



We Are Church Together

GOD'S MISSION MEMOS FOR LEADERSHIP DEVOTIONS

NORTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD OF THE ELCA

“God’s Mission Memos” are a collection of 12 devotionals to be used with congregational councils or other leadership groups. The stories being shared are about how God’s work is being done in the world through our mission support giving in our synod and through the ELCA.

Pastors Michael Ware and Brandon Heavener, members of the synod Stewardship and Mission Support Table, suggested that the use of stories with scripture and discussion could provide the church leadership team with more insights into the work of the church. There are current and archived stories that have been incorporated with the scripture and discussion provided by Michael and Brandon.

These stories are used by Mission Interpreters to help congregations understand how their mission support giving is making a difference in the life of others. You can find out more about the Mission Interpretation Ministry and the resources available on the synod website @ <http://nepasynod.org/resourcesmenu/stewardship/mission-interpreters/>, or look for us on our Facebook page "Mission Interpreters of NEPA Synod." If you would like to find out about how your congregation can have a Mission Interpreter, please contact Georgia Suranofsky at georgiasuranofsky@hotmail.com or call her at 610-703-0638.

Thank you to Michael, Brandon and Georgia for their team work to produce this devotional.

Serving as one body in Christ,

The Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod Stewardship and Mission Support Table

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Open Arms Senior Connections



Leader: As in one body we have many members,

Response: So we, who are many, are one body in Christ.

A reading from Isaiah 46:3-4

³Listen to me, O house of Jacob,
all the remnant of the house of Israel,
who have been borne by me from your birth,
carried from the womb;
⁴even to your old age I am he,
even when you turn gray I will carry you.
I have made, and I will bear;
I will carry and will save.

For over 17 years, the Northeastern PA Synod has made grants available through mission support giving, totaling more than a half million dollars. Grant applications are received by the Witness and Service Ministry Team and awarded based on the outreach the funding will accomplish. The story that follows is written by the founders and the current program director of Open Arms Senior Connection. It tells of an inspiring ministry that got it's beginning because of a vision, a need to help others, and grant funds available to make it thrive today.

Over ten years ago a small Welcome and Outreach committee at Arndt's Lutheran Church in Forks Township, PA was looking for another ministry that could use their resources. The congregation came together to modify their existing spaces using funds predominantly from a Transforming Congregations grant and a Witness and Service grant, which are both mission support grant programs and were available through the Synod. Today "Open Arms Senior Connection" continues as a two-day a week program for older adults in the greater Easton, PA community.

Realizing that the time some of them spend with us at Open Arms might be the only times during the week that they enjoy a meal with someone, or have any human contact at all, inspires us to make the program as effective and impactful as possible.

Questions for prayerful discussion:

- In what way(s) does this story exemplify the biblical passage?
- Identify the passion that motivated the people in the story. What passions motivate people in your ministry setting?
- What new idea(s) for ministry in your setting does this story inspire?

L: Let us pray:

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NOTES:

A Broader and Deeper Perspective



Leader: As in one body we have many members,

Response: So we, who are many, are one body in Christ.

A reading from Leviticus 9:33-34

³³When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. ³⁴The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.

Pastor, when he leaves, will you come visit me?

That was what Raheel asked Dione Miller while she was visiting him in jail. A Pakistani exiled in Bangkok for religious reasons, Raheel had been arrested just two days ago and had tears in his eyes. A seminary student at Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, Miller had just started her year-long Horizon internship in the city when her supervisor announced he was leaving.

Until that point, Miller wasn't sure she'd stay either.

Without hesitation she answered him, "Yes, of course

Working with displaced people like Raheel was a highlight of Miller's ministry while she interned with the International Church of Bangkok that year. In Pakistan, Christians like Raheel face persecution because of their religion. Raheel came to Bangkok in search of safety, but because of Thailand's strict laws, he was considered an illegal immigrant rather than a refugee seeking asylum.

That Christmas, Miller came back to visit Raheel. They spent time talking about Christmas traditions and sing-shouting carols to one another across the hall due to the jail's unusual confines. "It was this wonderfully strange, very holy moment," she said. "(I realized) why I'm here; that's why I'm meant to be a pastor."

Today Miller still keeps in touch with Raheel and others she met, many refugees, while participating in the Horizon internship program. Heading into her first call a year later, Miller said she now really appreciates how much she learned from everyone she met in Bangkok. Her biggest takeaway?

“Being able to take a step back and recognize and understand my own faith while respecting and seeking to understand the faith of other people that varies and is different than mine,” Miller said. “It seems very obvious and very important to me now, the value of this experience. My perspective had broadened and deepened at the same time.”

Questions for prayerful discussion:

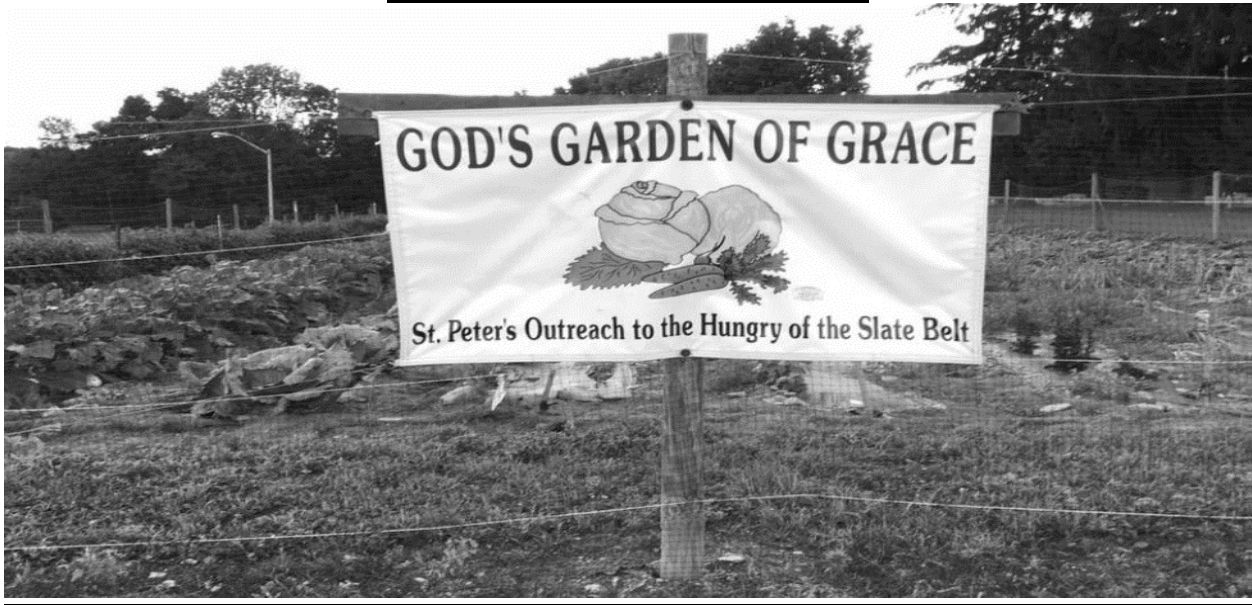
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NOTES:

God's Garden of Grace



Leader: As in one body we have many members,

Response: So we, who are many, are one body in Christ.

A reading from Ruth 2:1-4, 8-20

Now Naomi had a kinsman on her husband's side, a prominent rich man, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. ²And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone in whose sight I may find favor." She said to her, "Go, my daughter." ³So she went. She came and gleaned in the field behind the reapers. As it happened, she came to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech. ⁴Just then Boaz came from Bethlehem. He said to the reapers, "The Lord be with you." They answered, "The Lord bless you."

⁸Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. ⁹Keep your eyes on the field that is being reaped, and follow behind them. I have ordered the young men not to bother you. If you get thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn." ¹⁰Then she fell prostrate, with her face to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?" ¹¹But Boaz answered her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. ¹²May the Lord reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!" ¹³Then she said, "May I continue to find favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, even though I am not one of your servants."

¹⁴At mealtime Boaz said to her, "Come here, and eat some of this bread, and dip your morsel in the sour wine." So she sat beside the reapers, and he heaped up for her some parched grain. She ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over.

¹⁵When she got up to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, “Let her glean even among the standing sheaves, and do not reproach her. ¹⁶You must also pull out some handfuls for her from the bundles, and leave them for her to glean, and do not rebuke her.”

¹⁷So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. ¹⁸She picked it up and came into the town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gleaned. Then she took out and gave her what was left over after she herself had been satisfied. ¹⁹Her mother-in-law said to her, “Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you.” So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said, “The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz.” ²⁰Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, “Blessed be he by the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!”

A third-generation produce farmer in Pennsylvania, James Sandt started as a boy by pitching in on his family’s farm, moved into the management of large corporate farms as an adult, and eventually made the dream of working for himself a reality by purchasing his own farm.

In 2011, Sandt attended a four-day educational event hosted by ELCA World Hunger. Soon after, he was motivated to begin a community garden.

In collaboration with his congregation and its social ministry committee, Sandt began God’s Garden of Grace with a goal of supplying fresh food to their local food banks.

A small venture by Sandt and St. Peter’s Lutheran Church in Plainfield Township, Pa., quickly became a community effort, involving and inspiring other organizations and residents. A contractor supplied them with a 3,000-gallon water tank for irrigation, and the fire department fills it as often as three times a week.

The garden has almost doubled in size since its first harvest. In 2017, it yielded 15,000 pounds of produce. Since the expansion of God’s Garden of Grace, Sandt now also uses his own property to grow crops for food bank distribution. Last year his 120 fruit trees yielded an additional 5,000 pounds of produce, harvested by food stand owners and food bank volunteers.

Over the years Sandt has received requests from other congregations and communities that wanted help starting a garden. Together, six new community gardens have been started in the area.

A venture that was once subsidized solely by St. Peter’s and its members is now entirely funded and supported by the community. “We have become self-sufficient in that we don’t require our own social ministry to support us anymore,” Sandt said. “This garden and this mission only exist because of the great volunteers that help it and make it happen,” Sandt said. “And for that I thank them.”

Questions for prayerful discussion:

- In what way(s) does this story exemplify the biblical passage?
- Identify the passion that motivated the people in the story. What passions motivate people in your ministry setting?
- What is one thing you learned about ministry across the larger church (ELCA, Synodical partnerships) from this story? How might that help influence ministry in your own setting?
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NOTES:

Called and Connected



Leader: As in one body we have many members,

Response: So we, who are many, are one body in Christ.

A reading from 1 Thessalonians 5:12-18

¹²But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labor among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; ¹³esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. ¹⁴And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them. ¹⁵See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. ¹⁶Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray without ceasing, ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Members of St. John Lutheran Church, Dickinson, N.D., cheered when their own Kathi Nygaard was ordained there in 2015, but they weren't the only ones. Present in person or in spirit was a lifelong network of family, friends, mentors, supporters and ministries that helped shepherd Nygaard into ministry.

"The first time somebody said I should be a pastor I was in grade school," recalled Nygaard, who grew up attending worship and Sunday school at Zion Lutheran Church in Noonan, N.D., and was confirmed at Grace Lutheran Church in Wildrose, N.D. It was a comment she heard over and over while participating in other Lutheran activities that deepened her faith.

After college Nygaard took a job as a social worker while involving herself deeply in congregational and synod life in Dickinson. Eventually, God's call to ministry became irresistible. "It just became clearer and clearer that I was being called to equip people to serve," Nygaard said.

But how would she manage the time and financial commitment of seminary? The answer was the distributive learning program at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn., which enabled her to work on a Master of Divinity degree while living and working in Dickinson.

Thanks to the generosity of fellow Lutherans, the ministries that had helped form Nygaard in faith also provided financial assistance.

After graduating from Luther, Nygaard awaited her first call. Meanwhile in western North Dakota, two rural congregations were being guided in the search for a new pastor and would eventually call Nygaard.

Looking back at her journey to pastoral ministry, Nygaard is thankful the support she received. It enabled her to answer, at last, the call that God first put on her in the first place.

“God’s pretty persistent, no matter how many times we let the call go to voicemail,” she said.

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NOTES:

Congregational Care Team



Leader: As in one body we have many members,

Response: So we, who are many, are one body in Christ.

A reading from Psalm 91

- ¹You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
²will say to the Lord, “My refuge and my fortress;
my God, in whom I trust.”
³For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence;
⁴he will cover you with his pinions,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.
⁵You will not fear the terror of the night,
or the arrow that flies by day,
⁶or the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
or the destruction that wastes at noonday.
⁷A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.
⁸You will only look with your eyes
and see the punishment of the wicked.
⁹Because you have made the Lord your refuge,
the Most High your dwelling place,
¹⁰no evil shall befall you,
no scourge come near your tent.
¹¹For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways.
¹²On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.

¹³You will tread on the lion and the adder,
the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.
¹⁴Those who love me, I will deliver;
I will protect those who know my name.
¹⁵When they call to me, I will answer them;
I will be with them in trouble,
I will rescue them and honor them.
¹⁶With long life I will satisfy them,
and show them my salvation.

The purpose of Congregational Care Team (CCT) ministry's advisory committee is to educate pastors and congregations on the value of CCT ministry and to provide training & support for existing & new teams. Our purpose sounds simple! However, the amazing ministry stories coming from the congregational teams are profound! Here is one such story...

Sara, a mother of two, didn't know how she would be able to live if she left her abusive husband. She didn't know if she would live if she stayed with him. It was a challenging time. Friedens Lutheran Oley's Congregational Care Team offered to walk with her through this difficult time. Julie, a member of Friedens' CCT was her primary connection. Julie listened to Sara's fears and frustrations. She offered suggestions when Sara needed them. When life challenges seemed too big to overcome, with permission, Julie took those concerns to the team. Food insecurity became an issue for Sara and the team was able to suggest the Oley Food Pantry. When housing became a challenge, resources were found to provide temporary housing until permanent housing was found. Once housing was found – volunteers were needed for home improvements! Sara is so grateful for the help Friedens' CCT and congregation provided for her and her children. She is looking forward to the day she can help others!

Thanks to the generosity of the Witness and Service team of NEPS Congregational Care Team ministry continues to be possible!

Written by: Kathy Schaffer, Friedens Lutheran-Oley

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NOTES:

Faith in Nature



Leader: As in one body we have many members,
Response: So we, who are many, are one body in Christ.

A reading from Psalm 95:1-7

- 1 O come, let us sing to the LORD;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
- 2 Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
- 3 For the LORD is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.
- 4 In his hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his also.
- 5 The sea is his, for he made it,
and the dry land, which his hands have formed.
- 6 O come, let us worship and bow down,
let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!
- 7 For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.

Visit New Life Lutheran Church in Dripping Springs, Texas, on a Sunday and you'll be greeted by friendly faces as well as three giant, century-old oak trees that frame their worship space—the great outdoors.

Although some might describe New Life's venue as nontraditional, its pastor, Carmen Retzlaff, says this outdoor worshiping community is actually a return to ancient times when everyone worshiped outside. The central Texas climate makes outdoor worship possible nearly year-round, but New Life also has a large event tent and outdoor heaters to use when it's cold or raining.

How did the new congregation land on worshiping outside? In 2010, the ELCA Mission Investment Fund purchased 12 acres of land and was holding it for New Life until members had enough money to erect a building on the site.

After a few years of using a rental property, the congregation decided that they had fallen in love with the land and didn't need to wait to have a building, Retzlaff said.

"I can only credit the Holy Spirit that [our members] were so willing to know that our mission was to reach out to people with the good news of God's love and not to build ourselves a church like the one we came from," Retzlaff said.

Without having to worry about constructing and maintaining a building, the congregation has more energy to focus on outreach, including its regular community-service Sundays, which have found members cleaning up a portion of a highway and pausing for communion at the site to make their work part of the liturgy.

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NOTES:

“I Can” Ministry



Leader: As in one body we have many members,

Response: So we, who are many, are one body in Christ.

A reading from Philippians 4:4-13

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

¹⁰I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. ¹²I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. ¹³I can do all things through him who strengthens me. ¹⁴In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress.

For the past ten years, Historic Trinity Lutheran Church in downtown Reading, PA hosts eight monthly meetings a year for a mental health support group called “I Can”. The group members are adults with cognitive disabilities, addiction, or mental health challenges. For this ministry, Trinity Church partners with the Greater Reading Mental Health Alliance. Some Alliance coordinators attend each meeting. The group has grown from about ten people per month to an average of 70 adults.

“I Can” gatherings are opportunities for social interaction, fellowship and spiritual nourishment. Community Outreach Coordinator, Dee Horst heads a team of volunteers who lead the group’s activities. Members and staff from Trinity and nearby churches lead Bible study, prepare and serve a homemade hot lunch, and call Bingo games. Periodically a representative from local health services, community agencies and job placement firms come to share information.

Connecting members to beneficial nearby services enriches their lives and spreads the benefits of the ministry beyond Trinity's walls.

The "I Can" ministry serves the body, mind and spirit of people with mental health issues, cognitive disabilities, or addiction. Church staff and members volunteer together, united in this holy purpose to minister to those in need and extend love in the name of Jesus. The Holy Spirit has guided us to God's work with our hands in the "I Can" ministry.

Written by: Rachel Gambone and Dee Horst, members Of Trinity Lutheran

Questions for prayerful discussion:

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NOTES:

Open Space, Open Arms



Leader: As in one body we have many members,

Response: So we, who are many, are one body in Christ.

A reading from Romans 15:1-7

1We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.
2Each of us must please our neighbor for the good purpose of building up the neighbor. 3For Christ did not please himself; but, as it is written, ‘The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.’
4For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. 5May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus,
6so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
7Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

There aren’t many ELCA congregations with a graffiti mural covering one side of their building, but that’s just what members of San Juan Bautista, Tucson, Ariz., asked for when they agreed to host a live graffiti art show for Open Space, a new ELCA congregation in Tucson.

“Open Space is a small group, but about half of our members are graffiti artists, and very good ones at that,” said Lars Hammar, Open Space mission developer and pastor of Lord of Grace Lutheran in Tucson.

Open Space started in 2013 and since then members have organized two graffiti shows in partnership with other ELCA congregations in Tucson to spread the word about their ministry.

Citizen Clown, as he is known by his graffiti crew, painted the mural at San Juan Bautista and has become a regular at Open Space, despite his initial reluctance to attend.

“I was never really comfortable in a traditional church setting,” Klown said. “Being a graffiti artist, most of society doesn’t see a difference between us and gang members, so they usually judge us. But after my first night at Open Space, I felt like I was welcomed.”

Open Space members get together for a Bible study on Tuesday nights, and Hammar said they dream of owning a storefront to use as gathering space and as a place to sell art.

“There are guys at Open Space with immense talent, and this church gives them a legitimate place and way to do their art,” Hammar said. “This is a place where they’re told they aren’t pariahs.” All are welcome and cared for there.

Klown said Open Space has become a home for him and he wants to see it grow: “I want Open Space to be a place for people who avoid church because they feel they don’t fit in and give them a chance to re-establish their personal relationship with God.

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NOTES:

Puerto Rico Mission Trip



Leader: As in one body we have many members,

Response: So we, who are many, are one body in Christ.

A reading from Colossians 3:12-17

¹²As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. ¹⁷And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Imagine riding in one of two fifteen passenger vans both navigating a narrow two lane road twisting and winding up into the tropical mountains of central Puerto Rico. The views are spectacular. Palms, giant philodendron, and the fiery flowers of the Flamboyant Royal Poinciana tree grace the roadsides and green mountain walls. Small, compact and humble homes supported by what looks like toothpick legs hug the steep slopes. Our morning journey brings us to the town of Comerío where the streets have yielded to the mountain's natural topography reminding me of the hilly streets of San Francisco.

On June 30, 2019, under the guiding eye of Lutheran Disaster Response working through Lutheran Social Services of Puerto Rico, 25 Lutheran volunteers from 5 Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod churches traveled to Puerto Rico to repair homes damaged by Hurricane Maria.

Divided into four teams, one team repaired a house needing to have the roof power washed and sealed as well as its interior ceiling and walls scraped and painted. This house had stood empty for the past two years and was unlivable in its current state. The family who had lived there pre-Maria were hoping to return to their home as soon as possible.

The father, an Iraqi War veteran, and his wife, a physical fitness instructor, were forced from their home along with their three preschool age children as Maria's flooding rain waters cascaded down the mountainside onto and into their home destroying the roof and claiming all that it contained. The hot, humid conditions of Puerto Rico provided the perfect environment for molds and mildews to thrive making habitation impossible—particularly for their asthmatic two year old.

Thanks be to God and the excellent guidance and organization of Lutheran Social Services of Puerto Rico our team was able to power wash their roof and seal it. We scraped ceilings and painted the interior of their home. Much of their nearly new furniture, now moldy and warped, still awaited removal. All their kitchen appliances had been destroyed.

And yet, because of the hard work of our team and the generous grant from The Witness and Service Team Ministry supported through Mission Support giving to the Synod, our work was accomplished. Through donations of various gift cards from a number of congregations, we were able to purchase the family a new refrigerator. What a joy to see faces of hope as our homeowners came so much closer to reclaiming their home. We truly did use our hands to do God's work!

Questions for prayerful discussion:

- Identify the passion that motivated the people in the story. What passions motivate people in your ministry setting?
- What is one thing you learned about ministry across the larger church (ELCA, Synodical partnerships) from this story? How might that help influence ministry in your own setting?
- How might you share this with others in your ministry setting?

L: Let us pray:

R: Gracious God, we cannot begin to know all the ways we, as your church, respond to the needs of the world. We thank you for the generosity shared from across our church. Give us strength to respond to your call to live out our faith in service to our neighbors, near and far. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

NOTES:

We Sustain Each Other



Leader: As in one body we have many members,

Response: So we, who are many, are one body in Christ.

A reading from Romans 10:13-17

13For, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

14But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? 15And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!' 16But not all have obeyed the good news; for Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our message?' 17So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.

At 109 years old, St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church in Baltimore had deep roots in the community but was in danger of closing. The congregation's unstable situation was akin to many others in southeast Baltimore in 2009, the year Mark Parker, their current pastor, arrived.

Parker said it was their synod's director for evangelical mission that suggested rapidly transforming the congregation by focusing on the surrounding community. This changed St. Paul into what is now known as Breath of God Lutheran Church.

"A congregation in decline in terms of numbers and energy and people has a really hard time reversing that because you need resources in order to do different things," Parker said. "Each year [the newstart funds] gave us room to grow without a sense of scarcity or anxiety it could all fall apart next month because we couldn't pay the bills."

Breath of God is in an area that is rich in diversity.

In order to grow, the congregation began to shift its focus outward to its surrounding neighborhood.

“We do a lot more community outreach than we did in the last 25 years,” said longtime member Joe Burk. “The building is used every day of the week.”

The new direction invigorated current members and began attracting new ones.

“I felt inspired in a way where I haven’t felt before from a church,” said member Jennifer Pruitt.

The change in focus would not have been possible were it not for the funds Breath of God received through Mission Support, according to Parker. At the same time, they contribute between 10 and 12 percent of their annual offerings to Mission Support.

“It’s interesting because we give Mission Support and then we’re getting it back,” he said. “That’s how the church works; we sustain each other.”

Questions for prayerful discussion:

- In what way(s) does this story exemplify the biblical passage?
- Identify the passion that motivated the people in the story. What passions motivate people in your ministry setting?
- What new idea(s) for ministry in your setting does this story inspire?

L: Let us pray:

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NOTES:

Interwoven an Intergenerational Ministry

Leader: As in one body we have many members,

Response: So we, who are many, are one body in Christ.

A reading from I Corinthians 12:4-14, 27-31

⁴Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

¹²For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. ¹⁴Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many.

²⁷Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ²⁸And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. ²⁹Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

Interwoven is an intergenerational ministry that was started in January 2019 with a grant from NEPA synod, for we are deeply grateful for the seed money. Our initial idea came from our confirmands who were not really excited about Sunday morning worship. They wanted to experience God where they experience God, in service. After discussion with them we put a plan together to formulate a plan. We would meet twice a month, because “once wasn’t enough” (their words) to gather around food, fellowship, learning, and service. The structure that we came up with is starting at 5pm with dinner and discussion, introducing a theme for the night, having conversation about the theme, and working on/at the service project. Our service project ranged from fun open houses to play volleyball with anyone who wanted to come, to serving Opportunity House, a local center for those in need of a meal, to “focus bottles” for children in the foster care system. Every time we gathered our youth spent time with not only other youth but other adults from the congregation. As this was “intergenerational” we had numerous people who attended. Some early elementary children and their families, to seniors, who wanted to play volleyball!



One of our youth who attends regularly shared this “What interwoven means to me: Interwoven helps me to maintain bonds with the people that I grew up with. It’s always a safe place where I can be myself. As well as always providing good food for everyone to eat.”

-Fiona H.

An adult who regularly attends stated, “The Interwoven participants have welcomed me (with my service dog) to do community service projects where I feel I can be useful. I’ve learned about the needs of others, some I knew of and others I didn’t realize. I’ve gotten fulfillment being able to Help. The unexpected value to me was my learning through the eyes of the kids. The children are getting to know many ways people connect with others and serve each other as Jesus teaches. Very Real, Serious concerns of our local community, and throughout the world are brought right out in front of the children. It’s extraordinary to see how they get to lend a hand in tackling issues, trying to make a palpable difference. It’s a perfect teaching structure: We eat together, learn about the needs of others then pray together. We then do a project that directly has touched others. It’s as if Jesus were here.” –Kim P.

Interwoven is an amazing group of people, started from the ideas and passion to serve that our youth have. We are still finding new ways to share together. It’s amazing to me, we don’t always have the same people, or same structure, people show up when their passion to serve is struck by the focus for the night. Growing together being interwoven together, sharing God’s grace, to live into engaging others to have a personal relationship with a gracious God.

Written by Pastor Zach Labagh, Lead Pastor Allegheny Evangelical Lutheran Church, Knauers, PA

Questions for prayerful discussion:

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- How might you share this with others in your ministry setting?
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NOTES:

Telling the Story in Jerusalem



Leader: As in one body we have many members,

Response: So we, who are many, are one body in Christ.

A reading from John 15:12-17

12‘This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. 14You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. 16You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. 17I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Years ago Lutheran missionaries were sent to start new churches around the world, and now those churches run their own seminaries and ministries. What, then, is the role of the ELCA missionary today?

Today’s missionaries are doctors, nurses, teachers, educators and community organizers—and the ELCA sends them to work alongside other Lutherans only when an invitation is issued by one of the ELCA’s global companion churches.

“Instead of approaching us for long-term people to help start and grow a church, [our global companions] are asking us to fill more specific technical positions,” said Heidi Torgerson, ELCA director for global service. “Our fractured world needs healing. ELCA missionaries are agents of healing through the work they do.”

Adrainne Gray and her husband, Ben, for example, are missionaries working in technical positions as communicators for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.

Whether they are taking photos, writing stories or preparing press releases, their charge is to connect the English-speaking Lutheran world to the reality of life for Arab Lutherans in Palestine, Jerusalem and Jordan. “The amazing thing is that [in spite of the conflict], our co-workers are joyful, hopeful people,” Adrainne said. “They are living.”

While the majority of ELCA missionaries are in their 20s, early 30s or close to retirement, the Grays are in the middle of their careers and raising their 14- and 11-year-old kids. They came to Jerusalem after Adrainne completed her training as a deaconess in 2015 and was looking for a call.

“We didn’t have this part of the world on our radar at all, but when we saw the opening, we knew immediately that our talents fit its need,” she said. “We wear the term ‘missionary’ proudly—it’s central to the work of the church.”

Questions for prayerful discussion:

- In what way(s) does this story exemplify the biblical passage?
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