



ADORE LA is a digital faith community that is driven and led by people of color and the LGBTQIA+ community, led by pastor-developer Joseph Castañeda-Carrera (left).



“COURAGE TO BE WHO WE ARE”

Ed Ramirez’s journey to find a church was a long one, filled with disappointments. Ramirez, who uses the pronouns they/them, wanted a place where they could feel at ease and fully accepted, but nothing they’d encountered in the Los Angeles area fit.

Ramirez’s search led them to Hollywood Lutheran Church, where Joseph Castañeda-Carrera served as pastor. “I was the member that zipped in and out of service,” Ramirez said. “I didn’t want to engage with the community out of fear of being rejected like in other ‘affirming’ congregations. Joseph was quick enough to catch me one day and ask what I was looking for, and I answered honestly: ‘A place where I can be all of me.’”

The pastor told Ramirez about ADORE LA, a digital faith community that Castañeda-Carrera served as mission developer.

Supported in part by grants from the churchwide organization and the ELCA Southwest California Synod, which are funded by Mission Support, ADORE LA is driven and led by people of color and the LGBTQIA+ community.

“So often in our church, we don’t have very many queer people of color,” Castañeda-Carrera said. “Community can’t build around them because we’re all spread out all over the place. ... People from all over have joined ADORE LA because it’s creating a community that doesn’t exist in their own neighborhoods.” As church buildings were shuttered and some congregations struggled to stream worship

online during the COVID-19 pandemic, ADORE LA didn’t skip a beat. It was already using digital channels and messaging apps such as GroupMe to engage members. The faith community used the time to innovate and enhance its ministry, Castañeda-Carrera said.

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Ramirez is grateful for their faith home at ADORE LA. “Faith is something that has been taken from a lot of us,” they said. “So ADORE LA focuses on community that then lets us reclaim faith and grow into it together. It also helps to sow our roots like a beautiful LA palm tree because being fully yourself in this world and church aren’t always the easiest things to navigate. The faith we gain as a community provides that: the courage to be who we are, fully created in [God’s] image.”

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