

Transcript TSV 009:

Radical Inclusion: Redefining Religious Borders

w/ Rev. Yadi Martinez-Reyna

Axis Mundi: [00:00:00] Axis Mudi.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Welcome to Teología Sin Vergüenza, Queer and feminist theology from Latin America and its diaspora to get those spiritual justice juices flowing. I'm your host, Reverend Sex. You may not have heard from a lot of folks who live shamelessly as both queer trans feministas and people of faith, but you're about to!

Even if you don't know it, we are everywhere. We do our work in the academy, in the church, in our homes, and on the streets. We fight for our communities and for our own lives. We are not macho, but we are many. We're irreverent Queer feminists who are shamelessly faithful, and we're faithful [00:01:00] theologians who are shamelessly activistas. We are shamelessly, las sinvergüenzas.

We pluck the ripest fruit from the Bible to make juicy, queer feminist Latine theology that refreshes your spirit and quenches your thirst for liberation. In this episode, you'll find delicious decolonial theology for the real world, right now. So get your cup of coffee, pull up a chair 'cause you belong here.

Now let's get down to pleasure.

Welcome to this week's episode of Teología Sin Vergüenza. Today we have a riveting conversation with the Reverend Yadi Martínez-Reyna, who is a bilingual, Latinx, gender non-binary artist and a border lander out of southern Texas. They're a certified spiritual director and co-pastor at first UCC in Second Life. If you don't know what that is, it's a virtual church inside the virtual reality called [00:02:00] Second Life, but it has real life standing in the Southern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ.

They're also the co-founder of Color Splash Out a nonprofit organization dedicated to creating safe and brave spaces for LGBTQ plus youth and their ally friends. I'm telling you, do not miss this episode. It's gonna be amazing.

Yadi, Hi!

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Hello.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Welcome to Teología Sin Vergüenza!

I have been wanting and waiting and anticipating this phenomenal episode. I know it's gonna be great because literally some of the stuff we're gonna talk about I've never talked about before and I've never heard about before. So I am just like delighted and over the moon that we are gonna get to jump into some really cool stuff today.

So let's start. Let's start where we always start with Sinvergüenzura. Do you [00:03:00] identify as someone who is Sinvergüenza? Yes or no, and why? And for our audience who may not be as familiar with Spanish, will you say what Sinvergüenza means to you as a concept, as an identity, as a theological premise? Mm-hmm. Tell us what your experience is with that and um, and how you relate to it.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: I am shameless and in particular, I would say, because I was, I was raised in a very conservative church where everything was shameful. Yes. From like, what you're wearing and what you're saying and where you're going and who you, you know, things like that. To finally have felt that freedom to, to be like, you know what, I'm, I'm shameless about how I am queer and loved and I'm shameless at how I'm an advocate and I'm an activist, and it's like. I am. Yeah. I'm a Sinvergüenza. Like I love it. I'm able to say that now.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): That's right.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: I'm gonna claim it.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): The words It's a journey.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Yeah.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): You're shameless in lots of [00:04:00] ways because you, I mean, I could just, I have a laundry list in my head of all the ways that you defy what is considered proper or the regular or normal way to do things, it's one of my favorite things about you that you're like, why does it have to be that way?

What if we did it a different way? And that queering everything, literally being like, we got this and we got that we can make something happen, um, is both like profoundly Mexican and Latine and also Totally. Totally Sinvergüenza. So, will you tell us just a little bit about where you are in the world and what home

is for you right now or in general? Because we find you in a very particular geography right now.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Yeah, I, I am born and raised in Texas. And that's where I'm right now,

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm. Northern Mexico.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Texas. Texas, Texas, Texas. But, um, I was actually born and raised in the border of Brownsville-Matamoros, Mexico. So I'm a border lander.

I consider myself a border lander. Um, [00:05:00] which is like someone who's, who's born and raised by the border, but also someone who expands that, that border of ni de aquí ni de allá

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yep.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Um, Mexico, Americano, Chicano, you know, Chicane, whatever. But also in, in terms of like, I moved, uh, to north, north Texas, um, when I was going to college, like 1999, 2000, something like that. I moved up here to Texas in my twenties up in north Texas, leaving my conservative evangelical family and, and life and and all that.

And I ventured into North Texas, the Dallas, DFW area. Yeah. And that's when I was just like, oof. Because you know, for the longest time I was being raised in such a conservative bubble.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: In family. And everything was, was Mexican and familia and, and the border and everything is, life is so different.

And then you moved up to North Texas where it's like this cultural phenomenon of like, that I was just like, whoa. Like everything just kind of like happened up here. And, and I, I've [00:06:00] been up here for, uh, the past 25 plus years now I'm looking into moving back down to the border, uh, eventually by the end of next year.

But yeah, I'm in Texas. If, if many of you might not know, but Texas is such an anti-LGBTQ+ and in particular trans, at this moment in time. And I've had people that say, well, why don't you move? And the truth is because not

everybody can move. And believe it or not, I, I love Texas. I love being so close to the border.

I love being able to jump from, from Mexico to Matamoros, from Brownsville. I mean, it's just, it's been part of my life. And so I don't see myself, like, leaving Texas. But at the same time, I feel like, you know, there's so many kids here that might not be able to leave. And so it's where I'm, this is where I am.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Okay. Well that brings us to your ministry. And maybe we'll just start there, because when you're talking about there are a lot of kids who can't leave, you have been in youth ministry for a very long time. Yeah. And I love, I first I wanna hear about what you're up to in youth ministry these [00:07:00] days.

And I think there's a really important conversation that you and I have talked about around how youth ministry isn't seen as real ministry. It's like a stepping stone to the adults. And one of the things I love about you and your orientation to the work is like, it is absolutely not a, like, beginner level actually, it's really hard ministry.

Mm-hmm. And it is a worthy and value of its own time, budget, energy, effort. Kids aren't the like adjacent throwaway to the adults with the money who have like the resources to give. They, in and of themselves, uh, have, have spiritual meaning and personhood. And so will you tell us a little bit about youth ministry in particular?

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Yeah.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Some of the radical badass ministry that you're doing in Texas where it's so hostile right now?

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: In Texas.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: So I started in ministry. I, I had left the church in my twenties and eventually I rounded it back into the church and I ended up going to this huge, [00:08:00] massive, um, church, like as, as a volunteer in youth ministry.

And, and eventually I ended up being the youth pastor or the youth minister of that ministry. Mm-hmm. Um, and, but one of the things that I've noticed and

I've worked for, for four or five different congregations as, as, as a pastor, as as a youth pastor is, and, and sadly a lot of 'em have this in common, where there's this matrix or this measuring matrix of like how many kids are in the pews.

Yes. How many kids are sitting on the pews? Um,

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): On Sunday morning.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: I've had pastors, on Sunday mornings, and so I've had pastors that literally would get upset at me and say, all right, you just threw this lock-in. Which I love lock-ins and people think I'm crazy, but something about run- because kids don't sleep and, and neither do I 'cause I have insomnia.

So like, it just works. They're like, you just, you like, it seems like all you do is, is is get pizza and throw parties and lock-ins. And then they like, yeah, like you have 20, 30 kids show up randomly and, and you have like all these things. But then Sunday morning comes and like you have two or three kids.

And so the measurement of it, it's, and I've actually had a pastor tell me, like, [00:09:00] it just doesn't seem like the investment is not returning, um, ministry. And, and it's sad, but I, I came to the realization that because that is a matrix that a lot of, and and sadly progressive churches are, are more at fault than this, than you see conservative churches are full of kids.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Because their investment in that, a lot of progressive churches would be like, well, we don't, we don't have youth ministry, we don't have kids, and mm-hmm. And it's like, you had a, a really big children's ministry. What happened? How did they fell off? And so that's when I realized like, I don't think I am doing my best or I'm, I am doing my out of the box thinking as I am. Yeah. Um, and my shamelessness of like being in this box, that it, the matrix is how many kids are in the pews,

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Like as if, and so as if that was like an economic exchange, right? Like what is that about? Why is it that kids have to be sitting in a pew on Sunday morning for that particular service and that one counts?

Mm-hmm. Whereas other ones where they're like sharing their heart, they're being vulnerable, they're [00:10:00] off the streets, they're finding community. Why is that? Why doesn't that count? Like what did you put together in that, in

like, what's behind all that? What is that about? 'cause I think it's more and more irrelevant what's happening on Sunday mornings as compared to what we're doing in the lives of people.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: In particular, this one church where I was working at, like, they were like, you're gonna be over social services now. Which is, you know, feeding the homeless, doing the pantry and all that. Because like, you're just playing with kids like, you know, we're paying you the salary and all, you just play with kids.

And I'm like, no. Like I'm answering their phone calls and their text messages. I'm showing up at their school when they're being bullied by some administrator because they're queer and because they don't respect them.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: I am showing up at their games. I am showing up when parents can't show up, not because they don't want to, but a lot of, especially Hispanic parents, they work two, three jobs.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: And so here you have Juanito who, it's raining, and doesn't have no one to take him home and missed the bus. And so who they call? They call the youth pastor. Yeah. And, and so that was my [00:11:00] ministry. But what ended up happening though, instead of like being a bad thing that I was with social services is that I realized the connection and the intersectionality over some of the kids that don't have food but they won't tell you Mm. Don't have parents at home, but they won't tell you.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Are homeless, but they won't tell you.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: See, you see kids that are like in sports and so they're showering in the gym. Yep. They're eating, they're doing all these things is you don't have, you don't realize that they're homeless.

So the same thing happens in church. You don't realize that these kids that are coming might not have anywhere else to come. And so you have, uh, a deacon

that's upset because these kids are like eating all the donuts before the parishioners arrive, but you don't know that that might be the only meal that kid had.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): That's right.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: And so I came to realize such intersectionalities on these kids that I started doing mission trips and I started doing trips where I wouldn't charge anything.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: And I would just tell parents, donate what you can, because I came to realize that there was kids that were not going to my events and they were not going to my mission trips.

And because they were too embarrassed to say, I don't have money, or I don't even have a place to live, [00:12:00] or I'm living in a car. Yeah. Why? Because they tell you and then you're a mandatory reporter, then they think you-

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yep.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: And so, um, kids just learn how to maneuver. Navigate Yep. And navigate things. And so they won't tell you, but when you completely open it mm-hmm. To where like, come help me at the pantry, and then at the end you can take whatever you want. I realized that there was no, like, they weren't feeling embarrassed about saying like, I don't have food at home.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Right, talk about shameless, yeah!

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Because I'm not asking, all I'm saying is come help, and then take whatever. And then take whatever.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Right. It's about working on that shame. And it's like, we as adults can be like, I'm shameless, and we can put it out there as like, we're proud and we can mm-hmm. Use words to talk about our experiences of oppression and marginalization, or our hard times or whatever, but, maybe being shameless for kids is helping them be able to navigate in ways that they don't have to disclose.

Especially for, they're not stupid, they know about mandatory reporting. And you know, most of our mm-hmm kids want to be in [00:13:00] family. They want family to be better or different or more resourced, which is often about systemic injustice and not about hardworkingness.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Right.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Um, but that's so creative. I really, really love that.

So what do you up to these days?

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: These days, well, I, so all this, all that church parish ministry Yeah. And all these things, like, it ended up showing me how much, like, I, I really love creating these spaces where young people can just show up and be. And so yeah, I created a nonprofit organization called Color Splash Out.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: And it's about splashing color and, and, and when you splash color and when you throw color, which is one of our games at the end. Uh huh. Um, it, it goes everywhere. You can't control it. And so what is, if like, if we offered a space where kids can just be authentic and be their authentic self? Yeah. And, and we've been creating summer camp, uh, I call it Summer Camp Adventures. When they can literally come and, um, parents drop 'em off.

And unlike other summer camps where the parents take him to the rooms and like, we don't do [00:14:00] that. We, they drop 'em off in one area. We're all playing games. When parents leave, I ask them, um, what house do you want to go to? And house, I name, um, cabins, we named them houses. Mm-hmm. And so, uh, you wanna go to the girls, you wanna go to the boys, you wanna go to the non-binary?

And then we ask the house leaders, which are our cabin counselors, we call 'em house leaders. Yeah. And I play in that whole ballroom experience of being in the house

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes. Yes ballroom culture.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: As a form of creating, as a form of creating this space where they're brave and they can write their name tag on the name they want. Not what the parents wrote on their form.

What name they want. Yeah. And then they can tell me what house they go to. Yes. And so we, I tell people that volunteer in our, in our, in our camps and our, that's house leaders. I say, I can't tell you if you're gonna be with the girls, you're gonna be with the boys, you're gonna be with non-binary. I can't tell you what that's gonna be like because I don't know.

I don't know who we have until they come and they give me their cards and I give 'em a note card where they write and they give it to me. [00:15:00] Then I grab 'em and be like, okay, I have 5 boys. I have 10 girls. I have, and then I'm like, dividing, dividing the stuff. And it, and people are like, isn't that chaotic?

And I was like, no, that's, and that's the thing about youth ministry that's learning to pivot.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Ooh, yes. Pivot. That's, that's a life lesson.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Yeah. And, and that's youth ministry. Yeah. Youth ministry is about pivoting. Youth ministry is about, um, logistics. The youth ministry is about creating. And learning how to, how to create things out of nothing. 'Cause your budget sometimes is like itty bitty, your old, your old budget.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: And it's about, it's about making things happen. I mean, this year we didn't have any funding for camps. Uh, that's one of the things that happened with all this administration stuff. A lot of, lot of nonprofits lost funding. And then when they lost funding, the funding that was coming from other nonprofits that were helping us, we lost it.

And so a mom said, I have a ranch. It's a little house. Um mm-hmm. And I was like, youth pastor heart, gimme a, gimme land, gimme a water hose and let's do it. And we did it. [00:16:00] We did three different camps for the age groups, but we did it. Wow. And so it's about pivoting really. It's about creating.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah, I'm just thinking about the imagination and creativity needed to be able to really make something from nothing.

Yeah, and it feels a little bit like the parable of the loaves and fishes of like, we have a house and we have some land and a water hose, and then let's do it. We expand this into this whole camp experience, especially for our like L-G-B-T-Q kiddos, and I wonder if you feel like. It's harder where you are because I feel like mm-hmm.

If this was a different place, maybe a big city or maybe one of our hubs where there's a lot of communal support Yeah. That it would be a different experience, but I think it's, I think it's a particularly brave and urgently needed and precious ministry to be creating that space for kids to be able to have as much agency and self sovereignty and space to [00:17:00] explore their, their true selves.

Absolutely. I just think of how old some of us are before we have the space or the bravery or mm-hmm. The support from those around us to try even, and, and to be giving that to young folks feels just like, wow, what an incredible gift. But I'm curious about the context that you're in, if that, if you feel like that makes it a difference.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Yeah. No, absolutely. So color splash out is we, we don't, we don't promote. We have had up to 30 kids and every, every year we have like 30 kids, 30 plus kids, or 25 and, and we don't promote it and they're always a bit different. Mm-hmm. And it's all word of mouth. It's, it's all within nonprofits that like share within each other, like the Open and Affirming Coalition shared it on their website, or shared it on their not website, but shared it in email.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Um, or like different, um, organizations share it among themselves. But we've never promote where we are. We've never, um mm-hmm. We never go out there. The San Francisco Chronicle wrote a, a article on [00:18:00] us and actually the, um, um, reporter came and spent an entire week with us at one of their camps.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Wow.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: And, and the photographer as well. And, and the only thing I asked is, you know, one, they got permission from the parents to be able to interview the kids and be able to follow them around and ask questions and go to cabins and all that. But the only thing I asked is not to disclose where we were. Yes. Um, and we also change our locations often mm-hmm.

Of where we are. Because of that. Because we don't wanna, we don't wanna create, um, you know, uh, a situation where, where, you know, will be canceled. Because that almost happened to us on our second year. Um, the place where we were gonna hold our camp called us and was about to cancel because Texas was in the middle, middle of making it illegal to do drag shows.

Anyone that does drag shows was gonna be, you could be subject to felonies or, or indecency with a child. Yeah. Or um, like all these things,

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Scary stuff, yes.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: When they saw that we have a drag show as part of our camp, they, they called us and they're like, [00:19:00] like, this is, and I was like, no, no, no, no, no. This is a misunderstanding.

And so we changed it to Variety Extravaganza Show. Ooh. And, and then, and, and I told, and I told our leaders, I was like, you know the truth, it really is not a drag show because we have trans kids performing and that ain't drag. Yeah. So we left it at Variety Extravaganza Show and. And, uh, it is scary also now that Texas passed a law where, um, trans kids have to detransition.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: And they, um, you have to report as child abuse if parent, if you know, parents who are giving their kids hormones and, and, or all this stuff. And so what I did is I completely eliminated the whole send your, um, medical forms or your medical data on email and update on, on when you register. All I need to know is you have medicines.

That's it. Do you have medicines that I'll need to connect with you when you get here? Come and see me, me and, uh, I have them fill out a actual paper, old school paper, [00:20:00] and I put it in a Ziploc.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Back in the day when we used paper and pen.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Paper, we went back to that. Uh, we put it in a plastic Ziploc with their name on it.

I take care of everything. I'm responsible for everything. So none of my adults, that might be teachers, that might be whatever, they might get in trouble. I get in

trouble, I'll take it. And then when they leave, they take their stuff and there is, there's no data, there's no information. Right. We do not keep anything.

Um, so if the government ever comes and knocks on my door, what are you gonna get? 'cause there's nothing.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: And I don't even take addresses anymore. I take zip codes.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: So good luck with that. Because we have, we actually have kids that have left Texas. We have some kids that went to New York, some take kids that have moved to Chicago, have some kids who move to New Mexico.

So we have kids that have left the state and so, but they come back to camp. Yeah. And I, and I'm just so grateful that they do and, and, and so excited to see them again. Um, and, and, and that's my, that's my promise to the parents. Like, yes, I got you. Here you and [00:21:00] me. Nobody else needs to know this.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): I love that.

It just feels like this.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: And I'm shameless.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Is the moment. That's right. This is the moment, right? This is, it feels like this is the moment, this is the time. We are the ones. And so creating those spaces and those commitments of like what, who are the people that you will be shoulder to shoulder with in La Lucha?

Who are the folks that you will fight for? And um, yeah, it just is amazing. It's amazing, amazing work.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. I love it. And so when people think, when people say, well, you know, youth ministry is a, it's a, because I've heard it before, like when I was about to graduate from seminary.

Mm-hmm. And they would say, well now that you're, now that you're gonna get your master's and you're gonna get ordained. 'cause I was licensed, now you're gonna get ordained. Like, would you be taken in a call? And I was just like, this is my call. Like this, this is like, I'm gonna be the old, I used to say I'm gonna be the oldest youth men pastor in the world.

Like, I'm gonna be like in my eighties and still be playing soccer, whatever. Like if you're gonna go into parish ministry, youth ministry is, it's not the [00:22:00] stepping stone that is your training wheels. Because you're gonna learn how to keep confidentiality, but at the same time, you're gonna know how to balance that.

And, and I always told them, you know, like, I'll hold it, but if you're gonna hurt yourself or others because I care for you, I'm gonna have to find out, help. Find help. And they would understand, because I'm, I'm being honest about what I can do and cannot do. And you're gonna do that in parish ministry.

You're gonna learn how to do logistics. You're gonna learn how to pivot. You're gonna learn how to create.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): I love it. But you are not just a minister extraordinaire. In real life. And I don't think that I quite had a sense of the phrase in real life until we had our first conversation and I was like, oh, there's real life.

And then there's another whole world that is not real in the sense of like, you get in a car, you drive somewhere. But it is absolutely real in the sense of like alternative universes, which feels like theological imagination. It feels like prophetic, [00:23:00] prophetic vision and creativity. So I'm gonna pivot us right now.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Yeah, absolutely.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): To talk about your other ministry, which literally blew my mind, um, in a different way. Because you are a pastor. Mm-hmm. A real pastor at a real, like inside of the UCC denomination, official and all of that, part of a conference, church inside a video game. Right?

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Yeah. A virtual world.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Okay. Virtual world. Will you help us understand, because I had never heard of this before, and I'm sure that there will

be people listening who have never heard of this before. What, what, what, what, tell us about this. What church?

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Yeah. So I, yeah. I, I, so I'm, I'm, I'm a co-pastor. There's three of us, Uhhuh, I'm a co-pastor of, uh, um, [00:24:00] at first UCC in Second Life.

Second Life is a virtual world, Uhhuh. Um, and so first UCC in Second Life is a real church with real life standing in the, in the, um, Southern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Okay. How'd that come about?

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: And the three of us

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah. How'd that happen?

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Yeah. So, so Pastor Jerome Newstart, uh, our founder. Uh, California may, may rest in peace, uh, created in Second Life. So second, life's been around for for a while now. Uh, and it's a virtual world where people literally log in into this virtual world through their computers, create their avatars and create homes. They actually pay money, real money to create a land, to create all kinds of stuff, universe.

And a lot of people that have been in Second Life and create these things are perhaps people that are like home bound. Mm-hmm. Uh, or people that are [00:25:00] in other countries that might not have a connection to progressive church or places.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Or, or trans people who like, create a new avatar, a new world.

And there's also, uh, a community of littles. There are like a bunch of little children running around who might be, uh, adults who are autistic and see themselves as children. Uhhuh. So you have this, or you have furies. Um, so you have like this whole different,

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): What are furies? Tell us about that too, too.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: So you might have like someone who, um, who is like, likes to dress up in costume or furry, uhhuh animal, things like that.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Like cosplay kind of thing.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Cosplay kind of thing. Absolutely. Yeah. Um, and so this world, Pastor Jerome Newstart, he, he is a, uh, a trans man who realized like, you know, I'm a pastor and I would like to create some space where people can come and just be

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Wow.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: And so he created this, this church, this First UCC in Second Life an island, it's called Newstart Island. And he created like a little chapel there. And then he realized like people were [00:26:00] coming, people were, and so he did something called Psalter. So Psalms.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Uhhuh.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: So Wednesday. Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, something like that.

Like you go online, you go and sit around a circle and there's no voice. It's just a chat box. And then it just increased to creating a, uh, a church. And so October 14th, 2013 would be the exact, um, time of the first service, church service that he created, where people came in and, and went to church as whoever they say they are. So I've been preaching to unicorns, I've been preaching to whoever, whoever shows up.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): I love it. And the church is beautiful, like the setup in the game, in the virtual reality. Yeah. It's a beautiful worship space with altars and flowers and candles and like, it's very, it feels like church.

It's very beautiful.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Yeah. It and and and it's cheaper to get your vestments and all your stuff, so.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes. And I saw you have your [00:27:00] like rainbow stole.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Stole. Yes.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): It goes like all the way the ground. Yes. It's, it's beautiful. And, and so I love this idea of you preaching to a unicorn. What was that moment like?

Did you just like look around one Sunday morning and there was like a unicorn in one of the pews or?

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Yeah. Yeah. So I call my ministry Blind Grace. Because I, I don't know who it is that I'm ministering to. I know who you say, you're telling me you are.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Either by voice or by chat, but I really don't know who you are.

And, and, and it doesn't matter. You're, you're a sacred person and I am gonna treat you with the sacredness that you are if you're humanity and or whoever you are.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: And so, in fact, the, a couple of days ago, um, somebody had messaged me that they wanted to do some, needed some pastoral care. Yeah. And so I was trying to figure out the time zones because they're in Portugal.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Oh.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: And I was trying to figure out like, what would that time zone be? And so finally I said, is this church time good for [00:28:00] you? But tomorrow? And they're like, yeah, that would work. I'm getting outta work. I work, you know, whatever. And I was like, okay. So wow. Pastoral care through chat and, and because, you know,

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Inside the virtual reality.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Yeah. Yeah. I, I, I hold a lot of, I hold a lot of pastoral care through chat because, um, either they don't wanna use their voice

or they can't. Some, I had, um, one person who say, you know, um, I, my, I, my roommate's very nosy. I can't talk, but, so can, do you mind if we just chat? And I was like, sure. And so we'll do some chat and, and.

Other times we'll do, we'll do voice. So it really depends how people are comfortable.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes. And that like, it's actually open and affirming and welcoming. Like that you don't get more expansive than inviting littles and unicorns and furies. Like it is for real when we say all are welcome. It's like a new standard in my book for what it means to be like, all are welcome.

But you had to fight for that to be seen as legitimate in [00:29:00] seminary. So I would love for you to tell the story of like

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Yep.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Because you know, I, I mean it blew my mind and I was totally fascinated and delighted and like this is the queerest, coolest shit ever.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Yeah.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): But I can imagine for institutions that it, it felt like what in the world are we talking about?

Will you tell us a little bit about that story? Because I know the founder

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Right? Absolutely.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Came like was coming behind you being like, this is real and so this tell us. Yeah.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: I needed to do my internship for seminary because my spiritual director, Dr. Christine Ng, was at Second Life as one of the pastors.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Um, oh, cool.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: So she's, she's responsible for taking me there. Uh, but she

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Her fault.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Yeah. It's her fault. And so she said, you know, why don't you do your, why don't you do your internship with us? Yeah. And I'm like, okay, but I'm gonna need a convener. And I'm, because you know how Seminar is, you're gonna need a convener, you're gonna need a moderator.

You're gonna need, like, you need all these people who are gonna fill your paperwork. Yeah. That you're doing all the things that it says that you, because it's an [00:30:00] institution, you gotta do all these things for seminary, right? And so she's like, yeah, absolutely. We have that. We'll have that. 'cause there's Jerome, there's me, there's, there's Doug there, a lay minister, there's other people we can tag in for other members.

And she's like, yeah, we can do it. And so I took it to seminary and I was like, I would like to do my internship at First UCC in Second Life. And so they were like, what? And so luckily for me, um, Dr. Sprinkle at that time, and, and Dr. Joretta Marshall, who's like, was the dean at that time, said, yeah, let's do it. But then they went on sabbatical.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Wow.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Right when I was about to start my internship. So some new people came in and they were like, you're crazy. Um, because what are we? And so one of 'em actually said, what are we gonna tell people that you could just go online and call it ministry?

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): YES!

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: So, fast forward to COVID.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes, that's exactly what we're gonna do!

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Fast forward to co COVID times, they're calling me back and saying, Hey, do you mind coming, you know, coming to seminary and talking about ministry and, uh, [00:31:00] the computer. I was like, yeah.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): And doing it online.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Doing it online. I was like, sure. So yeah, it took, it took a minute, but, but it was, it was, and it's so amazing because like I had my convener, my moderator, all these people that are filling out documents on

me and, and doing all this stuff that were like in, in Connecticut and Virginia and New Mexico and all over the US. And then they were all showing up to these, to these meetings on Zoom and everything. Or on, on to try to send my paperwork in.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes. You were before your time.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Before COVID. Yeah. So then when COVID hit, it was, it was a matter of, like, for us, it was just like. Yeah, but we were able to help, uh, in fact, we were able to help others to see ministry as like, it is beyond part of my, my prayer when, when I do is like invoking the Holy Spirit and like, may, may the Holy Spirit be wherever you are.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: And, and may the Holy Spirit go through the network and through these waves of wherever you're found because that's Second life. Like we're just, we'll go wherever it is that you're [00:32:00] found and you're at. And, and the hardest part I think for some folks is like, so how do you do communion? And I'm like, you do it like you do it anywhere.

I break the bread and my avatar would raise the, the bread 'cause I program it. And it'll raise the cup and. And it's cool. We've done a baptism, um, which that brings people's mind.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes. Tell us that story. Yes. No, tell. This is a really important story because I think especially these days where we're becoming more aware and more sensitive to people's different needs and preferences around things like touch, around people's cognitive abilities and preferences. So that, this was one of the things because in Culto Cuir, in Teología Sin Vergüenza, we have a Culto Cuir, where we do a trans baptism and a renaming ceremony mm-hmm. And that's a really important moment for folks to be able to have a community of faith, an ordained pastor, affirming their name with a certificate, with their declaration of who they are before a congregation to say, we love and support you and we care for you.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Absolutely.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): [00:33:00] And we're here for you. And you have a parallel story in Second Life. So will you tell us the story of that baptism? 'Cause that feels really meaningful. Yeah. And important.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: So baptism is you have to have water, right?

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: You have to have the community

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: And the words of institution that's baptism, those three things.

And so here we have a young person who is, um, who is the other part of the world, I believe it was, uh, Sweden, I think, or it was, it was another part of the world. I think it's escaped me. But, um, he wasn't, he's in an institution. Mm-hmm. Um, um, on the spectrum, cannot be touched, uh, does not like to be touched, do not like to be handled.

And here he is and he wants to be baptized. And so, yeah, we made a, so Pastor Newstart and, um, and Pastor Christine Ng um, they, they did something where they're like, well, they created the whole avatar water.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): So you literally have to like build that right? In the game. In the virtual reality.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Yeah. They, in the, they got that in, in the [00:34:00] virtual reality they have the water and uh, they have the, um, the congregation all came in for the special ceremony. Yeah. And in real life, um, he is in his part of the world with, with his brother and nurse or whatever, putting his hands in a water bowl.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: And naming, naming his, his name, and we're saying, we're baptizing the little avatar baptize you in the name of the Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit.

And in real life he's dipping his hands in the water and being affirmed. Wow. And so that, that parallel of like being able to, to touch water, tangible

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes. Yes. in us and around us. water being universal. Yep.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Two individuals next to you. Yep. Um, and then you are watching everything happening to your little avatar where your little avatar is being dunked. 'Cause that's like Yes. The coolest thing. Um, and all these avatars all [00:35:00] around you, all these people all around you sitting in their computers, in their homes, affirming you, welcoming you, congratulating you, and you're in another part of the world.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): That's amazing.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: And you're welcomed into the, into, into family. And to be able to say, you know, I baptize you, I baptize you. Yes. And I name you and I welcome you. And you're part of this family. Yes. To someone that might not be able to, to be touched or to speak or to leave the room.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: But they got to experience it.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): It's a whole lived experience that is really, truly lived, but is kind of the epitome of accessibility. Mm-hmm. And the epitome of care. And I just, there's a movie called The Remarkable Life of Ibelin that is about a person who was home bound and their experience of a degenerative illness mm-hmm. And their life [00:36:00] inside a virtual reality and how much community and friendships and, and lived experience they got to have in the final parts of their lives, life where they weren't able to be out in the world. And you know, I don't think it has to be that severe, but I do think about like our elders who were home bound. Mm-hmm. I think about folks who are institutionalized for whatever reason. I think about so many human beings. Also, some of us who, especially post COVID, are just like, I don't want to be out and around people in germs.

And like, there's a thousand reasons why this kind of virtual reality, I can just see it now that you've, like, described it, I just can see it as such an offering for our communities of so many different forms. Do you find that that's true in the people that come through?

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: It's absolutely true. In fact, one of my first funerals or, or memorials that we did actually, um, there was a little who was bound to to their bed, to their home.[00:37:00]

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: And, uh,, one of the members, family members logged in, asked, asked them to, and, and told us. She's passed.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Wow.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: And we were like, oh my God. Like, this is like, it, it, it hit our, our, our, our, our community. Right. Like, oh my gosh, she's passed.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah. Yes. Um,

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: and so we decided we need to do a, a memorial because just like in real life, like someone's passed. Yeah. And so we need to offer pastoral care. We need to show up, we need to be here for our community. Yes. And so we told the family we're gonna be doing a memorial for, for, for her. And so we logged the family in through Zoom to see the memorial that we were holding for her. And so we went and got one of her photos that we had of the little uhuh.

Um, and the family was touched by the fact that all these little avatars, all these people showed up. Yes. To a memorial. And we did, like we do in real life. A funeral, all three pastors. Um, we [00:38:00] stood together and we read through it, and we did a memorial. Same thing when, uh, pastor Jerome Newstart passed away.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: So many people that he's touched and through, through the last, since 2013 that he's been a pastor of here. Yeah. And so we created a, a memorial for him. In real life. Our conference minister was doing the funeral in real life in California.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: And in Second Life, I was doing it in Second Life.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Oh my gosh.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: So at the same time, we were having fu- the funeral homes and the the, the, the, um, they were seeing the Second Life community.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Wow. And the funeral was going on virtually.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: At the same time. Um, one of our pastors was over there with the conference minister doing it, and we were. Parallel. Two worlds.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Honoring this, this great guy who, who created this and who had passed. Yes. And so it's just such an honor to carry on, on that legacy, to carry on, on that dream that he had of, of creating this space. And then to see it [00:39:00] beyond his passing. In fact, when he passed he said, I'm gonna leave. He left this, uh, he left some money and everything so the church can continue.

Wow. Because as I say, you have to, you know, you buy for the land, you pay for the land and all that stuff, so Right. He, he left this church, Newstart Island and everything paid for. His son gave us access to his avatar so we can keep him as, as one of the caregivers of the island.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm. Um,

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: So that we can, you know, log him in and, and put vestments and put things and create things and, and then we log him off 'cause it's kind of creepy to see his avatar around.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: But, um, yeah. But, but his son, his family got to see how we continue that legacy of, of this space. Yes. And so when, when I finished my last, uh, parish ministry, I, I decided that I wanted to, I wanted to continue this and so I, I accepted a call to become the pastor of this community.

'cause I was like, I had so much fun when I was an intern and I felt like, God, there's so much I could do with this. And Yeah. And sure enough, like. I feel like I'm home.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes. Oh, I love it. I [00:40:00] logged into YouTube because not only if folks don't have, if they're not, if you're not savvy and you aren't ready to enter into the whole virtual reality. Though, my whole family has been like, what if we, we've been chatting about what our avatars

might look like. But even before that, folks can access it on YouTube because you also stream the services.

So I got to see one of your services most recently that I think was like a movie mixed in with, with a sermon. Um, but I got to see the entire, you know, hour long church service in Second Life. And I just am astounded and humbled. And I mean, maybe this is a little extreme, but I feel like in this moment where AI feels scary and mm-hmm.

The internet feels scary and there's so much control and, you know, authoritarian threat, that when I see things like this, it. Truly restores my spirit in a way that's like we are as creatively [00:41:00] good as we are creatively bad as a species. Yeah. And it, and like there are, there are those of us, like you, like Jerome, like the people who started this and continue it and come, who are really willing to lean into something that is totally unexpected.

Mm-hmm. And yet makes all the sense in the world. And when I think about ministry and I think about what our aims are, especially those of us who believe in radical inclusion. Yeah. It doesn't get more radically inclusive than this. Like what have you learned over your time there? What, what are your takeaways from this?

Because clearly it hooked you because you're back as one of the ordained ministers after your internship. Yeah.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Yeah. So I actually had pastors that would say, it's cool if you like video games. Hmm. Or you know, things like that. And I'm. You could play video games. You, you could actually go to concerts too.

You can. Wow. You can do so much there. But it is so much beyond that. In [00:42:00] fact, um, I, I've been, I'm still learning. I'm always learning in, in Second Life. Yeah. But I had someone actually tell me, um, one of the reasons that you might see one of our avatars there, uh, and, and it says away, or they're asleep.

'cause they'll actually create, like, areas they're like, because in real life we don't have nobody.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: And so we're literally asleep on Second Life because we feel like I'm going to bed, but I also know my little avatars in bed

and it's in a community. Mm. And so I was like, that, that blew my mind. Like, oh my God.

So. But because they might be home bound, and so when they wake up, they literally wake up their little avatar.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: And they literally check in with their friends and they literally go to school and they literally have families and, and they have like, they have family dinners and they're all sitting around a, a fa because I actually was invited by one of the littles to their, to their home for dinner.

And I was just like, okay,

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): These are chosen families?

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Chosen families. And so they, they have a dad, a mom, a brother, a sister, because they, they don't [00:43:00] have that. So in real life, they created this world, they created this, this, um, this, this whole family of choice. And so I was invited to dinner to someone's house, and I was just like, okay, this is weird.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Wow. You're like, the pastor going to family dinner.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Go to someone's dinner. And so they send me the link to where, and I show up and I'm like, I should probably bring flowers. And so I, yes. Google, you know, and so I show up and I'm like. Good evening. And I brought, and so everyone's sitting around the table and they're bringing all these things and, um, but in real life they're literally sitting having dinner mm-hmm.

While their families are having dinner.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes. Like I to each in their own, own respective country or place. Yeah.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: And I got to hear how they all connected, how they all came together, how they'll all be at church on Sunday. Like I had, I got to hear all these things and it's like, I was, it was, it blew my mind.

'cause I was like, of course. Whoa. Like this is crazy. Wow. Like, but, but they check in on each [00:44:00] other. They, how is school today? How is work today? How is, because that is the only connection they have. And so, um, yeah. There's always folks who would say like, yeah, but, um, you're spending too much time online.

What about real life? Which is, you know, you see that game Ready Player One, things like that. It, a lot of things come to mind in that. But the truth is, some folks don't have the ability to go out. Some folks are immune, uh, compromised that, that, that might not be it. That might not. And so they'll sit at home and they'll be alone. Or, they enter this world where they're free.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: And so you've had avatars who I had, there's this one avatar who was wearing a whole apparatus thing, Uhhuh, because in real life they needed a breathing system. And so they created their avatar to have a breathing system.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Wow.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: So some create what they see themselves as. Others create a whole different persona.

Um, and that's why I say like, I don't know who I speak to. I don't know who I'm talking to. [00:45:00] I don't know what I see is real, but as we're here, it's real. And I always say, and, and part of part of what we say is, it feels good to be real in Second Life. Mm. And that's part of our model. Yes. Um, no matter who you are or where you are in life's journey, you're welcome here because it feels real to be. To be real in Second Life. And, and it's a way of saying like, we see you. Mm-hmm. Um, we acknowledge you and we honor you.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes. It's like, you know, so much of our role as chaplains or as pastors is to be the presence of the divine with the people that we are with. And that's literally what you're doing.

You're providing that ministry of being there, of seeing, of, of reflecting back someone's sacredness regardless of what the, being in front of you, what their avatar is like. And I just feel so inspired by that possibility because of course, we all have our biases, so we mm-hmm in real life have our, you know, prejudged, [00:46:00] preconceived ideas about people or, or what they're gonna be like. And that ability to just open your heart and be present with folks when

they need you and need church, and know that it's gonna be there and the doors are gonna open and there's gonna be you coming through preaching or having other kinds of services. Like I saw a taize service and like, there's just all kinds of stuff that people can really be a part of.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: We have meditation on Mondays and Fridays mm-hmm. Where we do Lectio Divinia, we're doing, um, a book and, and you know, I'll, I'll get some Cassidy Hall with, with Queer, Queer Spirituality. Like I'll get different texts and, and we'll go through the text and we'll do like, Divina and we'll like, which is like, like Divina is like going through the text and repeating it several times and then creating different and, and listening.

Careful listening. One of the things that I did, uh, I did a two year residency with Stillpoint on the art of spiritual direction. So I'm a spiritual director as well. And so, and, and so [00:47:00] I, Christine Ng, who's my spiritual director, wanted to create that meditation part of like spiritual direction on Lectio Divinia on Mondays and Fridays.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: And so now I lead it. And, and it's really cool because like you don't have to speak. Like, you literally can just come and sit there, uh, around the fire. Yeah. And just see the text rolling. One of the things that I, that I do wanna say is, being a pastor at First UCC and Second Life, I still have to get my sermons ready for Sunday.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: I still have to get my, I still do pastoral care, like I still have to show up and do things. I still have to do like all these things that you do as a pastor, like, it's still true.

But I have to get all the texts into note cards because those that cannot hear everything is on, on a chat box.

Everything's on a note card. So I cannot just wing a sermon. Yes. I have to be able to put it on, on a box, on a chat box, on a note card. That then gets, you get like people are reading it and seeing it as you're talking, because we [00:48:00] do have people who cannot hear. So I mean,

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Just the accessibility aspects of it alone are just. Just wildly creative, wonderful, super helpful things that should always

just be true. There should always just be closed captioning, and yet there's like this intentionality behind what you're doing that I just feel like is a beautiful, mind boggling, incredibly creative, brilliant, um, expansion of what feels possible in ministry and also that feels super relevant.

You know, I feel like the church is constantly having this conversation about like, how do we get more people? How do we become more relevant? And it feels like y'all kind of did the opposite, where it's like this is what is needed and therefore this is what we are creating. And it makes so much more sense to do it from that way versus this like, how many butts in the pews on Sunday morning kind of mentality that we were talking about earlier.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: And for me, like even right now in today's world where if I have to leave the, if I have to leave the country. Yeah. Which, you know, [00:49:00] sometimes, uh, I, as much as I'm like a stubborn Texan and I'm like, I'm not going anywhere, y'all have to leave. So I'm not leaving. I'm shameless and I'm gonna stay here. Yes. And harass and, and create trouble for y'all.

But if I do have to leave and I have to leave the country, yeah. I'm still gonna be a pastor in Second Life. Yeah. Because as long as I have internet, as long as I have, I have wifi. As long as I can connect, I'll continue ministry. Yes. And, and I really like that, um, ability to travel and to do what I do in my ministry and still be connected to my parishioners and still be correct, connected to the community that I'm serving. No matter where I am.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

I love it. Speaking of that, you know, the what if, the questions that are coming up and, and all of those things. I feel like it's important for us to talk a little bit about you also in your own life and your own, not just your ministry and what you offer to others, but in your own world of like, how is it for you right now?

How is the, how are we in [00:50:00] community? What are you seeing around you right now in your specific place of community, in your family? Mm-hmm. Um, tell us a little bit about where you are on your journey. I know you're starting a new chapter, um, also in family life, so any of that that you wanna share, we wanna know about you.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Yeah. For the last, uh, for the last four years, my partner and I have been raising our grandchild. Mm. Um, and our grand boy, he's, yeah, he's, he's a little white boy with blue eyes and so-

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): I love that "grand boy"

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: My grand boy. Um, yeah. And, or, or, yeah. And so, um. Our, our, our son is, the last one in, in, in our little nest is, is 23.

And so. Yeah, so he's, he's studying music and he's gonna graduate next year. And so we're so proud of him. Wants to be a school teacher, a band teacher, a music teacher. And so I'm so proud of him for that. And so we were so excited to be like, yay. Empty nesters. Empty nesters. We're gonna travel. I was already measuring the room, and where am [00:51:00] I gonna put my bookshelves?

And so excited about it. And then, um, we realized that our, our, our grand boy needed, um, needed family, needed. Yeah. Needed. We needed to raise him and we needed to, so we took him in. And so here I am sitting at pre-K and I'm going. So, yeah. But, but I've really been enjoying the whole raising him and, and he's on the spectrum, so he's got his own little spicy personality. Yes. Of things. And so I've been, I've been learning how to navigate that and Yep. I'm homeschooling him now, so,

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Woo. Adventures in homeschool. Woo!

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: So I'm also learning, I'm still learning how to do that. But, you know, he'll, he'll be standing at his desk and dancing and doing all kinds of stuff, and then he'll be serious doing his homework, and then he'll be dancing and, and it's just like, I'll look at him and I'm like, oh my God.

Like, no wonder his teacher was going nuts with him. But I, I'm learning this whole thing, and my partner is a school teacher, a paraprofessional, so she helps, she's actually a, a teacher aid. Mm-hmm. And, [00:52:00] and so she was ready to just go and teach. And so I'm, I'm excited because my whole, so she kind of raised our kids, you know, and so, yeah, I was in seminary and I was working jobs and I was traveling and I was doing all this stuff.

So now I get to do this. Um,

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): You're the primary parent?

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: I'm the primary person, yes. Who's with him and I'm really enjoying this, this leg of my, of my life. So, yeah. And, and I'm learning that he, he cannot, um. Be put in a box when it comes to studies. And I think we tried that, um, the last few years. We had to move him from his regular

elementary school. 'Cause by 10:00 AM he was done with his homework. And um, the school was like,

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah, that's a dangerous one. When you get 'em that smart, it's like, woo, you're gonna have, he's run to keep up.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Well, and then the school was like, um, he's done with his homework at 10, so he gets to play Play-Doh and for the rest of the day.

And I was like, why don't you challenge him? Why don't you give him Yeah. He's like, because we have 35 [00:53:00] others

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: That we need to teach. And so we can't stop for one. And the thing about it is that you don't get to, um, you know, like this, uh, special education or or gifted and talented until you're in third grade.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Wow.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: And so here we are in first grade and he's done by 10:00 AM. And so we put him in a charter school and he did good. But once that charter school closed, as many schools are closing right now here in Texas especially. Yes. Um, and maybe all over the country as well, with the education stuff going where it is, we realized that for third grade, it's like, we're just not gonna, we're gonna like, we're gonna try something different.

And yes. And I'm learning, but he's done by one with schoolwork. And then I'm like, all right, let's go take the dogs for a walk, or let's go on an adventure or let's, you know, and I'll, I'll work in between whatever it is that we're doing. Um, but it's exciting to see him and he see his little brain just,

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes, just learning.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: But I'm learning, I'm learning. I'm in, I'm in, I'm in that thing of learning how to [00:54:00] maneuver his outbursts that sometimes he has.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: And being like, oh my God. But, but it's, that's how he is, I guess, I dunno.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Right and us. I mean, it just feels like an extension of your work around, like, we accept all of the person and we are doing all of this work.

And it feels like, man, we're putting that to the test 24/7 with another generation. But I was raised by my great grandmother, so I have a very tender spot for grandparents who are raising their grandchildren or for people who are raised by their grandparents. And I just think it's like, it's a special moment and it's really cool that you have this whole new generation where you are more stabilized in your ministry mm-hmm.

And your work, and now you're getting this whole other parent experience. So Yeah. Yeah. That

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Well, and cultural. Yeah, cultural wise. I, I, you know, cultural wise, uh, I, my dad, I mean, that's just the way we were raised. They're like, you're ADD. No, you're not. You're chiflado [00:55:00] Calm your ass down, or you know, we're gonna get the chancla, you're, we'll see how ADD you are when you get home.

You know what I'm saying? Yes. So it wasn't so, I,

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): There was no accommodation.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: No, it was like, you what? Um, or you wanna go to therapy or you wanted to go somewhere? And it was like, no, you don't do that because they'll think you're loco. You know, you're crazy. Yeah. We don't do that. Yeah, we don't do that. Or you're just chiflado, or you have a learning disability.

No, you're not. You're lazy. Mm-hmm. And so I, you know, I, I was raised with a lot of that stuff, A lot of, uh, and so now with him, you know, I'll hear things and I'll find myself going like, maybe I'm not pushing him enough. And then I'm like, no. Like, that's just how he is. Um, but you know, it's so learning that that whole cultural thing.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes. We're unlearning all the stuff that we learned.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: I'm learning that. And so, yeah. I'm doing a lot of reading and I'm doing a lot of searching and a lot of trying to figure out, because like there's that cultural part of me of like, nah, he being chiflado, like he's gonna, and then I'm like, I catch myself going.

He can't, like, that's just, that's just his personality. I don't think he's doing it to annoy. He's just, [00:56:00] that's his personality. He just randomly starts singing in the middle of-

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): That sounds like praise and worship. Just he up in the spirit.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: There he goes. Like he just felt the spirit and he started dancing.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): That's right.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: But it's, it's been a whole cultural thing of like, of learning. And, and the funny thing is he likes hot stuff and, and he's learning Spanish and I'm having him, yeah. I'm teaching him Spanish and I'm having him write it. Okay. Um, 'cause I was having him doing Rosetta Stone and then he learned how to cheat the system.

Mm-hmm. So he would just say the end part of the last part of the word. So then it would go bing. And I'm like, little shit's like he's, he's, he's cheating the system and so now I'm making him it,

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Which is a skill we want. But now you actually have to teach him Spanish.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Yeah. So I'm having him say it and then I'm having it write it, and then I'm like, what does it mean? And so that way I can really, and I, and I made it part of his learning, I made it part of his, like, so he has Spanish Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and then he has like typing Tuesday, Thursday. So I'm typing.com. Like I'm doing all these different things that, that I'm trying to do different that I'm like, because he is done by one.

And the cool part [00:57:00] about it. And I'm able to do different things with them and, and create different things with them.

So yeah, learning, it's lot of learning.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Keeping you young over there. Keeping you young.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Oh yes. Oh yes. Yes. 'cause all of our other kids were like very like little you know, chest, very quiet, very chill.

You know, Josh would do little with paper, paper things, and. Not this one. This one like bounces off the walls. He's like Tigger all over the place and I'm just like, oh, I'm not prepared for this.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Oh, I love that image of Tigger.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Yeah, he's like, like I, wasn't prepared for this. He's got two speeds, like super slow with a tablet or he's gone.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah, gone. I love it. Yeah. Well, it's been an amazing conversation. I wanna wrap up with our, always our final question, which is, who are your ancestors? What is that fount of ancestral wisdom and knowledge that you go to when you need to be restored, when you need to remember who you are, be they thinkers or your family.

Like, [00:58:00] tell us about your ancestors. Tell us about where, where are those cloud of witnesses for you?

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: So my family's from Mexico. From, from, uh, Matamoros. From San Luis Potosí. I always think of my, my mother. My mom had a degree in, in teaching. School teacher. Mm-hmm. But then when she came to, to the US, she didn't have that. And so she would teach Sunday school. Mm. And I, and she was an artist, and so I would do puppet shows with her. We would do sewing. She would, she would sew and then I would learn how to do puppet shows. And that's how we would do ministry in Sunday School through puppet shows and through, through characters and through all kinds of stuff. And so I always look at that.

Uh, another aunt of mine was, um, the equivalent of a registered nurse when she was in Matamoros and, and all that. But then when she came over to the States, she lost all that and yeah. And she got married and she was just a housewife, but she was our nurse.

Every- if any kid got sick, you would go to, you would go to her and she would go across the border and get the medicina, and she was the one that [00:59:00] would give you the shots and Woo. And so what I learned, um, and my tíos

were like, they were, you know, they, they had their little businesses, their tienditas. And so my, my ancestors are my family who, who they taught us how to survive.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: How to make a way when there's no way. Mm-hmm. How to share your frijoles and arroz tortillas so that you never really felt like you were poor or lacking or anything.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: And so that's who I go to in terms of like, no matter how hard things are, like you always are just grateful. And that's what I learned about from, from my family, is that they were always grateful and they always taught us, too, um, some things might not be working. But how can you creatively be and exist?

And, and in their own way, they were teaching us about wholeness.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: And they were teaching us about surviving skills, and they were teaching about, about sharing the table even when you didn't have any. Like you still had [01:00:00] something. And so I think that I, I have, I have grown and I have, um, I have kept that with me in everything I do in, in things.

And then in terms of seminary, once I entered seminary, I learned about the life of Gloria Anzaldúa. Yes. You know, a Chicano, um, lesbian who, um, she has a book called *The Border Called Me Back*. And, and I, at this time in my life, I'm like, the border's calling me back. Hmm. And so, um, I also treat her as an ancestor and as a yes, as someone that I learned so much. Because I learned from her, one of her quotes was that, um, people always try to divide the educator, the lesbian, the activist. People always try to divide these different personalities, and Gloria Anzaldúa would say, I am an entire person in all of these things and I cannot separate myself. And, and, and that really touched me.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Um, because I was like, how many times through growing up you [01:01:00] try to separate

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: In, in what areas you were in that you had to become something or put a mask on or mm-hmm. Or, and, and I learned that like, no, like the whole beautiful thing about who you are is bringing all of you in.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: The queerness, the sacredness, the theological part, everything. You bring all that in and that's what makes it so like, just authentic.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: And I think that's what I try to give that message to the young ones that I serve and, and those I walk with, it's like, be you. Mm-hmm. Because that's all that's being asked is for you to be you.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes. Woo. And you are one of those people who are so authentic in every piece of

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Thank you.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Every place I see you in all of the wildly creative and interesting things I see you doing.

I'm just like, that's you. Like you are being you. And I think that is as much of an example as anything that you tell anybody else is like how we live our lives. So thank you for living your [01:02:00] life out loud. Thank you for sharing it with us. Thank you for your time and uh, yeah, this was an amazing episode.

It did not disappoint you.

Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna: Thank you for having me. Thank you for having me. Yeah. Thank you for what you do. Because the truth is that by getting those voices out there and, and, and connecting with the work that all everyone else is doing out there, it is so much needed right now. Yeah. Because as we're hearing all the negativity in the world is good to also hear all the great stuff going on around us.

So thank you for this platform. And for Soulforce.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Absolutely. Thank you.

Thank you for joining us today for Teología Sin Vergüenza. I'm Reverend Alba Onofrio, but you can call me Reverend Sex. Let us know what resonated for you from today's conversation, and make sure to like, subscribe and share this episode with someone in your life who might need it.

Check out all of our other juicy content on this channel and find us on social media @soulforceorg or @teosinvergüenza in Spanish. Cuídate mucho, and remember, we are Las Sinvergüenzas. [01:03:00] Are you one of us? Oo, sí! Sí, sí, sí.