

Rural Latino Outreach in Northern Minnesota
Misión Luterana del Valle Río Rojo

Misión Luterana has grown from a dream to reach out to the growing number of Latinos who are our neighbors in the upper Red River Valley to an active multi-site Synodically-Authorized Worshipping Community (SAWC) of the Northwestern Minnesota Synod.

The August 2006 opening of a site in Stephen was a natural outgrowth of a series of Spanish language worship services that had previously been held at First Lutheran Church of Stephen. The congregation continues to be a strong partner.

Much of our time and energy has been directed toward building ever-stronger relationships within the Latino community in Stephen. That has been done both formally and informally – but always through conversation and spending time with each other. We visit people in their homes, personally invite families to worship each month, and just stop to chat on the street corner or in front of the post office. As we have spent time getting to know each other, trust has been built and we have become more open to one another. Hopes and dreams are shared; struggles and concerns come to light; and through it all we gain a better understanding of how Misión Luterana can play a positive role within the community.

Coming together to worship is a core element of who we are. To begin with, we have been worshipping together on a monthly basis. Our primary worshipping language is Spanish, although there are often bilingual elements to the liturgy. We come together on the fourth Sunday of the month, and also for church festival days – especially during Lent and Advent. It has been exciting to watch as leaders emerge and ask to help lead different elements of the worship service!

There are other pieces that have helped shape Misión Luterana to this point as well. Language and communication was an area identified early on as something that both Anglos and Latinos saw as a challenge to relationships. In order to help transform this struggle, we have partnered with Stephen's Community Education program and began offering Spanish as a Second Language classes in June of 2007. Likewise, English as a Second Language classes are offered. In the future we hope students from each class might be able to get together and help tutor one another!

Misión Luterana also partnered with other community organizations to celebrate Mexican culture in particular, and also Latino culture in general. Festivities have included salsa dancing and lessons; a tortilla-making demonstration; an exhibition of traditional dress from various countries; games and piñatas for the children; and, of course, authentic Mexican food.

A highlight was bringing an internationally-known artist to Stephen for a concert. Marita Garza is a Christian musician who has performed in many parts of Mexico, as well as throughout the U.S. She brought her mariachi style of music – and strong Christian

message of hope – to town, and there were well over 100 people from throughout the region who joined us for the event.

In Oslo, Minnesota, we have visited door to door inviting the Latino children in our area to Vacation Bible School and Sunday School. Approximately 25-30 percent of the children who attend VBS each year are Latino, and we include a Spanish language component into the program.

In addition, we provided pastoral care when a young man in our community committed suicide, including a house blessing and visits with the family. Informal visits occurred with residents, and we began work to set up ESL and GED courses in Oslo. Citizenship application help was also provided.

As we move into the future, continuing to build *confianza* – mutual relationships of trust – will remain central to the ministry of Misión Luterana del Valle Río Rojo. We look forward to continued worship experiences as a community – bringing us together as a family at God’s table. We are also excited to see how the other aspects of our ministry continue to take shape. We trust and pray that God will continue to guide us into that future. *Guíanos, oh Dios, en tus caminos, para que podamos ser testigos de tu gloriosa resurrección; por tu Hijo, Jesucristo nuestro Señor. Amén.*

- The Rev. Deb Hanson