

Nineteen parishes in Baltimore hold regular Spanish Masses

With a consistent congregation of more than 100 each week, a two-month pilot program offering a weekly Spanish Mass at St. Michael the Archangel, Overlea has become a permanent fixture on the parish's schedule.

The weekly patrons of the Sunday noon Spanish Mass in the basement chapel have already formed a music ministry and recruited altar servers, and Father Thomas Kuller, S.J., who recently relocated from Allentown, Pa., has signed on to preside over the service, said Father James D. Proffitt, pastor of St. Michael.

Its permanent status makes St. Michael the 19th parish in the Archdiocese of Baltimore to have a regular Mass said entirely in Spanish, and more are expected within the next year, said Maria T. P. Johnson, director of the office of Hispanic Ministry for the archdiocese.

Since assuming leadership five years ago, Ms. Johnson has seen the number of parishes offering Spanish Masses grow from 12 to 19, and five of those churches hold services in the language two or more times each week.

Transfiguration Catholic Community in West Baltimore is currently holding a monthly Spanish Mass at St. Martin and if it attracts a substantial flock, it will consider creating a weekly service, making it the 20th such parish in the archdiocese, she said.

"This is a positive growing trend," Ms. Johnson said. "We have more and more clergy taking the pastoral Spanish classes at (College of Notre Dame of Maryland), addressing the religious needs of a growing Spanish-speaking population."

These Masses offer more than just the Spanish language for these congregations. They also present a reflection of the religious traditions in many Latin American countries, she said.

An example is Quinceañera - a coming-of-age ceremony for 15-year-old girls - which is a ritual in many Latin American Catholic Churches now being held at a majority of the archdiocesan parishes that hold Spanish Masses, Ms. Johnson said.

“Even though we are all Catholics, there are some things that are unique for the Hispanics,” she said. “The clergy is not only learning the language, they are immersing themselves in the culture and religious practices. It really adds to the richness of the ministry.”

Overlea resident Anna Correa was thrilled when St. Michael the Archangel began its Spanish Mass, even though she has become fluent in English since emigrating from Colombia several years ago.

“It’s a bonus to have a Mass in my native language at St. Michael’s,” said Ms. Correa, who attended the first Spanish Mass at the parish with her fiancé, Mike Granados, also of Overlea. “This feels so natural to celebrate Mass this way.”

The Spanish-speaking community has so embraced the Mass at the Overlea parish, it holds a social gathering in a room behind the basement chapel each week, complete with refreshments and conversation, Ms. Johnson said.

“We’re also going to have our first baptism from this congregation in the near future,” Father Proffitt said. “While we’re very pleased this Mass has been so well attended, we want them to become involved in all levels of the parish. That is the ultimate goal. We don’t want them to be sectioned off.”