

July 2023 Newsletter

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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.

This year, the ELCA has changed our newsletter schedule a bit, moving from six newsletters per year, to four newsletters per year. The hope is that while there are less newsletters, we will also look for opportunities to connect virtually throughout the year through virtual calls, and mini-articles and updates. So please let us know if you would like to set up a virtual meeting for a Sunday adult education time, a meeting with your Global or Outreach Committee, or just a time to check-in; we would love to continue to connect with you all throughout the year!

Prayer Requests:

We hold the Guatemalan people in our prayers, including the Iglesia Luterana Agustina de Guatemala, as they approach the second round of presidential elections on August 20th.

We also pray for the International Women's Leaders scholars who return back to their studies during the next few weeks at ELCA colleges and Universities. Anghy Aragon from the Iglesia Luterana de Nicargaua, Fe y Esperanza is returning to Luther College for her final year of studies, and Allannah Carron from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Guyana is returning to school at St. Olaf.

Finally, we pray for all of the new ELCA missionaries who are in the process of transitioning to their countries of service, and for those who are ending their time of service.

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Recent Activities

Accompanying rural communities in Somoto, Nicaragua through food security

In May of 2023, the Nicaraguan Lutheran Church of Faith and Hope (ILFE) organized a Farmer’s Market in the town of Somoto. Within the ILFE’s understanding of holistic ministry, the ILFE accompanies rural communities with diaconal projects in areas of health, water and sanitation, food security and nutrition, and income generation. Over a period of 15 years, the ILFE has supported introduction of communal plots of land where local farmers have access to wells, irrigation, seeds, greenhouses, technical support, and fertilizers. Additionally, the ILFE has more recently introduced collectives (organized local community groups) focused on the raising of chickens and pigs.

The Farmer’s Market on May 18th was an opportunity for the rural communities of Las Brisas, El Rodeo, San Luis, and La Carbonera to sell their agriculture and livestock products: corn, beans, eggs, vegetables, fruits...and other products they make: artisanal wine, honey, clothing, and handicrafts. The Farmer’s Market was organized in collaboration with the local non-government organizations, and local Somoto government, and included a worship service, cultural acts, and the marketplace! Starting at 9AM, most of the vendors sold out of their products by around 11AM – so it was a very successful day for the farmers and artisans! As the ILFE continues to accompany rural communities with community development and capacity building, their hope is that these individual communities will begin to organize themselves and initiate these activities on a regular basis; bringing locally grown and produced products to near towns and cities.

This ministry in Nicaragua is supported by your generous giving to ELCA World Hunger!





(Left): Marcela Salas, Director of Amextra, facilitating a group dynamic during the PME capacity building event.

(right): Group photo from the event that included individuals from companion churches and institutions in Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean, as well as persons from Latino Congregations and the ELCA Caribbean Synod

Regional Capacity Building event with Companion Churches and Institutions

Within the strategic plan of the Latin American and Caribbean team for 2022-2024, we commit to accompanying companion churches and institutions in capacity building processes for planning, monitoring, and evaluation (PME) of ministries and projects. In June of 2023, the ELCA LAC team invited emerging leaders (60% women and 30% youth) from companion churches and institutions from Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean to participate in a workshop centered on the basics of PME.

For this workshop, held June 5-9 at the Lutheran Center in Mexico City, the ELCA invited Amextra, the Nicaraguan Lutheran Church of Faith and Hope, and the Lutheran World Federation, World Service – Central America Office, to facilitate various modules of the training. This model of co-facilitation with companions, alongside colleagues from LAC desk, ELCA finance, and Building Resilient Communities, allowed the opportunity to include voices and expertise of colleagues and leaders across the region. Furthermore, many of our companions that facilitated have organizational structures and processes that are very similar to other churches and institutions in the region, thus enriching the conversations as we progressed through the training.

In addition to the innovative facilitation model, the LAC desk collaborated with selected Latino Congregations, and the Caribbean Synod of the ELCA, to invite domestic leaders to this workshop. These leaders were able to actively learn from companion churches, share from their own contexts, and make connections with companion church leaders for further engagement. The LAC team is excited to continue with capacity building opportunities in the future that respond to the needs and requests of companions.

This regional capacity building event is supported by your generous giving to ELCA World Hunger!

Honduras - Accompanying the ICLH in their review and implementation of Gender Justice Policies

The Iglesia Cristiana Luterana de Honduras (ICLH), through their Women's Ministry, developed and implemented an internal diagnostic tool to analyze the status of women's leadership and empowerment within their church, to learn about advances that they have accomplished, and what processes they are still missing. The church had studied and contextualized the Lutheran World Federation Gender Justice Policy, and over the last 7 years, have incorporated in their ministries some principals of that policy to provide equal access to opportunities to all leaders. Even when the ICLH incorporated gender justice lenses to some of their formative processes, women still experience some disadvantages and challenges.

With financial support from the ELCA, during the first six months of 2023, the ICLH women's ministry, led by Pastor Belinda Colindres, developed and implemented a diagnostic with women being the audience of the focus groups they spoke with. The presentation of the results was incorporated into a three-day workshop held from July 7-9, 2023, with an aim to revise their Gender Justice policy and to identify some next steps for the church to address the situations mentioned by women. Some of the challenges identified by the Women's Ministry were: 1) gender-based violence continues to be a problem in communities, 2) the lack of formal education for women in the community, and 3) the poor promotion and reflection upon the polices within the leadership. Hellen was invited to attend this workshop; in addition to listening to the results of the diagnostic, Hellen gave a presentation on how to continue to implement the Gender Justice policies.

In sharing these challenges, the leadership heard, learned, discussed, and defined a clear path of actions for the staff, leaders and also the communities where they have presence. This work doesn't stop with the three-day workshop as the Women's Ministry, together with National Church Council, will continue to reflect and decide upon concrete actions to overcome the current challenges women face within the church. We are hopeful to continue to accompany this work in the future with the ICLH.



(Above): a collage of photos from the three-day workshop

(Below): a group photo of the ICLH leadership and administration that participated in the workshop



Assembly and Convention Season

For most Synods in the ELCA, the months of April-July is season of Synod Assemblies; gatherings where the Churchwide Office, Synods, and Congregations are able to share updates from the previous year, review governing documents, and elect leadership.

April-July also generally happens to be the season of assemblies and conventions for some churches in Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean. This year, Hellen and Mike were invited to participate in the Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Guyana (ELCG – May 7-9) and the Iglesia Cristiana Luterana de Honduras (ICLH – June 23-25). As the ELCA, our participation in these assemblies and conventions is as observers and companions in ministry; we do not vote nor try to influence the assemblies by our presence. Oftentimes we bring greetings on behalf of the ELCA, listen to the reports of the churches from the previous year, and participate in worship services and installations of Church Councils. In Guyana, the ELCG celebrated the ordination of Sandra Kurtzious. Carolyn Schneider, missionary serving with the seminary of United Theological College of the West Indies, accompanied Hellen during the ELCG convention as well.

We are thankful for the invitation from our companions to accompany them in these important events and continue to hold the ELCG and ICLH, among our many companions who celebrated assemblies this year, in our prayers through these processes. We will continue to hold you all and your Synods in our prayers as well during this time!

These assemblies and scholarships are supported by your generous giving to ELCA Mission Support!

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.

Celebrating International Leaders Program Scholars who graduated in 2023

In May two leaders from companion churches in El Salvador and Suriname finished theological Studies and have returned to their home churches to continue growing in their service and ministries.

The Rev. Arisbé Gomez, from the Salvadorian Lutheran Synod completed her Master of Arts in the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. Rev. Arisbé will continue serving in the Woman and family ministry of the church.

Rafael Van Ommeren, from The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Suriname completed his Master in Contextual Ministry at the United Theological College of the west Indies. Rafael is back in Suriname starting his internship year and is expected to be ordained next year.

(right): Rev. Arisbé Gomez receiving her diploma from LSTC.

(below): Rafael Van Ommeran, pictured with spouse, Lucille (far left), Professor Carollyn Schneider (ELCA missionary), and Hellen (far right)

