



# Friends of Las Casas

Quarterly Newsletter

February 2022

## TWENTY YEAR ANNIVERSARY

*2002 ~ 2022 Opening Doors, Changing Lives*

It all began with an announcement in the parish bulletin . . .

Sister Ann Ronin, OP, started Las Casas in 2002 with 3 students, parishioners of St. Elizabeth Church. In her 2004 request for funding, S. Ann wrote, "There was a small response to my first invitation, and I taught 12 adult students in the Convent. As the class grew larger (25), I moved to the parish hall. With 55 applicants, classes moved to the St. Elizabeth Elementary cafeteria!" She noted that there was no precedent and no budget, but the program had taken root, and she pressed forward with **"establishing a program that will have a significant impact on the adults we serve and on this inner-city community."** Her commitment to social justice, pursued through educational equity, found a home base in the Fruitvale community.

Twenty years later, Las Casas continues to meet a vital need - providing a safe and supportive learning environment to an economically and educationally disenfranchised population. The majority of our students, primarily from Central America, work full time, most make \$20,000 or less per year. Language acquisition can be life-altering for our students and, by extension, their families.

- Spring 2022 was delayed due to Omicron, but classes are now in session. Teachers and students are thrilled!
- Volunteers and students meet 3 nights a week, with all materials provided. Pre-Covid, over 275 students registered for classes every year.
- Want to get involved? Join us as a volunteer, make a gift, send a student our way. **You can make a difference today!**

### Our Voices

I am thankful for this classroom and this class. I appreciate the teachers, they do the best job helping people. I want more lessons and homework. I am happy for the teacher. I am loving learning a third language!

Dominga, Intermediate Low, 2021



## BACK IN CLASS!

*Masked & Vaxxed*

*Following an unprecedented year of distance learning, students and teachers eagerly returned in-person to Cristo Rey de la Salle High School in September 2021.*

Fall semester, 30 teachers and 3 Program Assistants contributed nearly 900 volunteer hours, serving 150 students. Over 30% were new to the program or had only been in our virtual classes.

While Zoom was a huge challenge for students and teachers alike, we were able to apply some of the new technology to our classroom repertoire - Classroom 2.0! During the pandemic, Cristo Rey added large screen TVs to the classrooms we share. Now, we blend the best of both worlds - engaging lessons centered around personal connections and active teacher support.

With strong safety protocols in place, the semester was a huge success with zero COVID cases reported. ¡Muy Bien!

# FACES OF LAS CASAS

## Matthew Stewart -Volunteer

Matthew joined Las Casas in 2014. He is one of our longest serving staff (8 volunteers have been with us 5+ years). Most of his time has been spent with our “seniors” - the Intermediate High class.

While he didn't use his BA in linguistics, earned many years ago, it seemed to be a foreshadowing of his deep connection to our multi-lingual students. In his day job, UNITE HERE Local 2, he sees firsthand the struggles of those in the service industries, and works hard to give them a voice, and economic stability – much like the work he continues with us!

He came to Las Casas via UC Berkeley Extension, an invaluable feeder to our program. At the time, he lived a couple blocks away, so it seemed like serendipity. And so it was - for Las Casas!

*“We live in a world increasingly filled with misinformation, fear, scapegoating and hatred. Our students are working so hard to support themselves and their families and to be good members of our community in the midst of that demoralizing atmosphere. Now more than ever I am grateful to have a way to resist that tide, and to use my time to make a concrete, positive and critically important difference in their lives.”*

*The students are so wonderful and so grateful to have this opportunity that it is truly a pleasure to teach them. In fact, it's such a pleasure that sometimes I think I get more out of it than they do!”*



## Celebrate Our Twenty Year Anniversary!

~~ \$20,000 for 20 Years ~~

**A generous donor has committed a significant matching gift.**

**All donations up to \$12,000 will be matched 1 to 1!**

The Las Casas - *English as a Second Language* program is completely self-sustaining. While our volunteers supply the heart and talent, we depend on gifts and grants to sustain our work.

**Save the Date! - Saturday, April 30 ~ 1:00 - 3:30pm**  
**Join us for our Anniversary Celebration at Cristo Rey!**

**We welcome your gifts – of any size – to continue to open doors to opportunity.**

**Donate to our GoFundMe campaign [here](#) or on our [website](#) - **DONATE NOW****

*Las Casas is a registered 501(c)3 organization, under the umbrella of the Dominican Sisters MSJ.*

## Las Casas ESL

c/o Cristo Rey de la Salle High School  
1530 34th Avenue  
Oakland, CA 94601

[lascasasoakland@gmail.com](mailto:lascasasoakland@gmail.com)  
510.842.3070

[www.lascasasoakland.org](http://www.lascasasoakland.org)

