

Claiming our Gifts

RE•FORMATION FOR THE SAKE OF MINISTRY AND WITNESS

Our particular way of participating in Christ's Church as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is rooted in distinctive gifts visible in our **theology • practice • ecclesiology • legacy**. Claiming these gifts helps us recognize how God uses our distinctiveness to form and re-form us for partnership in ministry and witness.

The gift of our ELCA **theology** includes an emphasis on:

- Grace – *God's unconditional love for all, without exception*
- Paradox – *Life as God's both/and people in an either/or world*
- Cross – *Discovering how Jesus meets us in the margins of life and the world*

The gift of our ELCA **practice** includes an emphasis on:

- Word and Sacrament
We experience God's grace through the living Word, the promises of Baptism, and Christ's presence in a meal of forgiveness and life.
- Service to the neighbor
Our experience of God's grace leads us into the world in service where:
 - we actively witness to God's justice and peace as a public church;*
 - we equip ourselves through ministries of Word and Service.*
- Ministry of the Baptized
We carry out ministry in our daily lives and vocations.
- Lifelong Faith Formation
Our journey of faith and growth continues from birth to death.

The gift of our ELCA **ecclesiology** means that we understand church to be:

- GLOCAL (global + local):
Our local witness is always informed by our global relationships
- Ecumenical:
We find fullness in relationship with other churches even as we partner with other religions and communities for the sake of the world
- Interdependent:
Our threefold ELCA expression as congregations, synods, and churchwide ministries

Our ELCA **legacy** provides us with gifts from which to engage in God's mission:

- As heirs of the Lutheran reformation:
we are called to be a catalyst for the Spirit's continuing work of reform.
- As a church shaped by an immigrant history:
we are committed to ministry with refugees and immigrants even as we "decolonize Lutheranism" to expand our self-understanding and welcome
- As a church formed by mergers:
we are drawn together by what we share, not what divides.

Christ's Church, Better Together



Rainbow Trail Lutheran Camp South:

A dream in the making

Connecting in Ministry & Witness

It was a dream for more than two years, but on Sunday, July 16, 2017, Rainbow Trail Lutheran Camp South became a reality.

In the spring of 2015, the leadership of the Border Conference of the Rocky Mountain Synod approached Rainbow Trail Lutheran Camp about the possibility of bringing camp a little closer for the people in southern New Mexico and the El Paso, Texas, region. The Rev. Kristi Koppel and Deacon Laura Carson, co-deans of the conference, were the driving force behind getting this movement started.

On the Saturday before camp, Rainbow Trail headed south with 10 staff members and a trailer full of recreation equipment, guitars, song sheets and program materials for their week of camp. Dave Jarvis, executive director of Rainbow Trail, was part of the leadership team for the week and handled the behind-the-scenes logistics to ensure that the event ran smoothly.

The staff helped lead worship at two congregations in Alamogordo, N.M., before heading to Aspendale Mountain Retreat Center, a Baptist encampment in Cloudcroft, N.M.

Upon arriving at the site, the Rainbow Trail staff unloaded the trailer and walked the site to make it their own. They named areas that were familiar from their site up north, such as the Fircle (the fire circle), and made up names for new areas, such as the Gratch (the gravel patch).

At 3 p.m., the first junior- and senior-high campers arrived and the week began.

Campers participated in numerous activities, including hiking, daily Bible study, leading worship, doing archery, participating in both low and high ropes, playing gaga ball and 9 square in the air, and creating arts and crafts. The power of the week, however, was the relationships that formed between campers and staff, as well as with the 11 pastors and adult leaders who attended camp with their kids.

Since everything was new, everything that was done established a new tradition. At closing worship on Friday morning, Rainbow Trail staff talked about how these campers had been risk-takers and were willing to take a chance for all of those youth who will come behind them.

The campers came from all over the Border Conference region. The group included campers from Lutheran and Presbyterian congregations from El Paso, and congregations from Las Cruces, Hobbs, Alamogordo and Albuquerque, N.M. New

relationships were built between congregations that came from the same town. Friendships were formed between youth groups that promised to get together after camp.

There is already talk of Rainbow Trail Lutheran Camp South 2018. This week was the start of a tradition that is expected to continue for a very long time. Special thanks to Koppel and Carson for their bigger vision of camping ministry in the Border Conference, and for never giving up on that dream. **L**



Campers, adult leaders and camp staff of Rainbow Trail South.

Educate, Equip, Enact

By the Rev. Janice Kibler



It's stewardship season! While that's the cry in many churches, the 16 congregations in the Rocky Mountain Synod that are engaged with Stewardship for All Seasons view this time of year differently. For them, it's the season of yet another phase in claiming who they are as the church, and inviting people to participate in what God is doing through them.

Two of those congregations are Lutheran Church of Hope in Broomfield and Lord of the Hills in Centennial, both Colorado.

As the congregation of Lord of the Hills was doing their work of naming their part of God's mission (well before the fall campaign), a generous member approached the Rev. Margot Wright and asked for guidance in the most effective use of a \$10,000 gift they intended to be given in addition to the regular contributions. Consulting with Evan Moilan, who leads the synod's Stewardship for All Seasons program, they decided to make it an incentive/match gift for the fall campaign. Their goal is to have 20 additional households pledging in 2017, and they know this original gift will help make that possible, as generosity invites others into generosity. Stewardship for All Seasons is helping them speak freely about faith, finances and generous lives.

About two weeks before Hope's "Commitment Sunday" in the spring, brochures, inserts and "Motion Moments" were shared and distributed. In response, the Rev. Scott McAnally received a

text from a third-generation family. The young dad had grown up at Hope, and he and his wife had become more engaged in the congregation's ministries in recent years. Struggling with the whole money and church thing, and specifically the "Hope in Motion" campaign that was part of Stewardship for All Seasons, this man had something happen to him during worship that caused a change of heart. He texted: "If the church isn't asking for money, someone else will."

He and his wife talked all that Sunday afternoon about their giving, specifically to the place and community they love and trust, and a place and ministry they believe in. With a changed heart, and recognizing all of their giving choices, they decided the church should be their priority and their joy to give to.

Stewardship for All Seasons helps congregations talk about priorities, generosity and funding God's mission throughout the year. While the results that are reported at congregational meetings include the number of households giving and amounts given, the larger impact is on lives changed.

We anticipate that 25 congregations will begin the Stewardship for All Seasons program in May 2018, with generous scholarships available through Educate, Equip, Enact to make it possible. If you are ready to talk more openly about faith and finances in your congregation and would like to be part of the next "class" of participants, contact me, the Rev. Janice Kibler, at jkibler@rmselca.org.

Considering all that God has trusted to our hands, this is stewardship season, along with every month of the year. **L**



Educate, Equip, Enact
Lilly Grant Initiative

Janice Kibler is the 3E project director.

Sowing seeds

By Nicole Garcia

Accompanying
one another into
God's Future

This story begins in prison. I had the privilege of preaching at New Beginnings Worshiping Community where I met the Rev. David O'Rourke, a deacon at St. Aidan's Episcopal Church and a chaplain at the Denver Women's Correctional Facility. That evening, O'Rourke and I chatted and discovered our mutual desire to have our respective denominations participate in Denver PrideFest. We decided to combine our efforts.

Our presence received an overwhelmingly positive response. Many people stopped by to say they were so glad to see churches there. Others engaged us in long conversations about the congregations they were raised in and the many reasons why they no longer attend church. A few told heartbreaking stories about being told they were no longer welcome because of who they loved or how they presented their gender. These were opportunities to care for people who needed to hear that they are beautiful children of God.

This reminds me of the parable of the sower: we are called to proclaim the word wherever and whenever we can. It doesn't matter if we think the soil is rocky or good—we must sow the word. I am positive our Lutheran and Episcopal presence made a positive and lasting impression on hundreds of people. A few people told me they



Epiphany and St. Paul joined together for a PrideFest witness in Denver.



Lutherans and Episcopalians gather at Denver PrideFest.

attended a church, but most said they “used to go to church.” If one person was moved to pick up their Bible, or if they were motivated to step inside a church once again, we did what we are called to do—we sowed seeds. It's up to the Spirit to help those seeds blossom and bloom.

Gratitude and hope

Epiphany Lutheran, St. Paul Lutheran and Catholic Community of Faith partnered together in Denver PrideFest this summer. Ron Rinkle, a member of Epiphany, shares these words of gratitude for his congregation's witness:

“On behalf of Leo, I wanted to thank all of you for extending a hand of hope through your presence at the PrideFest this year. For Leo and I, it was uplifting. One woman commented: ‘Given the situation in the world today, I need to find a place of rest and hope.’ From my own experience in this subculture and being deeply anchored in a kind of cynicism and isolation, there is indeed pride, but below the surface, there is a tremendous need for hope. The gay and lesbian community is not unique in their need for hope, but it is powerfully present. We see it most clearly in our older gay friends who too often (as a holdover from an earlier set of life experiences) are lonely, without meaningful community. The Christian message is uniquely able to resonate here. We share that message and, with the help of the Spirit, maybe we are also planting some seeds for the further entrance of grace between the cracks.” ✠

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