



*The Westside Story
Presents*

HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 15 - OCTOBER 15, 2021

The Westside Church is honored to recognize all our Hispanic brothers and sisters during this Hispanic Heritage Month. We invite you to share in some of their personal stories, culture, faith, and service within our Westside Church and their communities.



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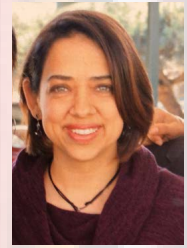
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Singles Ministry



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SPANISH SPEAKING COUNTRIES





Mexico



El Salvador



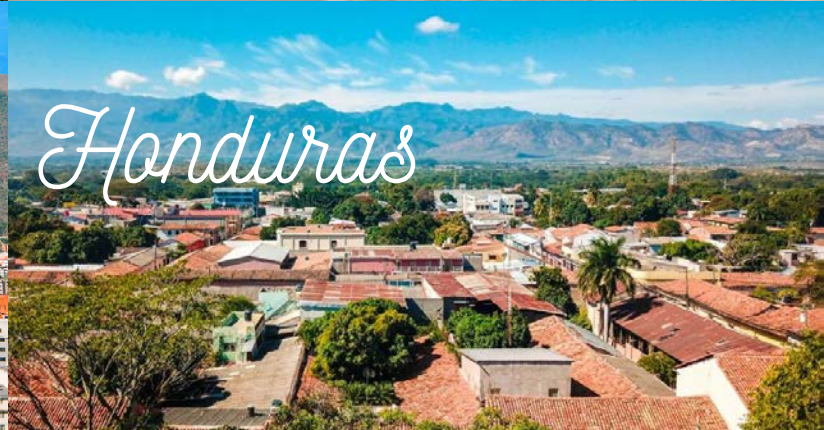
Guatemala



Cuba



Venezuela



Honduras



Puerto Rico



Columbia



Panama



Dominican Republic



Peru



Bolivia



Nicaragua



Paraguay



Argentina



Spain



Chile



Uruguay



Ecuador



Costa Rica

Eddie Chacon

I KNOW WHAT IT IS TO BE IN NEED, AND I KNOW WHAT IT IS TO HAVE PLENTY. I HAVE LEARNED THE SECRET OF BEING CONTENT IN ANY AND EVERY SITUATION, WHETHER WELL FED OR HUNGRY, WHETHER LIVING IN PLENTY OR IN WANT. I CAN DO ALL THIS THROUGH HIM WHO GIVES ME STRENGTH.

PHILIPPIANS 4:12-13



In this picture are Luz, Axel, and Cielo. Cielo turned two years old this June. We celebrated small due to the pandemic. Her theme was ice cream. Ice cream is her comfort food as well as anything that can be interpreted as a snack. I believe she takes after me.

My name is Eduardo Chacon. I am currently in the Westside Church of the LA Church. I became a disciple in December of 1994, Christmas Eve at the age of 15 years old. From 1994 to 2011, I was in the Central Region, which is now Lifeway. In 2011, my wife and I decided to move to the Westside Church.

A little background of myself: I was born in El Salvador; 1978. A year or so after I was born, a Civil War which would last 12 years had begun. My family decided to move to the US for safety reasons. My parents were getting confused for relatives and affiliates and would be searched for by the Government. We arrived in Los Angeles when I was four years old. I grew up in Los Angeles - I was an outdoor kid. Being outside all the time, I was exposed to a lot of violence, drugs, gangs, etc. God instilled my passion for sports which is what kept me out of trouble. I liked both playing and watching sports. My passion changed just 6 days before I turned 16 when I was baptized. God revealed himself to me through his word, his church, and specific brothers and sisters that inspired me. I am currently married to Luz Chacon. We have two kids, Axel (4) and Cielo (2). My aspiration is that my kids grow up to have an amazing God connection and watch sports with me, and if they want to play sports, I want them to enjoy it as I did.

In my early twenties, I pursued a career with the United States Forest Service as a Wildland Firefighter. This year began my twentieth fire season. I have been fortunate to develop in a variety of specialties in my field of work, which I enjoy a lot. I have worked on a Helicopter crew, an Interagency Hotshot Crew, and several Engine Companies. I started my career as a call when needed reserve firefighter and have climbed up the ladder up to Engine Captain. My longest job tenure has been Engineer; this is also my favorite and, in my opinion, the most challenging job.

I am also one of a handful of lead instructors at Rio Hondo College in the Wildland Fire Academy, where I have been helping with that program since 2007. My teaching experience is different, when students fall asleep, they get pushups. I could never get away with that anywhere else, just the Academy. The programs I help put together at the college have been recognized as top-quality learning environments with the most real-life student learning outcomes.

I have been blessed with an amazing family, an amazing church family, and a special brotherhood in my fire family community.



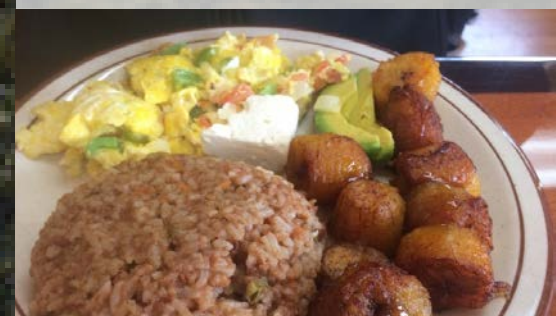
In this picture, I am the Landing Zone (LZ) Coordinator for a Super Puma helicopter that had picked up a patient who had fallen off a motorcycle with serious injuries. I am sheltered at that location with a handheld radio communicating with the helicopter.



This was the Spring fire 2020. This is my Engine Company, Engine 322 where I was Captain last year. This picture was taken after we secured our division with a large burnout operation that I lead with 2 Engine companies. It was unique because the nation was in what we call Preparedness level 5, which is the highest level, and we had begun to activate the military and the international communities of fire fighting resources. That means that it is difficult to fill resource requests on time or at all. Because of that, we were understaffed for the task at hand. However, we did it with fewer folks but did it slow, methodical, and flawless with both modules overworked and spread thin - we got the pre-work in before the burn. The next day we burned out about a mile long and stopped the fire from reaching this store and SPI land, which was valued at about 50 million in timber stand. Lucky for us the caretaker stayed back and did not evacuate, and had some coffee for us in the morning after a 24-hour shift.



My favorite food looks a little like this. Fried Plantain. I love it. I grew up on it, and it's the best. You may differ from my taste in food, and that's okay because God said I must love you as well.)



Maria Chavez



I am Maria Chavez and I was born and raised in Mexico City, Mexico and to this day, it is one of my favorite places on earth. Mexico has always been a source of joy and peace for me. My mom is from Mazamitla, Jalisco, which is known as one of the pueblos mágicos (magical cities) in Mexico and I couldn't agree more. It is filled with rich culture, flavorful food, and a beautiful language. Most of all, my Mexican heritage has deeply rooted traditions and core values that have made me who I am today. One is that I have learned the deep value of familia. Regardless of whether one is a blood relative or not, familia means showing respect, love, and support to our neighbors. Overall, I am deeply proud of being Mexican American and am thankful for my roots that have encouraged me to give my best in all that I do.



Maria's favorite dessert. Flan!

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7



Mazamitla, Jalisco



Lupe Lem

MY STORY



Romans 12:2 "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Hi Westside family! My name is Lupe Lem. My full maiden name is Guadalupe Ramirez Larranaga. I am an immigrant from Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico, and my parents brought me here to Venice, California when I was 9-years old. Before becoming a disciple of Christ in 1992, I married an immigrant from Michoacan, Mexico, whose last name is Chavez, and I have three wonderful children Joshua, Daniel, and Victoria. Recently in 2014, I got remarried to a disciple from The Westside Church, James Lem, who happens to be a Canadian, Asian, and American!

My father was Salvador Francisco Ramirez Chavez, and my mother was Irma Ramirez Larranaga. My mother's parents were Maria Del Rosario Larranaga Nevarez, and Cipriano Larranaga Cortez and they all lived in Mexicali, Mexico. My mom was born in Sinaloa, Mexico. Her mother was a teacher, and her husband was a farmer. Both grandparents came to the United States, Francisco worked in the railroads in Chicago, IL, and Cipriano worked at the Los Angeles Port in San Pedro, CA. Both families settled in Mexicali, Baja California where I was born.

My paternal grandmother was a devout Catholic, and she instilled religion, Catholicism, and prayer. She wanted me to be a nun, and later in my teens, I did too. During breakfast, she would tell me stories about the Bible. I didn't quite understand a lot of them, but I certainly enjoyed spending time with her and that she devoted her time to me. My grandmother instilled in me to go to church. She was a churchgoer daily, sometimes in the evening, she would be at the Catholic church at mass or do some service for the community, and she showed me how to pray. My grandfather on my father's side was born in Sonora, Mexico, in 1901 and had a sister named Lupe, who were both orphans. My grandfather joined the revolution with Pancho Villa and rode with him when he was about nineteen years old. He was subsequently shot in the back four times and was left for dead. However, he claimed that he prayed to the Virgin of Guadalupe and was saved. This is the story he told all the grandkids including myself, and he would show us the four scars and grooves on his back. My happiest times were when I was reading Scripture - I especially enjoyed Psalms 119, and of course, the stories of Jesus. I joined youth groups and started organizing weekend retreats.

Lupe Lem

Favorite food:

I love ALL foods! Especially Asian food! I guess that's why I married an Asian man!



Mexicali

Ezekiel 36:26 "And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."

When I was nine, my parents came to Venice, California. We lived there for a while, and I went to elementary school there. After that, we moved to Santa Monica, where I attended Will Rogers. I didn't speak English at all, so I was immersed in English classes. My parents had seven kids, four girls, three boys, and I am the second oldest. In my teens and early twenties, I spent time looking for a Convent that I liked. Most teachers were nuns, and some were nurses. Most of all, I sought to see what that life would be like. I enjoyed the worship singing, and I felt God's love during the quiet solitude in prayer. Catholicism is all I knew, but I sought God and other denominations, even Buddhism. My parents were not religious as they never had enough time, especially with the difficulty of trying to provide for seven children.

In 1992 I was invited to come to a Bible talk by Kelly Baldwin. I visited the Multicultural church, and everyone seemed so happy in South Central. Growing up in Los Angeles, there are not only Mexicans but other Hispanic as well. They had rich cultures, and their food is so different from where I came from. I've been here so long that I feel like I have become a native Angeleno. I was baptized in the South Central Church in 1992, and I stayed there for several years. Later, I joined a Latin church - the De Las Americas. I stayed and served there many years. That's where I used to translate the service for Latinos that couldn't understand the messages in English. I witnessed many conversions, including my parents, two sisters, one brother, cousins, uncles, aunts, and family.

Recently, I counted the family members that became Christians, and the total was 22. That was just incredible to me. I had never sat down and counted how many family members became disciples. Just last year, my niece and her husband also became disciples. I am still praying for my children to follow Jesus. I didn't have to be a nun to love God with all my heart, all my soul, and all my mind. Being of service in the church worshipping God brings me much joy. I have lived through many trials, and I am sure there will be more. Being a part of The Westside Church has been a joy. The diversity, the love for one another, how we challenge each other to be more like Jesus, to be more God-like. I've been blessed beyond my dreams in my journey with Jesus through prayer and contemplating God's word in the morning and at night. My Heritage is important to me, but I believe studying the Bible has transformed my mind and my actions. I asked God to show me his will for me and the power to carry out his will, but not

Val Posada

I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Philippians 4:13

*That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses,
in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties.*

For when I am weak, then I am strong.

2 Corinthians 12:10



In 1979, during the Civil War, my parents fled El Salvador and immigrated to America. Their journey to the States began with a lot of turmoil as they were thrown into learning how to navigate young adulthood in a foreign land.

In 2003, my father was in a major accident that left him severely mentally ill. This event led to being raised by a Hispanic single mother for the rest of my upbringing. I am the fourth generation in my family that has seen the example of strong, independent women working hard to make a life for themselves. My family has taught me a great amount of work ethic, compassion, hospitality, and strength.

I am grateful to God that my mom became a disciple before I was born, giving me the opportunity to see an authentic relationship with God up close and personal. This set the foundation for my faith and belief in God. I saw the way my mom stayed in constant prayer for emotional strength and daily provisions. The peace and gentleness that she exemplified to my two brothers and I, impacted the way that I learned to carry myself. However, to a fault, I began to take on the burden of appearing calm and collected even when I was upset, sad, or discouraged. As I grew into my teenage years, my lack of ability to verbally express my genuine emotions led to a lot of pride and independence because I felt the need to always take care of others and be the strong one, so that I would not be a burden for someone else to carry. (continued on the next page)

Val Posada



Beautiful volcano in Cerro Verde National Park in El Salvador at sunset

(continued from the last page) In 2015, I began to learn more about how God viewed weakness and vulnerability as I sought a deeper relationship with Him. God's faithfulness and grace began to create a safe haven for my heart. After making the decision to respond to the Gospel and surrender my life to Him, I committed to the journey of learning how to navigate the fears and depths of my heart. It is a daily spiritual battle to continuously surrender my insecurities, fears, and weaknesses to God, but I strive daily to allow Him to be the one that gives me strength.

Val's favorites:



Salvadorean staple: Pupusas!



Salvadorean Horchatas

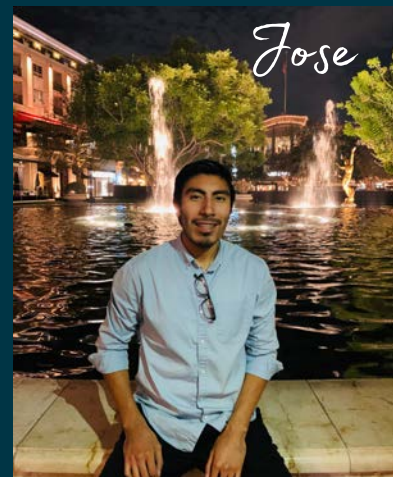
Elias Aguilar

A TALE OF THREE BROTHERS

I think of Timothy 4:16 as a resounding theme in my family. My parents met at a local church where they both served in. My dad played the bass in the worship team and my mom served in different capacities as a laywoman. Eventually, they married and had my older brother Jose, then me, and finally my younger brother Kevin. Over the years, however, our family was torn when dad was unfaithful to mom. By the time I was in middle school we had completely stopped attending church. Dad moved out and seldom saw him. Eventually divorcing. All of us had our own sins and struggles and were very lost.

Years later I graduated high school and enrolled at Santa Monica College along with my older brother Jose. These years were difficult for me. I couldn't find meaning in life and felt hopeless and sin was ever entangling me in momentary pleasures that left me emptier every time. A few years in and I wanted to quit - not just school. But by God's grace, I did not. He had a plan for us all along. In fact, he began to work in my older brother's life first. You see Jose and I used to hang out all the time together and his friends became my friends. But after his relationship with his girlfriend took a turn for the worst, we all stopped hanging out. It was during this time he began looking for answers as well as a new church until eventually, two disciples met him on campus. It was Raquan Harrison and Jennifer Fuentes. After this, he began attending the campus ministry events and to study the Bible. All along I had no idea of it. On one occasion we crossed paths outside the school library and he invited me to meet his new friends who happened to be the campus disciples. A few days later my brother had finished his studies, repented of his old life, and made Jesus Lord. I attended his baptism where I got to meet the rest of the campus ministry.

In the midst of this though I would question his faith and sometimes even mock him, yet he would always stand firm and gave me a reason for his faith. This was an aspect that in time would win me over. There were also two disciples that played major roles in helping me turn to Jesus. That was Juan Martinez and David Zambrano. They always had my best interest in mind, helping me find a job and helping me get to events as well. But most importantly they persevered in the hope that I would come to understand the Scriptures as I studied the Bible with them. Eventually, I made the decision to leave my old life and make Jesus Lord. After my baptism I felt an overwhelming sense of peace and holiness, knowing that my sins were forgiven by Jesus' blood. (to be continued on the next page)



(continued from the last page)

It wasn't too long after that my younger brother Kevin saw a radical transformation in my life and it began to set some interest of his own. This was because I was the crazy one in the family. I would always start verbal and physical fights with my family. I had a sailor's mouth and easily lost my temper. But all that had miraculously changed. I have to admit, I was surprised too. I could have never imagined such transformation in my life but with God it was possible.

Naturally, Jose and I began to reach out to Kevin as well. At first, like me, he was reluctant to attend any events. But after days of prayer over him, he eventually accepted the invitation to attend an event. When he saw the Kingdom and the love within it he was instantly won over. The following weeks he was already studying the Bible, and soon enough he gave up his old life and made Jesus Lord and got baptized. But God's plan did not end there. With much prayer and perseverance, a couple of years later, my mom also began to study the Bible and got baptized as well.

Our walks with the Lord have not been easy, but we see many blessings he has poured on us. Like one of my closest friends and brother in the faith Alex, who Vanessa Naranjo and I reached out to one morning at SMC. He is now serving in our sister church El Mensaje. Another of these is the restored relationship with my dad whom at one point was damaged. I still don't get to see him often, but we certainly talk more often. And when I do get the chance to visit him in Houston, we always have a great time. Along with these, there are still so many friendships forming in the faith that I'm grateful for - brothers and sisters who have ministered and encouraged me in the faith.

I hope this snippet of our family's life lifts hope to those who have family members that have yet to know the Lord, that it is possible. Keep persevering in God's love because, in his perfect timing, he will move in the hearts of those who are listening to you and see your authenticity in him.



Adorable smiles!



A Traditional favorite: Panes Con Pollo



Reyes González

Hi Westside Church family! My name is Reyes Gonzalez, and I'm grateful to have the opportunity - during this period of celebration of Hispanic heritage - to share a bit about what this particular church community means to me.

When I first attended a Westside Church service in the same Veterans Auditorium, back in 2012, I was showered with welcoming hugs and caring, wholesome conversation. My second meeting with the body happened to be a Brother's Encouragement Night for the campus brothers, so of course, I was again inundated with so much food, good friendly times, and more selflessness than I thought was possible. That same night, a sister gave me a nice card that read:

JAMES 1:17 - "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."

To my then very young mind, the above Scripture was so world-changing and opened me up to deep thinking about who God was/is - the Scripture still has the same effect on me today! As a young man, I was only used to being so well-cared for and pampered at home with my parents, so finding that in a community of then-strangers yet true believers, left me wanting more. It was at this point I knew that the Westside Church was a welcoming community to all.

After I served in the Spanish-language ministry as worship leader for four years (the then MOE church, now El Mensaje), I returned to the Westside Church in 2018, and I was received with warmth and care as if I had never left.

To me, the Westside Church is two things: a community that gives AND a community that welcomes everyone, helping them become part of God's family. I've personally seen these two traits prevail in my own story, and to this day, I continue to see them resurface as God adds more faithful disciples to our community. I believe that because the Westside Church, in general, is grateful for "every good and perfect gift" - and we attribute it as a blessing from God - we have built this identity as a church community that gives and welcomes.

As I reflect on my Hispanic heritage, I'm proud to be part of the Westside Church because it exemplifies so many of the core values I appreciate as a Mexican-American male (family, selfless giving and care to a fault, loud, eccentric talking for no reason). As a Latino, since day one, I've felt welcome in this church, I continue to feel welcome here, and I believe that because of the ethnic diversity that you add to the mix, you'll be welcomed here too.



Linda Herrera



Oaxaca, Mexico



Favorite dish: Pozole



Eliazer and Linda

Hello, my name is Linda Herrera. I was born in Oaxaca, Mexico, and came to the states at the age of nine. My parents encouraged my siblings and me to work hard and to do well in school. Thankfully, God opened the right doors, and I was able to attend UCLA where I was invited to church. After graduating, I decided to go into teaching and went to CSUDH to obtain my teaching credential and my Master's.

This is my 20th year in education. There are always challenges in every academic year, but since March 13, 2020, it has been like being on a roller coaster. Last year was emotionally draining because from the moment I opened the Zoom room, I had to be cheerful, energetic, and present for my students. I had to be silly to keep them engaged. It was hard to hear and see the challenges they were facing. Many were homeless, parents lost their jobs, one child ended up in ICU due to Covid. Another child lost her mother due to complications with Covid. All of this broke my heart! It was also challenging to go back to business as usual after my aunt's death as a result of Covid. I had to be strong for my students even though at times I felt like breaking down and crying. What kept me going day after day was seeing how loving and caring they were towards each other. They enjoyed being with each other, even if it was through Zoom.

Now that we are back to teaching in person, we are short-staffed and district policies keep changing making it tough to focus on our job. As well as all the media coverage targeting teachers and making us the villains for pushing for a safe environment for our students and ourselves. As a result, every morning, I make a decision to not worry about the things I have no control over. This year, I learned that things can change in a blink of an eye. I can stress unnecessarily if I don't put my trust in God and allow the news to get me rattled up. I remind myself of Romans 8:28 that God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. All I can do is be present for my students. The rest is in God's hand!



Jenn Nascimento

Where I'm From

I am from cilantro, from adobo and Oreo cookies

*I am from pots and pans that smell like my grandmother's homemade
sofrito as rice and beans cook for dinner*

*I am from the mint leaves and rose petals from my grandfather's
garden I was sent to gather for Abuelita's bath*

*I am from Church on Sundays and cocoa butter skin
From Mima and Sonia and Tommy*

*I am from the loud ones who like to laugh and talk over each other
"Tu novio no te escribe." and "No te viste, que no va."*

*I am from a community that taught me how to love God even if we
never read the Bible*

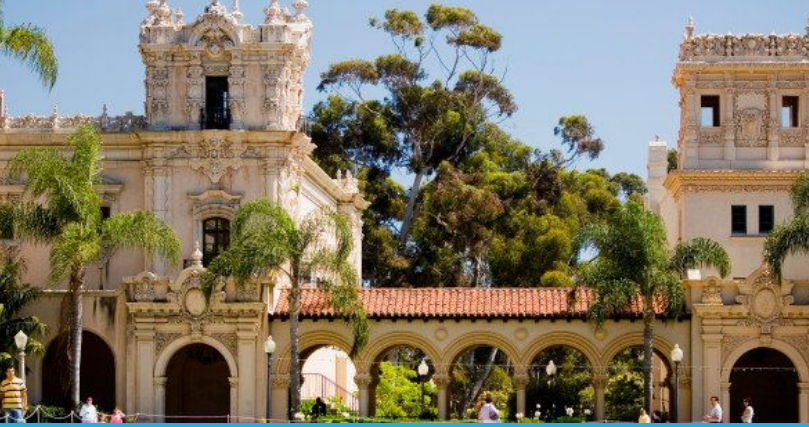
*I am from Queens and a Puerto Rican family
White Castles and stuffed shells*

*From the time my Abuelita, my great grandmother still showed her
grown son who was boss, and to maintain respect
And the music love of my uncle, who had entire rooms devoted to
recordings*

*I am from pictures on the walls, in albums, in trunks, pulled out to
reminisce, and from a dad who has apologized for his teenage
mistakes*

June 2019





Discover Hispanic Heritage in LA!

Museum of Latin American Art: MOLAA

Long Beach

<https://molaa.org>



LA Plaza de Cultura y Artes

Downtown LA

<https://lapca.org>

Olivera Street

Downtown LA



El Mercado de Los Angeles

Boyle Heights

Lonzo's
Bread and Peruvian Eatery
5084 Washington Blvd Culver City, CA 90230



Discover Hispanic Food in LA!

Gloria's Cafe
SERVING LOS ANGELES SINCE 1981



PORTO'S
BAKERY & CAFE
SINCE 1960



Mofongos



SOL
MEXICAN • COCINA



Carnveteca
A MEXICAN JOINT
LOS ANGELES • CALIFORNIA



The EMPANADA
Factory
LATIN STREET FOOD



Versailles
COMIDA CUBANA



LALA'S
argentine grill

