

August 2024 Newsletter

Hellen Rios Carrillo and Michael Busbey



Who we are and some brief updates!

BY HELLEN AND MIKE

Rev. Mike (he/him/his) serves as regional representative for Central America and Mexico, and Hellen (she/her/hers) serves as regional representative for the Caribbean and Gender Justice. We are based in Costa Rica but relate to companion churches and theological institutions throughout the region.

Prayer Requests:

We rejoice in prayer for the ordination of Rev. Rafael van Ommeren, of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Suriname, who was ordained on July 28th. May God continue to bless his ministries.

We rejoice in prayer for the recently ordained Pastors of the Salvadorean Lutheran Synod, who were ordained at the beginning of August. May God continue to bless their ministries and the communities where they are called to serve.

Finally, we pray for all students who are returning to the theological institutions in the region for the start of their semesters.



Hellen and Mike with Rev. Renee Splichal Larson, Assistant to the Bishop, South Dakota Synod at the South Dakota Synod Assembly

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Home Assignment 2024!

We want to thank you all for the wonderful in-person visits that we had with you over the last 3 months. It has been a true blessing to be welcomed into your congregations, your communities, and your homes to deepen our relationships. We are back in Costa Rica, energized by the exchange of experiences and stories, the interactions, and amazing hospitality over the last few months. The gospels tell us that the disciples were sent in pairs to preach and teach, and perform miracles – Jesus provides instructions about staying in one place upon arriving and cautions against receiving hostility. During our visits, we preached and taught, we shared about the miracles happening in the Mexico and Central America, the Caribbean and Gender Justice Ministries in Latin America. This is Holy and you are a part of it! What the texts in the gospels don't talk about is what the experiences the disciples gained from these visits; the disciples learned so much from the communities they visited and we imagine that they took these learnings back to Jesus and it impacted Jesus' ministry. Siblings in Christ....we learned so much from you! How your church is worshipping, responding to the needs of your community (both local and Global!), the struggles, the resilience, and above all...your faith. Your faith has been such a gift to us over the last few months; a faith that sustains us in our ministry. We look forward to the exciting future of our relationship with you, and our connections with our companions in Latin America!



Clockwise from top LEFT: Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Granada Hills, CA ; with Pastor Cathy from Bethany Lutheran Church, Crystal Lake, IL; St. Luke's Lutheran Church, Park Ridge, IL; Hellen speaking at the WELCA meeting of Desert Hills Lutheran Church, Green Valley, AZ



Left: With Current and Former members of South Dakota Companion Synod Committee



Right: With Bishop Hutterer (Grand Canyon Synod) and Troy from Desert Hills Lutheran Church



Left: With Pastor Jeff Whillock from Bethlehem Lutheran in Aberdeen, SD



Right: With Pastor Megan Fryling and Bishop Brenda Bos (Southwest CA Synod)



Left: With Pastor Sawyer and Vicar Melinda of St. Mark's in Sioux Falls

Bottom Left: with Spirit of Joy in Sioux Falls, SD

Bottom Right: with Bishop Constanza Hagmaier at the South Dakota Synod Assembly





(Left): Julie, Amextra staff based in Guerrero, MX, sharing how Amextra accompanies indigenous communities through sustainable agriculture and nutrition



(right): Group photo from the event includes all of the current staff from Amextra.

Celebrating 40 years of Amextra

40 years! The Asociación de Transformación Rural y Urbana (Amextra) celebrated their 40th anniversary in July of this year. Founded by a group of seminary students in 1984 with a commitment of living out the gospel's mandate of accompanying people who are most vulnerable in society, Amextra continues with this vision and mission by accompanying four of the most impoverished communities in the entirety of Mexico. From health and education, to sustainable agriculture and beekeeping, to financial management and loans, to nutrition and community organizing, to handicrafts and play centers, Amextra listens to the needs of communities across Mexico empowering the communities to be agents of transformation within their contexts. Providing technical, and sometimes material, support, Amextra walks alongside these communities to identify and respond to needs within their communities.

From what started as a small, dedicated, group of students in 1984, Amextra has evolved to an organization that manages over \$10 million USD annually (\$8 million in the area of communal microloans).

On July 6th, Rev. Mike participated in the celebration of the 40th anniversary of Amextra. This celebration included a remembrance of one of the founders of Amextra who passed away in January 2023, Rev. Dr. Pepe Alcantra (also a Lutheran Professor at the Lutheran Augsburg Seminary in Mexico City), speeches by former executive directors, an interactive center where teams from various states of Mexico shared about their work, and a cake-cutting moment. It was a wonderful rite of celebration for an organization that has been extremely dedicated to the service that God calls us to be a part of. The ELCA has been privileged to accompany Amextra since the creation of the ELCA. Thank you for being a part of this ministry.

Amextra's ministry is supported by your generous giving to ELCA World Hunger!

Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation. Project Management. Financial Accountability. Budgets and Audits. Problem Trees, Objectives, Indicators, Activities, and Outcomes. Local assets, diagnostics, and strategic plans. All of these are pretty specialized and technical terms. All of these are areas that the ELCA requires that our companions be proficient in, in order to receive financial support from the ELCA. A tall order no matter where you are located.

In June 2024, we gathered in Matanzas, Cuba with companions in from Venezuela, Peru, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Brazil, El Salvador, Honduras, and Cuba for a Capacity Building Event focused on these important areas. Why Cuba? Individuals from most of these countries have trouble getting a visa for other countries; in Cuba the churches and Seminario Evangelico de Teologia (SET) are able to request religious visas for all of us to be present. If you can't arrive to us; we, the ELCA, arrive to you. With SET as our hosts, champions in these areas from the Latin America and Caribbean region alongside the ELCA facilitated a three-day workshop. Twenty-five leaders shared their experiences, learned about these processes, in order to better equip their churches with the tools necessary to identify and respond to problems within their local communities and churches.

This is the second event in these areas (the first in Mexico City, June 2023) that we have planned and implemented in our region, strengthening abilities of new, young, and diverse leaders of companion churches and institutions in the region.



(Above): A group of participants, representing, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Cuba, Bolivia, Honduras, and Peru work through the problem tree, one of the tools we use for this training

(Below): a group photo during one of the plenary sessions

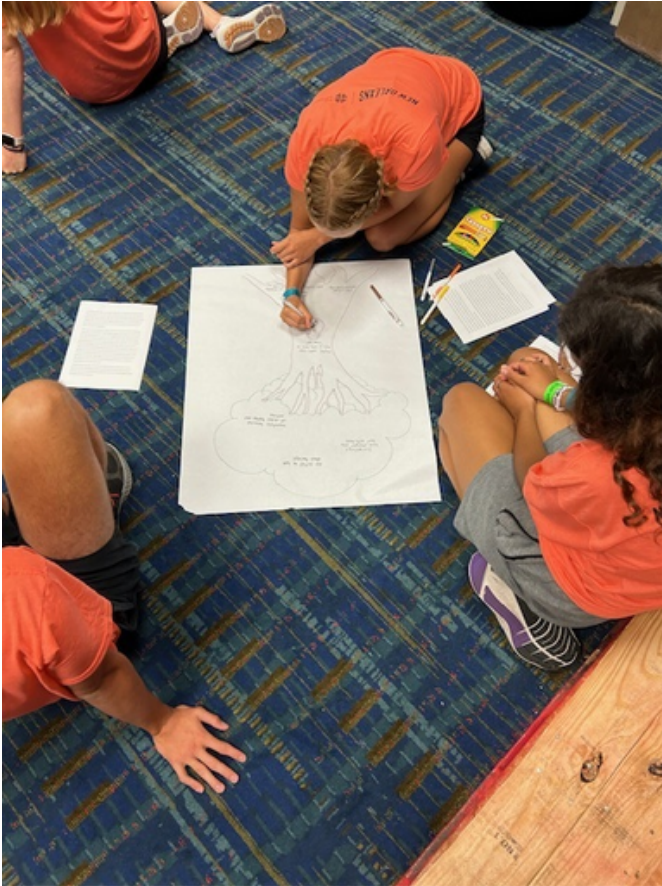
(Right): A group of participants, representing Cuba, Peru, Venezuela, and Bolivia, work through one of the case studies as part of the training



ELCA National Youth Gathering - New Orleans

During the ELCA Youth Gathering, Hellen collaborated with the ELCA Gender Justice and Women's Empowerment Office of the Churchwide Office. This year, the gathering divided the Service Learning Project Day in two different spaces: participants could learn at the interactive center about a specific topic in which the ELCA is engaged with, or partner outside with congregations and hands on service-learning opportunities. Hellen co-facilitated a Gender Justice conversation at the interactive center as part of the onsite workshops. During three days for 3 hours, middle school and high school youth and adults were invited to participate in in-depth discussions around Gender Justice and the role the ELCA plays domestically and globally.

The youth, at the end of the workshop, were able to identify some action areas in which they can continue addressing this topic, and also challenging the rest of their congregations and high school classmates to do the same.



(Left): Youth participating in the Gender Justice Workshop during the ELCA Youth Gathering

(Right): Heather Dean, Program Coordinator, Theological Discernment, and Hellen at the Youth Gathering. Heather and Hellen co-facilitated these workshops at the Youth Gathering

Thank you for reading and if you are interested in supporting it makes a world of difference! Here is how to give:
By check: Make payable to "ELCA Global Mission" with "Busbey/Rios-Carrillo GMG2004" in the memo line. Give through your synod office or mail your check to: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Gift Processing Center, P.O. Box 1809, Merrifield, VA 22116
By credit or debit card: See community.elca.org/missionarygiving or call 800-638-3522 and specify "Michael Busbey and Hellen Rios-Carrillo."
By automatic monthly bank withdrawal or to establish a covenant of prayer, communication and support: Contact 800-638-3522, ext. 2820, or globalchurch@elca.org.