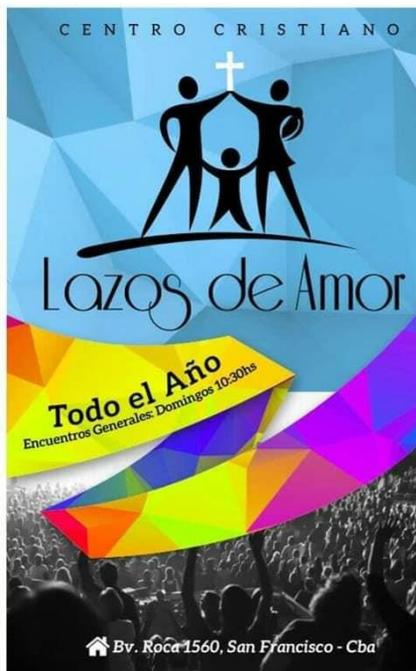


Dear Everyone,

Greetings from hot December in San Francisco. This is a historic moment; the first time we have managed to write twelve newsletters in a year, thank you to everyone who has read them and especially those who have given feedback. Hazel's new year resolution will be to try and update the blog each month in 2020.



For this month we wanted to write something about one of our churches, Lazos de Amor. Lazos de Amor, (bonds of love), usually known simply as Lazos, has been around for close on a decade. It started as a small non-profit, one family and a few friends, who focussed on organising workshops on areas of social education, eg. non-violent conflict resolution. Hazel gave a workshop on autism as part of their activities. Then they started a church, and then they acquired their own rental building, and there (some might say,) the trouble set in. Where before, they were dynamic and went into schools and community settings (Hazel's talk was in the museum), now everything happens in The Building. Where before their time and resources went into community projects, now the priority is Running A Church, and in practise there is almost nothing left to do anything else with. So, of the original congregation, those who joined hoping for a "different" sort of church have largely left disillusioned, and a succession of other fallings out have thinned the rest down to a dozen or so. As things became difficult, the pastor's response was to "baton down the hatches" and preach increasingly annoyed sermons on "obedience" which mostly involved

haranguing the decreasing number of attendees for not being the multitude he was hoping for. This also ensured that no visitor ever came twice. Hazel was exiled from the preaching rota for a year after I was asked to preach on "evangelism" and I described and destroyed a straw man of those "hit-and-run" evangelistic events beloved of past generations, without realising that he was planning on following up the preaching series with exactly such an event. I honestly didn't know! However, after a tough couple of years, and wondering what we are still doing there but sensing that we might be being called to hang on and wait, in the last few weeks there have been some signs of new hope and openness. Things are still hard; the congregation is tiny, the building is a drain on resources, paying the rent costs more than the collection gathers, but there is a new sense of willingness to be vulnerable in the leadership, an openness to asking questions, building relationships and thinking together about what to do next. Hazel was suddenly put back on the preaching rota and has delivered three sermons without apparently offending anyone, which may be a miracle in itself, and the other week the pastor asked Hazel's advice on how they could better take advantage of Martin's Bible knowledge. We welcome all prayers for this small congregation who have a heart to serve God in the city, and who are currently struggling to find a way to be church that is healthy and sustainable for the existing members, as well as reaching and welcoming newcomers. The blog can be found at www.frostmartinhazel.org it was updated last month and I will try and do it again soon. Thank you to everyone for sticking with us through another adventurous year. We wish you a blessed and meaningful Christmas and a happy start to 2020.

Love from

Hazel X Martin



Joni & Daniel

Latin Link 

