

PARTNERS IN  
*the spirit*  
MARCH 2005



The Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod

One Word for Servant Event:  
**AWESOME!**

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New Friends and an Unforgettable  
Experience

Quilt-a-thon for Tsunami Victims

Union Lutheran's First Communion  
Class for an Autistic Child

Serving Diversity

After 250 years, Christ Hamilton is still  
thriving



From December 26, 2004, through January 2, 2005, ten youth and two adults from the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod traveled to Argentina to participate in a youth servant event.

The event was held at San Timoteo (St. Timothy), in the city of La Plata, about one hour southeast of Buenos Aires. San Timoteo is a congregation of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Argentina and Uruguay (IELU). The synod and the IELU are companion synods.

Although the event was sponsored by the synod, no funds came from the synod. The adults and the youth all paid their own way. Some congregations raised funds to help with costs. Those congregations that raised more money than needed gave the extra funds to the youth, who presented the money to Pastor-President Alan Eldrid, the bishop of the IELU.

"The kids learned that there is more joy in giving than in receiving," said Kurt Garbe, synod staff and one of the adults on the trip.

In this issue of Partners, three of the youth share reflections on the trip — the same three youth who shared their thoughts before the trip in the December issue of Partners.

Below are reflections from Walt Hampton, a member of Christ Lutheran Church, Dryville, and Todd Ebling, a member of Allegheny Lutheran Church, Knauers



Walt Hampton writes, “The synod servant trip to Argentina was amazing. The whole thing started at the airport. As soon as we got to the terminal, the ten youth from around the synod became ten close friends. It was amazing how quickly everyone bonded. We immediately sat and talked and played cards.

“When we got to Argentina the youth we met there thought we had known each other for years. It didn't take everyone long to get over the language barriers though. The first evening we were playing cards and talking to the Argentines like we had known them for years. It was amazing how God brought such an awesome group of kids together from both countries.

“The second day we began our work. We painted multiple parts of the church we stayed in.

“It was fun to work with our new friends. In between our work times we talked about each other's likes and dislikes. In my group we talked a lot about football — the football of Argentina, which is called soccer here. I learned about the strong rivalries between the fans of the two major teams in Buenos Aires. In the afternoons we got to hang out with all of our new friends and go sightseeing.

“It was interesting to hear the stories of the struggles the Argentines had to endure to get out of a military coup in the seventies. It was really neat because the church where we were staying was strongly involved in that part of their history. We saw how a country and our Church could stand strong and do what is right. It is amazing to think about how God kept the congregation safe when it was cleared by armed soldiers on a Sunday, or when they actually fired on the church and left bullet holes in the pulpit.

“Throughout the week we made friendships that will grow and last forever. We saw how God influences everyone around the world and most of all we got to serve God by helping a church and congregation in Argentina.”

Todd Ebling writes, “Todd Ebling here again. This trip to Argentina was everything I had hoped for and more than I could have expected. I got a chance to connect with a culture of beautiful people who share the same awesome faith even though they are thousands of miles from my home. I learned so many lessons of life and so many things about myself that are really priceless to me.

“I feel as though God picked me out and placed me there to do something in the world. I helped these people who were in need of help and I truly feel that they helped me so much more. I was so blessed with this amazing chance and now I exist with so much more purpose and vigor and excitement and life because of it. I felt compelled to go there and help and leave, and once I was there I felt compelled to stay.

“God can do absolutely amazing things in just one week and I experienced these things to an incomprehensible extent.

“One last word...AWESOME!!!”

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By Hillary Bender, New Jerusalem, Hellertown

Argentina! So many new and exciting things to write!

The trip was what I expected — and much more. Along with the lessons I learned, I became very attached to the people; both those with whom I traveled and those that I met in Argentina.

Sandals in winter were definitely a good way to start our trip — it was hot down there. We arrived at about noon in the afternoon heat. After a much needed change of clothes, we met and began to get to know the Argentinean kids.

The advisors had planned an afternoon of games and activities geared toward all of us getting acquainted. This was nice but still proved difficult. In the end, all it took for us to get close was a game of cards. A simple card game got all of us communicating, the kids from the United States using what Spanish we knew or learning some, and the kids from Argentina using their English, which proved to be very good. After the night of cards, each of us learning games from the others' country, the week was much easier.

I had a very personal experience in Argentina, one that I pray I will never forget. I was blessed to spend my sixteenth birthday in the middle of the trip, on December 28. I thought I might get a little something from my American friends, but what I got was an excellent jelly cake made by the woman who served our food, a card signed by all (in Spanish and



English), and happy birthday sung in two different languages! Although I missed my friends, family, and boyfriend on this special day, it was definitely a special birthday celebrated in a special way that I will never forget.

Argentina was very different from what I thought it would be. I pictured a more run-down and poor area than what it turned out to be. Yes, there were some shabby homes and buildings, but for the most part it was a very nice place.

We never had an actual church service in Argentina, but I got a taste of what it might be like. Every morning and night all of us gathered in the sanctuary to sing songs and hear a short lesson in English and Spanish. After the morning gathering, we worked on the church for a few hours.

We traveled to a few places both in La Plata where we stayed and in the city of Buenos Aires. Every night we came back for dinner, said a short prayer, and went to bed or had free time.

Except for the first few nights, the free times were spent dancing to different Argentine CDs and learning new dances. For me, the nights and dancing were the most fun. There was no pressure of schedules, just friends hanging out. The language became less of a barrier and the relaxing feeling of letting loose took over. Relationships were formed more strongly in this time than any other.

New Years Eve was a night to remember! I was lucky enough to spend it with Magalie, a girl I had gotten very close to throughout the week, at her grandparents' house.

It was a bit difficult because Magalie and her family didn't know much English, but it all worked out and I had a great night with her. We counted down to midnight in Spanish, then counted down in English because the U.S. is two hours behind Argentina.

The week I spent in Argentina, meeting new people, helping others, and sharing God's Word, was an amazing one and I will never forget it! If you have the opportunity to go on a trip such as this one, go for it and do all you can to expand your mind and faith.

A few of us are planning to go back in a few years for an Argentina reunion. Hopefully our dream to go back will come true so we can reunite with the people we met because God chose us.

Two months later, we still communicate with our friends in Argentina through e-mail and Instant Messenger. Who knows where our futures will take us and when we will see each other again? My hope is that their experience has changed and affected them as much as our experience changed and affected us. Our being there altered their perception of Americans and hopefully opened lines of communication and caring in our generation.



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## Quilt-a-thon for Tsunami Victims

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By Pastor Roxi Kringle, St. John, Farmersville

Moved by the devastation of the South Asian Tsunami, Chris Piro of St. John Lutheran Church, Farmersville, decided to gather as many sewers as possible to make quilts for Lutheran World Relief. "I wanted to do something and feel like I was doing something rather than just give money to a cause," Piro said.

It was a sentiment shared by all who came. Eighteen women from four congregations and a local quilt guild came together January 13 and 14 at St. John Lutheran Church, Farmersville, for a two-day quilt-a-thon for tsunami relief.

Even a "wintry mix" of rain and snow did not keep these compassionate quilters away. "At first I didn't want to come out in this weather," said Ellie Lazar of St. John Windish, Bethlehem, and Colonial Quilt Guild member, "but then I remembered what all that water in the tsunami did to those people."

By the end of the second day, 21 quilts had been completed. In addition, the quilters from St. Andrew Lutheran Church, Easton, donated six completed quilts, and folks from Hope, Tatamy, dropped off seven. Several women who couldn't stay for the entire day took projects home with plans to complete them and return them within the week.

Pledges for hours worked or quilts made raised over \$400 for Lutheran World Relief's "Wave of Giving." In addition, the Lower Northampton chapter of Thrivent Financial for



*"I make my quilts as fast as  
I can to keep my family  
warm, and as beautiful as I  
can to keep my heart from  
breaking."*

-- Anonymous pioneer woman

Lutherans donated \$300 to be used for shipping the quilts to Lutheran World Relief and LWR's Project Comfort.

A single quilter making a relatively simple quilt top can easily spend 20-40 hours to construct it. In order to complete 21 quilts in 24 hours, many hands were needed to cut fabric before sewing as well as tying the quilt layers together once the tops were sewn. Coming and going as their schedules allowed, the 18 women put in 118 hours cutting, sewing, pressing, tying, and finishing the quilts.

Information on Wave of Giving for Lutheran World Relief can be found at <http://www.waveofgiving.org/>. Information about Project Comfort can be found at <http://www.lwr.org/parish/comfort.asp>.

Participants were from St. John's, Farmersville; St. Andrew, Easton; St. John Windish, Bethlehem; St. Peter, Bethlehem and Colonial Quilt Guild.



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Each year during Lent, Union Lutheran Church offers a three-week First Communion program for children who are at the end of their first grade year or older. Children are invited to join the pastors and lay volunteers as they learn about and participate in interactive sessions to help them better understand this means of God's grace.

Two years ago we took into membership a family with an 11-year-old autistic child, Chris. He could not read or communicate with words – instead, he uses a special “picture book” in which he points to certain pictures to express his feelings and needs. As we were putting together the list of invitees for our First Communion class, we realized that Chris had never received instruction for communion. Our challenge was to offer this opportunity to the family and, if they accepted, find a way to teach Chris in his own “language.”

Chris's mother was overwhelmed that we would even consider trying this with her son. But, with the help of his personal aide in the school district and one of our members who works with special needs children, Chris's “picture book” about communion was developed.

Over the three weeks, children hear about the history of communion – from the Exodus to Jesus' last meal with his disciples – and how we celebrate communion today. They investigate the meaning of communion as a conveyor of God's grace and forgiveness and as a gift to each one of us. And, finally, they learn about how communion is a “family”



meal.

As our other children met in their classes, Chris met one-on-one with his teacher who worked with him, through his picture book, to help him understand the basic concepts of communion – God’s *gift* to us given because of God’s *grace* for us for the *forgiveness* of sins shared in the context of our *family* of faith. Chris joined the entire class for a family potluck meal and “going through the motions” of what it might be like that first time they participate in the Lord’s Supper.

When Maundy Thursday arrived, the night our children receive communion for the first time, so did Chris and the rest of our class. Chris came to the chancel rail with his family and took communion – just like everyone else. It was an awesome moment, one in which we took to heart the words “This is my body. This is my blood. They are given and shed for ALL PEOPLE for the forgiveness of sin.”

*(If you are interested in hearing more or seeing the materials developed for these classes please contact Pastor Jami Possinger or Pastor Dennis Moore at Union Lutheran Church, Schnecksville, at 610-767-6884.)*

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City grocer honored for contributions to the community  
By Dan Kelly, Reading Eagle reporter

(This article is reprinted by permission from the January 21 edition of the Reading Eagle newspaper. Tom Schleifer and his family are members of Trinity Lutheran Church, Robesonia.)

Ricardo Mercado said he feels invigorated when he eats sancocho.

"It makes you feel good, like you can't get sick after you eat it," he said, referring to the Puerto Rican-style beef stew. "Especially in the winter." Mercado and his wife, Blanca Cruz, said the Buttonwood IGA is the only market in Berks County where they can find all the ingredients they need for the stew in one place and at a good price.

Cruz said Reading grocer Thomas R. Schleifer is the reason.

"He's very good," she said.

Schleifer, the owner of the store, was sorting yautia and other roots and tubers common in ethnic recipes when Mercado and Cruz browsed through the produce section.

They were not the only Schleifer fans in the store.

Schleifer rang up some high praise Thursday as area church and political leaders honored him for his 26 years in business.



Pastors and representatives of 22 area churches and political leaders, including Mayor Tom McMahon, honored Schleifer for his contributions to the neighborhoods around the store at Buttonwood Street and Schuylkill Avenue.

Whether it's a cake sale for a church or picnic supplies for a summer program, Schleifer has always been there, said Vera Ellison, a member of the Mount Zion Church of God in Christ, who helped organize an impromptu ceremony outside Schleifer's office.

"I came in here the other day and bought two containers and his people wrapped them up special for me and then they called me to make sure I got home with them," Ellison said. "You can't fake that kind of love."

"There was a time in this community when you couldn't ask for chitlins, collards and pigs feet," said Jean Nelson of Washington Presbyterian Church. "But not any more."

McMahon presented Schleifer with a proclamation citing his dedication to the city.

"He's one of the last ones that still carries on the tradition of one-on-one customer service in a store of this size," McMahon said. "I can't think of a better example of community building."

State Sen. Michael A. O'Pake, State Rep. Thomas R. Caltagirone and City Councilman Dennis M. Sterner also presented Schleifer with proclamations honoring his work.

Schleifer of Robesonia thanked everyone for the attention, but insisted it wasn't necessary.

He said the reason he stocks a full line of Spanish, Mexican, Jamaican, African, Caribbean and other specialty foods is because that's what his customers want.

"It comes from years of experience looking for things people are asking for," he said. "Sometimes I'll go to New York. I found a woman in Newark, N.J., who specializes in African foods.

"In a community like this you sell your business by word of mouth," Schleifer said, holding up a six-pack of Vimto, African soda pop.

Greg Little and Collette Gilmore of Laureldale said that's

exactly how they ended up shopping for meat there.

“We're looking for a slab of beef at a good price that we could have butchered into cuts of meat,” Gilmore said.

“Her cousin told us about this place, so we decided to check it out,” Little said.

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By CAROL O'NEILL, Pocono Life Writer

(Excerpted by permission from an article in the Feb. 25 issue of the Pocono Record.)

Not many people can say they've attended the same church all their lives, but Bill Lotz can.

The 71-year-old Hamilton Square resident has been going to Christ Hamilton United Lutheran Church since his parents brought him there as a baby.

One recent Sunday morning he sat with other longtime members in the white farmhouse that used to be his family home and reminisced. The Christ Hamilton congregation bought the Lotz family home in 1994 and converted the rooms to office space. The family barn next to the house became a place for Scouts and youth groups to meet. Now Bill and his wife live across the street.

"I still drive to church in the winter time," Lotz said, laughing. Christ Hamilton has been Lutheran since 1974, but before that two congregations — Reformed and Lutheran — worshipped there with two alternating pastors. "When Sunday came, you dressed up and went to church," Lotz said. "It didn't matter which it was going to be."

Christ Hamilton, then called Christ Church, was part of a four-circuit charge that included churches in Mount Eaton, Brodheadsville and Bartonsville. Today Mount Eaton is an independent church. Zion Lutheran in Brodheadsville is affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



and St. John's in Bartonsville is linked with the Evangelical Congregational Church in America.

Lotz remembered the longtime Reformed pastor, the Rev. Adan Bohner, and the Lutheran pastor, Pastor Kellow. He also remembered how the church struggled during that time. "The doors just about closed," he said.

Then the Lutheran synod sent a new pastor just out of seminary, David Ritterpusch, in 1972. Two years after that, the two congregations voted to unite as one denomination — Lutheran.

Annette and Charles Huhn moved to a farm on Manor Drive near Burnley Workshop in the early 1950s. When their son Charles was baptized as an infant in 1955, they decided to join the church. Pretty soon Annette was recruited to teach Sunday school and served in the nursery department for 25 years.

Annette Huhn remembers going to the different churches in the circuit for catechism classes. "And we used to follow all the picnics. When one church had one, we all showed up."

At some point after it was built in 1829, the stone church was covered in stucco, probably added for insulation. Lotz recalled that his father and another member noticed the stucco crumbling off. So, in 1953 they removed it all to expose the beautiful stone underneath.

In 1930, the church installed an organ it had purchased from Stroudsburg Methodist Church. Lotz talked about the Sunday that the electricity went off and the organ wouldn't play. Lotz and another young man decided to pump the bellows by hand. "I tell you, it wears you out," he laughed.

The organist at the time was Velma Hartman. She moved in 1946 from Bethlehem to a big white house on the east side of the church property. In 1951, she started playing the organ and played it faithfully for 39 years.

Lotz's father and Hartman's husband Jacob, a "darned good carpenter," according to Lotz, watched over the construction of Covenant House, the second building added to the property.

Until Covenant House was completed in 1978, Sunday school classes met in every available space in the little stone church.

Besides more space for Sunday school, Covenant House gave the congregation something else it hadn't had for more than 200 years — indoor plumbing. Before that, parishioners used the old outhouse.

Annette Huhn said, "When kids came to Sunday school, you spent a lot of time showing the kids what the outhouse was all about. One would find out and then they all had to go to the bathroom. You know how kids are."

When Pastor Ritterpusch left in 1982, the Rev. Ralph Boyer IV came to pastor the growing congregation. Under his leadership, the congregation has continued to thrive, making it necessary in 1999 to build another new building on the church property. Called the Lighthouse, the structure includes more Sunday school rooms, a stage, a kitchen and a full basketball court.

Now Christ Hamilton has close to 2,000 members.

For the longest time, Christ Hamilton had only one service on Sundays. Now there are three, and on Christmas Eve there are four services to accommodate everyone.

Besides the many buildings used by the congregation, a picnic pavilion has been added and plans are being made to add more parking and possibly fields for soccer and baseball.

Lotz gave credit to pastoral assistant Fred Robertson for the expanded youth programs. And he credited Stephanie Boyer, the pastor's wife, for adding a touch of warmth. "Stephanie, to me, she's the closest thing to an angel. She's one beautiful lady."

"And she bakes," added Hartman.

Picturing all the young people in the Sunday school, or coming up to hear the children's sermon, or playing basketball in the Lighthouse, Lotz said, "I remember when Jake (Jacob Hartman) used to say, 'We need a Sunday school, we need a Sunday school.' Now when I see all these kids, I think, 'Jake, I hope you're looking down.' "