

Life in Sanctuary During a Pandemic

AN INTERVIEW WITH JAIME RUBIO

"My son and my wife are my world, and I love them with all my heart. I am just waiting for the day that we can walk outside without the fear of being separated."

—Jaime Rubio

Jaime, how has the pandemic impacted you and your family?

Before the pandemic, even though I had been living in partial isolation for more than a year, I was fortunate to spend time with friends and people from the congregation in-person. My family and I were able to attend Sunday services at Saint Mark's Cathedral and it was always a good opportunity for me to have conversations and to get to know people. I never really felt alone because I was always surrounded by wonderful and caring people.

But I have to say that I wasn't prepared for total isolation from the outside. Before the pandemic hit, I could have visitors, or I could volunteer in the cathedral side-by-side with other volunteers. In my small circle of friends, I could still have some face-to-face communications and social life. I never felt alone or afraid.

When the city shut down and social distancing became mandatory at the end of March, I was very scared and uncertain. I felt vulnerable. I think it was the first time I really felt afraid because the people that I used to talk to and work with could no longer be physically around.

Did your experience in Sanctuary prepare you for the pandemic in any way?

I thought I was prepared for social distancing. I was already used to the idea that I can't go out. I have learned to identify what is important and what is necessary. Through living in Sanctuary for a year, I realized that there are many things that I was holding onto and I learned to let them go.

What are some ways that you continue to nurture friendships and maintain connections to your community?

I keep connecting through multiple platforms such as phone calls, text messages, Zoom meetings, and Skype. My family connects with the church community by attending the Sunday services online at Saint Mark's and by messaging each other saying, "Peace be with you."

Some of my friends and I started a cooking meet-up via Zoom, in which someone teaches a new recipe every week and we learn it by cooking together. One of my favorite recipes is gumbo from a friend in New Orleans. I had no idea what I was doing when he had us mix oil and flour to make



roux, but after it was combined with the rest of the ingredients, I was pleasantly surprised how tasty it was. Okra, sausage, shrimp, vegetables, and spices combine to make a fantastic dish!

I continue to be a part of Latin Dance community in Seattle, and I enjoy training with my friends over Zoom meetings. It is not an ideal set-up, but it is our new reality for now.

Do you have practices, or are there activities that are a source of comfort and encouragement for you right now?

I still practice dance, focusing on body conditioning and choreography, although it is hard sometimes to

find the motivation to do the training alone. I used to practice in a group setting and doing it alone does not project the same energy. I am trying to be consistent and need to keep working on it.

The chance to use my knowledge of construction to do socially distant repairs and improvements at the cathedral makes me feel helpful. I really enjoyed refinishing the hardwood floor of the organ loft and building decking for storage in the "crypt." It feels good to give back to the community.

Being around my family definitely gives me comfort. This includes taking care of my son, playing with him, helping him with schoolwork, talking to my wife, cooking together as a family, and planning the future for my family. All those things are incredibly valuable to me and I am eternally grateful to everybody that makes this possible. Without the friends and the support of this community, I would not be able to enjoy those things in my life.

What is the biggest challenge for you right now?

Talking to my child about our situation is difficult. My wife and I both understood that finding a legal remedy will take some time. I know that our son is happy that I am here to play, talk, and read books with him. But, from time to time, he asks me hard questions such as, "When we will be back home?" or "Why we can't go to a park, a lake, or a camping site the way we used to?" or "Why can other friends go out for a trip with their entire family, but we can't?" These questions really break my heart because I just can't find the right answers for him. My son and my wife are my world and I love them with all my heart. I am just waiting for the day that we can walk outside without the fear of being separated.

Where do you see hope right now?

I believe that I have the same hope as everyone—a good outcome for the presidential election. If there is something that America needs now more than ever it is leadership. We need someone that can unite us as a nation and not separate us based on race, color, or religion.

How can we continue to support you and your family in this time of pandemic?

Vote, Vote, and Vote! Something that I've learned during this pandemic is that we need to educate ourselves to really understand the problems that we are facing in the country, not only the immigration policies, but discrimination against race, sexual orientation, religious belief, and so on.

We must understand that the country is stronger when we are united. If we can put ourselves in the shoes of others, we can make the change we need.

The passage from Mark 12:31 that says, "Love your neighbor as yourself," carries a strong message for me. We truly understand this when all of us stand up and do our part to make this world a better place. As long as there is injustice for one person, there is injustice for many. We belong to the same race, the human race. Vote! ♦

Jaime Rubio has been living in Sanctuary at Saint Mark's Cathedral since March of 2019, as he works toward a legal remedy which will allow him to stay in the United States with his wife and son.

