

 **St. Raphael**  
CATHOLIC CHURCH



## V ENCUENTRO

DISCÍPULOS MISIONEROS: TESTIGOS DEL AMOR DE DIOS  
MISSIONARY DISCIPLES: WITNESSES OF GOD'S LOVE



October 30, 2017

**Sister Norma Edith Muñoz, MCP**

Director of Hispanic Ministry  
2500 N Tyler St  
Little Rock, AR 72207

Dear Sr Norma:

After months of delay, we are finally sending you our bilingual working document for *V Encuentro*. I apologize for the delays, but parish life is very hectic here and it is hard to control the uncontrollable.

I am adding this cover letter to the working document to explain how our *V Encuentro* was carried out here at St Raphael. As pastor of St Raphael for the past 8 years, I have learned that what works well in small to mid-size parishes, whether programs or ideas, do not work well in large parishes or a very large parish such as St Raphael.

We began our preliminary work on *V Encuentro* in the fall of 2016. Our sessions were carried out during a 5 week period in Lent of 2017 and our "Parish *Encuentro*" happened in early June. Our *Encuentro* process was carried out under the direction of Father Juan Guido, my former associate and Jonathan Ramirez, our Hispanic Ministry coordinator. We had to adapt almost every aspect of the guide that was provided so as to complete the process and still have the data necessary to file this report.

A big part of this *V Encuentro* calls for those participating to go out to the peripheries. This part was almost impossible for us to do on a large scale during this process, but we are fortunate here at St Raphael that groups such as *Fuerza Transformadora*, *Renovación carismática* and *Campamentos y Retiros* do exactly this on a regular basis here at St Raphael for the past 15 years not including our ministries such as the ministers of the sick who are always seeking out the sick and homebound to bring Christ to them.

My prayer is that you find our working document useful in building your own diocesan document. Thank you for your dedication and hard work that you have been doing for our Hispanic community in the Diocese of Little Rock. You are a blessing.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rev. John M. Connell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev. John M. Connell  
Pastor

## **PARISH INFORMATION**

**DATE:** 10/30/2017

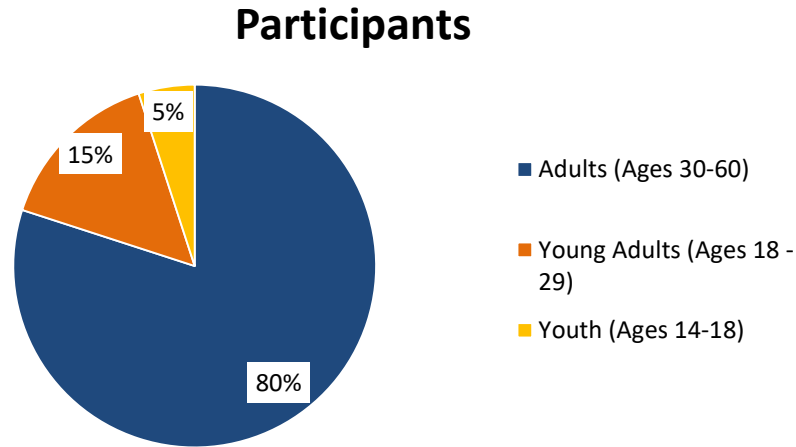
**Name of Parish:** St Raphael Catholic Church

**City:** Springdale, AR

**Diocese:** Little Rock

- 1. Briefly describe the parish:** St Raphael Church is located in Springdale, Arkansas which is located in the Northwest part of Arkansas. St Raphael is part of the Diocese of Little Rock. St Raphael Church currently has over 6000 registered families which totals over 23,000 parishioners. The parish is roughly 86% Hispanic and 14% Anglo and other. The majority of our Hispanics have immigrated from Mexico or El Salvador with a sprinkling of families from other Central America countries. The average age of all parishioners is 42. With such a large number of Latinos, we have very active Hispanic Groups; Renovación Carismática, Fuerza transformadora, Cursillo, Campamentos y Retiros (families), Jovenes con Maria (high school), Nuevo Corazon (Young adults), EPJ. There are also very active Ministry groups such as Lectores, Ministros de Comunión y a los enfermos y muchos coros.
- 2. Parish Team:** Our *V Encuentro team* consisted of 13 volunteered parishioners, all whom are members of one of our Hispanic groups or ministries. Their information is as follows:  
Cristobal Cartagena – actively participates in Lectores, Ministro de Eucaristia and Parish Council; Cristobal migrated from El Salvador and a 1<sup>st</sup> generation Hispanic.  
Jose Laguna – actively participates in Lectores, Ministro de Eucaristia and as a Catechist; Jose migrated from Guanajuato, México and a 1<sup>st</sup> generation Hispanic.  
Eustaquio Fuentes – actively participates in Lectores and Campamentos y Retiros; Eustaquio migrated from Hidalgo, México and a 1<sup>st</sup> generation Hispanic.  
German Najera – actively participates in Campamentos y Retiros; German migrated from Guerrero, México and a 1<sup>st</sup> generation Hispanic.  
Ricardo Castillo – actively participates in Campamentos y Retiros; Ricardo migrated from Zacatecas, México and a 1<sup>st</sup> generation Hispanic.  
Aurelia Moncada – actively participates in Cursillo and at times as a Catechist; Aurelia migrated from Guanajuato, México and a 1<sup>st</sup> generation Hispanic.  
Adriana Perez – actively participates in Cursillo, Ministro a los Enfermos and as a Catechist; Adriana migrated from Guanajuato, México and a 1<sup>st</sup> generation Hispanic.  
Javier Hernandez – actively participates in Fuerza Transformadora; Javier migrated from Guanajuato, México and a 1<sup>st</sup> generation Hispanic.  
Celia Martinez – actively participates in Fuerza Transformadora; Celia migrated from Guanajuato, México and a 1<sup>st</sup> generation Hispanic.  
Miriam De la Torre – actively participates in Jóvenes Nuevo Corazón, E.P.J. and Youth Choir Leader; Miriam is an Arkansas native and a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Hispanic.  
Gabriela Bautista – actively participates in Jóvenes Nuevo Corazón, Youth Choir; Gabriela migrated from Guanajuato, México and a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Hispanic.  
Roberto Lopez – actively participates in Renovacion Carismatica, Ministro de Eucaristia and as a Sacristan; Roberto migrated from El Salvador and is a 1<sup>st</sup> generation Hispanic.  
Rosa Lopez – actively participates in Renovacion Carismatica and as a Ministro de Eucaristia; Rosa migrated from El Salvador and is a 1<sup>st</sup> generation Hispanic.

3. **Briefly describe the participants:** All participants actively participate in various groups and organizations within the parish; such groups include: Fuerza Transformadora, Renovacion Carismatica, Campamentos y Retiros Familiares, Lectores, Coros, Legion de Maria, Ministros de Eucaristia, Ministros a los Enfermos, Catechists and Grupos Juveniles. During the 5 sessions, there was an average of 240 participants in total; which can be broken down as follows:

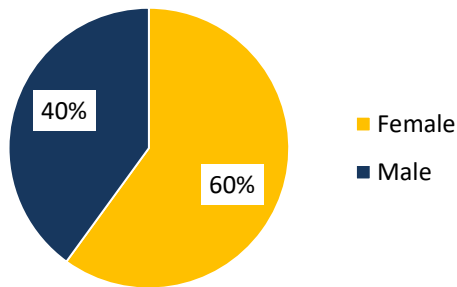


All participants are from Hispanic/Latino descent. The 5 sessions were provided in Spanish for the most part, however, when presenting to the youth some of the sessions were provided in English in an attempt to make it more relatable as well as understandable to the youth.

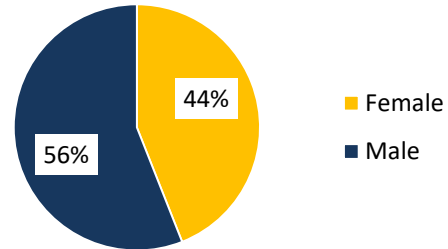
#### **DEMOGRAPHICS OF HISPANIC/LATINO PEOPLE IN THE PERIPHERIES**

4. **Briefly describe Hispanics/Latinos encountered in the peripheries:**
- A. Who they are:** Being that the five Encuentro sessions were presented in a different manner as previously mentioned, the following information pertains to parishioners rather than people encountered in the peripheries.
- B. Locations:** Sessions were presented throughout the parish facilities; mainly in St. Raphael Hall, St. Michael Conference Room, Upper Room in the Old Church, Youth House and inside the Church.
- C. Sex:** Males were predominant among the Youth on a 9:7 rate. However, females were predominant among adults on an approximate 4:3 ratio.

### Sex (Adults)

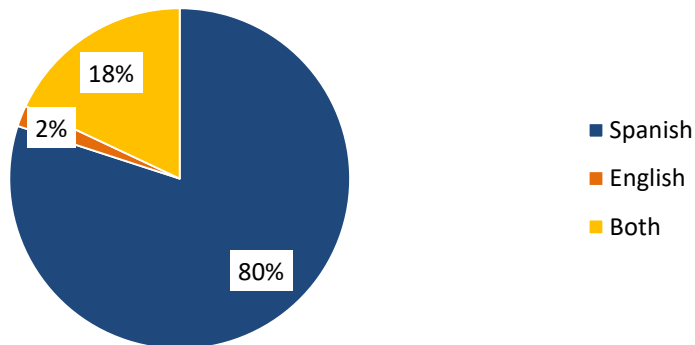


### Sex (Young Adults & Youth)



**D. Primary Spoken Languages:** All participating Adults prefer to express themselves in Spanish; claiming to have a better control of the language due to it being their mother tongue. Young Adults and the Youth do not have a preference; they can easily revert back and forth between languages, especially when they cannot “find” the right word to express themselves. There was only a handful of Youth who expressed to have better control of the English language and thus would rather use it over Spanish.

### Languages



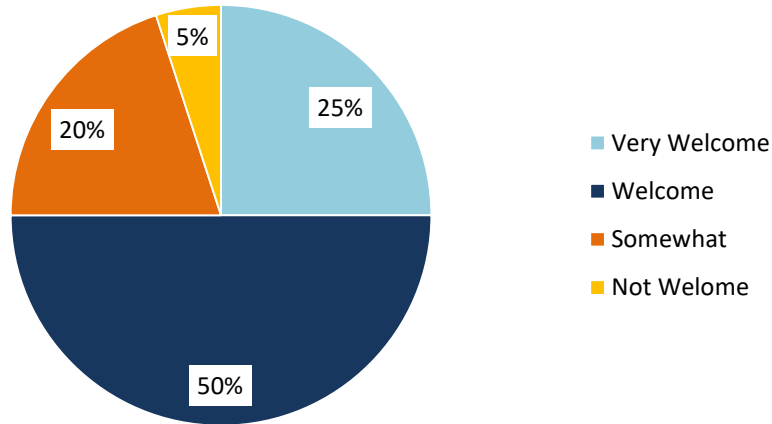
**E. Country of Origin:** most participants have migrated from Central and South America, with the exclusion of those born in the U.S. Country of origins include: Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, Venezuela, Peru and the United States.

**F. Catholic Identification:** All participants identified as Catholic. However, some declared to have converted to Catholicism.

### THE VOICES OF HISPANIC/LATINO PEOPLE IN THE PERIPHERIES

**5. Sense of Belonging:** Although most of the attendees are parishioners that have had a positive experience with St. Raphael, the staff, and/or ministry they belong to, we also found participants who did not feel welcome after interacting with a ministry or staff at St. Raphael. These negative responses have brought to our attention what we need to improve to provide a welcoming parish, not only for our parishioners but for all visiting St. Raphael.

## Sense of Belonging



Participants had the following to say regarding our staff or their ministry:

"My ministry has made me feel very welcomed".

"Con el idioma bien, pero con la cultura se está perdiendo."

"I feel like I have been welcomed because they always treat us right."

"Del uno al diez, un ocho respecto al servicio del personal de la oficina."

"I feel very welcomed and like I have a place to learn and grow in my faith."

"I feel like they don't understand me completely but they do know what it's like"

"St. Raphael is a Church that gets all cultures together and makes all people feel good."

"Buena, pero antes era mucho mejor. Se daba bienvenida a las nuevas personas, bienvenida a los bebes nuevos, se trataba de unir más a los ministerios por las religiosas."

**6. Obstacles, needs and situations:** Within participant responses we did not find any indication that language was an obstacle or barrier to communicate with our parish staff. However, we did find responses alluring to their insecurity, lack of faith, lack of understanding their culture, family separation, discrimination, and immigration issues.

The biggest worry many of our participants face is their lack of legal status in the U.S., which makes them feel insecure and unsafe. This was evident with examples such as:

"Ser Ilegal".

"No tener papeles".

"Estar alejado de mi familia".

"Conocer a Dios y no compartirlo con los demás, por inseguridad o no manejar".

Some participants feel they have been discriminated with responses like the following:

"Los hispanos necesitan más apoyo".

"Se ha perdido mucho la cultura hispana."

"En la administración [de la parroquia] nos marginas un poco y nos excluyen."

"No tenemos el mismo apoyo que la comunidad Anglo".

“Make us feel welcome by treating us with equality. We do not have the same rights when it comes to materials or some events”.

Other parishioners are afraid of not finding God or not learning about Him as shown by the following responses:

“No creer en Dios”

“Not finding my purpose”.

“Peer Pressure” was a popular response among the Youth when asked about their biggest obstacle in life, family, school and religion.

**7. Dreams, Aspirations and Contributions:** In the same manner that participants were open and honest about our shortcomings in the parish, they were open to share with us their dreams and hopes to better serve them and how they can contribute to achieve it.

**A. Hopes and Dreams:** Most participants noticed the need to unite all communities within our parish making statements as:

“Necesitamos más unión entre los hispanos y anglos”.

“Deseo ver una Iglesia comunitaria, ver apoyo a TODOS los grupos y ver clases de formación”.

“We need more bilingual Masses/Events”.

While others feel as though we do not offer enough formation for new parishioners or people who are lacking knowledge about the catholic faith, making comments as:

“Necesitamos estudio bíblico”.

“Me gustaría ver clases de Teología”.

“Necesitamos formación para los que quieren aprender a leer la biblia, de principio a fin. Enseñarles como leerla y por dónde empezar”.

Other participants focused on the needs of our community, making comments like:

“Necesitamos un ministerio de Cuidado de Niños”.

“I’d like to see an event or dinner catered for the poor in our community”.

It was also mentioned the lack of Hispanic culture appreciation with comments such as:

“[We need to] adapt to Hispanic traditions”.

“Ver que traten igual a los jovenes hispanos y anglos”.

**B. Gifts and Talents:** Participants were willing to share with us their Gifts and Talents, giving responses such as:

“Talking to the elderly”.

“Conocimientos bíblicos”.

“La enseñanza que tengo la comparto no solo con el grupo sino con la periferia”.

“Patience and gratitude. Realizing how to be humble in order to live a peaceful life”.

“Mis dones son proclamador de la palabra de Jesucristo. Se las comparto a todas las personas que vienen a misa, a la iglesia San Rafael”.

However, when asked how they could share their gifts and talents to achieve their hopes and dreams, most participants left the question unanswered. While others answered the following:

“Transmitiendo la palabra.”

“Compartiendo, evangelizando.”

“Necesitamos traer mas personas a nuestro grupo”.

“We need to spread the word about our group so it can grow”.

“El Padre puede entrenar a personas para que ellos despues nos den temas”

“Have ministers come together and create it”.

## **LISTENING TO THE VOICE OF THE PARISH COMMUNITY**

**A. Responding to the Obstacles, Challenges and Needs:** As previously stated, no response allured to a language barrier within our parish. We have a Spanish-speaking representative for every position within our staff; therefore we’ve already overcome one of the major obstacles usually found in parishes within the US.

Not all participants answered when they came to this question, most left it blank, although there was a couple who gave answers like:

“La Despensa de Comida”.

“Visit the elderly”. – This answer refers to a program sponsored by our PRE program, in which students enrolled in Confirmation class visit a Nursing Home during the Holydays.

“Nos dan informacion de Caridades Catolicas”.

It seems not all of our parishioners are aware of the different outreach programs we can guide them to. This is one of the reasons we are already working on setting up a bilingual Outreach Program Bulletin Board, to make it visible for all parishioners who might benefit from these programs.

**B. Affirming the Presence and Utilizing the Contributions of the Hispanics/Latinos in our Community:** Throughout the years there have been several changes in our parish influenced by Hispanics/Latinos in our community. Most notably the integration of a Spanish-speaking PRE program, a Spanish-speaking Youth Ministry for Youth and Young Adults and the many Ministries, Groups and Organizations already established in our parish.

The presence of Hispanics/Latinos in our parish is also notable in events such as our Monthly Food Sales, in which all Ministries come together to raise funds for our parish. Not to mention the integration of both communities Anglo and Latinos in our Annual Summer Festival, which showcases the wide diversity of cultures found in St. Raphael. Not only can we find Anglos or Latinos in St. Raphael, but there’s also Marshallese, Asian, Middle Eastern and so many other ethnicities and cultures that have found and made a home in St. Raphael.



When presented with this question participants had to say:

“Los Boletines en español”.

“La participación en los eventos de la Iglesia”.

“All information given is bilingual”.

“El día de la Virgen de Guadalupe y el Domingo de Ramos”.

“Our presence is notable in Our Lady of Guadalupe pilgrimage”.

“Han crecido mucho los ministerios y hay más retiros gracias a ello.”

“Que cada vez hay más católicos en las calles trayendo a los que no vienen.”

“La organización de los ministerios que hay en la iglesia, las misas que celebra el sacerdote, y que en algún problema la iglesia nos ayuda.”

“Hispanics contribute hard work, loyalty, creativity, culture, and love to the Catholic Church in the US.”

“Bring the traditions of our culture and blend them into the church”.

“En las ventas de Comida de cada mes”.

**9. Describe the ways in which we can increase and strengthen our ability to welcome, accompany and embrace Hispanics/Latinos in our faith communities:** Taking into account that throughout the years a lot of parishioners have moved and established in Springdale, Arkansas at different points in time, we are not sure if participants responded to this question based on a fear of losing such customs while living in the US or if events mentioned were not readily available at other parishes they have belonged to.

**A. Increase Sense of Welcoming, Belonging, and Stewardship:** When participants were presented with these questions most responses focused on the inclusion of events already established at St. Raphael, these responses are as follow:

“More outreach available. Invite different people and be out in the community”.

“A no dejar que se acaben nuestras costumbres religiosas que traemos de nuestros países.

Ejemplo: Viacrucis en las calles, santo entierro, etc”.

“En lo que nos gusta en el ambiente, en las ventas y eventos grandes como el 12 de diciembre; caminatas y viacrucis”.

“To be bilingual, because someone could translate for people who don’t understand English/Spanish.”

Get other Hispanic people to open up their culture like South Americans or lower North Americans.

**B. Strengthen our Ability to Seek Out and Accompany Hispanics/Latinos:** Participants seemed eager to come up with different ideas on how we can seek out our estranged brothers and sisters. Not surprising since ministries like *Renovación Carismática* and *Fuerza Transformadora*, both established in the parish, already have a sub-ministry of sorts that goes out in the periphery to visit and spread the Gospel to those having difficulty to attend Mass or have questioned their faith. Responses like the following were given:

“Con organizaciones y eventos sociales”.

“Create Fundraisers to help out those in need”.

“Dando más información sobre cómo ser un católico”.

“Saliendo a conocer las necesidades dentro de la comunidad.”

“Involucrandónos en las preparaciones de los cursos que den en todas las iglesias y diócesis para poder ayudar y dar la bienvenida a nuestros hermanos”.

**C Foster Family Ministries:** Another issue we, at St. Raphael, have already begun to work on is establishing a Family Ministry. Our *Campamentos & Retiros* organization focuses on family, on how to live out your faith together, the struggles that parents and children may face as well as spouses and siblings and how to solve them with a well fermented faith. Their retreats are an experience to be lived out by the family as a whole.

During the five sessions, we ensured to advertise any and all ministries we had in the parish, especially those for our Spanish-speaking parishioners. We figured this would be a perfect platform to evangelize and introduce everything St. Raphael had to offer. In the process we noted that participants, and ministry leaders, began reaching out to other groups and ministries to learn about them, most notably *Campamentos & Retiros* due to its focus on family.

**10. Insights and Next-Action Steps:** Our dream is that all St. Raphael Groups, Ministries, Organizations and parishioners thrive and grow. We hope to achieve this goal; by first, evaluating our roll as parish staff and our direct relationship with them. Secondly, asking all Groups and Ministries to evaluate themselves in this ever changing Hispanic reality at the parish, so as to meet the needs of new and younger members who were born here or raised here in the US and that their dreams are not over looked or ignored.

**11. New Leaders:** In regards to participants, there have been a few that have stood out from the crowd and began a more active parish life. In all honesty we did not keep a number of participants on which we've seen a proactive change. However, speaking of those who formed the V Encuentro Parish Team, all members have gone out of their comfort zone to help out whenever needed. We are happy to say that both of our Youth members have taken on the role of coordinators of their respective groups, E.P.J. and Jóvenes Nuevo Corazón. Our Fuerza Transformadora and Renovación Carismática representatives have taken an active role in their ministry; in some instances they now are coordinating one of the sub-ministries within the group. Representatives from Cursillo, Lectores and Campamentos & Retiros have also re-integrated back to their respecting group, yet also branching out to other ministries and helping out when called upon. It is safe to say that after the Missionary and Consultation process we have a total of 13 new Spanish-speaking leaders, two of which are bilingual.