

Viva Las Casas

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSES IN OAKLAND

By Michele
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Photos by
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After a full day of teaching in Contra Costa County, Oscar Barreto found the energy to enter a night school classroom of English-learners in Oakland's Fruitvale District.

He has no doubt as to what motivated him: The students in front of him, all seeking a new life in the United States. The skills they would learn in the classroom would help them find better-paying work to support their families.

And he knew, too, why he was there.

"I see a great need for this service. There are not too many ESL programs in this area," he said.

“

You are serving these people and you are getting more than you are giving. This is what I feel good doing. As a Catholic, I am following Jesus' words, 'Serve the one in need.'"

But that was not the only reason. "You are serving these people and you are getting more than you are giving," he said. "This is what I feel good doing. As a Catholic, I am following Jesus' words, 'Serve the one in need.'"

Las Casas was founded, one might say, humbly.

Sister Ann Ronin, OP, a Dominican Sister of Mission San Jose, was living in the St. Elizabeth Convent in 2002 when she began with two or three students, using a classroom at the neighboring elementary school.

Then it just kept growing, -said Sister Rose Marie Hennessy, OP, who now volunteers in the classroom twice a week.

Sister Rose Marie, who has served as superintendent of the Diocese of Oakland schools and as principal of St. Elizabeth Elementary, has praise for the students.

The students, she noted, work all day in Spanish and come into a classroom in the evening where they speak English.

Las Casas celebrated 20 years of teaching and learning English as a Second Language, and so much

more, at an April outdoor gathering, complete with cake, at Cristo Rey De La Salle High School, St. Elizabeth Campus, where the classes are conducted three evenings a week during the school year.

The program is celebrating, too, the retirement of Phyllis Martinez as program director and the appointment of Dana Neufeld.



The students in the program are an educator's dream.

"Once they understand they can speak well, they can continue to make great progress," Oscar said. "They say now they were able to find a better job. They can see how the doors open when they speak."

All classes are taught in English. There are five levels of classes; Oscar had been working in the



middle levels. He had worked at level one as well.

“I like to be in front of the class, so this is easy for me,” he said.

He teaches art and geography in Contra Costa County. “I am able to teach all the subjects.”

Like his students, Oscar is an immigrant.

“I came in 1980,” he said. “I took formal classes in college and came to California as an international student. You will hear my accent.

“I try my best for them. I’m also very lucky to have so many volunteers. That offers the opportunity for everyone to work with a native English speaker.”

Las Casas’ strength lies beyond the textbooks.

“What a difference this is making in the community,” Oscar said. “It’s a place where they have an outlet, one of the few in a daily life that is 99 percent work and home.



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“In the classroom, they share their life. How to live in this new country. How to grocery shop.”

Las Casas enriches the lives not only the lives of the students, but their teachers, he said.

“Whoever joins Las Casas says, ‘I come here to teach.’ Soon they will realize it’s much more than that. You’re opening doors,” he said.

Without an experience like this he said, “You don’t understand whatever you give, you will get more in return.”



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Oscar, too, said he, too, thought it was a cliché. But he found he did.

“But, my God, yes!”

Oscar Barreto’s time at Las Casas has come to an end. He retired from his teaching position in June and is moving to Mexico.

“I will miss this place,” he said. “It’s in good hands.”

He will be volunteering in Mexico, working with at-risk students, or those with learning differences.

Helping others, he said, is part of his faith. “I follow Him. This is one way that I do. This is what I’m supposed to be doing,” he said. “And I’m happy.”

The Dominican Sisters have a school in his destination city.

One imagines they are happy, too. †

ESL Teachers Wanted

Las Casas English as a Second Language seeks volunteer teachers and assistants for the adult ESL program. Located in the Fruitvale district of Oakland, classes run from September to May. We meet Monday, Tuesday and Thursday from 7-8:30 p.m. at Cristo Rey de la Salle High School. We are looking for a commitment of at least one evening a week and can provide subs when you have an occasional conflict.

More information: lascasasoakland.org

Student Demographics

(2021-2022 School Year)

60%
Men

40%
Women

65%
Guatemala

18%
Mexico

11%
El Salvador

3%
Afghanistan

31
Average age
in years

1
Average years
in U.S.

8
Average years
of prior schooling

50%

Full-time employment down from prior years

65%

Percentage of students with yearly earnings of \$15,000 or less, across full- and part-time

**Las Casas, 2021-22 school year*



Registration, Assessment and Orientation Nights

2022-2023 classes will be in person at Cristo Rey De LaSalle East Bay High School, 1530 34th Ave. St., Oakland. Students and teachers must be fully vaccinated and boosted to attend.

NEW STUDENT ASSESSMENT - FALL 2022

- Monday, Aug. 22 6:30-8 p.m.
- Tuesday, Aug. 23 6:30-8 p.m.

Our assessment will tell us your level so that you are placed in the correct class. Full COVID Vaccination is REQUIRED.

If you have questions or would like more information, please email lascasasoakland@gmail.com or call or text (510) 842-3070.

RETURNING STUDENT REGISTRATION - FALL 2022

Registration Nights for returning students:

- Monday, Aug. 22 - Last names A - L - 6:30 - 8 p.m.
- Tuesday, Aug. 23 - Last names M - Z - 6:30 - 8 p.m.

The registration fee for Fall 2022 is \$30.



Noches de Inscripción, Evaluación y Orientación

Las clases 2022-2023 serán presenciales en la Escuela Secundaria Cristo Rey. Para su seguridad y la de los demás, requerimos que los estudiantes y maestros estén completamente vacunados y preparados para asistir.

EVALUACIÓN DE NUEVOS ESTUDIANTES: OTOÑO DE 2022

Las próximas Noches de Evaluación para nuevos estudiantes:

- Lunes, 22 de Agosto 6:30- 8 pm
- Martes, 23 de Agosto 6:30-8pm

La evaluación nos dirá tu nivel para que te coloquen en la clase correcta. Se REQUIERE la vacunación completa contra el COVID.

Si tiene preguntas o desea obtener más información, envíe un correo electrónico a lascasasoakland@gmail.com o llame o envíe un mensaje de texto al (510) 842-3070.

INSCRIPCIÓN DE ESTUDIANTES QUE REGRESAN: OTOÑO DE 2022

Noches de Inscripción para Estudiantes que Regresan:

- Lunes 22 de Agosto - Apellidos A - L - 6:30- 8pm
- Martes 23 de Agosto - Apellidos M - Z - 6:30-8 pm

La cuota de inscripción para el Otoño de 2022 es de \$30.



+ MORE INFORMATION

NEW STUDENTS

To register for classes with Las Casas, students must complete an oral and written Assessment to determine their class level. There are 2 or 3 Assessment nights each semester (Fall and Spring). Once a student has been assessed, they are placed in one of five class levels. If space is available, a postcard is mailed asking the student to come and register.

Orientation and registration are required for all new students before starting class (see below for the next available Assessment and Orientation dates). The registration fee varies by semester - the Fall semester is \$30. The registration fees include the textbook and all classroom materials.

RETURNING STUDENTS

Students continuing from the prior semester can register for classes at a Registration night.