

First Posadas

By [Amy Frykholm](#)

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About a decade ago, the rector of our small Episcopal church began to incorporate Spanish into the liturgy. She didn't do this because we had Spanish-speaking members. We didn't. She did it, she said, to remind us that the liturgy doesn't belong to us alone. In a geographical place that is nearly 50 percent Spanish speaking, she wanted to keep in front of us the broader community of which we were a part. And she had a dream that if someone who spoke Spanish was seeking a spiritual home, they would find a welcome.

As a result, for ten years we've been "practicing" Spanish. Now, in this last year, we are seeing the fruit of that dreaming and practicing. A priest from El Salvador has come into our congregation, and he and his wife have gradually been building around them a small and vital community. Spanish-speaking people now supervise our community meals and organize our food bank. Together with English speakers, they are holding language classes and knitting groups. Our two communities are gradually getting to know each other.

During Advent, the community decided to host a Las Posadas celebration, a Latin American tradition of visiting each other's homes in preparation for Christmas. As an introvert, I found the possibility of participating in a nightly social gathering for almost two weeks daunting, to say the least. I've noticed—and I know I am generalizing—that when we all have supper together after church, most of the English speakers (myself included) eat their soup and leave, while often the Spanish speakers will stay on into the evening talking and laughing together. My social shell is probably cultural.

But I had always been curious about Las Posadas, and the priest was asking for volunteers. So I crawled out of my shell to both attend and host.

On the night that I was to host, two women brought over a creche on a table, set it on my front porch and lit candles in front of it. The group split into "pilgrims" and "insiders," and we sang to each other through a closed door. Then the door was

opened, the people came inside, and we shared hot chocolate, some homemade rhubarb schnapps, cheese, crackers, fruit and sweets.

Many of the people were tired after a long day of work. They looked weary in their uniforms and sturdy shoes. But we sat around the table together for a while, laughing and delighting in being together. Then they went off into the cold night. I felt just that much closer to the prayer of Jesus: that all may be one.