



## A Wonderful Learning Experience

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Third World Opportunities: Changing Lives

Amazing Grace in Worship

Prayer Shawl Ministry: A Powerful Outreach

Tanzania Day at Mountain Top

Weeping and Rejoicing with Africa



By Pastor John Hart, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Catasauqua

This past summer my son, Gideon, and I had a wonderful learning experience. We were members of a mission trip in Tecate, Mexico.

The trip was organized by Third World Opportunities, a faith-based organization based in San Diego in conjunction with the San Diego County Ecumenical Council.

The trip was a seven day event. We arrived in San Diego on a Saturday and spent the night at a local Lutheran church. On Sunday, we departed the city with Pastor George Johnson, director of Third World Opportunities. An hour later we arrived at the grounds of Rancho San Juan Bosco, an orphanage for boys. The ranch became home for us a very exciting and moving week.

The orphanage is a privately run home financed entirely by private contributions. During our stay, the home housed 36 boys ranging in age from 5 to 18 years old.

The first night at the orphanage we were welcomed by a missionary from the United States who explained to us the work projects that needed to be completed. In addition to Gideon and me, groups from North Branch, Minnesota, and Fort Collins, Colorado, were working at the orphanage that week. Since there were only two of us, the group from Minnesota "adopted" my son and me, and for the rest of the week we worked side by side on a home building project on the outskirts of Tecate. I say "home," but in actuality it was about the size of what would be a medium-sized shed in the United States.

After breakfast with the boys each day, we would travel to the job site and spend several hours constructing the house. The building



was a real test of our carpentry skills, mainly due to the poor quality of wood available.

With our slogan, "brute force and ignorance gets the job done every time," the house was completed on Saturday morning, our last day in Mexico, just moments before the arrival of the new owner. We presented her with a Spanish Bible and performed a very moving house blessing.

When we weren't working on the house, we went on field trips. The trip that made the greatest and most lasting impression on us was a visit to Tijuana. We spent the night at the House of the Migrant, a five story building that offers housing and care for men recently deported from the United States.



During the Tijuana trip we toured the wall separating the United States from Mexico, which was erected in its current form in 1994. On the Mexican side of the wall are over 2,000 large crosses with the names and ages of those who have lost their lives crossing the border over the past decade.

That evening we dined with one hundred recently deported men and learned about their stories. The next day we visited a community of people living in the city dump, home to thousands who make a living picking trash.

The sad reality of our time in Tijuana was that, while all of this poverty was happening, just miles away in affluent San Diego and Pacific Beach people are surfing, roller-blading, walking, and relaxing on the gorgeous beaches.



I learned a lot during that week, and I have developed a whole new insight into what it means to be blessed. I made many new friends while on the trip, and our congregation now has several outreach programs in discussion. I feel blessed to have been able to travel to Mexico, and I encourage you all to pursue outreach in your own congregations.



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Third World Opportunities, a faith-based organization supported by the Hunger and Housing Ministry Team of the Pacifica Synod, ELCA, arranges education and service trips into Mexico for youth groups and adults. It provides experiential learning just across the Mexican border in Tecate at an orphanage called Rancho San Juan Bosco.

The purpose is to gain a cross-cultural experience and to learn about poverty and immigration and how the Gospel relates to these issues. Groups participate in service projects, go on field trips, and develop relational skills as they live at the orphanage in Tecate. Bible studies that lift up the message of Jesus about loving our neighbors are offered each day.

This face-to-face encounter with Hispanic people living on the edge of poverty can become a life-changing experience. One mother from California asked her pastor, who had taken a group of high school youth on a Third World Opportunities trip, "What did you do to our daughter? She isn't the same person since her trip to Mexico."

**Participants learn through—**

- Interaction with boys at the orphanage
- Work projects and lending a hand
- Walking tour of a rural village
- Visit to an immigration shelter
- Sharing a meal in a Mexican home
- Conversations with local people



- Reflection and social analysis
- Participating in Bible studies

A youth director from Minnesota wrote, "This mission trip experience was by far the best that I have been part of. It was truly a life-changing and eye-opening time."

For more information, visit the organization's website at [www.thirdworldopportunities.org](http://www.thirdworldopportunities.org) or the Pacifica Synod's website at [www.pacificasynod.org/HungerandHousing.htm](http://www.pacificasynod.org/HungerandHousing.htm), or email the director, Pr. George S. Johnson, at [severinelaine@aol.com](mailto:severinelaine@aol.com). You can also contact Pastor John Hart at 610-264-2641. See [his story](#) in this issue of Partners.

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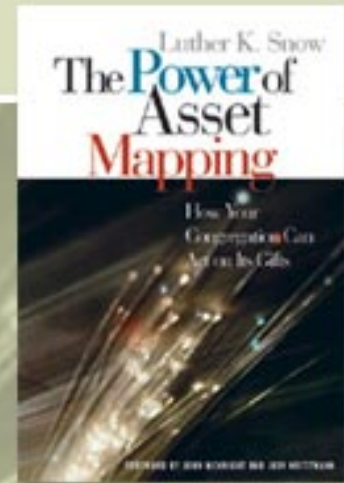
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**Reflections on a New Experience**

By the Rev. Rebecca Knox, Christ Lutheran Church, Grill

It was summer. I had just begun reading *The Power of Asset Mapping* by Luther Snow.

On page 6, Snow writes, "I once listened to a speech by Mark Hanson, presiding bishop of the ELCA, in which he talked about how they used to run church council meetings where he was a parish pastor. Instead of the usual business agenda, they would get most things done by prayer, Bible study, and discussions of faith. And they would open every meeting with a question, 'What signs of God's grace have you witnessed lately?'"

I was compelled to highlight the passage, turn down the corner of the page, and write "worship starter" in the margin.

During that week, conversations with three separate families revealed folks tired by Sunday morning, dragging themselves to church, and getting more tired. Each time I thought to myself or said out loud, "Worship is supposed to be energizing." Instead, for us the cup is half-full. I realized that we needed to take a different path in worship.

What would help? I prayed and reflected. Our congregation is a close group. In statistical terms, that means that 28 of the flock gathered that next Sunday morning. We're in a beautiful village, in a picturesque red brick church. The faithful core is wholeheartedly trying to love God and



neighbor creatively.

But an annual deficit of \$5,000, shrinking attendance at worship, evaporating savings, and dramatically increasing average age of active members are stumbling blocks.

We, pastor and people, too often look at our congregation and, on a good day, see a half-full glass. On rough days, we only see a few dregs at the bottom.

So the next Sunday we began worship differently. I explained in my welcome that announcements would be abbreviated so that we could focus on sharing our experiences of God's presence in our daily lives. I told them about the book I was reading and gave these reasons for changing the format of worship:

1. This will help us better prepare for worship. We can let go of distractions like "What did I forget from the grocery list?" or "Will the service end in time to change and get to the field for the game?"
2. This will help us see that God's presence is in, with, and under us as we move into the unknown of different styles of outreach and other ministry.

"So", I said to the seemingly agreeable congregation, "What signs of God's grace have you witnessed lately?"

In the moment of silence that followed, I thought, "We've witnessed to each other before. There have been a few power-of-prayer testimonials and even the occasional benefits-in-my-faith-and-life-from-increasing-financial-stewardship faith stories. I'm sure someone will be comfortable enough in our intimate summer worship space to share..."

And they did!

First was a beautiful description of forgiveness in an airport: A forgotten ID, a departing flight, and, instead of wrath and unknown security measures of punishment, compassion in the form of a hug. All this was witnessed out of earshot, but well within range of the heart.

Then a moment of joy as a member told of experiencing the delight in the celebration of people of a different culture. "They know how to celebrate! It was beautiful. I never knew."

“A soldier friend came home from Iraq to her US base,” noted another member. “It is only for six months, but now she can be with her dying grandmother.”

We began worship in these shared moments. Then we went into the worship printed in the bulletin. There was God’s grace among this flock, all over the place!

The next week we began worship again with “What signs of God’s grace have you witnessed lately?”

A baby was born into the congregation.

A child had shared a beloved toy with a friend. Dad thought that the exchange must’ve been coerced. But no, it was sacrificial giving, God’s love straight up from one child to another.

Ahhh. Again one could sense the awareness of God’s presence as we proceeded into worship! “It brought our minds and hearts closer into God’s presence,” said some worshippers.

We continued with this worship practice for the rest of our summer worship.

At the end of those worship experiences, I prayed silently, giving thanks. “God, your grace is amazing!”

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The idea came to Mary Emeigh, a member of Christ Lutheran Church, Lower Saucon, when she read an article about prayer shawl ministry in the December 2001 issue of *The Lutheran* magazine.

The story told of people praying over shawls as they knitted them, then sharing the shawls with persons experiencing illness or other need.

Mary took the idea one step further than the description in the article. She suggested to Pastor Tom Neel that the many knitters in the congregation provide shawls. Then the shawls could be passed through the congregation during worship so that each person could hold the shawl and say a prayer over it.

The idea was an instant success. Knitters provided the shawls; the entire congregation provided the prayers. About once a month, new shawls are passed through the congregation during worship. As persons receive a shawl, they pause from the worship service and say a prayer.

Sometimes the name of the recipient of a shawl is known. Most times, the prayed-over shawls are stored in a closet to wait for the appropriate time. When Pastor Neel visits someone in the hospital or anyone in need, he takes one of the shawls along as a gift.

You don't have to be a knitter to participate in the project. If you don't knit, you can provide yarn or monetary gifts to



purchase materials.

Last winter, one of the recipients of a shawl following surgery was Pastor John Brndjar, former director of Lutheran Congregational Services. Although he is not a member of the congregation, he received the shawl during a hospital visit by Pastor Neel, who was the LCS board chair at the time.

“It was a very powerful experience,” Pastor Brndjar reported to synod staff member Jim Wolford.

“One of the most wonderful aspects of this project,” says Pastor Neel, “Is that it came from the congregation. I had nothing to do with its initiation. It’s a great witness to the ministry of everyone in the congregation.”



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Sunday, September 19, was Tanzania Day at St. Paul Lutheran Church, Mountain Top.

The event began with a special program for children and adults at 9:45 a.m. Jean Marie Warpus, a member of St. Peter Lutheran Church, Scranton, and an RN, showed slides and shared personal experiences from her trip to our companion synod, the **South Central Diocese** of the **Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania**. Ms. Warpus was one of the participants in a delegation from the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod led by Bishop David Strobel that visited the diocese in September 2003.

During the event participants had the opportunity to purchase handmade arts and crafts from Ten Thousand Villages, a nonprofit program of the Mennonite Central Committee that provides vital, fair income to Third World people by marketing their handicrafts.

Persons attending Tanzania Day were invited to bring school supplies for the children in Tanzania. "Many, many boxes of supplies were gathered," said the Rev. Michele Kaufman, pastor of St. Paul's. "Youth from our congregation took the notebooks that were contributed and wrote messages to the children in Tanzania."

The theme of worship was "Weaving a World Tapestry." Pastor Kaufman noted that the service used Tanzanian tunes and music by the popular group Dakota Road.



Following the worship service, members and friends gathered for a Tanzanian dinner of pineapple curried chicken with sweet cinnamon rice, followed by a variety of pumpkin and pineapple desserts.

Over \$500 was raised through the sale of merchandise from Ten Thousand Villages and donations for the dinner. These monies will be matched by the Luzerne County chapter of Thrivent Financial for Lutherans. The funds will be used to send a child to school (a cost of \$30 per year per child) and to purchase a motorbike for a pastor in the Tanzanian diocese. Pastors travel many miles, often by foot, to small village churches in the mountainous region.





## Weeping and Rejoicing with Africa

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By the Rev. Eric Shafer, director, ELCA Department for Communication

In February 2004, I was fortunate to lead a group of ELCA communicators on a "Stand with Africa" trip to east Africa. We saw the ELCA World Hunger Appeal funds at work in Uganda, Tanzania, and Ethiopia, addressing HIV/AIDS and combating hunger and starvation.

As I reflect on this visit, I think more of our time as "weeping and rejoicing with Africa" rather than "standing with Africa." I am also proud to say that ELCA World Hunger Appeal funds are working wonders in east Africa, saving and changing lives.

### **Weeping with Africa**

How does one tell the story of how our hunger appeal funds help children to have a good death? That is not the usual hunger appeal success story we tell, but it is a "success" story nonetheless.

Supported by funds from the ELCA Division for Global Mission and the World Hunger Appeal, staff of the North West Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania support families caring for children orphaned by HIV/AIDS. Some of these children are also HIV positive themselves and the program gives them funds for school uniforms so that they can attend school as long as they are able and for medicine to ease their pain.





We visited families living in the countryside outside of Bakoba, Tanzania. These families lived in the poorest conditions, mud homes with dirt floors. They spread fresh hay on the floor for our visit. One mother ran after us as

we left to give us a gift of fruit. Another asked me why her one grandson was dying of AIDS while her other grandson was not and, before my halting response could be translated, asked me to pray with her. We wept with Africa that day.

Later in our trip, we visited a relief station near Wenenata in southern Ethiopia. There, staff of the [Ethiopian Evangelical Lutheran Church Mekane Yesus](#) (EECMY) coordinates food donations to 300-400 people each day. This year the EECMY will feed 54,000 Ethiopians in six relief centers like the one near Wenenata.

These efforts are supported by our ELCA World Hunger Appeal funds through the [Lutheran World Federation](#). The good news is that, because of better rainfall thus far in 2004, this number has decreased from 94,000 in 2003. The bad news is that famine in Ethiopia has continued there for nearly 30 years and shows no sign of ending soon.

I wept after visiting this relief station. I wept for the injustice of nearly 30 years of starvation. And I wept as I thought of how decreasing churchwide budget support further restricts the help that the Division for Global Mission can give to the EECMY for similar projects.



### **Rejoicing with Africa**

Despite my weeping, there is much to celebrate in Africa and many amazing projects supported by the ELCA World Hunger Appeal through the Division for Global Mission and companion churches, the Lutheran World Federation, and [Lutheran World Relief](#).



In Uganda, we spent a day with the women of the Katosi Women Fishing and Development Association (KWFDA), a project supported by World Hunger Appeal funds through Lutheran World Relief. Begun as a fishing and fish-marketing project for

women in the town of Katosi, this work has expanded into micro-loans for small businesses, organic farming, safe water, home and latrine construction and much more. There is no way I can capture the enthusiasm and determination of these women, some of whom are HIV/AIDS widows with children.

Also in Uganda, we visited the Kiteredde Vocational Institute, begun more than twenty years ago to educate Ugandan civil war orphans and more recently dramatically expanded to serve HIV/AIDS orphans. Supported by our ELCA World Hunger Appeal funds through Lutheran World Relief, the Kiteredde Vocational Institute has more than doubled its student body, many of whom live on campus in buildings they have built themselves. Most graduates are able to find employment, even in the desperate Uganda economy.

I was pleased to make this journey with eight ELCA colleagues: Deb Bogaert, Aaron Cooper, Paul and Sue Edison-Swift, Bob Fisher, Marcia and Mark Holman, and Nathan Ruby. Our trip was partially supported by a grant from the ELCA Ministry Among People in Poverty immersion funds.

To support the ELCA World Hunger Appeal, make a gift through your congregation or send your check, payable to the "ELCA World Hunger Appeal," to P.O. Box #71764, Chicago, Illinois 60694-1764. To pay by credit card, telephone 800-638-3522 or go online to [www.elca.org/hunger](http://www.elca.org/hunger).

To see more pictures and read more stories, visit this website: <http://www.elca.org/hunger/stories/EastAfrica.html>