

A VISIT WITH THE REVEREND DJALMA ARAUJO . . .

In his modesty, Rev. Araujo might deny it, but his timing and his personality caused him to become a guiding light in the unfolding drama of ethnic change and awareness at First Church.

It was the summer of 1991 at First Church that Rev. Djalma Araujo became an associate pastor under Dr. Mark Trotter. Rev. Araujo had just come from a pastorate in Los Angeles, at the Wilshire United Methodist Church. In his experience, he had become fully aware of some of the difficulties of assimilation that Latinos might experience in mostly non-Latino communities. Even here, at First Church, he met up with a few examples of this complex phenomenon found in our culture, but with his own special gifts of grace and patience, he overcame many obstacles.

Rev. Araujo came to this country fully ordained as a minister recognized by the United Church of Christ of America. While in Pomona, he attended the Claremont School of Theology. In 1969, Djalma had his ministerial credentials examined and recognized by the Cal-Pac Conference of the United Methodist Church. He became a probationary member and was received as a Deacon. In 1971 he became an Elder. Among his service credits, Rev. Araujo was in ministry at Temple United Methodist Church, Los Angeles. Also he served seven years as associate dean of students at UCLA, earning another master's degree; this one in 19th Century Latin American Studies. Djalma has taught at the School of Theology in Claremont as an Adjunct Professor for the last twenty years during the summertime. For the last three years, he has been involved with a similar program in El Salvador, Central America.

As a new associate minister at First United Methodist Church, Djalma's primary responsibility was to oversee Adult Christian Education as well as to be the Dean for the School of Christian Studies. He also became one of the liturgists and took part in other ministerial functions usually fulfilled by associates. His busy day included organizing and supporting various Bible studies and prayer groups, including his work with the Latino church membership.

Groups of Latinos, plus other minorities, would occasionally visit the church, but seldom stay on. One of Djalma's personal goals was to set up bilingual (Spanish-English) Bible studies. In spite of his impressive background of linguistic skills, Portuguese being his native language, he discovered that his task was not a simple one. Djalma's mandate was to make certain that these various visiting ethnic groups not only felt welcome, but would be comfortable enough here to become members. A bilingual class was put together that met every third Sunday morning of the month. With continued effort and patience, attendance of minorities grew as new people became aware of what was being offered and enthusiasm for these activities caught on.

For Rev. Araujo, First Church was very impressive. He found the layout of the entire structure very beautiful in its graceful design. As he grew to know the congregation, he discovered that the church members were mostly sophisticated people, well-established in the community. He commented on how very different they were, economically and culturally, from the people in his previous churches. Also, he soon learned that at First Church, worship services, as well as other church activities, tended to be more formal and tightly-organized. Djalma liked

to compare First Church with the classic image of Methodist churches that he had seen in New England. His relationship with Mark Trotter was strong and supportive from the beginning. Djalma considered it a privilege to work with Mark and made a strong effort to see him as a role model.

Rev. Araujo spoke of some early incidents that he had experienced. Initially, there were some members of the church that did not appreciate having a Latino minister as part of the staff. He spoke of an insulting letter sent to him and critical comments made about his accent. Subsequently, Djalma took a few courses at a local university to improve his pronunciation.

On one occasion when he was still very new to the church, Djalma was asked by Mark Trotter to receive new members into the church and conduct the usual service associated with this event. This was a "last minute" request, but having done something similar at his previous church, Djalma did not hesitate. After the meeting, Mark approached Djalma, tactfully remarking about the "unique" service that had just been conducted. Concerned that he had made some obvious error, Djalma apologized and asked what had been incorrect. Mark responded that nothing had been incorrect, but that the meeting was certainly short. As it turned out, his previous church's procedures used fewer words and procedures than those of First Church and Djalma had "simplified" all of the new member liturgy.

Comparing conditions between churches, Djalma referred to his wristwatch saying that he found that he had to pay much more attention to each minute after he started here. He commented that one member wrote him a message that he had been cutting the silent prayer too short. The member wrote, "The silent prayer needs to be 30 seconds long. No more, no less." Djalma added that things have settled down now for him in this church. He finds that he no longer feels entirely dependent on his wristwatch.

Rev. Djalma Araujo retired December 31, 2005 after 14 years as associate pastor at First Church and more than 40 years in ministry. The church was delighted that Djalma agreed to continue to stay on as a part-time Minister of Visitation. Above all, we are grateful to have known and worked with this gracious pastor.