

Rev. Djalma Araujo

by Karen Ristine

Rev. Djalma Araujo has ministered lovingly to the First Church congregation since 1991, so it should come as little surprise that his care and kindness, his deep faith in the Church of Jesus Christ and his ministry of both word and sacrament have been welcomed and cherished throughout his ministry.



PHOTO: FRED PETER

From his first U.S. congregation, the Pomona United Church of Christ, to his most recent Course of Study class in El Salvador, the people whose lives Djalma has touched and taught value his presence, his prayers and his personality.

Djalma came to the United States from his home country of Brazil to continue his studies on a scholarship to Andover Newton Theological School from the World Council of Churches. He already held degrees from The Federal University in Recife, Brazil, and the Congregational Seminary in Recife. The scholarship did not cover the cost of bringing his wife, Marcia, and his son,

Djalma Araujo Jr., with him. So they stayed in Brazil, living with Marcia's parents while Marcia studied social work.

When Djalma was called to serve Pomona United Church of Christ, Marcia and Djalma Jr. joined him. He served that congregation as associate pastor and then pastor for five years. The position called for a bilingual minister, so Djalma preached his first sermons in Portuguese, thinking he could adapt it. Some in the congregation called the UCC church leadership, Djalma recalls, and said: "The young man is very likeable. We like him, and we want to keep him, but his Spanish is peculiar." Djalma taught himself Spanish and within six months could preach in that language, too.

During his time at Pomona he also attended Claremont School of Theology, where he earned a master's in theology. Dean Tom Trotter tried to persuade him to become a Methodist minister. "He told me: 'You look like a Methodist. We need people like you.' " At the same time, he was talking with UCC leadership about his next post. They told him it would be very difficult to place him because congregations were not used to foreign accents. That helped Djalma's discernment. He transferred his orders to the United Methodist Church and served as pastor of a Hispanic congregation at Temple United Methodist Church in Los Angeles.

Nevertheless, Djalma fondly remembers the welcome the Pomona church gave to him, preparing the parsonage, furnishing it comfortably and graciously welcoming Marcia and his

family as they moved from Brazil after a separation of almost two years. His daughter, Suely Araujo Haynes, was born while he served in Pomona. “Pomona is very special in my life because they were not only welcoming but adopted us as their children.” Djalma still gets calls to perform marriages or baptisms for members of that congregation.

That same hospitality and appreciation has been extended to Djalma throughout his ministry. Most recently, the office of Ministerios Latinos of the Cal-Pac Conference experienced an outpouring of appreciation for Djalma’s teaching during a Course of Study seminary class in El Salvador in October that occurred in the aftermath of the devastation of Hurricane Stan. “They really, really like him,” a Ministerios Latinos staff member said of his students. “As a person, he always gets compliments.” Most notably, the family with whom Djalma stayed during his El Salvador visit sent a thank you note to Ministerios Latinos for sending Djalma.

Djalma was received as a trial member of the Cal-Pac Conference in 1969 and became an elder in 1971. In addition to serving at Temple United Methodist Church, he served seven years as associate dean of students at UCLA, earning another master’s degree – this one in 19th century Latin American studies. His appointment before joining First Church was as associate pastor for Hispanic ministry and evangelism at the Wilshire United Methodist Church in Los Angeles.



His appointment to First Church began as a plot hatched with Rev. Chuck Hoffman, who was an associate here at the time. They both served together on the Board of Ordained Ministry and thought it would be a pleasure to work together at First Church. Djalma did get the job at First Church, but the opening was created when Chuck Hoffman was appointed elsewhere. While they have never served together, their friendship endures.

“He’s a great pastor,” Rev. Hoffman said of Djalma. “He’s easy to talk to. He cares about people.” He praised Djalma for always taking the high road no matter what adversity he faced in his ministry.

In his last Minister’s Musings, Djalma said he will miss standing at the east door of the sanctuary to greet people as they leave each service. What he didn’t say is how much we will all miss seeing him standing there and receiving his smile and his blessing.

“I have no regrets at all,” Djalma said during his last week of work. “It’s been a wonderful, wonderful ministry.”