



Rocky Mountain

Mexico City immersion:

A 'reverse mission process'

We listened, learned and grew in relationship with those on the margins

The beatitudes are inscribed on the processional door of the Cathedral in Cuernavaca: “*Bienaventurados los que tienen espíritu de pobre . . .*”

The verb, *tienen*, makes all the difference: “Blessed are those *who have* the spirit of the poor.” This was the blessing we received through the Rocky Mountain Synod immersion trip with the Lutheran Center in Mexico City.

We experienced the reality of poverty as we listened, learned and grew in relationship with those on the margins of life. We received God’s blessing as we were caught up in the spirit of the poor who struggle against the systems of poverty and injustice that affect their daily lives.

Our immersion trip included time in Mexico City and Cuernavaca, known as “the city of eternal spring.” Our accommodations were hospitable, simple, clean, safe and set in the beauty of a culture that celebrates life, *con vivir!*

The food was incredible and was well prepared to keep us healthy. The abundance of hospitality overflowed during our overnight home stay with a family in Cuernavaca. The experience was personal and profound and provided a glimpse of the vibrant life of our Mexican neighbors.

The immersion was transformational, a kind of “reverse mission process.” Traditionally we think of mission trips as a way to share *our* resources and solutions to overcome poverty. Here we were on the receiving end, listening to stories from *campesinos* (peasant farmers), families, community leaders and organizations who called us into solidarity with those who struggle.

Kim Erno, program director, challenged us

to think about how our faith calls us to stand in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed. With good humor and incredible faith, he led us through topics of liberation theology, Mexican history, globalization, the U.S. military presence in Latin America, immigration and food sovereignty.

He was our *compadre* and guide who accompanied us on public transportation. During our visit he helped us see the beauty of Mexican life and culture. He was our pastor, opening our eyes to see anew the living Christ through our encounters with those who struggle for justice.

“We do theology from the place where our feet are standing,” he said. “In the North, people talk about eternal life. Here, in Latin America, we just talk about life.” □

Steve Klemz

Klemz is pastor of Zion Lutheran Church, Salt Lake City.



Pastor Steve Klemz, Zion Lutheran Church, Salt Lake City, shares a moment with the grandchildren of his home-stay hosts. The little girl is named America. Her cousin is named Obed.

2009 Mexico City trip is June 9-17

This year’s Rocky Mountain Synod Mexico City trip is set for June 9-17. Come with empty hands but open hearts and minds, ready to receive the hope, gifts and blessing that we share with our Mexican sisters and brothers in Christ. For more information go to www.elca.org/mexico and www.rmselfca.org/globalmission/trips.htm for an application.

'A ministry of service we do with our voices'

Terri McMaster reflects on eight years of advocacy ministry

In the advocacy world, tenure is measured by legislative sessions, and I recently celebrated the completion of my eighth session as director of Lutheran Advocacy Ministry Colorado. I have been fortunate to follow in the footsteps of capable and faithful predecessors, and doubly blessed to count two of them as trusted mentors.

Kay Bengston, our first director, clocked five sessions in the '80s in Colorado, then served out her career in advocacy in our ELCA Washington Office. Betty Boyd tallied eight sessions as our director in the '90s. She continues racking up her session count as an elected official, serving five years in the Colorado House of Representatives and three in the state Senate.

I accepted the call to serve in this role with great joy, and it is with both sadness and joy that I leave for early retirement. Sadness around health issues related to multiple sclerosis, but also joy in looking forward to a more relaxed schedule and the opportunity to follow new passions in play and volunteer ministries.

As a diaconal minister, I was recently invited to submit a "diaconal vignette" for a Lutheran World Federation project. Writing it, I was reminded that advocacy ministry is diaconal by its very nature. It is a ministry of service we do with our voices. We evaluate public policies by the impact they are likely to have on those in greatest need or most marginalized. We speak with them and on their behalf to advocate dignity and justice for all people and responsible care for creation.

At our "Lutheran Day at the Legislature" a couple years ago, one ELCA member was glad to learn we were advocating for a law to prevent foster-



Diaconal minister Terri McMaster addresses the Rocky Mountain Synod Hunger Summit in her final months as director of Lutheran Advocacy Ministry Colorado.

care youth from losing health insurance on their 18th birthdays. She said the issue was deeply personal and she wanted to help. When we asked her to testify before the Health and Human Services Committee, she was somewhat intimidated but said "yes."

The hearing room was hushed as she told the story of her foster son, his mental-health problems and her anguish when, upon turning 18, he lost Medicaid health insurance and access to expensive medications. Without them he became violent and ran away, and she feared he was living on the streets in Denver.

Her powerful testimony put a real face on the problem. Dozens of

Thank you, Terri!

In this season of legislative activity, it is important to remember and say thank you to diaconal minister Terri McMaster. Terri recently retired as director of Lutheran Advocacy Ministry Colorado. She is respected, treasured and missed by all of us and by our many partners in the work of advocacy. Her tireless and effective voice for children and the poor was very effective. We miss her, and we give thanks for her. Thanks, Terri!

And welcome to her successor and protégé, Brad Wood, the new director.

Bishop Allan Bjornberg

Lutherans responded to our e-mail alerts, contacting their legislators to advocate for Senate Bill 002. The bill passed and the governor signed it into law, extending Medicaid coverage for youth exiting foster care to age 21.

Advocacy also serves as a ministry of evangelism, a witness to our theology of grace. In 2006, Lutherans supported a citizens' initiative to increase Colorado's minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$6.85 an hour. It passed.

What I remember most vividly about the minimum-wage campaign are the comments of a stranger at a press conference where we announced that we had gathered enough signatures to put the initiative on the ballot.

At the press conference, I described the ELCA's support as a matter of simple justice. A woman found me in the crowd afterward and clapped my hand in a joyous high-five. "What church did you say you're from?" she asked.

We picked up boxes of signed petitions and joined other advocates to carry them to the Secretary of State's office. As we walked, she spoke with emotion in her voice, saying, "Lutherans, huh? Well, I've been going to church for 20 years and this is the first time I've ever heard anybody from church say a word about caring whether I can feed my kids or put a roof over our heads. All I ever hear about in church is when the world's going to end and who's going to heaven!"

Looking ahead, it is a joy to welcome Brad Wood as our newest director. He brings many gifts for leadership and a deep understanding of poverty issues. I am sure that he will find this ministry both challenging and rewarding. □

Terri McMaster

McMaster, a diaconal minister, is former director of Lutheran Advocacy Ministry Colorado.



Brad Wood (left) was named the new director of Lutheran Advocacy Ministry Colorado. He is pictured at last year's Denver Advocacy Day, preparing to give a tour of the Capitol.

Brad Wood named new director of Lutheran Advocacy Ministry Colorado

The Rocky Mountain Synod is pleased to introduce Brad Wood as the director of Lutheran Advocacy Ministry Colorado. Brad comes most recently from a similar role as the executive director with Hunger for Justice: Interfaith Voices Against Poverty. In both this previous role and in his many years of work at Metro CareRing, a Denver food pantry, Brad has worked on advocacy issues with a faith lens.

Brad has advocated primarily on issues of affordable housing, criminal justice and health care during his years of service. He also worked

directly with outgoing director Terri McMaster over the past two years while he was at Hunger for Justice.

He looks forward to working with Lutheran Advocacy Ministry Colorado and helping to grow the network of churches and individuals called to advocacy ministry.

Brad is a lifelong Lutheran, having attended Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa, before coming to Denver as an Urban Servant Corps volunteer. He is currently a member and serves on the congregational council at Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Denver. □

Bishop's reflection

A word-shaping, life-changing witness



One of the five strategic directions adopted by the churchwide expression of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is articulated this way:

“Claimed, gathered, and sent by God’s grace for the sake of the world, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in and through its churchwide expression will: ... *Step forward as a public church* that witnesses boldly to God’s love for all that God has created” (emphasis mine).

This strategic direction dovetails with one of the goals from the Rocky Mountain Synod’s *Vision, Passion, Action* initiative: “We have a transformed culture around evangelism that says, ‘We have something to share.’”

We do have something to share—namely, the good news of Jesus Christ. And we are sharing it. Most of the congregations in the Rocky Mountain Synod are proclaiming and demonstrating the gospel. I know that because word and sacrament is the center of our Sunday gatherings, because the hungry are fed, and because newcomers are welcomed, baptized, and nurtured.

It may be true that this is often a passive evangelism, but it is gospel proclamation nonetheless. Let’s keep doing it! And let’s talk about how it happens in your congregation and mine,

so that we can do it better and more actively.

To step forward as a public church means being present as gospel-bearers wherever we live and work. Martin Luther would describe that as our baptismal vocation.

I see that in so many ways, from hunger walks to Habitat builds, from youth mission trips to parish nurse visits, from mentoring programs to tutoring ministries. Congregations around the synod are going green, living out their creation stewardship. Many of you are engaged in the public conversation, through political process, both local and national, even international. Add to that the amazing work of the ELCA World Hunger Appeal, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service and Lutheran Family Services.

Being a disciple means living grace-fully, entirely, in every aspect of our daily lives. Receiving life as a gift, seeking Christ in those we meet, and responding in gratitude and hope. We are only a public church as we individually make our faith a determinative and directive part of our living. And then it all adds up to a collective, world-shaping, life-changing witness.

“God is working in each of us for a more faithful future. Every gathering in grace and every ministry has more capacity to reach beyond itself than we know and more capacity for change than we have imagined” (*Vision, Passion, Action Guiding Principles*).

Bishop Allan Bjornberg