



Rekindling our Relationship with the Lutheran Church in Costa Rica

It's been 6 years since we as a synod visited the Lutheran Church in Costa Rica, (ILCO) which is our companion. They have experienced a lot of turmoil, with multiple leadership changes and internal conflicts which has made it difficult to receive visitors. But their recently elected leadership, Pastor Carlos

Bonilla(Pastor Presidente) and Pastor Erick Umaña (General Secretary) have been working with other newly elected leaders to regain their footing.

ILCO was founded the same year as the ELCA — 1988 — and they have been our companion synod for many years. We share in this relationship along with the North Carolina Synod. ILCO is a small but mighty church, committed to the radically inclusive gospel of Jesus, and standing up for those who are marginalized — migrants, indigenous persons, women, and LGBTQIA+ persons. They are a prophetic witness for justice and inclusion in what is largely a Catholic and Pentecostal population.

Our synod has sent many delegations over the years, and has worked with ILCO on a number of projects, including Centro Manu – an outdoor camp. We provided them with a missionary (Pastor Rosemarie Doucette) for one year.

From August 21-27 Pastor Phil Tonnesen from the NC synod, Pastor Judith Spindt and I traveled to and around Costa Rica, visiting various communities of faith and outreach. We built relationships with the new leaders, some of whom had been around when the church was founded but had not been involved for many years. We were supported by Pastor Mike Busbey, who is the in-country ELCA representative.

Quitirrisi - an indigenous community that teaches the faith as well as cultural heritage

Alejualita – Hermanas & Hermanos de Jesus faith community -- where the women celebrate Noche de Te regularly and they have been active in supporting and equipping young people

La Carpio – the site of the children's center Casa Abierta in an impoverished community in San Jose.



Sarapiquí – There are 2 communities of faith in the midst of banana and pineapple plantations – Chilimate and El Jardin.

San Jose – San Pedro and San Pablo, at the site of the ILCO offices as well as the diversity community.

They also have a shelter for migrants at the ILCO offices which houses up to 40-50 people a night for up to 4 nights which is the current limit according to Costa Rican law.



Because of their challenges over the last few years, a lot of their funding sources dried up. They are working to rebuild trust with their partners and encourage new ventures of mission and service. They have also lost a number of faith community staff. This presents a challenge to raise up new Word and Sacrament leaders.

We have agreed to be in regular contact with one another, to pray for one another and to seek out joint projects such as the possibility of doing Camp Hope in Costa Rica. We will be restarting our Companion Synod team to support these efforts. If you would like to know more, please feel free to contact Bishop Sue or Pastor Judith Spindt (jspindt@outlook.com)