters in the "sacristy" that was created from another former side bar of the reception hall (which later became the Blessed Sacrament chapel).

On February 3, 2013, Holy Family hosted its first annual celebration of *Día de la Candelaria*, with a feast of *tamales* and *atole* (chocolate) provided by those who found an image of the Christ Child in the *rosca de reyes* on Epiphany.

In February 2013, Holy Family hosted a "Parish Love Notes" contest, inviting parishioners to share poems or "love notes" speaking of the things that they loved about Holy Family. On World Marriage Day, February 10, Holy Family also hosted its first annual Valentine's Day blessing of couples. As Lent approached, parishioners donated the necessary monies to purchase Lenten vestments for Ash Wednesday on February 13, 2013.

February 17, 2013 marked the first Sunday on which Father Jayme was not able to be physically present at Holy Family: Roy Gomez led a celebration of Sunday Worship in the Absence of a Priest (SWAP), and all present agreed that he certainly possessed the necessary knowledge and skills to exercise ordained ministry in the Church. It was a true confirmation of Roy's vocation to ministry!

On February 26, 2013 parishioners rallied and assisted with the parish's move into a new rectory, a three-bedroom, two-bathroom home owned by Lidia Perez, the past owner of *Las Manitas* Mexican Restaurant, at 1612 Garden Street. The move required some six trucks and four trailers. This home served as the parish rectory, Father Jayme's residence, and as a place for parish meetings through April 2022.

On Saturday, March 9, 2013, parishioner Benny Lozano coordinated an evening of Total Championship Wrestling at Holy Family. Parishioners cleared the worship space to make room for the wrestling ring.

On March 10, 2013, on the occasion of Father Jayme's 12th anniversary of priesthood ordination, Holy Family celebrated its first anniversary with *mariachi*, and with its first annual "Holy Family Awards" to recognize all who generously supported the parish community during its first year.

A new logo—of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph in front of a house—was revealed for the parish and was included on the parish's first annual Holy Family Awards. Jesus, clothed in royal purple and of dark complexion, stands in the center of the image, with hands outstretched, recalling his openness to all and his later crucifixion, and with the gazes of both parents fixed on him. Mary was dressed in blue, the traditional color of Mary, and Joseph was dressed in red.

An incredible act transpired in the Roman Catholic Church on March 13, 2013: Following the mysterious and untimely resignation of the conservative "Papa Ratzinger" (Benedict XVI), Jorge Mario Bergoglio, a Jesuit cardinal, was elected pope and took the name Francis, signaling the compassionate stances he would take in contrast to his two predecessors. Though leading a worldwide organization resistant to change, the pontiff continued to surprise the Roman Church and the world with his inclusive spirit—a spirit much more aligned with Inclusive Catholicism than with traditional, conservative expressions of Roman Catholicism. Francis signaled the need for a shift within his church, titling his first work, *The Name of God is Mercy*—a stark contrast with the writings of his predecessor, whose first homily as pope suggested the need for "pruning" within the Roman Catholic Church.

On March 15, 2013, Holy Family held a spring cleaning day: Parishioners brought cleaning supplies to tidy the worship space and parish hall. That event brought to the parish new volunteers, like Shirley and Margaret Bruch.

In March 2013, Holy Family celebrated its first Easter Triduum in its new worship space: with Palm Sunday on March 2**4**, Holy Thursday on March 28, Good Friday on March 29, and the Easter Vigil on March 30. On Easter Sunday, March 31, Holy Family hosted its first annual visit from the Easter Bunny, who stopped by for photos in the back room of the church after every Mass. Many parishioners have fond memories of this special moment, made possible each year by Leonard and Waldine Gonzales.

During April 2013, Holy Family parishioners rallied to transform the church's worship space. Roy Gomez, Gonzalo Rodriguez and Ramiro Manzano constructed an altar platform, covered garage doors, and framed the space with pipe-and-drape.

Parish women rallied to sew the necessary tan curtains to frame the worship space on all sides in the larger, north room of the former *Los Dos Laredos* reception hall.

Father Jayme convened a Spanish Pastoral Council meeting on April 14, 2013. Pedro Mercado offered at that meeting to provide a weekly *plática de superación* (motivational talk) before the weekly Sunday Spanish Mass. This group convened on a regular basis through September 2015. Initial members included Dulce Castillo, Irma Galarza, Monica Manzano, Pedro Mercado, Zenaida Parra and Rosa Zavala.

In April 2013, Holy Family formed an Outreach Committee, which organized the creation of a welcome packet for visitors and hosted a booth on April 27-28 at the local flea market on the northeast corner of Highway 183 and Farm to Market Road 812, to spread word of Holy Family.

On April 28, 2013, Holy Family hosted its first celebration of Children's Day. To mark the event, Rafaela Leal coordinated the parish's first-ever Children's Liturgy of the Word in English. Parishioners donated new toys for children, and Monica Manzano planned various activities for children after the Spanish Mass.

During April 2013, Holy Family accepted donations of homemade and hand-painted crosses for a *Día de la Santa Cruz* silent auction of crosses that the parish hosted throughout the month of May. Many parishioners shared their talents to create over 100 crosses. Pre-school teacher and talented artist Susana Trujeque Cooper painted several crosses for the fundraiser, and Lidia Perez secured a cross from noted New Mexican artist Amado Peña, Jr., which received the highest bid in the silent auction.

On May 5, 2013, Holy Family observed the traditional Mexican celebration of *Día de los Albañiles*, with a blessing of tools, cars and heavy machinery.

On May 19, 2013, Archbishop Johnson visited Holy Family for his second episcopal visitation. Holy Family hosted a backyard barbeque at the rectory for him and his wife, Audrey, and he celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation for 178 *confirmandi*.

On June 1, 2013, Monica Manzano hosted a "Zumbathon" at Holy Family, which drew several people to the church for a day of fitness and fun.

On June 2, 2013, Holy Family celebrated its annual Graduation Mass and was visited by Independent Catholic priest Father Cody Blair, who announced the creation of a ministry at Holy Family to unhoused people of Austin. In July, Father Cody coordinated the collection of travel toiletries, new socks and lightly-used clothes for the unhoused.

On June 11, 2013, Father Jayme hosted the first weekly three-hour class of the newly-formed Holy Family Theological Institute, which offered a number of courses over the next three years on behalf of the St. John XXIII Theological Institute of the American Catholic Church in the U.S. The institute launched its first course on Liturgical Theology at the office of Ramón Carrasquillo at 5113 Southwest Parkway. After two weeks, Father Jayme moved the institute to the living room of the rectory at 1612 Garden Street. With a regular attendance of 15-20 people, attendees quickly outgrew the space, and Herbert and Susie Martinez offered the use of their office conference room at 2800 South IH35, beginning on July 23, for the next three years. Other early courses included Spiritual Theology and Introduction to the Bible.

On June 20, 2013, Holy Family convened the first official meeting of its St. Francis of Assisi Joy Group ministry. Many members of the former ministry created by Brother Kerry Guillory at Cristo Rey Catholic Church in 1991 now found themselves at Holy Family, and Roy Gomez and Mary Lou Piña coordinated home visits to the elderly, funeral rosaries for those who passed, and a monthly rosary on the fifteenth of each month at the rectory—a tradition that later transferred to the third Sunday of each month between Masses at the church.

On June 27, 2013, Father Jayme hosted a meeting of those interested in a ministry to the LGBTQIA+ community. Jessica Leal and Becky Lego stepped up to lead this ministry and plan Holy Family's first presence in the 2013 Austin Pride Parade.

On June 30, 2013, Holy Family hosted an Independence Day "Weenie Roast and Pie Contest," with certificates for winners in the following categories: Most Beautiful Pie, Best Fruit Pie, Best Cream Pie, Best Sugar-free Pie, and Best Pie by a Child.

During July 2013, Holy Family recognized and blessed its liturgical ministers: proclaimers of the Word on July 7, altar servers

and cantors on July 14, hospitality ministers on July 21, and breakfast groups on July 28. Many parishioners participated in these liturgical ministries. Sandra Quintero stepped up as cantor, Becky Lego became the head altar server at the English Mass, and Marko Perez became the first regular altar server at the Spanish Mass.

On July 7, 2013, Holy Family announced its creation of a new YouTube page for parish videos. Parishioners donated for the purchase of a video camera, Sandra Quintero recorded homilies, and all classes of the theological institute were recorded and shared as well.

Beginning in August 2013, Father Jayme offered a course on the history of Independent Catholicism as part of the parish's theological institute. Other courses in the Fall of 2013 included Theology of the Diaconate and Priesthood, and Foundational Theology.

On August 7, 2013, in an attempt to express his appreciation to the members of Holy Family breakfast groups, Father Jayme hosted a waffle dinner at the rectory—since waffles were the extent of his culinary abilities. Photos exist showing attendees in tall chef hats.

On August 8, 2013, parishioners participated in a service project: helping to refurbish the Stewart Conservatory on the northeast corner of Chicon and 22nd Street.

On August 15, 2013, Archbishop Johnson returned for his third episcopal visitation to the parish, for meetings with the pastor, and for the recording of various ACCUS videos. On that evening, the parish's Joy Group gathered with him at the rectory for their monthly praying of the rosary. Archbishop Johnson welcomed John "Canica" Limon and Angelita Mendoza-Waterhouse as seminarians, bestowing on them the title of Brother and Sister, and announcing the possibility of their diaconal ordinations in May and October 2014, respectively.

On August 18, 2013, Holy Family hosted its first annual distribution of back-to-school supplies for children.

On September 7, 2013, Holy Family Catholic Church made history by being the first Catholic Church in Central Texas to participate in Austin's Pride festivities. The parish hosted a booth

at the Pride Festival at Fiesta Gardens, and Holy Family parishioners Jessica Leal and Becky Lego organized a parish float in the Pride Parade, greatly supported by Gonzalo and Cynthia Rodriguez.

On October 26, 2013, Roy Gomez was ordained a deacon for the ACCUS by Archbishop William A. Johnson during the Archbishop's fourth episcopal visitation to the parish. ACCUS priest Father José Castro and seminarians Jeffrey Wolfe and Jason Johnson joined Holy Family for the weekend. The following day, after 22 years of ministry as a deacon in the Roman church, Deacon Cleofas Cruz was incardinated into the ACCUS by Archbishop William A. Johnson.

On Halloween night, October 31, 2013, the community of Dove Springs flooded, and many residents, including Angelita Mendoza-Waterhouse and her family, were forced to flee their homes. During the following days and weeks, Holy Family parishioners rallied to provide resources to the community, and to help the Waterhouse family clean their home, which filled with some three feet of water. Holy Family parishioners would later donate several turkeys for a Thanksgiving dinner for displaced residents.

John Zavala coordinated a parish raffle on November 3, 2013, the day on which Herbert Martinez offered the parish's first "View from the Pew." Holy Family hosted a ministry fair on November 10.

The agenda of the November 5, 2013 Pastoral Council meeting speaks of the facilities changes occurring at that time: Since the last meeting of the Pastoral Council, the church floors were stained, the curtains were hung, a ramp was installed outside the front door, turbines were installed in the roof vents, the sacristy was moved from the side bar to the northwest bar (now serving as a parish office), thus freeing up a new space for a Blessed Sacrament Chapel there. Upcoming facility projects included the installation of French doors inside the front entrance, the creation of a Blessed Sacrament chapel, and bringing in more gravel for the parking lot.

During December 2013, Holy Family offered a new, green parish T-shirt, with a redaction of the parish logo, showing Saint Juan Diego, Our Lady of Guadalupe and Bishop Juan de Zumárraga in

the place of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. The parish also hosted a silent auction of numerous images of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

On December 12, 2013, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Pastoral Council hosted its annual Christmas dinner.

On December 15, 2013, the Joy Group prayed its monthly rosary in the parish hall after breakfast. Holy Family hosted its parish *posada* on December 18, and a bilingual Christmas Day Mass at 9:00 a.m. on December 25.

Now that Holy Family had three clergy—Father Jayme, Deacon Roy and Deacon Cleofas, Father Jayme convened the first-ever meeting of the parish's Clergy Council on December 30, 2013. They reviewed the liturgical calendar for 2014, and Father Jayme encouraged both deacons to discern the possibility of one day serving as priests in the Church.

2014

In January 2014, Father Jayme offered a course on Homiletics as part of the parish's theological institute, providing parishioners an opportunity to break open the Word of God for others. Other Spring courses of the institute included the Pentateuch, Synoptic Gospels, and Pauline Letters.

On March 16, 2014, Holy Family celebrated its second anniversary with its second annual Holy Family Awards.

On April 17-20, 2014, Archbishop William A. Johnson presided at the parish's Easter Triduum liturgies, as part of his fifth episcopal visitation to the parish.

On April 27, 2014, Angelita Mendoza-Waterhouse launched Holy Family's first vegetable coop, an idea to monthly buy vegetables in bulk from a local produce supplier, to provide healthy eating at more affordable prices. She provided this service for eight months, discontinuing it after participation fell from a high of 52 participants, to 16 participants in November. Angelita also operated a parish "thrift store" from a storage space in the parish hall, where she sold donated clothing and household items.

On May 31, 2014, Holy Family received its third deacon when John Hubert "Canica" Limon was ordained a deacon for the ACCUS by Archbishop William A. Johnson during the

Archbishop's sixth episcopal visitation to the parish. The event was attended by many members of the Limon family, including Deacon John's 100-year-old mother, Eloisa (Ojeda) Limon. On the following day, June 1, Archbishop Johnson celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation for 72 *confirmandi*.

In August 2014, Father Jayme offered a course on the Sacraments of Initiation as part of the parish's theological institute. Other Fall courses of the institute included Ancient Philosophy, Church History I, and Christology.

On September 7, 2014, Holy Family hosted an 11:30 a.m. live auction for a University of Texas Longhorns quilt made and donated by Stella Duran.

On October 19, 2014, Holy Family celebrated its first *Jamaica* and Fall Festival in the enclosed courtyard east of the church. John Zavala secured donations of beer for the event, Los Texas Wranglers provided the music, and 2,500 tickets were sold for a raffle of 30 prizes. The event netted $12,297. Pastoral Council minutes note that Mass attendance in October peaked with 411 people in attendance at Masses earlier that day.

On October 25, 2014, Holy Family received its fourth deacon when Archbishop William A. Johnson ordained state judge and longtime Cristo Rey lay leader Angelita Mendoza-Waterhouse as a deacon for the ACCUS during his seventh episcopal visitation to Austin. On October 26, Archbishop Johnson celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation for 53 *confirmandi*.

2015

In January 2015, Father Jayme offered a course on Johannine Literature as part of the parish's theological institute. Other Spring courses of the institute included the Prophets, Ethics, Moral Theology, and Catholic Social Justice.

On March 15, 2015, Holy Family celebrated its third anniversary with its third annual Holy Family Awards.

On April 2-4, 2015, Father Jayme led the parish in its third celebration of the Easter Triduum. Father Libardo Rocha Camargo, a Colombian Roman Catholic priest with more than 20 years of ministerial experience in the Diocese of Latina-Terracina-Sezze-

Priverno, 40 miles southeast of Rome, joined us for our celebration of Holy Thursday and Easter Sunday, and expressed his desire to incardinate into the ACCUS. Father Libardo had previously served as a pastor, chaplain, postulator of the causes of saints at the Vatican, and professor of dogmatic theology at the *Angelicum*, the Pontifical College of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome. Father Libardo was referred to Holy Family by a priest of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Austin, and Holy Family shortly thereafter decided to sponsor Father Libardo's securing of an R-1 religious visa to serve the Holy Family community. Father Libardo then returned to Italy, to await the approval of his visa.

In April 2015, Darrell Cox, who trained and oversaw the parish's collection counters, announced that he might soon be moving to Florida. Rebecca Saenz and Terry Ann Caballero stepped forward to lead this ministry, and Monica Manzano volunteered to lead the sewing of the necessary curtains to provide privacy to money counters and to hang over the counter of the parish office, to signal when the office was open or closed.

In April 2015, Holy Family celebrated its height of weekly Sunday breakfast groups: With the addition of a breakfast group by Inocencio and Amanda Rodriguez, the parish now had six breakfast groups.

After two year of tracking sacraments and stewardship through spreadsheets, Holy Family purchased a subscription to ChurchDB in May 2015. The parish used this database, created for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Austin, to track sacraments and stewardship for the next nine years, through its conversion to Parish Data System (PDS) on January 1, 2024.

On May 24, 2015, Archbishop William Johnson returned to Holy Family for his eighth episcopal visitation. He celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation for 55 *confirmandi* on the Solemnity of Pentecost, and he shared the Calls to Orders for the presbyteral ordinations of Deacon Cleofas Cruz and Deacon Roy Gomez. On the same Sunday, John Zavala hosted a raffle that netted $1,000 for the parish.

On May 16 and June 13, 2015, a parish Strategic Planning Committee, comprised of English-speaking Pastoral Council members, convened for eight hours of retreat over two days, to

assess the parish's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and to begin to formulate a draft mission statement and vision statement for the parish. They formulated the following:

Our Mission (i.e., Who We Are):
Loving. Inclusive. Catholic. Doing It Jesus' Way!

Our Vision (i.e., What We Aspire To Do):
We will expand the vision and presence of loving and inclusive Catholicism!

Values:
Each word of our parish mission flows into values espoused by our parish Family:

Loving
- Jesus' command (viz., love of God and love of neighbor) is our supreme command.
- Like Jesus, we are compassionate.
- Our love seeks to cultivate a sense of family and community.
- Service is important: Our love expresses itself in action!

Inclusive
- We recognize and value diversity.
- We welcome, accept and love all people for who they are.
- We truly believe that *la unión hace la fuerza* [unity brings strength], so we seek to exclude no one.

Catholic
- We celebrate the fact that we are Catholic Christians and Christian Catholics!
- We are part of the Catholic tradition, sharing in the Church's faith and sacraments.
- We recognize that the Church provides a certain structure (e.g., rites and rituals) within which we choose to operate.

Doing It Jesus' Way!
- We seek to live the gospels, following in the footsteps of Christ.
- We seek to imitate Jesus, always asking ourselves: "What Would Jesus Do?"
- We seek to live Catholicism in the way that we imagine Jesus might, if he were Catholic, not excluding anyone, but inviting all into a loving, personal relationship with God & others.

As part of the parish's strategic planning process, Holy Family decided to apply for its own 501(c)(3) not-for-profit status, so as not to be dependent on the American Catholic Church in the U.S. for the use of its non-profit status.

In June 2015, Deacon Angelita began overseeing the parish gift shop, inside the front doors of the church.

On June 27, 2015, following the June 26 landmark same-sex marriage decision of the U.S. Supreme Court, Holy Family Catholic Church made history by being the first Catholic church in Texas to celebrate a same-sex marriage. The *Austin Chronicle* published a lengthy article on the marriage of Holy Family parishioners Darrell Cox and Andy Steffen, witnessed by Father Jayme Mathias.

The following week, Father Jayme had a conversation with parish leaders about his own decision to marry his fiancée, Anthony. On the week before his marriage, he mailed the following letter to active parishioners.

> I hope this letter finds you well and enjoying health, happiness and the choicest of blessings.
>
> Knowing how fast news travels, I'm imagining you may have heard some reports of recent events in my life. Out of respect for you, I write with an update and an invitation.
>
> The winds of change are certainly blowing, and a tremendous paradigm shift is occurring with the Supreme Court's June 26 decision to recognize same-sex marriage in the U.S. There are many perspectives on this issue. Sociologist Geert Hofstede defines culture as "the software of the mind," suggesting that we're each "programmed" to think differently about different issues. As a priest, it's fascinating to see how many people are arriving at different conclusions regarding this issue. Some are using the Bible as a "hammer," (mis)interpreting its words to condemn certain people, while others see these recent changes as an opportunity to be the loving and inclusive community that Jesus envisioned. I certainly find myself among the latter. I also recognize that same-sex marriage has long been a

taboo subject, one that many of us never talked about so openly, and one about which younger generations speak more freely. …

The Roman Catholic Church is the only Catholic/Christian church that forbids married men and all women from serving as priests. For this reason, I know it's difficult for many Catholics to imagine their priests being married. Other Catholics, on the other hand, see the value of having married priests who can better offer a perspective on married and family life. Again, there are many perspectives on the issue.

Anthony and I were engaged on New Year's Eve. Now, with the Supreme Court's recent decision, we are preparing to celebrate our love this weekend. Because of my love and respect for you, I would like for you to know this—and, despite the late notice, also to feel invited to the celebrations, if you feel comfortable.

We'll celebrate our marriage on Saturday, July 18, at 6:00 p.m., on the south walk of the Texas State Capitol (1100 N. Congress Avenue). My parents will be there, and Archbishop Johnson will preside at the ceremony, which will be a casual, family-friendly event open to all.

In lieu of a wedding reception, Anthony and I will host an Urban Farm Tour and Fundraiser to benefit our local public schools on Sunday, July 19, 1:30-4:30 p.m. at Springdale Farm (755 Springdale Road). We are asking people to direct all gifts to support our public schools, and we're hoping to raise $6,000 through this event for back-to-school supplies for the students of our East Austin and Dove Springs schools. We'll have food and drink, farm tours, a farm photo booth, a DJ, and…a wedding cake! Again, this will be a casual, family-friendly, alcohol-free event open to all.

Same-sex marriage and the idea of a married clergy are very new for many Catholics. I certainly respect your feelings and decisions concerning these issues and am, of course, always happy to speak with you about such matters.

> In the meantime, should you feel comfortable, your presence is warmly welcomed at these events.
>
> Please know of my continued prayers for you, your family, and your intentions. I'm glad you're part of our Holy Family Family!

During a July 7, 2015 Pastoral Council meeting, Father Jayme reported that the parish's two Sunday Masses were regularly attracting a total of 220 to 400 people. In light of the parish's month-to-month lease from Ignacio Loredo and the parish's continued capital investments in the facility—including insulation, roofing, parking, electrical upgrades, and the creation of a new door near the parish kitchen, the Council pushed for a two- to five-year contract with Mr. Loredo. Deacon Cleofas reported on his two mission communities: His Pflugerville community had dwindled to five people who could hardly cover gas money, and his Dale community had recently gathered, but without taking up any collection.

On July 18, 2015, Archbishop William Johnson returned to the parish for his ninth episcopal visitation. He witnessed the celebration of the sacrament of Marriage between Father Jayme and his husband, Anthony. The celebration on the south lawn of the Texas Capitol was attended by a number of Holy Family congregants. The following day, Archbishop Johnson participated in the parish's celebration of St. Mary of Magdala and of women in the Church. This day featured the parish's first women-led liturgy, with Rev. Kathleen MacPherson of the ACCUS presiding at the weekly Sunday Mass in English, and with Deacon Angelita Mendoza-Waterhouse preaching.

In August 2015, Father Jayme offered a course on Reformation and Modern Church History as part of the parish's theological institute. Other Fall courses of the institute included Modern Philosophy, Spiritual Theology II, Ecclesiology, Homiletics II, and Philosophy of Human Nature.

On August 21, 2015, Archbishop William Johnson returned to the parish for his tenth episcopal visitation, to work with Deacons Cleofas Cruz and Roy Gomez in preparation for their upcoming ordinations to the presbyterate.

In October 2015, Abel Luna created a wooden altar for the parish's Blessed Sacrament chapel, as well as a wooden pedestal for the parish's image of the Holy Family. He also announced that he would next build a new altar and ambo for the parish.

During October 2015, Inocencio and Amanda Rodriguez leveled the parish parking lot and created parking spaces, placing handicap-accessible signs in three spots. They also created highway banners for the parish, so that drivers on Highway 183 might know of the presence of Holy Family on Lava Hill Road.

During October 2015, Father Jayme completed the necessary paperwork to bring Father Libardo Rocha to the U.S. with an R-1 religious visa.

On October 11, 2015, Holy Family hosted its second *Jamaica* and Fall Festival. John Zavala led the coordination of all details for the event, which featured music by DJ Jesse Cruz and Los Texas Wranglers. Offerings included eight food and drink booths, a plant sale, moonwalk, fish pond, cakewalk, ring toss, and a raffle for which John Zavala and Louis Cuevas printed 2,000 books of tickets.

On October 23-25, 2015, Archbishop William Johnson returned to the parish for his eleventh episcopal visitation. On Friday, October 23, he witnessed the marriage of Deacon Cleofas Cruz and Dulce María Castillo. On October 24, Holy Family celebrated its first presbyteral (or priestly) ordination: Archbishop Johnson ordained Deacon Cleofas Cruz to the priesthood, bestowing on him a new name to honor Mary: Father Cleofas María Cruz. On October 25, Archbishop Johnson celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation during Sunday Masses for 25 *confirmandi*.

In November 2015, after 3.5 years of the extraordinary volunteer efforts of Diana and Angie Coy in the parish office, Amanda Rodriguez began assisting with office details and would later be named the parish's first office administrator.

Beginning in November 2015, in light of the expanded number of clergy—with Father Jayme, Father Libardo, Father Cleofas, Deacon Roy (soon to be ordained a priest), Deacon John and Deacon Angelita—Holy Family piloted through the end of March a schedule of six Sunday Masses, to give new clergy more opportunities to preside and preach. The new Mass schedule

included a Saturday 6:00 p.m. bilingual Mass, and Sunday Masses at 8:30 a.m. (Spanish), 10:00 a.m. (English), 11:30 a.m. (Spanish) and 1:00 p.m. (Spanish). At a November 3 Pastoral Council meeting, Father Jayme reported that 249 people attended Mass the previous Sunday, November 1, with the highest attendance at the 10:00 a.m. English Mass (97 people), 11:30 a.m. Spanish Mass (82 people) and 1:00 p.m. Spanish Mass (46 people). The 7:00 a.m. Mass, which had an attendance of three people that Sunday, was eliminated after eight weeks.

On December 12-13, 2015, Archbishop William Johnson returned to the parish for his twelfth episcopal visitation, together with his wife, Audrey, and his Vicar General, Father Christopher Bisett. On Saturday, December 12, Holy Family celebrated the ordination of its first "home-grown" priest: Archbishop Johnson ordained longtime servant of God Father Roy Gomez during an evening celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe and named him Parochial Vicar of Holy Family. On Sunday, December 13, Archbishop Johnson and Father Christopher joined us for our annual Pastoral Council Christmas Party. Archbishop Johnson gifted two chalices to Holy Family: one from his predecessor, Archbishop Harms' ordination and consecration, which Holy Family would often use in the parish chapel, and the ornate ordination chalice of Archbishop Harms' partner, Father Vincent Robinson, which contained the images of the twelve apostles.

During a Clergy Council meeting on December 15, 2015, parish clergy discussed various liturgical details, including the possibility of eventually transitioning to metal Communion cups, since the glass Communion cups used over the past three years continued breaking. They also reviewed the first draft of a parish Pastoral Manual. By that time, Father Jayme reported that 60 individuals had participated in the parish's theological institute during the past 2.5 years, attending over 300 hours of course offerings, and accumulating more than 3,400 total instructional hours in the program.

2016

In January and February 2016, Father Libardo offered two Spanish courses—on Marriage and Sexuality, and on Mariology—as part of the parish's theological institute. Other Spring courses in English, by Father Jayme, included Pastoral Counseling, and Death and the Pastoral Care of the Dying.

On February 2, 2016, Holy Family clergy, who now numbered five, met for their first Clergy Council meeting of the year. In attendance were: Father Jayme Mathias, Pastor; Father Roy Gomez, Parochial Vicar; Father Cleofas María Cruz, Associate Pastor; Deacon John H. Limon; and Deacon Angelita Mendoza-Waterhouse.

On March 13, 2016, Holy Family celebrated its fourth anniversary with its fourth annual Holy Family Awards.

On March 24-26, 2016, Holy Family celebrated its fourth Easter Triduum. Father Cleofas María presided at the Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's Supper, Father Roy presided at the Good Friday Commemoration of the Lord's Passion, and Father Jayme celebrated the Easter Vigil, at which Deacon Angelita preached. The weekend marked the last regular service of longtime dedicated altar server Becky Lego, now pregnant with her daughter, and Becky's brother-in-law, Christopher Leal, stepped up as head altar server going forward.

In April, May and June 2016, Father Libardo offered two Spanish courses, on Sacraments of Initiation, and Introduction to Sacred Scriptures, as part of the parish's theological institute.

On May 14-15, 2016, Archbishop William Johnson returned to the parish for his thirteenth episcopal visitation. He celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation with 35 *confirmandi* on the evening of Saturday, May 14.

On June 12, 2016, Holy Family was visited by Majid Hemmasi, who announced that he was the new owner of the Loredo property. The property at 8613 Lava Hill Road had been foreclosed, sold on public auction, and purchased by Hemmasi on March 3 for $200,100. Though not specifying an amount, Hemmasi demanded back-rent to March 3. Father Jayme and Father Roy met at Hemmasi's office on June 16, thus initiating various months of

negotiation with him to purchase the property. Though he wanted to immediately offload the property, he was willing to sell it to Holy Family for $500,000. Prior to this, Holy Family had been working with architect Ben Heimsath to create a vision for the future of the Loredo property and facilities; Hemmasi's visit put an end to this strategic planning process.

On June 29, 2016, the Holy Family Theological Institute completed three years of weekly curriculum. During those three years, the institute offered nearly all required philosophy and theology courses of the St. John XXIII Theological Institute.

On July 19-21, 2016, Archbishop William Johnson returned to the parish for his fourteenth episcopal visitation. On July 19, he joined a parish meeting with Heimsath Architects, the firm that led our parish through a master planning process. On July 20, he met with Father Jayme, whom he recently named Dean of the St. John XXIII Theological Institute of the American Catholic Church in the U.S. On July 21, he joined the quarterly meeting of the parish's Clergy Council at the home of Mary Lou Piña.

In August 2016, Father Roy Gomez convened the parish's first bible study and rosary. This weekly gathering continued through Father Roy's retirement from active ministry at the end of 2020, when Father Jayme assumed leadership of this ministry.

On October 11, 2016, local graphic designer Luis Armando Ordaz Gutiérrez began leading our parish community through a rebranding effort, resulting the following month in a renewed parish logo with softer colors. The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph were placed against a stained-glass window, Mary was clothed in red (a symbolic color of divinity in the Eastern Church), and Joseph was dressed in blue (a symbolic color of humanity in the Eastern Church). A heart was added to the image of Jesus, reminding us of his limitless, all-encompassing love for all, and a cross topped the image, reminding us of the sacrifices we are called to make as we open our hearts and our arms in the loving embrace of all persons.

On October 28, 2016, Archbishop William Johnson returned to the parish for his fifteenth episcopal visitation. On October 29, he celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation for 18 *confirmandi*.

By November 2016, the attendance at Father Cleofas María's San Lorenzo Catholic Community in San Marcos was regularly 6 to 18 people, though 50 people gathered for their October celebration of St. Jude.

In November 2016, after a leave of absence of a few months, Father Roy returned to Holy Family. In November, Father Jayme was also elected to his second four-year term on the Austin ISD Board of Trustees.

In November 2016, Holy Family launched a pledge drive that netted $4,800 in pledges. As the result of one gift, the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation pledged an additional "double matching gift" of $7,800.

On November 20, 2016, Father Libardo convened a three-hour planning retreat for Spanish-language parish leaders. In addition to Father Libardo, Father Jayme and Father Cleofas María, seven lay leaders attended. Knowing that the parish's English motto—"Loving. Inclusive. Catholic. Doing It Jesus' Way!"—did not easily translate to English, they suggested the following phrases for Spanish-language branding of Holy Family:

- *Sagrada Familia: donde todos somos bienvenidos*. [Holy Family: where we're all welcome.]
- *Nos sentimos hijos de Dios*. [We feel like children of God.]
- *Nos sentimos en familia*. [We feel like we're among family.]
- *Donde no juzgamos a nadie*. [Where we don't judge anyone.]

They also formulated the following SWOT analysis of Holy Family:

- Internal Strengths
  - The leadership of Fr. Jayme & Fr. Libardo
  - An inclusive community, where all are invited & welcomed
  - We have less gossip & cliques than in other churches
  - Many people come to us for sacraments
  - *Somos católicos que no mienten* [We're Catholics who don't lie]
  - We receive everyone

  - We’re a modern church, for a new generation
  - We’re Catholics who follow the footsteps of Christ, reaching out to the Zacchaeuses of this world
  - A church where all can feel good
  - An inclusive church
  - *Una segunda casa para todos* [A second home for all]
  - *Haciendo lo que a Jesús le gustaría que hiciéramos* [“Doing what Jesus would want us to do”]
  - We don’t exclude or reject anyone
  - “The church where everyone fits”
  - We practice *amor prohibido* [“forbidden love”; we love in ways that other Catholics are not “allowed”]
  - We’re a different & inclusive Catholic church
  - Fr. Jayme’s props & energy; the way he connects with people; he’s fun
- Internal Weaknesses
  - Lack of parish identity
  - We don’t own our property
  - Perhaps we’re not in the right location
  - Lack of events that attract people
  - Lack of help from [Spanish-speaking] people; they don’t volunteer
  - People don’t return after receiving sacraments from us
  - We don’t have the answers to people’s questions: What diocese are you part of? Why aren’t you part of the [Roman Catholic] Diocese of Austin? Why don’t we pray for the pope and the [Roman Catholic] bishop of Austin?
  - People don’t realize that we’re not Roman Catholics
  - We’re programmed to think we need to confess our sins [every time] before going to Communion
  - We’ve divided Spanish-speaking people across three Masses. It would be better to have a single Mass at 11:30 or 12:00

    - We don't have choirs, music or any way to include or involve people
- External Opportunities
    - We don't lie, like the Roman church—with respect to such issues as marriage & divorce, living in sin [*vivir en el pecado*], our gay children, the "*pero*" *con los sacramentos* [conditions placed on sacraments]
- External Threats
    - People don't feel they need church
    - People are often moving
    - People speak ill of us and our parish, saying that we aren't a true church with valid sacraments

On December 7, 2016, Bianca Briones announced her intention to begin a Children's Ministry at Holy Family on February 1. Three people came to a volunteer meeting on December 14, then four volunteers came to an organizational meeting on January 4. They decided to launch a ten-week "Maker Fun Factory" for children 3 to 13 years old on Wednesday evenings, and to renovate the back room of the church, which previously served as the cluttered storage area of the former owners. Father Roy, Andres Cantu, Inocencio Rodriguez and Margaret Bruch led the project of cleaning, repairing and painting the room.

Holy Family celebrated the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe on Sunday, December 11, 2016. The 11:30 a.m. Spanish Mass, with 118 attendees, saw the highest attendance for that Mass since 2015. After Masses, the English Pastoral Council hosted its annual Christmas dinner, with a catered meal and the sharing of White Elephant gifts. Holy Family then hosted a pilgrimage to the live nativity in Burnet, Texas: 40 parishioners rented a charter bus and played bingo to and from the very cold evening event.

On December 20, 2016, Holy Family hosted its annual *posada*, followed by a visit from Santa Claus and the sharing of toys with children.

On December 25, 2016, Reverend Patrice Cheasty-Miller, a former United Methodist Church minister ordained an Independent Catholic priest by the Ecumenical Catholic Church of Australia in 2015, preached for the first time at Holy Family during

our bilingual Midnight Mass. She announced that she would be living in Austin through June and desired to support the ministries of Holy Family Catholic Church.

2017

On January 15, 2017, Holy Family hosted guest preacher Rev. Jennifer Cumberbatch, for a parish celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr. Pastor Jen and her husband, Rev. Ashton Cumberbatch, led the parish in prayer to conclude the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

On January 25, 2017, Holy Family hosted an Ethics and Integrity in Ministry training session for the volunteers interested in supporting our new Children's Ministry.

On February 1, 2017, Holy Family launched its Children's Ministry, "Maker Fun Factory," a ten-week program in which children learned about the Catholic faith through science. In preparation for the event, parishioners cleaned a cluttered storage room in the back of the Lava Hill facility and painted it with vibrant colors for the new Children's Ministry. The program weekly attracted 6 to 13 children.

On February 12, 2017, Holy Family sold CDs with Father Jayme's Advent and Christmas homilies. This was the second CD of homilies that Father Jayme recorded for Holy Family.

On February 19, 2017, John Zavala hosted a raffle that raised $1,000 for the parish's new Children's Ministry. The same day, parish clergy hosted their first gathering of local Independent Catholic Clergy. They were joined by Father James Yelvington, a local Independent Catholic priest who regularly attended Mass at St. David Episcopal Church. Having moved to Austin, Rev. Patrice Cheasty-Miller started regularly attending Holy Family for the following months. By February, Holy Family clergy were discussing the possibility of creating an Independent Catholic Conference, with the goal of networking with and providing community and support for Independent Catholic clergy. At their next planning meeting on March 2, they discussed hosting a three-day, two-night conference in Austin, to build community and share best practices with other Independent Catholic clergy.

On February 22, 2017, Father Jayme hosted a recording session for the pilot episodes of *Fides Populi*, a series of "Catholics React" videos for the parish's YouTube page, which now contained nearly 1,000 videos.

On February 26, 2017, Holy Family took a "family photo," containing all who attended Mass. The same day, Father Cleofas María Cruz celebrated his first 11:00 a.m. Spanish Mass with a community of some 20 people in Hudson Bend, near Lakeway. Their community would soon become known as *Misión Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* [Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission].

In February 2017, Holy Family received a donation of an 18th-century cross from Mexico, which the parish used in its Lenten décor that year.

On March 5, 2017, Andrew Cantu of the Holy Family Finance Council visited Salem Lutheran Church, located at 9322 Farm-to-Market Road 812, to inquire into the possibility of renting the church for Holy Family services. When he entered the front doors, he found the congregation's church council gathered in the narthex, discussing the possible closure of their congregation. Pastor Laura Lincoln had been assigned to assist the congregation's "hospice experience," and Andrew's arrival was greeted as a divine sign amid a very painful conversation. Longtime Salem leaders Lynn and Rita (Staton) Luedecke became tremendous champions for the idea of allowing Holy Family to rent facilities from Salem, and both congregations eventually agreed to a lease agreement effective July 1, 2017.

On March 12, 2017, Holy Family celebrated its fifth anniversary, with its fifth annual Holy Family Awards.

On March 31, 2017, Father Libardo returned from Italy with his R-1 religious visa, which allowed him to legally serve our parish community through July 2019.

On April 2, 2017, Father Jayme announced that the parish had succeeded in securing an R1 religious visa for Father Libardo Rocha, who officially began his ministry as associate pastor in our parish community that day, exactly two years after his first visit to Holy Family on April 2, 2015.

On April 13-15, 2017, Holy Family celebrated its fifth Easter Triduum. Father Roy presided at the Holy Thursday Mass of the

Lord's Supper, Father Libardo presided at the Good Friday Commemoration of the Lord's Passion, and Father Jayme celebrated the Easter Vigil, at which Reverend Patrice preached. Father Cleofas María presided at all Triduum celebrations at the parish's Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission in Hudson Bend.

On May 19, 2017, Archbishop William Johnson returned to the parish for his sixteenth episcopal visitation. On May 20, he celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation with our parish community, and on May 21, he celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation with some 20 *confirmandi* at *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* Mission in Hudson Bend, near Lakeway.

The May 24, 2017 issue of *Texas Monthly* featured an article on Holy Family by Robyn Ross, titled: "Critical Mass: An Austin church remakes Catholicism without the pope, celibate priests, or most of the other rules." The article cited the challenge of longevity in Independent Catholic communities and the challenge that Holy Family had of attracting young couples with children.

On May 28, 2017, in light of the diminishing number of breakfast groups, John Zavala hosted the parish's first "continental breakfast" (of cereal, fruit, sweetbread and coffee). The vision for this was far simpler than the parish breakfasts that soon evolved from it.

On June 22, 2027, the Pastoral Council decided to pilot a "Kindles for Kids" raffle on the second Sunday of each month, in an attempt to increase Mass attendance, and to implement Rev. Patrice's idea of providing a "Children's Treasure Chest," with free toys for children, after all Masses. The Pastoral Council also supported the idea of celebrating the sacrament of Anointing on the third Sunday of each month.

On June 25, 2017, Holy Family celebrated its last Masses at 8613 Lava Hill Road. After the final Spanish Mass, parishioners loaded all parish property into their cars and a moving van, to make the move to Holy Family's new home at Salem Lutheran Church.

As part of the move that week, Holy Family assisted with a deep clean of the church and the power-washing of all sidewalks and of the stone base of the front church sign. Holy Family would later assist with such projects as the pouring of new sidewalks around the church, led by Inocencio Rodriguez, and the painting of

Salem's Activity Building (which Holy Family used as its parish hall), a project led by Father Roy Gomez. Inside the church, the ambo was in a far corner, obstructed by the organ, so Father Jayme turned the organ against the wall, and Andres Cantu moved the ambo closer to the main aisle. Salem's altar table was small and low, so Father Roy and Agustín Galarza installed better sanctuary lighting, and Joe Rodriguez later created an altarpiece to lift the altar closer to the eyes of priests. The altar, ambo and back altar made by Abel Luna for our previous space were accommodated in Salem's Religious Education Building, which became Holy Family's chapel. A second image of the Holy Family was brought from Mexico for the chapel. Salem provided an office space on the west end of the Religious Education Building for Holy Family's parish office. Holy Family initially leased storage space at a rental facility on Ben White Boulevard, then built a new storage shed at Salem in March and April 2018. Though Salem's parking lot accommodated its congregants, it needed to be expanded to accommodate Holy Family: Salem contracted Inocencio Rodriguez to bring in eight loads of base to expand and level the east parking lot. Holy Family then created an additional parking lot on the west side of the church and worked with Salem to designate additional handicapped parking spaces. Holy Family provided a bilingual sign in front of the church, welcome mats outside all doors that listed the names of both congregations, outdoor signage directing people to various buildings, feather flags for both congregations, and a new air dancer with Father Jayme's image. Fans and pens were made with the names of both congregations.

On July 2, 2017, Holy Family celebrated its first Masses at its present location, at 9322 FM 812. To accommodate the 10:30 a.m. Sunday service of Salem Lutheran Church, Holy Family changed its Mass schedule and began celebrating a 9:00 a.m. English Mass in the church, a 10:30 a.m. Mass in English in the parish's new chapel, and a 12:00 p.m. Spanish Mass in the church. On this first Sunday, Holy Family provided a July 4 barbeque of brisket, sausage, potato salad, beans, and banana pudding after the 9:00 a.m. Mass. On the same day, Father Libardo launched a *Misa de fraternidad de la comunidad* [Mass of community fraternity], with a

potluck on the first Sunday of each month. Photos were taken after Mass, with all Mass attendees standing in front of our new church.

Prior to the move, Holy Family clergy and lay leaders discussed how to accommodate the parish's Masses in a Lutheran space, including such details as hiding Catholic images and the parish gift shop during Lutheran services, and how to accommodate Communion processions in a smaller space. Holy Family previously had two bread ministers and four cup ministers at each Mass, but the physical space at Salem Lutheran had no side aisles and could comfortably accommodate only three Communion ministers. Salem did, however, possess a projector and screen, such that the words of prayers and songs could be shared during Masses. For nearly three years, until the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Inocencio and Amanda Rodriguez's sons, Miguel and Jon Paul, assisted the ministry of advancing slides during Masses.

Beginning in July 2017, Father Jayme had hoped to escape on the fourth Sunday of each month, to visit Father Cleofas María and his mission community in Hudson Bend. After his visit in July, he was unable to do so again, and Father Cleofas María increasingly distanced himself from Holy Family, choosing instead to be a "missionary priest." Shortly thereafter, the Hudson Bend community folded, and Father Cleofas María began celebrating a 10:30 a.m. Sunday morning Mass at Holy Cross Chapel, his home chapel at 4885 Old Colony Road in Lockhart, and a 5:00 p.m. Mass at San Lorenzo Chapel, in his mother's home, at 3401 Highway 21 in San Marcos.

During July 2017, Holy Family hosted its annual fan drive, to provide fans to senior adults in need.

Beginning in July 2017, we moved our Children's Treasure Chest outside the church after Masses. At our location on Lava Hill, we invited children to come forward to the altar after Communion, to choose a toy from the chest, but the large number of children at the Spanish Mass and their indecision with respect to choosing toys turned this into a long ritual that could better be accommodated outdoors after Masses.

On August 6, 2017, Reverend Patrice visited us from North Carolina and preached at our 9:00 a.m. Mass.

On August 13, 2017, Holy Family received its first visit from "Felix, the Holy Family Flying Frog," a green-faced parish mascot in a blue cape, who greeted children and parishioners after Mass. Father Jayme explained that "frog" is also an acronym, reminding us to "fully rely on God." Leonard Gonzales served as our parish mascotter through the COVID-19 pandemic, and Milo Schindler-Cruz assumed this ministry after the pandemic.

On October 15, 2017, Holy Family hosted its first *Jamaica* and Fall Festival at Salem Lutheran Church. The festival featured music by *Grupo Kapricho*, Los Texas Wranglers, and Ashley and the Boyz, and included food and drink booths, children's games, a cake walk and ring toss. A professionally-designed ad book was shared, celebrating family members and advertising local businesses.

On October 26, 2017, Archbishop William Johnson returned to Holy Family for his seventeenth episcopal visitation. On October 26-28, he participated in an assembly of ACCUS clergy convened by our parish community. On October 27, to mark the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's 95 theses, ACCUS Vicar of Clergy Father Michael Zocholl presided at a "Mass for the Reformers of the Church." On October 28, Archbishop Johnson celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation for 41 *confirmandi*. On October 29, Deacon Angelita preached, as was her custom on the fifth Sunday of the month.

In November 2017, Father Jayme and Father Roy made the decision to change the governance structure of Holy Family Catholic Church. The parish was incorporated with Father Jayme, Father Roy and Mary Helen "Nena" Quintero as the initial officers—and the Pastoral Council since then was only consultative. They now revised the parish's bylaws and expanded the Board: New members included Deacon Angelita Mendoza-Waterhouse, Terry Ann Caballero, Louis and Rita Cuevas, Leonard and Waldine Gonzales, Rafaela Leal, Rebecca Saenz and John Zavala. After this election, Nena resigned from the Board, to focus on the parish's bookkeeping functions, and Father Roy served as Chair of the Board for the next 2.5 years.

On November 19, 2017, Holy Family hosted its annual Thanksgiving brunch. Holy Family's annual end-of-year appeal supported the parish's dream of a new church, the services of

Father Libardo, and scholarships for 2018 graduates. All who contributed to this campaign received a Holy Family lapel pin.

On December 3, 2017, Holy Family hosted a movie day and rented out an entire theater for a showing of the new Disney movie, "Coco."

On December 10, 2017, the Pastoral Council hosted its annual Christmas dinner, with White Elephant gift exchange, at 1:00 p.m., followed by a 3:00 p.m. parish pilgrimage to "Main Street Bethlehem" in Burnet, Texas—with "bilingual Burnet bus bingo" aboard! Archbishop Johnson joined us for the trip.

On December 17, 2017, Holy Family hosted three groups of *danza azteca* in the parish's outdoor pavilion: They danced from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and the event concluded with a parish raffle.

2018

During 2018, Holy Family had the practice of recording and sharing "Holy Family Shout-outs" for ACCUS clergy and seminarians who celebrated birthdays or anniversaries.

In January 2018, Holy Family received its first officially-designated "aspirant" to ordained ministry when Vincent Maldonado announced at Mass that he intended to one day serve as a deacon. Parish clergy formulated the term "aspirant" to recognize Vincent's aspiration, and Vincent participated in diaconal formation for a brief time with Father Libardo. Though he did not continue his formation, Vincent continued to use the title aspirant, even in his mother's April 18, 2023 obituary. After Vincent's passing on December 15, 2023, his obituary noted this aspiration as well.

On February 4, 2018, Holy Family hosted its annual St. Blaise blessing of throats, followed by *tamales* and *atole* in the parish hall in honor of *Día de la Candelaria*, complete with a parish breakfast by Leonard and Waldine Gonzales and Ramiro and Mary Alice Guzman. Other monthly breakfast groups at that time included the Andrew and Mary Alice Cantu family, the Zavala and Cuevas families (John and Estela Zavala and Louis and Rita Cuevas), and

the Inocencio and Amanda Rodriguez family—all assisted by Mary Lou Piña.

On February 11, 2018, Holy Family hosted its annual Valentine's Day blessing of couples and renewal of vows, and Leonard and Waldine Gonzales took photos of couples in the parish hall during coffee and sweet bread.

On February 14, Holy Family celebrated Ash Wednesday for the first time at Salem Lutheran Church, with a 6:00 p.m. bilingual Mass in the chapel, and a 7:30 p.m. bilingual Mass in the church. During Lent, Holy Family continued its tradition of hosting the bilingual Stations of the Cross each Friday at 7:00 p.m., but now at Holy Family's chapel at Salem.

On Sunday, February 25, 2018, Father Libardo preached his first-ever English homily.

On March 29-31, 2018, Holy Family celebrated its first Easter Triduum at Salem. As always, Easter featured a visit from the Easter Bunny after all Masses, courtesy of Leonard Gonzales, with free copies of the photos available the following Sunday.

After Masses on April 29, 2018, volunteers helped to clear the parish's storage space on Ben White, and move all items to the newly-built storage shed on Salem's property. Inocencio Rodriguez poured the concrete slab for this project, and Father Roy and Andy Cantu worked with him to oversee the construction of the new shed.

On May 13, 2018, Holy Family hosted a Mother's Day bake sale and raffle.

On May 17-19, 2018, Holy Family hosted Father Lawman Chibundi, pastor of Rabbouni Catholic Community in Louisville, Kentucky, for a three-day spiritual retreat.

On May 17-20, 2018, Archbishop William Johnson returned to Holy Family for his nineteenth episcopal visitation. On May 19, he celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation for 57 *confirmandi*, and on May 20, he celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation for 19 *confirmandi*.

On May 20, 2018, Holy Family celebrated the 25th anniversary of Father Libardo's ordination to the priesthood with celebrations at the 10:00 a.m. parish breakfast, the 1:00 p.m. Spanish Mass potluck, and an evening clergy dinner. Bishop Johnson and Reverend

Kathleen McPherson of the American Catholic Church in the U.S. joined the celebration, which included a parish breakfast by the Zavala and Cuevas families.

In June 2018, a crisis erupted at the U.S./Mexico border, resulting in hundreds of divided families and thousands of detained children. As a result, Father Jayme and Holy Family parishioner Sabino Rentería, who served on the Austin City Council, traveled to the border in El Paso, where they surveyed the situation with the likes of New York Mayor Bill de Blasio and Miami Mayor Francis Suarez. As a result, Holy Family hosted a brief but robust conversation on Father's Day, June 17, on the (im)morality of using the Bible to justify such reprehensible actions.

On July 1, 2018, Holy Family parishioners participated in a survey on what they would change or improve about Salem's property and facilities.

On July 6-7, 2018, Holy Family hosted its first casino bus trip—or "pilgrimage," as Father Jayme preferred to call it—to Coushatta, Louisiana.

On July 29, 2018, Holy Family marked the 50th anniversary of *Humanae vitae* by sharing a pastoral letter signed by parish clergy on the many goods that have resulted from artificial birth control—something still condemned and vilified by conservative forces in the Roman Catholic Church.

Disappointed by the lack of community in the American Catholic Church in the U.S. and that fact that only one ACCUS priest came to Father Libardo's silver jubilee, despite Holy Family's willingness to pay for travel and accommodations, Holy Family clergy gathered for a Clergy Council meeting at Mary Lou Piña's home on August 21, 2018, to discuss the forging of relationships with the largest Inclusive Catholic jurisdictions in the U.S. Father Jayme agreed to represent Holy Family to the American National Catholic Church, Father Libardo represented Holy Family to the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, and Deacon Angelita represented Holy Family to the Ascension Alliance.

On August 25, 2018, Father Vincent McTighe of the American National Catholic Church moved to Austin, to be with his fiancée, Steve McPeek, who was a seminarian at the Seminary of the

Southwest. A former Roman Catholic priest for 19 years, Father Vincent occasionally joined Holy Family for Mass during the coming months.

On September 9, 2018, Holy Family celebrated its Holy Family Awards, to recognize the generous sharing of time, talent and treasure by parishioners.

In September 2018, Holy Family welcomed Father Daniel Storrs of the *Altkatholische Kirche* of North America, who moved to Austin in July. Father Daniel weekly served Holy Family as a visiting priest through April 28, 2019, before opening a new ministry, Holy Name of Mary Catholic Chapel, in his home in Avery Ranch, beginning on May 5, 2019. Father Daniel was often accompanied by his husband, Anthony Almond, and their eighth-grade son, Dan Storrs, who served as an altar server at Holy Family Masses. In 2021, Father Daniel and his family later moved their Holy Name of Mary Catholic Chapel to Towanda, Pennsylvania.

On October 7, 2018, Holy Family celebrated its annual St. Francis of Assisi pet blessing, and the clergy and lay leaders of Salem Lutheran Church invited Father Jayme to preach on the occasion of their 130th anniversary. The celebration continued with Salem's annual Oktoberfest, which included a barbeque, bake sale, live auction and raffle.

On October 10, 2018, Holy Family hosted its annual *Jamaica* and Fall Festival. The event included children's games, a cake walk and ring toss. After that event, Father Roy enjoyed a sabbatical—some well-deserved rest!—through the end of 2018.

On October 21, 2018, our Environment Committee set up a Fall photo booth in the chapel for "Holy Family Fall Family *Fotos*" after all Masses.

On October 26-28, 2018, Archbishop William Johnson made his twentieth and final episcopal visit to Austin and celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation. After 6.5 years with his jurisdiction, Holy Family withdrew from the American Catholic Church in the U.S., largely disappointed with the lack of communion among the jurisdiction's clergy.

On October 28, 2018, to celebrate All Hallows Eve and All Saints Day, Holy Family hosted saints photos after Mass in the parish hall, with a variety of vestments and saintly costumes.

On November 18, 2018, Holy Family hosted its annual Thanksgiving brunch.

On November 27, 2018, the Holy Family Board of Directors met. Father Jayme welcomed back Father Roy after a few months of sabbatical. After tensions at that meeting, largely over her suggestions to immediately cut clergy stipends and eliminate the parish rectory, Holy Family began to see Deacon Angelita less and less; after Father Libardo established *San Judas Tadeo Iglesia Católica Independiente* in August 2020, she would find her spiritual home there. Noting the conflict of having the Pastor report to other parish clergy who serve on the parish's Board of Directors, the Board agreed not to appoint clergy to the parish's Board of Directors going forward. Jennie Kennedy was elected to the Board, and, with the hope of increasing participation in the parish's Board of Directors by members of our Spanish Mass, Elsa Nelligan was elected to the Board.

At the conclusion of all Masses on December 2, Holy Family welcomed Saint Nicholas, who, courtesy of Vincent Maldonado, shared gifts with all present.

On December 16, 2018, the Holy Family Board hosted a potluck to honor the previous Parish Council's tradition of an annual Christmas dinner with White Elephant gift exchange.

On December 23, 2018, Holy Family hosted its annual Christmas sweater contest, with prizes for Most Festive, Most Sparkle, Most Adorable, Most Retro/Vintage, and Ugliest Sweater!

In 2018, Father Libardo hosted a series of *posadas* in the homes of parish families:

- December 16 – Javier & Mirea Villegas, Cedar Creek;
- December 18 – Aida Cano, McKinney Park East;
- December 19 – Fr. Jayme Mathias, East Austin;
- December 20 – Nicole Felán, Buda; tragedy struck the Holy Family community when Elsa Y. Nelligan learned at the conclusion of the *posada* of the death of her daughter, Kimberly;
- December 21 - María Núñez, McKinney Park East;
- December 22 - Jesús Hernández & Dolores Torres, one mile east of Holy Family;
- December 23 – María Luisa Loya, East Austin;

- December 24 – Morado Family, Dale.

As usual, Holy Family's bilingual Christmas Midnight Mass began with a candlelight service, which included the final *posada*, the *arrullo* (lullaby) of the Christ Child, and with the veneration of the Christ Child after Communion.

2019

On January 6, 2019, Holy Family welcomed back Father Roy after his nearly three months of sabbatical. The parish celebrated Epiphany with its traditions of the *rosca de reyes* (king cake), Epiphany extractions, and the traditional Epiphany house blessing.

On January 13, 2019, parishioners were invited to bring their baptismal candles to Mass for a renewal of their baptismal promises. After the noon Spanish Mass, the Environment Committee hosted a pizza party to pack up and store Christmas décor.

By the beginning of 2019, Father Cleofas María was celebrating a single 10:30 a.m. Sunday Mass at his Holy Cross home chapel in Lockhart.

On February 3, 2019, Holy Family hosted its annual St. Blaise blessing of throats, followed by *tamales* and *atole* in the parish hall in honor of *Día de la Candelaria*, complete with a breakfast by the Rodriguez family.

On March 3, 2019, Holy Family collected and burned old palms, to make Ash Wednesday ashes, and the Zavala and Cuevas families prepared a Mardi Gras breakfast, complete with masks and beads!

On March 6, 2019, Holy Family celebrated Ash Wednesday with bilingual Masses at 6:00 and 7:30 p.m. As always, Holy Family hosted the bilingual Stations of the Cross on the Fridays of Lent.

On March 10, 2019, Holy Family celebrated the First Sunday of Lent, with congregants dressed in purple, and also the parish's "Lucky 7" anniversary!

In March 2019, Father Roy and Rebecca Saenz led the project of repainting the exterior of the parish hall, the expense of which was

credited toward Holy Family's monthly lease to Salem Lutheran Church.

Beginning in March 2019, Father Libardo began offering regular diaconal formation to Elsa Nelligan and Vincent Maldonado.

After Palm Sunday on April 14, 2019, Holy Family celebrated its second Easter Triduum at Salem on April 18-20, 2019.

On Easter Sunday, April 21, Father Daniel Storrs announced that he would launch Holy Name of Family Catholic Chapel in his home in Avery Ranch beginning in May, using the Roman Rite 3rd edition ("and with your spirit").

On Mother's Day, May 12, 2019, John Zavala hosted a Mother's Day raffle that netted $2,714 for the parish. Raffle prize donors included: Rafaela Leal, Inocencio & Amanda Rodriguez, Mary Raigosa & Julia Machuca, Jerry & Terry Ann Caballero, Becky Saenz, Danielle Pinta & Jeff Varwig, Andy & Mary Alice Cantu, Eva Hernandez, Mario & María Cruz, Geneva Moreno, Rudy & Gloria Nieto, and Ray & Orfalinda Orta. The ten winners were: Rosa Gil, Amanda Rodriguez, J.G. Gomez, Jeffrey Romero, Alicia Caballero, Paul Foster, Christian Cruz, Carlos Antero, Janey Santana and Lana Denton.

On May 26, 2019, Holy Family awarded five $300 scholarships to graduates in the community. We also celebrated the 47th ordination anniversary of Father Vincent McTighe, who visited us as he prepared to leave the U.S. and continue his ministry in Germany.

On June 2, 2019, Holy Family raised money to purchase a new set of green vestments in time for the parish's return to Ordinary Time on June 30. Parishioners responded so generously that the parish was able to buy a new set of white vestments as well.

On June 8, 2019, Bishop Armando Leyva of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion Diocese of California visited Holy Family and celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation.

On July 7, 2019, the Zavala and Cuevas families provided a post-Mass brunch of Independence Day hamburgers and hotdogs.

On July 8-12, 2019, Father Jayme attended the annual summer school in Old Catholic theology in Utrecht, Netherlands, where he met Archbishop of Utrecht Joris Vercammen and Independent Catholic clergy from throughout the world. The event was eye-

opening for him: This was the first time that he learned of the Philippine Independent Church, an Inclusive Catholic organization with over 800 clergy who purport to serve six to eight million Catholics in the Philippines. He returned to Holy Family enthused by all he had learned and the relationships he had established.

On August 4, 2019, Holy Family was the only Catholic community in Central Texas to participate in the Austin Pride Interfaith Service at Temple Beth Shalom.

On September 8, 2019, Holy Family celebrated Grandparent's Day with a blessing for all grandparents, followed by photos of grandparents and grandchildren after Masses.

On September 22, 2019, we invited parishioners to wear Holy Family T-shirts to Mass, for a "Holy Family family photo" after each Mass, to be included in our *jamaica* program for October 12.

After returning from Utrecht, Father Jayme immediately set himself to the task of planning a first interjurisdictional gathering of U.S. Inclusive Catholic clergy. The event, "Utrecht Sweet Utrecht," was hosted at Holy Family on October 24-27 and drew 12 bishops, 13 priests, four deacons and eight lay leaders from outside of Austin to speak of the current state of Inclusive Catholicism in the U.S. Many Holy Family volunteers assisted with details of hospitality, opening their homes, providing meals, and attending the event, which featured an unforgettable evening drum circle with a local middle school music teacher. The proceedings of that gathering were published as *A New Way of Being Catholic*. In preparation for the gathering, Father Jayme published his four books: *Extraordinary Celebrations, Extraordinary Growth: Ideas for Independent & Old Catholic Communities during the Year of Matthew 2020*, *A Bibliography of Old Catholic & Independent Catholic Works*, and Father Libardo's *Islands & Bridges: Three Essays and an Interview on Independent Catholicism in the United States*, which was published in English and Spanish. At the conclusion of that first interjurisdictional gathering, Archbishop Alan Kemp of the Ascension Alliance celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation at Holy Family for 13 *confirmandi*.

On November 10, 2019, Father Libardo shared autographed copies of his new book, *Islands & Bridges: Three Essays and an Interview on Independent Catholicism in the United States.*

In November 2019, parishioners generously responded to donate a variety of North, Central and South American flags to decorate our sanctuary for the Solemnity of Christ the King of the Universe at the end of the month—a symbol that Christ is king of all nations!

During the four Sundays of Advent in 2019, Holy Family shared a different Christmas tree ornament each Sunday, and we hosted our annual Christmas sweater contest on December 22—the day on which Santa Claus visited us after all Masses. Parishioners also donated Christmas poinsettias in honor/memory of loved ones.

2020

On January 5, 2020, Holy Family celebrated Epiphany with its traditions of the *rosca de reyes* (king cake), Epiphany extractions, and the traditional Epiphany house blessing. The Cantu family prepared a delicious parish breakfast.

On February 2, 2020, Holy Family hosted its annual St. Blaise blessing of throats, followed by *tamales* and *atole* in the parish hall in honor of *Día de la Candelaria*, complete with hamburgers and hotdogs by the Rodriguez family.

On February 9, 2020, Holy Family hosted its annual Valentine's Day blessing of couples and renewal of vows, Leonard and Waldine Gonzales took photos of couples in the parish hall during coffee and sweet bread.

On February 16, 2020, we celebrated Our Lady of Lourdes and World Day of the Sick with the sacrament of Anointing, followed by breakfast by the Gonzales and Guzman families.

In February, parishioners also generously responded to provide a new set of purple Lenten vestments for the parish.

By mid-March, the 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) quickly spread through the U.S., propelling Holy Family and countless congregations into the uncertainty of a pandemic, the likes of which the U.S. had not seen since the 1918-1919 influenza pandemic. On March 14, 2020, Father Jayme returned from spring

break travels to Alaska just before airports closed nationwide. Initially, due to the lockdown, he tried to provide assurance and prayer through Facebook Live. On March 15, Holy Family celebrated its last live Masses at the church for over four months.

On March 22, 2020, in light of the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Texas, Holy Family broadcasted its first recorded Sunday Masses. The Sunday announcements shared: "We're suspending Sunday Mass at our church on FM 812, but we'll be broadcasting the Mass here on Facebook Live! We'll take this pandemic scare one day and one week at a time, and we'll look forward to our homecoming to Holy Family!" At that time, U.S. President Donald J. Trump was assuring the country that churches would be open in time for Easter, and Holy Family shared its hope of celebrating the sacrament of Confirmation at the end of May. In response to the newly-coined phrase of "social distancing," Father Jayme wrote, "During this time of 'physical distancing, but spiritual closeness,' let us continue to pray with and for one another and for our intentions!"

Parishioners quickly learned how to log into Zoom, a platform for face-to-face communication, and Father Roy used Zoom to connect with those who gathered for the parish's weekly bible study and rosary. Holy Family was in the middle of the Lenten season, so the bilingual Stations of the Cross were broadcasted through Facebook. By this time, Holy Family had built its Facebook audience to over 4,000 followers and its YouTube presence to over 6,000 people.

Familiar with the Be.Live platform, which was capable of broadcasting Masses with PowerPoints on screen, Father Jayme assembled a skeleton crew—Father Roy, Father Libardo, Rebecca Saenz, Terry Ann Caballero, Amanda Rodriguez and Jon Paul Rodriguez—to don masks and record Masses in a near-empty church, which they shared on Sunday mornings through Facebook. They gathered on Saturday, April 4 to record Palm Sunday and Easter Triduum Masses. This group continued to gather in the empty church on Saturdays, to record the Sunday Masses that were broadcasted on Facebook.

As the pandemic lingered, Holy Family clergy and lay leaders mobilized to provide "drive-thru Communion," where

parishioners could drive to Holy Family at certain hours on certain days, to pray with clergy and receive Communion from their cars. This was "Phase 1" of the pandemic, and Holy Family looked forward to local health officials declaring "Phase 3," which would mean resuming indoor Masses at 25% capacity. Not wanting to miss any possible income, local Roman Catholic churches were quick to reopen. Following the health advice of physician assistant Eva Montes and nurse Rafaela Leal, Holy Family did not reopen so long as there was a heightened risk of parishioners contracting COVID at church.

On July 6-17, 2020, Father Jayme hosted a two-week Inclusive Catholic Virtual Summer School through Zoom for clergy and lay leaders throughout the U.S., followed by a similar two-week experience in Spanish on July 20-31.

On August 1, 2020, as the first wave of the pandemic began to subside, Jerry Caballero and other parish leaders hosted a barbeque chicken and sausage plate fundraiser, which netted $3,980 for the parish.

Holy Family resumed in-person Masses on August 9, 2020—masked and physically-distanced—through the Feast of the Holy Family on December 27, when Austin's holiday rise in COVID cases signaled the necessity to close the church again through May 2021. During this Fall opening, Holy Family instituted a number of COVID precautions, including no holy water in the entrance to the church, temperature checks (initially, then deemed useless due to asymptomatic transmission of the disease), the cordoning off of every other pew, the removal of pew cushions, the sanitizing of pews between Masses, and the discontinuation of parish breakfasts, processions, Communion cups, the Children's Liturgy of the Word, and the Children's Treasure Chest. Eva also donated plentiful hand sanitizer and masks for church use.

Meanwhile, the bible study met physically-distanced in the parish hall, but with an option to attend through Zoom, and Holy Family's prayer and liturgical life continued to be shaped by the pandemic. The parish weekly prayed for all who suffered as a result of the pandemic. Labor Day prayers were raised for all who experienced unemployment as a result of the pandemic, and, to celebrate *fiestas patrias* in mid-September, all were invited to wear

a green, white or red mask for "pandemic *fiestas patrias* photos." The parish's September 22 celebration of Our Lady of Sorrows lifted up all who suffered as a result of the pandemic.

In August 2020, Father Libardo started Holy Family's second mission, *San Judas Tadeo Iglesia Católica Independiente* [St. Jude Thaddeus Independent Catholic Church], which nested at Trinity United Church in Niederwald, 11 miles south of Holy Family. With Spanish Masses at San Judas at 11:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m., Father Libardo no longer returned to Holy Family, which paid the first month lease of $500 for him to begin this parish mission. By the end of 2020, Father Libardo separated himself from Holy Family, largely due to his inability to serve Holy Family's English-language community that gathered at 9:00 a.m. and 10:30 a.m., and also due to his unwillingness to abide by Holy Family's policies and internal controls for parish missions.

In mid-September, amid the pandemic, wildfires spread through California and Oregon, such that the parish's second collection on September 20, 2020 benefited the relief efforts coordinated by Independent Catholic priest Father Scott Carter in Ashland, Oregon.

On October 3, 2020, Father Jayme, through the delegation of Bishop Marc Morales de Castillo, celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation for four *confirmandi*, all masked and physically distanced in the church.

On October 20, 2020, the Holy Family Board of Directors met and learned that, fortunately, despite the pandemic, Holy Family finished the first three quarters of 2020 with a loss of only a nickel—and did not need to withdraw any savings to date to get through the pandemic. The Board elected new members: Jordan Dickenson and Stephen Rodriguez, Rudy and Gloria Nieto, and Vincent Maldonado.

On World Mission Sunday, October 28, 2020, Father Jayme published *Aglipayan: The Flourishing of Independent Catholicism in the Philippines*, a 180-page book that explored the history of the world's largest expression of Inclusive Catholicism.

National politics continued to influence the pandemic response. On November 3, 2020, President Donald J. Trump was narrowly defeated—some suggest due to his (mis)handling of the COVID

crisis—and Father Jayme wrote the following Sunday: "This week's [presidential] election revealed how deeply divided our nation is. May we all rededicate ourselves to unity and reconciliation!" On that same Sunday, he shared: "We recognize that we're in the middle of a pandemic, and we're taking all precautions. We're not seeing the same spike in cases here in Travis County as we are in Texas and the U.S. If/when we do, we'll spread word of our return to virtual Masses on Facebook! Until then, we'll continue with Sunday Masses, plus drive-thru Communion from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m."

On November 22, 2020, Holy Family's annual Thanksgiving brunch was prepared "to-go," so that parishioners could enjoy a hot holiday meal at home.

In November 2020, Father Jayme published *Celebrations that Stick: Ideas for Independent & Old Catholic Communities during the Year of Mark 2021.* The book later stirred some controversy in the Holy Family community: It was one of three books published by Holy Family that contained cover photos shared with Holy Family by Father Daniel Storr's husband, Anthony Almond, who, after opening their own home chapel, insisted that his photos be removed from the covers of all previously-published books. The event resulted in the souring of various Holy Family parishioners toward Anthony, thus providing Holy Family the opportunity to practice the love and forgiveness preached at Holy Family.

On December 2, 2020, Father Roy celebrated his 75th birthday. To mark the occasion, Father Jayme published a 24-page booklet titled *In Giving, We Receive: Celebrating 30 Years of Ministry to the People of God by Father Roy Gomez.*

On December 31, 2020, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Father Roy Gomez retired from active ministry. He continued to assist Holy Family, as needed, and on the third Sunday of each month, when the parish celebrated the sacrament of Anointing. To celebrate Father Roy's five years of priestly ministry at Holy Family and his many contributions to the parish from the moment of its conception, Father Jayme published a 100-page book of Father Roy's homilies, *Love God & Love Others: Reflections by Father Roy Gomez*, which Father Roy shared as a gift with those present at his last Mass as an active priest on December 27, 2020.

Father Jayme later shared that the parish's Facebook fundraising efforts in 2020 netted $17,640 for the parish and other projects, as follows:

- $2,377 – Support for Holy During the Pandemic
- $1,820 – Chicken & Sausage for Our BBQ Fundraiser
- $1,858 – Virtual Summer School Scholarships
- $820 – Preparing to (Hopefully Soon) Re-open
- $2,492 – Motorbike for Sierra Leone
- $985 – School Supplies
- $770 – Support for Our Building Fund
- $545 – Kindles for Kids
- $435 – West Coast Wildfire Relief
- $655 – Support for Our Building Fund
- $665 – World Mission Sunday fundraiser for Philippines
- $1,030 – Giving Tuesday Fundraiser
- $1,060 – A Christmas Gift for Holy Family
- $826 – "Santa Support" for Holy Family Families
- $1,750 – Honoring Father Roy Gomez
- $690 – New Whiteboard for Holy Family Theological Institute
- $770 – Annual Music License

2021

After January 3, 2021, Austin returned to COVID Level 5, and Holy Family shut its doors until the city's return to Level 4—which came in late February.

With Father Roy's retirement from active ministry at the end of 2020, Father Jayme assumed leadership of the parish's weekly Wednesday evening bible study and rosary, which began to meet masked and physically-distanced in the parish hall. On March 1, Father Jayme published *Father Roy's Rosary*, the scriptural rosary that Father Roy shared during the weekly bible study, with a Spanish translation by Elsa Nelligan. He reinitiated the parish's theological institute, with initial courses on Hebrew Scriptures, Catholic Liturgical Ministries, and the Gospel of Mark. Parishioners generously provided a new whiteboard for this purpose.

With his retirement from active ministry, Father Roy also resigned as Chair of the Holy Family Board of Directors. In accordance with the Board's bylaws, Rebecca Saenz served as Acting Chair through the end of Father Roy's term in April 2021, and, at the Board's January 19, 2021 meeting, Terry Ann Caballero was named Chair Elect.

After nearly eleven years of truly magnanimous service, Mary Helen "Nena" Quintero retired as Holy Family's volunteer bookkeeper, effective January 31, 2021. After that, bookkeeping functions were assumed by Father Jayme's executive assistants: Carlos Alonso through June 2023, then Daniel Winkler after that.

On February 7, 2021, Holy Family lost two saints. After an extended illness, longtime and dedicated Holy Family volunteer Mary Lou Piña entered her eternal reward. On the same day, Holy Family lost Deacon John Hubert "Canica" Limon, who contracted COVID-19 during a New Year's Eve party at his home, was hospitalized, and, after a courageous fight, succumbed to the disease. Father Libardo, who lived with Deacon John, also contracted COVID-19 at that New Year's Eve party, was hospitalized for five weeks, and was still struggling to recover at the time of Deacon John's funeral. Amid such darkness, Father Jayme and Father Roy led the celebrations of the lives and legacies of these faithful servants.

On February 12, 2021, amid the pandemic, a federal emergency was declared in Texas after an unusual blizzard caused massive power outages, leaving many Holy Family parishioners without electricity for up to a week in freezing temperatures. Father Jayme took advantage of the shut-down to assemble and publish two online directories: a directory of over 1,800 Independent Catholic clergy worldwide, and a directory of over 230 Inclusive Catholic community throughout the U.S.

On Ash Wednesday, February 17, 2021, Holy Family—still closed due to Level 5 of the pandemic—hosted drive-thru ashes.

On February 28, 2021, Holy Family resumed in-person Masses, since Austin was back down to COVID Level 4. Because Deacon John Limon and Mary Lou Piña had passed during the most recent closure of Holy Family, we celebrated their lives and legacies, and we shared magnets with their images.

The parish's weekly bible study and rosary resumed, with an option to listen through Facebook Live, and, since it was Lent, parishioners gathered in the chapel on Friday evenings for the bilingual Stations of the Cross.

On March 7, 2021, Holy Family shared copies of the newly-published *Father Roy's Rosary*, the scriptural rosary that Father Roy shared during the weekly bible study. On the same day, reflecting on the anti-vaccine sentiment that was sweeping the U.S., Father Jayme, who had previously noted on various occasions that the COVID-19 pandemic lingered two years later due to people's unwillingness to wear masks, practice social distancing, and receive vaccinations, wrote, "Faith is not opposed to science: Let's wear our masks, physically distance, and stay safe until we have enough shots in arms to end this pandemic!" He often referred to vaccinations—shunned by many conservatives—as a truly "pro-life" issue.

In March 2021, Father Jayme edited the first volume of *Sacramental Whine*, a work on the Independent Sacramental Movement, of which Independent Catholicism is part.

On April 1-3, 2021, Holy Family celebrated its first post-pandemic Easter Triduum, and the Easter Bunny visited Holy Family, courtesy of Jordan Dickenson and Stephen Rodriguez.

On April 20, Rebecca Saenz was elected Chair of the Holy Family Board of Directors, an office that she held for the next two years.

In May 2021, Father Jayme debuted *Extraordinary Catholics* magazine, a bilingual (English/Spanish) periodical that he edited, with contributions by Inclusive Catholic clergy and lay leaders from throughout the U.S. For the first issue, Father Roy wrote the cover article on May, the month of Mary.

In April 2021, COVID-19 vaccinations first became publicly available in the U.S. On May 15, 2021, Father Jayme, through the delegation of Bishop Marc Morales de Castillo, celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation for 16 *confirmandi*, all masked and physically distanced in the church.

On June 6, 2021, Holy Family celebrated its annual Graduation Mass and awarded scholarships to high school graduates Ethan Cuevas, Katie Krause, Leila Magallanez-Delgado and Isabella

McAfee. We also blessed all students who endured 15 difficult months of online learning, as well as spurts of school openings and closings that mirrored the openings and closings of churches.

On June 27, 2021, Independent Catholic priest Father Jerry Maynard concelebrated our English Masses, and seminarian Elsa Nelligan preached at the noon Spanish Mass. Seminarian Stephen Rodriguez preached at our English Masses the following Sunday, on July 4, 2021.

On July 9, 2021, the church was broken into by a person who entered through the small south sacristy window. Though Holy Family didn't suffer any apparent loss from the event, $300 was stolen from Salem Lutheran Church. The church was broken into twice in three months.

On July 11, 2021, Holy Family shared St. Benedict crosses, and Jerry Caballero provided a "St. Benedict brisket brunch."

On July 18, 2021, seminarian Laura Hayes Marsh of the Ascension Alliance, from Montgomery, Texas, preached at our English Masses, we celebrated the Sacrament of Anointing, and we shared scapulars in honor of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

On July 25, 2021, congregants of Salem Lutheran Church returned to their church for the first time since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. Going forward, they agreed to meet for their 10:30 a.m. service only on the first and third Sunday of each month.

When the parish's weekly bible study, rosary and theological institute resumed after its July break, Fall courses included the Biblical Canon, Biblical Apocalyptic Literature, and the Gospel of Luke.

After exhausting the parish's supply of Amazon Kindles in July 2021, and no longer being able to secure Kindles for a more affordable price, Holy Family's monthly "Kindles for Kids" raffle was discontinued.

On August 1, 2021, Austin returned to COVID Level 5, causing Holy Family to shutter for another nine Sundays, resulting in a third-quarter loss of $4,875. As a result, Father Jayme shared a Facebook fundraiser titled, "The Cost of COVID Closure." Holy Family continued to offer "drive-thru Communion" from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on Sundays. Four months after the widespread

diffusion of a vaccine, he continued to encourage vaccinations as the most pressing "pro-life" issue during this lingering "pandemic of the unvaccinated." By this time, COVID had claimed over 630,000 lives in the U.S.—and most deaths due to COVID were now avoidable. That number would continue to rise, to over 1.2 million deaths, largely due to the unwillingness of people to get vaccinated.

On August 15, 2021, Father Jerry Maynard joined us for the weekend and preached at our English Masses.

By October, 2021, a national debate raged over "critical race theory." On October 12, Father Jayme added his voice to the debate: "As we celebrate *Día de la Raza* this weekend, we recall that the current controversy regarding Critical Race Theory has everything to do with whether we're willing to acknowledge what the Church refers to as social sin: Sins like discrimination and inequity become embedded in the systems we create!"

On October 30, 2021, Bishop Mark Elliott Newman, of the Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch, celebrated the diaconal ordination of Deacon Elsa Y. Nelligan Contreras at Holy Family. Two hours later, at 4:00 p.m., he celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation for nine *confirmandi*.

On October 31, 2021, Salem Lutheran Church celebrated its 133rd anniversary. To mark the occasion, Pastor Deb, one of two regular visiting pastors for Salem, invited Father Jayme and Father Roy to concelebrate at the 10:30 a.m. Lutheran service. Holy Family canceled its 10:30 a.m. Mass and invited parishioners to join the Lutheran liturgy.

In November, Father Jayme published *Extraordinary Celebrations for Extraordinary Catholics: Ideas for Independent & Old Catholic Communities during the Year of Luke 2022.*

On November 4-6, 2021, Holy Family sent a delegation to Las Vegas for a second interjurisdictional gathering of Inclusive Catholic clergy and laity, called "Saints in Sin City." Holy Family representatives included Father Jayme, Father Roy, Rebecca Saenz, Terry Ann Caballero, Stephen Rodriguez and Jordan Dickenson. They stayed in an Airbnb with Roman Catholic Womanpriest Mother Annie Cass Watson, assistant priest at St. Stanislaus Kostka Polish Catholic Church in St. Louis, Missouri, who would later

move to Texas and be part of Holy Family. The gathering was organized by Father Jayme, Father Marek Bożek of St. Stanislaus Kostka Polish Catholic Church in St. Louis, Missouri, and Father Mike Lopez of All Saints Priory in Ridgewood, New York. The proceedings of the event were published by Father Jayme as *Our Better Version of Catholicism: Proceedings of "Saints in Sin City," a Gathering of Inclusive Catholic Clergy & Laity.*

Holy Family's annual end-of-year appeal was entitled the "Holy Family Safety Patrol"—an effort to cover the cost of the parish's closure due to COVID. Holy Family also provided a holiday meal and gifts to 500 children in Sierra Leone, Africa, as well as an effort to provide "Santa relief" to parish families in need.

In December 2021, Father Jayme recorded a handful of guitar lessons for interested parishioners, though insufficient interest brought this pilot to a close by the end of the year.

On December 12, 2021, Holy Family celebrated Our Lady of Guadalupe, and seminarian Stephen Rodriguez preached at the parish's English Masses.

On December 21, 2021, Father Libardo published a 44-page Spanish book, titled *A Priest Forever: Reflections on the Sacrament of Holy Orders.* Father Jayme translated the work to English and made it available at no cost to Holy Family parishioners on the Feast of the Holy Family, December 26. On the same day, Father Jayme published a 96-page thesis: *Inspiring the Generous Sharing of Time, Talent & Financial Resources among the Mexico-born Adult Population Residing in the United States.*

In December 2021, Father Jayme piloted a podcast series, "Extraordinary Catholics," which ran for nine months.

2022

After our January 2, 2022 celebration of Epiphany, Holy Family closed again for seven weeks as Austin returned to COVID Stage 5. Roman Catholic parishes, not wanting to miss a cent of income, remained open. Father Jayme shared: "Austin has returned to COVID Stage 5. Like all truly pro-life churches, and so as not to overwhelm the professionals in our local hospitals, we'll provide virtual Masses only, until Austin returns to Stage 4. Spread the

word of drive-thru Communion 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. on Sundays!" On February 6, drive-thru Communion featured the St. Blaise blessing of throats. Our annual celebration of Valentine's Day on February 13 included a special blessing and gift for couples during drive-thru Communion. Holy Family hoped to reopen again on February 20—but then Super Bowl parties and a new omicron variant caused the COVID cases in Austin to rise. Drive-thru Communion on February 20 featured the sacrament of Anointing. Holy Family reopened on February 27.

On February 27 to March 1, 2022, Father Jayme attended the annual retreat of the Society of Old Catholic Priests at the Roman Catholic Seminary of the Immaculate Conception in Lloyd Harbor, Huntington, New York. That encounter led to the creation of a new entity, the New Catholic Community, which was created by Father Jayme with the help of Father Marek Bożek, Mother Annie Cass Watson and Father David Jacobi of St. Louis; Father Mike Lopez, Father Ángel Lugo and Louis Núñez of New York; Father Joseph Dang of Denver; Father Tom Pels of Chicago; and Father MichaelAngelo D'Arrigo of Atlanta.

On March 2, 2022, Holy Family celebrated Ash Wednesday with drive-thru ashes from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m., and a bilingual Mass at 7:00 p.m.

In the midst of the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic, Holy Family marked its tenth anniversary on March 13, 2022. On that day, Holy Family also took up a second collection to purchase a full-page ad in the *National Catholic Reporter* with an Inclusive Catholic response to the Roman Catholic Church's "Synod on Synodality."

On March 27, 2022, Holy Family hosted an effort to renew its annual music license: All who contributed to the campaign received a recorded song from Father Jayme.

In March 2022, in an attempt to keep Father Libardo connected to Holy Family, Father Jayme offered to contract his services to provide a theological institute in Spanish at Holy Family. Nothing materialized from the invitation.

Property and facility improvements by Holy Family during the first quarter of 2022 included new feather flag bases by Rudy and Gloria Nieto, a new wooden lectern cover by Joe Rodriguez, and the trimming of trees around the church by Rudy. Gabriel Rojas of

the noon Spanish Mass continued to generously share of his time and his company's resources to mow Holy Family's lawn.

With the completion of Father Jayme's new home in northeast Austin, Holy Family's April 10, 2022 celebration of Palm Sunday included an auction of art and furnishings from the parish rectory at 1612 Garden Street.

On April 14-16 ,2022, Holy Family celebrated its second post-pandemic Easter Triduum, and the Easter Bunny visited Holy Family on Easter Sunday.

In April 2022, John Zavala solicited new breakfast groups in light of the fact that three longtime breakfast groups had dissolved during the pandemic.

By the end of April 2022, with the completion of Father Jayme's new home in northeast Austin, Holy Family vacated its rectory at 1612 Garden Street, which it had rented since 2013.

On May 1, 2022, parishioners surprised Father Jayme with a *mariachi* Mass in honor of his birthday, followed by a parish breakfast with *mariachi*.

On May 19-21, 2022, Holy Family hosted the third interjurisdictional gathering of Inclusive Catholic clergy and lay leaders. The theme of the encounter was a sesquicentennial remembrance of the 1872 execution of GomBurZa, three Filipino priests whose death precipitated the Philippine revolution and the birth of the Philippine Independent Church. The gathering included presentations by Father Jayme, Father Libardo, Father Henry Janiola of the Philippine Independent Church, Father Mike Lopez of New York, Rev. Trish Sullivan Vanni of Charis Ecumenical Catholic Community in Minnesota, Father Marek Bożek of St. Louis, and Archbishop Alan Kemp of Washington. This event also marked the first visit to Holy Family by Bishop John Luft and Father Brett Banks of the Independent Catholic Ordinariate. Father Jayme published the proceedings of this gathering in the book *Revolutionary Church: A Sesquicentennial Remembrance of GomBurZa and a Celebration of the Church Birthed from the Nationalism They Inspired.*

On May 20, 2022, Holy Family received a new deacon with the ordination of Deacon Stephen Rodriguez by Archbishop Alan Kemp, who had shared with him the sacrament of Confirmation

two years earlier. The next day, Archbishop Kemp celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation for 10 *confirmandi*.

On May 29, 2022, Holy Family hosted a "Buy-a-Bible" campaign to replace the bibles in the pews at Salem. Parishioners purchased bibles in honor or memory of loved ones.

On July 8, 2022, Father Brett Banks of the Independent Catholic Ordinariate and the Advocates of St. Sebastian, who was moving to Florence, Texas just before the May interjurisdictional gathering, began an internship at Holy Family. After six months of weekly ministry at Holy Family, he was named an associate pastor at Holy Family in January 2023.

On June 25, 2022, volunteers from Holy Family's noon Spanish Mass tore down and disposed of the old playscape at Salem Lutheran Church. The following Saturday, they set up a new playground set, with space for additional pieces. The new playscape was blessed after the Spanish Mass on July 3. The new swings were almost immediately stolen, leading to the placement of a lock on the playground. Holy Family assisted with other facilities details, including the removal of old electrical wiring from the pavilion, the installation of a new air conditioning unit in the sacristy, and Rudy and Gloria Nieto restained the front doors of the church.

In July 2022, Father Jayme published *Tradition and Adaptation: Interjurisdictional Perspectives on Inclusive Catholicism in 2022*, a 375-page book that resulted from numerous "think tank" conversations by Inclusive Catholic clergy and lay leaders throughout the U.S. Father Libardo also created a single Spanish-language episode for *Católicos Extraordinarios,* a podcast in Spanish, before going silent for the next two years.

On August 1-12, 2022, Father Jayme hosted a second Inclusive Catholic Virtual Summer School in English. He published the proceedings of that gathering in a 350-page book, *Explorations in Inclusive Catholicism: Proceedings of the 2022 Inclusive Catholic Virtual Summer School*.

In August 2022, Deacon Stephen Rodriguez began a unit of Clinical Pastoral Education with Bishop Ken Corbin of St. Francis Community of Faith for All People in New York. As part of his practicum, Deacon Stephen served unhoused persons in

downtown Austin, eventually transitioning to a ministry to local nursing homes.

On August 14, 2022, Holy Family blessed students at the beginning of a new school year and provided them free backpacks and school supplies.

On August 16, 2022, the Holy Family Board of Directors elected Cornelia "Corne" Benitez Carbajal to join the board as a representative of the noon Spanish Mass.

On August 20, 2022, Holy Family participated in the San Marcos Pride Parade. Participants sported new, white parish T-shirts that advertised Holy Family as the "Cool Catholics who love you just as God created you!"

On September 3, 2022, Holy Family hosted a Labor Day White Party after Masses.

On September 22, 2022, a delegation from Holy Family, consisting of Father Brett, Deacon Stephen, Jordan Dickenson, Becky Saenz, Terry Ann Caballero, and Amanda and Inocencio Rodriguez, attended the 130th anniversary of St. Stanislaus Kostka Polish Catholic Church in St. Louis, Missouri, presenting the church a plaque from our parish community and continuing to build bridges between Holy Family and St. Stan's.

On October 9-11, 2002, Father Jayme represented Holy Family at the biannual Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion in St. Louis, Missouri, where he presented a keynote presentation for the gathering. Six days later, he presented at the annual convocation of the Ascension Alliance.

The Holy Family Board of Directors met on October 18, 2022, and discussed the possibility of affiliating with a larger jurisdiction, like the Episcopal Church of the U.S., the Philippine Independent Church, or the Ecumenical Catholic Communion. At that time, Holy Family was one of four large autocephalous or "bishopless" Independent Catholic communities in the U.S., along with Rabbouni Catholic Community in Louisville, St. Stanislaus Kostka Polish Catholic Church in St. Louis, and All Saints Priory in Ridgewood, New York. The Holy Family Board decided to take no action at present to affiliate with a larger jurisdiction.

On October 29, 2022, Bishop John Luft of the Independent Catholic Ordinariate celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation for

26 *confirmandi*. While in town, he also celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation for Father Libardo's congregation, *San Judas Tadeo Iglesia Católica Independiente*, in Niederwald.

During October 2022, Father Jayme and Deacon Elsa worked to transcribe the 1912 Spanish *Catechism of the Philippine Independent Church* and the 1902-1905 Spanish correspondence of the church's first supreme bishop, Gregorio Aglipay. They published these works in Spanish, with English translations. In October, Father Jayme also published *Extraordinary Celebrations for Extraordinary Catholics: Ideas for Independent & Old Catholic Communities during the Year of Matthew 2023.*

On November 6, 2022, John Zavala led a parish raffle for $3,900 in gift card prizes, which netted $3,867 for Holy Family. Some $700 of gift cards were compromised, which took considerable time and effort to resolve. On the same day, Deacon Elsa and a group of *danzantes* shared the *danza del torito de Silao, Guanajuato* (the dance of the bull from Silao, Guanajuato) after the noon Spanish Mass, in honor of *Día de los Muertos*.

On November 13, 2022, Holy Family was visited for the first time by Mother Annie Cass Watson, previously of St. Stanislaus Kostka Polish Catholic Church in St. Louis, whose husband, Dr. Jimmy Watson, was assigned pastor of Weimar United Church in Weimar, Texas, some 75 miles southeast of Holy Family. Mother Annie preached at the 9:00 a.m. Mass and presided at the 10:30 a.m. Mass—the first time in Holy Family's 11-year history that a cis-woman presided at a eucharistic liturgy! We also celebrated Veteran's Day, and we blessed small business owners in honor of St. Martin of Tours—*San Martín Caballero*—a popular saint in Mexican devotion. The second collection enabled the parish to purchase additional Our Lady of Guadalupe vestments for our new deacons.

On November 14-15, 2022, Father Jayme convened a fourth interjurisdictional gathering in Phoenix, Arizona, which focused on the theme of greater unity across jurisdictional lines.

For the Solemnity of Christ the King of the Universe on November 20, 2022, Father Jayme published and shared copies of *¡Viva Cristo Rey! An Oral History of the Roman Catholic Community in the Flats of Lower East Austin* to mark the centennial of St. Mary

Roman Catholic Cathedral "gifting" a tent and parcel of land to the "Mexican" (read Hispanic) community of Lower East Austin, to get them out of their back pews. The 400-page book chronicled the history and resiliency of Holy Family's "mother parish," Cristo Rey Roman Catholic Church in East Austin, including Holy Family's 2012 schism from the parish and Roman Catholic Diocese of Austin. Deacon Elsa translated the work to Spanish. Holy Family hosted its annual Thanksgiving brunch between English Masses, with plenty of turkey, sides and desserts for all in attendance.

On November 27, 2022, to commemorate the 90th birthday of Mary Lou Piña, who went to the eternal reward in 2021, Father Jayme published *A Joyful Heart: The Life & Ministry of Mary Lou (Figueroa) Piña*. Mary Lou's children joined us for Mass on December 5 and shared a major gift with Holy Family, and Holy Family unveiled a plaque in the parish kitchen dedicated to St. Mary Lou Piña, the matron saint of Holy Family breakfast groups. Holy Family wanted to honor Deacon John in a similar way, since he went to his eternal reward on the same day as Mary Lou, but various factors suggested that this was not advisable at the time.

On December 11, 2022, Deacon Elsa and a group of *danzantes* performed *danzas* in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe, followed by the first-ever performance of a group of parish *matlachines* led by Juan and Maribel Lopez of the noon Spanish Mass. Father Jayme and Deacon Stephen donned *trajes* and danced with them, too! During Sunday Masses, the parish hosted a second collection to publish a statement condemning the Roman Catholic Church's anti-LGBTQIA+ hate speech.

2023

Beginning on January 8, 2023, the Solemnity of Epiphany, Mother Annie Cass Watson began to regularly visit Holy Family once or twice a month, to preside and preach at Sunday Masses.

When the parish's weekly bible study, rosary and theological institute resumed after the holiday break, Spring courses included the Prophets, and the "Bad Boy Jesus"—a study of Jesus in apocryphal literature.

On January 29, 2023, Father Brett Banks, after serving Holy Family for six months as a visiting priest, was named Associate Pastor. Deacon Stephen and Heather Lucas also began a regular ministry of visiting and praying the rosary with the residents of Riverside Nursing and Rehabilitation Center.

Beginning in February 2023, John Zavala and Rosa Gil, with the help of a dedicated team of volunteers, resumed a monthly parish breakfast. They hosted breakfasts on February 5, March 12 and April 29. Beginning in March 2023, Deacon Stephen Rodriguez and Jordan Dickenson also stepped up to begin providing a parish breakfast on the first Sunday of every month.

On February 12, 2023, Holy Family continued its tradition of sharing Super Bowl hamburgers and hotdogs after Mass, along with a Super Bowl cake, with Super Bowl rings, by Mary Raigosa. Leonard and Waldine Gonzales also took Valentine's Day photos of couples.

On February 19-21, 2023, Father Brett and Deacon Stephen attended the annual retreat of the Society of Old Catholic Priests at the Roman Catholic Seminary of the Immaculate Conception in Lloyd Harbor, Huntington, New York.

On February 22, Holy Family celebrated Ash Wednesday with a 7:00 p.m. bilingual Mass with ashes.

On February 26, 2023, recently-elected Austin City Council Member José Velásquez visited Holy Family. His predecessor on the city council, Holy Family parishioner Sabino Rentería, welcomed him and presented him a copy of our parish's work, *¡Viva Cristo Rey!*

During the first parish breakfast by Jordan Dickenson and Deacon Stephen on March 5, 2023, Holy Family parishioner Gary Yorke presented a magic show in the parish hall as "Dr. Gary."

On March 8, 2023, the Holy Family bible study went to the theater to see together the movie "Jesus Revolution."

On March 12, 2023, Holy Family celebrated its 11th anniversary, and Father Jayme marked his 22nd anniversary as a priest—such that he had now passed the first half of his ordained ministry as a Roman Catholic priest, and the second half of his priestly ministry as an Inclusive Catholic priest.

On March 19, 2023, Mother Annie Cass Watson presided at Holy Family's 9:00 a.m. Mass for the first time. She also preached at the parish's 10:30 a.m. Mass. Holy Family shared the following press release to mark the occasion, which also featured the annual Holy Family Awards.

Woman Catholic Priest to Celebrate Mass in Austin

Mother Annie Cass Watson of the Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests will preside at Holy Family Catholic Church on Sunday, March 19, 9:00 a.m.

AUSTIN, March 16, 2023 — As part of the celebration of its eleventh anniversary as Austin's only inclusive Catholic community, Holy Family Catholic Church in Southeast Austin (9322 FM 812, 78719) will host Mother Annie Cass Watson of the Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests (https://arcwp.org). Mother Annie will preside at the parish's 9:00 a.m. Mass and preach at its 10:30 a.m. Mass on Sunday, March 19.

Mother Annie previously served as Assisting Priest at St. Stanislaus Polish Catholic Church in St. Louis, Missouri (www.saintstan.org), which famously split from the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St. Louis in 2005. This will be Mother Annie's fourth visit to Holy Family since moving to Weimar, Texas in 2022 with her husband, Rev. Dr. Jimmy Watson, who serves as pastor of Weimar United Church. Mother Annie is known as an extraordinary homilist, and this will be the first time that she presides at the parish's 9:00 a.m. Mass.

Father Jayme Mathias, pastor of Holy Family Catholic Church, says, "Words cannot describe how excited we are to welcome Mother Annie and to reclaim the early Church's tradition of allowing our sisters to serve in the ordained ministries to which they are called and to which they were ordained during the first five centuries of the Church." Excluded from ordained ministry by the Roman Catholic Church, many women find a home in independent, inclusive expressions of Catholicism.

On March 26, 2023, Holy Family celebrated its Holy Family Awards, to recognize the generous sharing of time, talent and treasure by parishioners.

On April 2, 2023, Holy Family began a monthly Children's Liturgy of the Word on the first Sunday of each month, led by Jennie Kennedy and Brian Gaar.

Holy Family celebrated the Easter Triduum on April 6-8, 2023, with a special visit by the Easter Bunny after Masses on April 9.

On April 16, 2023, Holy Family celebrated the Second Sunday of Easter with a petting zoo in front of the church. Father Roy returned to Holy Family after his February knee replacement, and Sister Maria led the praying of the Divine Mercy chaplet before Mass. After the noon Spanish Mass, Deacon Elsa and a group of *danzantes* shared Mayan dances in honor Divine Mercy Sunday. By this time, she was also serving as a chaplain for Gentiva Hospice Care.

On April 25, 2023, Terry Ann Caballero was elected Chair of the Holy Family Board of Directors for two years. At that same meeting, Father Jayme shared data on the parish's social media. At that time, 3,803 people liked Holy Family's Facebook page, and 4,017 people followed it. 10,248 people had "checked in" at Holy Family through Facebook during the previous 12 years. During the previous six months, Holy Family's Facebook presence reached 7,125 people, who responded with 5,282 post engagements and 20 page likes. 6,340 people had subscribed to Holy Family's YouTube page, which now contained over 1,800 videos with 1.1 million views. During the past six months, 20,740 people learned about Holy Family on Google, many of them discovering Holy Family by searching for "Catholic church near me," which, since Holy Family is the closest Catholic church to the Austin-Bergstrom International Airport, often results in visitors to Austin coming to Holy Family. During the past month, 770 people visited 1,790 pages of the parish's website, 82% of whom clicked into the website from Google. At this time, Holy Family was sharing weekly text messages with 191 English-speaking people and 99 Spanish-speaking people.

On April 30, 2023, Holy Family hosted a bouncy house outside the church in honor of Children's Day, and, courtesy of Deacon

Elsa, Dimples the Clown provided balloon sculptures for children after the noon Spanish Mass.

By May 2023, Salem had completed the renovation of the floor and west wall of the parish hall. Holy Family would later donate the blinds for the windows of that wall, which were hung by Rudy and Gloria Nieto.

On May 14, 2023, our parish *matlachines*, led by Juan and Maribel Lopez, danced in honor of St. Isidore the Farmer after the noon Spanish Mass. The following week, they danced in honor of St. Toribio Romo, the patron saint of the undocumented community.

On May 18-20, 2023, Holy Family hosted an interjurisdictional gathering of clergy and laity, named "Building Community," planned by Father Brett and his bishop, Bishop John Luft. The proceedings were later published in the book, *Building Community: Proceedings of an Interjurisdictional Gathering of Inclusive Catholic Lay & Ordained Leaders.* On May 20, Bishop John celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation for 21 *confirmandi*.

On May 31, 2023, the Holy Family Joy Group prayed the funeral rosary of Vidal Limon, who played the guitar for countless Masses and funeral rosaries during his life.

In May 2023, Mother Annie initiated a Prayer Shawl Ministry at Holy Family, in which parishioners were invited to knit, crochet or quilt items for Deacon Stephen and Heather Lucas to share as part of their ministry to the residents of local nursing homes. The following month, Father Jayme's mother, Rose Mathias, visited Austin and offered eight consecutive days of crochet lessons at Father Jayme's home and at Holy Family.

On June 11, 2023, Holy Family took up a second collection to provide a meal and program for children in Sierra Leone on Day of the African Child.

On June 25, 2023, Deacon Elsa and a group of *danzantes* provided traditional dances from the state of Hidalgo, Mexico in honor of St. John Baptist after the noon Spanish Mass.

On July 2, 2023, Holy Family shared Independence Day hamburgers and hotdogs after Mass, and Father Jayme's mother, Rose Mathias, concluded eight days of crochet lessons for our Prayer Shawl Ministry, with a gathering in the parish hall through 2:00 p.m.

On July 10-21, 2023, Father Jayme hosted a third Inclusive Catholic Virtual Summer School, which was attended by 85 Independent Catholic clergy and lay leaders, and netted $1,407 for the parish.

On July 16, 2023, Holy Family's social ministry collection purchased a webcam and printer for the campus and parish ministry at the University of the Philippines, a ministry of Father Dionito Cabillas of the Philippine Independent Church.

On July 23, 2023, Mother Annie joined us for a celebration of St. Mary the Magdala, "the Apostle to the Apostles," and blessed donated items for local nursing homes.

On July 26, 2023, Holy Family hosted a meeting of Central Texas clergy—though no clergy from outside of the parish came to the encounter. Parish clergy agreed to start hosting pre-Mass catechesis before all Masses.

In July 2023, Father Marek Bożek, former pastor of St. Stanislaus Kostka Polish Catholic Church in St. Louis, moved to Georgetown, Texas, where he began serving as a chaplain for Gentiva Hospice Care and began visiting Holy Family on a semi-monthly or monthly basis for the next year, until he was invited to serve as transitional pastor of Hope United Church in Georgetown on July 1, 2024.

On August 12, 2023, Holy Family participated in the annual Austin Pride Festival and Parade. Though having an unenviable booth location, far from the action of many other booths at Fiesta Gardens, Father Jayme, Father Brett, Father Marek, Deacon Stephen and various lay leaders participated in the nighttime parade.

On August 20, 2023, Deacon Elsa and a group of *danzantes* provided traditional dances in honor of Our Lady of San Juan.

On August 27, 2023, Father Marek donned an Our Lady of Czestochowa chasuble to celebrate a special Mass in her honor at Holy Family.

On September 10, 2023, Holy Family celebrated Grandparent's Day, and parishioners provided a beautiful display of dozens of free books for children on International Literacy Day.

On September 15, 2023, Holy Family hosted a pilgrimage to the "painted churches" of Schulenberg, Texas. Mother Annie and her

husband, Dr. Jimmy Watson, hosted the tour and provided lunch at Weimar United Church. Rudy Nieto and Father Roy drove, and participants prayed the rosary and played bingo in the van to and from Schulenberg.

On September 17, 2023, Holy Family provided a breakfast of crispy tacos for *fiestas patrias*, and the parish's *matlachines*, directed by Juan and Maribel Lopez, danced after the noon Spanish Mass in honor of Mexico's independence.

On September 30, 2023, Holy Family hosted Independent Catholic priest Father Jerry Galaviz, pastor of St. Augustine Orthodox Church, which gathers at the old St. Elizabeth Catholic Church in Pflugerville, Texas. Father Jerry concelebrated, with Father Jayme and Father Roy, the *quinceañera* of Alina Manzano, the daughter of Ramiro and Monica Manzano, who came from St. Augustine to Holy Family 11 years earlier.

On October 1, 2023, Holy Family hosted its annual St. Francis of Assisi pet blessing before and after all Mases.

On October 16, 2023, Father Brett initiated "Spiritual Brew," a semi-monthly ministry for English-speaking young adults, which met at Bennu Coffee (515 South Congress) on the first Monday of the month and through Zoom (later Google Meet) on the third Monday of the month.

On October 23, 2023, Salem Lutheran Church lost Rita Irene (Staton) Luedecke, a great champion of collaboration with Holy Family during the previous 6.5 years. In preparation for the celebration of her life and legacy, Holy Family hosted a Fall cleaning day of the church on October 27, cleaned the carpets in all Salem facilities, and donated two new vacuum cleaners to Salem.

On October 28, 2023, Bishop John Luft of the Independent Catholic Ordinariate celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation for 25 *confirmandi*.

On October 29, 2023, Salem Lutheran Church celebrated its 135th anniversary, and Holy Family celebrated St. Jude, the popular patron saint of impossible cases, by sharing St. Jude medals after all Masses. Deacon Elsa and a group of *danzantes* also provided traditional dances after the noon Spanish Mass in honor of the saint, followed by the dance of the *matlachines* by Juan and Maribel Lopez and friends.

In October 2023, Father Jayme published the fifth edition of Holy Family's ordo, *Extraordinary Celebrations for Extraordinary Catholics: Ideas for Independent & Old Catholic Communities during the Year of Mark 2024.*

On November 2, 2023, Deacon Angelita Mendoza-Waterhouse was ordained to the priesthood by Archbishop William Johnson. The event signaled a sad break between Holy Family and Father Libardo's *San Judas Tadeo Iglesia Católica Independiente*, as no Holy Family clergy or lay leaders were invited to celebrate this significant event at the nearby community.

On November 5, 2023, Holy Family celebrated All Saints and All Souls with a traditional *Día de los Muertos* altar, filled with photos and flowers in front of the altar, and with a beautiful flowered arch by Deacon Elsa over the altar. On the same day, Heather Lucas flew to Puerto Rico for the biannual convocation of the Benedictines of the House of Initia Nova, where she joined the formation program of the Order and assumed the religious name Sister Maria. At that time, Renee Senn, who came to Holy Family in June, was also discerning a possible vocation to ordained ministry with the Independent Catholic Ordinariate.

On November 6, 2023, we mourned the passing of Monsignor Victor Goertz, age 95, a former beloved pastor of our mother parish, Cristo Rey Catholic Church in East Austin.

On November 19, 2023, Holy Family hosted its annual Thanksgiving brunch, organized by John Zavala, with the help of several donors and volunteers, including Jerry Caballero, who prepared all the turkey and ham.

On November 26, 2023, Juan and Maribel Lopez and their group of *matlachines* danced after the noon Spanish Mass in honor of Christ the King of the Universe. This was their last regular performance at Holy Family before moving the following month.

In November 2023, Holy Family shared the cost of reconstructing the southeast stone column of the Salem Lutheran Cemetery, which was destroyed by a car. Within a month, the column was destroyed again, by another car. During November, Ramiro and Monica Manzano donated new feather flags for Holy Family, to signal the church's presence to passersby.

On December 10, 2023, Deacon Elsa and a group of *danzantes* danced after the noon Spanish Mass in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Women of St. Stanislaus Kostka Polish Catholic Church in St. Louis donated food and drink for our parish celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

On December 15, 2023, Holy Family lost one of its Directors, Vincent Maldonado, who went to his eternal reward after a sudden illness. Twelve days earlier, on December 3, Vincent dressed as Saint Nicholas and greeted parishioners with gifts after the 9:00 a.m. Mass.

On December 17, 2023, Holy Family celebrated its annual *posada*, followed by a potluck, after the noon Spanish Mass.

On December 24, 2023, Holy Family celebrated its annual Christmas sweater contest after the 9:00 a.m. Mass. Father Roy and Father Brett respectively presided at the Christmas midnight and morning Masses. Father Joseph Dang of Denver attended our midnight Mass, and women of St. Stanislaus Kostka Polish Catholic Church in St. Louis donated a new image of the Christ Child for the celebration.

By the end of 2023, it was announced that Father Brett was named Clinician of the Year for Gentiva Hospice Care, a national company with more than 10,000 employees.

2024

On January 7, 2024, Holy Family celebrated Epiphany with the traditional sharing of the *rosca de reyes* (king cake) after all Masses.

On January 28, 2024, in honor of National Wear Red Day, Jill Ramirez and María Isabel López Ríos of the Latino Healthcare Forum visited us and spoke on women's heart health. We also hosted our annual St. Blaise blessing of throats after all Masses.

On February 4, 2024, Bishop John Luft of the Independent Catholic Ordinariate joined us for our celebration of *Día de la Candelaria*, complete with *tamales* and *atole* in the parish hall.

On February 11, 2024, we celebrated World Marriage Sunday with our annual renewal of vows and blessing of couples. After Mass, we had Valentine's Day photos and Super Bowl hamburgers and hotdogs in the parish hall.

On February 11-13, 2024, Father Brett, Father Marek and Deacon Elsa attended the annual retreat of the Society of Old Catholic Priests at the Roman Catholic Seminary of the Immaculate Conception in Lloyd Harbor, Huntington, New York.

On February 14, 2024, Holy Family celebrated Ash Wednesday with drive-thru ashes from 12:00 to 2:00 p.m., and a bilingual Mass at 7:00 p.m. During Lent, we continued our tradition of hosting the bilingual Stations of the Cross in the chapel on Friday evenings.

On March 3, 2024, Mother Annie joined us, we hosted our monthly Children's Liturgy of the Word, and, in honor of Read Across America Day, we provided books to parish children.

On March 10, 2024, we celebrated our 12th anniversary as a parish and Father Jayme's 23rd anniversary as a priest with a *mariachi* Mass, followed by a parish breakfast with *mariachi*.

During March 2024, in honor Holy Family's 12th anniversary, Rebecca Saenz provided a major gift pledge to the parish to launch the "1+2=3 Pledge Drive," which resulted in $22,300 in pledges.

On March 24, 2024, we celebrated Palm Sunday and shared our annual Holy Family Awards.

On March 28-30, 2024, we celebrated the Easter Triduum. On Easter Sunday, March 31, our second collection was a "Lenten almsgiving do-over" to help build a medical clinic in Sierra Leone, and the Easter Bunny visited us for photos after Masses.

On April 28, 2024, Holy Family had planned to inflate a bouncy house in front of the church for Children's Day; heavy morning rains pushed the bouncy house to the following Sunday, but the rain cleared in time for children to enjoy horse and pony rides and a train ride after the noon Spanish Mass, courtesy of Deacon Elsa.

On May 5, 2024, to mark Father Jayme's birthday, Holy Family hosted a *mariachi* at the 9:00 a.m. Mass and during breakfast afterward.

On May 12, 2024, Holy Family celebrated Mother's Day with handmade corsages for all mothers and mother figures by Gloria Nieto and bible study volunteers.

On May 16-18, 2024, Holy Family hosted Father Kevin Yell of the American Catholic Church in Vancouver, Washington, to lead a three-day retreat titled, "Creating the Space where 'Something Happens.'" After our bible study on March 15, the evening before

the retreat, Father Kevin presented a workshop, "The Seven 'Dials' for Proclaiming God's Word." After the first full day of the retreat, on May 17, Father Jayme, Father Roy, Father Brett, Mother Annie, Father Marek and Deacon Stephen visited Jump Party, a local trampoline park, to fulfill an agreement to jump once for every $10 donated to Holy Family's building fund during the previous month. Parishioners pooled the necessary resources to make clergy jump over 230 times!

On May 18, 2024, Bishop John Luft of the Independent Catholic Ordinariate celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation for 14 *confirmandi*. The following day, Holy Family celebrated Pentecost and its annual Graduation Mass, with scholarships for graduates, with a parish breakfast of enchiladas, and with *baile folklórico* by Deacon Elsa and parishioners after the noon Spanish Mass.

On June 2, 2024, we marked the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ with a visit by Mother Annie, whose birthday we celebrated. We hosted our monthly Children's Liturgy of the Word, celebrated Father Brett's ordination anniversary, prayed for all priests on World Day of Prayer for Priests, and we blessed items to share with the residents of local nursing homes. Jordan Dickenson and Deacon Stephen provided breakfast after Mass.

On June 30, 2024, John Zavala, Rosa Gil and volunteers prepared hamburgers and hotdogs after the 9:00 a.m. Mass, in honor of Independence Day. A new grill was purchased for this annual tradition.

On July 8-19, 2024, Father Jayme hosted a fourth Inclusive Catholic Virtual Summer School, which was attended by 44 clergy and lay leaders.

On July 14, 2024, we celebrated Our Lady of Mount Carmel with scapulars after all Masses, and with folkloric dances after the noon Spanish Mass.

On August 4, 2024, parishioners provided a beautiful display of dozens of free books for children on International Literacy Day, as well as backpacks and school supplies for students.

On August 10, 2024, a small delegation from Holy Family participated in the annual Austin Pride Parade, marching with Equality Texas, whose development director was Holy Family parishioner Justin McCormick. The following day, Holy Family

was visited by local activist and mayoral candidate Doug Greco, who shared a copy of his book, *To Find a Killer: The Homophobic Murders of Norma and María Hurtado and the LGBT Rights Movement*. Father Jayme presided at the double funeral for the mother/daughter victims of this hate crime 13 years earlier at Cristo Rey.

On August 25, 2024, in honor of Women's Equality Day, Mother Annie presided at Holy Family's 9:00 a.m. English Mass, and Deacon Elsa shared the homily.

On September 1, 2024, Holy Family celebrated Labor Day weekend with our monthly Children's Liturgy of the Word, a White Party and breakfast by Jordan Dickenson and Deacon Stephen, and with "Cornhole Olympics" by Father Brett.

On September 8, 2024, Holy Family celebrated Grandparent's Day and shared books with children in honor of International Day of Literacy.

On September 29, 2024, Father Joseph Dang of Denver joined us for our annual blessing of pets in honor of St. Francis of Assisi, and he announced his hope of soon moving to Central Texas. Mother Annie also joined us for our celebration of Priesthood Sunday.

On October 6, 2024, to celebrate Our Lady of the Rosary and mark the Month of the Rosary, Deacon Stephen, Sister Maria and Deacon Elsa led the praying of the rosary before Masses. Jordan Dickenson and Deacon Stephen provided breakfast, complemented with cheeseburgers by Rosa Gil. This was the first month in which the noon Spanish Mass did not host its monthly *convivio* and potluck on the first Sunday of the month, choosing instead to host this event on feast days of the Church.

On October 20, 2024, Holy Family marked the 300th anniversary of Independent Catholicism by sharing the present book of stories by Holy Family parishioners. At that time, parishioners were looking forward to an October 24-26 retreat by Father Gianni Passarella, the author of a bestselling Italian book on angels, and an October 26 celebration of the sacrament of Confirmation with Bishop Pablo Burson of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion.

During its first 12.5 years, Holy Family celebrated 1,167 Baptisms, 733 First Communions, and over 732 Confirmations.

If You Attend Once, I Guarantee You'll Want to Come Back!

Vanessa Arrellano-Meraz



I was born and raised in Austin, Texas. I started school in Austin ISD, but then, when I was nine, my parents moved to Del Valle. This was when Del Valle was "up and coming," and not much was out there. I studied in the Del Valle ISD from third grade through high school.

I attended religious education classes and made my sacraments at Santa Julia and Cristo Rey, and I also visited Guadalupe Catholic Church, but then I was absent from the Church for a very long time. I didn't feel comfortable at church anymore: I felt I had to dress and act a certain way, and I was told at eight years old that if I didn't know all my prayers or was a "bad girl," I couldn't receive my sacraments. I thought: If God loves everyone, why are there so many rules? As a result, once I could make my own decisions, I had no interest in Church. Instead, I talked to God on my own.

Many years later my wife, Yazmin, and I had the privilege of having our daughter baptized by Father Jayme at Holy Family, when it was on Lava Hill Road. We really liked the atmosphere, and it was a beautiful thing for us to be there together. What church allows that?! Even though we had a great experience, my previous bouts with Church caused me to be very standoffish. I eventually followed the church on Facebook, I saw how Holy Family included the gay community, allowed people to be their true selves, and didn't shame people or make them feel bad for being different. That's really what attracted us—that and the fact that we've always been big fans of Father Jayme. To our family, he looks and reminds us of Jesus, and we always feel like he speaks directly to us. Even my dad, who doesn't attend church that much, is a fan of Father Jayme! We're also big fans of Deacon Stephen. I'm friends with a family member of his, and I always tell her just how much his

words speak to me. All of that made it easy for us to try church again.

My mom always went to Cristo Rey or Guadalupe, and she wanted me to go back to church, but I refused to go back to those churches. One day, I told her, "I really do want to get back to church. Can we give Holy Family a try?" She met us halfway and said, "Okay, let's give it a try!" After that, the rest is history. We had finally found our home at Holy Family, and we said, "This is where we need to be!"

I remember how welcomed and accepted my wife and I felt at Holy Family. We could finally be who we are. At Holy Family, I can say, "This is my wife, and this is our daughter"—and we aren't made to feel different.

Sometimes we can't be there because of Sunday softball tournaments, but we go to Holy Family every chance we get. Even my wife—who has never been one for going to church every Sunday—likes Holy Family. We agree: We feel really good when we go to Holy Family! Our daughter loves it, too. She's only nine years old, but she loves Father Jayme's singing, and she'll come home singing church songs and looking up things on YouTube, like Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. She may seem shy at church, but she sings loud and proud at home! We love the fact that our daughter is growing up able to practice her faith with her mommies.

I just love to worship at Holy Family. It really touches us, and sometimes it's hard not to cry! We love having breakfast with everyone there. They are always so welcoming, they notice when we're not there, and, when we are there, they're happy to see us.

Holy Family has the same Mass as all other Catholic churches—but there's a different feeling. I'm so thankful that we have found our way back to church, and that I'm able to give myself to religion again, without feeling shame or that I shouldn't be there.

Just like I used to, many of my friends keep their distance from church. I encourage them: "Come to Holy Family on Sunday. You'll feel so much better! You don't have to 'dress to the nines,' but you'll feel welcomed and comfortable. It's a great place—and if you attend once, I guarantee you'll want to come back!"

Holy Family Has a Role that I Can Fill!

Rev. Brett Banks



I'm originally from Snyder, Texas, a small town in west Texas, where I learned the values of community and taking care of others. I wasn't raised in a single religious tradition. A babysitter took me to her Baptist church, which is where my parents were married. I have a lot of Catholic family members, so I was exposed to Catholic baptisms, weddings and funerals. Before I went to college, I didn't go to church more than eight or nine times.

After my father passed and I experienced an intense faith crisis, I moved to Abilene, where I attended McMurry University. I studied Christian Ministry, and I intended to teach theology. I began attending the local Catholic church there, and I really fell in love with liturgy and community—but I also felt a distance because I identified as a progressive Christian, and I didn't love the idea that women couldn't be priests and that other people couldn't be married. I wandered for a bit, and I considered myself Episcopalian for a short time, but I found myself drawn back to Catholicism.

After college, I studied theology at Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth, and I taught theology at a Catholic high school in Dallas for a year before transitioning into chaplaincy. As an undergraduate, at age 19, I worked part-time as a chaplain for a hospice company in Abilene. It was an experience that inspired me in ways I didn't fully understand at the time. It fit with my major, but I didn't have a sense that it was what I wanted to do. I owned that calling and completed a residency in 2019 at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas.

I heard of Holy Family Catholic Church through Facebook, where I was trying to build a network of likeminded friends. I had

added Father Jayme as a friend, and I was reading posts about Holy Family.

At that time, I began writing for *Extraordinary Catholics* magazine, and I enjoyed contributing to a magazine tailored to lay people, attempting to bridge my academic training with practical, pastoral experience. Too often, the academic seems impractical—which is why I had majored in Christian ministry, and not in religion. I wanted a practical faith, and that partly led me toward chaplaincy. I like to contextualize elements of Christian history and help people understand what ancient messages might mean for us today. For my first article, I wrote about the Mandalorian, a Disney+ series that 100% borrows Christian language from the early Church: In it, those who are marginalized follow "the Way"—the earliest name for the Church! I also enjoy speaking on Star Wars, which is a very profoundly theological series, offering practical theology in modern terms.

For a few years, I served as a visiting priest at St. Anne Independent Catholic Community in Forest Hill, near Fort Worth. I started as a deacon there in 2018, and was ordained to the priesthood in 2019. For a while, St. Anne's was really my home in the Independent Catholic movement, even though I was only able to be there once in a while, due to my responsibilities as a chaplain. Then, of course, the pandemic hit in 2020.

People sometimes notice my tattoos: On my left arm I have Jesus standing on roses, in front of the sun, in an image that typically resembles Our Lady of Guadalupe. It's Jesus in his radiant glory, and, in times of doubt, difficulty and pain, I have turned to him, particularly in Communion, a comforting, peaceful, engaging ritual that makes me feel like I'm a part of something larger than myself—in the sharing of one bread and one cup! I have another rose tattoo that symbolizes new life, and another tattoo on my right arm that symbolizes peace, love and light in the world.

I visited Holy Family for the first time in May 2022, for a powerful, invigorating clergy conference. It really filled my "cup"! At the time, my partner, Joey Martinez, and I had just purchased a home in Florence, 60 miles north of Holy Family, which would be closer to my work as a bereavement counselor and volunteer coordinator for Gentiva Hospice in Georgetown. I approached

Father Jayme with the idea of doing an internship at Holy Family, to build on my formation—since the scarce resources in our movement often inadvertently translate into less formation.

During undergrad, I pastored a Methodist church in a small town of about 100 people. McMurry was a Methodist school, I loved studying Methodist theology, and the school and church provided opportunities to those of us who discerned possible service to the Methodist Church. I gained experience in preaching at that little church, and one woman there suggested that my greatest gift is my peaceful voice and my ability to engage people in mindfulness practices. I was glad to bring that experience of preaching to Holy Family.

Prior to Holy Family, I celebrated the third edition of the Roman rite ("and with your spirit"), so I had to learn the second edition ("and also with you") for Holy Family. I also had to learn to engage the space—since Holy Family actually has space!

In my 15 months of serving Holy Family, I have found it to be a unique space in the Catholic world. It's an inclusive community, with space for everyone, and it truly ministers to the Spanish-speaking and English-speaking communities of its congregation. Holy Family sees and fulfills needs, and its clergy are present to people, rather than being a lording force over people.

I'm currently learning Spanish. I would say that I currently speak advanced elementary Spanish. I started studying it in high school, and I almost ended up with a minor in Spanish in college. I'm currently taking a Spanish course in Georgetown on Thursdays, but Holy Family is an immersion experience for me! Learning Spanish has unlocked a new world for me. I can now speak with people and be present to them in ways that I couldn't before, when I didn't speak or understand their language.

I enjoy ministering at Holy Family—but I also feel ministered to at Holy Family. I'm glad that Holy Family has a role that I can fill! In the religious world, there aren't a lot of young people who are connected to spirituality and to nerdy stuff, so I feel graced to help build that bridge!

Holy Family is Different: People are Welcomed!

Cornelia Benítez Carbajal



I come from Palmar Chico, in the state of Mexico, where I was raised Catholic, and my parents, who were my guide, took me to church. God-willing, I have always been and will always be Catholic.

After coming to the U.S. in 1997, I first went to Cristo Rey, then to San José, then to Cristo Rey again, then to Sacred Heart—and now I have been part of this beautiful church for four or five years.

I discovered Holy Family one day when my husband and I were coming from JD's market and gas station. I told him, "I think that's a Catholic church." He said, "No, it says that it's another religion." I saw people leaving the church, so we stopped, and my husband said, "Let's go in and ask." We met Maestra Elsa outside, and I asked her if this church was Catholic. She said, "Yes, it's Catholic. Welcome!" I was excited because we had just moved in this direction. Since then, we've kept coming back, and we're happy.

I like the fact that Holy Family is a small and very close-knit church. Almost everyone knows one another, and they welcome you. When I come to Holy Family, I feel that I'm in God's house. I feel calm, at peace and very happy.

My young daughters especially enjoy the Children's Treasure Chest. They say, "We want to go to church: The priests there are good to us, and they give us toys. In other churches, the priests don't give us anything—and they yell at us!" My daughters are happy, and they ask, "Will there be toys?" No other church does that. In the Bible, Jesus says, "Let the children come to me," yet, in other churches, priests who hear crying children push them away. They say, "Get that child out of here! Go to the cry room over there!" When we take our children out of Mass, they feel pushed away, and they can't learn about God's Word.

I love serving as a minister of hospitality—and when I'm not able to come, I want to be here. I love helping, welcoming people, and getting to know them. I feel good about inviting them to Communion. I really enjoying supporting the church in that way, and I feel good knowing that there are other people who support the church in such ways when I can't be there.

I also very much enjoy serving on Holy Family's Board of Directors. In our meetings, we learn about everything that is happening in the church, and we hear about all the responsibilities of the parish, like finances—things we don't hear about when we simply come to Mass to hear the Word of God on Sundays.

Holy Family is different: People are welcomed! In other very large churches, there are so many people, and the priests don't take the time to meet you and talk to you. You have to make an appointment to talk to the priests! I love the fact that Holy Family is open to all, and our priests take the time to listen to us and talk with us.

We also have a monthly get-together after the Spanish Mass, which is always very nice. We get to know each other better as a parish family. In other churches, we simply say hello and goodbye to others. At Holy Family, though, we get to spend time with the people next to us, and we get to know them better. I really love that.

Holy Family is not a big church. It's a small, beautiful church where you can hear the Word of God. Everyone who wants to come to Holy Family is welcomed!

You Go to Holy Family Feeling One Way, and You Come Out Feeling Totally Different!

Irma (Rangel) Bowden



I was born and raised on the property where I now live in Lockhart, Texas. The house I was born in has been torn down, but I'm as rooted to this property as a pecan tree!

I was baptized Presbyterian. My maternal grandfather, Juan Flores, was one of the founders of Faith/*Fe* Presbyterian Church, just around the corner from where I live. Like Holy Family, they raised money, and they built a little building—first a wooden structure, and now a brick church. It was the Flores and Perales families that built that church! I was baptized, went to vacation bible school, and participated in youth groups there.

I believed in God and prayer, but, before Holy Family, I wasn't really going to church. When I went to church, I felt I wasn't getting anything out of it. Then my friend, Shirley Bruch, discovered Holy Family. She wanted to try it, and so she did. She spoke about Holy Family with excitement: It was like she experienced a natural "high" when she talked about Holy Family! Now I know what she was talking about: You come away from Holy Family really feeling good inside. There's a good vibe in the congregation, and we don't feel judged. I was nervous the first time I went to the old church on Lava Hill Road, but I'll never forget how accepting people were. With all the hurt that I've experienced in life, I was always breaking down in tears at Holy Family. Shirley and her daughter, Margaret, would hold me, and people could see that I was hurting. I could express that hurt at Holy Family. I've been able to share some of that hurt with close friends—and there are other hurts that I carry deep inside me. The folks at Holy Family just wrapped their arms around me and "carried" me. And they continue to carry me: Becky Saenz tells me that she keeps me on the prayer list at Holy Family!

Shirley and Margaret encouraged me to help their breakfast group. Mary Lou Piña would show us what to do: We made sure the coffee was made, the fruits and pastries were cut, every dish was in place—and she always made sure we prepared a plate for Father Jayme! We also used to decorate the parish hall tables a lot back then. Helping with the breakfasts always left me with an energy and a yearning to give more.

Shirley and Margaret also had a tradition of sharing ravioli at Holy Family on the Feast of St. Joseph every March. It would take us all day to make that ravioli! We rolled the pasta and prepared the meat fillings. It was very hands-on!

I also assisted Margaret with the Environment Committee. We set up Christmas trees for Christmas. We decorated the parish hall. It was just all so beautiful!

When my son Richard was ill, Father Jayme was always here. At first, I wasn't sure that I had faith. I remember one particularly bad night, when I was struggling to keep my composure: I went outside and literally dropped to my knees, and I asked God for guidance. I had never done that. At times like that, when I feel alone, I remember that I'm not alone and that I've never been alone. Many people have been with me through this journey!

Holy Family is different from other churches. At Holy Family, they really speak the Word, and we think about what the Word means. You go to Holy Family feeling one way, and you come out feeling totally different! It's like we're reborn, and we can rejoice!

After I leave Holy Family on Sundays, I feel it's my goal to touch people with kindness throughout the week. I sometimes tell Shirley that I try to go out and touch ten people throughout the week—perhaps people that nobody talks to, or who might not want to talk to others: I attempt to touch them in some way! During COVID, I sat a dry-erase board in my front yard every day, with positive messages. I wanted neighbors to know that I care. It was my way of sharing hope with others. The *Lockhart Post Register* ran a story on it, and U.S. Congressman Lloyd Doggett even recognized me for it. People drive down our street just to read what I write there, and sometimes it seems like a parade on our street! That would annoy Richard at times. He would say, "Mom, get rid of that board!" I would tell him: "That board is important. People

need it." And if the board isn't out there, people ask where it is! I just love people, and I love our *barrio*. I feel that I honor my parents and elders through that sign.

To those who haven't come to Holy Family, I say: Come, visit, so that you can feel what I feel! I just love Holy Family!

I Love Every Minute Spent with the Wonderful People of This Church

Rev. Marek Bożek



I was born in Poland, where I grew up in a forester's lodge in the middle of the woods. Both my father and his father-in-law were forest rangers, and our family truly cherished living on the literal outskirts of "civilized society." Living in the woods shielded us from many of the difficult realities of life under a totalitarian regime, since, at that time, Poland was run by a communist regime, imposed on us by the Soviet Union after World War II.

On December 13, 1981, the communist government of the "People's" Republic of Poland declared martial law in an attempt to stymie the growing popularity of the Solidarity movement. Food was rationed, and tanks and armored vehicles on the streets—as well as random checkpoints by the police and military—became a part of daily life. Thousands of de-legalized opposition leaders were jailed, including several priests who dared to provide forbidden religious services. Even though the martial law was officially lifted on July 22, 1983, Poland remained in the shadow of that traumatic experience for years. The "People's Party" controlled every sphere of our lives: They decided what could be taught in schools, and only public schools were allowed to function. They censored what was printed in newspapers and magazines. They controlled what was played in theatres and on

radio and television, where there were only two channels. Shelves of most Polish stores were chronically empty, with big lines forming in front of them twice a month when new deliveries were scheduled to arrive. The regime was everywhere, and it controlled everything—or, rather, almost everything: There was one place where people dared to speak freely, one environment where forbidden books were sold and discussed, where censored plays were shown, and fiery speeches regularly reminded us of our call to live with freedom and dignity. That one, lone space of liberty in the 1980s in Poland was the Roman Catholic Church.

A week after my First Communion, at the age of nine, I became an altar boy, and the church became my second home. I could not yet understand why I sensed that we were doing something important when we gathered for prayer and social or educational gatherings at the church. As I grew older, I realized that in communist Poland, in an ocean of permanent state-sponsored vigilance, control and political bullying, the Church was the Noah's Ark that allowed us to keep our dignity and sanity. When no one else would stand up to speak the truth or to defend the persecuted, Catholic priests filled the void. They became community organizers, underground activists, and sometimes martyrs. They became my heroes, and I wanted to be like them: I knew I wanted to be a priest from the time I was 10 or 11 years old.

As a teenager, while I continued to serve as an altar boy and later as a lector in my parish, I was also quite active in underground Scouting. Unlike state-controlled Scouting, we were attached to the democratic opposition movement. In addition to typical Scouting activities, like camping and having the time of our lives, we assisted with more serious activities, like spray-painting Solidarity logos on government buildings or distributing forbidden books and magazines. When the first free elections in Poland were finally allowed on June 4, 1989, we were charged with gluing Lech Walesa and Solidarity posters all over the town. For teenage boys, it was fun and exciting, especially since all those activities had to be done after sunset and always avoiding the state police. In our own way, we knew that we were a part of something bigger, something historic. A huge change of historic proportions was taking place right in front of our eyes: An oppressive, communist regime was

peacefully being dismantled, and we played a small role in it. It was Liberation Theology 101 in practice!

I came to the U.S. in 2000, and I was ordained to the priesthood for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau, Missouri on my 28th birthday, on December 18, 2002. My parents and sister came from Poland to participate in the joyous occasion.

For my first priestly assignment, I was named associate pastor in Neosho, in the southwest corner of Missouri, where I discovered the joys and challenges of the Catholic priesthood. Together with the pastor, we were responsible for three parishes: in Neosho, Seneca and Noel. People did not seem to mind my broken English and thick Polish accent, in English or in Spanish. It was in Noel, Missouri that I first discovered the vibrant faith of Mexican and Central American immigrants, and I was enamored with it from the get-go. It was there that I was once again invited to sit with the tangible reality of death, as my mentor and pastor was dying from breast cancer, and I held his hand while he breathed his last breath. In June 2004, I was assigned to St. Agnes Cathedral in Springfield, Missouri, where I assisted the ministry to the Spanish-speaking people in Branson. Just as I had done in Neosho, I also volunteered as a police chaplain in Springfield.

In early 2005, I was contacted by a representative of St. Stanislaus Catholic Church in St. Louis, Missouri, which found itself in a dire situation. In August 2004, then-archbishop of St. Louis, Raymond Burke, demanded that the parishioners of St. Stanislaus transfer the deed to their church and property to the Archdiocese. St. Stanislaus was one of the last ethnic parishes established in the late 19th century, with its own board of directors, bylaws and ownership of church property. When faced with the very real possibility of being shut down and demolished, the good people of St. Stanislaus refused the archbishop's demand, and were promptly interdicted, which, according to canon law, forbade any Catholic priest in good standing to offer any sacraments in their beloved church. They could not be baptized, married or absolved of their sins until they relented and obeyed the archbishop!

By the time they reached out to me, the conflict had so ignited that even the mediation offered by my Springfield bishop brought

no results. I was torn: Should I answer the call of my people, or remain obedient to the institution that I once saw as Noah's Ark? After seeking advice from several older, wiser priests, and after many sleepless nights and countless hours of prayers, I ceded to their cries for help, and I celebrated the Christmas Eve Mass at St. Stanislaus, despite direct orders not to do so. I and the almost 2,000 people at that Mass were promptly excommunicated by Archbishop Burke.

Since our excommunication in December 2005, the parish of St. Stanislaus has experienced a gradual but extravagant process of widening its horizons, theology and praxis. Knowing first-hand the trauma and pain of exclusion—of literal marginalization (excommunication!) by their Church—the people of that parish decided to create a space where everyone would be safe, welcomed and affirmed. Today St. Stanislaus, very much like Holy Family, is a proudly-inclusive Catholic community that welcomes everyone to Holy Communion, celebrates marriage equality, and is served by women clergy. They feed more than a hundred of their neighbors on weekly basis, offer free religious education classes to children and adults alike, and walk in the local Pride parade and the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure. Yes, sometimes they argue and annoy each other, but, no matter what, they choose to continue being witnesses of God's love in this messy world.

Seventeen years in a single parish is a long tenure for a priest. I had been tremendously blessed to baptize hundreds of babies, pray with and anoint hundreds of sick and dying people, officiate at hundreds of weddings, and listen to countless confessions. In the midst of all those sacred encounters, I was especially touched and transformed by the quiet moments of whispered prayers and long conversations with people of all walks of life.

I first learned about Holy Family through Father Jayme, who reached out to me in 2021. We became "long distance friends" and helped each other with advice and prayers. We then worked together to plan and host an interjurisdictional gathering of clergy and lay leaders in Las Vegas in November 2021.

I first visited Holy Family in May 2022, when Holy Family hosted an interjurisdictional gathering of clergy and lay leaders on the sesquicentennial of the 1872 martyrdom of GomBurZa, the

three Filipino priests who inspired the nationalism that resulted in the Philippine revolution. I shared a presentation at that gathering on the similarities between the Philippine Independent Church and the Polish National Catholic Church here in the U.S.

A year later, in July 2023, I moved to Central Texas and became a hospice chaplain. I was also eager to become a part of an inclusive and Catholic community like Holy Family! At Father Jayme's gracious invitation, I have been privileged to pray with this amazing faith family, to celebrate Holy Mass, and to preach from time to time. I love every minute spent with the wonderful people of this church!

I fondly remember the invitation to participate with Holy Family in the 2023 Austin Pride Parade: Holy Family's clear and loud witness to God's love makes a huge difference!

Until I was recently called to serve Hope United Church in Georgetown, I kept coming back to Holy Family because I can no longer imagine praying with a church that isn't fully inclusive. Every time I'm able to be with this community is another blessed adventure. The fact that so many people are deeply engaged in the life of this parish is truly inspiring—something that sure doesn't happen often in a typical "Roman" parish!

I have never felt excluded in any way here at the Holy Family, and, while Father Jayme deserves credit for creating this awesome community, I want to recognize and praise all the lay members who are deeply engaged in and devoted to this parish. No matter how amazing a priest happens to be, the priesthood only makes sense in relationship with and in service to the Body of Christ.

When people ask me about Holy Family, I tell them that every Catholic parish should be like this one—and I pray that one day it will be so!

Holy Family is What a Church is Supposed to Be!

Margaret Bruch



I was born in Memphis, Tennessee, but, for the most part, I grew up in Austin and Menchaca. My family was a traditional Catholic family, and we attended St. Ignatius, where I received all my sacraments. I grew up at a time when we had CCD classes in people's homes, and I fondly remember listening during those classes to songs of justice and peace by Simon and Garfunkel. We then attended Mass at the chapel at St. Edward's University. My family had an affinity for St. Edward's, and I enjoyed the singing and dancing of the students during Mass there. I also have a fond memory of a Holy Cross Brother at St. Edward's who came to our new home in Menchaca, baked altar bread with us, and we had a really nice celebration there. It was a traditional activity done in a non-traditional way! Those are my fondest memories of growing up Catholic.

Then, of course, I fell away. When I went to college, I didn't connect with a church—and I stopped going altogether. Holy Family was really the first time that I came home to a real parish or church community after that.

When my father fell ill, I moved to Lockhart to help take care of him for many years, until his death in July 2012. At that time, my parents were members of St. Mary's in Lockhart. In Spring 2013, my mom heard a priest at Mass say some very negative things about another priest and about his "invalid" sacraments. She told me about it after Mass, and we said, "Let's look him up! Let's see what this is all about!" I told Mom, "I'll go with you to that church if you want to try it"—and so we went, and we just fell in love. At that first Mass, Father Jayme announced a spring-cleaning day at the church that Saturday, so we decided, "We'll come back for that!" We just kept coming back to Holy Family, and we loved it.

What I remember most about those first visits was the welcome and the friendliness. No one was a stranger, and everyone was so glad to see you! We didn't know anyone there, but everyone was so friendly. We enjoyed the Mass and the people so much. The Mass was familiar, but Father Jayme interpreted and explained the Bible in an incredible way. I had never experienced a priest who broke down the scriptures like he did. I also remember how the response before Holy Communion was so different, acknowledging that anybody and everybody is welcomed at the table. Holy Family was so different from other Catholic churches—so incredibly compassionate, and we never felt that we were judged in any way. Holy Family is what a church is supposed to be.

I very much loved being involved in the Environment Committee. There were some really great people on that committee, and it was so much fun to make the church attractive and welcoming. I love to enhance spaces, but it was more than that: I learned about the significance, symbolism and colors of the different liturgical seasons—things that I didn't notice growing up. St. Ignatius was always such a harsh, cold, stone environment, and St. Edward's chapel was very austere, with only a few homemade tapestries on the walls. I had never been in a church with an Environment Committee. Serving on it was a wonderful way to share something that I was good at, I enjoyed being around that group of people, and I enjoyed the challenge of bringing together all that was around and behind the altar, to artistically and creatively share a message.

I remember how we used a light, draping material to visually frame the altar: It looked like the tabernacle in the desert! The worship space was a large space that needed definition, but we also decorated the parish hall, in the back, and we painted a room for a children's ministry: Each wall was a different bright color, and we decorated it with large gears, for the theme of a vacation bible school that Holy Family hosted in the evenings. We transformed a really messy, yucky space, overflowing with junk, into a colorful and inviting place for kids. It was dreadful to clean out—it took a few trailers to get rid of all that stuff—but it was fun to see what we created!

My mother got involved—but I also involved my brother, Mark, who's good at woodworking, and he carved a very beautiful cross for the Easter Triduum, which we continue to use every Good Friday, and that was a wonderful gift from him.

I just really loved serving on the Environment Committee, and I miss it very much. I also got involved in the *jamaica*, and I did the fish pond those first years. The kids were so wonderful, and that was a lot of fun. The *jamaicas* were one of the few opportunities for us, from the English Masses, to really interact with people from the Spanish Masses.

For years, our family provided a breakfast at Holy Family. It was a lot of work, but that breakfast is the best thing ever! I remember fondly the times that I took the lead on it: We'd make blueberry and banana pancakes for everybody, and I just thought it was a wonderful ministry, giving people an opportunity to sit and visit after Mass. It was a time of bonding before transitioning back into the week. I love being on the receiving end of such delicious food—but it was also fun to serve the breakfast, and our friend, Irma Bowden, was also very involved and helped us when she could. We have a 15-year tradition of making ravioli as a family for the Feast of St. Joseph in March, so our family would also serve ravioli once a year at Holy Family. Many friends from Holy Family also drove to our home in Lockhart to enjoy our family gatherings with ravioli!

When you swallow your fear and come to Holy Family and get involved, you get hooked. There's a welcome and an energy that you just get "addicted" to—and it makes you want to participate even more.

I moved to New Mexico in 2018, and I really miss Holy Family, but I always enjoyed bringing Mom and coming home to Holy Family when I'm in Texas! My Uncle Joe, who is my father's identical twin brother, also remains very active at Holy Family, and Mario and María Cruz are always willing to give him a ride to Mass and to bible study. Holy Family made it possible for me to connect with the Church after losing that connection over the years, and there's a wonderful sense of peace and belonging there. Holy Family is not a biological family, but there's a sense of community and togetherness that's not found in other churches!

Holy Family is Love

Shirley (Cervetti) Bruch



I was born and raised in Memphis, Tennessee, and I lived there until I married at age 20. I came to Austin kicking and screaming. My husband had studied at St. Edwards University on a partial scholarship, and he loved Austin. After our daughter Kathy was born, he got a job here, and we moved to Texas.

I studied in Catholic schools for 12 years, then three more in the nursing program of a Catholic hospital. When we moved to South Austin, I tried to get involved in the church as much as I could. I was part of the St. Vincent de Paul Society since the 1970s. We went to St. Ignatius mostly, where I was one of the first women to be invited to be part of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. In the 1980s, we moved to Lockhart and attended St. Mary of the Visitation Catholic Church.

At St. Mary's one Sunday, Father Alberto read a letter from the bishop, and he said something to the effect of, "If you receive sacraments from Jayme Mathias"—he didn't say Father Jayme—"those sacraments won't be accepted at this church!" Some of my friends call me a "cafeteria Catholic": I was not happy with certain things in the Roman Catholic Church—but I also didn't know that there were other Catholic churches besides the Roman Catholic Church. I came home and told my daughter, Margaret, "We need to find out what this is all about!" Fortunately, we saw Holy Family's weekly ad in the *Austin American-Statesman*, with Father Jayme's picture. I went to Ash Wednesday at St. Mary's in 2013—and I never went back.

The next Sunday, we came looking for Holy Family on Lava Hill Road. We were greeted at the door by Louis Cuevas and Leonard Gonzales. Everyone was just so friendly. There were lots of smiles

and waves—just like we always do at Holy Family. It was a very good experience.

It's my nature to help, so, when Father Jayme announced a spring-cleaning day, we went to help! We also helped with parish breakfasts: We made pancakes and waffles, and our friend, Irma Bowden, helped us out. It was fun!

Everyone is accepted at Holy Family. I know people who were married in the Catholic Church and later got divorced—but they never got an annulment due to money or all the rules and regulations that go with annulments. That's not an issue at Holy Family. We're not going to turn someone away because of something like that! My next-door neighbor quit going to church after she was divorced and remarried. We don't turn people away because of their sexual preferences either.

I love celebrating the sacrament of Anointing at Holy Family. It's something I really look forward to. I also love our bilingual services, like the Easter Vigil. I have found that the more involved I am, the more meaningful the services are! The Eucharist actually means more to me now; I really can't tell you why—except that I feel closer to the Church.

I'm glad we've gotten through the pandemic. I'm glad we had drive-thru Communion at Holy Family—and that we continue to have Masses and bible studies online. Sometimes I feel more comfortable just staying home and connecting with Holy Family through Facebook, and not having to be anxious about catching something from a group of people.

For me, Holy Family is love. It's that feeling of love that you feel from other people—and when you're suffering from illness or other problems, you get a lot of prayers at Holy Family!

You Get to Know Everyone

Jerry Caballero



I was born in Austin, Texas in 1956. My parents were both from Monterrey, Mexico, where my older siblings were born. My parents named me Gerardo Javier. They came to East Austin, and I grew up as Gerard Xavier—which I never liked. All my friends call me Jerry.

I attended Catholic schools from the first through the eighth grades at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church. They still had nuns teaching school back then! After the third grade, they moved our classroom to the basement of the church, while they built the new school building. The old school that we attended was a big, three-story house for first through eighth grades. Being a private school, the classes were small. In fact, they combined our seventh- and eighth-grade classes because there were only 13 students total in both classes. I received my sacraments at Guadalupe, and I was an altar boy there for three or four years.

After a year at Martin Junior High, I could have attended Austin High School or Johnston High School; our next-door neighbors went to Austin High, so I did, too. I was part of the last class to graduate from the old Austin High School on Rio Grande Street, before the school moved to its present campus.

Before I came to Holy Family, I had actually given up on going to church for a long time. I was previously married, and my former wife and I occasionally went to St. Paul Catholic Church, since we lived in deep south Austin. We divorced in 2004.

I later met Terry Ann, and we got married in 2011. In 2012, we learned of Holy Family through Terry Ann's uncle, Louis Cuevas. He told her about Holy Family and got us involved. She went a few times without me, then I started going. She said I would like it.

I remember that old church on Lava Hill Road, with all the folding chairs. It was a nightclub at night. I was really impressed with Father Jayme. He broke the Bible down in plain English and made things so easy to understand. I thought, "This guy really cares about what he's doing. You can see it in him!" That made a lot of difference in my decision to go to church—and I really enjoyed it! I also really liked Holy Family's inclusiveness.

I always enjoy meeting new people during breakfast at Holy Family. I like to know the people who are around me, and when I move into a new neighborhood, I get to know all the neighbors. I've met a lot of people over breakfast at Holy Family! A lot of churches don't have that. My brother-in-law talked about his visit to a megachurch once. It was a huge, huge church, with lots and lots of people. I asked him, "How many people did you get to know there?" He said, "None." Holy Family is the right size: You get to know everyone, and that's just really, really nice.

I barbecued a lot, so the way that I first got involved at Holy Family outside of Mass was by cooking turkeys! John Zavala needed volunteers in 2012 to cook turkeys, so I helped out. The next year, Holy Family cooked lots of turkeys that we delivered to the families affected by the 2013 Dove Springs Halloween flood, and I cooked eight turkeys for that, too. Except during the pandemic, I've been making the turkeys for Holy Family's Thanksgiving every year.

A lot of people like my brisket, so I've smoked a lot of briskets for Holy Family. It took me a couple of years to figure out how to cook a good brisket—and I ruined a lot of briskets before I learned how to get them just right! I'm pretty proud of my consistency now. Louis and I made sausage wraps for one *jamaica*, and I helped with a church fundraiser when we served a quarter-chicken plate. That was a lot of leg quarters—and we were overwhelmed by the amount of people who came off the street and didn't have tickets.

About a year ago, Becky asked me to read at church, which I've done a few times. I've never been comfortable speaking in front of people. Even in high school, I'd get the jitters and get nervous trying to talk in front of the class. I guess I've gotten over that a bit.

I'm happy to help, when needed. I've also gotten involved when we moved storage facilities, and when we set up canopies and

chairs for *jamaicas*—but I don't get involved in changing the church's colors, like Terry Ann does! She loves Holy Family so much, and she says that when she wins the lotto, she's going to buy Holy Family a million-dollar church! She keeps me on my toes, too. She'll say, "It's the first Sunday of the month: We have the Building Fund collection!"

I'm "old-school," so I wish my daughter were more involved in church and believing in God—but Terry Ann doesn't want to force it on her. She wants her to make her own choices

Other than that, I love going to Holy Family and meeting all these people—all the friends that we've made!

If people would only try Holy Family once, they'd be "hooked." Look us up online, see our Masses online, but if you just go one time, you'll come back! Deacon Stephen and Deacon Elsa are involved now. We have Father Roy and Father Brett. There's so much to get involved with. Come, see how Holy Family is!

From Day One, I was Hooked!

Terry Ann (Guerrero) Caballero



I was born and raised in Austin, Texas, where I was baptized at Cristo Rey Catholic Church. A year and a half later, my father was killed in Vietnam, and my mother was understandably angry with God, so we didn't attend Mass or anything like that. My grandparents, Leonardo and Frances Cuevas attended Mass, though, and I sometimes went with them.

When my mother remarried, we moved to Kingsville for a couple of years, where I attended private school for kindergarten, then public school for first grade. When I was in the second grade, we moved back to Austin, where I attended St. Mary Cathedral School downtown. I made my First Communion there, but that

was the extent of my involvement in the church until I was 18. I thought, "If I want to be married in the Church, I'll need my Confirmation." So, I did my Confirmation at Cristo Rey—which I considered my home church. Then I realized: In order to be married by the Church, I had to be a "member." My fiancée and I started attending Mass regularly, and I celebrated my first marriage at Cristo Rey. We seldomly attended Mass after that. I do remember one Sunday, though, when there was a youth choir at Cristo Rey: Their singing was such a breath of fresh air! I thought, "Wow! This is great!" At the time, I didn't know who the choir director was—I would later learn that it was Brother Jayme Mathias—but not even that great music was enough to keep me coming back to church.

Life went on. I divorced. I met Jerry. I missed going to Mass—but I also never got much out of it. I went to Mass because I felt I was supposed to go—and not because I was getting anything out of it. For several years, I worked on Sunday mornings, so Mass just wasn't an option.

One day, my uncle, Louis Cuevas, told me that Father Jayme had started a new church. "Father Jayme?" I remembered him from that youth choir at Cristo Rey! Uncle Louis said, "You need to come to Mass." So I went to Holy Family for the first time in May 2012, when the church was over on Lava Hill Road. From day one, I was hooked.

Father Jayme was such a vibrant, happy-go-lucky priest. He was happy and passionate about church. His homilies were great—and that's what hooked me. So I kept going back.

Eventually, I saw those who were proclaiming the Word at Mass, and I saw the ladies who helped the priests, and I said, "I really want to be one of those people!" But I was afraid to approach them. In July or August 2012, Father Jayme asked for volunteers to help in the parish office and to count the collections. I said, "There it is: That's my opportunity!" I took it, and the rest is history.

I volunteered to help in the office. I started counting collections, which was easy for me. Then I discovered that I could help with the questions that parishioners had, too.

A few months later, Father Jayme asked for volunteers to help decorate the church for Advent and Christmas. Margaret Bruch led

those efforts at the time. Father Jayme needed help, and I was like, "Here I am!" Becky Saenz, Rafaela Leal and I volunteered for that, too, and we were all involved in decorating the church—and I got hooked into that, too!

Uncle Louis led a breakfast group, so I helped out with a pot of beans when they needed them. That was my introduction to breakfast groups, and I would take a dish when they needed one—but I didn't stick with that ministry, like I did with others.

I always loved reading—it's one of my passions—so, when Father Jayme asked for volunteers to proclaim the Word, I jumped at the opportunity. I learned to proclaim the Word pretty well, with eye contact and inflection, and pausing for commas and periods. I continued to do that, and I enjoyed it immensely. And it gave me greater confidence for other tasks.

Before the pandemic, and after our move to Salem Lutheran Church, Becky, Rafaela and I were a constant presence in the parish office: counting collections and assisting with the transition of the church between our Catholic Masses and Salem's Lutheran services. We also covered for Amanda, our office administrator, when she was out.

After we moved to Salem in 2017, Miguel and Jon Paul Rodriguez helped us with AV until the pandemic in 2020, when our nation went in to lock-down and we started social distancing. At first, Father Jayme and Father Roy recorded the Masses on Saturdays, and played them on Sunday. Due to safety concerns, Becky and I were their "congregation," assisting them with readings and other details. Becky started recording the homilies, and I raised my hand to be the AV person, to get us through the pandemic. I guess that ministry stuck! A lot of people think it's difficult, and they get really nervous around technology, but I know what I have to do, and I get it done.

After Father Roy retired from active ministry at the end of 2020, I also took over his responsibility of banking all the monies received by Holy Family. Even during the pandemic, people continued to send in their collections. I record all donations on a spreadsheet, take the money to the bank, pick up the bank receipts, and I don't mind doing it at all.

I easily spend six hours a Sunday at church, but the time just flies by so fast. Many people dread Sundays because they have to go back to work the next day—but I really look forward to Sundays, and I look forward to church! I find it comforting, and it gives me satisfaction to serve in whatever capacity that I can. And if that means getting there a little bit early to set up for Masses, I'll do it! I find that I'm now the person I wanted to be all along.

I have attended our weekly bible study, rosary and theological institute since we hosted those classes at Herbert and Susie Martinez's office in South Austin. I had always been interested in learning more about the Bible, and I attended a bible study at San José Catholic Church in my mid-20s, for about two sessions, but I didn't know any of the people, and I felt like an outsider. This bible study has been great: Father Jayme was so knowledgeable, and then Father Roy took over and turned it into a bible study, where we studied the scriptures for the following Sunday. I have immensely enjoyed reading the Bible and learning about the stories that are in it. He introduced the rosary as well. It's a great opportunity for people who want to come together to learn about the Bible and pray—and I'm still there!

I participated in all the classes for diaconate formation with Deacon Elsa and Deacon Stephen, because those classes were so interesting, and I enjoyed learning about the different aspects of their calling. I had entertained the idea of possibly serving as a deacon, but I don't feel that's my calling—and I'm still fascinated with all aspects of it!

I encourage people to get involved at Holy Family. My life is so much different now as a result of my service. Just approach someone and ask how you can get involved! There's a comfort factor to do certain things, like proclaim the Word or serve as a Eucharistic minister, but the more you do it, the more confident you become. Give it a try!

Holy Family has definitely opened my mind to the teachings of Jesus, and I feel I'm a more religious person today than I have ever been in my whole, entire life. Because of Holy Family and its loving and inclusive environment, I have become the person that I am today. I'm just really, really thankful for Holy Family! We've come a long way, and we're encompassing what Jesus meant for

everyone in the world. I'm very proud to be a member of this church—and I'm not shy about telling people about Holy Family!

We're Passing Down Holy Family from Generation to Generation!

Eduardo Carranza & Claudia García



Eduardo: We come from the border town of Matamoros, Tamaulipas, Mexico, and we have been here in the U.S. since May 1998. Ever since I can remember, my mother—may she rest in peace—always instilled in us, as children, that we believe in God, observe all God's commandments, and receive our sacraments: Baptism, Communion and Confirmation. I received my sacraments from Father Oscar at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church in my hometown of Matamoros, Tamaulipas.

Claudia: Since I can remember, my parents took us to church, too, and they instilled in us that we had to go to church every Sunday. I received my sacraments, and it's funny: Eduardo and I met at Our Lady of Lourdes!

Eduardo: We met through a mutual friend at the church, who sang in the choir. I first served as an altar boy, then became a sacristan, and I was in charge of maintaining the church until I was 14 or 15 years old. During high school, I was a bit more distracted, studying and enjoying life, so I distanced myself a bit from the church—but then I found the love of Christ again, and a friend at church introduced me to Claudia in 1996, and we've been together ever since. Holy Family was the first church we came to know in Austin. My brothers-in-law came to Austin first, so we asked them about churches, but they didn't have one here. Coworkers invited me to their

churches, so I visited some three churches before I found a place where my entire body, soul and spirit understood the gospel: Holy Family! We learned about Holy Family due to a mistake while driving in October or November 2012. I needed to buy some tools for work, and I was told that I could find them at the flea market at the corner of 183 and FM 812. Claudia and I packed up the kids—they were small at the time—and we headed down 183. I didn't know how to use the GPS back then, so we passed FM 812. Claudia said, "It seems you've gone too far," so I turned onto Lava Hill Road, to turn around. She saw all sorts of people ahead, and we thought that maybe it was a flea market or garage sale. I parked the car and went inside to investigate. To my surprise, it was Holy Family!

Claudia: It was a church!

Eduardo: It wasn't a garage sale. It wasn't a flea market. It was Holy Family. I closed the door, walked out, got in the car, and told my wife, "It's a church." She asked me, "Which religion?" I told her, "The religion doesn't matter: It's a church, and there are a lot of people praying!" We left with that impression of Holy Family, and we went to the flea market, where I bought my tools. We were left wondering what this church was, where I could understand the gospel, where my heart and soul felt happy, and where my family and I could understand every word. I remember Father Jayme's sermon about the glass of milk, for instance: It was something that even my young children could understand! I remember another homily when he interlocked his fingers and explained that we are in God and that God is in us. We all understood that! Looking back on my driving mistake, it was no accident that I went through the green light at FM 812: The Lord was showing us a new way!

Claudia: I remember our first visit to Holy Family: I was afraid that our girls were going to cry during the Mass. Instead, they were very attentive. Father Jayme spoke in a way that even children understood! He also asked first-time

visitors to introduce themselves: It's nice when people acknowledge you and applaud for you! We have always felt welcomed at Holy Family—so, thank God, we're still here!

Eduardo: Holy Family has been a blessing for us—and now with the birth of our first granddaughter in June 2024, we have added another member to Holy Family! My daughters have received all their sacraments from Holy Family, and now we're passing down Holy Family from generation to generation! We like to support Holy Family. It's a way for us to express our love of God. Money is essential to live, and money makes people happy, but the love of God is of more value. It's priceless! We are all rich. We wake up and open our eyes every morning, thanking God for the family that God has given us. God's limitless love is the greatest possible value!

Claudia: Deacon Elsa's words really struck our hearts, when she encouraged us to give in an envelope, rather than simply in the collection basket. As we began feeling Father Jayme's charisma, we started, little by little, to give through envelopes, and we started to get involved. We felt that we were helping the church, we were getting involved, and now I'm anxious to come every Sunday because I feel at home here. It's a nice feeling!

Eduardo: From then on, our story has been one of helping others and humbly fulfilling the task that God has allowed us, passing that on to our daughters, and now to our granddaughter. Like Holy Family, our generosity keeps growing. We try to contribute to this growth: We've brought to Holy Family my in-laws, my sisters-in-law, my nephews and nieces, my uncles and aunts, and my cousins. Every time we receive something from Holy Family—a prayer card or whatever—I share it with my relatives and friends. At every family dinner or birthday, I'm talking about Holy Family! I also share the business cards of "*el Padre chido*" ("the cool priest"), Father Jayme, and we've seen a few of those people visit us at Holy

Family. On Mondays, I tell my coworkers over lunch what I heard Father Jayme say on Sunday, and, thank God, I have brought more sheep to the flock!

Claudia: Father Jayme always says "*chido*," which is a Mexican expression for "cool." My Honduran brother-in-law asks me, "What does *chido* mean?" Our priest is *el Padre chido*!

Eduardo: We have so many photos and other things that Holy Family has given us and that fill us with great joy. When our daughters visit us, they see the pictures, they see our Holy Family T-shirts, they see our Holy Family Awards hanging in the living room—a blessing that we accepted with grateful hearts. When Father Jayme or Father Roy ask for help, for the elderly or anyone in need, we bring bags full of material things, but our love of Christ is greater than that. If we have an extra penny for backpacks for students, or toys for children, or socks for the elderly, we give it to the church!

Claudia: I like Holy Family because we don't discriminate against anyone. We don't exclude people based on their preferences, as many churches do. Here at Holy Family, no one judges you or looks down on you. Everyone is welcomed here, and I like that!

Eduardo: We are welcomed at every Mass as if it were our first time. Father Jayme always tells us before Mass to turn around and get to know one another—something that other churches don't do. Father Jayme honors the name of our parish! Such faith and community helps us through the difficult moments of life. We will always have trials in life, times when there is no one to complain to, and when we have to cling to faith and hope and take refuge in prayer. I'm fond of saying that my heart is in God, and that I walk hand-in-hand with God. When I was fighting cancer and the doctor would give me pills, I would think, "The Body of Christ." When I received infusions of medicine through my veins, I would think, "The Blood of Christ." The nurse would ask me, "Are you praying?" I replied, "Yes. I believe in God, and I believe that you are giving me the 'Body' and 'Blood' of

Christ. God has put you here to cure me!" I shared with her a Holy Family prayer card, and she said that one day she'll come visit us at Holy Family. It's been 15 months since I was diagnosed with cancer, and God still has me here, alive and participating again!

Claudia: Eduardo's diagnosis with cancer has been very difficult for us, of course, but we never let go of God's hand. I thank everyone at Holy Family for their prayers. They have helped us a lot, and, thank God, my husband is here with us!

Holy Family is Truly a Testament to God's Love!

Mother Annie Cass Watson



I was born in Chicago, Illinois and moved to the suburbs when I was young. I am a cradle Catholic, my mother is Italian, and my biological father is of English/Scottish descent. I was adopted by my stepfather who was a German Jew. I was exposed to both faith traditions and yet primarily embraced my Catholic roots. From an early age I was overjoyed with the excitement I felt when I could be in church. All over scripture, we are told to "serve the Lord." Psalm 100:2 tells us to "serve the Lord with gladness." I have served with gladness my whole life: From Holy Orders, to becoming a women priest and a Protestant pastor's wife, I am committed to living my life in such a way that glorifies God and serves people. So, every effort expended in the service of God is a God-given effort.

In 2012, I married Dr. Jimmy Watson, and soon was introduced to the RCWP/ARCWP, the womanpriest movement. I was intrigued and spent some time with these women who had similar stories as I had, wanting change in the Roman church through ordination. I followed my heart and charted a path for myself in

this historic movement. In 2025, I will be celebrating ten years as a woman priest. I served Independent Catholic churches along the way. Most recently because of a calling that my husband had to serve a United Church of Christ congregation in Weimar, Texas, I have found my way to Holy Family.

A bit of a back story: My husband, Dr. Jimmy Watson, a sixth-generation Texan, was longing to have his last call to serve a congregation back in Texas, and God answered his prayers. He has been a UCC Pastor for the last 35 years, serving churches primarily in the Midwest, and he longed to come home before he retires.

I first met some of the clergy and parishioners of Holy Family at an interjurisdictional gathering in 2021 in Las Vegas. I actually stayed with them, and they were so welcoming to me. I felt a kinship, a sense of belonging. I knew that a year later I would become a visiting priest at Holy Family. I have now been with this beautiful community for over two years. I have started a prayer shawl ministry and am working on leading a short women's retreat for the women of Holy Family.

Holy Family is a beautifully-woven tapestry of believers who walk with you through life's joys and trials, laughing, praying, and crying with one another. This means more that I can put into words. I feel blessed and humbled to be a part of Holy Family Catholic Church. Father Jayme and Holy Family have had far-reaching effects on the Independent Catholic movement. This parish is a true testament to the glorious love of Christ. I pray you will always remain strong in grace. Happy anniversary, and many blessings of joy!

Whoever You Are…
There's a Place for You at Holy Family!

Rev. Dr. Patrice Cheasty-Miller



I was raised a Roman Catholic and attended Catholic Schools throughout elementary school and high school, including at a Catholic boarding school. As I grew older, I began to have some serious questions about the religion in which I was raised. When I was free to do so, I stopped attending Mass, and gradually had nothing more to do with the Roman Catholic Church.

After I married and started to have children, I began to think about the importance of faith in their development. I went to see the priest in my local parish, and asked him for something I could read about the Catholic faith. As an adult, I thought I'd like to read up on Catholicism from a perspective other than the *Baltimore Catechism*. The priest seemed genuinely confused by my request, and told me that he would think about a book for me to read. I left his office feeling less-than-thrilled that he wasn't able to immediately suggest some titles. As I was walking down the block, the priest ran after me, calling my name, and gave me two books to read. I was rather disappointed with his selection of reading material, because these books were clearly meant for children, and weren't exactly what I was looking for.

I decided that the Episcopal church was not the place for me, since the bishop of the local diocese wouldn't ordain women at that time, and, even though I wasn't considering ministry at that point, it was this kind of exclusionary policy that was one of the reasons I left the Roman Catholic Church.

I then went to the local Lutheran church, since my husband had been raised in that tradition, but found the response to my inquiries less than helpful.

My next stop was the United Methodist Church, where the Pastor, Rev. Phil Gerhes, turned out to be a consistently excellent preacher and an openminded and progressive pastor. After a while, he became both a friend and a mentor to me.

When I perceived a sense of call into ministry, Phil was supportive and led me through a discernment process, after which, I decided to go to seminary. I was accepted wherever I applied, and finally decided to attend the Divinity School at Duke University, and then served as a pastor in the United Methodist Church, until the point where the church's stance on same-sex marriage and the ordination of LGBTQ people became an obstacle for me. Since I had completed my doctorate in psychology, and had moved to Austin, I decided the focus of my ministry would be to provide pastoral counseling for people, instead of serving the local church.

However, when asked to preside at the marriage of two men, who had been my parishioners, I did so gladly, in violation of the Discipline of the UMC. When I did this, I understood that I could be brought up on charges for violating the Discipline and lose my ordination. So, I called a friend who is the archbishop of the Ecumenical Catholic Church of Australia, who I had met while getting my doctorate. He was the person who introduced me to the Independent Catholic movement, which I found to be very intriguing, particularly because my theology has a strong sacramental component to it, and I had missed this in the United Methodist Church.

I explained to Bishop Ron that, if I lost my ordination, I would no longer be able to provide pastoral care under the umbrella of my ordination. After much discussion, Bishop Ron offered to ordain me in the ECC of Australia, and so, that summer, when I was in Australia, I was ordained as an Independent Catholic priest.

I then found myself in the position of looking for an Independent Catholic community in which to worship. It was then that I found Holy Family. I called Father Jayme, and he invited me to come to Holy Family, to see what it was all about. I accepted his invitation and found a welcoming and open Catholic community, where I began to worship on a regular basis. I felt like I had come

home. The worship is enriching, the people are friendly and always glad to greet newcomers with open arms.

As the mother of five children, I have a soft spot in my heart for kids. I wanted to find a way to encourage the children at Holy Family to want to come to Mass and to enable their parents to attend Mass without having to struggle with their children. I suggested that Holy Family introduce the Children's Treasure Chest. The idea is that the community provide little toys for the Treasure Chest, and, at the end of Mass, the children who behaved themselves, could come up to pick a toy from the Treasure Chest. It turned out to be a success!

When I moved back to North Carolina, unfortunately, there was no Independent Catholic church to attend. I miss Holy Family, its people, and receiving weekly Holy Communion. Even though I am no longer living in Austin, I continue to support Holy Family, and I am thrilled that the Children's Treasure Chest is still going on, as a ministry to children!

I also appreciate Father Jayme, who welcomed me and included me as a colleague in ministry. Father Jayme is the person who is responsible for bringing Independent Catholic clergy together, which is no easy job. It's sort of like herding cats! He has written several books about the movement and, to encourage the community of Independent Catholics, he has started regular Zoom meetings, to help build community among Independent Catholic clergy. For this, and many other things: Thank you, Father Jayme and Holy Family!

I Like Everything about Holy Family, Especially How Welcoming Everyone Is

Modesta Choc



I come from Petén, Guatemala, where my parents shared with me their Catholic faith, so I have always been Catholic. I have been here in the U.S. for two years, but my husband and our oldest son, Elmer, have been here for five years. They came to Holy Family with a friend, then, after I arrived, I started coming, too. I like everything about Holy Family, especially how welcoming everyone is.

My son, Franklin, feels happy here, and we are proud that he participates as an altar server at Mass. He wanted to help, even before he started serving. I told him that he would have to wait until he received his First Communion, but he wanted to serve, and Deacon Elsa said that he could, and that he could receive his First Communion later. He is sad on the Sundays when we are not able to bring him, when my husband or sons need to use the car.

Holy Family is a united family: Everyone who comes here is welcomed!

I Fell in Love with Holy Family

María Coronel



I am originally from Los Angeles, California, but my family moved to Austin about 25 years ago, so I graduated from Travis High School.

I was baptized Catholic, but I was a little rebellious, so I didn't receive my First Communion or Confirmation until I was in high school.

I attended Dolores Catholic Church for a time, but then I eventually got away from our faith, and I found myself in an abusive relationship. My friend, Jana, said, "You should go to Holy Family. I think you'll like it!" I did, and I just fell in love with the church.

Holy Family was on Lava Hill Road at the time. Even the first time I went, I felt welcomed and not judged. I thought everyone was really welcoming. Sometimes you feel like an outsider at Hispanic churches; you don't know anyone, and you don't feel welcomed. Holy Family was different.

At first, I visited Holy Family alone, then I brought along my sons, Nicholas and Noel, and eventually we baptized my daughter, Neala, there. Like kids, there are times when they don't want to go to church, but I threaten them: "If you don't go to Holy Family, then we'll go to another Catholic church"—and that makes them want to go!

One of the reasons I fell in love with Holy Family was because of the way that Father Jayme simplifies things. I was away from the Church for a long time, and I had forgotten everything I learned as a child, but Father Jayme shares things in a way that energizes me. I love his sermons—and he also keeps my kids' attention! I like the Mass programs that he shares, which allow me to follow along during the Mass, rather than be lost. Father Jayme just makes things so much more understandable.

I also love the fact that Holy Family welcomes all people, including members of the LGBT community—and people aren't made to feel that there's something wrong with them. I love that model: that we should welcome everyone and not exclude anyone. We need to let people be who they are. I have friends who are lesbian or bisexual, and they're made to feel that something is wrong with them because that's what the Roman Catholic Church preaches.

I really like how we're able to say "hi" to one another before Mass. It's a simple gesture, but I really love it. My kids love the parish breakfast—and that gives us a chance to meet and talk to other people.

I totally recommend Holy Family. It's a welcoming church!

They Made Me Feel Like a Rock Star!

Andy Cox



I was born in Victorville, California, where both my parents were stationed at George Air Force Base, which is now closed. They were both from the same block in Houston, so I was actually raised in Houston. When I was 11, my parents purchased a ranch in Weimar, off I-10. We commuted for a while to Smithville, 35 miles away, then we eventually moved there. My father committed suicide on that ranch, so we divested ourselves of it and moved to Smithville. When I was a senior in high school, we moved to Austin, where we rented rooms from a gentleman in Hyde Park. I graduated from McCallum High School in Austin.

My family was not very religious, and we didn't attend church regularly, so I had very limited connection with the Church. When I was younger, I attended an Episcopal church with my mother. When I was a teen, she sang in the choir of a Presbyterian church in Smithville, so I attended the services and events at which she

sang, but I was not connected to the church at all. After my father's suicide, I felt like life crapped on me, and I didn't feel that I belonged anywhere—until I started attending Holy Family with Darrell Cox.

Darrell and I have been together for 15 years. In Fall 2013, I was on a business trip when Darrell attended the Austin Pride parade with his kids. He saw Holy Family's float in the parade, and he couldn't believe that a Catholic church was in the Pride parade. He always wrangled with that aspect of his Catholic faith, so he was super-excited—and he couldn't wait to tell me about it. He went the following Sunday, and he invited me to go with him the Sunday after that. We were hooked.

I'll admit that I was a bit hesitant about going to Holy Family, but I wanted to be completely supportive of Darrell. I was excited to meet Father Jayme and to see what Holy Family is all about. I was blown away by Holy Family. The fellowship there blew me away: Every single person that we talked to was so accepting and inviting. Quite honestly, I loved the experience and looked forward to it every week. I did. I really, really enjoyed Holy Family.

There was no cantor at Holy Family at the time, and it seems that people around me heard me singing—including Father Jayme, who asked if I would be interested in cantoring. I said, "Yes, I'd love to!" I wasn't a regular church attendee before, so Holy Family was my first real experience of singing in a church setting. I sang at my mother's church on Christmas, and I performed with groups in college, but now people at Holy Family seemed to enjoy my regular singing. They made me feel like a rock star!

From my perspective, Holy Family's Mass is structured like the Catholic Mass in other churches. The difference is that everyone is invited to take part in Communion. Because so much of the Mass was sung, I could remember and repeat the words of the eucharistic prayer!

It was also very exciting for Darrell and me to be the first same-sex couple in Texas to celebrate the Catholic sacrament of Marriage in 2015. We had been become impatient with the U.S. Supreme Court, so we got married by a justice of the peace during our annual trip to Pensacola on Memorial Day weekend that year. It was really important to Darrell that our relationship be blessed by

the Church, so we picked June 27, 2015 as the date that we would celebrate our love at Holy Family and receive a blessing from Father Jayme. Coincidentally, that was the day after the U.S. Supreme Court decision legalizing gay marriage—so we were the first couple in Texas to celebrate a same-sex marriage in a Catholic church! We were interviewed on television and in the *Austin Chronicle*, and it was very, very, very exciting. It's a great story, and we continue to tell it today!

We moved from Austin to Lago Vista in December 2017, but the whole Holy Family experience sticks with me. I'm still touched by the people and fellowship there—and I miss it. If we didn't live so far away, we'd be regular attendees! And every time we return, we're so moved by the welcome we receive with open arms. We're welcomed back into the fold as if we had never left!

In 2019, we were excited to discover Holy Name of Mary Chapel, which was closer to us. It was led by Father Daniel Storrs, who was at Holy Family for a while. We attended with them for a while. It was a different experience, since it was much smaller and in their home, but we bonded with them as well—until they left for Pennsylvania.

Holy Family has touched my life like no other spiritual organization I've ever experienced. For me, Holy Family is amazing love and fellowship. That sums up Holy Family for me!

Our Church Doesn't Discriminate Against Anyone

Angie Coy



I was born here in Austin, Texas, and I grew up in East Austin until I went to high school. Then we moved to South Austin and have lived there ever since. I attended the original "haunted" Metz Elementary, Pleasant Hill Elementary for fourth to sixth grade, the Kealing Magnet Program, then the Science Academy at LBJ High School.

When I grew up, my family attended various churches. In the eighth grade, we started attending Cristo Rey, and we were there until we moved over to Holy Family. We were always involved in the church in some way. My mother taught CCD at Cristo Rey, so I helped with that. She helped with the Altar & Rosary Society breakfast, so I helped with that. When I was in college, I worked with her in the parish office. I assisted people with sacraments—and everything was manual back then. We logged everything in books, until we digitized all those records.

I knew Father Jayme from Cristo Rey. Mom was the office administrator at Cristo Rey when Father Jayme came there as a Franciscan brother in 1995. I was in college, and one night I invited him along to Sixth Street, when I went out with friends. We hit a few clubs, we had fun dancing, and we got him back to the rectory at 2:30 a.m.!

My Mom began attending Mass at Holy Family in March 2012, when it met at Father Jayme's home on Willow Street. I started attending Holy Family after it moved to the building on Lava Hill Road. It was different back then: Because there were fewer people, we passed around a loaf of bread at Communion, rather than use hosts. I really enjoyed that. I also like that Holy Family was very welcoming: You felt like you were gathering with family and friends.

Mom and I were instrumental in the parish office during those first years. There was a need in the church, and we were ready to volunteer! It was a pretty big undertaking. After we had moved to Lava Hill Road, Mom and I drove around to different used office furniture stores, looking for items we could use at the church. We found the lectern that we used as an ambo for a number of years. We bought printers for Mass programs and sacramental certificates, and every purchase back then was big for us. We created registration forms for each sacrament, and my dad printed them on carbonless triplicate paper and glued them. We created Excel spreadsheets to track sacraments—until we were ready to digitize all records. I printed the Mass programs every Saturday night—and I swear my printer would always decide not to work on Saturday nights. That printer could be temperamental, and I would say a little prayer: "Dear Lord, please let the printer be okay!" We had to print out everything, then we'd sit around the table and fold the Mass programs for the next morning.

I enjoyed working in the parish office, but it could be super-stressful. I had to follow up with people, to get in all the necessary paperwork for all the sacraments. If someone was missing a birth certificate for a baptism, for instance, I was the one to call them and keep following up with them until they submitted it. In October 2013, we celebrated over 200 Confirmations, so that was a lot of paperwork, and over 800 people joined us that Sunday, so that was a lot of Mass programs! We were creating the systems as we went: I remember the expandable file folders that we used to alphabetize and track sacramental records back then. Fortunately, Mom and I brought our experience in parish office administration from Cristo Rey. There was a lot of data entry, but we had systems that worked. And for nearly five years, we hosted the office behind one of the bars of that old dance hall!

We dedicated a lot of time to that ministry, and you can imagine our gratitude when Father Jayme recognized Mom and me with Holy Family Pioneer Awards in 2013. It was a lot of work, but we were bringing to birth a new church!

After some time, Monica Manzano started helping us in the parish office after the Spanish Mass. Father Jayme would gather the three of us—Mom, me and Monica—at the old parish rectory

on Garden Street, to talk about parish systems and how we might continuously improve the "customer" experience. And now, of course, Holy Family has a more formal parish office, where Amanda Rodriguez can host the families that come to our parish.

Holy Family didn't make it difficult for people to receive sacraments—like so many Roman Catholic churches do, saying that godparents have to be married by the Church, and you need to show proof of everything. In other churches, you have to submit a lot of documents in order to be a sponsor for Confirmation or a godparent for Baptism, then you have to attend all sorts of classes. Father Jayme changed up all that: He offered a single class on the day of the sacrament, and he would tell godparents that the most important thing was that they be good godparents—good models and examples of the faith—not that they jump through all sorts of hoops.

My family provided a parish breakfast for some years, and my parents pulled us all in to help out. We really enjoyed doing that. Eventually, we had to step away when my mother's health declined, and then COVID came.

From the very beginning, we tried to create a welcoming and inclusive spirit at Holy Family. I remember we had one retreat for parish leaders, when we brainstormed and formulated a parish mission statement: "Loving. Catholic. Inclusive. Doing It Jesus' Way!" Inclusion was important for us! There are not a lot of Catholic churches out there that are open to everyone. I really enjoy the fact that our church doesn't discriminate against anyone. God loves everybody, so why shouldn't we? It's one of the things about our church that I really do like. I also like that we shake hands with everyone before Mass and say "good morning" to everyone. Being a community is one of the things that I love about Holy Family. I've been to a lot of churches that are not like that.

COVID changed things, but we would go to Holy Family for "drive-thru Communion" and prayer with Father Jayme and Father Roy. It was nice to get out of the house and to receive Communion and the sacrament of Anointing. It was nice to have that connection during the pandemic. We've always liked the fact that Holy Family shares the sacrament of Anointing. I like the fact that Holy Family now has online Masses that we can watch.

Sometimes I don't want to wake Mom when she's sleeping, so we sleep in and watch Mass online.

I tell everyone that they need to experience Holy Family themselves. Come, see what it's like! Holy Family is a church that's like a group of friends where we can listen to the Word and worship the Lord in an environment surrounded by love!

There Was a Need, and We Chipped In!

Diana (Castro) Coy



I was born in Austin. I went to Allison Elementary in Montopolis, Allan Middle School, and Johnston High School. My family attended Dolores Catholic Church, and we sometimes went to Santa Julia or Guadalupe. Cristo Rey was Tony's church, so we went there after we married.

I knew Father Jayme when he came to Cristo Rey in 1995 as Brother Jayme. At that time, I served as the office administrator at Cristo Rey, and my daughter, Angie, helped in the parish office with our computers and sacraments.

After Father Jayme left Cristo Rey in 2011, we continued to go there—just because we were "supposed" to go to Mass —but we couldn't understand the accent of the Spanish-speaking priests, so we weren't getting anything out of the Masses anymore. That's when we decided to go to Mass at Father Jayme's home on Willow Street in 2012. We liked it, and we got a lot out of it. They cooked breakfast in his kitchen and shared it with everyone. One parishioner from Cristo Rey asked us why we were going to Mass with Father Jayme, and I told him, "I'm getting nothing out of Cristo Rey, so I'm going with Father Jayme—and you should come, visit us!"

When we moved to Lava Hill Road, we had to get accustomed to having Mass in such a wide, open space, which didn't resemble

a church environment, but we got used to it, and it started to get full. It was really nice.

My family and I formed a breakfast group: My husband Tony, my sister Coy, my daughter Angie, my son Tony and his girlfriend, and our granddaughter Abi. Shirley Bruch also helped our breakfast group.

In an effort to help lift up the church, Angie and I also worked in the parish office. We saw that the church needed help, and our experience at the Cristo Rey parish office gave us the skills we needed to do that kind of work. There was a need, and we chipped in! We also helped as lectors and eucharistic ministers. We did as much as we could to help.

When the pandemic came in 2020, Father Roy and Father Jayme provided drive-thru Communion at the church. Because I couldn't get out of the house too much, I was so glad that they were available to us. After we moved into our new home three years ago, Father Roy started bringing me Communion. He sits with us and prays with us. He would also come to the hospital to pray with me before surgeries. I always appreciated that.

Everybody at Holy Family is loving and caring. Everybody is a family. Everybody worries and cares about each other. They always ask, "How you doing?" or they say, "We're praying for you." I like that. At Holy Family we are closer to one another as parishioners. You don't see a lot of that at other churches. At other churches, people go every Sunday, but they never talk to each other. At Holy Family, though, everyone is very welcoming and loving. Everyone says hello!

I Want All My Kids—and Not Just the Boys—to Know That They Can be Priests or Deacons

Becca Cross



I grew up in Nashville, Tennessee, and I came to Austin in 2012. There were a lot of stops along the way, but I've spent most of my adult life in Texas.

As a girl, I was definitely involved in church. My parents were Baptists, and we went to church three times a week. My parents weren't pastors, but they literally opened the doors of the church each day. My father was the music minister, and my mother was the pianist and organist. When I was 10, they decided to become missionaries, so we moved to Namibia, where they taught in schools. I lived in Namibia for most of my teenage years.

As an adult, I found it difficult to reconcile my left-leaning political beliefs with Baptist churches. I experienced a real incongruence. I dated a Catholic guy in my 20s, and he took me to Mass. I loved the liturgy and the Catholic Church's concern for the poor. I found it ironic: Baptists are so good at reading their bibles, but then I found the Catholic church, where Catholics are not known for reading their bibles—but they were living their faith in a way that deeply resonated with me. Their pro-immigrant stance, for instance, was refreshing. I deeply struggled with the Roman Catholic Church's stance on other issues, though, like birth control and homosexuality. As a result, I never officially converted or joined the Roman Catholic Church. I just attended.

When we moved to Austin, we went to the closest Roman Catholic Church to us. I had adopted Zach by the time. We attended an Ash Wednesday service, and the homily was all about the "abomination" of homosexuality. I looked down at Zach, and I thought, "I can't in good conscience let him hear this." So, I stood up and walked out. I tried a couple of other churches, but I never really landed on anything. Then I read a July 2015 article about

Holy Family in the *Austin Chronicle*. I got so excited! By then I had adopted Charlie, so I took Zach and Charlie to Holy Family on Lava Hill Road that Sunday.

The traditions of Catholicism really appeal to me, so I was just so glad to find Holy Family. At Baptist churches, men preach for 35 minutes, telling you what they think the Bible says. The Catholic tradition is so much more appealing, and I feel that I'm part of a global church. Holy Family had a philosophy that I could embrace and share with my children. I no longer feel that I'm participating in something in which I don't believe. I never thought I'd find that!

I grew up in very segregated churches, and we now live in Oak Hill, where some of the churches closest to our home still reflect that segregation. In contrast, Holy Family embraces anyone and everyone. Zach and I are White, Charlie and Aaliyah are Latino, but Holy Family is a church where we all feel comfortable. I want all my kids—and not just the boys—to know that they can be priests or deacons. There are few places where you can share that possibility with kids, even in this day and age, and even in this city.

I was raised Baptist, but my adopted kids all come from Catholic families of origin. Zach was never baptized as an infant, so he celebrated his Baptism and First Communion at Holy Family. I invited my dear friend, Jessica, who is Jewish, to be his godmother—and that was really special. His godparents are very close friends, and we share a lot of common values, and I appreciate the fact that this wasn't an impediment to Zach receiving the sacraments at Holy Family. Charlie and Aaliyah received their First Communion at a Christmas service at Holy Family—which was so cool to me. I have a photo of them, dressed for their First Communion and standing in front of a Christmas tree! That photo is a reminder of Holy Family's philosophy that there shouldn't be barriers to the Church's sacraments—like nine months of First Communion classes. Those were all special memories for us at Holy Family!

It has been easy to be generous with Holy Family, because Holy Family has been very generous with me. Shortly after I found Holy Family, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. One Sunday, as Archbishop Johnson was walking out of Mass, he saw that I had lost all my hair, and he stopped in the aisle to bless me. I was very

touched by that. There have been other times when Holy Family has helped me deal with the issues of raising kids. After COVID, it has been a struggle for us to regularly go back to church, for multiple reasons, yet I haven't felt any judgment. People don't say, "Where have you been?" Instead, they say, "We're so glad you're here!" Holy Family feels like a family that's always here for us.

I'm really grateful for Holy Family, and I want to see it grow. I definitely want to see a new building come to fruition.

I would encourage anyone to check out Holy Family—particularly if you're familiar with the Catholic tradition but, for whatever reason, aren't comfortable in other churches. I have spoken about Holy Family with several people who fall into that category. Once you discover Inclusive Catholicism, it's hard to reconcile attending a non-inclusive church—and that's not limited to Catholicism, either. Over Christmas, I went to my parents' church which is divided over whether to baptize LGBTQ Christians. There was a disturbance during the service: A woman got up, walked to the front, and started condemning homosexuality. As we talked about the episode, one family member said, "Well, it's complicated," and I thought to myself, "It's not complicated. Certainly, at Holy Family, it's not complicated for us."

I Recommend Holy Family 100%!

Daniel Eduardo Cruz Vázquez



I come from Tampico, Tamaulipas. My mother, Juana María Vásquez, is very active at St. Joseph the Worker Catholic Church in Tampico, and she always took us to church events—especially the feast day festivities for our patron saint, St. Joseph the Worker! I am her youngest child, so I always had to accompany her. She was very involved in the church, so she took me

to religious education, retreats, and when it was our turn to serve at the church. She is always at the church, participating in Eucharistic adoration and other activities, and she instilled that involvement in us from an early age.

When I came to the U.S., I wanted to continue being active in the church. For about 14 years now, I have been coming and going with a Mexican visa. I come and stay for five or six months, then I return, but the other year I decided to stay for a while longer.

I came to Holy Family in mid-May 2022. I was renting a place near here, and my coworker, Juan López, used his van to help me move. I had used a previous work van to help him move. His wife was previously a church bookkeeper, and they discovered that Holy Family was near them, so they came to Holy Family. One day, Juan said to me, "Hey, Daniel, rather than stay here alone, let's go to church!" I said "sure," and that's how I first came to Holy Family. It was closed at the time, due to the pandemic, but Elsa Nelligan and Becky Saenz prayed with us in our car and shared Communion with us. Now that the pandemic is over, I enjoy attending Mass live.

I didn't get involved at Holy Family until July 2022, when Father Jayme asked for volunteers to dismantle the old playground and build a new one. My experience of the church in Tampico is that you couldn't join or take part in church activities because they had their "favorites." Here at Holy Family, though, you can help! So I said to Juan, "Let's go help!" We all brought our tools, and we volunteered to dismantle the old playground on a Saturday morning. That was the first time that I did something outside the Mass at Holy Family.

As I began socializing with more people from Holy Family, I became more involved. Judith Rincón used to proclaim the Word at Mass, but one day she went to Mexico with her parents, so she couldn't perform her duties, and she asked me to step in for her. Becky had previously asked me to proclaim the scriptures, but I told her that I couldn't. I wasn't used to reading in public! She told me, "Don't be nervous." She sent me the scripture the day before, and I spent the night studying it. I didn't sleep that night! That was the first time that I read the reading, and I was really nervous! I recorded myself, to see how I could improve, and to this day I

continue to proclaim the Word, and that has helped me a lot. I still get nervous about standing up and reading, but I study the reading at night, and I arrive at church early to pray and soak in the beauty of the church. I enjoy feeling that I'm contributing to the church.

I find relief at the Holy Family, both mentally and physically. When you come to Holy Family Catholic Church, everyone greets you, saying, "Good morning! How are you?" Everyone makes you feel like part of the family. I look forward to the weekend, to be able to go to church, where everyone greets you.

I also got involved in dancing. Deacon Elsa invited me to dance with her dance group, but, because of work, I couldn't. Then Juan formed another dance group, the matlachines, and, because we worked together, he encouraged me, saying, "Daniel, let's do this!" I joined. It was something I had never done in Tampico. I don't know how to dance, but I was excited to be more involved in the church. It was a commitment, and one time I had to travel back to Austin for practice after a late night with family in Houston, but I made the sacrifice in order to fulfill my duty here with my other family! I enjoyed dancing, and I never thought that one could feel such great joy while dancing.

I encourage everyone to get a little more involved at church. Many feel excluded from the sacraments by other churches. At Holy Family, though, we don't discriminate against anyone. It's great that everyone is made to feel like part of the family and to receive Communion.

My experience here has been great, and I recommend Holy Family 100%!

Holy Family Makes My Heart Feel Good

Mario Juarez Cruz & María (Favila) Cruz



Mario: I was born in San Angelo in 1940. My mother gave birth to seven children—and we're all still alive. The youngest is 80! My father's previous wife died while giving birth, so after my mother married him, she raised his six children as well!

María: I was born in Mexico, and my parents immigrated here when I was two. I was raised on a ranch in Eldorado, outside of San Angelo. My grandparents knew Mario's grandparents. Our kids joke that we've known one another since I was two—and I say, "Yes, I've known your dad since he wet the bed!" I was a tomboy on the ranch. I used to enjoy coming home from school and running around the ranch with no shoes on, just my shorts and a top. I wasn't afraid of the dark or anything. And now we've been married for over 50 years!

Mario: After I earned my degree in counseling from Texas Tech and interviewed in Lubbock, my wife, María, said, "Let's go to Austin!" She had an aunt and cousin here, and they were very helpful. We rented a house on El Paso Street, then bought our present house a year later. My mother was very Catholic, and she was very involved in the Church. As children, she made us go to church. Whether we wanted to or not, we had to go! Before Holy Family, María and I were involved at San José Catholic Church, and we were involved in a breakfast group there—until I got upset that a priest said at Mass that President Obama was at war with the Church. I was very upset, and I told him, "You shouldn't bring politics in here!" Then, when Father Tom Frank shared Bishop Vasquez's letter concerning Father Jayme, I wrote them both. Father Tom

called me to apologize, and I told him, "I'm not going to come to church here anymore. I'm going somewhere else!" Ernesto and Acacia Rodríguez told us that Father Jayme had a church on Lava Hill Road. María and I went looking for the church on Sunday—but we couldn't find it! Then Ernesto told me exactly where it was, and the next Sunday, María and I went to Holy Family for the first time. I remember that we were welcomed by Leonard and Louis. They made us feel very welcomed. We just love Holy Family, and Father Jayme is a very, very intelligent person. He's gifted. We were very impressed, and María said, "We need to come here!"

María: The camaraderie, the closeness, and the way that people welcomed us just kept drawing us back! You could see it in their faces when they said, "Good morning!" Then Father Jayme would invite us to stand and share our name with those around us, and give each other hugs. We never did that at San José! We never knew who was next to us; we were told to sit there and stand there, and that was it. The atmosphere at Holy Family made us feel very comfortable. We got to know other people by name, which we never did. We used to see Toby and Julia Machuca at San José—Mario and Toby were in the Men's Club together—but we had no communication with them at San José. My father lived with us during his last four years, and no one from San José ever came to bring him Communion. We'd call them, and they never came! It was just a very cold church.

Mario: I love the breakfast at Holy Family. It's just wonderful!

María: Every Sunday that we go to Holy Family, it's like seeing your family again. We catch up with one another. We talk about our children and grandchildren, what we're going through, and the aches and pains that we experience as we get older.

Mario: Then we had a new ministry when Father Roy asked us to bring Paul and Mary Alcala with us to church, when Paul could no longer drive. We continued to bring Mary to

Mass, then I started bringing Joe Bruch to Mass and bible study, too.

María: Ms. Alcala has a great story: After Father Jayme disappeared from Cristo Rey, she had a hard time understanding the priests there. One day, she was reading the newspaper over breakfast, when she came across his ad in the *Austin American-Statesman*. She says, "I literally screamed at Paul: 'I found him!'" When they started coming to Holy Family, people would tell them, "Father Jayme is no longer a real priest!" And Mary would tell them, "I don't care. I enjoy his sermons, and I enjoy going to his church!" She has told us that story several times! She looks forward to Sundays and to getting out of the house. She's going somewhere, she's going to see other people, and that makes her feel good. Holy Family makes my heart feel good, too. As Father Jayme says, I feel like I'm earning my wings for heaven! I hope that when we're no longer able to drive, someone will keep taking us to church at Holy Family!

Mario: I also enjoy proclaiming the Word at Mass. Becky asked me once to do a reading, then Father Jayme gave us some training, and I've been proclaiming the Word ever since. I was a little scared about getting up there, but Becky said, "You're going to learn!" She helped a lot. Now my grandchild, Milagros María Cruz-Schindler, is beginning to proclaim the Word, so that is very exciting!

María: She's working on her reading and enunciation. It's a process! It helps that we have such a positive attitude at church. We don't have any negativity. Even if people are having a miserable day, they don't show it.

Mario: Milo has also volunteered to dress up after Mass as our parish mascot, Felix the Frog!

María: From a young age, Milo has come to Mass with us at Holy Family. She used to sit on the floor, with her blanket, stuffed lion, and iPad, and, when we told her to turn down the volume before Mass started, she inevitably asked why, and we said, "Jesus is going to pray." For the longest time, she thought that Father Jayme was Jesus! Milo was

baptized at Holy Family, and now she proclaims the Word at Holy Family. Her mother is on the fence with the [Roman] Catholic Church—but I tell her, "We're not Roman! We're independent. We're more liberal. We're not the same!"

Mario: Christ was very liberal. He accepted Gentiles and taxpayers. He was open to everyone. He showed us that God loves and accepts everyone. Christ didn't cut people out, and neither do we. That's what I like about our church.

María: We've also helped the church with the *jamaica*. My daughter is an art teacher, so I thought about doing face painting—but then I thought, "Why should I do face painting? I would be bad at that!" Tina said, "Mom, you can make slime!" I learned how to do that with the kids, and we made quite a lot of money! The kids get a kick out of making their slime. It's a process for them, and they can see the end result. The second year, we sold plants as well.

Mario: People are so dedicated to our church—people like Rudy and Gloria, and Becky and Terry.

María: And I remember Mary Lou Piña, too. At first, I just knew her as the little old lady who would come and sit next to me, with her beautiful hats. I loved to see her in her hats! She would give me her checkbook and ask me to write her check to the church for her. We would talk a bit, and then Andy and Mary Alice, her niece, would come and sit with us. She would just make my day!

Mario: As a church, we have to be like that: We need to help people. People are coming here from Mexico, and there's a lot of need. We need to have compassion for them. We need to feed them. We need to show that we're a Christian country that cares about others. Unless we're Native American, we're all immigrants here. Some of my ancestors were Native American, and others came from Spain. All our families came to this country once—so we need to be compassionate!

María: That's what it boils down to in our church: Our priests are able to marry and experience family life—so they can

relate to us. Roman Catholic priests just can't relate to us. They don't have spouses or in-laws. They're very isolated. Sometimes, I hear things from Roman Catholic priests, and I just want to say, "Really, Father? Really?"

Mario: Father Jayme isn't like that. He's a very intelligent man. He's very bright and gifted. He can sing and play the piano and organ. He has so much talent! But María is right: Father Roy brings so many skills to his ministry as a result of his experience as a husband, father and grandfather. He knows how to reach people! And now Father Brett is learning Spanish, too!

María: I love seeing Deacon Stephen grow in leaps and bounds. It's beautiful—and he's now beginning to preach more and more from his heart! He's blossoming in front of our eyes! And I remember how sick Leonard was, and how we journeyed through cancer with him and Waldine. It's just beautiful, and I love to tell people that I'm an Independent Catholic!

Mario: I love our church. It's very strong and very liberal. We accept people the way that God created them, and we don't question them. Everyone is welcomed. That's the whole essence of Holy Family!

María: We finally feel at home in a church, where people are friendly and nice and openminded. That's a good thing—and that's the good thing about being Independent Catholics!

Mario: My sister couldn't be in our wedding because she was divorced and the Roman Catholic priest wouldn't let her. So I enjoy the freedom we have at Holy Family—and the camaraderie and togetherness that we have!

We Were Building Something That We All Believed In!

Louis & Rita (Navarro) Cuevas



Rita: I was born in Taylor, Texas, where I lived until I was in the middle of the fourth grade. Then my father got a job with the U.S. Post Office, and we moved to Austin in 1959. I then attended Govalle Elementary, Allan Junior High and Johnston High School.

Louis: I was born in our family's home in East Austin, at Cesar Chavez (East First Street) and Broadway. I came to this world early. My mom did not have an opportunity to get to the hospital, so our family doctor, Dr. Barth Milligan, made a home visit for the delivery. The story is that my grandmother was making breakfast and Dr. Milligan was eating when I finally decided to arrive! I attended Brooke Elementary, Allan Junior High and Johnston High School.

Rita: I was born into a devout Roman Catholic family. Though we lived in Taylor, I was baptized at Cristo Ray in 1950 by an aunt and uncle who lived in Austin. Father George Green baptized me. We lived on a farm near Taylor, and there was not a Catholic Church close by, so we attended Mass at Our Lady of Guadalupe in Taylor. Back then, we had catechism or *doctrina* in people's homes. My father would drop my brother and me at the home of my mother's friend, who taught us Catholic prayers, tradition and history, to prepare us for receiving the sacraments. I remember attending Sunday Mass in the winter and trying to hide inside my dad's overcoat so that I wouldn't have to attend catechism taught by the Sisters. There was one Sister who was very strict. She preached "fire and brimstone" when we were not good children. She showed us pictures of hell and the devil

which really scared me. I received my First Communion and Confirmation there, at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Taylor.

Louis: My parents and grandparents were members of Cristo Ray from the beginning. I was also baptized by Father Green and attended catechism classes beginning in the first grade. In order to receive our First Communion, the girls went to classes on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, and the boys went to classes on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. I was scared to death when I had to recite all my prayers in front of Father Victor Goertz and answer his questions. Similar to Rita's experience, the pictures that the nuns showed us about hell and the devil were pretty scary! I received my First Communion and Confirmation at Cristo Rey. After we made our First Communion, the girls attended classes on Monday and Tuesday, and the boys on Thursday and Friday—for the whole school year. During those early years, my dad would pick up my grandmother for the Sunday 6:30 a.m. *misa de gallo*, and I would go with him. A benefit to going early to Mass was that my grandmother and my aunt would always make a huge breakfast!

Rita: When we moved to Austin, we began attending Santa Julia Catholic Church. Father Noble was the priest there at the time. When he moved, Father Joe Znotas took his place. Father Joe was awesome. I was in high school by then, and we really became active in the church. We volunteered with the *jamaicas*. We established a college scholarship program for underprivileged kids. I was fortunate to meet Cesar Chavez there at the rectory in the early 1970's. Not long after, I moved to Denver for about ten years, where I attended Holy Family Roman Catholic Church. It was a predominately Hispanic parish, and I felt right at home. I had such a favorable impression of that church, and it plays a part in the story of our parish here in Austin, for that was the name I suggested in 2012 for Holy Family!

Louis: As a boy, I was member of Cristo Rey's Boy Scout Troop 26. Frank Ramirez was the Scoutmaster. I was also involved in the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO). We participated in

softball and basketball leagues. After I married the first time, my wife and I moved to Barrington Oaks in Northwest Austin. Our children attended St. Mary's Cathedral School downtown, and then we took them to Confirmation classes at Cristo Rey.

Rita: Later, after Louis and I were married, my brother and his wife asked us to be godparents for their new baby girl. We went to a baptism class at Santa Julia, and the deacon who taught the class said, "You have to be married in the Church to be godparents." Louis and I were civilly married and were going through the annulment process. Unfortunately, the deacon made a very public example of us, saying that we were not suited to be godparents because we were not good role models for children and we were outside of canon law. He made it quite clear that we were no longer welcomed at the baptism class. He told us to leave. It was quite humiliating.

After that, our nephew and his wife asked us to be godparents for their new baby girl. At that point, there was a temporary priest at St. Julia. I called repeatedly to schedule an appointment with him, to discuss our situation, but he never returned my calls. We decided to call Father Larry Mattingly at Cristo Rey. He knew that we were seeking annulments to be married in the Roman Catholic Church. He said to us, "I see you at Mass every Sunday. You are both excellent role models. I would be happy to baptize the child." So we were blessed to be godparents to our nephew's baby girl. Without Father Larry, I don't know what we would have done. He was a very kind and compassionate priest.

Louis and I were asked to be godparents a third time, this time by another nephew and his wife who attended St. Austin Catholic Church. We were required to attend a brief baptism class, and they never asked if we were married in the Roman Catholic Church. Not one time. We realized then that every priest/parish has their own interpretation of baptism rules. Again, we were blessed to be godparents to our nephew's baby girl.

Louis: After Father Larry retired from Cristo Rey, we were looking for a new church to call home. We attended different churches—St. Catherine, St. Mary, San José, St. Paul, St. Peter and St. Ignatius—but none felt like home. Then we heard that Father Jayme was going to start Mass services at his home, so we began attending there. We had always enjoyed Father Jayme's Masses and homilies, so we attended on day one. I still remember that first day. Herbert and Susie Martinez, Leonard and Waldine Gonzales, and Ramiro and Mary Alice Guzman were all there, as well as other people from Cristo Rey. That first day, I felt right at home.

Rita: Attending Mass at Father Jayme's home was a joyful experience. It felt so comfortable, so right, and so uplifting. It reminded me of so many biblical stories and what the early Church must have been like: We shared a loaf of bread as Communion! It was followed by amazing fellowship.

Louis: And everyone stayed afterward for a potluck breakfast!

Rita: When Father Jayme invited various members of the community to dinner at El Gallo on South Congress, to discuss formalizing the church's organization, he invited us to brainstorm possible names for our new church. It was then that I suggested the name of Holy Family, from my time of living in Denver. The majority voted yes, and that's how we came to be Holy Family here in Austin. From the start, everything felt the same as in the Roman Catholic Church. The difference: We were inclusive. We accept all people, and we do not exclude anyone.

Louis: Back at Cristo Rey, my dad and uncles were always ushers at Mass. I never did it myself at Cristo Rey, but at Holy Family, Father Jayme asked for volunteers to welcome people, and I jumped at the opportunity. I enjoy greeting people and welcoming them to our church, of which we are so proud.

Rita: Father Jayme formally trained us to be Lectors and Eucharistic Ministers. He spoke to us about the importance of the Eucharist and the Wine. He described the different parts of the Mass and their spiritual significance. I love

being a Eucharistic Minister and Wine Minister. Father Jayme also taught us how to confidently proclaim the Word. He taught us how to proclaim the word softly or loudly for emphasis, or to pause when appropriate. I enjoy assisting with those ministries to this day, and I always will. We also had a parish breakfast every single Sunday back then. Our breakfast group was small at first, but then a few more members joined our group. It is truly a labor of love, and it makes me feel good to serve our parishioners.

Louis: And we really get to know people well while serving them breakfast!

Rita: Before the pandemic, Mary Alice Guzman, Estela Zavala and I were the volunteers who sold *jamaica* tickets and Waldine Gonzales worked in the bank. We had a pretty good system in place, and it felt really great to help the church with a successful fundraiser!

Louis: John Zavala organized our *jamaica* raffles from the beginning. With my background in printing and contacts in the paper business, we were able to print *jamaica* raffle tickets at a reasonable price. Jerry Caballero and I also volunteered to make sausage wraps for the *jamaica*. Working at the *jamaica* is a labor of love!

Rita: For me, it's been enlightening to serve on Holy Family's Pastoral Council. I had never served on a parish council before. It has been a great experience helping to guide the church and make recommendations for improvements. We held our first Pastoral Council meeting at the home of Mary Lou Piña, and then we hosted potlucks at our rectory on Garden Street. Our Pastoral Council meetings made us feel that we were part of something bigger than ourselves, and we were building something we all believed in! Those meetings provided us with a strong foundation to grow, and they brought us together as a group.

Louis: I remember telling my mom and sisters about Holy Family. It made my heart proud when they joined Holy Family, because they, too, loved Farther Jayme from his days at Cristo Rey. As a result, it was easy for them to attend Holy

Family. I have enjoyed attending Holy Family with my whole family!

Rita: We have apostolic succession at Holy Family, in the same tradition as the Roman Catholic Church. All our priests and deacons are ordained in a direct line to the hands of Peter - just like Roman Catholic priests and deacons. Many people are not aware of this significant fact.

Louis: I enjoy spreading word of Holy Family on Facebook as well. A few times, people have made comments on Facebook that Holy Family is not a real church. As a result of Father Jayme's classes, I was able to provide facts that Holy Family is real, and that Independent Catholicism is on equal footing with the Roman Catholic Church. Many do not know a lot about the history of the Roman Church and how it was formed. They are not aware of the schisms that have happened over centuries. They are not aware of the Old Catholic Church. They are not aware of the history of indulgences or the story of Martin Luther.

Rita: Those who don't attend Holy Family, don't know what they are missing. It provides us with uplifting spiritual nourishment, inclusivity, and it is truly a blessing to be a part of Holy Family. We are fortunate to have Father Jayme as our shepherd.

Louis: I tell people that they have to give Holy Family a chance. Come to a Mass or two, and you will see how spiritually awesome Holy Family is!

Such Lovely, Lovely People!

Rev. Joseph Dang



I was born in Saigon, Vietnam. My parents and I fled from Vietnam by boat in 1986, when I was 10 years old. At age 14, I joined the Congregation of the Mother Co-Redemptrix, a very conservative Vietnamese monastery in Carthage, Missouri. I continued my seminary studies with the Benedictines at Conception Abbey in Conception, Missouri until age 26, when I left and joined the Independent Catholic movement.

After the controversy between St. Stanislaus and the Archdiocese of St. Louis, Missouri, I connected with Father Marek Bożek, and I discovered that we were both in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau. I visited St. Stanislaus to support him and his parishioners. I felt in love with the church and its parishioners. I joined them and became a registered parishioner.

I am currently living in Denver, Colorado, where I wear several hats. I am a community liaison at Denver Health Hospital, where I help Asian populations to navigate the healthcare system. I am a chaplain at the Denver Police Department. Through a ministry of presence, I am often there to support our officers during crisis, and I help them to communicate with our Vietnamese-speaking residents. I am also a speaker for the Vietnamese American Community of Colorado, where I represent the Vietnamese community at the local, state and federal levels.

During the pandemic, I created a daily talk show to share information with the Vietnamese community. I hosted all sorts of nonprofit leaders, and even the mayor and the governor, which made me somewhat famous in the community. The Vietnamese Roman Catholic community is very conservative, so I continue to be attacked by them, even today. They print in their newspapers that I'm a fake or excommunicated priest. They say that, because I don't have a parish, I'm not a true Catholic priest. They note how

my bishop was excommunicated after he was one of five men consecrated by Roman Catholic Archbishop Emmanuel Milingo. For this reason, I'm very interested in Independent Catholic apologetics—how we can defend ourselves against the criticisms and attacks of others. It's a challenge: There are times when I respond with silence, and there are times when I stand up and fight back against bullies. When I interviewed with the Denver Police Department, for example, six Roman Catholic priests who serve the department attacked me, saying that I couldn't call myself a Catholic priest. I fought back, schooling them on how chaplains must be available to officers of all denominations. We're not there to market our religion!

I first met Holy Family through the delegation that it sent to our second interjurisdictional gathering in Las Vegas in November 2021. I instantly fell in love with them. I could relate to them, and I was really impressed with Father Jayme. He's a wise guy, with many talents, including singing. So, I promised to visit Holy Family! I saw him again when he came to our pre-Lenten clergy retreat in Ridgewood, New York in February 2022.

I visited Holy Family for the first time in May 2022 for a conference on the Aglipayan Church in the Philippines. That experience was awesome. I joined Father Mike Lopez in serving as emcee at Deacon Stephen's ordination. I stayed in the home of Mario and María Cruz, who are such lovely, lovely people! We became great friends, and I promised to come back to Holy Family again—which I did for Christmas Midnight Mass in 2023, when Father Roy asked me to carry the image of the Baby Jesus during the procession and place it in the manger for everyone to reverence.

I was so glad when Holy Family came to the 130th anniversary of St. Stanislaus Polish Catholic Church in St. Louis in September 2023, and I was able to better know Deacon Stephen, Jordan, Becky, Terry, Amanda and Inocencio. I felt so connected to them, and we had a great time with each other. I even invited them out for some Vietnamese food!

Central Texas clergy have continued to attend our pre-Lenten retreats: Father Brett and Deacon Stephen in 2023, and Father Brett, Father Marek and Deacon Elsa in 2024.

If you are a Catholic in Central Texas and want to go to a non-judgmental church, a church with a welcoming community and a diverse clergy, check out Holy Family!

We Accept Each Other the Way We Are!

Jenny Amor DeLeza



I was born in Puerto Rico and moved to the U.S. in 1977. My Mom's side of the family is Italian and Catholic, and my Dad's side was Presbyterian—so we attended Catholic churches in Puerto Rico. After we arrived in the U.S., here in Austin, my Dad's cousin, who lived here and who helped us settle, took us to Allandale Baptist Church—so she turned us all Baptist! When I became an adult and was on my own, I did not regularly attend church. Occasionally, I visited my parents' Baptist church.

In 2011, I met Valentino "Tino" Perez, Jr., and he invited me to Mass at Cristo Rey, where I first met Father Jayme. I enjoyed his way of keeping the congregation engaged by the use of props, which, for me, makes it easy to understand and retain the homily. His messages have always been inspiring and have helped me to become a better person.

Then Father Jayme was no longer at Cristo Rey. I found out about Holy Family through Tino. He worked as a waiter at Nuevo León, where Father Jayme had gone to eat, and he told Tino that he had started Holy Family Catholic Church on Lava Hill Road. Tino and I went to Holy Family together quite a few times before Tino became ill. I thought it was great that Father Jayme was out on his own, and with his own place. I loved the people. I loved Father Jayme's messages. Holy Family feels real to me. People there are not fake. We recognize that we're not perfect, and we accept each other the way we are! I love Holy Family!

In 2015, I became a flight attendant, and unfortunately Tino also passed. When I was able to be in Austin on a Sunday, I would come visit Holy Family. After two and a half years, I came back to Austin at the end of 2017. With a new job, I could not wait to return to Holy Family again!

I especially enjoyed the *jamaicas* at Holy Family. They were a great event to bring the community together. I had a "salon booth" at the *jamaica*, where I cut hair for visitors and members. It was a way for me to put my services to work to support the church. I also enjoyed helping to decorate the church on Lava Hill Road from time to time. It was fun to learn about the different church seasons and colors. We would decorate the church in white for Easter and in blue for Advent.

Holy Family and my faith in God also equip me for my current "ministry" to families. I work for the Travis County Indigent Burial Program, which is part of the County's Family Support Services, along with social work, food, resources and utility assistance. We help Travis County residents with fewer resources to bury their loved ones. Travis County is one of only six counties in Texas with its own cemetery: We have 99 acres in Manor. Three funeral homes help us with County burials, and they provide a time of closed-casket visitation for the family. The County spends over $300,000 each year to bury the indigent. I believe that God put me there, and people are really grateful for our assistance—and I'm really thankful that I can help them. It is very rewarding!

To those who haven't visited Holy Family, I say, "Please come!" The people at Holy Family are great. They're genuine. The homilies are great, the services are great, breakfast is the best, and it's very welcoming! I'm excited and very happy to be part of Holy Family! I love it!

Holy Family Really Is a Family

Jordan Dickenson



I was born in Iowa, and I grew up in New Mexico, then I moved to Texas about 15 years ago. I was raised Roman Catholic, and I went to church with my grandmother. Once I got into college, I didn't really feel called to go to church anymore, and my work often left me without time for church.

After I moved to Austin, I went to St. Ignatius Catholic Church a few times—but I received a very, very cold reception. I just didn't feel welcomed there. So, I stopped going to church completely.

When I got together with Stephen Rodriguez, one of the first things we talked about was an article he read in the *Austin Chronicle* about Holy Family—but Stephen was too nervous to go by himself! He asked if I would go with it, and we attended Mass at Holy Family the next week.

That first experience of Holy Family was fantastic. We walked in the door and were greeted right away. We were really made to feel welcomed. We stayed for the breakfast after Mass that day, and a lot of people came up to us and welcomed us. It was just a completely different feeling than I've ever felt in any Roman church.

Stephen and I first got involved in Holy Family outside of Mass through the bible study. The bible study had just finished its summer break, and a new bible study was announced. We talked about it, and we decided we wanted to get more involved with the church. We started attending the bible study in the Fall of 2019. I had never experienced a pastor like Father Roy, who broke down the Word for us. We got a lot out of that experience, and we kept coming back!

The third or fourth week that we attended Holy Family, Becky Saenz asked if I wanted to proclaim the Word at Mass. My heart

stopped. I thought, "There's no way that she wants me up there, proclaiming the Word. I'm not worthy to do something like that!" I backed off immediately and told her that I was not comfortable with that. After getting to know Becky through bible study, she asked me again, and I felt a lot better about it—because I felt more connected to the church, and I felt a calling to be of service to the church. I also became a eucharistic minister.

More recently, Stephen and I were invited to join Holy Family's Board of Directors. We had only been attending Holy Family for two years at the time, so it was very humbling to be asked to serve on the Board. We certainly didn't feel that we were high-profile enough to be asked to do something like that—but we were honored to do it. When Deacon Stephen stepped down from the Board after his ordination, I was humbled to be asked to stay on, and I was recently named Chair Elect of the Board.

It was a really awesome experience for us to be married in our church in October 2022. It wasn't like a "gay wedding": It was just our wedding, and we celebrated it with our family and friends. It wasn't anything out of the normal. It was just a normal Catholic wedding ceremony—but it was really special to us! For many of our family and friends, their only interaction with Holy Family was at our wedding. My Mom, for instance, was raised Roman Catholic—but she kind of abandoned the church over the years. She was very glad that we could celebrate the wedding that we wanted in our church. It was a fantastic service!

I'm very supportive of Stephen in his ministries. He's been called to serve in different ways: Originally, he started a homeless ministry, and we distributed food, toiletries and items to homeless people in the downtown area. Recently, he's felt called to serve a nursing home, where he hosts a biweekly Liturgy of the Word, with Communion for those who attend. I feel compelled to support him in any way I can, so I tag along. When we're asked to serve, we don't have a problem saying "yes." It's humbling, and it's a pleasure for us. We'll often attend two or three Masses on a Sunday. The Spanish Mass can be a little long for me, because I don't speak Spanish, but you can feel an energy in the church, and I leave feeling filled with the Spirit.

I encourage people to get involved with Holy Family. Take advantage of opportunities like our breakfast or our bible study!

Holy Family really is a family. It's my second family. I care about the people there. It's just a phenomenal place!

Holy Family Is
What the Catholic Church Should Be!

Bobby Duhon



I'm from Lake Charles, Louisiana, where I lived until I was 21. After moving around, I came to Texas about 40 years ago. I was raised Roman Catholic and served as an altar boy for many years, but when I got older and "came out" at age 18, I was sad to learn that the Roman Catholic Church didn't accept me the way that God made me. I was still extremely blessed because my Mom and Dad, who were wonderful, totally accepted who I am. This was the early 1970's and many people didn't accept or understand my lifestyle. It was hard for Mom and Dad, but there was one thing that helped them: My family owned apartments, and the gay tenants always took care of their apartments. They kept them nice and clean, and more importantly, they were good, loving people. I know this exposure helped my parents' understanding and acceptance.

I have always loved the Church. I love the Mass. Through the years, I went to church every once in a while—but I never felt that connection with the Church again until I found Holy Family! I always felt Catholic, so I always went to Communion in those other churches—until a few years back when the priest at one Catholic church made me feel funny and ill-at-ease about going to Communion, so I didn't. After that, I stopped going to Communion in the Roman Catholic Church. One of my cousins said something like, "Communion is so special that you can't just

give it to anybody!" And I thought, "Maybe that's the wrong way to look at it: Jesus dined with sinners and tax collectors—with everyone! Shouldn't we, then, give Communion to everyone who might gladly receive it? Perhaps their hearts would be warmed, and they would feel closer to God!"

I attended the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) on South First for a while. I liked it, and it was very accepting. It was the first church that was accepting of who I was, but it didn't have the same love that I feel at Holy Family. Holy Family simply has a friendly, loving, caring feeling! The first time that I went, Jerry Caballero introduced himself to me and welcomed me to the church. He instinctively made me feel welcomed, like I was part of the family—that this *is* my family! After Mass, I attended the breakfast, and Jerry said, "Come, sit with me and my family!" That really touched my heart. I thought, "Wow, he doesn't even know me!" Everyone was very welcoming and very loving, and it's been that way ever since.

Michael and I met in Lake Charles, Louisiana, and then he went off to Germany. When he came back, I brought him here to Austin—over 30 years ago. We actually found out about Holy Family when the U.S. Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage. We were watching the news the next day, and they said that the very first gay marriage in a Catholic church in Texas was celebrated at Holy Family Catholic Church in Austin. That made my head spin! I said, "I've got to find this church!" And I did!

I go to church for communion with God, but it's nice to go to church with people who are loving, accepting and caring! It totally is like family. And I love that everyone hugs at Holy Family! When Michael and I were married at Holy Family, during the pandemic, it was really beautiful. Words can't even describe how happy that made me. It was amazing! Not only that we were married, but we were married in the Catholic Church that I love so dearly. We've brought Michael's mother to Mass, and it's been a wonderful experience for her as well. She has told us, "If there was a Catholic church like this back home [in South Louisiana], I'd go to church every weekend!"

I find that it's easy to give to Holy Family. I feel like I want to do and give what I can to help Holy Family grow. So, I joyously give what I can.

I love Holy Family. I love our church. I love the people. I love the sermons. I love the inclusiveness. And I talk about Holy Family often, with anybody who will listen. Holy Family is what the Catholic Church should be: loving, accepting and embracing!

It Just Felt Good to be Around All of Y'all!

Henry & Stella (Rodriguez) Duran



Henry: I was born and raised in East Austin.

Stella: Me, too. I went to Our Lady of Guadalupe School through the eighth grade, then to Allan Junior High, then to Austin High for a while.

Henry: I went to Zavala Elementary, where many of the students were *pachucos*, so I like to joke that I made it: I graduated from the sixth grade at Zavala! Then I went to Allan Junior High, then to Austin High, where my mind got out of hand, so that's as far as I went. My father had a mom-and-pop store in East Austin, so we didn't go to church. I was the eldest boy, and I worked seven days a week, from 5:00 a.m. to midnight. That's what I did: I worked in my father's grocery store. I was a meat cutter and ran the meat department when I was 10 years old! Every few years—three or four times in my life—my father took us to the *misa de gallo* [midnight Christmas Mass].

Stella: I went to Our Lady of Guadalupe, and that's the only church that I went to. My mother took us there. After we got married, we took our kids there.

Henry: We started going to Santa Julia, and the kids went to school there, then we moved to Our Lady of Guadalupe, where we had Father Bill Elliott. We called him "Wild Bill"! We got ourselves involved in church because of our children. We lived close to Santa Julia, and we were good friends of Father Noble, when he was the priest there.

Stella: We did a lot of volunteer work there!

Henry: After he moved, we got very involved at Our Lady of Guadalupe. We had eight kids, so we filled the pew every Sunday at church! We learned about Holy Family through Mary Helen Quintero, then I called my cousin, Leonard Gonzales. They told us how good Father Jayme was, and they took us there, and we just fell in love with him!

Stella: The way he does Mass is beautiful!

Henry: Then, when we started volunteering at Holy Family, we felt connected. It felt like a family. We all knew each other, we volunteered together, and I just loved it! Father Jayme made us feel so good!

Stella: It's been difficult for us to get to church from Kyle. Henry still drives—but not as good as he used to. We liked everything about Holy Family, the way the Mass was done, the way Father Jayme spoke…

Henry: We felt like we were part of the family!

Stella: It felt like a family, where everyone knows everyone. I loved helping with the breakfast: being in the kitchen, and making food at home to take to church. I love cooking, so I loved it! It was wonderful. It's not like that here at St. Anthony's, which is just down the road. I don't know the people there, like I did at Holy Family, where we really felt like a family. Everybody was part of the family there!

Henry: Holy Family made our whole body, soul and mind feel good! We felt like we were part of this church! It just felt good being around Father Jayme and the people there!

Stella: Holy Family isn't like other churches that make it so difficult to receive sacraments. At St. Anthony's, you have to go to all these classes and classes and classes before you can baptize a child. We didn't have that at Holy Family.

Father Jayme is more concerned with people being baptized, than with all those rules.

Henry: I just felt so good anytime I was at Holy Family. The church made us feel so good and welcomed. It just felt good to be around all of y'all! Especially Father Jayme: His words have always been beautiful. It's like his words are the words of God! And he's honest with everyone. He would let people ask questions before Mass, and he would be honest with us, and if someone seemed to be going after him, he'd answer in a way that made them back off. I liked how honest he was.

Stella: I couldn't say it any better. We really enjoyed Father Jayme's sermons—and we felt we could talk to him and we could ask him questions. Or we could sit there and talk to the people beside us. Holy Family is an open church!

Henry: And they really made us feel like part of the family there—like part of the Church! Even though we've been disconnected from Holy Family since the pandemic, we think about you all very often. We love you!

We Have a Sense of Humor at Holy Family!

Cy Michael Emon

I was born in La Jolla, California, which is in North County, San Diego. I grew up in Encinitas, a tiny, little beach town in Southern California. Growing up, I didn't really have a church. My dad had me baptized at an Episcopalian church. My grandmother was Catholic, and one of the reasons that my dad wasn't Catholic was because of the way the Catholic Church treated my grandmother: In order to protect her family, she divorced my grandfather, who was horribly abusive to her and all her children. She believed that Jesus would forgive her—but her entire church community shunned her. She held on to her faith, but all her children were very angry and wanted nothing to do with the Church. My dad had me baptized "just in case"! I went to Sunday school at times, but it was

more like daycare. So, I wasn't raised with a whole lot of religious upbringing.

After high school, when I could no longer afford to live in California, I came to Texas, to live with my mother in Austin for a while. That's been over ten years ago now.

Around 2020, I was going through a low point in my life—with addiction and a codependent relationship I had to get out of. I said, "I need Jesus," and I started looking into churches that were openminded and GLBT-friendly. I attended one church a couple of times, but it was a little "New Agey," and there were things that didn't sit right with me. Because my grandmother held on to her faith her whole life, I specifically searched for an inclusive Catholic church. In late 2020, I started following Father Jayme and Holy Family online—but I didn't come to Mass at Holy Family until the Fall of 2021.

I was really nervous the first time I came to Hoy Family. I came alone—but I quickly felt very welcomed, despite the fact that I was very shy and standoffish. For sure, I felt a welcoming atmosphere. I just knew that this was exactly what I needed in my life—so I decided to keep coming.

My mom joined me for the Easter Vigil in 2022 and has been coming with me ever since. I remember that Easter Vigil: Growing up, I was searching for a spirituality, and I tried out things like New Age, magic and paganism; little did I know that elements of mysticism and ritual are right here in the Catholic Church!

It strikes me how my mother and I can be talking about something on the way to church—and then it'll be addressed in the scriptures or preaching. Or something will come up at church that we talk about throughout the week. My boyfriend doesn't enjoy coming to church. He joined me for the Easter Vigil once and for the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Church is really just not for him. He believes in God, but he's the opposite of me—and he doesn't like all the ceremony. He's more into the independent practice of spirituality.

Holy Family has been exactly what I've needed. I wish I had found it way earlier! It has provided me consistency and encouragement to do the right thing and to live a good, Christian life. It challenges me to be better!

One example of this was at the Christmas midnight Mass last year, when Becky asked me to read at Mass. It was terrible and nerve-wracking—but it was also amazing. It's something that I always wanted to do, and something I hope to do more of in the future, but I never would have raised my hand and volunteered. I was too scared!

I like the fact that Holy Family is not as solemn or strict as other Catholic churches, where people feel very guilty and sad. We have a sense of humor at Holy Family! I can even talk about shared interests—like reptiles—with Father Brett and Deacon Elsa. That makes church feel even more welcoming—and I love the fact that Holy Family is welcoming!

Other Churches Exclude People, but We Don't Do That Here: That's What I Like Most about This Church!

Alejandro Esquivel



I was born in Dolores Hidalgo, Guanajuato, Mexico, and I came to the U.S. in 1998. I met María here. She had four children before the death of her husband, and now we have four children together.

As a child, I attended weekly Sunday Mass with my parents at Our Lady of Sorrows in downtown Dolores Hidalgo, though I really didn't know much about the stories of Father Miguel Hidalgo and his actions there in Mexico's "cradle of freedom."

Here in Austin, we attended Santa Julia through the pandemic, though we didn't get involved there much, then we stopped going to church during COVID.

We learned about Holy Family due to a baptism and *quinceañera* here, and now we've been coming to Holy Family for several months. Outside of baptisms, there aren't many people, and we rarely see those who come for such celebrations return.

We like Holy Family because it is not like other churches, with all their requirements: You have to go to Confession before receiving Communion, you have to tithe, and they ask whether you're married or not.

At Holy Family, we get together more than in other churches. It's rare that priests in other churches get together and talk with you. Here, though, we all get along very well.

Our children really like the Children's Treasure Chest. It's something that I haven't seen in other churches.

Two of our children participated in classes with Deacon Elsa. I'm glad that they took advantage of that opportunity to learn more about God's Word.

I enjoy attending Holy Family. I feel comfortable here. In other churches, the priests are strict and scold children for misbehaving. That's not the case here. Other churches exclude people, but we don't do that here: That's what I like most about this church!

Rather Than Judge Us and Make Us Feel Different, Holy Family Accepts Everyone!

María Esquivel



I was born in Austin. My parents were born in San Antonio, but my mom was raised in Wisconsin, and she met my dad there, where my grandfather rented a room from my dad. My mom was very young—she was 16—when she married my dad, who was 26. They later moved to San Antonio, where my older brother, Arturo, was born. Then, my mom wanted to come to Austin. We lived in a small house on East Fourth Street: My parents had six children, and my dad's sister, who was separated, came to live with us, with her six children. So there were 15 of us in a small house!

My parents raised us Catholic. Dad made us pray after eating: We couldn't leave the table before praying! We also had to go to church—Dolores Catholic Church in Montopolis—for Confession every Saturday and Mass every Sunday and on all holy days. And we didn't eat meat on Fridays.

My dad drank a lot and was strict, but he also taught my brothers to work hard to support their families. He taught them plumbing, electricity and everything else he could. My dad was active in the church. He sang in the choir, worked with cement, and did a lot of work around the church. The nuns knew my dad drank, and they wanted to help my mom, so they talked to the priest, and he offered her the job of cleaning the church and ironing the altar cloths. My dad said that my mom could work only if she took along my little brother, Antonio, so she took him, and she cleaned for the church and ironed for many years.

As a young woman, I became very involved in the church. My parents wanted my youngest brother to receive the sacraments, and he didn't want to go to religious education, so I became his teacher. He was eight years old, and I was 18, when I started taking him to the religious education class that I taught. I was his teacher until he finished all his sacraments. Afterwards, I did the same with my son, though he didn't receive his sacraments. I taught at Dolores for some 15 years.

I was also a missionary. I went to Saltillo, Coahuila, to teach there for three weeks during the summer. I became very good friends with the Franciscan nuns from Spain, who served the community. We stayed with families, taught religion classes, did activities with students, and they treated us very well. Before I got married, the nuns invited me to go with them for a month to Mallorca, Spain, to see if I really wanted to get married, or to go into religious life. My father was very strict and wouldn't let me go out—I'm his only daughter, and I have five brothers—so the only way that I could go out was with the nuns! I had always heard about vocations and "special callings," but I never really felt that type of calling.

I was married for 11 years, and my husband was unfaithful for ten of those years. His sister insisted that I had to remain married to him and put up with him until I was able to change him. The

monsignor at our church, though, helped me see how religion was being used to threaten me. He said that if my husband asked for a divorce, I should leave him. He also told me that Communion is for everyone, including sinners and victims. After my dad died, my mom came to live with me. After the church told her that she was no longer needed, she felt bad and stopped working there, but then she served the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

My mom had suggested that we look for another church. We visited Guadalupe, but we didn't feel the same connection; it seemed to have its cliques, and we felt that people were judging us. Then we learned about Holy Family through Irma Galarza, who worked with my mom at St. Vincent de Paul. We came to Mass at Holy Family, where Irma welcomed us, and we've been here ever since! Father Jayme had celebrated the funeral of my cousin, Frank Campos, and he did so beautifully—another reason to follow him to Holy Family!

I like Holy Family, where we are all equal and where the doors of the church are always open to everyone. I feel comfortable here, and my mother says the same. My mother enjoys coming here, too. Rather than judge us and make us feel different, Holy Family accept everyone!

We Belonged There With Father Jayme!

Teresa (Cuevas) Estrada



I was born and raised in Austin, where our family was part of Cristo Rey from the beginning. My grandmother made *tamales* for the *jamaica*, and those were beautiful years. I sang in the choir, in the choir loft of the old Cristo Rey Church, with the Pulido family, the Ramirez Family, and with Mrs. Reyes, who played the piano and organ. We all scrunched into that small choir loft to practice the songs for the Sunday Mass!

My husband, Frank, is from San Antonio. We met when he was stationed at Bergstrom Air Force Base, and I was working part-time during my junior and senior years of high school at the Piccadilly Cafeteria, on the northeast corner of Eighth and Congress, in order to earn my graduation ring. Frank and his friends used to go to that cafeteria for coffee—and that's where I met him! After we married, because he was still in the Air Force, we moved to San Antonio. We returned to Austin in the early 1980s. Frank and I got divorced in the 1980s, and I moved in with my parents. It made me sad that I could no longer receive Holy Communion—which is why I was so glad to find Holy Family!

My brother and sister-in-law, Louis and Rita Cuevas, first told us about Holy Family. Louis told us that he was going to Mass at Father Jayme's home, and he'd say, "I need y'all to start coming!" We talked about it with my mom and my sister, Janie. We had our questions—especially since Holy Family isn't Roman Catholic, but once we visited Holy Family, there was no question: We belonged there with Father Jayme!

When we first started attending Holy Family, it was located in a dance hall. The first time I visited, I thought, "Where are we going?"—but when we walked in, it was so beautiful. We started in a small area, in a back room, then we got bigger. It was a joy,

and my mom and I and Frank—we looked forward to going to Mass!

Louis got Janie and me and Frank involved in the breakfasts at Holy Family. Frank couldn't stand or walk too much, but he sat in the parish hall, and he was the first to get a plate of breakfast!

For a time, I also helped Terry, Becky and Janie to decorate the church and to get it ready for Christmas or whatever was coming up. That definitely was so much fun! I would wait for them to tell me what needed to be done, and they knew, "Father Jayme likes this, but he doesn't like that!" I remember one night I set up the iron and ironing board in a little room—because Father Jayme doesn't like to see wrinkles in the vestments! Becky looked at them and said, "They're not so bad. You don't have to iron them." I said, "Are you sure?" I knew that Father Jayme would notice those wrinkles! Becky said, "You're right: We better iron them!"

I have to take care of Frank now, so I don't get to Holy Family as often as I'd like—but I still send in my monthly donation! We'll see when the weather warms up if Frank is able to move a little better with his arthritis—and we'll try to be back soon for Mass and breakfast. We have really appreciated visits by Father Roy and Deacon Stephen during these months.

There's such a wonderful feeling at Holy Family. People sing and belt out the music with Father Jayme, and I feel blessed to be able to share what I have and to receive Holy Communion!

The Type of Religion I Want Our Child to Grow Up In

Janette & Jocelyn Flores



Janette: I was raised in Morelia, Michoacán. From the time of my childhood, my grandmother was very devoted to the Roman Catholic religion, so I grew up in that environment. I went to religious education for many years, and I made my First Communion and Confirmation in Mexico. I came to the U.S. in 1988 and noticed that there are not as many churches here: In Mexico, there are a couple of churches in every neighborhood! I no longer felt the same closeness to the Church, but I lived with my mother, who is very devout, so we continued with our prayers. I always dreamed of getting married with the blessing of a priest. After same-sex marriage became legal, under President Obama, I saw Father Jayme on television, and I said, "Wow! Where is this church? This priest is going to marry me!" I knew that this wasn't possible in the Roman Catholic Church, so I started researching Holy Family on the internet, and Jocelyn and I started going to Mass there. We haven't been there much since the pandemic, since we don't go out like we used to, but we do plan to go back!

Jocelyn: I was born in Dallas, Texas. My parents are from El Salvador. I grew up knowing that there was a God, and that we were Christians, but we never practiced our religion. My maternal grandmother, whom I remember, taught me how to make the sign of the cross. I would make the sign of the cross every time I felt scared or afraid, but I didn't know that making the sign of the cross

was a Catholic gesture—until I met Janette's mom, who asked me, "Are you Catholic? Why do you make the sign of the cross?" That's when she taught me how to pray and how to say the Lord's Prayer and other prayers. I felt closer to the Catholic Church and to Our Lady. I was excited when Janette suggested that we marry in the Church. It felt more real, and I felt more blessed!

Janette: I feel accepted and free at Holy Family. It's incredible to think that there is a church that is so inclusive, and where I feel more at home.

Jocelyn: Churches preach love and that we should love everyone, but this is a reality at Holy Family. For the first time, I can hold my wife's hand at Mass without being afraid or thinking that people are judging us. It is a beautiful experience. This is the type of religion I want our child to grow up in.

Janette: For my mother, Holy Family is a little different. She goes to Sacred Heart Catholic Church, and she has always said that Sacred Heart is her church—but she sometimes goes with us to Holy Family. In her own way, she is happy for us, and she is happy that we go to Holy Family. For her, the most important thing is to believe in and love God. She says, "It doesn't matter if you go to Holy Family or Sacred Heart." For us, the experience of being married in the Church has changed our lives. It was one of the happiest moments in my life. I felt like all my dreams were coming true: I was marrying the woman I love, and we were celebrating the sacrament of Marriage with a priest! For me, that was incredible, and we have watched our wedding video some 50 times! It was a beautiful ceremony. All the guests congratulated us and said it was one of the best ceremonies they had ever seen.

Jocelyn: It was a blessing from God. That day was so beautiful, and everything went perfectly. I felt it was a sign from God that we were meant to be together. I was so looking forward to the ceremony, and it made me feel closer to Janette in my new role as her wife!

Janette: You can feel humility and love at Holy Family, and you are free to love yourself. The atmosphere at Holy Family makes you feel happy. You feel the Holy Spirit!

Jocelyn: For me, the best word to describe Holy Family is love. At Holy Family, you feel God, and you feel close to God. You feel God's love. You really feel it! And that's important.

The Least We Can Do is Serve God!

Rosa (Alvarez) Gil



I was born in San Marcos and raised in Lockhart, then I came to Austin in 1955 or 1956. I attended Metz Elementary, Allan Junior High, and Johnston High School. My family raised me Catholic at Cristo Rey, where I attended Mass and was part of the Mariettes. After I was married, I helped with the *tamaladas*, and, after my dad passed away in 1977, we had a breakfast group there for about ten years. I did the monthly purchasing for the breakfast groups at Cristo Rey. I was part of the Altar and Rosary Society.

When Father Jayme was transferred from Cristo Rey and started Holy Family, I looked for him because I loved the way that he said Mass. He came down and explained the readings, so that people could understand them. Hearing them being read is very different from hearing them being explained in simple language. Even youngsters can feel the Spirit when he preaches! I really like the way that Father Jayme does the Mass. It's very understandable.

I learned about Holy Family when Father Jayme celebrated Mass at his home on Willow Street. We had Mass in his living room, and we prepared breakfast in his kitchen. Then we started celebrating Mass on his back porch, with the *mariachi* in his yard. It was beautiful, you could feel the presence of God, and we socialized and got close to one another. I was helping at Cristo Rey,

but then I got involved at Holy Family. They said, "bring *chicharrones*," so I brought *chicharrones*. And I brought *nopalitos*. I'm the type that always gets involved, and I love cooking and getting involved in the kitchen! My gift from God is domestic work for the Church. God blesses us and gives us "our daily bread," so the least we can do is serve God!

When we moved to Lava Hill Road, I got involved in the breakfasts, and soon I was helping all the breakfast groups. I dice the potatoes here at home, and I take them to church where we cook them. I buy all the food and paper goods. When we had several groups, they took care of the food, and I took care of the coffee table and the desserts. Lots of people volunteer to bring what we need. When I ask people, they bring what they can! I enjoy cleaning, too, so I help clean the kitchen quite a bit. I clean all the tables every two weeks and sterilize them. I love to do domestic work for the church!

Many years ago, I converted to Pentecostalism, and I enjoyed it. That's when I learned what it means to feel the Holy Spirit. But then I came back to the Catholic Church at Holy Family—and I'm still there!

The people at Holy Family are very nice, and I like the idea of Holy Family. Too many churches require *doctrina* [religious education]; it's expensive, and you have to pay for it. Your sacraments are between God and you! We don't have all those requirements for sacraments, that other churches have. I tell people, "You don't have to go to all those classes and do all that to have the blessing of the sacrament!" Some churches say that the *padrinos* [godparents] have to be married by the Church to baptize a child. What's important is that they are good people who will look after the child. They don't have to be married by the Church to do that—and being married by the Church doesn't necessarily make you good *padrinos*! I just don't believe in all that. I like the American Catholic Church more than the Roman Catholic Church!

What People Have Done for Holy Family is Just Unreal!

Rev. Roy Gomez



After Father Jayme left as pastor of Cristo Rey Catholic Church in 2011, the Franciscans came in and didn't have an English-speaking priest. Many English-speaking people complained that they weren't getting anything out of the services. I remember sharing that with Father Jayme—and within two or three weeks we started a new community at his home on Willow Street! We had a lot of support from the beginning: Mary Lou Piña and Maggie Mofletas made tacos, and Alberto and Blanca García supplied the orange juice. I remember Herbert and Susie Martinez, and my sister, Isabel….There were a bunch of people there!

We brought Mariachi Cristo Rey for our Masses, and, after the services, Father Jayme and I used to dig in our pockets to scrape together enough money for their stipend. It was pretty cool.

After eight weeks on Willow Street, Mr. [Ignacio] Loredo offered his place on Lava Hill Road. He was with Holy Family from the beginning. We started off in the back room of his dance hall, where we hung a curtain behind the altar. One of the bar spaces became our sacristy. It was a challenge setting up that dance hall, especially if they had an event in there the night before, but we made if presentable for Masses. One weekend, Benny Lozano hosted a wrestling match in that dance hall. I went to Johnston High School with Dusty Rhodes, who became a famous wrestler, and his nephew wrestled that night.

We had a breakfast after Mass, and people brought different foods to share. People were really supportive and helpful. Some went out of curiosity, and others wanted to create a new community.

I never got any pushback, but others did. Vidal Limon would help me with music at funerals, and I remember him telling me that folks at Cristo Rey told him, "You shouldn't be helping them!" He

would tell them, "It's my time and my voice: I think I can do what I want with my time and my talent!" The story is still told of the priests at Cristo Rey essentially telling people, "If you go to Holy Family, you are no longer welcomed to minister at Cristo Rey!"

Almost my entire family wound up going to Holy Family at one time or another—except my sister, Vicenta. If she had been able to physically, she probably would have gone to church at Holy Family, too! And we celebrated the funerals of my sisters, Feliz and Vicenta, and of my brother-in-law, Rudolfo Martinez, at Holy Family.

During those early years, I was the "go-for." I coordinated the breakfast and made sure that the collections got counted. I set up for Masses and got others involved in helping. People volunteered as lectors and eucharistic ministers—and many of them looked to me for training and guidance. At Cristo Rey, I used to take Communion to people in their homes, and we would lead funeral rosaries, so I continued those ministries at Holy Family. Our Holy Family Joy Group wasn't as big as the Joy Group that we had at Cristo Rey, but we were quite active and got a lot of support from the people at Holy Family. We prayed the rosary at funerals, and we prayed a monthly rosary at the church after Mass and breakfast. Thank goodness the Spirit brought the Joy Group from Cristo Rey to Holy Family—and it kept going!

Then we had our first *jamaica* in 2013. I coordinated that for the first few years. We had a good crowd, and we did really well. Los Texas Wranglers sang at our *jamaica* for various years.

After a year, Father Jayme encouraged me to pursue ordained ministry. After a time of formation, I was ordained to the diaconate on October 26, 2013 by Archbishop William Johnson of the American Catholic Church in the United States. Two years later, he ordained me to the priesthood on December 12, 2015—the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Father Cleofas María Cruz and I were pretty close together: He was ordained in October, and I was ordained in December. It turned out to be a great blessing. The ordination was a big, big celebration, and a lot of family and friends came and helped out.

I was glad to be ordained a priest. For years, I struggled to fulfill my ministry as a lay person to the homebound—because I couldn't

share with them the last rites. I now felt that I could fulfill 100% of my ministry! To this day, one of the most gratifying parts of priestly ministry is being able to respond to families' calls to share the last rites with their loved ones.

The sacrament of Anointing is also very special for me. At Cristo Rey, the Joy Group would organize pilgrimages to the Basilica of San Juan del Valle, for its monthly healing service. The priest at San Juan used to say, "Your healing began the moment you had enough faith to decide to come here!"

When Mr. Loredo lost his property in 2016, we had a hard time with the gentleman who bought it. At that time, Andres Cantu visited Salem Lutheran Church—at a time when their council was thinking of folding due to inactivity in their congregation. They bought into the idea of sharing their space with us, which made it possible for them to stay there and for us to have a new space! We helped Salem with quite a bit of maintenance and upkeep. We painted the parish hall. Rudy Nieto stained the church doors. Both congregations have benefited.

We have so many dedicated people at Holy Family who give it their all. Before the pandemic, Becky Saenz, Terry Caballero, Rafaela Leal and Amanda Rodriguez—and Christopher Leal, too—showed truly godly effort each Sunday. What they did for us each Sunday was incredible. For over five years, Ignacio Loredo provided our facility on Lava Hill Road and was a great supporter. Mary Helen "Nena" Quintero shared her bookkeeping expertise with us for nearly ten years. Mary Lou Piña provided breakfast for us from that very first Sunday on Willow Street. After she finished cooking for us, she went to Cristo Rey, where she helped count collections—so you can imagine the heat she got there. Then John Zavala and Rosa Gil stepped up to lead our breakfasts. At the Spanish Mass, we had incredible people like Pedro and Lourdes Mercado, Zenaida Parra and Rosa Zavala. What people have done for Holy Family is just unreal!

In March 2020, the COVID pandemic brought a different approach to ministering. At first, I was uncomfortable preaching in an empty church to people through Facebook. As time went on, I imagined different people in different pews. Those were tough

times, particularly for maintaining contact with parishioners, but we had drive-thru Communion, and we kept things together.

After 12 years, we can see how the dream that God created for this community has blossomed. Through the efforts of so many people, Holy Family has continued to grow, and we have a beautiful community. Everybody tries to welcome and greet everybody—and that's one of the biggest asset of our community. That's one of the biggest complaints that we hear of other churches: that people go in and out, but no one says hello or goodbye. Here at Holy Family, it's different. It's really a family!

At Holy Family, Everybody is Treated Like Family!

Isabel (Gomez) Gonzales



I was born and raised in Austin, Texas. I went to Metz Elementary, then Brooke, then Allan Junior High, and I graduated from Johnston.

I was baptized at Guadalupe Catholic Church, and I received my First Communion and Confirmation there, but we lived on East Third Street, so we went to Cristo Rey forever. My mother was very active there: She was always at church, and going to church was a must for us. Even if we didn't want to go, we had to go!

Before Holy Family, I went to St. Catharine's a few times—because my grandsons wanted to go there. That's where they received their First Communion and Confirmation. But that church was not for me.

I learned about Holy Family at Cristo Rey—and from my brother, Roy, of course. I started going to Holy Family after it had moved to Lava Hill Road. I remember the feeling of going from a church like St. Catherine, to just a building, like Holy Family. It took some time to get comfortable with that place—but it all worked out.

I was always happy to help, when I was able to. I remember that we baked a lot of cakes for the cake walk at the *jamaica*!

When my brother became a priest, that was a big thing for our entire family. We knew that it was what he always wanted, and the whole family was ready and willing to do our part to see him ordained. Roy has never been one to judge others. He doesn't say, "Why didn't you go to church today?" When we ask him for advice, or when somebody passes away, he's always ready to assist. I'm so grateful that I have somebody to turn to when I need advice or when something bothers me.

Holy Family is entirely different from other churches. It's not a humongous church, where people come in late and you have to move aside to make room for them, or where phones are always ringing. Unlike other churches, you don't leave thinking, "Well, I didn't understand a thing that they talked about." At Holy Family, everybody is treated like family!

Some people have told me, "Holy Family is not a church." I remember telling one person, "We're all human beings—and there are a lot of good people there. I like it: It's a real church, and it's my church!" Fortunately, I hear less of that now. Some people think that the Roman Catholic Church is the only church—but we all have the same God, even though we have different beliefs. We're all human. We all have faults. We all try our best. I'm grateful to have a wonderful family, a brother who's very giving, and a wonderful church family with wonderful priests, where everybody is so nice!

I Am Where I'm Supposed to Be

Leonard Gonzales



I was born and raised in Austin. I was baptized at Cristo Rey, where my mom and grandfather were really involved, and they made sure that we did what we were supposed to do as Catholics: We went to church and "paid our dues." I went to catechism classes and received my First Communion. My grandfather was very instrumental in making sure we went to church, and, if he didn't go, my mom made sure that we went!

As adults, we learn to make right choices and we come to believe in a Higher Power, but I tried to rebel against that as a kid, by doing what a typical teenage kid does. I picked up some bad habits—but my mother made sure that we went to church. Even if I went out partying the night before and had a hangover, she told me, "You want to go out? Then get up and go to church!" She was very, very faithful. She and my dad made mediocre wages, but she provided us everything we needed, and she taught us to do whatever we could to help out the family.

My mother also wanted us to experience different religions. She sent us to other churches in the neighborhood that had religion classes: the Baptists, the Lutherans, or whatever other church that had a bible school. That was helpful to me, and it brought light to different religions—and I came to see that we all have the same God! After I came home from the Marine Corps, we got married at Cristo Rey. My wife was Pentecostal, but at some point she decided she didn't want to go to Cristo Rey. I didn't see anything wrong in going to the Pentecostal church—as long as my kids were learning about God.

After I got divorced, I turned my back on God, I started drinking a lot, and I got really lost. Then God got a hold of me one night. I had just gotten another DWI, and I was in a place where I shouldn't

have been—and I blacked out, like I normally did at that point in my life. I'll never forget the date: It was November 24, 1989, and I woke up in the middle of a field way outside of Austin. There's a shopping center there now. It was thundering, lightning and raining, like I had never seen before—and I woke up in a circle of light. I sat up and started shaking myself. I didn't know where I was or what was going on. I thought I was dreaming: I wasn't wet, but it was raining outside that circle of light. I put my hand outside the circle, into the darkness, and it got wet. Then I heard a voice that said, "Son, I've been carrying you on this cross for all these years. Now it's your turn to carry the cross." It was a rude awakening, and I realized how my divorce and alcoholism had caused me to turn my back on God and to be lost. The "lightbulb" came on: I quit drinking, and I started to change my life. I stumbled and failed several times—but I've been sober now for…I can't tell you how many years! I usually don't share that story unless people ask why I don't drink. Sometimes people are curious why I don't drink. They offer me a beer, then say, "You're a Mexican, and you don't drink?" I tell them, "I used to—until I realized where that was getting me—and now I choose not to."

At one point, I started going back to church, and I started getting involved in committees. Then Father Larry Mattingly at Cristo Rey asked me why I didn't receive Communion. I told him that I couldn't because I was divorced, and I wasn't going to pay all that money for an annulment. I also told him that I didn't feel that I needed to confess my sins to a priest, and that I confess my sins directly to God. Not long after that, God brought Waldine into my life, and she asked if she could go to church with me. She was Lutheran, but she said, "They're almost like Catholics!" One day at Mass, Father Larry noticed that I went up to receive Communion, but that Waldine didn't. I said, "That's something you'll have to take up with her." He approached her, and she said that she was Lutheran. After that conversation, she started taking Communion. God sent Waldine into my life at the right time. We got married after being together for several years. She has taken care of me through my cancer and heart attacks and other issues in my immediate family.

My parents always taught me that we need to give back from whatever God gives us. We give it as a gift, and we don't expect nothing back—and if we get something back, it's a gift from God. At Cristo Rey, Sister Guadalupe Medina approached me and asked me to donate a gallon of popcorn oil and a couple of boxes of popcorn for her CCD program. I bought her a five-gallon can of oil, and I started helping her. Then Father Larry invited me to help the *Jamaica* Committee. He said that he had heard that I can lead. I said, "Father, I don't want to lead. I can be a better Indian than a chief. I just want to do my part, where I can." Waldine had a background in finance, so we got involved with the *jamaica*. She worked in the "bank," along with Helen Morales, Barbara Rivera and Judge Elena Diaz. We did that for years. Then one year, we heard people spreading rumors and talking behind our backs. They said, "It's funny that right after the *jamaica*, you and Waldine go on fancy vacations!" That crossed me the wrong way. My parents taught me better than that: I've never stolen, and the last place I'm going to steal from is my church! That was the last year that we volunteered for the *jamaica*.

We kept going to Cristo Rey for a time, but then they booted out Father Jayme, they brought in other priests, and one Sunday I told Waldine, "This just doesn't feel like church anymore. We're missing something here." No one said hello. It just felt like there was nothing for us there anymore, so we walked out. We didn't go to church after that. Instead, we'd just read the bible and devotions at home.

Then one day we got a call from Father Jayme, who said, "We're going to start a little church in my house!" He invited us, and we started going. We went there the very first Sunday that he brought people together. We didn't know what to expect. I remember some of the people who were there: Roy Gomez, Mary Lou Piña, Inez Mendoza, John Zavala, Louis and Rita Cuevas, Herbert and Susie Martinez, Elena Diaz. The people there were really involved at Cristo Rey, which made me wonder, "Wait a minute: Why did all these people leave Cristo Rey with us?" Like us, many of them were at Cristo Rey their whole lives! I believed that God guided us to create a church where people really believe in God. We had a meeting, and Father Jayme announced that he was going to start

hosting Mass at his house as an Independent Catholic priest. I said, "This is what we need: fellowship and people who care about each other!" And it just grew from there. At Holy Family, I see a lot of love and fellowship—a lot caring for each other that I've never seen in other churches.

I knew Father Jayme when he came to Cristo Rey as a Franciscan brother. God told me, "Watch this guy," and I saw him come up the ranks. He never backed off, no matter how hard people came at him. He stood his ground and was sincere in what he did. He believed in what he did. I saw what the Roman Catholic Church did to him, and he still came back—and I said, "Man, this guy has guts!" I like that. I'm the same type of person: I don't back off anybody.

Waldine and I got hit from every angle. People said to us, "You can't be going there! He's not a priest! That's not a church!" People tried to steer us away from there, but I wasn't going to let that deter us, because I had a good feeling that we were headed in the right direction. I don't know if it's true, but we heard the story that someone approached Charles Villaseñor of Mission Funeral Home—since Father Jayme rented the house from Charles' mother—and they said they were going to protest his funeral home if he didn't kick us out! We moved out of that house, and Father Jayme "couch-surfed" with Mary Lou, who opened her doors to him. We ended up on Lava Hill Road, where Mr. Loredo opened his doors to us, and we started worshiping there. In the same way that we fixed up Mrs. Villaseñor's house, we really fixed up that place, too! It was a plain building, nothing elaborate, but we made it into our church—and we kept growing and growing. In 2017, we got thrown out of there, too, and we ended up where we're at now, with the Lutherans at Salem Lutheran Church.

Father Jayme was a guiding force and a father for me. Father Roy has been a guiding force, too. I saw how they were at Cristo Rey, and now I see them over here at Holy Family. It's like day and night: At Cristo Rey, we were totally lost, and they have been the instruments leading and guiding us in the right direction. It never fails that when I need something, I call on Father Roy or Father Jayme or Father Cleofas.

I am thankful for Father Jayme. He brings a lot to us. He guides and directs us, leading us in the right direction. To this day, people call me and say, "How can you go to that church? He's not a priest! He's gay!" I tell them, "Where does God say that we should judge others? God has sent him into my life, and he has guided me in the direction that I need to go."

At Holy Family, I enjoy helping with breakfasts. It brings me satisfaction to do things for the church. I enjoy dressing up as the Easter Bunny every Easter. Some people would never believe that I dress up like the Easter Bunny! I dress up as Felix, the Holy Family mascot, too. It's an opportunity for me to do something for others. It's my way of giving back, the kids enjoy it, and I enjoy making people laugh. I try to do as much as possible for the church.

I also enjoy serving as a hospitality minister. Mario Cruz once told me, "Leonard, you're the reason I'm here." I looked at him and said, "Mr. Cruz, God is the reason you're here." And he said, "Yes, but the first time I walked in those doors, you greeted me, and you welcomed me to this church: you, Louis, John and Ramiro. You all were an inspiration to me!" Little things matter—like opening the door and making people feel welcome. From time to time, people will say, "I appreciate what y'all do here!" We do it just to give back, in thanksgiving for what God has given us!

Looking back, I have no regrets about where I was or where I am today. God has me on the path I'm on, and I've grown—and I believe I am where I'm supposed to be. I like to tell people, "If you've been searching and looking all your life, come to Holy Family—then you can make the choice when you see who we are and where we're at!"

A Place Where We Feel Like a Real Family

Waldine (Anderson) Gonzales



I was born in Austin and grew up around East 51st Street: That was on the outskirts of Austin in 1944!

My ancestors were Swedish Lutherans, so I was baptized and brought up Lutheran. My dad had to work on Sundays, but my sisters and I rode the bus to church on Congress Avenue—until Messiah Lutheran Church sprang up in our area. My parents were charter members of that church. I was confirmed at that church and attended the Luther League, an organization for young kids and teenagers. My parents and I were very active in the church, and I had fun at church camp in LaGrange and visiting nursing homes. I remained at that church, my first marriage was celebrated there, and my kids were baptized in that church. My former husband was a lapsed Catholic, but we lived close to a Faith Lutheran Church, where I took the kids for Sunday school and Confirmation classes. After we divorced, I didn't attend church anymore for a long time.

Then I met Leonard in 1996, and we started going out. He went to church every Sunday, and I wondered why he never asked me to go to church with him. One day, I asked him, "Can I go to church with you?" So, I started going to church with him at Cristo Rey. The Mass there was so much like Lutheran services, and I thought, "I can go to church here"—but I didn't participate in Communion because I had read that only Catholics could participate in that, and that people who were divorced and remarried couldn't. One day, Father Larry Mattingly approached me and asked me why I didn't take Communion, and I replied, "I'm not supposed to. I'm Lutheran, not Catholic." And he said, "Catholics and Lutherans are similar: I give you permission to take the Eucharist." And I thought, "Well, he told me that I can do it"—so I started taking

Communion! I felt comfortable receiving Communion, and I didn't feel like I was doing something I shouldn't be doing.

Leonard and I got involved in the *Jamaica* Committee when Gilbert Velasquez chaired it. We did that for several years, and I helped Helen Morales, Barbara Rivera and Elena Diaz to count the money. We worked the "bank," and we had to follow certain rules and guidelines that I incorporated when we had our first *jamaica* at Holy Family. Then an incident happened when somebody basically accused us of taking money from the church to go on vacation, and that really didn't sit very well with us, so we stopped doing that.

After that, we got a phone call from Father Jayme, inviting us to come to a gathering at his house on Willow Street on a Sunday morning. We said, "We'll be there." We attended from then on. We weren't called Holy Family at the time—we didn't come up with that name until later. It was nice to be around people, where everybody seemed to care about everybody. It was different from Cristo Rey, where we'd walk in the door, sit down, listen to Mass, say "amen," and walk out the door. The people just weren't as friendly there—and we had all sorts of priests, and I couldn't understand a word they were saying. I thought, "What am I doing here?" It didn't seem like I was learning anything, or hearing anything that would help me through the week. You can imagine how thankful we were when Father Jayme called us and asked us to come to his home—and that's how we started our church! I was one of the first people to be confirmed at Holy Family, by Archbishop Johnson, and Leonard and I were married at Holy Family on July 19, 2014.

I got involved as a eucharistic minister, and I read the scriptures a few times. I helped count money in the parish office on Sunday mornings, and I helped with data entry and helping to get the church organized. Leonard and I enjoyed taking photos of parishioners on Easter and Valentine's Day. We also had a breakfast group from the beginning, and I was involved in the Social Ministry—until COVID put a wrench into that. COVID really affected us: We lost contact with people, we lost some people at church, and Leonard and I are old and high-risk, so we had to be careful and stay safe.

Holy Family is a place where you feel loved and welcomed by people. It's a place where we feel like a real family. It feels like how a family should feel—where people are appreciated. I'm a "minority" at Holy Family, and I don't speak or understand Spanish, but I've never felt ignored or neglected. I still feel loved—and I can understand how minority people sometimes feel. I feel accepted and loved by people at Holy Family.

Holy Family Really Is a Place for Everyone

Adrian Gonzalez



My roots are in South Texas, in the small town of Benavides, in Duval County, where my parents grew up. I attended middle school and high school in Knox City, Texas, some 65 miles northwest of Abilene. I came to Austin as the result of a football game between The University of Texas at Austin and the University of Oklahoma Sooners: I had to take my SAT in Wichita Falls, Texas, some 90 miles from my home, on the first weekend in October—the same weekend that UT played Oklahoma in the Cotton Bowl Classic. There was only AM radio back then, so I picked up the game on my drive home, and when I heard that Texas beat Oklahoma, I decided that was where I wanted to go to school! I enrolled in UT in the Fall of 1974 and graduated in the Fall of 1978. I have lived in Austin more or less since—except for three years in the Valley, when I took a career change and worked in pharmaceutical sales.

I attended public schools, but my spiritual formation came from the church where my parents were active leaders. They were heavily involved in the church, which was a strong example for us, their kids, setting a baseline for us wanting to give, rather than just receive. I received my First Communion and became an altar boy.

We were very involved at Holy Family Catholic Church in Corpus Christi, then we moved to Knox City, where the Benedictine priests served our St. Rose of Lima Mission. I participated in the Catholic Youth Organization, and the Benedictine priests encouraged my parents to send me to a minor seminary in Subiaco, Arkansas, to complete my high school studies. So, for a time, I explored a vocation to religious life, as the Benedictines wondered whether I might be called to the priesthood. I wasn't able to contemplate that at the time, as I was focused on getting married and having kids.

In college, I was part of Phi Kappa Theta, which was a merger of two national Roman Catholic fraternities. Through that organization, I had many mentors who helped me formulate my sense of servant leadership and giving back. After I graduated from college, I worked as a consultant for the national fraternity, and I traveled extensively around the country, to audit chapter operations. I served them throughout the years, on the board of trustees, then as national fraternity president in 2017-2019. That assisted me in my own spiritual enlightenment and commitment.

I was extensively involved at St. Catherine Catholic Church, so I knew Father Jayme from the years when he assisted there. With my teaching degree, I wanted to model to my kids the aspect of giving back to the church—so I became a high school religious education teacher. I also sang with the choir and played the bongos whenever they needed me to help out with the beat.

I found Holy Family through Google. I was searching for a more inclusive church home—one that would accept people regardless of their gender or identity. When I discovered that Father Jayme was pastoring an inclusive Catholic parish, it was a no-brainer: I was looking to affiliate with a new community, and I found a home here at Holy Family. From the first time I came to Mass, I knew that Holy Family was a special place where I could find a spiritual home.

I started coming to bible study, which got me praying the rosary again. The bible study was an extension of the warmth that I felt at Sunday Mass, and it allowed me an outlet for socialization, to get closer to others who participated in it as well. Holy Family really is a place for everyone. It has a sense of welcome that is lacking in

other parishes, and it provides a sense of homecoming—of coming home to the Catholic Church!

I love Holy Family's inclusivity and welcoming nature. Regardless of whether you live in the area or are a transplant, you can find a home at Holy Family. It's also nice to see young families with kids at Holy Family—which gives me hope for the future of this particular parish.

If you're contemplating a change in churches, for whatever reason, you'll find a very warm and welcoming atmosphere at Holy Family. It is a Holy Family, indeed!

At Holy Family, All Are Welcomed, Not Judged

Teresa (Mata) Gonzalez



I was born and raised in Austin, Texas. I attended Popham Elementary, Del Valle Middle School and Del Valle High School. When I was a child, my family hopped all over local churches: San José, Dolores and St. Ignatius. I went to CCD classes and received my First Communion and Confirmation, but I wasn't ever really involved in the Church.

In 2016, my sister-in-law, Kathy Mata, first told me about Holy Family. We lived off FM 812, about five miles east of Holy Family, and a lot of people said good things about Holy Family. In the beginning of 2017, my beloved husband, Benito Gonzalez, and I decided to check out Holy Family—and we've never stopped going! After about a year, we moved to Cedar Park, so now we drive from Cedar Park all the way to Holy Family.

I met my husband at a barbeque in 2016. I had been divorced, and he was going through a divorce. We had both been through a lot in life: a lot of hurt and disappointments. And we were struggling to make ends meet. I told Benito, "Let's go to that

church that your sister-in-law recommended." So, we went. The first day that we went, we just felt so much love and warmth. It was a beautiful feeling, and we looked at each other and said, "This is our home now!" We felt the love and welcome from Holy Family. And not only did we feel welcomed: Because of the parish breakfast, we left full! That meal was such a blessing to us at the time, and we've never gone to any other church since then.

My husband is really close to God, and I was so happy to find a person who was close to God. I always wanted to be close to God. So our bond really grew our faith, and the more that we went to Holy Family, the more we found our lifestyles changing. Back then, we rented a little home from my aunt, and we didn't have any furniture. But now, thanks to God and our faith, God has abundantly blessed us.

I like the English Mass, but Benito likes the Spanish Mass, so we sometimes go back and forth between them. Or, if he's too tired, because of work, we'll watch Mass here at home. We love Holy Family and wouldn't go anywhere else. It's such a beautiful community. We love it!

Holy Family is a community where you're not judged. I was raised Catholic, but I didn't do everything "by the book," and I remember that, after I was divorced, someone told me, "You're not supposed to take the Body of Christ. You're divorced!" It wasn't my fault that I got divorced, and that comment pushed me away from the Church. At Holy Family, all are welcomed, not judged. You're welcomed with open arms, no matter who you are, regardless of your race or color, or whether you're rich or poor. It's a beautiful community, and the people there are so loving, friendly and caring. And when Father Jayme sings, I feel the Holy Spirit in the whole church and in my whole body! It's so beautiful, and I love coming back every time!

Holy Family is Different: Everybody Cares

Irene Loredo Guerra



I was born and raised in Austin, Texas until I was 15, when my family moved to the outskirts, by Highway 183 and Spicewood Springs Road. We continued to visit my grandparents in Austin, who lived just down the street from Cristo Rey. I remember when they built and opened Cristo Rey: I was a little kid and could barely look over the pews!

My grandfather was a devout Catholic. He helped build Cristo Rey, and he used to help put up the *jamaica* booths. Even though my parents lived just down the street from Santa Julia, we never went there. We always went to Cristo Rey, where Grandpa and Grandma went. I remember that when I was very young, my grandfather told me, "I don't care what church y'all go to: It's all the same God!" And that's what I believe, too.

I started school at Guadalupe. Then I went to Govalle, the public school down the street. From Govalle, I went to Allan. For high school, I attended St. Mary's Academy on Red River for one year, then I went to Johnston for a couple of years, then my father moved me to Lanier High School. We didn't live in the Austin ISD, but that was the closest public school to our house. Because I moved schools so much, I really didn't develop many close friends. I did prefer parochial schools, though, and I wish my grandchildren went to them.

My husband, Robert, and I were married at Cristo Rey, then we became members at St. Louis King of France Catholic Church for many years. We attended the 7:30 a.m. Mass every Sunday, along with my son, and we always sat in the front pew. As my girls got older, they wanted to attend Mass with their friends, so we switched to St. Thomas More, and we were there until Robert passed away in 2003.

Honestly, after Robert's passing, Father Jayme saved me. I feel a strong connection with him. I felt that I could call him, and that he would listen to me and talk me through whatever I was going through. Other priests wouldn't have time, or would probably tell me, "Let me see when I have an opening." Father Jayme kept me coming back to church—and he and his beautiful voice keep me coming back to Holy Family!

After Robert's death, I started going back to Cristo Rey, because I felt very close to Robert there. Father Jayme was giving Mass at Cristo Rey at that time—and I would always try to go when he was saying Mass. I attended Cristo Rey until Father Jayme started Holy Family in 2012. Father Jayme called me and invited me to Mass at his home, and I said, "Of course, wherever Father Jayme is, I'm going to go!"

I enjoyed those Masses at Father Jayme's home. I truly did. It was small and intimate, and my dad would sometimes go, too—and that was the closest I have ever been to God and the Church. It gave me great pleasure, too, to know that Dad was with Holy Family. During the week, he went to Mass every day at the cathedral, then he went to Cristo Rey on Saturday evening, then to Holy Family on Sunday. Cristo Rey was his church, and it was my grandparents' church—but, after that, Holy Family was his church. He took María Elena and their daughters, and many times he'd tell me, "I'll meet you there!"

After those Masses on Willow Street, Father Roy asked me to count the money, and Susie Martinez and I did it—on top of the washing machine! When we moved to Dad's place on Lava Hill Road, Susie and I continued to count the collections in a bar that we turned into the parish office. We did that for about three years. I remember that well.

Dad's place on Lava Hill Road was just a little dance hall, a place for receptions, but Holy Family transformed it! The parish put up curtains and built a stage. Regardless of what the building looked like, we turned it into a beautiful church! It truly was. Behind the altar, we had an eating room, which was fantastic. So the facility worked out perfect. I wish we still had that building, but things happened that are beyond our control.

I miss Holy Family's *jamaicas*. We haven't had one since the pandemic. The *jamaica* was safe and fun, and all kinds of people are there. We got help from Constable George Morales and his crew. It was a lot of work, and a lot of people—like Father Roy—really hustled to make it a success. I'm not a cook, so I couldn't have a food booth—so I helped sell tickets!

Holy Family is very personable. In all those years that I went to St. Louis and St. Thomas More, I never met anyone. Those churches felt so cold. Holy Family is different: Everybody cares. Everybody's your friend. Everybody talks to you. You're not an outsider. That's what makes Holy Family stand out to me.

Father Jayme is an exceptional, wonderful priest, and I feel that we are a family. We don't go there to impress anyone. No one cares what we look like. Instead, everyone acknowledges you. We have the same Catholic beliefs, readings and Mass. We're just like any other Catholic church. People who haven't gone to Holy Family need to give us a chance. They really do. They truly, honestly do. And if I ever hit the lottery, the first thing I'm going to do is to help Holy Family build a church!

Holy Family is Diverse, Inclusive, Welcoming and Friendly

Celia Irizarry



I was born in Puerto Rico, and I came to the U.S. on January 6, 1991—on Three Kings Day! Because one of my brothers was working on his Ph.D. at The University of Texas at Austin, I came straight to Austin. After I married, we moved to Victoria, Texas, where my girls, Carolina and Karleen, were born, then we moved to Corpus Christi, where Antonio was born. Then we came back to Austin, and I've been here ever since.

To this day, my family is Catholic. As a girl, I belonged to the Catholic Daughters of America, and I got married in the Catholic Church. When I first arrived in Austin, I regularly attended Mass at the UT Catholic Center, where I also taught religious education on Sundays.

I learned about Holy Family from a lady who worked at the Manor ISD, where I worked at the time. She told me that her kids received their Confirmation, and they didn't have to attend a whole year of classes. I was interested in that—and that's how we ended up at Holy Family. My daughters received their Confirmation at the church on Lava Hill Road—and we just kept going there.

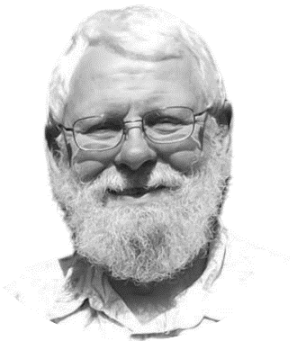
We felt extremely welcomed at Holy Family. We used to enjoy the *mariachi*, when people led the singing, and it sounds corny, but having the breakfast made it much easier for my kids to go. I'd say, "Let's go to Mass. Remember: There's breakfast!" And they would say, "Okay, let's go!" The girls assisted with the Children's Liturgy of the Word several times, and Carolina got involved leading the singing at Mass.

Outside of Holy Family, I'm the Advanced Academics Coordinator for the Manor ISD. Last year, I offered to assist Holy Family graduates with college applications and financial aid, but no one showed up. I was able to help Father Roy's grandchildren when I worked for the Pflugerville ISD. I'm always open to help any juniors for seniors who need assistance with their college journey!

I like the fact that Holy Family is diverse, inclusive, welcoming and friendly. I feel bad when I can't attend Mass, but when I do show up, people say, "How are you doing? We haven't seen you!" I just feel at home at Holy Family. If you're looking for a church that is welcoming—and where the priests sing really well—attend Holy Family!

I'll Never Forget It:
It Was Just a Marvelous Experience!

Most Rev. Dr. Alan R. Kemp



I grew up in Van Nuys, California, in the San Fernando Valley—so I'm a "valley boy"! After I served in the military, I returned to Burbank, North Hollywood, California, where my dad owned a Schwinn bicycle dealership until the mid 1960s. The plan was for me to take over the shop, and that was going to be my livelihood.

I was not raised in a religious tradition. My dad came from a farm in North Dakota. His dad was very abusive, and a Nazarene minister turned my dad off to religion. My mom came from a Scottish background, so she introduced me to the Presbyterian Church, where I participated and sang in the choir—but I was never baptized or confirmed. I was a Buddhist in high school and was involved in that religion for a while. After my tour of duty on patrol boats in Vietnam, I gave up on Buddhism. I went into a pretty deep depression and was searching for truth. It sounds quaint, but I was very serious about it! I went through periods of homelessness, and I used my G.I. benefits to go to college. I moved up to Washington State, and I turned my back on spiritual practice. In order to celebrate a marriage, I was "ordained" in the Universal Life Church. I then became interested in doing weddings, and I began taking ministry seriously. At that time, I found J. Gordon Melton's three-volume, *Encyclopedia of American Religions*, and I discovered the Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch. It "clicked" with me. I went down to Creswell, Oregon, where I met Matriarch Meri Louise Spruit, and I was baptized and began my studies with the Church of Antioch. That was the beginning of my journey into Independent Catholicism in late 1994 and early 1995.

In 2006, I was consecrated a bishop by Archbishop Richard Gundry, Bishop Paul Clemens and Bishop Kera Hamilton. Then,

Archbishop Gundry decided that he wanted to retire as Patriarch and Presiding Bishop of the Church of Antioch. He appointed me as the interim presiding bishop. I organized the election of his successor, and Bishop Mark Elliott Newman was elected. Shortly thereafter, I received the message that I didn't have a place in the Church of Antioch, so I decided to move on with my life. People started coming to me, requesting preparation for the sacrament of Holy Orders—so I transformed my local ministry, Ascension Mission, into the Ascension Alliance. I served as the original presiding bishop, then Bishop Patsy Grubbs was elected in 2012, and now Bishop Roberto Foss is our presiding bishop. I continue to play a role in the day-to-day administration of the organization and as the director of the Ascension Theological College.

I first learned of Holy Family Catholic Church through Deacon Angelita Mendoza-Waterhouse. She attended our Ascension Alliance convocation in Santa Fe in 2018 and 2019. A week before the convocation, I received an email from Father Jayme, asking whether he could send Deacon Angelita to represent Holy Family at the event. We said, "Yes, we'd love to have her!" Deacon Angelita told us about Father Jayme, Holy Family, and all the work that the parish was doing.

I visited Holy Family for the first time in October 2019. Father Jayme hosted an interjurisdictional gathering of Independent Catholic lay and ordained leaders at Holy Family, and Bishop Cathy Chalmers, Bishop Ted Feldmann and I decided to go. That was after Holy Family's separation from the American Catholic Church in the U.S., and Father Jayme asked me to celebrate the sacrament of Confirmation at Holy Family.

The Independent Catholic movement is known for really small congregations with very few people, and with very few brick-and-mortar facilities—so I was impressed with Holy Family's facilities. Holy Family had an actual church and a space where we could hold workshops, and a kitchen and dining room where we could gather together.

I had never used the *Novus Ordo*, like they do at Holy Family, so I felt like "a fish out of water" during the liturgy—but I felt Spirit moving inside me that day, and I remember really connecting with those folks who were being confirmed. I felt the overwhelming

presence of love and power. This love moved inside me, and it moved between me and the people who were being confirmed, and I felt very honored to be invited to do it. I'll never forget it: It was just a marvelous experience!

I retired from teaching in June 2020, so I have enough to live on—and a little bit extra. I always like to support causes that I believe in, and Holy Family is very active, which makes it easy to support Holy Family. Father Jayme is a really active guy, with all kinds of ideas, inspirations and desires for his ministry and community, and he has encouraged and promoted interjurisdictional collaboration in the Independent Catholic movement. So I'm happy to do my part to support such great work!

I was fortunate to return to Holy Family in May 2022. I had just finished a graduate degree in applied sociology, and I was thinking about the Independent Sacramental Movement as a social movement. At the same time, Father Jayme was organizing a conference at Holy Family on the Aglipayan Church—the largest Independent Catholic church in the world. He asked me to present on the Aglipayan Church as a social movement. Then Stephen Rodriguez, whom I confirmed in 2019 and who was preparing to be ordained to the diaconate, asked me if I would ordain him. I was honored by the invitation. I was honored to do that for Deacon Stephen and for the continued growth of our movement. It was good to connect again with the folks of Holy Family, and it's really exciting to ordain young clergy! It felt like family at Holy Family!

I love how members of Holy Family often speak on social media about their "Holy Family family." They say, "I love my Holy Family." It speaks to a feeling of connection, love, excitement, energy and enthusiasm at Holy Family, and I'm just so pleased and blessed to feel that I'm part of the family!

Holy Family is a Place where Love is the Bottom Line

Jennie Kennedy



I grew up in Metairie, Louisiana, and moved to Austin for college. I left for law school, but returned to Austin in 2008 and have been here since.

Our entire family participates in our parish. While many of the homilies have spoken to me and my husband, the warmth of Holy Family makes it home. And the entire family is very excited when it's breakfast Sunday!

I am on my second term on the Holy Family Board of Directors, where I serve as our Board's legal counsel. Our Board's commitment to the church and to each other inspires me, and it's fascinating to see what goes on "behind the scenes" at Holy Family.

After the pandemic, my husband, Brian, and I decided to restart the Children's Liturgy of the Word at Holy Family. It has been a blast! It's so much fun to break open the Word with kids and to watch them share at the end of Mass what they learned.

There are so many experiences—sacred and secular—that we cherish about Holy Family! My daughter's Baptism and son's First Communion at Holy Family were such special days. Many of our family memories feature Holy Family, including the day my girls won the "ugly sweater contest," the *jamaicas*, Dr. Gary's impressive magic shows, and the greatest church breakfasts in the world!

Holy Family reminds our family of what's important and centers us. Numerous rides home from Mass have been spent discussing Mass and its meaning for us. It's wonderful to share our faith in an environment where all of God's children are welcomed just as they are.

I have paragraphs of praise for so many people at Holy Family. That could be a book itself! I include here an Academy Awards-type sampling. I am so grateful for Father Jayme's leadership in building this community, and his constant work to make everyone feel welcome. I am grateful for Deacon John (we sure miss him!)

and Father Roy, for making a special effort to connect with my son. Somehow Rudy Nieto once manifested a juice box to calm a very noisy toddler. While many others have made a difference in our lives, Becky Saenz and Terry Ann Caballero are truly the backbone of the church, doing so much for us, from ensuring that the sanctuary is always beautiful, to running our Board.

Holy Family's motto—"Loving. Inclusive. Catholic. Doing it Jesus's way!"—really sums up our faith community. Holy Family is a place where love is the bottom line, where we are always on the side of the oppressed, and where the *tamales* are perfect!

I Just Love Everything and Everybody at Holy Family!

Irene Estrada (Davila) Lafuente



I was born and raised in Austin. My father was a butcher in Luling, and my mother's family, the Estrada's, were migrant workers in West Texas. I have ten brothers and sisters, and we raised one another. I'm the fourth oldest. I attended Govalle Elementary and Allan Junior High through the eighth grade. After a month at Johnston High School, I thought I knew it all, so I quit going to school.

I was baptized and raised Catholic, and I attended school at Santa Julia so long as my family lived on Zaragosa Street—then things got crazy after that. My parents divorced when I was six or seven. We ended up on Seventh Street, and we didn't go to church after that. I didn't have anything to do with the Church until I grew up and had my kids. Then I tried to go to church a few times—but I always fell asleep there. I never understood what it was about. When I was in my late 30s, my sister invited me to church at Santa Cruz in Buda. Father Dean was there, and he gave me my sacraments. So I started going there. I got bored there and started going to Sinai Church on Riverside, where I had my beauty shop.

But then the pastor started saying that the people owed him money. All the people there were from Mexico, and he would point and them and say, "God says that you need to give me $1,500!" That just broke my heart. I got mad and never went back. That was 10 or 15 years ago.

I first heard of Holy Family through my brother, Gilbert Davila. He was by my side at Irene's Beauty Salon for 30 years, and there were no strangers in my shop: Everybody was happy to come to the beauty shop, and we helped a lot of people in Montopolis.

Gilbert and Pauline went to Holy Family when it was on Lava Hill Road, and they kept telling me to come. Two or three years ago, my brother was sick, and I wanted to help them in any way that I could, so I accepted his invitation to come to church. My brother loved Holy Family. He loved everyone here. And Holy Family made me feel like I was back home. It was just so beautiful. When I got sick, I couldn't go to Holy Family for a while, and that broke my heart. I'm glad that everything's back to normal now, and I can come back to church. When I come to Holy Family, I feel close to my brother. I feel close to everyone at Holy Family—and it feels good to be there. It feels like a normal family.

My husband, Alfred, always wanted me to go with him to Dolores Church on Montopolis Drive, where he was raised. His family is very Catholic and very church-going. My husband is so Catholic, so into church. That church is so empty, and I start getting sleepy and bored—but when I go to Holy Family, I just want to hear more and more!

I just love how Father Jayme explains everything. He reminds me of Father Dean. Father Dean used to explain the Bible, and that's why I loved going to Santa Cruz, but then Father Dean retired, and the priests who came in were so boring. I just couldn't wait to leave. I used to receive the bread and run out the back door, then I'd run to a restaurant for a cup of coffee, just to relax!

Then I started coming to Holy Family, and I brought my husband, and he fell in love with everybody there. For me, Holy Family gives me a feeling of being back home and at peace. I just love everything and everybody at Holy Family!

Holy Family Isn't as Strict as the Roman Catholic Church

Christopher Leal



I was born and raised in Austin. I attended Blanton Elementary School, Pearce Middle School and McCallum High School. I was brought up at Sacred Heart and Cristo Rey at the same time. At age 15, I was the youngest Joy Group member, and I participated in the *Sociedad Guadalupana*. At 18 or 19 years old, I was active in the *Cursillistas* with my grandparents. I've known Father Roy since I was five or six years old, and I knew Father Jayme when he came to Cristo Rey as a Franciscan brother in 1995. In 2001, I traveled to Ohio with my grandparents and a busload of parishioners from Cristo Rey, for his ordination to the priesthood.

When my family discovered Holy Family, I was taking care of my grandmother at the time, so I didn't go to church with them. My sister-in-law, Becky Lego, always served at Mass —but then she stopped when she gave birth to her daughter. Back when Holy Family was on Lava Hill Road, I attended Mass for Ash Wednesday, and Deacon Roy asked me to step in and serve. I was very nervous, and I told him I was too old. He said, "Don't worry about that," and he trained me. I was so tall that the church's albs went above my knees—so I had to go to Catholic Art & Gifts after that, to buy an alb my size! I began serving at all Sunday Masses until the pandemic in 2020. Sometimes I didn't even have time to eat between Masses, and I remember that I sometimes had to finish the Blood of Christ when there was too much consecrated wine left after Mass!

After going to Holy Family, I no longer felt at home at Cristo Rey. I remember going to a local Catholic gift store. The woman there asked, "Don't you go to Cristo Rey?" I said, "I used to go to Cristo Rey, but now I go to Holy Family." She said, "Don't mention

Holy Family at Cristo Rey—or they'll kick you out!" Because of my size, I told that lady, "They're going to need an army to move me!"

Beginning in 2019, my mother and I attended Mass with Father Daniel Storrs at Holy Name of Mary Catholic Chapel in Avery Ranch on Saturdays, and at Holy Family on Sundays. I knew how Father Jayme liked to celebrate Mass, and I knew for instance, that he didn't like to light the candles too early before Mass. Back then, we had oil candles, and all the oil burned up by Communion. I also remember sharing my *Niño Dios* (Christ Child) with the church for Christmas 2019: One of the volunteers dropped it on the floor and broke it! I took that pretty hard, but fortunately Anthony Almond was able to fix and paint it. I enjoyed serving at Holy Family until early 2020, when my seizures got worse. My mother helped in the parish office, and I was able to serve at all the Masses and to train and mentor younger altar servers.

Holy Family isn't as strict as the Roman Catholic Church is on certain things, and I enjoyed helping there for a long time. I like that people say hello and ask how you're doing. I had to stop going for a time because my health was getting worse. I'm still recovering from a recent surgery, but maybe with time I'll be able to come back more often!

We Will Always Cherish Our Time at Holy Family

Jessica Leal



I was born and raised in Austin. I attended Sacred Heart Catholic School for Elementary, Pearce Junior High School for Middle School, and A.N. McCallum High School for High School.

I was raised Roman Catholic, but I left the Catholic Church due to its beliefs on homosexuality. I did not go to church for years. Then, one morning, I woke up and felt a

calling to go to church at Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) of Austin, which is now called Uprising. The sermon was moving, and it brought me to tears to know I had found a church home where I was told that I was perfectly made and that I am loved by God! I went to MCC for years, and I met my wife there. At MCC, I participated in the Red Carpet Ministry, where we greeted everyone at the door. We also introduced new members during the service, so that they felt welcomed. I was also an acolyte, and I helped start a young adult group.

My grandfather, Genaro Leal, attended Holy Family until he passed, and my mother, Rafaela, and my brother, Christopher, attended Holy Family as well. My grandparents knew Father Jayme when he was a friar at Cristo Rey—years ago!—then my wife and I got to know him really well as we became involved at Holy Family.

When the pastor left MCC, we did not like where the church was going, and we decided to stop attending. One day, my mom mentioned Holy Family and gave me Father Jayme's card. I reached out to him via email and asked if Holy Family was a welcoming church. He answered my questions, and my wife and I decided that we would go to Mass—and we brought our roommate at the time with us as well.

We decided to try Holy Family because we missed going to church, and we wanted to find out what Holy Family was all about. We continued to go because of the people. I decided to become one of the collection counters, and my wife, Becky Lego, became his alter server, and then his choir. Becky and I always enjoyed all the events at Holy Family, and we always relished the time we got to spend with him outside of church, getting to know him as "Jayme."

After some years, we stopped going to Holy Family because of the time change of the Mass, and we seemed to always have things going on during the weekends.

Becky and I were married by Father Jayme in New Mexico on Dec 20, 2013. Becky was confirmed and our daughter was baptized at Holy Family. We will always cherish our time at Holy Family, and the people there will always hold a special place in our hearts. We were accepted and made to feel at home from the first time we attended, and Father Jayme is an amazing friend and priest!

Holy Family Was Like a Family—
We Loved and Respected Each Other

Rafaela Leal



I was born and raised in Seguin, Texas, until I came to Austin to attend The University of Texas at Austin in 1970. I attended Catholic school from first through eighth grade. After that, I belonged to an organization called the *Hijas de María* (Daughters of Mary) until I graduated from high school: We attended Mass once a month, dressed in white, with a medal of the Virgin Mary. We had monthly meetings, and we helped out the church. My family lived catty-corner from Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church, where my mother was the housekeeper for the parish priest. My parents were *Cursillistas*, my mother was a *Guadalupana*, and my dad belonged to the organization of the *Santo Nombre*. My father also belonged to the Jaycees and the Woodmen of the World. My parents helped out the church any way they could.

When I moved to Austin, I rented a house on Anderson Lane, so I went to St. Louis Catholic Church. When my parents moved here, they bought our home on Gladstone, and we went to Sacred Heart. My mom and dad missed interacting with other Spanish-speakers, so they also attended Cristo Rey, while I continued going to Sacred Heart. After my mother fell ill, Dad and I took turns taking care of her on Sundays, and we alternated between Cristo Rey and Sacred Heart.

We knew Father Jayme when he was a brother at Cristo Rey. Then my parents and Christopher went to his ordination in Ohio in 2001. After he was banished by the Roman Catholic Church and people started badmouthing him, I told Dad, "Why does it matter which religion you belong to? Aren't we supposed to love and respect everyone?" I couldn't believe how they badmouthed Father Jayme. At Sacred Heart, they read the letter that the bishop

had sent to all parishes, and I said, "That's not right!" People were mean to Father Roy, too. Father Roy had talked to my dad about Holy Family, and he said, "Why don't you try Holy Family?" Dad asked me, "What do you think?" I said, "Let's go! It won't hurt." And so we went, and it was really enlightening. It was a good experience, and we never went back to Cristo Rey or Sacred Heart.

At that time, Dad and I went to Holy Family, and Christopher stayed home to take care of Mom. After my mom died, Christopher started coming to church with us. My daughter-in-law, Becky, was the altar server until she gave birth to her daughter, then Father Roy told Christopher, "We need for you to be an altar server." Christopher said, "I can't do that." And Father Roy said, "I'll be right beside you, and I'll tell you what to do. Now go, get dressed!" Christopher was tall, and none of the albs fit him: They were almost to his knees! That week, we went to get Christopher his own alb, and he served from that day on at Holy Family. He started at the English Mass, then we stayed for the Spanish Mass at Lava Hill, and he served at that Mass, too. Then, after we moved to Salem, he served at the 9:00 Mass, then he did the 10:30 Mass, then he stayed for the noon Mass, when Father Libardo needed him.

When we were on Lava Hill Road, I started counting collections, and I got involved in fundraisers. I also led the Children's Liturgy of the Word. Father Jayme announced that he wanted to start that ministry, and I said, "I can do that!" We held the Children's Liturgy in the back room. Sometimes we only had one or two kids, and sometimes we had 15 kids. At first, some parents and kids were reluctant—but then they got comfortable with the idea and wanted to go back there and learn! With some of the little ones, we taught very basic teachings, like "Jesus loves you" and "God is good," and we did activities that we thought they would like. I remember telling them, "Regardless of what happens, God always loves you—just like your parents love you!" We would discuss the readings or the gospel and ask them their interpretations of them. Janie Gomez helped me out, and my daughter, Jessica, helped.

I lectored a few times on Lava Hill. Father Jayme stated that he needed volunteers, and he had a sign-up sheet for eucharistic ministers and lectors, so I volunteered for those. I would mispronounce a word or skip over a word from time to time, but

we were all family, and no one seemed to notice. I volunteered wherever I was needed—including in the parish office and on the Environment Committee, decorating the church. As my heart condition advanced, I got tired more easily and wasn't able to do as much as I did before.

Holy Family was like a family—and there was no backstabbing or people saying, "I'm better than you are." I was really moved when my mother died, and people provided a meal after the funeral. After my dad died, people also came and helped out at the rosary and at the dinner after the funeral. You could feel the love and the welcoming. I was very touched by their love for me and my parents, and their sincere willingness to help us out. I'll always be grateful for the moral support they gave us at that time.

As my heart condition advanced, I didn't have the energy to do what I used to do, and the core group that used to be my core group was no longer my core group. In 2018, we got to know Father Daniel Storrs and Anthony Almond, when they attended Holy Family. They invited us to their home for a Christmas party, and we started celebrating Mass with them on Saturday, and at Holy Family on Sunday. I really enjoyed going to Mass on both days, at both places. When COVID hit, Holy Family closed its doors and televised recorded Masses, and Christopher and I helped Father Daniel and Anthony with their recorded Masses. I would do a reading for him, remembering what Father Jayme taught us at Holy Family: Don't read with your eyes down, make eye contact with listeners, don't concentrate on one person alone, be expressive, don't talk too fast—that much I do remember!

I was really happy that my daughter, Jessica, was able to marry in the Church. I always wanted them to get married in the Church, in front of a priest—and they were married by Father Jayme in New Mexico, before same-sex marriage was legal in Texas. Their ability to receive the sacrament sent the signal that they are not bad people, and that was a special moment for me. I also like the fact that the Independent Catholic Church allows people who are divorced to get married again in the eyes of God.

I used to question some of the things that I was taught in Catholic school. That's why I enjoyed the bible study classes that Father Jayme offered—first at his house, then at Herbert and Susie

Martinez's office. He made us think about things, like where unbaptized babies go after death, and that it's okay for anyone to baptize another person, especially if no priest or deacon is available. I learned quite a bit going to those classes, and it really sank in for me that God is good, that we have free will, that God does not punish us, and that God is waiting 24/7 to help us and raise us up. After we moved to Salem, it became more difficult for us to arrive at the bible study on time.

Holy Family is a very welcoming church, and I tell people all the time that there's no difference between Holy Family and other Catholic churches, except that women can be ordained at Holy Family, those who are divorced are welcomed and can receive Communion and be married, and we don't have to go to confession all the time. That's just not necessary. I don't tend to believe in the strict teachings of the Roman Catholic Church anymore. For those who are looking for other expressions of Catholicism, there's always Holy Family Catholic Church!

We Were Both Very Eager to Experience This Very Loving and Inclusive Way of Being Catholic!

Stephanie LeRoy

My husband, Matt Tominey, and I were born into deeply-rooted Roman Catholic families: His was Irish, and mine was Mexican. For many years, we faithfully followed Roman Catholic traditions. We were married in the Church, and we baptized our two children. We then became increasingly uneasy with the stark, non-Christian editorials on same-sex relationships and other issues by anti-abortion Roman Catholic clergy. Matt and I both loved the Church's traditions and beautiful hymns, but, in the end, it proved too difficult to maintain any joy in going to church. Matt and I strayed from the Church and from each other.

In 2015, I picked up a copy of the *Austin Chronicle*. It featured the story of a Catholic priest who happened to be gay. I thought, "WTF? How can this be?" I slowly read the story, not wanting to

misunderstand anything. I was amazed, confused and hopeful, all at once.

By that time, Matt and I had once again become companions and supports to one another—and we were both very eager to experience this very loving and inclusive way of being Catholic! After 20 years of not attending Mass, we set out together to find this Catholic church in south Austin. One Mass, and we were both hooked. It was as if my soul had found its true home!

We continue to attend weekly Sunday Mass, either in person or via YouTube. Attending Mass is a joyful experience again!

Our Holy Family family is an especially important part of Matt's life, as he travels through the cruelty of dementia. The peacefulness I see in him, and that I experience myself, is simply beautiful.

We are truly blessed to have discovered Holy Family. I often lull myself to sleep by playing Father Jayme's soulful singing in my head. A Father Jayme music CD could be a great fundraiser for the Holy Family church building fund!

We thank Father Jayme and all the strong Independent Catholics in Central Texas for showing the world what it means to be Christlike in our world. May God bless our Holy Family family forever and ever.

Holy Family is Food for the Soul

Dinora (Izquierdo) Leyva



I was born in Coatepec Harinas, in the state of Mexico, and I came to the U.S. 34 years ago. My husband and I lived in San Antonio, and he daily came to work in Austin, so he brought me and my son to Austin 32 years ago. Our daughter was born here in Austin.

My whole family is Catholic, and I attended a Catholic school, run by nuns, since kindergarten. My father was a band teacher at the school, so he took us there, where we

were taught by the Carmelite Sisters of Saint Teresa, through the equivalent of high school. I graduated with secretarial skills, similar to business administration here, and the school later closed when the nuns left town. The school building is now used for senior adults.

Our Mexican priests were kind of weird: Many didn't like involving people in the church. Things have changed, and many priests enjoy the help now, but it wasn't like that before.

After we arrived in Austin, we started attending San José Catholic Church, where my daughter went to San Juan Diego Catholic High School, where Father Jayme served as president. We then went to Cristo Rey Catholic Church, on Second Street and Robert Martinez. After my son finished school, though, I admittedly left the church. They were doing a lot of things at Cristo Rey that I didn't like. We wanted to celebrate our daughter's quinceañera, and they told us that we had to be tithing members and do so many other things. It was at that time that I said, "This isn't for me." I stopped going to church—until I found Father Jayme and started going again. And now, this is my home!

When I started looking for Father Jayme, I was told that he was off Highway 183, in a place without air conditioning. We started attending church at Holy Family on Lava Hill Road in 2015 or 2016, and our son and daughter were confirmed there.

After the pandemic, when we started going to church again, Becky Saenz invited me to proclaim the Word of God at Mass. She asked me if I could read the Word, and I said, "Sure, I'd be happy to!" At first, I was nervous, because I had never done that, but little-by-little I'm growing more confident and getting over my fears. Becky sends me the scriptures the day before, so I can start practicing by myself. That has helped me a lot.

From the very beginning, I felt good at Holy Family. At first, because I hadn't been to church in a while, I thought, "I'm going to go, to see what they're like, to see if they're nice, or whether they don't know you or talk to you, like in other churches." I felt good coming here, which gave me more confidence, and I said, "This is where I have to come!"

The people at Holy Family are very nice and sincere. Even from the start, they talked to me, though they didn't know me. I met

María and Marlén Gallegos, and several other people at church, and I thought, "I know more people here, I feel comfortable, so I'm going to come here more!"

I like to hear God's Word every week, and I like how Father Jayme explains it to us—and the fact that the Mass is not so long. I feel more devotion upon hearing God's Word, and I leave feeling good about having gone to church. I enjoy participating more in church, and I go whenever I can on Sundays.

We have a lot of Mexican traditions at Holy Family, including the *rosca de reyes* (king cake) on January 6, the raising of the Christ Child on February 2, and the Holy Week traditions that we celebrated with the nuns in Mexico when I was young. Those nuns taught us to pray and to sing many of the songs that we sing at Holy Family. Holy Family is food for the soul, often causing me to think of Mexico.

Holy Family Catholic Church is the best church in Austin. It's the best for me, and I have invited people to come to Holy Family. Some people prefer to follow traditions of the past, but that doesn't bother me. I always come to Holy Family because I feel good here. I invite my family to listen to the Mass on Facebook. They tell me that they like it a lot, because Father Jayme explains things very well and is not like other priests whom we can't understand what they're saying. Honestly, Father Jayme is really cool!

They Welcomed Us with Open Arms

Rev. Mike Lopez, O.S.B.



I was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, and I was educated by the Roman Church from Pre-K to college. At the age of 16, I began to discern a vocation to the priesthood with the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn. I eventually joined the postulancy program of the Scalabrinian Fathers, and I did my undergraduate studies in philosophy with them. I ended up as a candidate for the priesthood with the Vincentian Fathers for five years.

After leaving the Vincentian Fathers and getting married, I eventually felt a call to ordained ministry again, and I started discerning the different traditions that allow married priests. I came across the Independent Catholic movement. I then met at a wedding a married priest who was part of the Independent Sacramental Movement. I decided to join Independent Catholicism, and I was ordained on March 15, 2014. In October 2013, we had previously started All Saints Priory, a Benedictine priory focused on prayer and serving the poor in Richmond, Queens, New York. Our Hungry Monk Network grew from that, and we continue to provide housing and to fight food insecurity.

I first learned about Holy Family when I was attending my brother-in-law's wedding in Waco, Texas in September 2015. I googled Independent Catholic churches near there, and I found Holy Family, so I drove there for Sunday Mass. I walked in, and Gary Yorke introduced me to Father Jayme, who was getting ready to share a lesson before Mass. Father Jayme took me to the sacristy, and he told me to vest and concelebrate. Taken aback by his openness, I thought, "What the hell is going on?" He whisked me away, without any questions, and he and the entire community welcomed me. It was a great experience.

I returned to Holy Family for our first interjurisdictional gathering in October 2019, before the pandemic. Father Kevin, Deacon Marianne and I attended that conference and stayed at a nearby Airbnb. I remember that the people at Holy Family were just extremely welcoming. I come from a Latin/Caribbean background, so I'm intrigued by the Mexican-American population—they're from a different reality, a very different Latino experience—but I remember the hospitality: how caring everyone was and how they welcomed us with open arms. We saw it as a little weird, with them saying, "Hey, y'all"—but they probably thought that we, New Yorkers, were weird, too!

I met the folks from Holy Family again in November 2021, when they came to an interjurisdictional gathering in Las Vegas, that Father Marek, Father Jayme and I planned. Our delegation from New York opened up our Airbnb in Vegas and provided an Italian dinner for everyone, and the folks from Holy Family skipped the casinos to join us!

I then came back to Holy Family in May 2022, when I was invited to serve as the master of ceremonies at Deacon Stephen's ordination. We brought Father Henry Janiola, a priest of the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente*, with us from New York, and he presented during that interjurisdictional gathering. We have enjoyed hosting the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente* at our locations here in New York City, and we enjoyed listening to and learning from him at that event at Holy Family. Holy Family always puts together a good experience, and it was a pleasure to be there for that encounter.

We have also hosted Holy Family members in New York on multiple occasions, when they come here on business or vacation, or to visit family. We are grateful for the friendship of people like Gonzalo and Cynthia Rodriguez and Gary and Jane Yorke, who visited All Saints from Holy Family on various occasions. They have been extremely supportive of our homeless ministry here, particularly throughout the pandemic. They have shared ideas and tools with us. They've just been very kind to us! Gonzalo and Cynthia's daughter moved to our neighborhood, so they worshiped with us, and we took them to a real New York Italian restaurant, and we were able to say, "If you're daughter needs anything, just let us know."

In New York, we have hosted our pre-Lenten retreat for clergy for some eight or nine years now, and we're glad that Holy Family has sent representatives for the past three years. We host clergy from throughout the country, so there are many perspectives from many places, where the needs are different, and we build community and support one another. Next year, hopefully, we'll host our pre-Lenten retreat at our Benedictine priory in Puerto Rico for the first time!

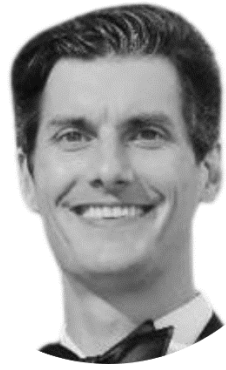
Father Marek Bożek has helped to coordinate and host that retreat since the beginning. I first met him when I invited myself to Father Tom Pels' ordination at St. Stanislaus Polish Catholic Church. Bishop Peter Paul Brennan from New York City—one of the Independent Catholic bishops consecrated by Roman Catholic Archbishop Emmanuel Milingo—was the ordaining bishop, so we flew to St. Louis. Since then, Father Marek has become a big part of our life here in New York as well.

It is important that we continue to share across communities in the Independent Sacramental Movement. Through his contact with our Benedictine community, Father Marek joined the Benedictines of the House of Initia Nova in Puerto Rico for a time, and now Heather Lucas of Holy Family has joined our Benedictine community as Sister Maria, O.S.B. She joins us through Zoom for daily midday prayer. Father Jayme connected her to our Sisters, then we connected her to our abbot and community. Last year, she joined us at our annual convocation in Puerto Rico, where she was the first Sister who was received at our new motherhouse there. She is a nurse, so she is so caring, and she bring a sense of peace and joy to our community. That ability to support one another in our vocations is a huge gift from heaven!

Holy Family is a great space and a great place to visit. The people there are extremely loving—and when you go, make sure that you go hungry and ready to eat!

A Sense of Joy—Even Elation—Rather than Obligation!

Gregory Lord



I'm from Wyomissing, Pennsylvania. I attended Catholic schools until I was confirmed in the seventh grade. Ten years ago, I came to Austin with a backpack and a dream.

My wife, Molly, is from Kentucky, and she went to Catholic schools through the twelfth grade. She has definitely been on a religious journey for a long time. She has volunteered with St. Ignatius here in Austin, and with Big Brothers, Big Sisters. She has a deep calling from God and a strong sense of faith. I have struggled with my faith more than her: I don't like to do things that don't make sense, and the Roman Catholic Church doesn't always make sense!

I fell away from the Roman Catholic Church for a long time, but I came back some six or seven years ago. Molly and I were both raised as traditional Catholics, and we had wonderful experiences of church together, but it definitely wasn't meeting our needs. We felt that something was missing. We didn't have a sense of connection. We were looking for less judgment and self-righteousness, and greater compassion. We were looking for a church that is less about "This is how it's always been!" We went to church in order to "check the box."

My sister and brother-in-law live in the D.C. metro area, and they invited us to be godparents for the baptism of my niece last year. My sister and brother-in-law had fallen off from the Catholic Church, and they have struggled to find the connection that we have found in Independent Catholicism. I credit my mother in Pennsylvania: My mom found this American National Catholic church outside of D.C., where you don't have to be married by the Church to baptize, and where they don't have all the requirements. So we went to that small church, where Father Jason Lody had a

wonderful Mass and baptized her. Afterward, we asked Father Jason, "Is there any church like this in Texas?" He said, "Funny enough, I studied in the seminary with a man named Father Jayme. His church is called Holy Family. You should look them up!" We said, "Let's try it!" The following week, we drove over to Holy Family, and we've gone to Holy Family ever since.

During our first visit to Holy Family, in September 2022, I felt a little trepidation—but even more a sense of guilt, like, "Am I supposed to be doing this?" We had visited other non-Catholic, nondenominational churches, but we knew that wasn't our call. We have ties to the Catholic Church, we love the traditions of the Catholic Church, and we weren't against calling ourselves Catholic—but we didn't feel that we assimilated to Catholicism. Holy Family almost immediately opened up a door to where we didn't feel guilt or judgment.

Many of us who were raised Catholic feel a certain guilt. We think, "This is the way I grew up, and my family has always done it this way." We were told to do certain things—even if they didn't make sense to us. For us, we thought, "Why are we judging others, when they're people just like us? They have hearts. They have love. They have feelings. It's not right for us to judge them!" Roman Catholicism does that. It boxes you in. It says, "You have to be this way!" And that has never sat well with us.

We like Holy Family for its community, its openness, its acceptance, and its non-judgment. It also has a sense of connection. Before Holy Family, we never stayed after Mass. At Holy Family, we feel called and invited to enjoy and connect with a community. Whereas going to Mass in the Roman Catholic Church was an obligation, we actually enjoy going to Holy Family! And when we donate, we feel that we can see where our money is going—rather than the obligation of standard tithing in the Roman Catholic Church. We now wake up with a sense of joy—even elation—rather than obligation! That's the biggest difference we've found between Holy Family and other Catholic churches. Holy Family is a beautiful church. The people are accepting, kind and openminded, and still strong in the apostolic, Catholic faith!

Holy Family Truly Feels Like a Family

Liliana Loredo



I grew up at Cristo Rey Catholic Church. I went to the *Escuelita* there for a few hours each day. I spent a lot of time there at the *Escuelita*! When I was a teenager, they had a teen course there one night a week. They invited speakers to talk about issues in school and life. I really liked going there. Cristo Rey has always been my base, though I did attend St. Louis here and there as an adult as well. St. Louis is a beautiful church—but I didn't feel at home there.

After Father Jayme left Cristo Rey in 2011, a lot of things changed—and I wasn't too happy. Cristo Rey seemed to be changing into a church of the *Hermanos*, and it just didn't seem Catholic anymore. I remember telling one priest in confession that I had divorced, and he said that he would listen to my sins, but that he wouldn't forgive me! I felt like he was judging me, and I thought, "Who are you to judge me? You preach forgiveness—and yet you won't forgive me?" That hurt me a lot. No one should be judged like that.

I'm thankful that Father Jayme has always loved God so much. He has been through hard times, and he had some negative experiences at Cristo Rey—but he overcame that. I admire his love for God, and he has always been a big part of my family. I will always cherish that. I'll never forget that.

In 2013, my uncle, Ignacio Loredo, and his wife, María Elena, told me that Father Jayme was celebrating Mass at their party place on Lava Hill Road. As soon as they told me that, I said, "I'm going to go there!" My kids were still young, and I wanted them to be a part of a church where we felt comfortable. We love Father Jayme, and we've known him for a long time, so we decided to follow his lead at Holy Family! We like the way that he explains scriptures, rather than just nagging and nagging about this and that.

I had never been to church in a dance hall, but I liked it. There were only a few ornaments at first, but it grew and became a nice place. It was a little different—we don't kneel, like people do in other Catholic churches—but I liked seeing familiar faces. From the start, I just felt that this was the place where we were going to continue coming for a long time.

My kids enjoyed Holy Family, too—especially the breakfast. They were familiar with Father Jayme and Father Roy, and they got to see their uncle and aunt and my cousin, Irene Loredo Guerra. Cristo Rey didn't feel like a familiar place anymore—but we found a home at Holy Family, where we felt comfortable. The way that everyone was together for breakfast was really special.

I liked how Holy Family takes family photos with the Easter Bunny, how it celebrates Christmas, and how it shares the *rosca* on January 6. Holy Family truly feels like a family. I love the fact that everyone knows everyone!

Holy Family doesn't judge people, and you can feel comfortable and welcomed there. There's not the feeling of being judged. Holy Family is inclusive, and everyone is accepted—no matter what. It's not a place where we feel obligated to go. Instead, it's a family!

Holy Family Welcomes Everybody

Eloysa (Salinas) Lozano



I was born and raised in Austin, Texas. I went to Metz Elementary, Martin Junior High and Anderson High School. I was raised on East Cesar Chavez, just around the corner from Cristo Rey, so I went there for most of my life. I received all my sacraments there, and I did a lot there with Sister Theresa Murillo and Father Kirby Garner. I was in the choir there for many years, and I joined the Liturgical Committee for a bit. I was also part of the *comunidades de base* there, where we

went to different houses to pray. I stopped singing with the choir after our director, Fernando Reyes, moved to San Antonio. He was my *compadre*, the godfather of my children. I stayed at Cristo Rey until I found Holy Family.

I discovered Holy Family online. Different people had told me that they were going to Holy Family, including our friends Monica Dominguez and Nina Zavala: They held Zumba classes at Holy Family, and I thought, "Wow, this is pretty cool that they're hosting Zumba classes at church!" I first went to Holy Family for Zumba classes, two or three times a week for about a year—but I wanted to go to Mass there, too. My Mom was the main one, though, who wanted to check out Holy Family: She just loves the way that Father Jayme preaches. Different priests preach in different ways, and she really loves how Father Jayme does it!

I remember the first time that I visited Holy Family for Mass. I felt overjoyed to find Holy Family and to listen to Father Jayme again. When I saw him, I said, "Praise the Lord!" It was just all so amazing that he was creating a new church! That was in 2012, when we were still on Lava Hill Road. Before that, I was very upset with the Catholic Church, particularly for the things that they did to my Mom and to other Native American peoples: How horrifying to hear of all the bodies of the children that they found buried at Catholic boarding schools! My Mom was lucky: She ran away. She actually got away! The news of all those dead Native American children really upset me and my Mom and my sister, so I quit going to church for quite a bit.

I was so glad to hear that Father Jayme was creating a different type of Catholic church. I thought of it as more non-denominational, and I felt drawn back to the Lord. Holy Family has particularly helped me with my son: He wants to know more about the Lord and about the Bible, and that makes me feel good.

Monica planned Holy Family's first *posada* in 2012, and I invited my boyfriend at the time to dress up as Santa for the event. That was fun, and it just cracked me up to see him dressed as Santa: I could have died laughing!

Holy Family is very similar to other Catholic churches. We go in and praise the Lord, we have the same prayers, and we celebrate the Eucharist. What I admire the most, though, is that Holy Family

welcomes everybody. I don't like it when churches make you feel unwanted or unwelcomed. I recently went back to Cristo Rey, and one woman, who lives across the street, asked me where I've been. I told her that I've been coming to Holy Family for a while, and she replied, "Don't you know: That's *not* a church?" I couldn't believe my ears. I said, "What? Why do you say that? It *is* a church—but I'm not going to argue with you about it here…in a church!"

Holy Family is a very welcoming church. You feel right at home. Everyone is ready to meet you and greet you, and you feel welcomed home!

I Love Our Church!

Sister Maria (Heather) Lucas, O.S.B.



I was born and raised in Hawaii, and I moved to the mainland when I was 21. I went to nursing school in Savannah, Georgia, and I ended up in Texas in 2002—because my mom is here. For 22 years, I've worked as a registered nurse in emergency and cardiac care.

I was born Catholic, and I was baptized at two months old. At age 15, I stopped regularly going to church—and I only just started going back to Church at age 45! My mom spent a lot of her life serving the Catholic Church. She did what she was supposed to do: She got married and had kids—but she also knew from the time she hit puberty that she was gay. When she finally decided to live her truth, the Roman Catholic Church excluded her. We continued trying to go to Mass for a while after she was open with us, but it got really weird—so I didn't want to go anymore.

I found Holy Family by googling progressive Catholic churches in Austin. Then I called Father Jayme. I wanted to receive the Eucharist and be confirmed—but I also wanted to make sure that

I wasn't going to break any church rules. A lot of people have to lie to their churches, but I wanted to be honest about my 21-year relationship with Rob. I am divorced, and he is divorced, and we are living together. I wanted to make sure that was okay in the church that I attended.

After speaking with Father Jayme, I decided to come by. Deacon Stephen was the first person to really reach out and welcome me. That was really special.

Holy Family has been so good for me. It makes me continue to want to come back. I love our church! It has made me feel good about the Church again. Many people in the Roman Catholic Church receive the sacraments but are secretive about whatever's going on in their lives that the Roman Catholic Church doesn't agree with. I think that's wrong. Holy Family is a place where I can go and I don't have to feel weird about living with the man I love, even though I'm not married to him—and I'm not made to feel like I'm breaking any rules. Instead, I'm a welcomed part of the community.

I have attended the bible study, rosary and theological institute at Holy Family and it is really enlightening. It's exciting to study the bible with a group of people and to listen to their ideas!

In the last couple of years, I started going with Deacon Stephen to visit a local nursing home, where we pray the rosary with residents and administer the Eucharist. They haven't had any Catholic services during the past couple of years, so they were excited to see us! Many of them have forgotten how to pray the rosary, so it's fun to teach them again. I learned to pray the rosary when I was young, but I've really become more attached to it during the last four or five years. Once we started praying it as a group, praying the rosary began to become more routine for me. I initially prayed the rosary for the holy souls in purgatory, especially during the month of November.

My Confirmation at Holy Family in October 2022 was amazing. Becky Saenz and Terry Ann Caballero do so much for the church, and I so appreciate them, and for my Confirmation they put together a luncheon with a really nice cake. Gloria Nieto was taking a class in flower arranging, and I joked with her that I

wanted her to make me a Hawaiian Haku lei if I ever got married—and she created a Haku lei for my Confirmation! I was a little worried because I chose to dress in blue for my Confirmation, to honor Mary, and Gloria's lei was red and white—which was perfect. It tied into the ceremony and made it even more special! Becky was my Confirmation sponsor, and she offered to help with anything I needed, or to talk with me about anything before the ceremony.

Coming to Holy Family has been a very positive experience. Holy Family has been very welcoming to me, and has made me feel very at home. I feel excited to come to Holy Family. It's a really special place, and I get my spiritual motivation there!

We Are Impressed With the Hard Work That So Many of Your People Do

Lynn & Rita (Staton) Luedecke



Rita: We were born and raised in Gonzales, Texas. We were both pretty faithful churchgoers as children. Lynn was raised Lutheran. I was raised Catholic, at St. James Catholic Church in Gonzales, and I became a Lutheran when I was about 20, after we married.

Lynn: My mother made me get up and go to church every Sunday morning, so I went eight to ten years without missing a Sunday!

Rita: Jobs were scarce in Gonzales, so we moved to Austin, where we lived off South Congress and went to St. John Lutheran Church. In 1980, we moved to Del Valle and found Salem Lutheran Church—and we've been with Salem ever since! I've been the church's treasurer since 2004, and Lynn has been on and off the church council for most of those 40

years. They grabbed us as soon as we got there! I taught Sunday school.

Lynn: The demographics have changed tremendously around Salem during these 40 years. When we first joined Salem, there were a lot of farmers and ranchers out here. Some of them were German or Swedish. Others were African-American or Hispanic. Salem was the German church, established in 1888, and it was common for Lutheran churches at that time to have cemeteries. If you go to Elroy, you'll find another Lutheran cemetery.

Rita: They were the Swedish church.

Lynn: They moved into town and became Prince of Peace Lutheran Church. Many of the children on the farms out here moved away, and as the farmers aged, they ended up selling their farms. As a result, there's a lot of development out here.

Rita: When Holy Family first came to us in 2017, Pastor Laura Lincoln was here at Salem. Prior to that we always had a full-time or part-time pastor.

Lynn: Laura wasn't a real pastor. She was more like a chaplain…

Rita: …or an intern. After our service one Sunday, six of us were sitting in the vestibule of the church, having our monthly church council meeting. Steve Bohmer was our president then, and his wife, Tracy, was on the council, too. I was on the council, and Pastor Laura was there with us. And Andy Cantu just walked in! He said something to the effect of, "I saw the cars out there, and I just wanted to come in and introduce myself and ask y'all if you were interested in sharing your facilities." During that time, we were not too healthy financially, so we told him we'd think about it and get back to him. He only stayed maybe 15 minutes, talking to us and telling us about your congregation, and how you had lost your lease. After he left, we talked about it, and we thought it was a pretty good idea. And we went from there!

Lynn: When you've got Lutherans and Catholics, of course you're going to have some opposition, but the vast majority of us felt it was a good idea and a Christian thing to do to offer some help to Holy Family. If anyone is struggling, we have

to help them out, if we can! Lutherans and Catholics are certainly different, but a lot of the basics are the same. A lot of our prayers are the same. Our church calendars are the same. A whole host of the fundamentals are the same.

Rita: Of course, we don't revere the Virgin Mary in the same way Catholics do. We don't pray to her.

Lynn: We pray directly to Jesus Christ. We consider Mary to be more of a normal lady. Catholics also have a different hierarchy and a lot of church doctrines that the Lutheran Church doesn't have. So, there are differences—but we all have the same goal! Of course, Martin Luther was a Catholic priest!

Rita: And he didn't want the church to be named after him!

Lynn: He never wanted to establish a separate church. There was a lot of sinful activity going on in Rome at that time, and he wanted to reform the Church!

Rita: Occasionally, we've enjoyed Holy Family's breakfast, and we enjoy Holy Family's *jamaicas*.

Lynn: For the most part, our Salem congregation is more receptive now to Holy Family, and we appreciate how Holy Family has helped to do things that need to get done around the church.

Rita: Congratulations to Holy Family on its 12th anniversary! We've enjoyed meeting you and getting to know you all, and we are impressed with the hard work that so many of your people do. I can't believe that we've been partnering for nearly seven years now!

Lynn: We are more alike than we are different!

A Lot of People Responded to Holy Family, and Holy Family Responded to the People!

Most Rev. John Luft



I was born in San Antonio, Texas, where I was baptized at St. Mary Magdalene Catholic Church, in the Archdiocese of San Antonio, and raised in the Roman Catholic Church. I was in state care for a big part of my childhood, and I was later adopted, so I don't remember receiving my First Communion or Confirmation.

Right before going into state care, I was evangelized by a bible church, and I became an evangelical Christian. I was "rebaptized" and all that. In state care, two of my foster parents were itinerant elders or ministers in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, so I attended an AME Church from age 13 to 16. After that, I was in a foster home where the wife was Baptist and the husband was Episcopalian, so I alternated between the Baptist Church, the Episcopal Church, and the AME Church. Every Sunday was a different service! I liked and appreciated all of them, but I maintained my membership in the AME Church, where I discerned my vocation to ministry. I did a lot of work under Reverend C.J. Walker, the pastor of Walker Temple AME in San Antonio. Then, as a young adult, my adoptive father was Jewish, and my adoptive mother was Catholic—and for some reason, they settled on the Baptist Church, so I joined the First Baptist Church of San Antonio, became an active Southern Baptist, and became licensed and ordained. I served as a minister of administration, an associate pastor, and as a delegate to the convention at the Baptist University of the Americas. When it came time to go to college, I chose our convention university for biblical and theological studies and pastoral ministry. I was a good Baptist until I realized that I was gay and that Baptists were not accepting of me. I joined a liberal group of Baptists and transferred my membership to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in San Antonio. For my graduate

studies, I decided to return to my Catholic roots, so I hopped on a plane and flew to the Washington Theological Union in Washington, D.C. As a Baptist minister, I was surprised that they accepted me into their program! I enrolled in the M.A. in theology, and I was working on my thesis in Baptist sacramentality. Dr. Theresa Koernke, a Sister of Notre Dame, said that I was wasting my time. The Union closed before I received my degree, but the Franciscans there introduced me to Dignity and to Independent Catholicism, believe it or not. I transferred to Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth. As a Baptist minister, I never joined the Catholic Church, but, after I married, my husband and I decided that we needed a faith that was going to unite our family. Since he was already Catholic, and I had a desire to return to the Catholic faith, we looked up Independent Catholicism.

I found Holy Family years ago, through YouTube, where I watched a lot of Father Jayme's videos from the Holy Family Theological Institute. I looked for a jurisdiction and found the United American Catholic Church (UACC), under Bishop Tony Hash of Virginia. I was received into the Catholic faith and became a deacon and priest. Bishop Hash said, "We need a parish in Fort Worth." I said, "I'm a clinical chaplain by education and training!" I had no desire to be a parish priest—but if there was anything that Donald Cardinal Wuerl taught us before he closed down the Union, it was the need to be obedient to Holy Mother Church!

St. Anne's in Fort Worth was part of the UACC until the pandemic, when I brought in a deacon candidate who was already formed by the Roman Catholic Church. Bishop Hash decided to tack on several things to his formation. We disagreed, Bishop Hash removed his faculties, and St. Anne's severed its relationship with the UACC. I incardinated into the Orthodox-Catholic Church of America, but I left them shortly thereafter because they had clergy on their roster with credible accusations of sexual abuse—and we didn't want to be part of that. During the COVID pandemic, our governing council elected me bishop, and we asked Bishop Jordan Morgan and another bishop to consecrate me.

From the first time that I stumbled onto Holy Family on social media, I thought, "This is cool. It's a functioning parish, with lots of videos to watch and learn from." I thought those videos were

the best thing since sliced bread. I wished that we had such well-formed parishes in Fort Worth or San Antonio.

My first visit to Holy Family was in May 2022, when Father Jayme hosted a conference on the Philippine Independent Church at Holy Family. We had been burned by jurisdictions and bishops and priests, so I was intrigued with the fact that Holy Family had no longer associated with a jurisdiction for over three years. I told Father Brett Banks, "Why don't we go to this conference and meet people, and see what it's like?" And I'm glad we did! We met a bunch of clergy from the Independent Sacramental Movement (ISM) at that conference. We got to meet Father Jayme and the people at Holy Family, and we found that Holy Family is what a parish should be: welcoming! Holy Family had programming and authenticity—and I really liked that. I tell most folks that Holy Family is a working model of an Independent Catholic parish—the type that we should strive to be, each in our own way.

During that visit, I attended the diaconate ordination of Deacon Stephen Rodriguez, and Father Jayme asked me to celebrate the sacrament of Confirmation at the conclusion of that conference. My entire liturgical formation at the Washington Theological Union was based on the Roman Missal, third edition, so praying the second edition at Holy Family was definitely something I remember. Holy Family has a very strong Vatican II emphasis and theology.

That celebration of Confirmation was one of the best experiences I have had as a bishop. Whereas a lot of Roman parishes put in place a lot of requirements that hinder folks, Holy Family is more pastoral than canonical. Holy Family really takes to heart the pastoral nature of the Church and of the sacraments. The celebration was filled with common, everyday people, and I really resonate with that—the type of people I come from and whom I serve in Fort Worth. The service wasn't pretentious at all, and I didn't sense that we were aiming for perfection. Instead, there was a feeling of community.

I guess I must have done okay—since Father Jayme invited me back for Confirmations in October 2022. By then, I knew some of the main leaders and other clergy at Holy Family, so I was even more comfortable at Holy Family the second time around. I had

that same feeling that Holy Family is community-driven: A lot of people responded to Holy Family, and Holy Family responded to the people! Both experiences were good.

I've come back to Holy Family various times, at Father Jayme's invitation. I like visiting Holy Family. It feels good to enjoy camaraderie and fellowship with other Independent Catholic people and clergy. I can honestly say that Holy Family has been the healthiest experience I've had in the ISM.

Holy Family has laity—and the laity are involved! This is not always the case in many ISM "parishes." The laity at Holy Family participate in the parish's life. They spread word of it on social media. Volunteers, like Becky Saenz and Terry Ann Caballero, help keep things going. And, as a parish, they introduce people to Independent Catholicism and Independent Catholic life. I'm impressed with the people at Holy Family: They're not just "blind sheep." They're informed, and they are integral in carrying out the mission of the local parish! That impressed me. It makes me feel good about the Independent Catholic movement. In my experience, you don't find that very often in Independent Catholic parishes.

Father Brett Banks is part of our Independent Catholic Ordinariate. He served with me in Fort Worth. When he took another job in Georgetown last year, I encouraged him to be part of an active community, like Holy Family. The theology of the Church teaches us that we belong in community, rather than wandering alone and offering daily Mass by ourselves in our own chapels. I knew that Holy Family would be a good place for Father Brett to learn, grow and serve, and I had no hesitation recommending that he be part of Holy Family.

I have also been supportive of Father Libardo Rocha and his ministry at Saint Jude Thaddeus Independent Catholic Church in Niederwald. I never saw myself as intentionally creating a bridge between Holy Family and Saint Jude, but I have enjoyed visiting and being supportive of both communities.

The ISM is very fractured, with several jurisdictions. It's hard to build bridges and bring people together. I've tried it in Dallas and Fort Worth, and it's like herding cats! For that reason, I enjoyed the retreat that Father Mike hosted in New York in February 2023. It

allowed me to connect with other clergy—and I wouldn't have made that connection to Father Mike had I not come to Holy Family last year! As a result, we're creating a network of people that we can reach out to in the ISM. As I continue to reach out to people, Holy Family is my barometer: I now compare the connection and participation of people in other communities to Holy Family! Holy Family is an example for the larger Independent Catholic movement, and we might all learn something from a community like Holy Family. It's a model for the rest of the ISM!

Holy Family is a healthy, committed, Catholic parish that is truly inviting and welcoming of all who come to it. And even when you don't come, Holy Family reaches out to you. That makes a difference in the world and in our local communities, especially for people who don't know where to go.

Congratulations, Holy Family on 12 years! That's no small feat in the ISM. It is my hope and dream that Holy Family will be around for the next 12-plus years. Holy Family has a good, solid foundation to build on, and I hope it's around for a very long time!

It's Like Being in Middle School with Your Girlfriends

Marie (Hernandez) Luna



I was born in Houston and came to Austin as an infant. I went to Palm Elementary through third or fourth grade, then we moved to the westside, where I attended Pease. Then I went to O. Henry Middle School, and then to Austin High School.

As a child, I went with my grandmother and my aunt to Guadalupe Church, and then St. Mary's. I received my First Communion and Confirmation at Guadalupe. We went to *doctrina* there at Guadalupe. My cousin,

Joe, would pick us up, and John Treviño, who later became a city council member, also picked us up, took us to church, then brought us home. When we lived on West Tenth, my sister and I walked to St. Mary's.

After Abel and I got married, I continued to attend St. Mary's with my aunt Maggie and uncle Fred. People thought they were my parents. I wanted Abel to come with me, but this was shortly after his mother had passed away, and he wouldn't go. Then, when my son, James, was born, I went to church with him, and I worried that people thought that I had a child, but no husband! Beginning in 1987, I went to San José, and I also attended their adoration of the Blessed Sacrament for one hour a week. I did that for years.

I learned about Holy Family through Deacon John Limon. When Abel's brother, Rudy, died, Father Jayme presided over the service. That's when Abel and I met him. The first time I saw Father Jayme, I started to cry: He looked just like my son, "Dano," on the altar! I wanted to say hello to him after Mass, when he was standing outside greeting people, but my heart was beating so fast. It might sound ridiculous, but every time I see Father Jayme, it's as if Dano is reminding me, "Mom, I'm here!"

Then Deacon John was ordained, and we attended his ordination at Holy Family. I knew Deacon John Limon from the time that I met Abel. He and his former wife, Dorothy, and I went to school together. I miss Deacon John's jolliness and sense of humor.

From the first time I went to Holy Family, I thought, "Everybody is so nice and so friendly here!" Holy Family wasn't like some churches, where you can go forever and people still don't talk to you or seem friendly. Holy Family was a whole different thing. Abel knew a lot of people at Holy Family, and I got to meet a lot of people. It was wonderful. I loved it. It felt like family—just like the name, Holy Family! Everyone accepts you and talks to you. We say good morning to each other, and when the Cuevas sisters say hello to me, it's like being in middle school with your girlfriends—getting together and everyone's excited! There aren't people who look the other way, or who don't make you feel welcomed.

I loved how we had a weekly Sunday breakfast at the old church on Lava Hill Road. We got to meet and talk to more people and see

what's going on with them, and I just enjoyed that. At first, I was amazed: All these people prepared all this food, and we sat down, and there was so much interaction. Wow! I really loved and looked forward to that every week. It was wonderful, and I loved being there. And they also had special meals on special occasions, like Thanksgiving and the Fourth of July.

The way that Becky, Terry and Rafaela decorated the church was just so lovely and welcoming. And we had a little store inside the entrance to the church, with all sorts of goodies, like rosaries and other things. I always enjoyed going to Holy Family, and Abel did, too. It's just like being at home!

Abel has also gotten involved and has shared his talent of carpentry with Holy Family. Someone had approached him about building a new altar and ambo for Holy Family, as well as an altar and pedestal for the image of the Holy Family in our Blessed Sacrament chapel. I told Abel, "Do you realize that if you make something for the church, it's going to be in the church forever? The people will always see your work, and God will always see the work you did for the church. The people might not know that you did that, but God will know!" I can't even explain how beautiful those pieces are! And they're there in the church! I'm so happy that he did that—and I have photos from when he was making them. He doesn't express a lot of belief in God, but I'm so proud of him for doing that—and I'm so excited and glad that Holy Family has those beautiful pieces of furniture.

Then COVID came, and I'm on oxygen now. I'm trying to walk and get strength back in my legs—so I miss going to Holy Family now. I miss the people, the camaraderie, and just gathering together, talking and catching up. I miss Mario and María Cruz. I miss Leonard and Waldine Gonzales, and Leonard continues to text us positive messages. Lynett Martinez always says things that make us smile and laugh. I miss so many people at Holy Family, and I wish that I could go back! I miss Mary Alice Cantu and Rosa Gil and all the people who attended Holy Family with us in that old church. I miss Genaro Leal and Ignacio Loredo, and Paul Alcala who always sat in a wooden chair in the church, when the rest of us sat on metal folding chairs. I miss so many good memories!

I tell people who haven't gone to Holy Family that everybody is so welcoming and friendly there. I say, "You're going to love it! You'll love the sermons, and you'll love the way you feel." Just thinking about Holy Family, I can feel those feelings. It's overwhelming to think just how wonderful it is to be there. It's a great feeling, and I love seeing all the people at Holy Family!

I Fell in Love with Holy Family— and I Was Learning About the Bible!

Vincent Maldonado



I was born and raised right here in Austin, Texas. I went to Brooke Elementary, then to Martin Junior High for a week before the district started bussing—and I was bussed to Bedichek Junior High. As a result of bussing, I went to David Crocket High School in South Austin, where I graduated in 1984.

I was baptized as a child at my dad's church, Cristo Rey, and I made my First Communion at my mom's church, Santa Julia. After we moved south, I made my Confirmation at St. Ignatius. According to my parents, Pedro "Pinky" Maldonado and María Gloria (Castillo) Maldonado, people said that we couldn't go back to Cristo Rey or Santa Julia because we lived in South Austin.

Before Holy Family, I basically went to church on Sundays, and I sometimes helped out my younger sister, "JoJo"—JoAnn—who was involved at Cristo Rey.

I got married at a young age, and we divorced, and one priest at Cristo Rey told me I couldn't take the host anymore. When I went up, he gave me a blessing, and after Mass he told me that, according to Catholic law, I couldn't receive Communion because I was divorced. I didn't know that. After that, I basically left the Church. I went to other churches—like Baptist and Methodist

churches—then I stopped going to church for a long time. After a time of transition at Cristo Rey, JoAnn told me that Father Roy and Father Jayme had started a new church. She said, "Why don't you go by there?" She went to Holy Family before I did. I hesitated for six weeks. When I finally went to Holy Family in 2014 or 2015, it felt like home. When I walked in the door, people hugged me and welcomed me, and I knew a lot of people from Cristo Rey.

When I arrived outside the church for the first time, I thought, "This is a church? I think I have the wrong address!" I deejayed a wedding at that dance hall one time! I even called JoJo to ask, "Did you give me the right address?" I went alone that first Sunday, then the next Sunday, I took mom, and my mom said, "I want to keep coming here!" She always enjoyed Father Jayme and his homilies, and she has always had a lot of respect for Father Roy—who was a deacon at that time. She felt really at home with both of them there. Father Roy was a longtime friend of my dad. They grew up together in East Austin. They were part of the same "gang" of really close friends. Because of Father Roy's association with the battered women's shelter, he helped JoJo a couple of times, and JoJo helped him, too, after his daughter, Michelle, was killed.

I kept coming back to Holy Family because I didn't have to question whether I should take the host or drink the wine. No one asked about the things I've done in life. I walked in, and the message was: We are all welcomed, no matter what our background is.

Raised as a traditional Catholic, I always saw the bible on our living room table, so I was intrigued by Holy Family's bible study. Most Catholics don't open the bible—but we do at Holy Family! We didn't usually talk about religion at my old workplace, but one day we had a little discussion, and I said, "Catholics read the bible—or at least in our church, we do. We're encouraged to read the bible!" I remember they thought that was a joke! We call it "the good Book"—and if you read it, it really is good!

At the same time, I met Christopher Leal and saw what he did as an altar server, and I asked him if I could help. And I asked Father Jayme and Father Roy, and they said yes, and that's how I got involved with the church. I fell in love with Holy Family—and I was learning about the Bible! I was very interested in becoming a

deacon, but, as an aspirant, I know that I'll be ready when I'm ready.

Father Roy once saw pictures of me playing Santa Claus at parties, so he asked me to be Santa Claus at Holy Family—so I've done that for a long time. I like doing that for the kids.

Being part of Independent Catholicism has helped me see the stronghold that the Roman Catholic Church and its rules have on people. Some people avoid the Catholic Church like they avoid people with COVID! Here at Holy Family, we treat people as we want to be treated. We walk the straight line with Jesus, who treated everyone with love. We love and accept everyone! We say that our doors are open to all—and they really are!

I was never a bad kid, but I was married and divorced—and I was made to feel that I was bad. That really hit home when I was told I couldn't receive Communion in the Roman Catholic Church. I still believed in God, but I walked away from religion. I'm a prime example of what Holy Family does for people: I can now go to church and receive the host, and it rejuvenates me for the whole week. I have found a family with Holy Family and the Independent Catholic movement!

I Never Felt that It Was Not a 'Real Church.' Instead, I Knew It Was Real!

Monica (Dominguez) Manzano



I was born and raised in Austin, Texas. I went to Ridgetop Elementary, Pearce Middle School—which is no longer there—and Reagan High School.

When I was young, I knew that most Hispanics from Mexico are Catholic, but my family went to Ridgetop Baptist Church. I enjoyed going to their Sunday school! Then, when I got older, around age 18, I

started going to St. Augustine Orthodox Church in Pflugerville—so I was part of Independent Catholicism before Holy Family came along! My friend baptized her child at St. Augustine's, and I enjoyed the service—so I started going there. I never went to a Roman Catholic church.

I wanted to help out, so I became the parish secretary at St. Augustine. After I met Ramiro at work, I invited him to church, and we started going to church together. Then he invited his family, and they started going there as well. My little brother and I were baptized at St. Augustine. Ramiro hadn't received his First Communion, so, while we were dating, he and I received our First Communion and Confirmation at St. Augustine. We were married by a justice of the peace, but we continued going to St. Augustine until we moved to Lockhart at the end of 2007. Father Jerry Galaviz is still the priest at St. Augustine, and I go there for their celebration of the Virgin Mary every December 12.

After we moved to Lockhart, we continued to drive to Pflugerville for church, because St. Augustine was our church, but then we started to look for a closer church. Because of family, we baptized our son, Marco, in the Roman Catholic Church, and we decided to baptize our daughter, Alina, at San Francisco Javier Church. That church was just too crowded, though, and I couldn't understand the priests in Spanish or English, so we stopped going to San Francisco.

Then, when I became a Zumba instructor, I was looking for a place to teach Zumba classes. In July 2012, I drove down Lava Hill Road, to see what the large building was on that road. I saw the sign: *Los Dos Laredos*. It was an event center. I got out of my car and looked through the window. I could see a sign inside with the Mass schedule—and I thought, "That's weird: Only Catholics use the word 'Mass!'" There was no sign outside the building, saying that it was a church. There was a white trailer on the side of the building, so I knocked on the door. A lady answered. I asked, "Is this a church or an event hall?" She told me, "both." I asked, "What kind of church is this?" She said, "Catholic." I thought, "Really?" I asked her the name, and she said, "Holy Family." I went back to my car and googled it—and I found Holy Family's ad in the *Austin American-Statesman*, with the church's address, phone number and

Mass schedule. I told Ramiro, "I found a church—and I'm going to check it out." I went to Mass that Sunday. Because Mass was held in the back room at that time, I remember going in and wondering, "Where's the Mass?" There was nothing in the front room, inside the front door! I walked to the back room and saw how it was set up. I thought, "*Está comenzando*. This church is just starting." I knew from the start that I would fit in there—and that I could help! I stayed for the whole Mass, and Father Jayme gave the service. I remember meeting Roy and a few other people. And I really loved the service. I went home and told Ramiro, "You have to check out this church: The priest there is amazing!"

I took my husband and kids the following Sunday, and they enjoyed it. Before Mass, Father Jayme talked about being an Independent Catholic church—and that didn't bother me because I came from an independent church! I'm very familiar with independent churches, so I never looked at Holy Family as "different." I felt like I was at home. At that time, Father Jayme hosted Pastoral Council meetings at people's houses, and I told him I wanted to go and that I wanted to help. They invited me, and the rest is history. For a long time, I was the only person from the Spanish Mass on the Pastoral Council, so I passed on information from those meetings to Spanish-speaking families.

We kept going back. We enjoyed the way Father Jayme gave Mass. Everyone greeted us. Because I came from an independent church, it didn't feel weird at all. I never felt that it was not a "real church." Instead, I knew it was real! I didn't have that "baggage." The fact that Father Jayme left Cristo Rey and started Holy Family never bothered me, not even for a second. Because of my work at St. Augustine, I already knew the backlash that independent churches take.

At first, I volunteered to register people for sacraments after the Spanish Mass, and people called me or came to me to register. When the first *jamaica* came around, I helped recruit volunteers from the Spanish Mass. I invited other Zumba instructors, and we hosted a fundraiser for the church. I helped with Holy Family's first *posada*, and I also volunteered at Holy Family's booth at the flea market—for advertising! Father Jayme was looking for ideas on how to spread word of Holy Family, and I suggested that we

set up a booth at the flea market to share information and brochures on the church. I also attended the Pride parade with Holy Family.

Then, in 2019, I received a phone call from Father Jayme. He shared that Father Libardo was going to establish a parish mission at a church in Niederwald, near our home. Father Jayme asked if I could help that endeavor, and I said yes. Father Libardo and I met with the pastor of the church, to see if they would be willing to rent the church, and Holy Family paid the $500 per month rent for a few months until we built up resources to sustain what we called *San Judas Tadeo Iglesia Católica Independiente* (St. Jude Thaddeus Independent Catholic Church). We opened in August 2019, then COVID struck seven months later, in March 2020. COVID! It wasn't easy trying to open a church during COVID—and then Father Libardo got COVID at the end of 2020.

I still refer Holy Family to people who need *quinceañeras* or blessings. I tell them: If you go to Holy Family, you'll feel exactly what it is: a family! It's a very close community, and you'll enjoy the service!

It Was Like a Real Close-knit Family

Herbert Martinez



I was born in Austin, and my family lived on Sabine Street, along Waller Creek, between Red River and I35. When I was three or four, we moved further east, to Broadway, in East Austin. I lived there until I got married and moved south. I attended Metz and Brooke Elementaries, Allan Junior High and Johnston High School.

I made my First Communion and Confirmation at Cristo Rey. I enjoyed going to church because I got to cut up a lot! Father Victor Goertz was a pretty good influence, and I asked him at some point

if he thought that I could become a priest. He said, "Well, you're a little young for that right now—but we're starting a group of teenagers to go out into the community and take a census"—and he thought that might be a good start. I quickly gave up that idea!

After I quit school at age 16, I went into the service one month after I turned 17. I remember that I wrote on the applicant that I hadn't graduated—but the recruiter whited that out and wrote "graduate." I received my GED while I was stationed in Okinawa. I spent three and a half years in the military and got out before I was legally able to drink.

I came home on leave in 1964, and I met Susie on a blind date. After that, I couldn't wait to get out of the military! If I hadn't met Susie, I'd probably still be in the service. I got out of the service in July 1965, and I married Susie in July 1967 at San José, where we went for years after that. I was also part of the Knights of Columbus there. After that, we went to St. John Neumann and St. Catherine. And then, when Father Jayme started his church, we went there!

Susie and I were part of Holy Family from the very first Sunday. We received an email from Father Jayme, inviting us to a little get-together at his home on a Sunday. We went, we prayed, and we kept going every Sunday. We just felt like we were at home. We found what we were really looking for. It was like a real close-knit family. We started having Masses, and we grew!

Susie and I made some really good friends there at Holy Family. We all grew up in East Austin, but we were different ages, and we hung around with different people. We continue to go out together, and we call ourselves "the church group": Susie and me, Leonard and Waldine Gonzales, Louis and Rita Cuevas, Ramiro and Mary Alice Guzman, and John and Estela Zavala. We all met at Holy Family—and many of them were there from the beginning as well.

I remember our first Masses at Father Jayme's home on Willow Street. Rather than use hosts, we passed around a loaf of bread. We started having a little collection to defray the cost of the tacos that we had after Mass. It was like a big family!

I remember when we first moved to Lava Hill Road: That dance hall was a wide-open space, and we set up chairs and moved them

around. We tried one configuration—kind of like a circle—then we eventually formed lines of chairs. Some of us started greeting people at the door: Leonard and myself, then Louis Cuevas. We were all greeters and ushers.

It started just by us standing at the door, greeting people as they came in. Then Diana and Angie Coy printed literature that we could share with people. Then we helped take up the collection.

Susie and I always sat in the front row, and Susie starting counting the collections after Mass with Irene Loredo Guerra—so she'd head out of church one way, and I'd head out another, to greet folks.

Outside of Mass, we started having meetings. I remember that we met at Mary Lou Piña's home. We also began hosting Holy Family's theological institute at our office in South Austin. We did that for three years.

We're not involved in Holy Family like we used to be. The big issue with me is that I'm pro-life. I remember greeting people one Sunday before Mass in 2015, when Father Jayme said, "Who are we to tell a woman what she can do with her body?" That hit me, and I told Susie, "Father Jayme is evidently pro-choice, and I can't support a church like that." That was it for us at Holy Family.

I tell people that Father Jayme is the most knowledgeable person about the Catholic Church and the Bible, and I enjoyed those classes that we used to have across the hall from our office. I got a lot from that—but what steered me away was that Father Jayme was pro-choice, versus pro-life.

Holy Family deepened my faith in God, and I like the fact that Holy Family gives the sacraments to certain people, especially to people who were married and are divorced, or who are living together or in same-sex marriages. Holy Family is a very open church: It opens its doors and arms to each and every person who want to pray, hear the Word, and receive the sacraments. Other churches are not the same; they're not as open or inclusive. There's only one issue with which I totally disagree.

Holy Family Is For Us!

Lynett (Arellano) Martinez Banda



My religious journey started off typical, but has changed in a huge way over time. I was born in Austin, at Brackenridge Hospital, in 1968. I was raised in the Eastside: first near Zaragoza then on Rainey Street, then on East First Street. (I'm an Austinite, so it'll always be East First Street, instead of Ceasar Chavez, for me!) During my teenage years, we moved to South Austin, then to Oak Hill, then to Menchaca. I was part of the busing system back in the late 1980's, so, even though we lived in Oak Hill, I was bused every day to Johnston. It was a long bus ride!

I was baptized at Cristo Rey. We were parishioners there until we moved south. Instead of commuting east, we registered at San José. When I was a young girl, Mom and I always sat in the very first pew in church. When I was growing up, going to church felt like something that I was forced to do. I didn't really have a choice. I did the whole CCD thing, and I received all my sacraments while at San José.

Fast-forward after high school, I joined the United States Air Force and was stationed at Hurlburt Air Force Base in Florida. The closest church was far from my home, and the long work hours hindered me from going to Mass regularly. Those were the longest four years! My mom was surprised that when I returned home from my tour, I asked, "Where are we going to church now?" There wasn't a need to force me to go to church. I was thirsty for God's Word! I started attending Cristo Rey again.

For the longest time, we were parishioners at Cristo Rey. My family and I were there when Father Jayme first came to Cristo Rey—and we all fell in love with him then. He shared God's Word in a way that really left us nourished. When he left, our family was left with a void. We found ourselves jumping around from church

to church. We attended Our Lady of Guadalupe, Santa Julia, Dolores, St. Ignatius, and San José. When I say "we jumped around," we *really* jumped around! Unfortunately, we weren't feeling any real connection anywhere. We felt homeless.

Then, one Saturday, we ran into Rosa Gill at a *quinceañera*. She gave me the best news ever: Father Jayme was spreading the word and pulling together Holy Family on Lava Hill Road! Rosa explained that Holy Family wasn't Roman Catholic; it was American Catholic. I had no idea what that meant, but I was curious. I looked into it, and I discovered that many of the problems that I had for years with the Roman Catholic Church—and all the judgment I felt—were not issues in the American Catholic Church. That was simply amazing to me!

Mom and I agreed to visit Lava Hill Road and check things out. I remember counting about 35 people that first Sunday. We continued to come back every Sunday: Even on the days when the heating or AC were on the blink, we were there! Getting my fill of God's Word is more important to me than the infrastructure around me. I don't care if we celebrate Mass outside—which we've done. It doesn't matter to me.

As a woman in the Roman Catholic Church, I felt we were "beneath" men. Men were placed on pedestals, while women were around, when convenient. I personally felt judged for being a divorcee.

The people of Holy Family are generally good-hearted people. The smiles, the hugs, and the energy they radiate are simply amazing! Going to Mass is something I look forward to every week!

I'm not going to lie: Mom and I initially received backlash for our choice to make Holy Family our home! One individual told my mom, "Father Jayme isn't a priest anymore!" My mom agreed to disagree. A family member told me, "I respect your decision to go there, but I hope that you'll come to your senses and come back to the Roman Catholic Church!" Needless to say, I didn't entertain the nonsense.

From the get-go, I was welcomed with open arms at Holy Family. I finally felt like I was filled with God's good Word! When we were "church shopping," you wouldn't believe how many

times we couldn't understand what Mass was about. Father Jayme, on the other hand, articulates his words well. I can take the homily with me for the week, and I have that warmhearted feeling as soon as I walk out!

How is it that I became a lector? I'm one of the "early birds" at Holy Family: I always try to get to church early. One Sunday, Becky Saenz asked if I could read scripture at Mass. I thought to myself, "I don't know if I can do this." It had been a minute since I had any sort of audience *per se*. Growing up, I was involved in drama and choir, and several years ago I presented quality training at my work place, but I couldn't say no to Becky. Instead, I felt honored by the invitation. Apparently, I did okay, because I had numerous comments, like, "I just love the way you read!" and "I really enjoyed hearing you!" There was my mom, right beside me, saying, "I taught her everything she knows!" Ever since then, I've been blessed to be involved in ministry.

During COVID, we lost a couple of church members, and it weighed heavily on my heart, but as a parish, we lifted one another up. Like our church's name, we're actually a family. We are brothers and sisters in Christ!

I especially love our *jamaicas* (even though it's been a minute), when everybody interacts. It's not just little groups of people over here or over there. We all interact, and we dance! Even Father Jayme runs onto the dance floor for the *macarena*! I laugh just thinking about the leader of my church getting out there and leading the *macarena*. We have a fun leader!

Recently, we had a visitor, Karen, from out-of-state. She mentioned she had Googled us. She was intrigued. She, too, was raised as a Roman Catholic. I welcomed her and said to her, "We're Catholics who do not judge." It's true! At Holy Family, we don't judge you based on your gender, skin color, background, who you love, or what you wear.

Holy Family has been nothing but a blessing to me and mine! Holy Family is for us!

Yes, Holy Family, Y'all Are Saints!

Hon. Rev. Dr. Jayme Mathias



I'm fond of saying that "I come from the corn fields of Ohio, to the corn tortillas of Texas." I hail from the village of New Riegel, a community of Catholic immigrants largely from Germany, Luxembourg and Belgium, where the Catholic roots were so deep that the local public schools rented its elementary school facility from the local Catholic church, and we were bused early each morning, so that we could daily receive 30 minutes of religious education in our classrooms or attend Mass at the church beside our school. There in the middle of the corn fields, three Catholic parishes were built some two to three miles apart,: St. Boniface for German-speaking immigrants, St. Nicholas for French-speaking Belgian immigrants, and Ss. Peter and Paul for the Luxembourgish-speaking Luxembourger immigrants. It seems everyone is related in those parts, so my ancestors are largely Belgian, German and Luxembourger.

My parents, David and Rose (Reinhart) Mathias bought the 1862 two-story, brick rectory beside St. Nicholas Catholic Church in nearby "Frenchtown," where my great great great great grandfather, Belgian immigrant Louis Mathaÿ (known as Lewis Mathias in the U.S.), and his second wife, Josephine (Goshe) Mathias, sold the bishop the land for the church. Both my parents spent part of their childhood in the old rectory: After the church no longer needed it, my maternal grandmother rented it for a few months after the death of my grandfather, then the church sold it to my paternal great grandparents, so my father spent a few years of his childhood in the old rectory as well.

Living beside the church and raised in a very Catholic family, my parents always took us to the same Sunday Mass, where we always sat in the same pew, the third from the front, so that we, rambunctious boys, might better see the action of the Mass. One of

my earliest childhood memories, likely at some three years old, is cupping my hands around my eyes, as if holding binoculars, and peering over the pew, at the priest behind the altar some six steps higher. My mother was a religious education teacher and later coordinated the parish's religious education program, and my father trained altar servers: Naturally, I assisted my mother with any artistic needs in preparation for her classes, and my father trained me so well to be a perfect, prayerful "statue" as an altar server, that I remember serving at the altar as a third-grader, feeling my heavy glasses sliding down my nose and trying to get them back up to my eyes by wriggling my face, rather than take my hands from a prayerful pose to adjust them! I didn't last long as an altar server—largely because I quickly became an organist.

When I was in the third grade, my parents enrolled me in piano lessons, then in organ lessons with the local Franciscan nuns, and I started playing the organ at Mass beginning in the sixth grade. The church paid me $4 per Mass for the next six years. When I was a senior in high school, Pastor Ann of Trinity United Church of Christ in nearby McCutchenville invited me to play a weekly Sunday service for her congregation: They paid me $40 per service *and* provided me organ lessons at nearby Heidelberg College. I was over-the-moon by their generosity, and that was my first exposure, as a young man, to female clergy. Unfortunately, as a busy high school senior, I didn't dedicate enough time to organ practice to please the very gifted (and very demanding) music professor, such that my joy for music quickly diminished.

As a high school sophomore, I attended a Teens Encounter Christ retreat, where I met Father Kevin Przybylski, a Conventual Franciscan Friar, who later became an Independent Catholic priest. Father Kevin was a gifted organist and pianist as well, and I was very touched by the community, music and prayer of that retreat experience. At the end of the weekend, Father Kevin pulled me aside and asked, "Have you ever thought about being a priest?" I had not. When I was in the eighth grade, the village attorney visited our class, leaving me to conclude that I wanted to be a lawyer. He was later named a judge. Raised in the era of "The People's Court" of Judge Joseph Wapner, I soon knew that I, too, wanted to be a judge! So, I shared this dream with Father Kevin,

letting him know that I had no illusion of being a priest. He replied: "You can be a priest and a lawyer at the same time!" That vision fueled my decision to explore religious life and ordained ministry in the Church.

I recall breaking the news to my mother. After mulling over the idea while mowing lawns and painting fences that summer, I visited Father Kevin to speak about being a priest *and* a lawyer. I came home to find my mother peeling carrots at the kitchen sink. I told her of the reason for my visit to Father Kevin, and I distinctly remember how she delicately put down the carrot and peeler as the weight of my words sunk in. She spent two years of her youth in a Precious Blood convent—so I often joke about how glad I am that she left the convent!

I accompanied Father Kevin to the Conventual Franciscan house of studies in St. Louis, Missouri for the Easter Triduum of my junior and senior years. Again, the community, music and prayer were so extraordinary that I made the decision to join the Conventual Franciscans at age 18. I studied at St. Louis University for two years, completed my year of novitiate in Arroyo Grande, California, then professed my first (or "simple") vows at age 21.

After two more years in St. Louis, in 1995, I earned two undergraduate degrees, then received my first assignment: Because I was so young, my superiors suggested that I take a year off from studies, for a pastoral experience. They suggested our Conventual Franciscan community at Cristo Rey Catholic Church in Austin, Texas. My maternal grandmother was a big fan of John Wayne and Westerns, so my initial imagined ideas of Austin and Texas in an age before the internet contained hitching posts and tumbleweed!

I arrived in East Austin in 1995, in the middle of a largely Mexican-American community. The Conventual Franciscans had previously sent me to study Spanish in Cuernavaca, Mexico, and I earned a minor in Spanish in St. Louis, so I was somewhat prepared for another "immersion experience"! At age 23, I was assigned to work with youth, to expand the parish's nascent English-language youth ministry, and to create the parish's first Spanish-language youth ministry. In an era when pizza companies did not deliver to East Austin, due to gangs and violence, I

attempted to integrate local gang youth and parish youth, with some success. I lived with Father Larry Mattingly, a former missionary to Central America with a great love for the immigrant community, and with Brother Kerry Guillory, who greatly increased the income of the parish's annual *jamaica* (or festival) and launched the parish's St. Francis of Assisi Joy Group, a ministry to the elderly, homebound and bereaved, in 1991.

That nine-month internship came to an end all too soon, but I was delightfully surprised in 2000, after completing my Master of Divinity in Washington, D.C., to be assigned to Cristo Rey again as a young deacon! I was ordained a priest the next year, on March 10, 2001, by Bishop Gregory Aymond of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Austin, at the Basilica and Shrine of Our Lady of Consolation in Carey, Ohio. This happened just weeks after light was shed on the sexual abuse scandals perpetrated by Roman Catholic clergy for decades, if not centuries. I loved being a priest, but it was certainly demoralizing to read the near-daily headlines of sexual abuse by priests and the many cover-ups by bishops during that first year as a priest.

I enjoyed the great activity of those two initial years of priestly ministry—we baptized over 600 children each year!—but I was also intent on one day being a lawyer. Father Larry encouraged me, suggesting that I expand my ministry as an immigration lawyer. We spoke to our provincial superior, who encouraged my longtime dream as well. I studied for the LSAT, was accepted into five law schools for the Fall of 2023, then, the Spirit threw me a curveball: Only weeks before I was to begin law school, our Conventual Franciscan community was struck with an $18 million lawsuit, as a result of the alleged sexual abuse perpetrated by one of my childhood pastors, leaving our Order without the resources to support my studies.

I had previously agreed to celebrate Mass at San Juan Diego Catholic High School, before leaving for law school. Now knowing that I would *not* be attending law school, I visited the high school's liturgist, to talk about how she wanted to celebrate the school's first Mass of the year. I'm fond of saying, "When the Spirit closes one door, it opens another." As I was speaking with the nun, the school's president walked in, disheartened, and announced that

his Spanish teacher just quit. I jumped at the opportunity, and the school was happy to have me as its new Spanish teacher. After teaching high school Spanish and theology for two years, Bishop Aymond asked me, at age 33, to serve as president of San Juan Diego. I happily obliged for the next four years. Charged with the responsibility of raising $2.5 million per year to keep the high school open, I pursued graduate degrees in Philanthropy and Development, Business Administration, Organizational Leadership and Ethics, and I began my Doctor of Philosophy in Leadership Studies—all at Catholic universities.

After Father Larry departed from Cristo Rey in 2006, a less-than-pastoral priest—one of the few people on earth whom I have judged to be truly evil—was assigned to the parish. He routinely ran people out of the confessional, crying. During a Spanish Mass, he stated that Spanish-speaking immigrants were like cockroaches, coming to the church for sacraments, then scurrying away. He also placed some $12,000 of personal expenses on parish credit cards. I was named Financial Administrator of Cristo Rey, to work with the parish's Finance Council and the Diocese, to remedy the situation. The Finance Council escalated the matter, demanding in writing that the priest resign by March 31. A stubborn man, the priest refused. On March 31, 2009, he departed for Mexico, which was his weekly custom—where he was brutally murdered by his live-in lover in the early hours of the next morning. I was awakened by a call summoning me to the murder scene in their bedroom in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, where the priest's blood was splattered on all walls. It was a ghastly scene—and the gruesome murder and the disappearance of his body for nearly a week made national news, inspiring great compassion for an otherwise truly abusive priest.

Bishop Aymond named me pastor of Cristo Rey, a responsibility that included bringing healing to a now-divided community. I'll never forget the response of parishioners to my leadership: I made some key hires for outreach to English- and Spanish-language parishioners, we summoned over 400 volunteers for a spring cleaning day, and we grew weekly Mass attendance from some 2,300 people, to 4,000-5,000 people each Sunday. To accommodate so many people, we offered nine Sunday Masses, five of which

featured the vibrant music of Mariachi Cristo Rey. For ten months, I was the only priest at the parish: I would celebrate the first six Masses, then race to the rectory to fall into a deep, three-hour sleep, then celebrate the two evening Masses. That year, we celebrated 12 Masses on the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe—the most Masses I've ever celebrated in a single day! Parish ministries grew, we shared a weekly, full-color, 16-page newspaper to spread word of all the activity, and we were all so proud to be part of Cristo Rey, "*Tu Casa*," "*la comunidad de las tradiciones*" (the Community of Traditions), and "*la majestuosidad de las Misas con mariachi*" (the Majesty of Mariachi Masses)!

After nine years as a Roman Catholic priest, my disillusionment with the Roman Catholic Church reached a new height. Bishop Aymond was named Archbishop of New Orleans and was replaced by an appointee of the archconservative Benedict XVI. As the pastor of Austin's largest Spanish-language parish, I was asked in Spring 2011 to host a visit by a Roman Catholic U.S. Congressman, Luis Gutierrez of Chicago, an outspoken proponent of comprehensive immigration reform. Three days before the event, I received an exploratory call from a diocesan staffer, asking whether I was aware of the Congressman's views on women's reproductive health—of course, the staffer used another, more stigmatizing term. The next day, the Diocesan Vicar called to report: "The bishop has asked you to disinvite the Congressman—and I am simply being obedient to my bishop." It was at that moment that I realized that I could no longer in good conscience be obedient to "[his] bishop." I had studied at the Washington Theological Union, a very progressive Roman Catholic graduate school, which embodied the best of Vatican II theology—and now, in an era prior to Pope Francis, the Church was being dragged backward in time. Our ethics professor, Father Ken Himes, once warned us: "If you want to be part of the Mickey Mouse Club, you have to sing the Mickey Mouse song. You can't be part of the Mickey Mouse Club if you sing the Donald Duck song!" In a Church increasingly bent on a "reform of the [Vatican II] reform," I had arrived at a crossroad: Would I continue to serve Papa Ratzinger and his local bishop, who was pushing a stilted translation of the Mass on his parishes, or would I be courageous

enough to step outside the Roman papacracy, knowing that, if I did, I would leave with nothing—absolutely nothing—from the Church I had served for so many years. I recalled one day, nine years before, when Father Larry sat me down in his office, looked at me with a penetrating gaze, and sternly warned me: "If you're ever going to get out, get out now, before you're my age—and you can't!"

I bid farewell to Cristo Rey in May 2011 and focused on completing my doctorate by December. My superior assigned me as pastor of St. Benedict Catholic Church in Terre Haute, Indiana. I happily disobeyed and remained in Austin.

In the meantime, the bishop assigned Conventual Franciscan Friars from Mexico to Cristo Rey, which, though great for the Spanish-language community, left English-speaking parishioners disenchanted with attending Masses and listening to homilies they could no longer easily understand.

My life took a turn in February 2012, when Alberto Garcia, a local attorney and former judge, who took over 120,000 photos for *The Cristo Rey Herald*, invited me to breakfast at Juan in a Million Mexican Restaurant, just around the corner from the church. He shared a dream suggested by his wife: "Blanca and I have been thinking that you should bring the American Catholic Church to Austin." I thought, "The…what?" He took out his tablet and pulled up the website of the American Catholic Church in the United States (ACCUS), an Independent Catholic jurisdiction led by Archbishop Lawrence Harms. It is telling that, in ten years of seminary study and ten years of priestly ministry, I had never once heard of Independent Catholicism. Never once. I had no idea what Alberto was talking about, but the website he showed me contained the photos of three former Conventual Franciscan Friars whom I had known: Father Jason Lody, with whom I studied for three years in Washington, D.C., Father Michael Zocholl, whom I came to know during my novitiate in California, and Father Christopher Bisett, a friar in California, who was a few years ahead of us and at whose priesthood ordination I led the music. I immediately knew that I had to look into this "American Catholic Church"!

I researched the ACCUS online, then I called Archbishop Harms. After 45 minutes, he concluded, "You sound more American Catholic, than Roman Catholics." I knew he was right.

I had remained in contact with Roy Gomez, a very active lay leader at Cristo Rey for well over 15 years, and I shared with him of my conversations with Alberto and with Archbishop Harms. Father Roy encouraged the dream, and we agreed to bring to birth an Independent Catholic community in Austin, one that, within a matter of weeks, would become known as Holy Family American Catholic Church!

Our early community was stigmatized and persecuted by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Austin: The bishop insisted that a letter be read in all parishes, announcing that I had excommunicated myself and that my sacraments (as a validly-ordained Roman Catholic priest!) "may be gravely illicit or invalid." It was the most disingenuous communication I have ever read from a Roman Catholic prelate. No one with even a half-semester of studies in sacramental theology could doubt the validity of my sacraments. Despite the stigma and persecution, we persevered. In reaction, we shortened our name to Holy Family Catholic Church: I argued that we were and are as Catholic as any Roman Catholic Church, and that we would place a modifier (like "American") in our name the day that Roman Catholic parishes clarify that they are "Roman Catholic." Catholicism is not synonymous with the Roman papacracy! The rest of our story as a parish Family is told in the introduction to this book.

During our first eight weeks as a nascent community, we celebrated Mass in my living room. I couldn't help but think of the early Church, where Saint Paul gathered with families to break open the Word and to break bread in their homes. In our intimate gatherings, we literally broke bread, sharing a small loaf of bread together, rather than receive the unleavened hosts that are a more recent invention in Church history. When we were evicted from that property, I called to mind the suffering of the first martyrs of the Church, who united their suffering to that of Jesus on the cross. Within five weeks, my paternal grandmother, Agnes Mathias, went to her eternal reward: She was proud of her grandson, the priest, and would likely be least able in our family to understand

the new path on which I found myself. Fortunately, my parents were supportive from the beginning.

Hundreds of other people have been so extremely supportive through the years as well, attending Mass at Holy Family, receiving the sacraments, growing in their relationships with God and others, and generously sharing of their time, talent and treasure for the upbuilding of God's kingdom on earth. They also allowed me to simultaneously serve in elected office for eight years, as a member of the Austin ISD Board of Trustees, where I helped oversee the 86,000 students and 11,000 employees of our 130 public schools. I believe that this shielded our parish community from further arrows that otherwise might have been hurled in our direction by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Austin.

I have been heartened and buoyed by the many clergy who have served our community through the years. I honor the countless hours of the many lay leaders and volunteers who have contributed to our community. Now twelve years after our founding, various clergy have moved on from us, and a number of our members have gone to their eternal reward. Every time I celebrate a Mass of Resurrection for a beloved member of our community, I imagine God welcoming each one with an all-embracing love, affirming, in the words of the scriptures: "Well done, my good and faithful servant!" (Mt. 25:21)

Words could never adequately express my gratitude to the many people who have brought life and joy to Austin's only inclusive Catholic community during the past twelve years. I'm fond of saying, "Y'all are saints!" In the case of Holy Family, this is so true: The words and actions of folks at Holy Family capture the essence of those who've gone before us in the faith and are now considered the great saints of the Church. We are not *ordinary* Catholics, who judge and exclude others from the sacraments of the Church. Instead, we are indeed *extraordinary* Catholics, faithfully following in the footsteps of Jesus, who modeled love and mercy. We carefully listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and our own Spirit-enlightened consciences, and we are helping others to grow in holiness.

Yes, Holy Family, y'all are SAINTS!

Holy Family Really Makes You Feel Like You're Part of the Family!

Rose (Reinhart) Mathias



I was raised in rural northwest Ohio. My mother, born in 1920, was a product of the Great Depression. She lived a hard life. She became pregnant with my oldest brother outside of wedlock—a stigmatized act at the time—so my parents were pressured by my grandparents to immediately marry. A nun later shared that she remembered how my father used to carry me to the school across the road from our church, where he daily stoked the coal furnace to heat the school on cold winter mornings.

Stories are told that my father was a hardworking farmer who, after thrashing the wheat—before we had combines—literally partied to death. His alcoholism certainly didn't help him to overcome the pneumonia or flu to which he succumbed when I was three years old. My mother never forgave him for being so drunk on the day that I was born that my mother had to drive herself to the hospital to give birth to me!

Fourteen months after my father's death, my mother married his cousin, and my stepfather, also a farmer, raised me and my two older brothers. My stepfather was focused on paying off his farm, so all our money went to that end, and the rare new dress was a real treat for my mother! He and his brother lowered the very tall steeple on our church after it was struck by lightning. As a girl, I remember walking down a lane from our home to the forge in our stepuncle's metalworking shop: We passed two fields, a woods, then two fields more, and my brothers always riled up the cows in a pasture along the way, so that they would chase me!

As a girl, I had a Precious Blood nun doll, so being a Sister was something I had always considered. I spent my freshman and sophomore year of high school at the Precious Blood Convent in

Dayton, two hours south of our home. We lived a very regimented life: It was so strict, it seemed we couldn't even breathe without permission! We had to sleep with our doors open. I'm not sure how I survived two years there. Other girls were assigned tasks like peeling potatoes and cleaning. The nuns gave me piano lessons, and I had to practice every day. After leaving the convent, I continued to study piano with my stepaunt, the first wife of my metalworking stepuncle. I tried a correspondence course in piano after that, though that didn't work so well for me.

After leaving the convent, my maternal grandmother taught me to crochet, something I have continued—literally to the present day. I have crocheted innumerable afghans for famiy and for various churches and charities. I'm perhaps most known for the kitchen towels that I've been crocheting and gifting for years.

I've known my husband, David, since we were children: We were classmates. We went to junior prom together, then he took another girl to senior prom. After high school grduation, we started dating. For nine months, he attended a drafting school in Columbus, Ohio, some 85 miles south of our hometown. He came home often during that time: He didn't have car, so he had to "thumb a ride" home to see me, or sometimes, when he had enough money, he took a bus from Columbus to Tifin. I accompanied him and his parents for one trip to Columbus: That was a long trip back then!

A high school aptitude test suggested that I was good with my hands, so a week after graduation, I enrolled in beauty school. We couldn't afford college, and I didn't want to perform factory work. I earned my beautician's license and worked as a beautician, where David would come to visit me during his lunch break. As a beautician, it took me years to repay my stepfather for my car!

Back then, you needed parental consent to marry before age 21, so David and I were married three weeks after his 21st birthday. We would have married a week earlier, but we couldn't rent the reception hall at Meadowbrook Park that weekend, where we squaredanced every other week.

We had four sons: Jeffrey Lee, Jayme Lee, Jeremy Lee and Joey Lee. They all share David's middle name. David named our firstborn, Jeffrey. I saw the name Jayme in a local high school

newsletter, where a student by that name received an award from the Future Farmers of America. After that came Jeremy, then Joey, our blizzard baby: I was nine months pregnant with him during the 1978 blizzard, so the National Guard cleared our road before others. Four years later, I had a miscarriage, so I like to think that we have an unnamed angel in heaven!

After four years of marriage, the old rectory owned by David's grandparents, in which we both spent part of our childhood, was sold on auction. We bought it for some $17,000, and my stepfather helped us with the downpayment. I remember moving in with two young sons: Our families moved our vintage, white, upright piano on a farm trailer, and David's father, who had an artificial leg, struggled to stabilize the piano as it swung back and forth!

During those early years of marrige, I enjoyed oil painting and did various paint-by-number pieces of Jesus and Mary, the Last Supper, Jesus blessing the children, and various country and pastoral scenes. During cold winters, we also quilted. David's friends made quilting frames for us, and David quilted an entire quilt that Jayme has today. He did pretty good!

I was a CCD teacher for 20 years. I was trained as a catechist when I was pregnant with Jeff, and I taught until Joey was in the sixth grade.

We had to constantly find ways to keep the boys busy. I became a Den Leader and David became the Cubmaster of the local Cub Scout pack. David then served as Scoutmaster for several years, taking great pride in seeing all four sons achieve the rank of Eagle. We also got them involved in the church nextdoor to our home: changing missalettes, raising and lowering the flag, and serving as altar servers. Jayme played the organ at Mass and often practiced the organ at church.

Each of our sons had different gifts. Jayme liked to draw. I still have some of his childhood sketch books. He also liked to read: I would take the boys to the public library in the summer, and he always checked out the 25 or 30 books allowed him. He took his studies very seriously. When he was in high school, there were many nights that he studied late into the night on the living room floor—and fell asleep face-down on the living room carpet!

I remember when Jayme shared that he was considering a vocation to the priesthood and religious life: He had always wanted to be a lawyer, and I was cleaning carrots in the kitchen when he told me that he was thinking of becoming a Conventual Franciscan Friar. After he graduated from high school, we took a family vacation to move him to St. Louis, Missouri, eight hours away. It was a long drive! I was afraid to drive across the Mississippi River, but David was sleeping, and there was no place for me to pull over, so I crossed the bridge—a considerable feat for me.

After Jayme moved away from home, we visited him in various places: We attended his simple vows at Mount Saint Francis, Indiana in 1993, and his graduation from St. Louis University in 1995. In 2000, we drove to Washington, D.C. for his graduation from the Washington Theological Union and his ordination to the diaconate in the crypt of the Basilica of the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. After his ordination to the priesthood in Carey, Ohio, in 2001, David and I flew with my mother-in-law, Agnes, to Jayme's first Masses at Cristo Rey.

David and I didn't initially understand what Jayme was doing after he left the Roman Catholic Church and started Holy Family in 2012, but we knew he had a vision. He has always kept going and not allowed anything to stop him. He doesn't let anything get in the way. If something falls down, he picks it up and keeps going. That's his attitude toward life, and David always liked that.

We were impressed with the group that came together at Holy Family and the way that they really made their new space on Lava Hill Road look like a church. Later, after Holy Family moved to Salem, I remember a motorcyclist who stopped by the church on his way to the Circuit of the Americas, the speedway down the road. He said, "I'll be back tomorrow. I'm glad that I can come to Mass before having to be at the racetrack!"

I am especially impressed with Becky Saenz and Terry Ann Caballero: They attend all Sunday Masses at Holy Family and are true pillars of the church!

Jayme came out to me and David in 1995, and we first met Anthony in 2013, so we figured, when same-sex marriage became a law in 2015, that they would soon be married. We come from a

very conservative part of Ohio, so David wasn't initially excited about going to Austin for their wedding, but I said, "I'm going." The next day, David said he'd join me. I told a neighbor in Ohio about their marriage—and he seemed to snub the idea! David and I were very moved by the way that so many people accepted Jayme and Anthony, and were happy for them. Because we come from farm country, it was really cute to see their farm-themed wedding reception at an urban farm in Austin!

Here in Vegas, I had a friend, Clarabel, who died last year at age 90. She dearly loved Jayme, and he changed her mind about the impossibility of being a married Catholic priest with his lifestyle. She had all sorts of questions. I told her, "He's just an ordinary guy with a deep religion." Clarabel really accepted him and dearly loved him. We all have ideas about how things should be, but even at age 89, she was changing her mind about such matters!

David passed in 2017, and I moved to Vegas in 2018. Since then, I've been able to enjoy longer stays in Austin. In July 2023, Jayme invited me to Austin for eight days of teaching crochet to Holy Family parishioners as part of the church's Prayer Shawl Ministry. It was fun to see people come to those classes! Nena Quintero had experience in crochet and was able to help teach. Jessica Leal-Lego and Becky Lego-Leal were eager to learn and brought along a friend who was also an excellent teacher. Becky Saenz had some experience in crochet, and Terry Caballero was a fast learner. Renee Senn learned to change colors of yarns. María Cruz was enthusiastically working on a lovely purple and yellow afghan. Amanda and her sons, Abraham and Luke, and her friend, Luis, were quickly learning to chain-stitch as well. Aileen, our youngest student, was eager to learn and quickly mastered holding a crochet hook. So many good memories from those eight days at Holy Family! It was fun!

Because I don't speak Spanish, I have especially enjoyed watching Jayme communicate with Spanish-speaking parishioners. He once invited me to a home Mass for Our Lady of Guadalupe, where the family created a beautiful altar with her image and lots of flowers. On another occasion, I attended a Spanish Mass and felt that the man and his son in front of me wondered who I was, since I can't speak Spanish: When Jayme

introduced me at the Mass, it was as if I recognized them saying, in Spanish, "Ah, that's who she is!" I took Latin and Spanish in high school, so it's fun to follow along the Spanish words on the screen during Masses at Holy Family.

Despite the distance, I remain connected to Holy Family through Facebook Live every Sunday. I tune in for Sunday Masses and for Wednesday evening bible study. I sometimes listen to the Spanish Mass—even though I don't understand it. Holy Family really makes you feel like you're part of the family!

Holy Family is a Very, Very Incredible Movement

Pedro Mercado Sanchez



I am originally from Mexico City, and we have been here in the U.S. for 15 years. My entire family is Catholic. I come from a very religious family, and we have priests and nuns in our family. My sister was president of a diocese, and my mother was part of a perpetual adoration society. My oldest sister had twins, a girl and a boy: He is a priest and seminary director in Texcoco, Mexico, and my niece is the president of a school for nuns in Querétaro.

From the time that I was a child, my family instilled in me a love of God and a reverence for God. They encouraged me to serve as an altar boy and later as a catechist. My mother was a catechist for many children, and she told me, "You have to teach them, too!" I was a catechist in Mexico City for four or five years.

We met Father Jayme one day when we visited Cristo Rey Catholic Church. We later learned that he was moving forward in a new location, where he was continuing the mission that God had given him and creating important projects within the church. The thought that he was creating a movement of faith under the name of the Holy Family made me very happy. Three or four years

before the pandemic, we decided to participate in his ministry. We were honored to be given the opportunity to serve as hospitality ministers, and we were very happy.

God's ways are inscrutable, and none of us knows where God is leading us—but God is leading us to God! God places wonderful people in our path, who inspire us to help others. God's call is always that we do good. At Holy Family, we felt love and affection for others, regardless of their condition or way of thinking or acting. We felt that we were free to approach God at a new place where God is worshiped.

When we first visited Holy Family, at the invitation of some wonderful people, it was like a seedling with small roots and its first leaves. We decided to support Holy Family in any way we could, knowing that this was going to grow little-by-little, because with the help of God, everything is possible!

Participating as a hospitality minister at Holy Family was a beautiful experience. I felt there the moral obligation of welcoming and sharing with others, providing them joy when they come to Mass, encouraging them and providing them the hope that God hears them. It is a ministry to receive people with love and enthusiasm, to open their minds and eyes to the fact that God is with us, and to send them away happy. That ministry was very satisfying!

When people ask us how we found Holy Family, I tell them, "God has a reason for bringing us to the places to which God brings us." We felt that we could help at Holy Family, and we wanted to do it. Everyone at Holy Family is treated affably. We felt part of Holy Family, and we felt that we were sharing our *granito de arena*, our "little grain of sand" with Holy Family.

Holy Family offers a beautiful experience of God and God's love in the church. Everyone helps out. There is not a single person who sweeps or cleans, but we're all united in such projects. Holy Family is a very, very incredible movement, providing personal satisfaction and making people feel happy to be part of this beautiful family!

Holy Family Makes It Really Easy for People to Celebrate Their Love, No Matter Who They Are!

Eva Montes & Andie De Luna



Eva: I was born and raised in Houston, Texas.

Andie: And I was born in Eagle Pass, Texas, then raised in Eagle Pass and in Princeville, Illinois.

Eva: In 2007, I moved to Austin from Dallas, for a job as a physician assistant. I always wanted to live in Austin, so it was an easy choice.

Andie: After I finished my undergraduate studies at St. Edward's University in 2003, I joined the military. I returned to Austin in 2014 and have been here ever since.

Eva: I was raised in the Roman Catholic Church. We went to church as a family every Sunday, and I did all my catechism. I've been very involved in Roman Catholic churches, mostly as a lector and eucharistic minister.

Andie: I was raised Roman Catholic, then did some experimenting with other faiths during college. For a long time, I didn't belong to a church. I couldn't find a church that really spoke to me—so I didn't go to any.

Eva: As an adult, I admittedly went to church out of habit. I wanted to go to church, but I also didn't feel a real connection to the church, outside of the ritual. I attended St. Louis King of France Catholic Church for a time, then I tried Methodist and Episcopal churches. For a little bit, I didn't have a church either.

Andie: I remember reading a July 2015 article about Holy Family in the *Austin Chronicle*.

Eva: I saw it, too, and I thought, "Wow!" I had no idea that there was an affirming Catholic church! I was really excited—but I didn't act on that excitement at the time.

Andie: Same here. I was surprised to know that there were excommunicated priests who were "swept under the rug" by the Roman Catholic Church, but who continued to minister. The thought of Holy Family stayed in the back of my head, as something I might try, but I was just really skeptical because of the way that the Roman Catholic Church had treated me. I thought, "Maybe I'll try it out later down the road." We came to Holy Family for the first time in January or February 2016, just after we started dating: Actually, going to Holy Family was our first date! Faith was really important to both of us, so we decided to go to church for our first date.

Eva: We came to know one another through the medical community, which is super-small in Austin. Andie wanted to date, and I wasn't ready to, but we started talking about faith, and I told her that I need a partner who knows the importance of faith, even if they're not the same religion. We talked about how we were both raised Catholic, but how that really didn't work out for us: We had to hide from other people who we really are. Then, at almost the same time, we said, "Have you heard about this church?" I said, "I tell you what: Let's go on a date. Meet me at church!" I wanted to see if she was for real, and if she would "put up." Andie met me at Holy Family, back when it was on Lava Hill Road: It was a sort of test, to see if we could take our relationship forward—and we've been together ever since!

Andie: The first person I met at Holy Family was Leonard Gonzales. He was super-friendly. Then I realized that everyone at Holy Family is super-friendly and super-welcoming. We talked back then about how we wished our church looked like a church—but it didn't matter. That place on Lava Hill Road was enough, and it felt good to go there. Even though it didn't look like a church building, there was such an awesome feeling there! You couldn't help but want to go every Sunday.

Eva: Going to a new church was definitely daunting, but everyone immediately welcomed us. It was so refreshing

to be transported to a really safe place, and I definitely wanted to keep coming back.

Andie: The biggest thing for me was seeing older Hispanics and Mexicans who were so embracing, accepting and affirming. They didn't even bat an eyelash at us. Instead, they were just like, "Okay, whatever." I hadn't received that amount of welcome from some family members—and now I was receiving it from my church!

Eva: The welcoming and fellowship are extraordinary, and it's hard not to feel good about those, but I'll also never forget having our priest, Father Jayme, witness our marriage on April 27, 2019. I had dreamed about being married in the Catholic tradition, and I thought I'd never be able to do that. Being able to celebrate a traditional wedding, though outside a church building, really meant a lot to me and my parents. My parents were very surprised, but they were also so happy to see how strong we were in our faith.

Andie: We got maybe an hour or two of sleep the night before, because we ran the Revel Marathon, which began on Mount Charleston at 6:00 a.m. and ended in Las Vegas—then we returned to Mount Charleston for our wedding in the evening!

Eva: Father Jayme brought the Eucharist for our Catholic friends, and people felt so welcomed by his sermon that everyone wanted to go to Communion.

Andie: Father Jayme brought enough Communion for the people that we told him would probably want it, but, by the time he was done, even our Jewish friends wanted the Body of Christ! We could see Father Jayme breaking the hosts into smaller and smaller pieces, to accommodate everyone who wanted to receive Communion, and we joked that those at the end weren't receiving the Body of Christ: They were receiving the "Pinky" of Christ!

Eva: We kept hearing Father Jayme say, "The Body of Christ. The Body of Christ. The Body of Christ"—and we thought, "Who in the hell is taking so much Communion?" The "real" Catholics received it. The lapsed Catholics received it. And, yes, even Jews received it! Seeing all those people

receiving Communion, that's when I said, "Someone's getting the Pinky of Christ!" The sermon and the ceremony were so moving, and everyone felt really included and loved, so they were all saying, "We want some of that!"

Andie: Having been in the military, leadership is really important for me—and I really love that Father Jayme has been a leader in our community. That's big for me. You don't often see Roman Catholic priests doing things outside their churches. Father Jayme, though, has been very involved in education: He "walks the walk" outside of Sundays. We saw that leadership in action during our move from Lava Hill Road, to Salem Lutheran Church. What really resonated with me was seeing the amount of people willing to help after Mass and the amount of care they showed. There was a real investment in that move, and we saw a different side to people. It was a super-windy Sunday, and people sprang into action after the last Mass. I remember seeing Leonard Gonzales climb a ladder, and I thought, "He's going to fall!" I thought, "It's okay if we leave a nail there." Becky Saenz was also so meticulous and detail-oriented, telling us, "You need to do this this way." A huge amount of care went into that move! People were super-committed to that move and to finding a new home, and that act of moving struck me so deeply.

Eva: I really like how Holy Family recognizes World Marriage Day by inviting all couples to renew their vows. That would never happen in a Roman Catholic church. Holy Family recognizes all couples and supports them and blesses them. It recognizes them, regardless of their relationship status, and that's really, really special.

Andie: Holy Family is different from other churches. I've never walked into any Roman Catholic church and felt so welcomed or safe. I've never felt safe, like I do at Holy Family.

Eva: There's also comfort in the fact that the rituals and beliefs are the same as in other Catholic churches. The ritual is very familiar…

Andie: …but we feel like we're actually invested in the words we're saying. We don't just say them because the rest of the congregation is saying them, or because the priest expects us to say them. We can now wholeheartedly be invested in the words coming out of our mouths!

Eva: I had plenty of nice priests and wonderful nuns in my life, who were really well-meaning, but the Roman Catholic Church has such strict guidelines, and I could never feel completely accepted. There was always a "but": "Yes, we know you love one another, but…" I've never had an experience of a faith community where I have felt so welcomed, safe, fulfilled and nourished.

Andie: During the last two months, I've actually gotten to know people that we would have only exchanged pleasantries with in the past, and I think to myself, "Wow, there's no way that I'd be here if this were a traditional Roman Catholic church—and I wouldn't have met you if it weren't for Holy Family!" I've gotten to know their struggles. I've seen how they show up every single Sunday and bear themselves to others. At Holy Family, there are several people of faith who would feel excluded at traditional Roman Catholic churches.

Eva: Father Jayme takes all the worry out of receiving the sacraments.

Andie: Exactly!

Eva: We joke about "Catholic guilt," but I don't ever feel guilt or worry when it comes to the sacraments. And the fact that Holy Family doesn't charge for sacraments or require you to take all sorts of classes makes me want to give even more to the church. Once, for instance, Father Jayme drove all the way to Katy, Texas, to celebrate the wedding of my sister and brother-in-law, who were both Catholic and in a committed relationship but couldn't be married in the Roman Catholic Church, due to their rules and regulations. That was a huge gesture for my family, and it meant so much to my sister and my parents. There's no way that could have happened in the Roman Catholic Church, with

all its rules. Holy Family makes it really easy for people to celebrate their love, no matter who they are!

Andie: It's been a long time since I've said that I'm a "recovering Catholic." That used to be my go-to phrase: I would say that all the time when people asked me about my religion. I haven't used it in a very long time—because I don't have to anymore.

Eva: I used to say that I was a "cafeteria Catholic": I would pick and choose what I would believe! I remember how the pandemic in 2020 really disrupted our life at Holy Family. At times like that, people really need faith. Father Jayme would reach out to me, as a medical professional, so that he could share with parishioners the truth about what was safe and what wasn't. He was also willing to celebrate Mass online when Roman Catholic churches insisted that people gather to worship in-person on Sundays—in the middle of a pandemic! He handled the unknown really well, and he was always mindful about keeping parishioners safe, especially those who are older and more vulnerable. I appreciated that. My parents felt that, even in the middle of the pandemic, they had to go to Mass at their Roman Catholic parish with 200 of their closest friends. I thought that was ridiculous—and that they were made to feel guilty if they didn't go to church.

Andie: Their churches were making them feel guilty for not attending in-person services!

Eva: It was just insane, which is why I appreciated how Holy Family handled the pandemic: At the risk of not having a church, with tithing and all that, Holy Family chose to follow professional medical advice.

Andie: For people who are used to the Catholic faith, Holy Family follows a very similar ritual and has very similar beliefs—but you don't feel the guilt during the sermon or Mass. It's just surprising to see that this part of the Catholic Church is so opening and affirming! For us, that keeps us coming back, and it keeps us spreading the word of Holy Family to friends, just letting them know that there's another option to quitting the Catholic faith.

Eva: I tell people all the time that Holy Family is a place you can go if you need respite or companionship or a laugh. If you're Catholic, it's a place where you can practice your faith with a really refreshing church community! We're lucky to have Holy Family in Austin: Not every city has a Holy Family!

Pretty Quickly, I Knew that I Belonged at Holy Family

Corey Hurt Montiel



I grew up in the little town of Floydada, Texas, and I lived there during my entire school career, from birth to graduation—then I moved to Lubbock, to study at Texas Tech.

I attended a couple of churches as a child, but my dad was a football coach, always watching films on Sunday morning, so we never really went to church. My mom was Baptist, and my dad was part of the Assembly of God, but neither was practicing. We went to a couple of the churches in town—and that small town of some 3,000 people had nearly 20 churches. As a result, I didn't associate with any denomination until I came to Holy Family.

I've always been interested in the Catholic faith, but I also knew that the Roman Catholic Church is not accepting of gays. I attended a few Catholic funerals, and I found Catholic rituals interesting. They caught my attention.

I found Holy Family after attending a friend's funeral in Lubbock in 2017. It was a Catholic funeral, and I wondered about the different things that happened during the funeral, so I googled it—and I came across a video by Father Jayme. This was around the time that gay marriage was legalized in the U.S., and here was a Catholic priest talking about gay marriage! That led me to YouTube, where I watched a lot of videos from Holy Family. I

found the videos really intriguing, and I liked the thought of an inclusive Catholic church! I didn't know where Holy Family was, so I thought, "I wish there were a church like that near me: I would go to that church if it were close by!" Then I found the address, and I said, "What the hell?!" I was living in Kyle at the time. The next day, I literally showed up on Holy Family's doorstep!

Obviously, I was anxious coming to a new church, but Holy Family wasn't like other churches, where no one pays attention to you. Everybody was so warm and welcoming, and they wanted to know my name! I left pretty quickly after Mass—I didn't stick around for breakfast that day. I said to myself: I'll go back, and, if they remember my name, I'll come again. So I showed up the next Sunday—and it wasn't just one person who remembered my name; it was several. And that's how I got to know the girls: Becky Saenz, Terry Caballero, Rafaela Leal and Amanda Rodriguez.

Pretty quickly, I knew that I belonged at Holy Family. I visited the parish office to inquire into baptism—and the girls were there. They said, "You need a sponsor," and I said, "I don't know anybody." Becky offered to be my sponsor. I was baptized in August 2017, during Hurricane Harvey, and it was pouring rain outside! I was confirmed the following May, and my mother came to that Mass.

In July 2018, I invited a friend for a Holy Family trip to a Mass in Louisiana for the golden jubilee of Brother Kerry Guillory. We experienced a different church, and we went to the casino, of course. That was a fun trip!

It has been easy to be generous to Holy Family. I feel such a connection to the people at Holy Family and their shared faith. It's a family, and I want to see it succeed.

I moved to San Antonio in September 2019, but I wish I were still close enough to be at Holy Family every Sunday. I still watch Mass on most Sundays. When I was there, Holy Family was welcoming and provided something I was missing. I found Holy Family to be the most welcoming, friendly group of people who just wanted to share love, laughter and communion—and Father Jayme provides so much education around theology. Those are big "selling points" to me—and it's why I recommend Holy Family to people who

want to learn more about our religion. I love being a part of Holy Family, and I'm glad that I'm still a part of Holy Family!

I Loved the Vibe, and Now It's Like Family to Me

Norma Morales



I came from New York to Austin at age 8, and I went to Crockett High School. I left school in the 11th grade—I was married early, and I got pregnant and had my daughter. Then I went to Austin Community College, where I earned my GED.

In 1980, I went back to New York. I helped at a soup kitchen at a Roman Catholic church in Ridgewood, New York. Father Mike Lopez from All Saints Priory in Ridgewood helped us. That Roman Catholic church did wrong during COVID: They shut down their soup kitchen and didn't let us share clothes with the homeless. Father Mike delivered us a lot of food, and they didn't let us share that with the people—so I started going to Father Mike's church and helping him in his food pantry. That was an awesome experience, and I miss them so much.

In 2020, during COVID, I moved back to Texas. My daughter was here, and she needed help with the kids. Father Mike told me about Holy Family, so I started coming here. I was scared, since I didn't know anybody here, but I enjoyed it. I loved the vibe, and now it's like family to me. Father Jayme and Deacon Stephen and Becky…everyone here is awesome!

I just love the feeling I get when I'm at Holy Family: the church, the service, the kindness and friendliness, the breakfast and how we all eat together, Father Jayme's homilies—and his singing is awesome. It feels like home here. When I moved back to Austin, I went with my daughter, Letticia, to Dolores Catholic Church, and now she follows me here to Holy Family!

I'm not into crafts, like Letticia, but she started helping the Environment Committee, so I try to help her out.

I seriously doubt that many churches would welcome my maltese, Mr. Poodles, as Holy Family does. He's like my service dog, and I can't leave him alone, or else he gets anxious and sick with his heart condition. I like to think that Mr. Poodles is the mascot of the church and that he's part of the family, too! Holy Family has welcomed him with open arms, and I am so proud of that.

Holy Family is the only church that I will go to in Austin. It feels like home, and y'all make me feel like family! I love it. It's like a big, happy family. It's awesome!

All Are Welcomed, Without Exception

Rev. Elsa Y. Nelligan



I am originally from Heroica Matamoros, Tamaulipas, Mexico, where I was baptized and received my First Communion and Confirmation at the Roman Catholic Cathedral of Our Lady of Refuge. After completing my elementary, middle and high school studies, I attended the José Guadalupe Mainero School for Teachers. After graduating, I came to Austin, Texas, where I attended six Roman Catholic churches before finding Holy Family, and I have been here ever since!

I was invited to Holy Family by Pedro Mercado, who wanted me to bring my dance students for a celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe and for a parish festival. I had previously met Father Jayme at Cristo Rey: Antolín Aguirre invited me to prepare a group of *matlachines* for the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe on December 12, so I attended Mass after one of our practices. That's when I heard Father Jayme preach. I loved it. He proclaims and preaches

the Word of God in a way that we hear and understand, and that make us reflect. His messages touch our hearts.

I remained at Holy Family due to the way in which I was kindly treated and the admirable way in which women are given the opportunity to participate in the ordained ministries of the Church. At that time, Holy Family was located on Lava Hill Road. Very soon after, I was invited by Dulce María Castillo to participate in the proclamation of the Word—the "readings" on Sunday, and then in the ministry of hospitality. At first, I felt very sinful and not worthy to be near the altar, but, after praying about it, I began to participate in those two ministries and to help, when needed, in the parish office.

I was later invited to greater responsibilities. After Father Libardo Rocha arrived in 2015, we became good friends, and he and others nurtured the seed of faith that was planted during my baptism, which bore fruit with my ordination to the diaconate on October 30, 2021 by Bishop Mark Elliott Newman. I am deeply grateful to Father Jayme, Father Libardo, Father Roy Gomez, Father Daniel Storrs, Mother Angelita Mendoza-Waterhouse, and the Holy Family community, who assisted in my formation.

My preparation did not stop there, as I continue to study on my own, and I participate in classes, conferences and spiritual retreats when I have the opportunity. Father Brett invited me to work with him as a hospice chaplain for a company in Georgetown, Texas.

I help Holy Family with sewing projects. I lead dances for the celebration of patronal feasts, like St. Jude, Our Lady of Carmel, Our Lady of San Juan de los Lagos, Divine Mercy, and Our Lady of Guadalupe. I help Father Jayme edit *Extraordinary Catholics* magazine and the books that he publishes in Spanish. When requested, I have taught religious education classes and First Communion preparation.

Holy Family Catholic Church is an independent church where all are welcomed, without exception. If you would like to learn more about the Independent Catholicism, or if you hear God calling you to help or participate in some ministry, please reach out to any of us, and let us know!

Holy Family Is Just Awesome

Rudy & Gloria (Escamilla) Nieto



Rudy: We were both born and raised in Austin. My grandfather owned four pier-and-beam houses on Wood Street, near Shoal Creek, so I was raised there, and I attended Pease Elementary. Then we moved toward East Austin when I was in the fifth grade, and I attended Brooke Elementary. I went to Allan Junior High, then graduated from Johnston High School.

Gloria: I lived on East Fourth with my grandma, so I went to Brooke Elementary, then to Allan Junior High and Johnston High School.

Rudy: When I was growing up in West Austin, we went to St. Mary Cathedral, but I also remember going to catechism classes at Guadalupe Catholic Church, where I made my First Communion.

Gloria: I did all my sacraments at Cristo Rey, where my mother, grandmother and all my aunts were *Guadalupanas*. That's where Rudy and I got married, and where our kids received their sacraments. When our kids were growing up, I volunteered as a CCD teacher at Cristo Rey for a time, with Sister Theresa. Then we moved to our present home and started going to San Francisco Javier Catholic Church.

Rudy: We were at San Francisco Javier for about 20 years.

Gloria: That's where we celebrated our 25th anniversary and renewed our vows! We were going to celebrate at Cristo Rey, because that's where I received all my sacraments. We were excited, and we visited the priest there in 1996, and he gave us an attitude: We were preparing to celebrate a joyous occasion and renew our vows, and he totally upset me and made me cry. He asked, "Do you really want

to do this? It's going to cost you money!" We completely left Cristo Rey after that. We would go there with my mother and grandmother, and they didn't respect the elderly. The people there were so rude—but Holy Family is totally different. It's more of a family, where there are no strangers, and people care for each other. We love Holy Family so much, because we're all family—and that's how we were brought up: to care for one another like family.

Rudy: Gloria discovered Holy Family in September 2016. After our daughter, Jeanette, passed away, we were between churches. I had completely lost my faith, and we weren't going to any church then. I just didn't have the energy to get up or go to church. I felt that I had been "let down."

Gloria: I worked for the Austin Independent School District, at Sixth and Lamar, when I saw a copy of *El Mundo Newspaper* one day in the waiting room next to the elevators. I saw Father Jayme's picture, and I thought, "Isn't this guy on our school board?" I was surprised to learn that he was a priest, and something told me to go and see Holy Family. I had to talk Rudy into it. He wasn't too thrilled about going to church, but he said, "Let's try it out." I remember our first visit to Holy Family on Lava Hill Road: We drove up and asked ourselves, "Are you sure this is a church?"

Rudy: When we turned onto Lava Hill Road, I asked Gloria, "Are you sure this is right?" It was an industrial area! Then we saw the sign for Holy Family Catholic Church, and I continued to slowly drive by.

Gloria: We were scared to go in!

Rudy: We were certainly undecided about going in. We turned around at the dead end, and we asked ourselves, "Should we go in?" We passed by the church again, and we almost got to 183, when I said, "Let's go back." So, we turned around, went back, and walked in—and Leonard Gonzales welcomed us at the front door. I told Gloria, "Let's go sit in the front."

Gloria: From the moment we walked in, we were amazed at how people made us feel at home, like family, with open arms

and everything! We were also surprised by Father Jayme's ministry: His Mass and homily were so beautiful. Holy Family was a breath of fresh air! We felt God within us, and we said, "Oh, my God, this is our church!"

Rudy: Everyone welcomed us. I remember Becky Saenz and Mario and María Cruz, and everyone shook everybody's hands. We heard the Mass, the readings and the homily. Afterward, I approached Father Jayme, and I didn't know what to say. I said, "You speak so well." And Mario and María quickly took us in and made us feel at home during the breakfast. Everyone was really friendly.

Gloria: So we kept coming back to Holy Family. Father Jayme's Masses were breathtaking, and he has a beautiful voice, and the people there created a real family atmosphere. I've been to so many churches and have heard so many priests, but Father Jayme gives us more information to help us understand the readings and our faith. During our weekly bible study, I learn things I never knew! We used to read the Bible as children, but we never understood what it meant.

Rudy: We had never been to a church where the priest stood up front before Mass and explained the readings. Before, when we went to church, we'd leave wondering what we got out of it. That was the first time that we experienced that, and it made us feel really, really good.

Gloria: We've been involved in several ministries at Holy Family. Before COVID, Becky got me involved as a eucharistic minister. I was very nervous the first time, but Becky gave me confidence, saying, "You can do this!" I got used to doing it, and I enjoyed it!

Rudy: I was a hospitality minister at San Francisco Javier, so when I came to Holy Family and John Zavala, Louis Cuevas and Leonard Gonzales asked me to help, I said, "Sure, I'll be happy to help!" I enjoy meeting everyone who comes through the door, greeting them and getting to know them better!

Gloria: Then we got involved in the Environment Committee. I saw all that Becky Saenz and Terry Caballero did to make

the church so beautiful, and I wanted to help. I really loved the way they decorated the church!

Rudy: We saw the needs of the church, and we saw things that we could make better. I see Holy Family as "my church," and I'm really proud of it, so I want things to look better. So we stained the front doors of the church, we cleared all the dead brush around the church, we replaced all the lighting in the church, and we created the cement bases for our feather flags. Then we started going to the bible study when Father Roy was holding it. Mario told us about it. He said, "We really get into the conversations! We agree, and we disagree, and we have a potluck each week. We eat and talk and pray the rosary." He kept reminding me, until we finally went. We've been going ever since, and we enjoy the way that Father Jayme teaches. He's entertaining!

Gloria: Before COVID, we also enjoyed helping our *jamaicas*. We did the fish pond and the duck pond. Pío and Lori Rentería got us involved in that, and they gave us everything we needed.

Rudy: After that, Father Jayme called to invite us to be part of the church's Board of Directors. Holy Family is just awesome. It's the best church I've ever gone to. Everyone is inclusive. Everyone! We don't turn anyone away. And I tell people, "We have a priest that is so intelligent: You gotta hear this guy!" I always brag about Father Jayme. I suspect his ears are always ringing!

Gloria: Holy Family is more than a church. It's a family—and we welcome people with open arms!

We Go to Holy Family Every Sunday— and It's Beautiful!

María Pérez



I am originally from Luvianos, in the state of Mexico, and I came to the U.S. about 14 years ago. As a child, my parents taught me to go to church every Sunday.

I learned about Holy Family through my neighbors, Olivia and Victor, who are my son's godparents. I really like Holy Family. What they say there is nice. My children also like Holy Family. They ask us, "Are we going to church on Sunday?" They are very happy at Holy Family, and they have learned a lot from Deacon Elsa, who teaches them religious education. I also enjoy our get-togethers every first Sunday of the month. We go to Holy Family every Sunday—and it's beautiful!

Holy Family Was Really a Beautiful, Beautiful Experience

Danielle Pinta



I was born and raised in New Lenox, Illinois, just outside of Chicago. I received my sacraments in the Roman Catholic Church, I was an altar girl and lector, and I sang in the choir. My mom was fairly involved in the church, so I got pulled in. By the time I was a senior in high school, I was teaching religious education to third-graders.

In 2018, I moved to Austin for my job. I had never been to Austin before, but I

packed up and gave it a go, and I was in Texas for two and a half years. I arrived on a Saturday, and I had to fly to a training in California at 11:30 a.m. the next day. I didn't know anyone in Austin, and I was feeling a little lost. It was a lot of change all at once—and I always appreciated the "rhythm" of the Catholic Church: You can go to any church and have a similar experience, and I was looking for that little piece of "home." I googled Catholic churches near the airport, with specific parameters: I didn't want to go to church too early, but I also had to catch my flight. Holy Family's 9:00 a.m. Mass was perfect!

I remember that Leonard was the first person to greet me and welcome me to the church that first day. I'll never forget my first Mass at Holy Family: The Roman Catholic Church changed the Mass in 2011, and Holy Family reminded me of the church of my childhood—without all the new crap. Holy Family had baptisms at Mass that day, and I remember Father Jayme dumping a bowl of water on the person's head. I had never seen that in a Catholic church! It was so real, and it caused me to think, "Wow, what is this church? I've never seen anything like this!"

I was dating Jeff Varwig at the time, and I told him, "You have to come to this church! They do things differently—and I really like it!" I really liked the Children's Treasure Chest. I really liked how people walked around the church during the Sign of Peace. Multiple people said hi to me on my first day there, when I was brand new to Austin and didn't know anybody. When Jeff moved to Austin, we had a plan that we were going to visit different churches—but we never ended up going to another church because Holy Family really spoke to us. I feel so happy just thinking about those memories, and I also feel sad because we don't have a church like that here in Chicago. I'll never forget the energy that we got from Holy Family, and the community we experienced there, away from home. It was just so cool!

Early on, I remember thinking that Father Jayme is a gifted speaker, and I felt drawn to Holy Family. Then, when Lent came around, Jeff and I decided that we wanted to make a positive commitment for Lent—rather than give something up. Jeff went to bible study, to "scope it out," and he said, "I really think you'd like this!" I went with him the next week, and we stayed involved. The

food helped: I always loved Holy Family's warm, delicious breakfasts, and the bible study always had a potluck.

I've never felt as close to a priest as I did to Father Roy. He actually acted like a father figure in my life. He showed us so much love, and he made us feel welcomed at bible study every week. He is such a good person. He would share crazy stories and experiences that I've never heard from a priest. It was like seeing your teachers outside of school and discovering that they're real people! We realized how much experience and love Father Roy had, and he gave us so much.

Holy Family was such a tight-knit community, and it was really nice to feel like we had a spiritual home in Austin, where we could see people we knew, and where people were excited to see us, and we were excited to see them! So many people genuinely cared about Jeff and me, and genuinely wanted to know how we were doing. That was just so important for us.

There's also a cultural piece that I love about Holy Family: I don't speak Spanish or come from a Hispanic background, but Holy Family always did such a good job of providing a space for people to celebrate and appreciate their culture. One way that I really appreciated that culture was through Holy Family's food and fellowship. We were also in Austin for two of Holy Family's *jamaicas*, so that was a cool experience, too.

I have always struggled with the Roman Catholic ideology of excluding people because of different attributes or choices—because of the different ways that we're human. I've always thoroughly believed that you need to find a religion that you can be proud of, and, for me, inclusivity is a core component of religion. I always appreciated how Holy Family talked about issues—including politics or refugee situations—in a very people-focused way. We sometimes lose sight of the fact that so many political issues are about people, and that, if we're called to love our neighbor, we need to love *all* our neighbors, and not just those we choose to love. That inclusivity lives in the spirit and in the DNA of Holy Family, and it's something I so strongly believe in. Everything else aside, that, to me, was just the most beautiful part of being a member of Holy Family!

When COVID came in March 2020, we watched a lot of livestreamed celebrations by Holy Family. In fact, for Easter that year, when we couldn't gather with others outside our family, my whole family gathered in the living room for a livestreamed celebration of Easter.

I recall my dad's first visit to Holy Family: He walked out of the church and said, "Wow, I actually understood what the homily was about. It was really relatable!" Holy Family's physical location is unique: It's in the middle of nowhere, and my parents wondered, "How did you even find this place?" Now, every time we come back to Austin, we prioritize coming to Holy Family. It's a community where Jeff and I felt so at home and so loved. Holy Family was really a beautiful, beautiful experience for me!

I Really Found a Lot of Satisfaction at Holy Family

Mary Helen "Nena" (Cuellar) Quintero



I was born in Lockhart, and my family moved to Austin in 1949, when I was nine years old. I attended Webb Elementary School, Allan Junior High and Austin High School. I wasn't raised in a family that was active in church, and we never went to church when we lived in Lockhart. When we came to Austin, we went to Cristo Rey. Later in life, I stepped away from the church for five or six years, until Sister Guadalupe Medina got me back. She directed the religious education program, and she needed someone to enter all the kids' information and attendance into the computer. My cousin, Mary Alice Ramirez, told Sister Guadalupe that I worked with computers, and Sister Guadalupe called and asked if I would be willing to enter all the information of all the students into the computer. So I did that, and my daughter, Sandra, taught CCD classes. That's how I got involved in the church again!

I found out about Holy Family from Father Roy. He said, "We're having prayer and a get-together at Father Jayme's house, behind Mission Funeral Home." He invited me and my sisters to come, and I said, "Sure, we will." So, Esther, Margie and I started going!

There were maybe 20 or 25 of us that first Sunday. That's when Mary Lou Piña started fixing breakfast, so we started taking food for her, to help her with expenses. And it took off from there—and the rest is history!

Before Holy Family, I never enjoyed going to Mass because I never felt that I was getting anything out of it. I went, and I listened to the sermons, which weren't very good. They were nothing that made you stop and think. But then, when Father Jayme came to Cristo Rey, his sermons made me stop and think. It was Father Jayme who got me going back to church. I enjoyed his services so much, and he really made me think—and he still does!

When I see what's going on in the world, it's hard for me to understand why these things are happening. Once, I told Margie, "The Jews were God's people—and look at all the suffering they went through. If they went through all that, what hope do we have?" I'll be honest: I sometimes have a hard time with religion. God has been so good and so patient with me, but I still sometimes have a hard time with religion. I see people who go to Mass on Sunday, and then I see how they act during the week.

For nearly ten years, I volunteered my time to do the bookkeeping for Holy Family. That started when we went to the little orange house on Willow Street. Father Jayme announced that he needed help with bookkeeping, so I volunteered to record the income and expenses. That took me about ten hours each week, in addition to the monthly reports that Father Jayme wanted: That took an additional ten hours! I really enjoyed that a lot, which is why I did it so long. I communicated a lot with Amanda Rodriguez, our office administrator. She was such a joy to work with. She always had a positive attitude, and we always had a good relationship of helping one another out.

We also enjoyed helping Mary Lou with breakfasts. We'd give her money or bake a cake or ask what she needed. She often say, "Just give me the money. I know what I need." So, I'd give her the money. And Esther and Sandra always helped with the tortillas.

Before Holy Family, I was never that involved in the church, so I really found a lot of satisfaction at Holy Family. We were never taught to read the Bible, so I really enjoy Holy Family's bible study. Father Jayme's bible classes are eye-openers and help us to understand so much about our faith! Holy Family isn't like other churches. You can go to other churches, and no one says anything to you. At Holy Family, as soon as the Mass finishes, we start talking to people, and the priests and deacons are outside, saying good morning to everyone. In other churches, the priests finish the Mass and disappear—so we only see them during Mass. At Holy Family, our priests and deacons actually greet and talk to people!

When you come to Holy Family, people are actually glad to see you—and they welcome you. The people at Holy Family are very friendly. There are just so many reasons I've love Holy Family!

Holy Family Doesn't Discriminate

Mary (Medrano) Raigosa & Julia (Medrano) Machuca



Mary: We were born and raised in Pflugerville, Texas. Our dad was a sharecropper for the Timmermans, a famous millionaire family in Pflugerville. Mr. Timmerman had five farmers working his land, and he gave my dad a little piece of land, a little row house, a cow, a bunch of pigs and chickens—all that we raised for our own needs. The five farmers planted Mr. Timmerman's crops first, then they would help each other with their own land. On his acres, my dad planted cotton, corn, maize and hay. We were the Mexican "Waltons": My parents had eight kids, and our grandparents and two old maids lived with us, too!

Julia: Mary and I had six brothers!

Mary: My grandmother had a huge garden, and we had to carry water from the well, to water her garden. That's how we lived. We only had money for necessary things.

Julia: And we didn't miss a thing!

Mary: We had plenty to eat. We had chickens roaming all over the yard. My grandmother would run after the chickens, grab them by the neck and twist them, and throw them into a big, black boiling pot that we kept outside. We always had food on the table, and once a year my parents would kill a pig—and we ate every bit of that pig! My grandmother made blood sausage, and she fried the ears, and she saved the feet for *menudo*. I swear we ate every part of that pig—even the heart! Mr. Timmerman was a racist: He called us Mexicans, and he used the N-word for Black people, but he treated us kindly, and he took care of us. Pflugerville was a little German town, and dad would take us with him to the cotton gin, pulling a trailer of cotton with his tractor. He'd tell us to stand by a tree and not go anywhere. People looked down on us and said, "Go back to where you belong!" Pflugerville was a racist little town of German people in the 1940s and 1950s! My grandkids don't believe these stories!

Julia: We didn't have what kids have now, but, oh, we had so much fun! We made our own games. We went down to the pond. We grew up so close together. We have such fond memories of growing up! We were baptized as babies at St. Elizabeth Catholic Church. There was never a Sunday that we didn't go to church. Then we moved to Austin and were right around the corner from Cristo Rey. My parents always woke us up early, and we had to go to the 7:00 a.m. Mass!

Mary: We moved to Austin in 1957 or 1958, and we made our First Communion at Cristo Rey when we were 10 or 12 years old. Of course, there were a lot of nuns at Cristo Rey, and we went to classes there. Then, in high school, Father Victor Goertz was our instructor. The nuns took care of the younger kids, and Father Goertz taught the high school kids. We had religion classes twice a week—at the same time that he was building the church! He would talk to us about his meetings with lawyers, architects and the bishop.

He'd tell us about fundraising for the church. He told us how hard it was to build a church, and, once the church was built, we were so proud of him, because we knew all the trouble he had gone through! My husband and I were married in the old church, though.

Julia: And I was married in the new church!

Mary: Even though we lived in South Austin, we kept going to Cristo Rey—until Father Jayme left in 2011. Then we slacked off for a year. We tried different churches…

Julia: …but we couldn't find a church where we were comfortable.

Mary: I live by St. Edward's University, so we tried there. The priests were very nice, and they had a good service, but we couldn't bond with the college kids. Then one day, I saw Isabel Gonzales at the store, and she said, "We're doing a fundraiser for Father Jayme. We're getting a church together, and y'all need to come! That's when we started coming to Holy Family—and we've been here ever since!

Julia: When Father Jayme left Cristo Rey, we continued to go there, but we just couldn't get anything out of the sermon. We came out the same way that we went in! Half the time we couldn't understand what the friars from Mexico were trying to tell us. It was just hard, and we didn't get anything out of it. We tried St. Ignatius, but we didn't feel we belonged. We tried San José, and we felt out of place. We went to Dolores a couple of times. We just roamed around until we heard about Holy Family—and then we fell in love!

Mary: We grew up on Third Street, with Louis Cuevas and Mary Helen Quintero, so we thought, "Hey, we've found our people!" We grew up with Roy, too!

Julia: It's hard to get used to saying "Father Roy"!

Mary: We grew up together in the neighborhood! Father Roy calls us his "cotton-picking friends" because we used to pick cotton with him! My dad was a hard worker, and he made us pick cotton in the summer for his former boss. My dad worked for the Southern Union Gas Company at that time and couldn't pick us up every day, so we stayed in the little two-room shack that his former boss provided us. We

camped there for a week at a time: the Gomezes were on one side of the shack, and we were on the other! My mom cooked for us all, and Roy and his mother picked cotton with us. On Friday night, my dad would pick us up and take us home for the weekend, then he'd take us back again on Sunday night and we'd stay another week. We did it to help out: My dad supported us all, including my grandparents, and there was no social security. Our grandparents came from Mexico in 1916.

Julia: At that time, you just crossed the river!

Mary: I remember when we first went to Holy Family. We saw all these people that we grew up with in the neighborhood. Father Jayme was running for the school board at the time, and Mary Lou was hosting a fundraiser for him, and she said, "You have to come!" It was just great to be around so many people we had grown up with. Our 9:00 a.m. Sunday Mass has many people that we've known our entire lives!

Julia: Some of my best experiences of church have been at Holy Family. We understand the Mass. We leave church feeling like we got something out of it. Father Jayme's sermons are so good. He goes over the readings before the Mass starts, and he explains everything. It's just so wonderful, and I leave Holy Family with energy for the week! My husband, Toby, helps at both churches: He's still part of the Men's Club at Cristo Rey, and he helps with their breakfasts, fish fries and *jamaica*. He goes to their Men's Club meeting every month, and their Men's Club Mass every month. I just love that he comes to Holy Family for me. I love him for that.

Mary: Father Jayme definitely keeps us coming back to Holy Family: We get so much out of his service.

Julia: And it's a big family!

Mary: We have such a nice time on Sundays, talking to everybody, eating *tamales* and getting together! Rosa Gil is such a dear. She is so sweet, and we help her in any way we can, with whatever she needs. We ask her, "What can we do for you? How can we help you?" We're not really good at cooking, but we can help her monetarily. We'll bring the *pan dulce*, or we'll give her money for *tamales*, or we'll help with a cake.

Rosa reminds us so much of Mary Lou Piña: She's such a dear, and we're happy to contribute in any way. In fact, I need to call John Zavala, to see if he needs drink or chips or bread for Sunday! We always ask him what he needs, too. If he needs a ham for our Thanksgiving dinner, we're happy to help!

Julia: When we come out of Holy Family, we know what the Mass was about. Holy Family just feels like a big, happy family! And I love that. I love how our priests and deacons come out and greet everyone after Mass. We come out feeling really good. We're united and close. I miss some of the people who don't go now because of the pandemic.

Mary: I tell people: "If you're looking for a church where you can be accepted, no matter who or what you are, try Holy Family. Everybody's friendly, and we accept everybody. You will never be turned away because of who you are." Even the pope in Rome is sounding more like Holy Family: Have you heard his speeches lately? He recently said that we're all God's children, no matter what orientation we are, and I told Julie, "The Roman Catholic Church is coming to our church!" It's like the pope is accepting us back under the Roman "umbrella." He's finally opening up and realizing that we're all equal, we're all human beings, and we're all God's children!

Julia: Holy Family doesn't discriminate. We're all God's children, and we are all welcomed!

Mary: One big plus is that Holy Family baptizes children, no matter whether their parents are married or divorced. Children get the blessing of the sacrament, and that's just really so great. What their parents do or don't do is not children's fault. It's so great that we baptize them and they can receive Communion. That's wonderful!

Julia: My granddaughter is doing her Confirmation in May, and she has to go to class every Sunday, and she has to do so many service hours. I asked Rosa if my granddaughter can help with the breakfast, to get some hours—but then her teacher said that she can't miss class to do her service hours! It isn't right that a person should have to go to class every

single Sunday just to make their Confirmation. My granddaughter went to St. Mary's for eight years, and now she's at San Juan Diego: She already knows our religion! That's just not right—and that's what so good about Holy Family: That you don't have to do all that to receive your sacraments.

We are Drop-out Recovery for Disaffected Catholics Who Have Been Denied the Sacraments!

Lori (Cervenak) Rentería



I was raised in Detroit, Michigan, where my father was the only Slovak-speaking doctor in the entire city. We lived in a Slovak/Polish neighborhood, where my family walked to St. Cyril Catholic Church. When my parents divorced, we moved to Farmington Hills, a suburb of Detroit, and we started attending a Catholic church that I absolutely hated. My mom and my stepdad forced me to attend religious education classes, and I hated that. I was constantly getting into trouble because they had a dress code that I refused to conform to. Girls had to wear skirts and ankle socks, even in the ice and snow, and, because the bus stop was far from our home, I put on nylons beneath the ankle socks—and that was not allowed. My mom constantly had to pick me up because of those dress code violations. I did my First Communion and Confirmation at that church.

I messed up and got involved in drugs and sex and all kinds of crazy stuff. I was a young hippie chick! The school that I attended offered vocational training, where I went to school half a day and worked at a store and got paid for half a day. I got used to the money, so I quit school, and both sets of parents said they wouldn't pay for my college if I quit school. I told them I didn't need their

money, and I bounced back and forth between their houses. I was pregnant with a tubal pregnancy and had to quit work. My boyfriend and I lived in cheap motels, but he was a slacker. He thought he was going to have a big career as a singer, like Mick Jagger, but he didn't have stable work. After we were married, he became abusive, and he beat me up and slapped me around. One day, I saw a sign for free room and board and education: It was an Army recruiting station—and I signed up and spent three years in the military. For over a year, I was in training at Fort Gordon in Augusta, Georgia, to learn to fix top-secret coding and decoding machines. I had fled my husband, but he hitchhiked to the base and busted through the security gate of our top-secret facility. They sent him home on a bus—but he did it again, busting through a metal detector, so they locked him up again. The chief warrant officer assigned me to Oahu, Hawaii, and he told everyone that I got those orders because my husband couldn't hitchhike to Hawaii! I got out of the Army in 1979 and went back to Michigan. Chrysler had crashed, and there was no work in Detroit. None at all. A veterans job counselor told me that, with my training in computers, I could get a job anywhere. He suggested Silicon Valley, but I knew that California was expensive and that, with all the hippies there, I'd fall into the same rut I was in before I enlisted. He suggested that I try any major city in Texas except San Antonio, which still had an agricultural economy. And I said, "I'm going to Texas, to marry me a cowboy!" I looked up Houston, Dallas and Austin in my dad's AAA travel guide. I knew I was not going to be a Gulf Coast resident, so Houston was out. I like to fish, and both Dallas and Austin had chains of freshwater lakes. Austin was a college town known for its artificial moonlight, so I took a job with IBM. I was supposed to follow around different repair techs during my 90-day probationary period, but Pio had gotten into a multi-car crash, so they assigned me to him, so that I could drive him in my car to our job sites. His wife was a drug addict, and he had two little boys. I learned from him what Mexican *fiestas* are all about! We secretly lived together for two years—it was against company policy to date anyone in your division—but then we went on vacation in Big Bend, and I forgot my birth control pills. I got pregnant, Pio's boys came to live with us, and we got married

two years later. We started attending Guadalupe, where the boys were baptized, participated in church plays, and received their First Communion. Our daughter, Solana, was baptized there. The little diva hated church! She would throw temper tantrums and kick the back of the pews, so we stopped going to church for a time—until she was about 12 and we felt that we could leave her home while we went to church. The boys were teenagers, so they didn't go to church with us. Father Bill Elliott was at Guadalupe at that time. I thought he was the greatest thing since sliced bread. He used to say that we're here to serve the poor. He would say, "I'm tired of all y'all putting your measly $2 in the basket when I know you can afford more. The church is struggling, and we want to build a new parish hall. One of these days, y'all are going to show up, and the church doors will be chained shut, with a sign on the door, reading, 'Go out and do street outreach! Help the homeless and sick!'" I really liked the fact that he was very action-oriented.

Pio and I had formed the United East Austin Coalition, a political group, because the leaders of *El Concilio*, another neighborhood group, were so corrupt. They were embezzling funds. So, we formed a new group, a new coalition.

I had gotten a job at Martin Middle School, and I only had two years to use my G.I. Fund before it expired, so I enrolled in an adult learner program at St. Edward's, where they gave me credits for my computer skills and experience. I quit IBM to go to school full-time, and the V.A. paid for some very expensive tuition credits at St. Edward's. After earning my degree in English, I started doing grant writing and fundraising.

I started applying for city grants, to form a teen club for the boys and girls on the block who had aged out of the Campfire group that we formed in 1976. The grant was for strategic intervention for high-risk youth. That's when we met Brother Jayme, in 1995. He was wearing monk robes and roaming around the Eastside, and I asked him, "What are you doing in my neighborhood?" He said, "I'm working with high-risk youth," and I said, "So am I: We should get together!"

At that time, Austin Interfaith had pulled together Cristo Rey and Guadalupe, and I had landed a job with community schools in the Austin ISD, where we opened our schools after hours and on

weekends for community use. We hosted free classes, since no one in the neighborhood could barely afford a six pack. After five kids were shot in the park, our principal encouraged me to write another grant, to get kids off the street and into school. We had already been working with the city's manager of youth services, and that's when Darlene Camacho and I got involved in gang intervention. We showed up at a fiery meeting at the library, and Father Bill was leading everyone in a prayer circle. When he finished, he looked at us and said, "Lori and Darlene are here: We need to conduct an exorcism!" That was it. I never went back to Guadalupe. I later found out that they had partnered with the United East Austin Coalition and were diverting a three-year Department of Justice grant from school-based programs, to pay for church roofs and youth ministers at Guadalupe and Cristo Rey! Darlene and I showed up at city hall to call attention to the fact that they were fraudsters, and the city council redefined the roles and responsibilities, so that we could participate in that grant. We just couldn't believe that they took a grant for school-based programs and gave it to the youth ministry programs at Cristo Rey and Guadalupe. I objected the whole time. They contracted a group to provide school-based case management for kids involved in the juvenile justice system—with no services for Martin Middle School. Years later, we were selected to be the first pilot neighborhood planning team. They chose the Cesar Chavez neighborhood for Mexicans, the Chestnut neighborhood for Blacks, and the Dawson neighborhood for Whites.

By then, it was 2001, and I was distributing the Grapevine newsletter door-to-door. I saw Brother Jayme again—and now he was a priest. I somehow convinced him to be the congregational rep on our East Cesar Chavez Neighborhood Planning Team. I worked with him to organize the Holly Neighborhood Planning Team, a truly representative group, like it was supposed to be. I wasn't going to church anymore because I was super-busy. I was also working with Father Jayme in 2011, when he brought Congressman Luis Gutierrez to East Austin—Pio was on the Pan Am Recreation Center board at the time of that fiasco, when the bishop tried to excommunicate Father Jayme, and he started having Mass in his backyard. After he moved to *Los Dos Laredos*, I

found out about Holy Family, and I loved the idea of going to church at a nightclub, at a dance club! I loved the focus on inclusion. I loved the fact that congregants were excommunicated from Cristo Rey, because I had excommunicated myself from Guadalupe.

I remember those first Masses there. It was a big hall. At first, you could see the bar in the dance hall, then Father Roy covered up the bar with curtains, and slowly but surely, it became a church!

When we found Salem Church, that was just fabulous. I remember thinking, "This is a much better place to have weddings!" We built a stage outside, which made it really fun when the weather was right, and we have a lot in common with the Lutherans. I provided a fish pond and duck pond for the annual *jamaica*, I did face-painting one time, and I spread word of it in the Grapevine.

We're an inclusive church. We don't judge people. We don't charge people for sacraments. We're not about money; we're about community. We're growing and expanding, and I'm just thankful to be part of it. When I hear Catholics say, "I can't go to church anymore," I say, "Oh, yes, you can. Come to Holy Family! We are drop-out recovery for disaffected Catholics who have been denied the sacraments!" I'm just so proud to be a member of an all-inclusive Catholic church!

We Leave the Judging to God!

Sabino "Pio" Rentería



I was born and raised in East Austin, Texas. After first grade at Guadalupe, I went to Palm Elementary School. I then went to University Junior High, the first integrated school in Austin, on the campus of UT. I graduated from the old Austin High School on Rio Grande.

When I went to school at Guadalupe, we went to Mass every morning. They flunked me in the first grade, so I went to Palm. Blackshear was closer, but I had a lot of friends at Palm, so I walked there every day, and we had a great time there—and I had perfect attendance for six years! I really had a great time at school, the food was great, and there was a big, two-story emergency slide on the west side of the building!

We went to C.C.D. at Guadalupe all those years, and we raised money for their *jamaica*, and we helped them set up and take down all the booths—so they took us to Six Flags.

As an adult, I continued to go to Guadalupe, but I didn't like their attitude: The Roman Catholic Church discriminated a lot, and they hated gays and Blacks, and they said that you couldn't go to any other churches. There was just too much hate, and I couldn't stand it anymore.

Then Lori excited me about this young priest at Cristo Rey, who was preaching the truth. He wasn't lying to people or saying, "You're going to go to hell if you miss church!" I went to church, and I had a great time. Father Jayme served with us on the East Cesar Chavez Planning Team, back when he was at San Juan Diego.

After Father Jayme was fired from Cristo Rey, we heard that he was giving sermons at his house on Garden Street. We went to Mass at his house, and we had a really great time. We had a service, we ate breakfast, and we had a great conversation. Father Jayme

preached and explained the Bible in a clear way: He actually explains it when he talks! He tells us, for example, what Jesus really meant when he talked about getting a camel through the eye of a needle: that people couldn't get their merchandise through the narrowest gate of the city! I'm a history buff and am fascinated by history, so I really like how he puts the Bible in context. I've never heard anyone preach like him in the Roman Catholic Church.

I like Holy Family because it's different from the Roman Catholic Church. At Guadalupe, if certain groups didn't like you, they treated you like an outsider—even if you were born in the neighborhood! We don't have those kinds of people at Holy Family, people who don't like you just because you don't believe what they say. Recently, I saw one of my dad's really good friends, and he was trying to convince me that I was sinning by going to Holy Family! I just responded, "that's interesting"—because when you question people, they only get angry. They don't have any defense for their B.S. That's one of the reasons I left Guadalupe: I just can't stand when people pass judgment on people they don't even know. I don't feel that at Holy Family.

I used to love going to that big, fancy barn that we used to have on Lava Hill Road. It was really great to see how people treated one another like family members. It's not like other churches, where people say, "I don't like him!" We don't judge people. That's what I like about Holy Family. We include everybody, whether you're poor or handicapped or Black or Brown or White or gay. That's what makes our church so great! It's one of the few churches that I've gone to that welcomes everybody, no matter who you are. It's an inclusive church. I have gone to funerals in other churches, where the priests and deacons criticize the lifestyles of others, and they don't give them a proper burial because of things they've done. There's just too much hate in some churches—but Holy Family is an inclusive church that welcomes anybody who comes! I tell everyone, "We welcome everyone, we don't care how you dress, and we don't care what you are! We leave the judging to God!"

Holy Family is a Real Family. It's a Real Team!

Judith Rincón



I am originally from Heroica Matamoros, Tamaulipas, Mexico, and I have been here in Texas for 22 years. I have been Catholic since my baptism at three months old. I treasure my Catholic faith, and I am very close to the Church. My parents belonged to the liturgy group at St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church in Matamoros. We never missed Holy Hour on Thursdays and Mass on Sundays. We were very close to the church, and we were good friends of Father López, may he rest in peace. He always took care of us, and he saw me grow up in the Rincón-Leyva family. He was the one who confirmed me and gave me my First Communion. He celebrated my *quinceañera*. I sang in the choir and helped at Mass. My youngest brother served as an altar boy. All that ended, though, when my parents divorced. That's where our beautiful and close relationship with the Church ended.

After my parents divorced, I became very angry with God and Mary. I prayed to Mary: "How could you, as a mother, allow this?" To escape that situation, I got married, and that's how I came to Texas.

Here in Texas, other churches invited me to visit, but I would say, "I'm Catholic"—even though I had stopped going to church. My marriage didn't work out, and I was left alone with my daughters, so I threw myself into my work. Work, work, work! I was healthy, and I had my daughters—but then I was diagnosed with cancer. That scared me: I didn't want my life to end yet! After cancer treatment and surgeries, God gave me another chance—and that's when I started looking for a church. I visited San José, Cristo Rey, and then I discovered Holy Family. It was April 2022, and I saw the church's flag—and a petting zoo—outside the church. I wondered, "What is this?" And I remembered that biblical verse:

"Let the children come to me"! The Mass was already over, but I met Father Jayme and Deacon Elsa, who is from Matamoros as well. They greeted me as if they knew me, and they gave me information on Mass. They didn't know that I hadn't been to Mass in years. I cried so much that day. Deacon Elsa was so loving, the people seemed very united, and I could hear a voice inside myself, calling out from the loneliness I had felt since my parents' divorce, telling me, "This is it! Come here!"

When I returned for Mass, Deacon Elsa invited me to proclaim the Word in Spanish. I had never done that before, so I was nervous the first time. Becky shared with me some tips, then I invited Daniel Cruz to proclaim the Word, too, so we studied and proclaimed the Word together.

One day, Father Jayme said, "We need volunteers to take down the playground set." I have always focused on creating spaces where children feel comfortable, so I volunteered that day—and on the day when they set up the new playground set, too. I am a chef, so I brought tacos and fruit to nourish the men who did the work.

I also danced with our *matlachines* on the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe in 2022. It seemed the right time to ask Our Lady for forgiveness and for the strength to follow her example. It was so beautiful to see her image in the sunlight that day. I prayed to her, apologizing and asking forgiveness, knowing that she remained with her son when he died on the cross—and that she accompanied me in my suffering, too.

In my experience, Holy Family is a place where everyone can feel comfortable. When people ask where I go to church, I tell them, "I belong to Holy Family, because they made me feel comfortable and loved, and my daughters understood the gospel." We went to several Masses at Cristo Rey and San José, but my daughters didn't understand anything there. At Holy Family, though, they would tell me, "Father Jayme and Father Roy explain the gospel in a way that we can understand"—and that was the point of going to church!

Holy Family is a real family. It's a real team!

Holy Family is a Pretty Good Group

Luis Alonso Rivas



I came from El Salvador to the U.S. at age 38. I'm 75 now, so I've spent nearly half my life here. I was born on Good Friday, April 7, 1949, and I was baptized in the Catholic religion in a neighborhood called Paleta, in Delgado, El Salvador. I received my First Communion there, too.

When I was 12 years old, we moved to another neighborhood, where I became involved in the church. I helped out at church there, and I even rang the church bells!

I studied engineering for three years, and I found my first life partner, and we got married when I was 17. At that time, I was a catechist, and I taught religious education to children. I have been civilly married four times, and I have eight children.

Here in the U.S., I became a painter and a draftsman. I am a poet, and I kill time by writing music. I am an accountant and a trainer for the Salvadoran Football Federation of Referees, so I travel a lot internationally and can't always go to Mass on Sundays.

I'm still Catholic today, but, as I tell my wife, I'm Catholic by tradition, not by conviction. In my old age, I understand many things. I've read a lot, and I have my own ideas on what Catholicism is. Tradition is one thing, but we all need to have our own principles. I have a family and other responsibilities, so I don't buy the fanaticism of going to church every day. Like the Bible, I say God first, then family. That seems rational and logical to me.

I was away from the Church for a long time, until I met Father Jayme, when he served as the pastor of Cristo Rey. I admired him as a religious leader, and I agreed with many of his ideas. I liked his eloquence, and how he emulated the gospel. He preached with visuals, like tree branches, animals, and other things. He is like a teacher employing didactic examples for visual learners. I liked his

attitude, and, because he was young, compared to older priests, he saw things differently.

After Father Jayme disappeared from Cristo Rey, I learned that he had a church somewhere south of Austin, but I didn't know where. I dedicated myself to wandering streets and looking for him. Finally, I found him, one day when I saw several cars leaving Lava Hill Road—and I got involved!

When I was in Austin, I got involved with Holy Family, and I tried to be helpful in certain things that were delegated to me. I proclaimed the Word at Mass. I usually do well at this. I've been a poet and involved in literature. In El Salvador, I belonged to the Young Poets of El Salvador, and I recited poems during gatherings at the National Theater of El Salvador. People often comment on my style of proclaiming. I do so with a poetic, semantic tone of voice, because that's what I was taught. When you speak at a podium or in front of an audience, you have to pay attention to your voice. You have to employ a very ambient semantic in the church, because it's one thing to talk, but it's another thing to proclaim the Word to an audience!

Holy Family is a pretty good group. It's the only church that I've touched more than a little. Many people don't understand the great Independent American Catholic family. I understand it perfectly. It is the same Catholic religion, and the rites are the same, whether it is Independent Catholic or Roman Catholic. All roads lead upwards, to God. To a certain extent, Holy Family is more sincere, because one goes knowing what the great Independent Catholic family is!

I Feel Like I'm Among Family

Francisco Javier Robles



I was born in Houston, Texas, then raised in Sabinas, Coahuila, Mexico. In April 2008, I moved to Austin, Texas.

I enjoyed a rather ethical upbringing. My mother is very Catholic, and my father, though not Catholic, is very devout. He understands Catholicism and sometimes accompanies my mother to Mass. His devotion to Our Lady of San Juan and Our Lady of Guadalupe rubbed off on me. In fact, I was baptized in San Juan de los Lagos, and I received my First Communion and Confirmation in Mexico.

I attended a Catholic school, the *Colegio Antonio Pancarte y Labastida*, in Sabinas, Coahuila. Even after that, I went to Mass every Sunday with my mom and siblings. After earning my degree as a mechanical engineer, I worked as an administrator in our capital city of Saltillo, Coahuila. I tried to attend Mass on Sundays and for big celebrations, like Easter or the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe on December 12. I knew what it means to be Catholic, and I know the difference between right and wrong, good and bad.

I got married. Then, four years ago, I experienced a very unpleasant divorce. My son was born during that divorce, so my ex-wife took my son, moved to Mexico, and has done everything possible to keep me and my family away from my son. My ex-wife expected me to support her and her family, though. My son bears my last name, and I was able to secure U.S. citizenship for him. For me, those five months were a time of real prayer!

I attended Mass during my divorce, but I often found that memories of church often triggered sadness: My ex-wife and I went to Mass together, we baptized our son, and the sight of families and babies now reduced me to tears. There were times when I couldn't stop crying during Mass. I felt uncomfortable, and

I suspect that I sometime made other people uncomfortable, too—so I began to distance myself from the church that I attended, where I no longer felt comfortable.

Thanks to a court order, I was able to bring my son to the U.S. It was so moving to see him asleep in his crib, in my house! Some people strive for money or their career, but all I ever wanted in life was a family—and God has blessed me with more than I ever imagined for myself! Sometimes I just fall to my knees and cry, "Why?" As a child, I wanted to be a father and to have a son. God has now allowed me to be a father. God gave me a son—and that means so much to me. It's just so moving. I am grateful to God for so many things that I haven't asked for as well.

My prayers now are no longer like traditional prayers. Instead, prayer, for me, is more like a conversation with God. This is new for me. Not even at our Catholic school did they encourage us to simply have a conversation with God, to talk with God and to listen to God. Every time I speak with God, I receive answers. This is something that I share with my family and friends.

I found Holy Family by googling "Catholic churches near me." I visited the church's Facebook page, and I saw the Mass schedule. Though it's only six minutes from my home, I had never heard of Holy Family, but I said, "I'm going to check out this church!" Since then, I've invited my siblings to Holy Family as well, but they're not so devout in that way.

The way that Father Jayme speaks and expresses himself really touches me, and I like the fact that Holy Family, though small, is very united. I feel comfortable here. I feel like I'm among family.

I remember telling Father Jayme one day, "Father, I have committed a mortal sin: I am divorced." He affirmed that the Body of Christ is for all people, and that God forgives us of our sins. I like that and, though it took me some time to feel comfortable with the idea, I took the step—a very, very big step for me!—of receiving the Eucharist again.

I'm thinking about marriage again. My fiancée is also divorced and has children. She has been a pillar of strength for me. I wasn't looking for her, but she came into my life: We ran into one another at her workplace, we began a friendship, which led to dating, and now we're engaged—all thanks to God!

For me, Holy Family is the foundation, the base, the pillar of what we want to share with our loved ones, and, with such a strong foundation, our lives and homes can never fall!

We Decided, "This Is Our Church!"

Amanda (Castillo) Rodriguez



I was born in Austin and went to school in Bastrop: at Mina Elementary, Bastrop Middle School and Bastrop High School. For many years, my family went to Dolores Catholic Church, where my grandfather would take us when we were smaller—until it got to be too much for my mom to drive all the way into Austin. Then we started attending the San Juan Diego mission in our neighborhood in Stony Point. We baptized all four of our boys there, and we went there all the time, until it closed. After that, we didn't go back to church. It was years before we found Holy Family and started going to church again, which felt rejuvenating and was something that we needed in our lives again.

We discovered Holy Family in 2014 through my sister, Geneva, who invited us to our niece's First Communion and Confirmation there. Geneva learned about Holy Family from Irene Hurtado, my nephew's mother-in-law. My first impression of Holy Family was, "This is a church?" It was an old warehouse on Lava Hill Road, which I didn't know existed. My mom fell in love with Father Jayme. I also like Father Jayme's homilies: He makes eye contact with everyone, and it's as if he is speaking to me. I was also surprised by how well he spoke Spanish. At that point, we decided, "This is our church," and we haven't stopped coming to Holy Family since.

I remember our first visit to Holy Family: Leonard Gonzales and John Zavala greeted us, and it was such a welcoming experience. Our boys could be a little antsy at times, and many people at Roman Catholic churches give you a dirty look when your small kids start making noise. I never got dirty looks at Holy Family. Everyone accepted us. It was like being with family.

I first got involved in the Environment Committee, then Father Jayme asked people to help with breakfast groups, so we spoke with John Zavala about having a breakfast group. Inocencio and I led the group, and our four boys—Miguel, Jon Paul, Abraham and Luke—helped us, as well as my mom, Mary Felis Cisneros; my sister, Geneva Moreno; and my aunt, JoAnn Cisneros. My cousin and some of our nephews and nieces helped as well.

We started cooking breakfast, and it made me happy to see how many people enjoyed our breakfast and conversed with one another while eating. Everyone loves Inocencio's *menudo*! It's so good that Terry Caballero tells me, "I can never eat more than one bowl of *menudo*—except for Inocencio's *menudo*!" We also loved the fact that Father Jayme went to every table and greeted everyone. That was something that we never experienced in any other church. Most priests just get their food and leave, or we never see them. After that, we started helping with the *jamaica*, and we got involved in helping to make the church better. People loved Inocencio's street tacos: *tacos al pastor*, *de bistec*, *suadero* and *chorizo*!

In 2015, Father Jayme announced that he was hosting a "data entry party" at the rectory on Garden Street, and I thought, "I can definitely do data entry!" That week, I volunteered to help with the data entry. That's really where I got to know Becky, Terry and Rafaela. Everyone was so nice, and they accepted me. I volunteered more, and Father Jayme eventually hired me as Holy Family's office administrator in October 2015.

I love helping people, and I love the fact that Holy Family is an Independent Catholic church, and that all the rules and restrictions of the Roman Catholic Church don't apply to us, even though we still have the same beliefs. People from other churches have such a hard time getting their sacraments. I can't tell you how many horrible stories I've heard of the Roman Catholic Church turning

people away, or making them go through so many obstacles to get their sacraments. At Holy Family, we want everyone to receive their sacraments, and I love the fact that you don't have to go to classes for two years just to receive a sacrament. We don't make people "jump through hoops" or go through all sorts of "red tape" to receive their sacraments. It amazes me that we have so many people who come to Holy Family from different states, just to receive their sacraments at our church—just because their churches do not allow them to receive the sacraments. Perhaps they're divorced, or they didn't receive the sacraments at the age they were supposed to. Helping people to receive their sacraments makes me love my job even more!

I'll never forget my mom's funeral at Holy Family in 2017: We had only been at Holy Family for two or three years when she passed, and everyone from the church was there, and they said such beautiful things about my mom. It made me realize how many people my mom touched at Holy Family. I want to cry just thinking about it: It was a feeling that I will never forget. That made me love our church even more!

Holy Family has brought us closer to God, and we have been part of a community that we never thought we'd experience. We have tried to help out as much as we can. When we cleaned out the back room on Lava Hill, for our children's ministry, Inocencio brought in all his heavy machinery to assist. We placed the tire stops in the parking lot there as well. Here at Salem, we poured the cement foundation for the parish's shed, we built the stage for the *jamaica*, and Inocencio poured the sidewalks around the church.

Our sons have gotten involved as well: Miguel and Jon Paul assisted with PowerPoints during mass from 2017 until the pandemic, and the twins, Abraham and Luke, helped with our breakfast. They all received their First Communion and Confirmation at Holy Family.

If you come to Holy Family once, you'll be back—because of how inclusive and inviting it is!

We Feel Part of the Family at Holy Family!

Joe & Sylvia (Ybarbo) Rodriguez



Sylvia: I was born here in Austin, and I went to Dolores Catholic Church for elementary school. In fact, I was born in 1953, the year that Dolores opened. I attended Del Valle public schools beginning in the sixth grade, and I graduated from high school in 1972.

Joe: I was born in Kerrville, Texas and raised in Ohio. I came to Austin in 1970, when I was stationed at Bergstrom Air Force Base, and I've been here ever since.

Sylvia: When I was a girl, we went to Dolores Catholic Church in Montopolis. Because I went to school there, too, I spent a lot of time there! I used to have to walk to school, and there was a family that lived next to church with many dogs who ran after me every morning and every afternoon. To this day, I'm afraid of dogs! I just prayed every day that those little dogs wouldn't catch me—and they never did! My younger sister complained to my mom and dad about this and that, so she was only in Catholic school for a year before they moved us to public schools. That was the best thing our parents could have done for us, and I never went back to a Catholic school at all.

Joe: I was raised Catholic, too, at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Port Clinton, Ohio, where I went to school through the eighth grade. I belonged to the Catholic Youth Organization. We had Mass every day, before school started. The nuns didn't use rulers at Immaculate Conception: They were more aggressive and would slap us!

Sylvia: Oh, my God!

Joe: In the seventh grade, I had a friend who, when the nun was going to slap him, caught her hand and said, "My Mom doesn't even slap me." He went to the principal's office, his parents were called, and the slapping stopped.

Sylvia: We attended Dolores from the time I was born—until my daughter tried to put my grandson in CCD, and they rejected him because of his disability. So, I quit going there, except for funerals. I went there all my life!

Joe: Before Holy Family, I only went to church off and on. I wasn't really into church. During my military career, I hardly went to church—and the same after that. It just didn't interest me. I lost interest in the Church. Then, when Sylvia found out about Holy Family, I started going. It's been a good change for me!

Sylvia: My cousin, Lucille Saldaña, told me about Holy Family some seven years ago. We were talking about churches one time, and I told her that I was upset that I couldn't receive Communion because I was divorced. She said, "Do you remember Father Jayme from Cristo Rey? He has a church now that is an Independent Catholic church and not a Roman Catholic church. You should go! I think you would like it!" I said, "Okay." I tried it, and that was the best thing that could ever have happened to me!

Joe: We started coming to Holy Family a few years before the pandemic started.

Sylvia: The first time I went was the 10:30 a.m. Mass in the classroom. I went home and told Joe, "You'll never guess what happened: I was able to receive Communion!" I hadn't received Communion in over 20 years. You know how the Roman Catholic Church is. When I received Communion at Holy Family that day, I didn't even want to swallow it. I didn't want to bite it. I missed Communion so much, and, when I was finally able to receive it, I just wanted that feeling to last! So, now I'm at Holy Family to stay!

Joe: I remember how friendly the congregation was during my first visit there. Father Jayme asked everyone to introduce themselves to those around them, and we felt

wanted. We feel part of the family at Holy Family! That experience turned me around.

Sylvia: Joe never went with me to Catholic Mass, but now he asks, "What Mass are we going to on Sunday?" And we go as a couple! I remember meeting Father Jayme's mother at Holy Family one day, and she said, "He's in the right place. This is where he belongs." I say the same: Holy Family is where we belong. I was recently telling another person, "I have found my place, and it's wonderful!" Everything about Holy Family is so positive. People are welcomed when they arrive. Everybody is so kind and makes you feel at home. I've never experienced a church like that! I'm so lucky that Lucille told us about Holy Family, and we look forward to going every Sunday.

Joe: I'm very grateful that Father Roy and Father Jayme have asked me to help with various woodworking needs.

Sylvia: It keeps him busy!

Joe: Becky and Terry gave me another project to do for the church this weekend—but they gave me a year to do it!

Sylvia: One of the things that I like about Holy Family is that, instead of having Confession before all the Masses, we have a rite of Reconciliation, where we write down our sins and share them with the priest, rather than saying them. We aren't forgiven by some priest, some man, behind a screen, to whom we tell our most private sins. I wonder why we had to do that all those years! The priests at Holy Family simply burn what we've written and assure us that our sins are forgiven. That is so nice: They burn it, and it's gone. It's so simple, yet it has so much more meaning!

Joe: I didn't list all my sins, but I did ask forgiveness for all the sins I have committed. I would need a book if I were going to write all my sins! But I feel better knowing that I wrote down my gravest sins—and the greatest thing is now being able to receive Communion. The other thing I love about Holy Family is the closeness of the parishioners. We get to know each other. When I used to

go to Mass with my parents, no one would say "hi" to us unless they knew us. They wouldn't say "good morning" or "good afternoon," and after church everybody would just leave.

Sylvia: There was no closeness.

Joe: I tell people Holy Family is a five-star church. If you go to Holy Family, you walk away feeling different!

Sylvia: Holy Family is my second home. That's how Holy Family makes me feel. We feel that we're at home, and we're there to stay!

Oh, My Gosh, This Church is For Real!

Rev. Stephen Rodriguez



I'm originally from Austin, Texas. I went to different elementaries, but I ended up at Langford, then Paredes Middle School, and I graduated from Akins High School.

I celebrated my First Communion at Cristo Rey, where I went to religious education classes until I was about 16 years old. Then we stopped. When I was 20, I enrolled in the Rite of Christian Initiation with my grandmother at St. Margaret Mary in Cedar Park. That really whetted my appetite for religion and spirituality. I started to understand things differently, and I felt differently about God and religion. It was around that time that I felt I had a calling from God, but I just didn't feel right in the Roman Catholic Church. I knew that I was gay, I knew how the church felt about that, but I also knew how I felt about God: These things weren't going to ever mix well with one another! I knew that something was going to have to give. I couldn't remain in a church that considered me a bad person or as

"intrinsically evil." I'm none of those things. Growing up, though, I didn't know that there are other ways of being Catholic.

One day, I saw a story on Father Jayme and Holy Family in the *Austin Chronicle*. I looked up Holy Family and learned that there are different ways of being Catholic. It took me a few more years, though, to build up the courage to go and check out Holy Family! Holy Family was on Lava Hill Road at the time. A couple of Sundays, I drove there and sat outside the church, but I said to myself, "Heck, no, I can't do this!" I drove off three times!

About six years ago, though, I met my husband, Jordan, and, with him at my side, I had the courage to check out Holy Family. I remember that first day: It was like the gates of heaven opened for me! Becky Saenz and Leonard Gonzales were the first people to greet us and introduce themselves. I loved the community, which reminded me of Cristo Rey. I loved hearing Father Jayme get up there and do his thing. I remember seeing a woman whose sons wrapped their arms around her and hugged her, and I remembered doing that with my mom at Mass. That Mass really took me back to when I was a kid, and I enjoyed those same good feelings! I went home and called my grandma and told her that we had found Father Jayme's church.

When we returned for our second Mass at Holy Family, Becky pulled us aside and asked if I wanted to read. I was weirded out by her invitation! I wanted to say, "Girl, are you for real? This is only my second time here!" I called grandma afterward and told her about the weird lady who wanted me to read. She replied, "Stephen, read. That's God's way of calling you. When you're asked to proclaim the Word at church, it's an honor. Just do it!"

When we went back to Holy Family the next week, I told Becky that I would do it. Simply being asked to be involved was one of the reasons that we kept coming back. Reading at Mass was nerve-wracking at first, because I knew how important it was. It's an honor and privilege to get up there, and it's not something that I take lightly.

Jordan and I started attending bible study with Father Roy. That reminded me of the days when I went to RCIA classes with my grandma. It was on Wednesday nights, so it made me think about how my grandma and I would hang out and go to bible study

together on Wednesdays. That bible study with Father Roy was a way for us to build community and participate. I will do whatever it takes to participate. I'll even clean the restrooms! I want to be an active participant in the community, and that what we're building at Holy Family!

If you're not yet involved at church, pray about it. It might be God's way of calling you! I had a dream many years ago that I was a priest, and I woke up thinking, "Heck, no, that's not for me!" I'm unworthy of everything related to the Church! Years of damage from the Roman Catholic Church made me feel unworthy. Now I understand that everyone is worthy. Everyone is good enough for God! I told my grandma about that dream, and she said, "Stephen, maybe that's God's way of calling you." We joked about it at the time, and I said, "God wouldn't call me: I'm not worthy!" That's how other churches made me feel—and I believed it for a long time, until I went to Holy Family and the Holy Spirit shook up my life. I remember my first homily as a deacon. I held up a can of Coke, and I talked about how going to Holy Family was like shaking a can of soda. Holy Family shook up my faith—and I couldn't ignore the Holy Spirit anymore. I had to listen. I had to follow and do what I was told.

I initially went to Holy Family for Father Jayme's music and preaching and all that good stuff. But then, when Father Roy celebrated the sacrament of Anointing on the third Sunday of the month, that always stirred up something in me. The first time I experienced that, I started bawling uncontrollably. I've always been a crier, but that day I was overcome with emotion. When I got home, I called my grandmother. I said, "I don't know why I got so emotional." She opened my eyes to the fact that those times when we're so overcome with emotions are sometimes signs that the Holy Spirit is present in our lives. I could only think: Oh, my gosh, this church is for real!

Father Roy was instrumental in helping me learn about ministry. Becky was also a very important person in my spiritual and personal journey: She really pulled me aside and took me under her wing. She's been like a second mom—and I love my mom and wouldn't give that honor to just anybody!

Jordan Dickenson has been a very supportive partner and has really been one of the best things for my spiritual journey. Because of him, I'm able to do what I do. He pushes me and helps me with such ministry details as homily preparation, preparing meals for the homeless, and supporting our ministry to local nursing homes. You can imagine how happy I am that Jordan and I were able to be married through the Church—especially after all those years that the Catholic Church told me that this was wrong. It was a day that I'll never forget! All three families were together, under one roof: Jordan's family, my family, and our Holy Family family! And to be married by the Catholic Church: I couldn't have asked for more!

After I discerned the possibility of diaconal ministry, Father Jayme offered us lessons on Fridays. Then he sent us out, to have us learn from actually doing ministry. I really enjoyed being out there and ministering to people. I began by ministering to the homeless, but I found that many of them came to us for food and not necessarily for ministry. At the nursing home, though, I'm better able to talk to people about God. I'm able to be the hands of Christ to those around us. I also accompanied Father Roy for his home visits on Thursdays or Friday—and this was in the middle of the pandemic, when we were trying to figure out different ways of keeping in contact with parishioners. We met parishioners in their homes, and we took them the Eucharist, and this experience also formed me to be the person I am today. We did this every day for two months, and we had lunch every day, to talk about what I was learning. In this way, my formation was more life-based than in a classroom.

I also completed a semester of Clinical Pastoral Education. It was hard, since they were helping me to dissect and take a deeper look at things, but I would definitely do it again. It forced me out of my comfort zone, and we had to complete 100 hours of ministry to people. We helped and learned from one another.

I love being a deacon in the Church. I love getting out and meeting people. I really love proclaiming the Word. I love sitting down with people and listening to their stories. Now, at the nursing home, I love seeing people's appetite for God, spirituality and religion. We're sharing with them something that they haven't gotten in a long time! I used to help my grandma with nursing

home visits, a memory that will live with me forever, and now I'm going out and ministering to people!

I say to everyone: Give Holy Family a chance. You'll love it! Everyone is welcomed here—and when we say that, we really mean it! The love that I feel at Holy Family is unlike anything that I've ever felt in any other church.

Everyone was Nice and Sweet: Our Family Felt Welcomed!

Jeffrey Romero



I was born and raised in East Austin. I went to Metz Elementary, then, when I got older, we moved to South Austin, and I attended Mendez Middle School and Johnston High School.

As a child, I went to the Baptist Church on Second Street for a while, with Ms. Pat, and I also went to Cristo Rey when I was younger, but then I just stopped.

I met my wife, Veronica, 16 years ago, and we've been married for nearly nine years now. She and Carlos attended *Todos Juntos* Learning Center, which Father Jayme started at Cristo Rey back in 2009, and my daughter went there, too, for a little bit.

Then, one day, I told my wife, Veronica, "I miss going to church. We need to try to find one." So, we went to several churches, and none of them seemed right. Then we found Holy Family, when it was on Lava Hill Road, and we just kept going!

I remember our first Sunday there: I liked it. I was happy. I felt relaxed. And I said, "I think we found the church where we're going to come!"

We loved how Father Jayme did the Mass, and everyone was nice and sweet: Our family felt welcomed! We loved getting involved and attending the *jamaicas*—enjoying all the food and

dancing, with everybody talking and just having a good time. And I liked the *jamaica* burgers!

Holy Family is a good church, where everybody feels welcomed, loved and respected. We all get together as one big family for Mass, then for breakfast after Mass is over.

We bought a new home in Kyle, so we're not able to get to Holy Family as often as we used to. We went there for about three years, and now we watch the Mass on Facebook. We're not there in person as much, but we're still watching you all!

Holy Family is Inclusive and Does Not Discriminate against Anyone

Teresa Ruiz



Born in Texas to Mexican parents, I was baptized at San Francisco Javier Catholic Church, though my family hardly went to church when I was young. As I grew up, I wanted to go back to church, to attend Mass.

Five years ago, my husband, Emmanuel, and I found Holy Family Catholic Church when we were looking to get married. Not having a church, we visited several churches near our home before choosing Holy Family.

We decided on Holy Family because it's close to our home, and we feel comfortable at Holy Family. Compared to other churches, Holy Family is not so large, so you can more clearly hear the entire Mass and connect with what's going on.

We became more convinced that this parish is for us when we realized that Holy Family is inclusive and does not discriminate against anyone. It is also the only Catholic church where we have seen women serving in ordained ministries.

I also like the fact that Holy Family shares little gifts with children at the end of the Mass. As a result, kids, like my son, feel

that they are being paid attention to. As adults, we go to Mass and listen, but children don't always know what is going on during the Mass. They might not understand everything, but they feel the church's affection for them when they receive a little gift at the end of Mass!

We Make Friends. We Get Involved.
We Help Others to Feel Welcomed!

Rebecca (Saucedo) Saenz



I was born in Bastrop, Texas, and I was raised on a farm in Cedar Creek. My dad was a farmer, and my mother was a homemaker. As a farmer, my father was always out in the fields, and he worked part-time as a carpenter in Austin. My mother didn't drive, so we didn't have the opportunity to go to church a lot. Though she couldn't always go to church, my mother always read the Bible, and she had her home altar. I remember going to CCD classes after school when I was eight or nine years old. The church had a little van that picked us up from school. I don't remember a lot from those classes—except that we had an Easter raffle every year, and one year I felt like the queen of the world when I won a little, pink styrofoam rabbit! We were poor, and we didn't have toys. I still have a photo of the day when my sister, Connie, and I made our First Communion. We were dressed in our white dresses, holding a bible and rosary—and I still have my dress and veil! Back then, we used to kneel at the altar rail to take Communion.

I don't remember a lot more about CCD or church until I was ready to get married. I had to take Confirmation classes at night, at St. Julia's, in order to be married. I don't remember a whole lot about that. I don't even remember who my sponsor was—but I remember that I had to do it before I could get married.

When my dad died in 1976, the bicentennial year, my aunt was a prominent member at St. Julia's. She invited us to go to St. Julia's, so we started going there every Sunday. My aunt was a founding member of St. Julia, where my older brother started a food pantry, so we would help him at the food pantry on Saturdays. That was so rewarding: We got to meet other people from the church, and we distributed fruits and breads and other foods to people. We continued that until Father John Boiko said that we couldn't do it anymore because it was drawing too many people from outside the parish!

For two years, I taught fourth-grade CCD at St. Julia's, as I followed the faith formation of my son, Andres. Before that, I assisted pre-K or kindergarten classes for a couple of years, and I followed Andres as he advanced through the grades. I helped the teachers, until they finally asked me to teach, so I taught for a couple of years. I later assisted Confirmation classes. Since we were going to St. Julia every Sunday, I figured I wanted to be involved in ministry. I wanted to read and help at Mass, but they already had their people who did that, so there was no way for me to "get in." At Holy Family, we ask people to participate, but nobody at St. Julia ever said, "Hey, would you like to do this, or help with that?"

When he served as president of San Juan Diego Catholic High School, "the School that Works," Father Jayme used to come to St. Julia's every year, to recruit students. Andres was fixing to go into high school, so I wanted him to go to San Juan Diego, where Father Jayme got them really nice jobs. I wanted Andres to experience that. Seeing Father Jayme celebrate Mass was like having a vision of Jesus! He was just wonderful. I thought he was so great. He gave me a San Juan Diego pencil that I still have. I thought he was Jesus in the flesh!

After Father Jayme no longer came to St Julia's, I really didn't enjoy church anymore. I wasn't really getting anything out of it. I knew I had to go to church every Sunday, so I just went through the motions.

Then one Sunday in July 2012, when I was reading the *Austin American-Statesman*, I saw a little ad in the religious section for Holy Family Catholic Church. It shared the Mass schedule, with

mariachi Masses, and the church's address on Lava Hill Road. So, mother, Andres and I got dressed, and we went to Holy Family! I remember the gentlemen who welcomed us: Leonard Gonzales, Louis Cuevas and John Zavala. I remember that Masses back then were in the back room, where we later hosted parish breakfasts. It was July, and it was hot in there! I remember seeing Father Jayme just sweating under all his vestments—but all I could think was, "Father Jayme is here! He's here!" Everyone was so welcoming. I remember looking for a place to sit, when Terry and Jerry Caballero said, "Come, sit over here!" That was my first experience at Holy Family. Father Jayme sang the Mass, and it was just wonderful. So, I continued to go, and I've been there ever since. I just love it.

Father Jayme's homilies really spoke to me. At St. Julia's, I was just going through the motions, and I didn't get anything out of the homilies. I would be falling asleep! But I understood what Father Jayme said and, of course, he was really easy on the eyes!

At Holy Family, I just really feel like part of the Church. Every Sunday, someone asks, "How are you?" And I also discovered that my "cousin," Louis Cuevas, is related to me through our Saucedo families—something I didn't know before going to Holy Family! It was such a wonderful experience, and it kept me going back.

I first got involved at Holy Family as a collection counter. Waldine Hernandez and Rita Cuevas were counting money in the parish office, and Darrell Cox was helping them, and he said, "Hey, come back here, and count money!" He really pulled me in.

Then, Mary Lou Piña took me under her wing and showed me how to set up for Masses. And Roy—before he was Father Roy—would look at what I did and say, "You need to count the Communion wafers" or "you need to fill the cups to here." Mary Lou was the one who told me, "Make sure you wipe the cup, and make sure you turn it, and all those sorts of details." I remember how humbling it was when I was first asked to be a eucharistic minister. I thought, "Me? Of all people? I'm just a nobody, and they're asking me to do this?"

Mary Lou was such a good teacher. She taught me about the altar linens, and she told me, "when I stop doing the altar linens, I want you to do them." She showed me all the details: How to pre-

soak them and remove the lipstick stains with a little detergent. She had beautiful plants, and she always said it was because she never poured the water from the altar linens down the drain—because particles of the Blood of Christ might be in it—so she put that water on her plants, and they blossomed! Every time I do the linens for the church, I always think of Mary Lou. Sometimes I'll even ask out loud, "Mary Lou, are you watching me? Am I doing this right?"

When Father Jayme started hosting Clergy Council meetings at Mary Lou's home, Mary Lou invited me to help her, and she and I would sit there and talk while they had their meetings. And then we cleaned up everything. She was a really great mentor.

At the beginning, we were fixing up a lot of things at Holy Family, there on Lava Hill Road, and Roy would call and say, "Hey, Becky, can you come and help me do this?" I would go and help the guys out, or sometimes I just kept them company. I would hold the ladder for them or hand them tools. Roy really honed my ability to do things the correct way, the way Father Jayme wanted things done—and Father Jayme wants things done a certain way! That precision became part of my life.

We were really fixing up that church, so I went to meetings and tried to share input: It had become my church, and I wanted to be a part of it as much as I could!

I don't recall who first invited me to proclaim the Word at Mass, but I remember thinking, "Oh, my God, I hate speaking in front of people!" But I did it. I attended the classes that Father Jayme gave, and he taught us to proclaim the Word. He would emphasize that we don't *read* the "readings"; we look up, and we *proclaim* them. He would correct us, and he put me on the spot: During one class, he had a buzzer that he sounded every time I looked down at the words, to emphasize the time that our eyes were on the book, versus on listeners. It was very nerve-wracking! I will proclaim the Word in a pinch, if needed—and I think I've gotten to be fairly decent at it. Now, if I need to, I'm more than happy to do it!

I remember how I was welcomed by Leonard, Louis and John when I came to Holy Family, so, when I see new people coming in, I try to go up to them and welcome them. I want to "pay forward" to others that feeling of being welcomed! In many ways, I want

them to feel what I didn't feel when I went to St. Julia's. If I notice that people continue to come back, I ask them, "Would you like to proclaim the Word?" If they say no, I suggest that they watch for a couple of times before I ask them again. I'm so proud of Deacon Stephen: After he and Jordan came a few times, I asked them to proclaim the Word. They were understandably scared: It's difficult to get up and speak in front of people! Father Jayme once told us that the fear of speaking in public is one of the greatest fears that people have. Now, Jordan proclaims the Word all the time, and Stephen is a deacon!

Before the pandemic, I really became close friends with my sisters: Terry Caballero, Rafaela Leal and Amanda Rodriguez. Rafaela is just a wonderful person, Terry is my long-lost cousin, and Amanda is fun! Amanda is our office administrator, and the other three of us counted the collections and assisted in the parish office. We each had various responsibilities, and we checked one another's math. We didn't want our priests to be hungry, so we started taking turns bringing food, to feed our priests. What started as a working relationship turned into friendship, and we started hanging out together and socializing. Rafaela has moved on—and I wish she'd come back! The four of us enjoyed a loving, working relationship, volunteering in the office and doing any job that needed to be done!

Margaret Bruch first involved me in the Environment Committee, back on Lava Hill. She asked for help and, of course, I wanted to be involved in the church. She was extremely talented and creative. I started helping her and was one of the few who religiously showed up. After Margaret moved to New Mexico, Terry and I started coordinating the Environment Committee. We would decorate the church for different celebrations and seasons. Back on Lava Hill, Leonard took photos of all parish families, and we hung them with wooden letters that spelled *somos familia* (we are family). We're a good team, and there are a lot of people who help out.

Once we moved to Salem in July 2017, we needed to flip the church after our 9:00 a.m. Mass every Sunday, for the Lutherans' 10:30 a.m. service, then back to a Catholic environment for our noon Spanish Mass. We had to take out all the Catholic images,

then set them all up again. It's not something we enjoyed, but we had to do it. We also created an intimate worship space in the chapel, where you are right there, next to the priests. The chapel is not that large, and it sometimes gets filled. The Lutherans wanted their church, often for only a few people, so we made it work. We did what we had to do.

I also remember our *jamaicas*: They were so much fun! For the first couple of years, I supported Father Roy's family, which made the hamburgers, and Mary Lou Piña would ask me to donate a brisket for her brisket tacos. After that, Waldine Gonzales and I were responsible for counting the money and preparing the money trays for Rita Cuevas, Estela Zavala and Mary Alice Guzman, who sold food and drink tickets. When we took a break, we would visit the booths, talk to people, and get our hamburgers. We did that for several years. One year, when Waldine went out of town, Danielle Pinta helped me count money. The *jamaicas* were fantastic. They were a lot of work, but they were so much fun! We would be exhausted by the end of the night, when Waldine or Danielle and I were working to provide a final figure, but it felt good to know that we had done our job.

For several years, I was involved in our St. Francis of Assisi Joy Group. When there was a death in the parish, Father Roy would call Mary Lou Piña, who was our point of contact, and Mary Lou dialed everyone, to tell them about the rosary and funeral. She would assign different people to lead the decades of the rosary. The first time, it was nerve-wracking, and I said 11 Hail Marys! Father Roy called to thank me for helping to say the rosary, and I shared how mortified I was to say 11 Hail Marys, and he said, "Nobody noticed." After we lost Mary Lou—bless her heart—Father Roy would ask me to call people for rosaries, to see how many people we could get, so I would call people and ask, "Can you come to help Father Roy with the rosary?" It was fun: Father Roy would invite Vidal Limon to play the guitar, and we'd all sing along—and sometimes he would forget the words! It is a wonderful ministry to be part of, though it can be nerve-wracking counting Hail Marys in front of so many people!

Father Jayme planned different trips and movie nights for us throughout the years. One year, Father rented a bus, and we visited

the live nativity in Burnet, Texas. Terry, Rafaela, Christopher and I arrived at the church early to make sandwiches and pack lunches for everyone. The bus was full! Father Jayme's mother crocheted all sorts of dish towels that we won during bingo, and Father Jayme would bless the bingo cards, saying, "Puh-lease, Lord Jesus, let my bingo card win!" I think the bus driver jumped when I yelled bingo! We waited outside the live nativity, in the cold, for a long time. I'll never forget that trip. We went back the next year, too.

We also took a road trip to Brother Kerry Guillory's jubilee Mass in Louisiana. We fit in three vehicles: Rafaela, Christopher and I rode with Father Roy. Deacon Angelita, Corey Hurt, and Corey's friend, Daniel, rode with Father Jayme. Amanda rode with Terry and Jerry. We texted back and forth and had a wonderful time, and it was a beautiful Mass —and, of course, we visited a casino there!

After the pandemic, we attended a conference in Las Vegas. That was amazing. Father Roy, Deacon Stephen, Jordan, Terry and I stayed in an Airbnb, where we met Mother Annie. We wanted to gamble in Vegas, but Father Mike Lopez invited us to his Airbnb, where he made dinner. I was just thrilled to eat and drink and hobnob with so many priests and deacons. They were such nice people, and it was a whole lot better than gambling!

We also met Father Marek at that gathering, and the next year we visited him at his parish, St. Stanislaus in St. Louis, Missouri, for their 130th anniversary. It was a remarkable trip: Deacon Stephen, Jordan, Terry, Amanda, Inocencio and I went. Father Marek was a great host, and his church was so beautiful. All of these experiences are moments that I'll remember my whole life!

We've also hosted a number of retreats and events in Austin. That's how we met Father Mike Lopez, Archbishop Alan Kemp and Father Joseph Dang. Terry and I joke that we are "the hostesses with the mostesses" at such events. We set up things and prepare the snacks, and Rosa and other volunteers cook the meals. We attend the meetings with the bishops, priests and deacons—and we get to see that they're real people. I always held priests on a high pedestal, but, now that I've gotten involved in the Church, I see that they're real people. At one of our first gatherings here in Austin, Father Jayme got all kinds of drums from an Austin ISD

music teacher, who led a drum circle under the pavilion. It was cold outside, but we had such a great time making noise!

I have attended our Wednesday evening bible study and theological institute for nearly 11 years now. At first, in 2013, we met all the way over at Ramon Carrasquillo's office on MoPac for a few meetings, then at the rectory on Garden Street, then at Herbert and Susie Martinez's office on South IH 35, and now at the church. I only missed one class in all those years—but Father Jayme forgot to record it, so I went to the session where he later recorded it. I was the only "audience" for that one! We always receive a lot of information there. Father Roy led it for over three years, and we learned about the Sunday scriptures. During the theological institute, Father Jayme used to give us assignments, and we had to present on different saints or topics. I remember presenting on St. Elizabeth Ann Seton one time, and on adultery for another class. I prepared a PowerPoint, and I thought I did a really great job! Another time, we had to prepare a homily and critique one another. I remember arriving early and practicing in front of Father Roy and Father Cleofas. I was so nervous! I preached on Corinthians' message of faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is love. I held up a picture, and I remember Father Jayme saying, "If you have something to show, you need to make sure that the people in the back can see it." Those were wonderful learning experiences, and Father Jayme really pushed us to do things. When Father Roy led our bible study, he was very different: very laid back and calming. That's when we started praying the rosary, which was always special. After Father Roy retired from active ministry at the end of 2020, Father Jayme picked up the bible study in January 2021. We learn so much, and sometimes it's hard to take in all that Father Jayme is trying to teach us. We're used to taking the Bible literally—that Jesus literally walked on water. But Father Jayme makes us think. He asks, "Did Jesus really walk on water?" And he's always saying, "The Bible is not a book of history; it's a book of theology." I went to St. Julia's all those years, and they never had anything like this, where we learn about our faith. It's really great!

Before coming to Holy Family, I never went to the Stations of the Cross. When I was still teaching in Bastrop, teachers would go to

the Stations of the Cross at Ascension Catholic Church, and I would see the Stations of the Cross at St. Julia's, but I never prayed them. We have them in the chapel, which is an intimate setting. Father Roy started that tradition. Some of us started coming because we said we needed to participate. Then, we started bringing food to share afterward. Someone would bring tuna sandwiches one week, someone else would bring bean and cheese chalupas the next Friday, then we'd have cheese enchiladas after that. People rotated every Friday, and we built community through the Stations of the Cross.

Because I'm so involved at Holy Family, I have toyed with the idea of becoming a deacon, and I talked about it with Father Roy and Father Cleofas, but it was Deacon Angelita who gave me a lot of material for self-reflection. Terry and I attended all the classes that Father Jayme shared with Deacon Elsa and Deacon Stephen—which was just priceless, and I soaked up all that I could. I'm good with what I do now for Holy Family. That's my ministry, and I'm happy with what I do for our Holy Family family! I just want to learn more. I learn something every time I come to Holy Family. During a Clergy Council meeting at Mary Lou's home, she once said, "Becky, why don't you become a deacon?" I said, "Mary Lou, I'm good!" I'm happy with where I am and what I do for the Church!

Mary Lou Piña did so much for Holy Family, and she adored our clergy. I do, too. She provided breakfast for our priests on Sunday, so, after she passed, I started to bring tacos, or, when Father Jayme's cholesterol was too high, I started bringing oatmeal and fruit for him. Then I found out that Father Brett likes yogurt, and Father Roy likes fruit and sweets, so I'd have some yogurt and fruit in the parish office refrigerator for them. Mary Lou always took such good care of our priests, and I knew that they were grateful, so that's something that I've tried to do to honor her memory. I get to take care of my priests!

When the pandemic struck in 2020, I was truly blessed to be part of the small group that met in person to record our Sunday Masses. When the number of COVID cases soared, we closed the church for several weeks at a time. The skeleton crew that gathered to record the Masses did so "socially-distanced" and wearing masks.

As the number of cases decreased after each peak, people were scared to come back to places like church, and many people had grown comfortable watching Mass online. For me, that's just not the same as being at church, at the house of God, to worship with other people. We took our Holy Family board meetings online, too. I served as Chair of our Board in 2021 to 2023, and I would tell them, "Y'all need to be here—in the parish hall with us." Suddenly, with the pandemic, it became more convenient to attend church and meetings online, but I wish more people would come back to church. We miss a lot of the people who no longer come in person.

It was at that time, during the pandemic, that I started to record all our homilies, for our parish to post to YouTube and Facebook. I don't mind doing it: I even pay extra close attention to the homily and to the priest or deacon as a result! Sometimes I go back and listen to them again—particularly the Spanish homilies, to listen and catch the words that I didn't quite get the first time. It helps me to learn vocabulary!

I served on our Pastoral Council for many years, then, when we expanded our Board of Directors in 2019, I was invited to be part of that. It's truly humbling to be on the Board and have a say in what happens in our church. I learned a lot from Father Roy, when he chaired our Board from 2019 to 2021, then I chaired it from 2021 to 2023. It was intimidating, but it was also a huge learning experience. Father Jayme leads us along, and we provide input and constructive criticism. People sometimes come to me with questions or issues, and I tell them, "I'll bring it to the Board." It's an honor and a privilege to be part of the Holy Family Board of Directors. I'm happy to step up and help out in any way I can!

As an Independent Catholic church, Holy Family has a Mass that is similar to the Roman Catholic Church, and we follow much of what they do. My experience of the Roman Catholic Church, though, is that it's cold, and people don't care about you in the same way that we care for one another at Holy Family. We make friends. We get involved. We help others to feel welcomed, and we invite them to participate. I remember, for instance, asking Cyan to proclaim the Word for the first time at our Christmas Mass. He said, "I have a fear of speaking in front of people—but this will

help me overcome that fear!" I asked him again the other day, and he did it. I'm just so proud when people respond like that.

It's just so beautiful that we can love all people, regardless of who they are. The Roman Catholic Church doesn't share the same message. Instead, it judges people, excludes them from Communion, and makes them feel bad about who they are. I went to Roman Catholic Church forever—religiously!—and I really didn't get anything out of that experience. Holy Family, though, has welcomed me with open arms and provided me with opportunity to help the church and be part of the church. Holy Family is my church! And if you come to Holy Family, I want to make sure that you have the same feeling of being loved, wanted and needed in an inclusive, Catholic church!

Nothing Compares to Holy Family!

Bhavik Shah



I was born and raised in Chennai, India, where I lived for the first 22 years of my life. I came to the United States in 2017, to earn my master's degree in computer science at The University of Texas at Dallas. After graduating, I moved to Austin in 2019.

I was raised a Hindu and have always believed in God. Since I was a child, my parents and grandma encouraged me to pray to God. Like my mother's brother, who came to the U.S. about 20 years ago to earn his master's degree and married a Catholic woman, I married my wife, Lan, who was raised Roman Catholic in Vietnam and is very religious. I definitely went from knowing 1% about Catholicism, to knowing more than 60% about it today.

We found Holy Family through Google: We searched for the nearest Catholic church to our home, and Holy Family sounded like a cool name. The concept of family is very strong in India, so I said, "Let's go! Let's check it out!" Once we visited Holy Family,

there was no turning back. Holy Family is the place where we want to go regularly. When we're traveling, we visit other churches. For instance, when we visit my in-laws in north Austin, we go to their church—but nothing compares to Holy Family! They may have grand, huge churches, but the feeling is not the same as at Holy Family.

We first came to Holy Family without any expectations, knowing that we wouldn't know anyone. Before Holy Family, I didn't frequent churches, but my wife says that people are really friendly and welcoming there. We also like the fact that Holy Family is not overly formal.

The familial feeling of Holy Family keeps us coming back. We are welcomed so well that we feel part of the community—and the fact that we "tied the knot" there will keep our bond with Holy Family forever! We also love the pet blessing that Holy Family shares on the Feast of St. Francis: We brought our puppy, Bougie, a Pembroke Welsh Corgi, and it was a special moment to have Bougie blessed by the church!

My wife and I also marvel at how people go through the effort of regularlycooking breakfast. Most often, it's just tacos, but the spicy tacos are always a hit! The regular breakfast is certainly a great feature and it helps us to meet other people. We sometimes arrive late to church and sometimes leave right after Mass ends, so we don't always get to interact with many people, except for those near us during Mass. The breakfasts give us an opportunity to connect with others in the church.

Father Jayme is also an important factor that keeps bringing us back to Holy Family. He is very charismatic and has an energy that resonates with us, and his Masses are not as straightforward and mundane as others we've attended.

Coming to Holy Family is definitely a beautiful experience. Words could never do it justice. If you haven't been to Holy Family, you should definitely try it for yourself!

I Liked Everything About Holy Family

Priscilla Tambunga



I was born in El Dorado, Texas and raised in Ozona. I came to Austin about 22 years ago. I grew up Catholic and received all my sacraments. I attended religious education classes, and I remember raising money for the church one year, when I ran for queen.

I learned about Holy Family through my sister, Ruby, whose children received their sacraments at Holy Family. I came quite regularly for a time. It's close to my home, and it reminded me of our small church back in Ozona. I liked everything about Holy Family.

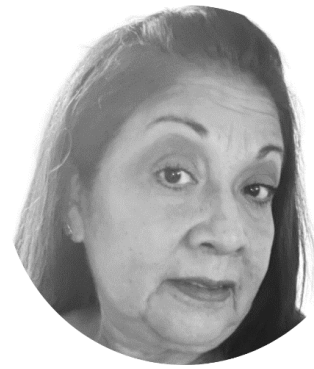
I like how Father Jayme makes the Mass very understandable. We can understand it in layman's terms. He's a good teacher, and he has a way of explaining things.

One year, I even danced with the *matlachines* at Holy Family! Deacon Elsa approached me and said she needed dancers, and I wanted to make sure that we honored the Virgin Mary in this way. I wanted to do it, but I'm pretty shy: For me, being part of that was really "stepping out there"! The rehearsals took time, but Deacon Elsa was a really good teacher, and she had the costumes as well. I really liked participating in that. It was very, very neat!

I wish all churches would be more involved and inclusive, like Holy Family. Other churches make kids go to classes for a year or two, just to get their sacraments. They can't always make it to those classes, due to school or whatever, so they end up not receiving their sacraments.

I Am a Catholic, I Will Always Be a Catholic, and You Cannot Tell Me What I Can and Cannot Do

Mary Tolentino



I was born and raised in Abilene, Texas, halfway between Midland and Fort Worth. I came to Austin in 2006, after my divorce. My daughters were both living in Austin: One attended The University of Texas, and the other was going to Le Cordon Bleu Culinary School. They told me, "It's time for a change, Mom!" So, I sold my house, and I was gone.

When I was a teenager, I was active at St. Vincent Catholic Church in Abilene. Then, after I got married, I started going to Holy Family Catholic Church in Abilene. I taught second-grade religious education there, for children who hadn't been baptized. I helped Sister Helen, and I was very involved there for seven or eight years. I also prepared second-graders for their First Communion.

When I first came to Austin, I attended St. Albert's for a bit, but it didn't feel like home. I lived my *Cursillo* in Abilene in 2001, so I connected with Adolfo "Doc" Álvarez at Cristo Rey Catholic Church. He was very involved in the diocesan *Cursillo* movement. I participated in the *Cursillo* School for Leaders and served as secretary for the diocesan movement for three years.

A friend, who was participating in the RCIA program at Cristo Rey, then asked me to be her sponsor. I went on retreat with her one weekend in 2010, and that's how I first met Father Jayme at Cristo Rey. The church was totally Hispanic, which is not my culture, but I said to myself, "This is home!" I spoke with Father Jayme about starting an English bible study, and he encouraged Doc and me to do that. We continued it after Father Jayme went on sabbatical in 2011, but it just didn't feel like home anymore, after the new priests arrived. Then, I attended Mass at Father Jayme's home on Willow Street, and that got me in trouble with the priests

at Cristo Rey. In April 2012, my father had just passed away, and I received a call from Cristo Rey that Father Mario wanted to meet with me. So, I went. I had no idea what I was coming up against. Father Mario's English was not the best. He said that he had heard that I went to Mass at Father Jayme's home. I said, "Yes, he's my friend." He said to me, "You're not supposed to come in contact with him. The bishop doesn't want any kind of contact with him!" I replied, "I am a Catholic, I will always be a Catholic, and you cannot tell me what I can and cannot do. No one can tell me that." Father Mario kept insisting, "You're not supposed to do that!" Father Mario had also heard that Father Jayme came to my father's funeral in Abilene. I said, "Yes, he did. He knew my parents. Did you go to my father's funeral? You did not." Father Mario just looked at me. I still have no clue who his "moles" were at Cristo Rey, but I left it at that. I said, Thank you, but I will not be coming back to complete our bible study." And that was the end of Cristo Rey.

I went to that first Mass at Father Jayme's home in 2012. There were maybe ten of us there, and I felt so at home there. We were just starting out, and we didn't know what was going to happen, but I really felt comfortable there—and it just blossomed after that! Father Jayme also started a bible study in his home: I remember taking my mom with me, and that's where I met Irene Loredo Guerra and Louis and Rita Cuevas, but a change in my work schedule made it difficult for me to attend after that. Within two months, we were at *Los Dos Laredos* on Lava Hill Road. I met lots of people during those weeks, and we became friends on Facebook. What started as a very small group of people started getting bigger and bigger!

Los Dos Laredos was a dance hall that hosted raves. When we would get there on Sunday mornings, it was a mess! And when we first moved there, there was nothing there—but it still felt like home. We met more and more people, and we became a tight-knit community. I remember thinking, "This is really where I need to be!" It was awesome. I didn't get involved, like I was involved in other parishes, but I just felt at home there. Everybody was so nice, and, even though the community was growing, people

acknowledged who you were. That's what I loved about Holy Family—and still love about it.

My mom enjoyed Holy Family, too. I took my parents to Cristo Rey before that, because I wanted them to experience my parish—and my father later told me that Father Jayme was the only priest who didn't make him fall asleep in church! After he passed away, I started bringing my mother to Holy Family. My mother just loved it. Everybody welcomed her, and she always said, "The people at Holy Family are so nice and loving: They give me hugs all the time!" She really loved Holy Family, and she thought the world of Father Jayme. She always said that she wanted him to celebrate her funeral. It was a long drive for us, but she said it was worth the drive, and she always loved breakfast after Mass. I remember our first *jamaica*, too, there in the back, on Lava Hill.

Being divorced, I never felt excluded by the Roman Catholic Church, but I do remember their annulment process. A priest friend of mine told me that I could receive Communion so long as I hadn't remarried, and he guided me through the steps to get my marriage annulled. It was such a big, long process, with money for this, and money for that. They wanted all sorts of witnesses, and I remember wondering where I would get all the money for the annulment. I started the process in Abilene, then I tabled it, then I started it again in Austin, then I tabled it again. I said, "This is too much for me!" You can imagine how glad I was to know that there was no annulment process at Holy Family, but that all were welcomed!

If you're looking for a parish to make your home, go and experience Holy Family for yourself. When you come out, you'll realize that you've found your home!

They Were All a Fun Group of People!

Jeffrey Varwig



I was born and raised in Chicago, Illinois, and lived there until I went to Nashville for college. I then moved back to Chicago briefly, before coming to Austin in the Fall of 2018, to be with my girlfriend—and later fiancée—Danielle. We had started dating about six months prior to that, and we were both interested in maintaining our relationship, so when Danielle had to move to Austin, we decided it was right for me to come to Austin, too. We lived there for two years until we moved back to Chicago in the Fall of 2020.

When I was a young boy, my mother was a Christian who took us to church pretty regularly. My father was not really religious. He was culturally Christian, but he was not very involved. We didn't have a specific denominational background, but we attended church and always looked to be part of a good church community. But, as a child, my mother made the decision of what church we attended, and we just went along. I had grown my own faith, but I had never found my own church.

When I moved to Nashville in 2011, that was the first time I had to find a church for myself. I explored some churches and tried to find the right fit. Ultimately, that brought me into a United Methodist congregation. In general, I share many beliefs with the Methodists, but my connection was primarily with that specific congregation, so when I returned to Chicago, I entered an exploring phase again. But that exploration was uprooted once again when I unexpectedly moved to Texas, and it was that change which ultimately led me to Holy Family. When we came to Texas, Danielle and I had a plan to explore different churches in the area, but it seems God had other plans. On Danielle's first Sunday in Austin, she attended Holy Family, and she loved it so much that she brought me back with her the following week, and I felt a really

strong connection. For the first six months or so, we attended each week and thought it was a good church, but still wondered whether we should be looking at other churches, too. We didn't want to just fall in love with the first church that we came to know. But as we kept coming back to Holy Family every week, we realized the reason we kept choosing to come back was because we loved it so much, and we knew we had found our church home. Everyone at Holy Family was really welcoming, and it was very clear from the start that this was a good community of people to be a part of.

After some six months of attending Holy Family, we started attending the weekly bible study with Father Roy. When we started, we had no idea what to expect, but we very quickly discovered we belonged there, too, and bible study became a major way that Danielle and I stayed involved and connected with our church community outside of Sunday worship. It was really fun to spend time with that group, and we learned some good things as well. Father Roy was a great leader and a true father figure for us. Outside of the clergy leadership at Holy Family, who were obviously a really big part of our journey, the people at bible study were great, too. Mario Cruz, despite being generations older than us, really took great interest in us. Every time we saw him, he seemed so happy to see us and so interested in our lives. He became a really good friend, because of how much he cared. It was so unexpected, and I really appreciated that. Everyone else was so nice, too: Becky, Terry, Stephen, Jordan—they were all a fun group of people!

The people at Holy Family are very welcoming. The church is obviously named after the Holy Family, but I'm sure there's an intentional connection: We are all part of this family of believers, and Holy Family is more like an actual family than any church that I have been a part of. Even the people that we didn't interact with very often seemed like our distant cousins who had come in for Thanksgiving: people just interact in a kind and familiar way!

Holy Family has a really unique atmosphere. We have attended other Independent Catholic communities elsewhere in the country, but they have tended to be more traditional in some ways. Holy Family is a unique group of people, with a lot of commitment to

being inclusive and welcoming to everybody, instead of judging marginalized groups and those who have traditionally been cut off. There's a humility that doesn't always show up in other churches, especially in other Catholic churches. The priests at Holy Family are very, very knowledgeable about the Bible, and great teachers, especially Father Jayme! They have strong personal convictions, but I've never seen them be overly critical of other Christians who disagree in good faith. They seek to understand and include, even when they see things differently. When discussing contentious topics, like the Roman Catholic Church's policy of denying of Communion to certain people, they approach issues with love and humility, in a Christlike way.

The inclusiveness of Holy Family really stood out to us, as well as the fact that we were part of a church where people really cared about us and our interests. It's as if Holy Family is congregant-focused and says, "We're going to do what serves people the best." As much as I could describe Holy Family to you, you need to go and visit Holy Family yourself. There's so much that I can't describe and that you need to experience for yourself. I definitely recommend that people come and give Holy Family a try!

Although we have moved from Austin, we have definitely considered coming back. We don't know what the future holds, but if that turn of events were to happen, both of us would be happy to reunite with Holy Family. Otherwise, we'll come back to visit whenever we can, because we miss Austin and Holy Family!

As the Name Suggests, It's Pure Family!

Javier Villegas & Mirea Arce de Villegas



Mirea: We are from the state of Guerrero, where I come from the town of Zacapuato.

Javier: And I'm from Orilla de Balderrama. As a child, I went to the church where our parents took us. We didn't go to Mass every Sunday, but when we did, we went to a Catholic church.

Mirea: We've been here in the U.S. now for 31 years.

Javier: I arrived before my wife, and then I went for her, to "steal" her away!

Mirea: Here in the U.S., we first went to Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Tyler, Texas.

Javier: Then we moved to Austin, in pursuit of a better job.

Mirea: In Austin, we started going to Mass at Santa Julia Catholic Church, where our children were baptized. Then we moved out of the neighborhood and went to Santa Barbara Catholic Church. We discovered Holy Family when we were invited to be godparents for a girl's baptism here. We liked Holy Family!

Javier: We liked the way they treated us, how they acted toward us and toward one another. As the name suggests, it's pure family!

Mirea: We feel good about the fact that Holy Family is a church that doesn't exclude love or peace. We have helped with parish *jamaicas*: One year, we sold *aguas frescas*, and another year, we made *enchiladas*. We especially like the parish *jamaicas*! There's a sense of comfort and tranquility that we find at Holy Family.

Javier: I like everything about Holy Family. I especially enjoy our monthly get-togethers after Mass.

Mirea: Those potlucks allow us to meet and interact with more families.

Javier: I also love how Father Jayme sings—and everyone with him. I enjoy how they sing, and I sometimes accompany them.

Mirea: Our daughter and son-in-law also like to go to Holy Family, when they can. They work, so they can't go every Sunday.

Javier: Holy Family is a family church, and I love going to Mass at Holy Family!

Mirea: We go when we can. Sometimes we can't, but even then, we're still with you!

If You Want to Be in an Inclusive, Accepting, Catholic Environment, Holy Family is a Good Place to Be

Dr. Gary Yorke



I was born in Woodstock, Ontario, and I grew up in Southern Ontario. When I was an undergraduate at York University in Toronto, I became very interested in phenomenological psychology. The only graduate school in North America that taught phenomenological psychology was at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, so that is where I went for my master's degree. After marrying an American and obtaining a green card, I moved to New York City for my Ph.D. Job opportunities brought us to Austin.

I grew up Presbyterian, then went through a fundamentalist phase as a teenager. I was swept up in the charismatic Christian movement of former hippies in the 1960s and 1970s, and I published an article on being a "Jesus Freak" in *United Church Observer*, then another in *Decision Magazine*. It was a very strange

experience for me: I received a lot of hate mail, because the magazine published a photo of me with long hair!

I became interested in Catholicism when I was in Pittsburgh, and I converted to Roman Catholicism after graduating from Duquesne, a Roman Catholic university. It felt right, and I felt like I was where I needed to be. I taught Sunday School for a couple of years when I lived in New York, as well as religious education for middle schoolers for the three years my daughter was in middle school. I became progressively disenchanted—not with my local church, because that always felt like a good place to be—but with the Roman Catholic Church. As my daughter went through Confirmation, she became extremely alienated by some of the things that were said during her Confirmation class. That was the final straw for me, and I stopped regularly attending church.

I used to make it a habit to listen to conservative radio for a few minutes every day. It was 2012, and Father Jayme had just been elected to the Austin ISD Board. They were bad-mouthing him, so I googled him, located Holy Family, and went out there one Sunday. I arrived early and wondered whether I was in the right place. It was a metal warehouse building. Then Waldine arrived, told me that Father Jayme was going to share a lesson 30 minutes before Mass, and she invited me to hang out. I recall how good it felt to be back in a Catholic environment—but in one that was accepting and inclusive.

Waldine was the first to invite me into ministry at Holy Family. She asked me to do a reading at Mass. Because I have a bit of performance anxiety, I said no. A few weeks later, she asked me again, and I thought this was probably something I should push myself to do. That's how I got involved greeting people, too: Someone asked me, and I said, "okay." Being a hospitality minister was difficult as well: Being raised in Canada, we have a larger "personal space" than people in Texas, so I'm not as accustomed to hugging and getting physically close to people.

Attending Mass so that I can take Communion is very important to me. Taking Communion in an inclusive, accepting, Catholic environment is something only Holy Family offers in Austin.

I believe there are many people who are disenchanted with the Roman Catholic Church and who still want to practice their faith. Holy Family is a good place to do that. I feel so appreciative that Holy Family is here. There are so many people in this country who are looking for a safe home, but can't find one, so I just feel really grateful and privileged to be part of Holy Family!

We Welcome Everybody!

John Zavala



I was born in Gonzales, but have been in Austin since I was 12. I attended Allan Junior High and Johnston High School here in Austin.

I was an altar boy in Gonzales, then, when we moved to Austin, we attended Santa Julia. After I was married, we attended Mass at St. Thomas More, then, after we moved to East Austin, we attended Cristo Rey.

Estella and I have been together for nearly 40 years now. We used to live on Springdale, then we moved to Cesar Chavez. Because we lived so close to Cristo Rey, we had a breakfast group there for a time. We were both divorced, so the Roman Catholic Church told us that we couldn't receive Communion for many, many years. We gave money to the church and everything, and still we felt disowned. When we started going to Holy Family, we appreciated Father Jayme's message that what's most important is that we love one another, and we have received Communion ever since.

When Holy Family formed in 2012, Estela attended some of the first Masses at Father Jayme's home on Willow Street. After one or two or three times, she asked if I wanted to go. She's the one who got me going to church at Holy Family. She used to go to church every Sunday, while I played golf, then she gave me an ultimatum,

saying that I couldn't be Tiger Woods—and I've been at Holy Family ever since!

After Father Jayme left Cristo Rey, they had so many priests from other countries, and I couldn't understand what they were saying. At Holy Family, though, we leave looking forward to the next Sunday! Your ears perk up when the priests are talking—unlike in other churches. Not only can you understand: You're also welcomed at Holy Family!

I first started getting involved outside of Mass at Holy Family by helping Mary Lou Piña with our weekly Sunday breakfast. We used to have a breakfast group, and we rotated every four or five weeks with other groups. Now, after the pandemic, it seems we're the only breakfast group left—and I can count on them when we have breakfasts.

I also enjoyed coordinating our parish *jamaica* for several years. Back in the 1980s, I coordinated one of the biggest softball tournaments in the state, so I had the connections and enjoyed doing that. I enjoy hosting raffles for Holy Family: selling tickets and raising good money for the church. I involve a lot of people, and no one has ever said no. I joke and try to make it fun.

We've also coordinated a number of special events. We have hosted an annual Thanksgiving brunch since that first year on Lava Hill, in 2012. Different parishioners donate the turkeys and sides. We provide hamburgers and hotdogs on Super Bowl Sunday. As we prepare for those events, people ask me what we need, and they help out. People are always willing to help.

It's also a good feeling to be a hospitality minister on Sundays. Different guys help out, so that makes it easier.

Holy Family has always been there for me and my family—especially when my oldest sister and younger sister passed.

We welcome everybody. We don't care where you come from, or anything like that. I give Holy Family a lot of credit for that: We welcome everybody!

Holy Family Award Recipients

The Holy Family Awards recognize individuals and couples for their generous sharing of time, talent and treasure with Holy Family Catholic Church. We thank God for the great generosity of the following individuals and couples who have received the Holy Family Award.

Holy Family Awards
March 10, 2013

Recipients of the Holy Family Founders Award

Ramón & Liby Carrasquillo
Angie Coy
Tony & Diana Coy
Alberto & Blanca García
Roy Gomez
Ignacio & María Elena Loredo
Mary Lou Piña

Recipients of the Holy Family Award

Connie Aguero Miralrío
Paul & María Alcala
Jenny Amor
Jerry & Terry Ann Caballero
Edward & Nora Cabello
Andy & Mary Alice Cantu
Dulce Castillo
Rosario Castillo
Vincent & Vera Cordova
Esther Cuellar
Margie Cuellar
Felipe & Adriana Cueva
Louis & Rita Cuevas
Orlando De León
Audie Embestro
Teresa C. Estrada
Estrada's Cleaners
David Flores
Irma Galarza
Gilbert García
Rosa Gil
Herminia Gomez
Thomas Gomez
Isabel Gonzales
Irene Loredo Guerra
Ramiro & Mary Alice Guzman
Leonard Gonzales &
Waldine Hernández
Genaro Leal
Rafaela Leal
John Henry & Diane Limón
John H. & Yolanda Limón
Benny Lozano
Julia Machuca

Ramiro & Mónica Manzano
Jesús José & María Elena Mares
Herbert & Susie Martínez
Irma Martínez Martínez
Mary Martínez
Angelita Mendoza Waterhouse
Inez Mendoza
Pedro & Lourdes Mercado
Eric & Mary Núñez
Kevin Ortiz
Zenaida Parra
Mary Helen Quintero
Sandra Quintero
Mary Raigosa
Acacia Ruiz &
Ernesto Rodríguez
Alfredo R. Santos
Paula Silvar
Steve Swanson
Susana Trujeque
San Juan Vásquez
Daniel Waterhouse
John & Estela Zavala
José O. Zavalija
Rosa Zavala

Holy Family Awards
March 9, 2014

Paul & María Alcala
Margaret Arriaga
Jenny Amor
Margaret Bruch
Jerry & Terry Ann Caballero
Andrew & Mary Alice Cantu
Eduardo Carranza &
Claudia García
Ramón & Liby Carrasquillo
Doris Casarez
Jennifer Casarez
Dulce Castillo
David & Emily Chapa
Vincent & Vera Córdova
Darrell Cox
Angie Coy
Tony & Diana Coy
Deacon Cleofas Cruz
Esther Cuellar
Margie Cuellar
Louis & Rita Cuevas
Henry & Stella Duran
Teresa C. Estrada
Estrada's Cleaners
Arnold Figueroa
David Flores
Irma Galarza
Alberto García &
Blanca Zamora García
Rosa Gil
David & Beatrice Gomez
Herminia Gomez
Janie Gomez
Mary Helen Gomez

Michael & Nora Gomez
Deacon Roy Gomez
Thomas Gomez
Isabel Gonzales
Irene Loredo Guerra
Ramiro & Mary Alice Guzman
Father Robert D. Hall
Leonard Gonzales &
Waldine Hernandez
La Peña
Genaro Leal
Rafaela Leal
Becky Lego & Jessica Leal
Brother John H. Limón
Juanita Lopez
Ignacio & María Elena Loredo
Sonny & Judy Loredo
Benny Lozano
Julia Machuca
Josefa Manzano
María Manzano
Ramiro & Mónica Manzano
Silvia Manzano
Herbert & Susie Martinez
Gilbert & Mary Martinez
Lynett Martinez
Patsy Martinez
Kathy Mata
Father Jayme Mathias
Manuel & Margaret Mendez
Sister Angelita Mendoza
Waterhouse
Inez Mendoza
Pedro & Lourdes Mercado
Jesús & Ana Mier
Mary L. Nuñez
Gloria Osorio
Zenaida Parra
Amado Peña
Mary Lou Piña
Manuel & Mary Helen
Quintero
Sandra Quintero
Mary Raigosa
Sabino & Lori Rentería
Luis Alonso Rivas
Gonzalo & Cynthia Rodriguez
Lauren Rosales
Acacia Ruiz &
Ernesto Rodríguez
Becky Saenz
Frank & Carmen Saldaña
Alfredo R. Santos, c/s
Paula Silvar
Susana Trujeque Cooper
Gary Yorke
John & Estela Zavala
Rosa Zavala

Holy Family Awards
March 9, 2014

Nelli Aguirre
Paul & María Alcala
Dulce Alvarez
Jenny Amor Deleza
Daniel & Filomena Andrade
Margaret Arriaga
Juan Barbosa
Irma Bowden
Dolores Briones
Margaret Bruch
Shirley Bruch
Jerry & Terry Caballero
Andrew & Mary Alice Cantu
Eduardo Carranza &
Claudia García
Doris Casarez
Jennifer Casarez
Vincent & Vera Cordova
José M. Coronado
Darrell Cox & Andy Steffen
Angie Coy
Tony & Diana Coy
Deacon Cleofas Cruz
Mario & María Cruz
Esther Cuellar
Margie Cuellar
Louis & Rita Cuevas
Henry & Stella Duran
Teresa C. Estrada
Estrada's Cleaners
David Flores
Agustín & Irma C. Galarza
Alberto García &
Blanca Zamora García
Rosa Gil
Deacon Roy Gomez
Herminia Gomez
Janie Gomez
Thomas Gomez
Michael & Nora Gomez
Isabel Gonzales
Leonard & Waldine Gonzales
Ramiro & Mary Alice Guzman
Archbishop William &
Audrey Johnson
Genaro Leal
Jessica Leal & Becky Lego
Rafaela Leal
Deacon Johnny H. Limón
Sonny & Judy Loredo
Ignacio & María Elena Loredo
Irene Loredo Guerra
Toby & Julia Machuca
Ramiro & Mónica Manzano
Silvia Manzano
Gilbert & Mary Martínez
Herbert & Susie Martínez
Lynett Martinez
Patsy Martínez
Father Jayme Mathias
Luisana Méndez
Manuel & Margaret Mendez

Pedro Mercado &
Lourdes Briones
Jesús & Ana Mier
Mary L. Núñez
Ray & Orfalinda Orta
Zenaida Parra
Irene Pavia
Amado Peña
Irene Peña
Lidia Perez
Michael & Erica Phares
Mary Lou Piña
Manuel & Mary Helen Quintero
Mary Raigosa
Delfino Ramírez Puentes
Sabino & Lori Rentería
Diana Rivas
Luis Alonso Rivas
Inocencio & Amanda Rodríguez
Gonzalo & Cynthia Rodriguez
Acacia Ruiz &
Ernesto Rodríguez
Rebecca Saenz
Frank & Carmen Saldaña
Lucille Saldaña
Marion "Ruth" Salinas
Marcelo Sánchez
Alfredo R. Santos c/s
Ernesto Soto
Fred & Vickie Tanguma
Eulalio & Mellie Treviño
Susana Trujeque Cooper
Marissa Vasquez
San Juan Vasquez
Gregorio & Dora Vega
José A. Vera & Family
Gary Yorke
Larry Waterhouse & Deacon
Angelita Mendoza-Waterhouse
Antonio & Dolores Zamarrón
John & Estela Zavala

Holy Family Awards
March 13, 2016

[The list of awardees from this ceremony has not been located.]

Holy Family Awards
September 9, 2018

Nelli Aguirre
Paul & María Alcala
Jenny Amor DeLeza
Margaret Arriaga
Dolores Briones
Margaret Bruch
Shirley Bruch
Jerry & Terry Ann Caballero
Andrew & Mary Alice Cantu
Lucy Cardenas
Tony & Diana Coy
Rabecca Cross
Father Cleofas María &
Dulce María Cruz
Mario & María Cruz
Margie Cuellar
Louis & Rita Cuevas
Gilbert & Pauline Davila
Andrea De Luna &
Eva Montes
María Esquivel
Frank & Teresa Estrada
Estrada's Cleaners
Flecha's Concrete Works, LLC
Agustín & Irma Galarza
Rosa Gil
Herminia Gomez
Janie Gomez
Father Roy Gomez
Isabel Gonzales
Leonard & Waldine Gonzales
Ramiro & Mary Alice Guzman
Corey Hurt
Juan in a Million
Mary Kathryn & Patricia Kane
Jennie Kennedy & Brian Gaar
Kindred at Home Healthcare
Rafaela Leal
John Henry & Diane Limon
Deacon Johnny H. Limon
Irene Loredo Guerra
Abel & Marie Luna
Toby & Julia Machuca
Inocente Maldonado &
Lucía Morgado
Emilio Maldonado Morgado
Vincent Maldonado
Ramiro & Monica Manzano
Gilbert & Mary Martinez
Lynett Martinez &
Sylvester Banda
Father Jayme Mathias
Manuel & Margaret Mendez
Deacon Angelita Mendoza
Waterhouse
Angel Morado
Elsa Nelligan
Rudy & Gloria Nieto
Ray & Orfalinda Orta
Gloria Osorio Silvar
Christopher Pierson
Mary Lou Piña

Manuel & Mary Helen Quintero
Mary Raigosa
Sabino & Lori Rentería
Father Libardo Rocha
Inocencio & Amanda Rodriguez
Gabriel & Matilde Rojas
Rebecca Saenz
Eli & Celia Santiago
Alfredo R. Santos c/s
Eulalio & Manuelita Treviño
Susana Trujeque Cooper
Gregorio & Dora Vega
Javier & Mirea Villegas
Larry Waterhouse
John & Erica Williams
Gary & Jane Yorke
Lupe Zamarripa
John & Estela Zavala
Roberto Zuniga & Daria Martinez

Holy Family Awards
March 26, 2023

María Alcala
Margaret Arriaga
Rev. Brett Banks
Cornelia Benitez Carbajal
Dolores Briones
Most Rev. Jerry Brohl
Shirley Bruch
Margaret Bruch
Joseph Bruch
Jerry Caballero
Terry Ann Caballero
Andrew & Mary Alice Cantu
Lucy Cardenas
Francisco & Modesta Choc
Estrada's Cleaners
Tony & Diana Coy
Rabecca Cross
Mario & María Cruz
Daniel Eduardo Cruz Vázquez
Louis & Rita Cuevas
Jenny Amor DeLeza
Jordan Dickenson
Bobby Duhon & Michael Stroder
María Esquivel
Alejandro Esquivel Serna & María Pérez Jaimes
Frank & Teresa Estrada
Gemini, Inc.
Rev. Roy Gomez
Tony Gomez
Leonard & Waldine Gonzales
Isabel Gonzales
Irene Loredo Guerra
Ramiro & Mary Alice Guzman
Celia Irizarry
Very Rev. Ben Janzen
Most Rev. Dr. Alan R. Kemp •

Jennifer Kennedy &
Brian Gaar
Dinora Leyva
Juan Lopez & Maribel Espinoza
Luis Alberto Lopez Espinoza & Linziy Abril Vasquez
Heather Lucas
Lynn & Rita Luedecke
Abel & Marie Luna
Toby & Julia Machuca
Vincent Maldonado
Lynett Martinez
Rev. Dr. Jayme Mathias
Gerhard Miller & Rev. Dr. Patrice Cheasty-Miller
Connie Miralrio
Eva Montes &
Andrea De Luna
Rev. Elsa Y. Nelligan
Rudy & Gloria Nieto
Ana Pecina
Michael Anthony &
Jan Marie Perez
The Mary Lou Piña Family
Manuel & Mary Helen Quintero
Mary Raigosa
Sabino & Lori Rentería
Inocencio & Amanda Rodriguez
Joe & Sylvia Rodriguez
Rev. Stephen Rodriguez
Gabriel Rojas Cruz &
Matilde Rojas
Rebecca Saenz
Francisco Saldaña
Salem Lutheran Church
Alfredo R. Santos, c/s
Rev. Annie Cass Watson
Olivia Willis
Dr. Gary Yorke
John Zavala

Holy Family Awards
March 24, 2024

Jenny Amor Deleza
Vanessa & Yazmin
Arrellano-Meraz
Margaret Arriaga
Rev. Brett Banks
Rev. Marek Bożek
Dolores Briones
Joseph Bruch
Margaret Bruch
Shirley Bruch
Alicia Caballero
Gerard & Terry Ann Caballero
Andrew & Mary Alice Cantu
Diane Capellupo
Lucy Cardenas

Eduardo Carranza Solís &
Claudia García León
Franklin Choc
Tony & Diana Coy
Becca Cross
Mario & María Cruz
Daniel Eduardo Cruz Vázquez
Louis & Rita Cuevas
Jordan Dickenson
Audry Jane Emon
Cy Michael Emon
Alejandro Esquivel Serna &
María Pérez Jaimes
María Esquivel
Frank & Teresa Estrada
Estrada's Cleaners
Thomas & Hortencia Eureste
Rosa Gil
Rev. Roy Gomez
Tony & Gina Gomez
Deanne Gonzales
Isabel Gonzales
Leonard & Waldine Gonzales
Adrian Gonzalez
Diana Goodman
Ramiro & Mary Alice Guzman
Most Rev. Dr. Alan R. Kemp
Jennie Kennedy & Brian Gaar
Alfred & Irene Lafuente
Gerardo & Dinora Leyva
Irene Loredo Guerra
Liliana Loredo
Sr. Maria Lucas, O.S.B.
Lynn & Rita Luedecke
Abel & Marie Luna
Toby & Julia Machuca
Ramiro & Monica Manzano
Sylvester & Lynett Banda
Rev. Dr. Jayme Mathias
Gerhard Miller & Rev. Dr.
Patrice Cheasty-Miller
Rev. Elsa Y. Nelligan
Karla Nevares
Rudy & Gloria Nieto
Cecilia Ordaz
Ray & Orfalinda Orta
Ana Pecina
Mary Raigosa
Sabino & Lori Renteria
Emmanuel & Teresa Rivas Ruiz
Amanda Rodriguez
Joe & Sylvia Rodriguez
Rev. Stephen Rodriguez
Gabriel Rojas Cruz
Rebecca Saenz
Salem Lutheran Church
Alfredo Santos c/s
Renee Senn
Bobby Duhon & Michael
Stroder
Juan Vela
Dr. Jimmy Watson &
Rev. Annie Cass Watson
Dr. Gary & Dr. Jane Yorke
John & Estela Zavala

In Memory

Please join us in praying for the repose of the souls of the following individuals who were dear to us and who now enjoy eternal life.

Gonzalo Portillo, August 24, 2012, age 66
Agustin Cuellar, August 17, 2013, age 82
Andrew Cuevas, May 26, 2014, age 89
Pete Charles Ruiz, Sr., August 24, 2014 age 89
Filomena (Leos) Leal, September 11, 2014, age 81
Frances (Saucedo) Cuevas, January 8, 2015, age 85
Juanita (Bazan) Lopez, February 4, 2015, age 85
Juana Carmen Rodriguez, July 2015
Oralia (Treviño) Mendoza, January 11, 2016, age 64
Fred Tanguma, June 9, 2016, age 83
Hon. Diana Castañeda, August 13, 2016, age 64
Mary Felis Cisneros, June 17, 2017, age 65
Ignacio "Nacho" Loredo, July 23, 2017, age 83
Francisco Rodriguez, September 9, 2017, age 92
Genaro G. Leal, February 14, 2018, age 83
María Lourdes, August 2018
Feliz (Gomez) Martinez, December 12, 2018, age 82
Kimberly (Nelligan) Rizo-Patron, December 20, 2018, age 30
Paul T. Alcala, January 22, 2019, age 84
Susie (Gomez) Navarro, January 23, 2019, age 94
María Louisa "Mary" Tolentino November 20, 2019, age 86
Vicenta (Gomez) Niño, December 6, 2019, age 87
Irene Pavia, December 21, 2020, age 90
Rudolfo Martinez, January 11, 2021, age 90
Mary Lou (Figueroa) Piña, February 7, 2021, age 88
Deacon John Hubert "Canica" Limon, February 7, 2021, age 76
Gilbert E. Davila, February 28, 2021, age 68
JoAnn Cisneros, August 19, 2021, age 55
Nancy Bruch Fuller, November 2021, age 80

Carmen (Cantú) Saldaña, December 28, 2021, age 70
Mary (Mojica) Herrera, June 12, 2022, age 76
María del Rosario Castillo, June 2022, age 34
José Ángel Reyna Martínez, August 19, 2022
Kristen Marie Martinez, September 27, 2022, age 42
Patricia Ramirez Valencia, October 5, 2022, age 69
María Salome (Rosalez) Alcala, March 7, 2023, age 93
Mary Gloria Maldonado, April 18, 2023, age 76
Vidal V. Limon, May 21, 2023, age 87
Ricardo "Peanut" Reyes, Jr., July 26, 2023, age 42
Rita Irene (Staton) Luedecke, October 23, 2023, age 74
Rev. Msgr. Victor Goertz, November 6, 2023, age 95
Marie Antoinette (Hernandez) Luna, November 19, 2023, age 74
Vincent Maldonado, December 15, 2023, age 57
Ramón L. Carrasquillo, February 2, 2024, age 70
Shirley Ann (Cervetti) Bruch, July 6, 2024, age 87
Matthew Tominey, II, August 31, 2024, age 65

Significant News Articles on Holy Family

November 2, 2012

"Religion Enters AISD Race:
Church and state still separate, last we checked"

Austin Chronicle

by Richard Whittaker

If you needed reminding why church and state are supposed to be separate, the latest round in the Austin ISD District 2 fight may help you. The Rev. Jayme Mathias, the challenger in the race, is asking the Roman Catholic Diocese of Austin to take its fingers off the election scales.

Mathias was a lifelong member of the Roman Catholic Church, and he spent much of his career as a priest in East Austin. Then, in March, he informed the Austin Diocese that he was leaving to join the more progressive American Catholic Church as pastor at Holy Family in Northeast Austin. The diocese ran a standard notice in the April 29 church bulletins, noting that Mathias was no longer receiving communion within its church, and that was that—until Mathias decided to run for the school board against incumbent Sam Guzmán. Five months after that first notice, the diocese started running it again, in English and Spanish, right in the middle of the election. When asked about the notice, diocese spokesman Christian Gonzalez said the bishop was simply clarifying "a matter of confusion about the sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church."

But the Mathias campaign is concerned that the diocese is trying to politicize his departure. Having trained and taught in Austin, Mathias was appointed by Austin Roman Catholic Bishop Gregory Michael Aymond—now archbishop of New Orleans—as pastor of Cristo Rey in April 2009, after the sitting pastor, the Rev. Jesse Euresti, was murdered in Mexico. During his tenure as pastor, Mathias doubled the size of the congregation. Yet like many Catholics, he found himself increasingly at odds with the church for its stance on key issues. He had begun his path to the priesthood with the Conventual Franciscan Friars, which he called

"a very progressive, liberal group," but saw the papacy as failing to live up to the reforming promise of Vatican II. He explained he had specific issues with the diocese—such as when Aymond's replacement, Bishop Joe Vásquez, banned Illinois Rep. Luis Gutiérrez from speaking to Mathias' congregation on immigration, because he is "too liberal" on birth control. The final break came this year, after Mathias finished a sabbatical and was introduced to the American Catholic Church. After meeting with Archbishop Lawrence J. Harms, Mathias said he finally decided that "this is the place where I feel I can be at home."

The Mathias campaign has now sent two cease and desist letters to the diocese, asking them to refrain from running the notice again: First, on Oct. 28, from campaign manager Steven Rivas, and then on Oct. 3, from attorney Alex Reyer. Telling the diocese that its actions were being viewed through a political lens, Reyer wrote, the timing "makes it evident that the republication was designed to scare voters away from our client and create conflict within the electorate."

This is not the first time the diocese has found itself in this political fight. Earlier this month, eyebrows were raised over a photo of Vásquez, Guzmán, and Guzmán supporter Frank Fuentes on Fuentes' Facebook page. According to Gonzalez, the photo was taken on Oct. 2 at Nuevo León, at the church's monthly public Theology on Tap luncheon, at the request of Guzmán and Fuentes. Vásquez "actually told them, 'Do not publicize it, because it is campaign season, and I don't want this to appear that I am endorsing anyone,'" Gonzalez said. "It is not the policy of the Roman Catholic Church to endorse or approve any party."

June 28, 2013

"Cut From A Different Cloth"

L Style G Style

by Yvonne S. Marquez

One look at the email signature of Rev. Dr. Jayme Mathias and you might just be intimidated or astounded (or both) by the numbers of initials that represent his education: M.A., M.B.A., M.Div., M.S., Ph.D. I certainly was. The man has two bachelor's degrees, four graduate degrees and one doctoral degree—how was I supposed to carry on an articulate conversation without embarrassing myself?

But after just 10 minutes speaking with him, I realized that instead of being a pretentious supergenius—like I imagined anyone with that many degrees would be—Mathias is approachable and genuine, two attributes most likely credited to his years of experience as a Catholic priest.

Mathias is one of nine school board members responsible for the education of 86,000 students in the 129 schools of the Austin Independent School District (AISD). Last November, he won the District 2 seat which serves East Austin and Dove Springs, by fewer than 100 votes over his opponent, a Latino incumbent, and became the first openly gay board member.

Serving the East Austin community for many years as pastor at Cristo Rey Catholic Church, Mathias initiated numerous efforts to "give a hand up" to the Latino community. He served as a Roman Catholic priest for 11 years before he was incardinated in 2011 into the American Catholic Church of the United States, a sect that provides a more inclusive expression of Catholicism.

Path to Priesthood

Born and raised in rural Ohio, Mathias was raised in a conservative Roman Catholic community. By age 12 he was an active member of his congregation and played the organ in church. Growing up, he never thought about becoming a priest; actually, his dream was to become a lawyer.

Mathias quotes Bible verse Jeremiah 20:7 when describing his path to the clergy: "Lord, you have duped me, and I have allowed

myself to be duped." He claims he was "duped" into becoming a priest. When he was 16, he reluctantly attended a youth retreat because he wanted to get out of an English exam. At its conclusion, the priest who led the retreat approached him to ask if he had ever considered becoming a priest. Mathias said he wanted to be a lawyer, and the priest responded by pointing out that priests have a number of careers, and that there was no reason why he couldn't be both a lawyer and a priest.

Thinking about the suggestion, Mathias grew more and more intrigued by the idea. For him, he knew going to the seminary at age 18 would be like walking into a shoe store and trying on shoes to see which ones fit. "One is not ordained a priest overnight; you go into the seminary, try on those shoes, walk around in them and see how they fit," he said. "And if they fit well, some eight or 10 years later, that person is ordained a priest. So for me, I tried on the shoes and they fit."

Mathias left Ohio to attend Saint Louis University in St. Louis, Missouri, to pursue two bachelor's degrees in philosophy and classical humanities. His initial degree in philosophy led him to a thirst for more knowledge. "Philosophy is all about asking questions about this world, about God, about what's right and wrong. One question leads to another question, which leads to another question, and so it's been a thirst all of these years: a thirst to learn more and a thirst to know more."

One afternoon when Mathias was 23 and about to graduate, a question posed by one of his psychology professors challenged his thinking. The two were having a discussion about sexuality when Mathias shared he was confused by his own. His professor asked, "Do you feel confused or guilty?" At first Mathias was angry that the professor would imply that he was gay. But as he drove home, he said, the "lightbulb" went on. "I thought, 'Oh my God, I am gay. I'm queer. I'm a faggot. All of these names we hear used to refer to the LGBT community…I was all of that. And it just made sense."

From the moment of his proclamation, he self-identified as gay. He initially came out to friends and classmates and finally to his parents in an eight-page letter a year later, but it wouldn't be until 2011 when he left the Roman Catholic Church that he would be able to live as an openly gay man.

Giving A "Hand Up"

After graduating, Mathias was sent to Austin in 1995 for a nine-month internship at Cristo Rey Catholic Church. "That was in an era when pizza companies would not deliver to East Austin and when an 8th-grader showed me a rock of crack cocaine. It was a sobering experience," he said.

When he first moved to Austin, Mathias didn't know what to expect: he had images of hitching posts and tumbleweeds. Once he was transplanted to East Austin nearly two decades ago, he learned there was a great deal of violence, gangs and drug activity. Through his ministry to the youth of Cristo Rey, he witnessed many young people in the community who were gang members, struggling with and dropping out of school and selling drugs.

"For these young people, there was no easy exit from the gang once you were part of it. And so, I was a confidant, a person who could somehow assist them in the midst of that difficult situation," he said.

That nine-month internship in East Austin was Mathias' first time working with the underserved Latino community. His eye-opening experience motivated him to continue his work in the area.

After earning his Master of Divinity from the Washington Theological Union in Washington, D.C., Mathias moved back to Austin to become a deacon at Cristo Rey Church and was ordained a Roman Catholic priest in 2001. He continued to serve Cristo Rey as an associate pastor for five years until 2006.

He noted, "It's a certain empathy, a certain compassion" that continues to drive him to help the people of East Austin. The elevated school dropout rate among Latinos, the high percentage of teen pregnancies in Latinas and the challenges that undocumented Latinos face every day "pull at [his] heartstrings."

It's this passion that prompted him to open *La Fuente* Learning Center at Cristo Rey during his time as associate pastor. The learning center attracted Spanish-speaking adults to English-language programs that were adapted for various trades, including construction and the restaurant industry. Twelve years later, the center continues to thrive in an offsite location. Mathias

helped found two more learning centers: *Sí Se Puede* Learning Center and the *Centro de Superación Sí Se Puede*, a collaboration of the Roman Catholic and Baptist communities of East Austin.

The Disillusionment

In 2003, Mathias was accepted into five law schools, but a multimillion-dollar sex abuse lawsuit against the clergy of the Roman Catholic Church deterred him from enrolling that fall. Instead, he became a Spanish teacher at San Juan Diego Catholic High School. Mathias admits he studied Spanish for four years in high school and only learned a single word: "*arco iris*" (which means "rainbow"). No joke. He said that he learned Spanish "on-the-job" at Cristo Rey, preaching and writing a column on spirituality in *El Mundo*, a Spanish-language newspaper. After two short years of teaching, he was named president of the school in 2005.

In 2009, the pastor at Cristo Rey was murdered in Mexico. There was an immediate need for a Spanish-speaking priest, so Mathias was named.

During his time at the church, Mathias doubled the attendance at Sunday Masses to more than 5,000 people. Of course, a percentage of those individuals were members of the LGBT community. For him, it was always a "joy" when a young person would turn to him for guidance because of struggling with the thought that he or she might be gay. "As a member of the clergy, that was a very beautiful and holy moment: to be able to accompany them, to be able to help them to better understand who they are and to help them navigate the challenges of coming out to themselves and to others. It was a gift," he said.

During the two years Mathias served as pastor, he became "disillusioned" with the Roman Catholic Church and realized he could no longer serve it in good conscience. He was advocating for women's rights and immigration rights and giving LGBT youth a positive message, most of which go against how Roman Catholic doctrine is typically interpreted.

"Ultimately, I had to choose: Will I stand on the side of the people, or will I stand on the side of this bureaucracy, which is the Roman Catholic church? And, for me, it was an easy choice."

In 2011, at the end of his time at Cristo Rey, he presided over the double funeral of Norma Hurtado and her mother, who were both murdered by Hurtado's girlfriend's father after the discovery of his daughter's relationship. Since he knew he was leaving the church, Mathias shared a message of love and understanding of one's sexual orientation.

Liberation

After a year of sabbatical to complete his doctorate and his fourth graduate degree, he incardinated into the American Catholic Church, where he currently leads Holy Family Catholic Church. The main differences between the Roman and American Catholic churches are their views of women, matters of sex and sexuality and "issues of conscience." Women can be part of the clergy and, instead of saying abortion is evil and condoms are bad, Mathias believes that if you're an informed adult, he has to trust "that you are making a choice in good conscience for a good reason."

According to the canon law of the Roman Catholic Church, Mathias could not run for any public office as a priest, but he could once he joined the American Catholic Church. Encouraged by others to run for the AISD school board, he wholeheartedly responded. His strategist, Steven Rivas, says that Mathias' campaign was an authentic grassroots effort.

Rivas added that "Jayme has an incredible sense of humor" and a "sincereness" when he's with others. "No matter where the spotlight was coming from, he stood firm in everything he believed and he smiled and shook hands, not like a politician, but like he was the member of your family."

As a school board member, Mathias continues to serve minority, low-income, mostly Latino students. He has advocated for same-sex benefits for AISD teachers and staff, and he hopes to serve as a role model for LGBT students. The work he does is a nonstop effort.

"People don't know when he's shutting down. Sometimes I don't even know," Rivas said. "He'll be up till 3 a.m. and he's up at 7 a.m. to be at an elementary school for Career Day."

As part of the American Catholic Church, Mathias has a newfound freedom to express his sexuality in a way he couldn't while in the Roman Catholic Church. He has the freedom now to celebrate his birthday at Oil Can Harry's—and find someone to love.

"As a Roman Catholic priest, one must remain closeted," Mathias said. "Then, it was difficult to imagine myself one day pursuing other options than the celibate life that I had been living. Once I left the Roman Catholic church, it was a lot easier to be honest with myself and with others."

June 26, 2015

"American Catholic Church will conduct same-sex weddings"

KXAN News

by Calily Bien

AUSTIN (KXAN) — Same-sex marriage is a divisive matter and it is no different when it comes to the stance taken by religious groups.

An American Catholic Church—with no affiliation to the Roman Church—in the Austin-area will be officiating a same-sex wedding mass on Saturday.

At Holy Family American Catholic Church in southeast Austin, this is an exciting time.

"Today's historic decision by the U.S. Supreme Court opens the door for same-sex couples within the Catholic Church to celebrate their love and union with the blessing of the church," said Rev. Dr. Jayme Mathias.

Mathias' church will officiate its first-ever same-sex wedding on Saturday, June 27 at 6 p.m. "The couple was previously married in Florida, and they tentatively scheduled it for this weekend while waiting on the U.S. Supreme Court ruling, but now we can move forward with their marriage," says Mathias.

For the Roman church, the situation is different. Bishop Joe S. Vásquez, bishop of the Diocese of Austin, says he is "deeply saddened by the Supreme Court's decision to require States to recognize same-sex marriages."

"Regardless of the court's decision, the nature of the human person and marriage remains unchanged and unchangeable. We will remain true and faithful to the Gospel and we will continue to call people to look deeply into the beauty of our theology of marriage and to come to a full understanding of a true sacramental marriage," continues Bishop Vásquez in a news conference on Friday.

"We're not going to close the door on [same sex couples]," continues Vásquez. "We're not going to shut them out, that's not our intent. Our intent is to try to hopefully go into a dialogue with them."

Pope Francis has upheld church teaching on marriage as a union between man and a woman, but he hasn't emphasized it nearly as frequently as his two predecessors.

"I am saddened that there are churches in this world that continue to judge and exclude people," says Mathias in response to Bishop Vásquez' stance. "But, I'm feeling good today, especially for the fact today that there are many Catholics now that can celebrate the sacrament of marriage."



July 3, 2015
"Gay Marriage American Catholic Style:
Local pastor celebrates marriage equality"
Austin Chronicle
by Kate X. Messer

"A new day has dawned here in the United States," says Father Jayme Mathias during a special Saturday mass greeting at Southeast Austin's Holy Family American Catholic Church, where he is pastor. "And a new day is dawning here in Central Texas."

Friends of the groom had just hung the last of the decorations, as friends of the other groom put the finishing touches on the church's modest but cozy gathering room where the beach-themed reception would take place after the service, and Father Jayme and Deacon Roy Gomez donned their vestments.

The new dawn to which the *padre* referred, of course, is the June 26 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in favor of nationwide recognition of same-sex marriage. The congregation had gathered this past weekend to witness the first Catholic mass celebrating the sacrament of marriage of a same-sex couple in Texas—and likely the U.S.—with a legal, state-supplied marriage certificate: the wedding of Darrell and Andy Cox.

Interestingly, the Coxes were not part of the mad Friday dash to obtain the newly-minted marriage licenses at the office of the Travis County Clerk. They had already gotten their license in Florida back in May, and planned on having a service to bless their union at Holy Family. Their ceremony just happened to be on the books for the day after the federal decree came down. "I didn't think it was going to be this exciting when I booked it," said Andy Cox, "but the timing was impeccable."

Another couple and friends of the Coxes, however, did partake in Friday's jubilant sprint to the county clerk's office for a license to get hitched: Mathias and his fiancé, Anthony Tang. Since Friday, Mathias and Tang have been cover boys for Austin gay marriage, appearing in the lead photo on the *Texas Tribune*, in clips on KEYE and KXAN, and on the front page of the *Austin American-Statesman*. The young couple was among a historic 313 to receive

marriage licenses issued to different and same-sex couples in Travis County on June 26, and enjoyed much of the public celebration in town that day.

"The congregation here at Holy Family Catholic Church has been so open and welcoming of Anthony," says Mathias, warmly. Holy Family is part of the independent Catholic movement, a parish within the American Catholic Church, an entity not burdened with the "when in Rome" obligations of churches bound to the Vatican.

The couple got engaged on New Year's Eve, and went down to the county clerk's office this past Friday. "We did think to ourselves, 'Should we just go get married today?' And we thought, 'No, let's wait so that we can celebrate with our family and friends [at Holy Family]'." They have a tentative wedding date set for July.

The Donald Duck Song

Mathias came out to his parents in the late Nineties, but says that "here in Austin, as a priest, it was very difficult to live as a gay man in the structures and strictures of the Roman Church."

He worked as a priest in the Roman Catholic Church for over a decade, eventually landing the position of pastor of Cristo Rey Catholic Church in East Austin. And, as it turns out, his sexuality was not what ultimately led to his determination that he needed to make a break. As pastor in 2011, he invited noted immigration expert, Illinois Congressman Luis Gutiérrez, to speak to the parish about comprehensive immigration reform.

"He's a champion for the undocumented. I opened wide the doors of Cristo Rey, believing it would be a shot in the arm for the immigrant community," remembers Mathias. "Three days before he was to come and speak, I get a call from the diocese. Austin Bishop [Joe S.] Vásquez has questions: 'Did you know Congressman Gutiér-rez is not pro-life?'"

Despite protest from Mathias that the intention of the Roman Catholic congressman's visit was to discuss immigration reform and not abortion, the bishop asked him to "disinvite" the dignitary. The moment set off a domino tumble of realizations for the young pastor, triggering a memory from his seminary days.

"I was told, 'If you want to be part of the Mickey Mouse Club, you have to sing the Mickey Mouse song. You can't be part of the Mickey Mouse Club and sing the Donald Duck song.' For over 10 years as a Roman Catholic priest, I found myself singing the Mickey Mouse song," Mathias says, "and there came a point where I just said to myself, 'I can no longer in good conscience continue singing the Mickey Mouse song.' So here I find myself in the American Catholic Church as a validly-ordained Catholic priest, and I am now able to sing the Donald Duck song."

Gimme That "Old Catholic" Religion

The history of the Catholic Church is rife with stories of rifts and break-off sects, including the well-known split between Roman Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox Church, which, Mathias points out, "excommunicated the Roman church in 1054"—and, of course, the Protestant Reformation 500 years later.

The American Catholic Church is part of the "Old Catholic" tradition. "By the name 'Old Catholic,' they believed that they were being more faithful to the ancient traditions of the church," says Mathias. The church traces its apostolic secession to the late 1800s over the issue of papal infallibility, when the Union of Utrecht [Netherlands], a federation of "Old Catholic" churches, seceded from what Mathias calls "the papacracy of Rome."

Fast-forward to over a century later: Archbishop Lawrence Harms, an openly gay man living with his partner (a fellow priest), founded the modern American Catholic Church in 1999. "They dreamed of the day when they would be able to live in a world that celebrated their love," Mathias explained. "From the beginning of the church, they had a rite of blessing for same-sex couples, what they called the 'Sacrament of Holy Union' in those states where same-sex marriage was to become legal."

Mathias first learned of the American Catholic Church in 2011 as his life in the church was taking a profound turn. "After I separated myself [from Cristo Rey], the bishop came out with a very deceptive letter saying that my sacraments may not be valid," said Mathias. "I was validly ordained. Any assault on my sacraments is an assault on [that] consecration. Needless to say, much of that has blown over." Since then, Mathias has not only

founded a new parish, the largest American Catholic parish in the U.S., but was also elected to the Austin Independent School District Board of Trustees.

Today, Mathias is a pastor again, but at a church which affords him the opportunity to celebrate the sacraments in an open and inclusive environment. "It's beautiful seeing couples who are active in the church now able to celebrate sacraments of the church."

Shortly after the SCOTUS decision, Roman Catholic Diocese of Austin's Bishop Vásquez released a statement that he is "deeply saddened by the Supreme Court's decision to require States to recognize same-sex marriages," and that "Jesus taught that from the beginning marriage is the lifelong union of one man and one woman."

"For so long," said Mathias, "the Catholic Church has excluded same-sex persons and in various ways told them they are not welcome. If I found myself as a [lay] gay person and heard the bishop's words, the Roman Church would have less appeal to me. According to the Pew Research Center, one out of every three baptized Catholics has left the church. In Mexico, 1,000 Mexicans leave the church every day."

Will this new dawn in America bring the faithful back into the fold? "Once word spreads that there is an inclusive and welcoming Catholic community in Central Texas, willing to celebrate the Catholic sacrament of marriage for same-sex couples," says Mathias, "it will be interesting to see how many of our brothers and sisters—Catholics and/or former Catholics—will want to celebrate their love in a sacramental way. I'd love to think that 10, 20, 30 years from now, we'll be looking back at other churches that previously excluded persons from the sacraments, that previously excluded persons because of their sexuality, and who will have joined us in seeing one another as the children of God that we are."

June 2017
"Critical Mass:
An Austin church remakes Catholicism
without the pope, celibate priests, or most of the other rules."
Texas Monthly
by Robyn Ross

"Any honest people here?" Grinning, Jayme Mathias scans the small crowd gathered for mass at Holy Family American Catholic Church, in southeast Austin. "Anyone brave enough to raise your hand if you've ever done a rolling stop? I come from the cornfields of Ohio, where you can see for miles, and folks slow down but don't always stop at intersections. They're not following the letter of the law, but they follow the spirit of the law, and no one gets hurt."

In the Gospel of Matthew, Mathias explains, Jesus admonishes the legalistic Pharisees for neglecting the spirit of the law. "But our mothers and grandmothers told us not to eat meat on Fridays!" he continues, to knowing nods and a few eye rolls. "Jesus would have said, 'Catholics, it's okay to eat a cheeseburger on Friday in Lent, as long as you love God and love your neighbor.'"

The sermon over, the congregation stands to prepare for the Eucharist. The altar where Mathias places the bread and wine is flanked by statues of Our Lady of Guadalupe and Saint Joseph holding the Christ child. But instead of light filtered through stained glass, fluorescent panels left over from the building's days as a dance hall illuminate the room. The pulpit, built by a parishioner, faces rows of metal folding chairs on a concrete floor. When the Eucharist begins, anyone will be welcome to come forward: Catholic or not, married or divorced and remarried, gay or straight. Mathias, who distributes the host, is himself married, to a man.

Holy Family is part of the American Catholic Church in the United States (ACCUS), one jurisdiction in the independent Catholic movement, a decentralized group of clergy and congregations worldwide that consider themselves Catholic but not subject to the authority of Rome. Like the Roman Catholic

Church, independent Catholic groups typically recognize seven sacraments and adhere to Catholic theology. But they diverge from Rome in various ways—some ordain women, some celebrate a pre–Vatican II Latin mass—and their stances on issues like homosexuality vary widely. To the Roman Catholic Church, the ACCUS is a schism, and Mathias, a former Roman Catholic priest, has excommunicated himself. To Holy Family parishioners, the church is an expression of Catholicism that has been updated for modern times.

Since Mathias formed Holy Family church, five years ago, it has grown from a handful of congregants to a weekly attendance of 215, making it the largest ACCUS parish in the country. But the history of independent Catholicism is filled with churches that flourished and withered in rapid succession. If Holy Family is to outlast them, it faces an uphill battle.

Independent Catholicism began as a response to the first Vatican council, in 1870, which affirmed the doctrine of papal infallibility. Those who disagreed with the doctrine allied themselves with the successors of a group of Dutch Catholic bishops who had been consecrated in the 1700s without the approval of the pope, a lineage that independent Catholic groups point to as evidence of their legitimacy.

Independent Catholicism expanded in the U.S. after the second Vatican council, in the sixties, both among traditionalists who rejected the council's reforms and among progressives who thought they didn't go far enough. Today, there are at least fifty independent Catholic groups in America, some deeply conservative and some, like the ACCUS, more liberal.

The ACCUS's progressive attitude is shared by many who have stayed in the Roman Catholic Church. According to a 2015 Pew Research Center survey, three quarters of American Roman Catholics think the church should allow the use of artificial contraception. Solid majorities think it should ordain women, scrap the celibacy requirement for priests, and allow people who have remarried without an annulment to receive communion. Asked whether the church should recognize same-sex marriage, respondents were evenly split. The Pew Center also found that

while many Catholics who disagree with the church on such issues remain in the church, 41 percent of American adults who were raised Catholic have left.

Groups like the ACCUS offer an alternative: an expression of Catholicism that responds to changing social norms but retains the familiar mass and sacraments and, in the case of Holy Family, Mexican Catholic traditions like Día de la Candelaria.

Mathias, who is 45, didn't set out to reinvent Catholicism. He grew up in staunchly Catholic rural Ohio and entered the seminary at 18. In 1995, after graduating from college, he was assigned to a yearlong internship at Cristo Rey parish, a predominantly Hispanic congregation in East Austin, where he eventually became fluent in Spanish. Quickly realizing that he had had very little life experience, he took the next year off to try on the life he was giving up to be a priest. He rented an apartment in the Seattle area and paid his bills by selling insurance. The job was revelatory, as Mathias realized how sales techniques could be applied in ministry. "I was sold on this notion of how we need to sell others on Christ," he says. He devoured books on neuro-linguistic programming and the difference between visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles. He realized that preaching, while effective for auditory learners, didn't engage the majority of people in the pews. In 2001, when he began his first ministry assignment, back at Cristo Rey, he incorporated props into his sermons; he has, for instance, been known to hold up a salt shaker and a candle when explaining how Christians are called to be salt and light.

Former Cristo Rey parishioners say his homilies were the first ones that ever held their attention. They remember his having an energizing effect on that church: increasing attendance, lifting the parish out of debt, and expanding the youth group. Mathias discovered an affinity for East Austin's Mexican immigrant community and started several programs that offered English classes for adults. "My heart was drawn to ministering to these people who were trying to survive and create a better life for themselves and their families," he says. He later taught Spanish and served as president of a Catholic high school in Austin. (Five

years ago, he was elected to the Austin Independent School District Board of Trustees.)

But for all his passion for his flock, Mathias found himself increasingly at odds with church leadership. "Of the three vows I had as a Franciscan—poverty, chastity, and obedience—obedience was always the most difficult," he says. Mathias's breaking point came six years ago, when Illinois congressman Luis Gutiérrez was touring Texas, speaking about immigration reform, and was set to appear at Cristo Rey. Shortly before the event, the Diocese of Austin told Mathias that Gutiérrez's support for abortion rights made it inappropriate for him to speak on any topic on church property. Mathias remembers telling the bishop's representative that Gutiérrez was "pro-immigrant, and being pro-immigrant is being pro-life…the congressman is on the side of the people." The presentation was moved to a community center, and Mathias, who had come to the conclusion that he could no longer be obedient to the bishop, took a sabbatical from ministry.

During the break, an acquaintance suggested that he affiliate with the ACCUS. Mathias had never heard of independent Catholicism, but on the ACCUS website he saw the names of three priests he knew from seminary. After talking with them, he decided to make permanent his split from the Roman Catholic Church and join the ACCUS. In the spring of 2012 he announced his new affiliation and his intention to hold weekly masses at his house. It was, at the beginning, a modest affair, drawing about ten people to each service. But word spread among the families who knew Mathias from Cristo Rey and from his work in the community. When attendance outgrew his backyard, the group moved to the dance hall, which sits at the end of a warehouse-lined road just south of Austin Bergstrom International Airport. The roar of a low-flying plane sometimes punctuates the *a cappella* hymns sung at the church's four weekly masses, one in English and the rest in Spanish.

A significant difference between the Roman Catholic Church and the ACCUS is their approach to the sacraments, including the Eucharist, which at Holy Family is open to all. In the Roman Catholic Church, the sacrament of confirmation is typically preceded by at least nine months of preparatory classes. At Holy

Family, people can be confirmed after attending a single class. The practice allows parents to have very young children confirmed, as is typical in some parts of Mexico, and it reflects the ACCUS's stance that the church should not place obstacles between believers and the sacraments. "The ancient church baptized, confirmed, and gave the Eucharist to people all in the same day, even to infants," Mathias says. "Should we withhold the sacraments from certain people for ageist reasons, because they're not yet eight years old? For sexist reasons, because we don't ordain women? We just decided we were going to make the sacraments available to all. If you feel called in your heart to receive the Eucharist, then I am not standing between you and your God."

The differences extend to the sacrament of holy orders, or ordination, which in the Roman Catholic Church requires an education that amounts to a college degree plus five to seven years of seminary education. Father Roy Gomez, a 71-year-old former supervisor for several Short Stop restaurants, was ordained as an ACCUS priest in 2015. He had nothing more than a high school education but had been heavily involved in ministry as a layperson at Cristo Rey and helped Mathias lead English classes for immigrants.

"You can be educated and not serve the people, but I'd rather be dumb and be able to serve," Gomez quips. "You have to know the people, gain their trust, and show them that you care about them, and I think that if you're able to do that, then you're fit to be a priest."

Because Holy Family is not in communion with Rome, the Roman Catholic Church considers sacraments given at Holy Family, with the exception of baptisms and some marriages, invalid or illicit. Beyond that, the Diocese of Austin doesn't have a position on the church, says Deacon Ron Walker, the chancellor of the diocese. "Every person has to worship in the way that their conscience says, so as with every other denomination, if a baptized Catholic decided to move away from the church and to worship in another church, they have the right to do that."

Austin diocese spokesperson Christian González says that in the early days of Holy Family, people called the diocese frequently to ask if the sacraments they'd received there would be recognized if

they returned to the Roman church. Those calls prompted priests across the diocese to read a statement from the pulpit a few years ago stating that Roman Catholics should refrain from receiving the sacraments from Mathias.

The statement had an unintended effect on some in the pews. Lifelong Catholic Mario Cruz, a 76-year-old retired school counselor, says it reminded him of growing up during segregation. "They said, 'He is not one of us,'" Cruz remembers. "They said, 'He's not a priest, so don't go to that church.' And when they say don't go, that tells me, go. Because who are they to tell me what I should do, and to exclude people?" Cruz and his wife went looking for Holy Family one Sunday and started attending regularly.

At a recent Wednesday night Bible study, Cruz and a number of other parishioners described their path from the Roman Catholic Church to Holy Family. Some left the Roman church after being barred from the Eucharist because they had divorced and remarried without an annulment. Others have gay relatives and disagreed with the Roman Catholic Church's teachings on homosexuality. Many say they still experience disapproval from staunchly Roman Catholic relatives and friends. "To this day, we still encounter people who say, 'That's not a real church, and [Mathias] is not a real priest,'" says Rita Cuevas, who followed Mathias from Cristo Rey to Holy Family.

Cuevas calls Mathias "perfect in every way," but she and her husband, Louis, describe the months after the Supreme Court's legalization of same-sex marriage in 2015 as a "bump in the road." Mathias officiated a wedding for two men at Holy Family that attracted a television news crew, and then photographs of Mathias and his husband, Anthony Tang, who were married that summer, appeared in local newspapers. The Cuevases say they thought Holy Family didn't need the added pressure of its priest being the public face of same-sex marriage. "We'd already gone out on a limb with our families, and here we are colliding with this other issue," Rita Cuevas says. "We supported gay marriage, but our priority was to build the church." Like a few other parishioners, they stopped going to mass. But months later, they raised their

concerns with Mathias, which seemed to clear the air. They returned and have been loyal congregants ever since.

Vincent Maldonado, another Wednesday night attendee, left his Roman Catholic church after getting divorced and started attending Holy Family five years ago. He was happy to receive the Eucharist again, but he was floored when Mathias and Gomez invited him to become a deacon; he managed a nightclub, a venue that Roman Catholic acquaintances had told him was a place of sin. "I'm an American Catholic follower, but I still have a Roman Catholic mind, so I had to let go of all the rules," Maldonado says. "The American Catholic Church is open to accepting everyone, and I think that's how religion should be. In the past five years, I'm proud to be Catholic again."

Despite independent Catholicism's appeal to people like Maldonado, the same ad-hoc quality that gives independent Catholicism its flexibility has prevented it from ever becoming a significant religious force, says J. Gordon Melton, a distinguished professor of American religious history at Baylor University who has closely studied independent Catholicism.

"Each generation has to start from the beginning," Melton says. "The churches grow from adult converts, and there are no seminaries or schools, so they aren't able to call young people to the ministry and train them. The parishes are, at best, a one-generation phenomenon."

Melton says that because independent Catholic bishops lack the sort of power that is vested in Roman Catholic bishops—control over property and pension funds, for instance—an independent Catholic priest who disagrees with his bishop often resolves the dispute by leaving to start a new branch of the church. Past efforts to organize the movement haven't lasted, Melton says, because the issues that drove clergy to form independent churches—such as the ordination of women or openly gay people—are the same ones that divide independent Catholic groups.

These challenges are familiar to Mathias, who wants to form an independent Catholic conference. He dreams of bringing independent Catholics from across the country to meet in Austin, but the largely part-time clergy don't have travel budgets, and he

doesn't have a retreat center. When he invited half a dozen independent Catholic clergy from Central Texas to Holy Family for Sunday lunch, only one turned up.

"When I joined the movement, it seemed stronger than I now perceive it to be," Mathias says carefully. He sees the cultivation of additional clergy—Holy Family now counts seven priests and deacons—as the best way to ensure the church's survival.

Independence brings both freedom and risk; when Holy Family discarded the "rules," it also abandoned the structures that sustain churches and help them grow. In the long run, its fate may depend more on such practical matters than on its message of inclusivity. But for Holy Family's parishioners, that message—and the sense of community they've formed—are, for now, enough.



December 10, 2018

"An American schism:

Independent Catholicism spreads into Central Texas"

Medium

by

AUSTIN — People wearing dresses and suits crowded the wooden pews inside Salem Lutheran Church. Blue organdy ribbons adorned the painted white stone walls of the church and fluorescent Christmas lights lit up the Lady of Guadalupe and St. Jude statues that flanked the alter area. It is the First Sunday of Advent at Holy Family American Catholic Church, a church that represents a schism in the Roman Catholic Church.

Pastor and church founder Jayme Mathias served as a priest at Cristo Rey Catholic Church in Austin until 2012 when he left his position after a request by the Diocese of Austin to disinvite Illinois congressman Luis Gutiérrez from speaking at Cristo Rey. According to Mathias, the diocese told him that because Gutiérrez supported abortion rights, he should not speak on the church grounds.

After leaving and taking a sabbatical, Mathias met Archbishop Lawrence Harms of the American Catholic Church in the United States (ACCUS). He suggested Mathias should form a church in Austin and bring independent Catholicism to Central Texas.

"It was definitely a risk at the time," Mathias said. "I was putting myself against the Roman Catholic Church."

The first Sunday mass for Holy Family took place in Mathias' living room in East Austin with 19 people in attendance. They eventually outgrew his living room and moved to a dance hall in Southeast Austin. Earlier this year, they moved again to Salem Lutheran Church, less than two miles from the old location.

Now, they are the largest parish within ACCUS and about 300 people attend their three different masses, including one in Spanish that preach under the practices of independent Catholicism.

Independent Catholicism began in the 1700s when a group of Dutch Catholics consecrated without the approval of the pope. Then in 1870, the first Vatican council affirmed the doctrine of papal infallibility, which states that the pope cannot be wrong when teaching about faith. Those who did not abide left the church, allied themselves with the Dutch Catholics and formed modern independent Catholicism.

The schism created by ACCUS focuses on more of a liberal ideology involving inclusiveness. Holy Family preaches the importance of creating a diverse community with people from a variety of backgrounds. Unlike with the Roman Catholic Church, divorced or gay persons can receive communion during Eucharist. Those same people can also receive different sacraments, such as the sacrament of marriage. Mathias married his husband Anthony Tang in 2015 after same-sex marriage legislation passed in Texas. Mathias said things like this could not be discussed or even considered when he worked as a priest at Cristo Rey.

"It's a breath of fresh air to be free—to live our life and be accepted by people at Holy Family American Catholic Church," Mathias said.

Mathias and Holy Family received pushback from the Diocese of Austin when their doors first opened. Throughout 2012 and

during Mathias' campaign for Austin Independent School District Board of Trustees, the church ran a letter written by Bishop Joe Vásquez from the Diocese of Austin about Mathias. It said that Mathias no longer associated with the diocese and any communion or sacraments by him are invalid and gravely illicit. Mathias and his campaign had to file two cease and desist letters to the diocese, asking them not to run the letter.

However, Mathias never received a formal letter of excommunication and according to diocesan spokesman Christian González, he does not need to.

"The church has not given formal excommunication," Gonzàlez said. "But he, as a well-educated priest, knows he has excommunicated himself from the church through his actions."

People who practiced Catholicism for decades like Mario Cruz, left their churches to join Holy Family. Cruz grew up in San Angelo, Texas when segregation divided the town. He came to Austin in 1971 after graduating from Texas Tech University and worked as a high school counselor until he retired. When the Diocese of Austin published the letter regarding Mathias, he decided to leave his church and go to Holy Family.

"The Roman Catholic Church is not very open to women or other different people," Cruz said. "We found this church and they don't judge. God is the only judge. I believe that I cannot discriminate against anyone else and that's why I come here."

Some who never felt at home while at church found one at Holy Family, like Elsa Nelligan. Nelligan went to more than five different churches in Austin in 30 years before finding Holy Family.

She first met Mathias while working as a *ballet folklórico* instructor for Cristo Rey. After listening to how he motivated kids there, she became hooked and started going to Sunday mass to listen to Mathias. After he left, she stopped going and a couple of year later, she found Holy Family. Since then, she regularly attends Sunday mass.

"Since I've been going to this church, I've felt at home," Nelligan said. "[Mathias'] homilies touch my heart and change me."

During a Sunday mass, one of the clergy asked her to read from the Bible during Spanish mass, something that never happened before. Ever since then, she became more involved with Holy Family by planning different events and translating English documents into Spanish. She even [participates in the] Joy Group, which prays rosaries at different funerals.

Now, she studies to become a deacon. Women within the Roman Catholic Church cannot do this, but Holy Family allows anyone to become part of the clergy. She said she wants to finish by May but does not want to rush it. It is something she wants to learn and prepare for.

"It's just different, I don't know how to explain it well," Nelligan said. "I feel comfortable here and I want to give my time to others who go here."

Holy Family recently formed a satellite community in Lockhart and plans for another in Leander, where there is a need for sacraments in rural communities. Mathias said they're trying to build relationships across Texas and spread Independent Catholicism to all those who want to listen.

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