

Campus ministry: On the shores of Lake Atitlan

By the Rev. Zach Parris

There's one in every group. This year it was Connor.

Lutheran Campus Ministry at the University of Colorado, Boulder, took college students and local Lutheran congregants to San Lucas Toliman, a Roman Catholic mission on the shores of Lake Atitlan in the Guatemalan highlands. Every evening before bed the students gathered to process the events of the day. There is always one. Long after everyone is ready for bed, one student will keep talking, keep asking questions. This year it was Connor.

Connor was a finance major and so the San Lucas Mission offered him rich soil in which to grow his faith and understanding of the church's work. While we do some service learning, this is primarily a trip to learn about what this community knows about being the people of God. Perhaps the mission's most iconic work is in the area of coffee production.

In the 60s there was only one buyer for the coffee that was grown by the people of the small village. Then the mission began developing the direct trade production of coffee. It began buying locals' coffee beans, processing and roasting them, before selling the finished product directly to U.S. consumers.

Today you can buy Juan Ana Coffee directly from the mission on their website. The increased competition for coffee beans more than tripled, not just for those who sold their beans to the mission, but the previous buyer was moved by market forces to increase what they paid. Every night Connor dove deeply into these issues. What was the overhead cost? How many buyers are there now? What does the coffee market look like today?

Connor was a senior. Graduation loomed in just a few weeks after our return to Boulder. He had a nice job lined up in high finance. But there was something about this trip. There was something about this immersive experience that expanded his vision of what the church and the gospel might look like, not just in a small village in Guatemala but in our community in Boulder and in the larger world.



Students at the University of Colorado, Boulder, were immersed in faith and life at the San Lucas Mission in Guatemala.

In the end, Connor turned down that job and with a friend started a small business based in Denver called ShareBrands. It's set up with the principles of conscious capitalism in mind. Twenty-five percent of the purchase cost goes to a nonprofit with which ShareBrands has a relationship. The catch is that the consumer gets to choose. At checkout you choose whether to donate to a nonprofit that focuses on the environment, poverty, children's health, education or women's issues.

There's nothing inherently wrong with working in high finance. One student deciding to seek the Spirit's calling in the world of business isn't that big of a deal. Unless it is. Who knows where God will lead Connor in the future? Who knows how successful ShareBrands will end up being?

What makes me particularly hopeful is that the world is now gifted with an incredibly talented and passionate business person who understands his work as a response to and a part of the life God gives to us. That, I think, is an awfully big deal. For Connor and for the world. ¶

Zach Parris is the campus pastor for Lutheran Campus Ministry, University of Colorado, Boulder.

Serving our neighbors through advocacy

By Ruth Hoffman



A "Raise the Wage" rally took place at the Colorado State Capitol last spring in support of fair wage bills being presented to the House.

In faithfulness to its calling, this church is committed to defend human dignity, to stand with poor and powerless people, to advocate for justice, to work for peace, and to care for the earth in the processes and structures of contemporary society (ELCA social statement: "The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective").

On the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, the Lutheran communion seeks to claim the church's public engagement as a vital element of what it means to be Lutheran. Public engagement is the church's ongoing response to the freedom that is ours in Christ to love and serve the neighbor. The Reformation clearly expressed that this freedom emerges from the salvation by grace through faith (Lutheran World Federation, "The Church in the Public Space").

Advocacy, as defined in the dictionary, is "to speak or plead on behalf of another." Lutherans understand advocacy, quite simply, as a way to love the neighbor and to do justice in society.

Motivated by God's love for us, advocacy seeks to express God's special concern for people living in poverty, for those who are neglected and vulnerable, by helping shape the public policies

that define how we live together in God's world. It is activity done for the well-being of others and particularly with those whose voice is not often heard in places of power.

Advocacy is an essential part of the church's call to serve our neighbors living in poverty and experiencing hunger, care for God's creation, and strive for justice and peace in our world. Advocacy is a practice that reaches back to Israel's calling, Jesus' ministry and the witness of the early church. Through faithful advocacy the ELCA lives out our Lutheran belief that governments can help advance the common good.

Advocacy goes beyond the vital gifts of charity, like clothing, food, time and money, by encouraging the adoption of public policies that serve justice. Advocacy can involve several elements:

Prayer. Include petitions in your personal and congregational prayers that center on community, society, our government at all levels, our neighbors living in poverty and experiencing hunger, and on justice, peace and God's creation.

Study and learning. Organize opportunities to learn about and discuss the issues in your community and the world. Every community has resource people who are eager to speak with your group. Encourage those affected by problems to share their stories. Study the ELCA social statements and social messages that guide the advocacy work of our church. Attend events offered by Lutheran Advocacy Ministry—New Mexico and Lutheran Advocacy Ministry—Colorado.

Discernment and planning. Discern how you/we, our congregations and our synod are being called to serve our neighbors. How shall I/we respond? With whom may I/we work? What resources do I/we have or need?

Signs of vital, healthy congregations

Action:

Write. Respond to action alerts from Lutheran Advocacy Ministry—New Mexico, Lutheran Advocacy Ministry—Colorado or ELCA Advocacy. Write “letters to the editor” to your local newspaper.

Call. Telephone your state legislators, federal senators and representatives, the president, your governor, your local public officials.

Meet. Attend town halls and other meetings with public officials; make an appointment to speak with public officials or their staff.

Speak out. Lutherans are “theological heirs of a parish pastor (Martin Luther) who wrote over one thousand letters to civil authorities, including letters regarding their public policies. He admonished preachers to preach against economic injustice and against public policies that thwarted the well-being of the poor” (Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, *Public Church For the Life of the World*; Augsburg Fortress, 2004).

Learn more about Lutheran Advocacy Ministry—New Mexico and Lutheran Advocacy Ministry—Colorado and join our advocacy networks by going to rmselca.org/advocacy. Join the ELCA Advocacy Network at elca.org/advocacy. 

Ruth Hoffman is the director of Lutheran Advocacy Ministry—New Mexico.

Vital congregations exude a certain vibrancy, a welcoming manner and a tangible sense of God’s presence. There is a strong sense of purpose. Followers of Jesus in these communities support each other by nurturing one another in the faith and helping each other identify their spiritual gifts. They feel called to use their gifts in the congregation and in the world. Disagreements are handled in a respectful manner, ultimately strengthening the congregation.

Vital congregations understand that God’s mission goes beyond their walls. They intentionally connect with the wider Christian community and within their local context to share the good news in word and deed by striving to be God’s hands in the world.

Vital congregations know that relationships are at the church’s heart. They intentionally strengthen our connections and relationships with God, with one another and within their context—sharing God’s love for the sake of the world.

Key, interrelated components of congregational renewal focus on God’s presence, mission and purpose, leadership, relationships, attitudes and culture, context, resources, governance and administration, and programs.

There are many processes and tools to promote and facilitate congregational renewal (see page D), including the Comprehensive Ministry Review (CMR) and Congregational Redevelopment. Contact Judith VanOsdol at jvanosdol@rmselca.org for information. 

Submitted by Judith VanOsdol, director for evangelical mission, Rocky Mountain Synod.

Upcoming synod advocacy events

Lutheran Advocacy Ministry—NM Bishop’s Legislative Luncheon
Jan. 31, 2017 • Santa Fe, N.M.

Colorado Faith Advocacy Day
DATE TO come • Denver

Ministry spotlight:

Utah congregation is transformed in redevelopment

By Christine Higuera-Street



The Rev. Christine Higuera-Street describes God's care for us like a parent's love for their child during the children's message at St. Matthew Lutheran Church, Taylorsville, Utah.

One year ago, St. Matthew's Lutheran Church in Taylorsville, Utah, began a journey of transformation through redevelopment. There have been the expected bumps in the road, but there have also been some amazing surprises along the way. The Comprehensive Ministry Review (CMR) was one of those blessings in disguise.

While the CMR uplifted the congregation's achievements and strengths, it also made recommendations that pointed out areas that needed work in the congregation. The CMR provided an initial road map for me, as the redeveloper pastor, to identify where the recommendations intersect with overarching goals for a healthy congregation.

The Rev. Judith VanOsdol, the Rocky Mountain Synod's director for evangelical mission, said, "Some of these are going to be adaptive change

and some are going to be technical." In other words, some will be easy—others, not so much.

The redevelopment team was formed and at each meeting we studied the story of Nehemiah's rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall. Prayer, study and discernment are slow processes. At the same time the congregation council was doing the same using Dave Daubert's book *Living Lutheran: Renewing your Congregation* (Fortress Press, 2007).

In February the redevelopment team began work to discover why people stayed even after St. Matthew's rocky past. There was an overwhelming sense of belonging, being reminded of whose we are with a place to call home as God's children.

We had our first "open space" conversation with the congregation to invite them to self-select what they are passionate about and where they are willing to work as part of our redevelopment strategy. The participants, not the team, drove the agenda, and the Spirit moved people's hearts that Sunday afternoon. We now have newly reshaped ministries that are developing and growing, with more people committed to participating in the life of the congregation.

What a delightful surprise: the people attending were moved into actions that were part of the CMR's original recommendations. No longer is it just a few people but many coming together to do God's work. We still have more to do on this road to redevelopment, but we are reignited with hope over and over through experiencing God's presence in very real and tangible ways! ¶

Christine Higuera-Street is the redevelopment pastor of St. Matthew's Lutheran Church, Taylorsville, Utah.