

THE REV. JOSÉ ROBERTO GÁNDARA-PEREA

Episcopal Priest · Theological Educator · Spiritual Director

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PROFILE

Episcopal priest, theological educator, and spiritual director with more than three decades of ordained ministry in the Caribbean, Europe, and the United States, in three languages. Rector of Emmanuel Episcopal Parish, Orcas Island, since 2014, with demonstrated leadership in congregational renewal, stewardship, liturgical development, bilingual ministry, adult formation, immigration solidarity, and ecumenical and interreligious partnership. Formerly a Redemptorist missionary and seminary educator; he continues to teach seminarians in Latin America and to lead retreats in spiritual direction and contemplative practice. His ministry is rooted in the Christian contemplative and mystical tradition and open in ongoing dialogue with other spiritual paths.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE

- Theological Education & Formation of Lay and Ordained Ministers
- Contemplative & Mystical Theology, and Interreligious Dialogue
- Spiritual Direction & Companionship
- Pastoral & Practical Theology, including Liturgical Renewal
- Art, Nature & Embodiment in Spiritual Practice — contemplative photography, pilgrimage, wilderness rites of passage, and comprehensive sexuality education

ORDINATION & ECCLESIASTICAL STANDING

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| 1992 | Ordained a Roman Catholic Priest , Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (Redemptorists) |
| 2009 | Received as an Episcopal Priest , Episcopal Diocese of New York, by the Rt. Rev. Mark Sisk |

PROFESSIONAL MINISTRY

2014–present **Emmanuel Episcopal Parish, Eastsound, WA** — Rector

Congregational Leadership & Stewardship

- Led the "Restore, Preserve, and Share" capital campaign (2019–2022): set a \$300,000 goal for facility restoration and repair and raised \$321,945, with a further \$129,647 secured through insurance proceeds and energy rebates following flood damage; also obtained nearly \$10,000 through the Orcas Island Community Foundation grants catalogue for the parish hall audio-visual system.
- Helped establish the beginnings of a parish endowment and its legacy-giving education program.
- Redesigned the annual stewardship campaign toward direct, transparent appeal, producing a single-year increase in pledged giving from \$263,187 to \$396,982 (2025–2026).
- Guided the parish through the COVID-19 pandemic without suspending a single regular service, building livestreamed and online worship from nothing across Vimeo, Facebook, YouTube, Zoom, and Mailchimp; 90–100 viewers weekly at its height, with viewers as far away as Brazil and Germany.
- Resolved the parish's compliance with Washington State law governing nonprofit use of church space (2015), protecting tax-exempt status while keeping the buildings open at no charge to more than a dozen island nonprofits.
- Led staff transition and continuity, including the retirement of a parish administrator after twenty-four years of service and the hiring and induction of two successors (2023, 2025).

Worship & Liturgical Renewal

- Created and developed a Rite III liturgy following "An Order for Celebrating the Holy Eucharist" (BCP p. 400), under Resolution D050 of the 2015 General Convention and with the approval of then-Bishop Greg Rickel; praised by Provisional Bishop Melissa Skelton. Attendance grew from six around the altar to more than thirty by 2024.
- Founded and led Emmanuel's Spanish-language monthly Eucharist (2014–2023), the island's only sustained Spanish-language Christian liturgy, together with bilingual Epiphany celebrations, the island's first Día de los Muertos observance, Sunday School for the children of Latino congregants, and baptismal and marriage rites in Spanish.
- Renewed the parish's liturgical life at the vestry's invitation, introducing prayers from across the Anglican Communion alongside the 1979 Book of Common Prayer with the Bishop's permission — A New Zealand Prayer Book, the Iona Book of Worship, the Church of England's Common Worship — together with alternative liturgies for spiritual seekers and a Taizé-style Ash Wednesday rite.
- Founded the Sophia Circle (2022), a monthly prayer service of chanting, silence, and shared reading centered on Christ as divine Sophia and on the Blessed Virgin, established at the request of parishioners seeking feminine symbols of the divine and led largely by young adults.
- Instituted a six-minister rota for both Sunday services — two lectors, an usher, two Eucharistic ministers, a healing minister — with training, as a deliberate broadening of lay liturgical participation (2023).

Formation, Teaching & Retreats

- Founder and teacher of the parish's weekly adult theological formation program (2014–present) — Lectio Divina, Spiritual Book Club, Centering Prayer, and an interreligious chanting group — regularly drawing fifteen to twenty participants, many with no other church affiliation.
- Courses and series taught include a twelve-week Introduction to Islam (2015; fifty at the opening session, some thirty sustained to the end), the apocryphal gospels and the Nicene Creed, Cynthia Bourgeault on Mary Magdalene, Marcus Borg, and Richard Rohr.
- Ongoing parish retreat ministry: an all-day retreat on the Eastern Orthodox Hesychast tradition and the Jesus Prayer (2024); an All Souls retreat on the afterlife and prayers for the dead (2024); two Praying with Beads retreats (2016, 2017); a Contemplative Photography retreat (2018); a retreat and sustained study on racism and white supremacy (2020); seasonal Quiet Days, Holy Hikes, and labyrinth workshops.
- Led a 2025–2026 inquirers' cohort of eleven adults preparing for confirmation, reception, or reaffirmation; seven were received into the Episcopal Church at Cathedral Day in 2026, with two continuing preparation for 2027. Earlier cohorts include seven inquirers taught entirely by Zoom during the pandemic, three of whom were baptized in September 2020, and a group of five received in 2016.
- Co-founded the EKids children's program (2024), Movies at Emmanuel (2023), and a scheduled pastoral and spiritual-direction appointment system that measurably increased one-to-one pastoral contact with parishioners and non-parishioners alike (2024).

Justice, Community & Ecumenical Partnership

- Led Emmanuel's designation and practice as a Sanctuary Church, voted by the whole parish in special meeting on 2 April 2017 and formalized in 2025; founded the Immigration Solidarity Group of Orcas Island, organizing legal clinics, Know-Your-Rights and ICE-response trainings, immigrant-rights allies meetings drawing 80+ attendees, and an ongoing Rapid Response Team coordinated with WAISN.org.
- Initiated and co-founded the Orcas Island Severe Weather Shelter (2015), an ecumenical partnership with the Community Church and the Roman Catholic parish providing overnight shelter for unhoused islanders through the winter months.
- Drafted and secured vestry adoption of the parish's public welcoming statement (2017), naming specifically those excluded by other religious communities and resulting in the parish's listing on LGBTQ-affirming directories; partnered with Safe San Juans on a transgender documentary screening and community conversation, and hosted Orcas Pride in the parish hall on Inauguration Day 2025.
- Organized immigration-law orientation for the island's Latino community (January 2017; seventy attending over three hours), and served the public schools' English Language Learners program as interpreter for parents and translator of school documents.

- Sustained partnership with the Samish Indian Nation's cultural department from 2014, hosting a Samish speaker on the Canoe Journey and participating in a Canoe Journey; invited in 2025 as one of the religious leaders of Orcas Allies, a year-long Indigenous relations cohort formed in coordination with Northwest Indian College, meeting monthly with three weekend retreats through December 2026.
- Hosts at Emmanuel ongoing interfaith and ecumenical programming, including a weekly Zen meditation group, Quaker (Friends), Unitarian Universalists, Lutherans, meeting in the parish facilities, and free use of parish facilities by more than a dozen island nonprofits.

2022	Sabbatical — three and a half months: two months of monastic silence and prayer, followed by time with family in Puerto Rico and reconnection with the Redemptorist community
2013–2014	Sabbatical
2009–2013	The Church of the Intercession, New York, NY — Priest-in-Charge; also taught photography classes to teens in Harlem
2006–2009	Harlem United AIDS Community Center, New York, NY — Mental Health Support Group Facilitator; Case Manager/Counselor, El Faro Adult Day Health Care Center; Program Coordinator, HIV Prevention Division
2005–2010	The General Theological Seminary, New York, NY — Field Education Director; Adjunct Professor of Pastoral Theology; Interim Director and Administrative Assistant, Hispanic/Latino Program in Theology
2005–2006	Holy Redeemer Parish, East Village, New York, NY — Priest in Residence
2002–2005	Redemptorist Missionaries, Province of San Juan, Puerto Rico — First Consultant, Provincial Council; Secretary, Board of Directors; Member, Provincial Chapter
2002–2005	Redemptorist Mission Church of Saints Peter and Paul, Guayama, PR — Church Planter/Vicar; Chaplain of two Catholic schools
1999–2002	Redemptorist Parish Missions Team, Fajardo, Puerto Rico — Director
1997–1999	Hermanas Mercedarias de la Caridad, Madrid, Spain — Chaplain to the Mercedarian nuns, Colegio Nuestra Señora de la Merced
1996–1997	Chilean Outreach Program, Brussels, Belgium — Chaplain to the Chilean community of Brussels, Antwerp, and Ghent
1991–1996	Parroquia Santa Lucía, Las Matas de Farfán, Dominican Republic — Transitional Deacon, then Assistant Priest; Director of the Diocesan Christian Education Department; Superior of the Religious Community
1987–1991	Parroquia San Rafael, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic — seminarian pastoral experience, including residence in the neighborhoods of Las Cañitas and Quita Sueño, living out what Liberation Theology calls <i>inserción en medios populares</i> : relocating among the poor to share as fully as possible in their daily life and struggle

SELECTED TEACHING & RETREAT APPOINTMENTS

2018, 2021, 2023	Visiting Professor, Seminario Episcopal Anglicano de El Salvador — three semesters: Pauline Writings and Universal Letters (2018); Introduction to the Synoptic Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles (2021); Christology (2023)
2005–2010	The General Theological Seminary, New York, NY — Adjunct Professor of Pastoral Theology; Field Education Director; Interim Director, Hispanic/Latino Program in Theology
2018, 2019	Retreat Leader, San Francisco Theological Seminary — two five-day intensive retreats on spiritual direction and contemplative listening, co-led with the Rev. Hugh M. Grant; participants across Christian denominations, a rabbi, and people of no religious affiliation
2025	Co-Leader, Buddhist–Christian Relations — a six-session workshop with Susan Shannon, chaplain and Buddhist teacher, opening to more than sixty participants and sustaining

	attendance in the high forties; followed in 2026 by the day-long retreat "Maps of the Spiritual Journey in the Christian and Buddhist Traditions"
2020	Facilitator, Diocese of Olympia — three-evening online workshop on Contemplative Prayer, offered during the pandemic
2017	Retreat Leader, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Sequim, WA — Contemplative Photography retreat, co-led with the Rev. Kate Kinney
2018, 2025	Pilgrimage Leader — a ten-day pilgrimage with twenty-two participants to the shrines of Mary Magdalene in the south of France (2018); a pilgrimage to sites in Portugal and Spain (2025)
1991–2005	Spiritual Director to Redemptorist seminarians , Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION & CONTEMPLATIVE FORMATION

- Listed Spiritual Director / Companion, Spiritual Directors International directory (2025–present).
- Spiritual director to seminarians of the Dioceses of Chicago, Southeast Florida, and California; spiritual director to Redemptorist seminarians in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico (1992–2026).
- Sponsoring Priest to a seminarian of Friday Harbor, Diocese of Olympia, at the request of the Canon to the Ordinary; continues to offer preaching opportunities and pulpit coverage.
- Established a scheduled appointment system for pastoral and spiritual-direction meetings at Emmanuel (2024), open to parishioners and to members of the wider island community.

Formation as a spiritual director:

- Licentiate in Sacred Theology (S.T.L.) in Practical Theology, Pontificia Universidad de Salamanca (1999).
- A lifetime of having been accompanied by spiritual directors; nine years of Jungian analysis.
- The Ignatian Spiritual Exercises: a directed month-long silent retreat with a Jesuit director (2004) and two directed eight-day retreats.
- Two sabbaticals given to contemplative deepening: a year in 2013–2014, including Miksang contemplative photography training and a queer-specific vision fast; and three and a half months in 2022, the first sabbatical of thirty years of priesthood, including two months of monastic silence and prayer.

COMMUNITY, ECUMENICAL & BOARD LEADERSHIP

2016–2022	Board Member, Orcas Island Community Foundation , including service on its grants committee and on its COVID response team
2020–2022	Board Member, Orcas Island Food Bank
2014– present	Member, Orcas Council of Churches — the island's ecumenical body of Unitarian Universalist, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Episcopal, and Community Church clergy
2018	Invited Participant, Key Leaders group , Orcas Island youth prevention programs
2014–2018	Co-lead Our Whole Lives program (OWL) a 26-week sex education program for island youth and adults; continues to be invited for panels on sexual orientation.
2025–2026	Participant, Orcas Allies — Indigenous relations cohort in coordination with Northwest Indian College

ACADEMIC DEGREES

1997–1999	Licenciado en Teología, especialidad en Teología Práctica — Sacrae Theologiae Licentiatum (S.T.L.), Pontificia Universidad de Salamanca, Madrid, Spain
1997	Licenciado en Estudios Eclesiásticos — Sacrae Theologiae Baccalaureus (S.T.B.), Pontificia Universidad de Salamanca, Madrid, Spain
2005–2006	Diploma in Anglican Studies — The General Theological Seminary, New York, NY

- 1996–1997 **Diplôme de Catéchèse et Pastorale** — L'Institut International Lumen Vitae, Brussels, Belgium
- 1987–1991 **Licenciatura en Ciencias Religiosas** — Seminario Santo Tomás de Aquino, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic
- 1983–1987 **Bachelor of Arts, Philosophy** (minor, Social Work) — Universidad Central de Bayamón, Puerto Rico

Note: The Licenciatura en Ciencias Religiosas (Santo Domingo) was a four-year, pastorally oriented theological formation, equivalent to an M.Div. The S.T.B. and S.T.L., pontifical (Roman Catholic) degrees, uncommon in Protestant institutions, represent a separate, more academic canonical track pursued afterward at Salamanca. The S.T.B., a five-year graduate program, was conferred after a written and oral qualifying examination on 39 areas of theology, since Salamanca did not recognize the Dominican Republic licentiate for direct S.T.L. entry. The S.T.L., the second of three canonical tiers before the S.T.D., required two further years of coursework and an original thesis; it is comparable to doctoral coursework, though not itself a doctorate, and is required for teaching theology in a Catholic major seminary.

SELECTED PROFESSIONAL & SPIRITUAL FORMATION

- 2015 **College for Congregational Development**, Diocese of Olympia — week-long intensive in congregational development, community facilitation, and town-hall process
- 2014 **Our Whole Lives (OWL) Facilitator Certification** (Middle School, High School, Adults), Unitarian Universalist Association / United Church of Christ. Led courses 2014–2018, including a 26-week program for island youth; continues to be invited for panels on sexual orientation.
- 2011–2017 **Contemplative Photography Training** — PhotoManhattan, New York (two introductory courses, 2011); International Center of Photography, New York (two courses, 2012); a week-long retreat at the Centre Shambhala Dechen Chöling, Saint-Yrieix-sous-Aixe, France, with Hélène Vink (2012); "Miksang Contemplative Photography," two courses, Boulder, CO, with Michael Wood and Julie DuBose (2013); "Vision Quest Photo Workshop in the Badlands and Black Hills of South Dakota" with Douglas Beasley (2013); "The Art of Seeing and Creating" with Bruce Barnbaum (2016); "The Spirit of the Middle Kingdom," a two-week workshop in Yunnan Province, China, with Douglas Beasley (2017)
- 2011–2014 **Wilderness Rites of Passage** — Vision quest with Animas Valley Institute, Mystery Canyon, Canyonlands, Utah (2011); queer-specific vision fast with the School of Lost Borders, Dragonback Springs Ranch, Saguache, CO (2014)
- 1985–1991 **Redemptorist Religious Formation** — novitiate year 1985–1986; temporary vows professed 1986; final vows professed 1991
- 1996, 1998 **Language Institutes** — Alliance Française, Lyon, France: four months (200 hours) of intensive French (1996); Alpha Sprach Institut, Vienna, Austria: two months (160 hours) of intensive German (1998)

LANGUAGES

English, Spanish, and French — fluent, and comfortable using academic and pastoral resources in all three. Italian and Portuguese — reading fluency. German — working knowledge. One year each of Latin and Greek in seminary.