

# Mission Partners

Fall 2008

# FOCUS

Congregations Encouraging One Another

## What You Can Do

- Pray that God will raise up wise and skilled leaders for God's church.
- Encourage gifted people to consider mission development.
- Talk to children about becoming deaconesses, diaconal ministers, youth leaders, pastors, evangelists, associates in ministry . . . (Age ten is not too early!).
- Support the Fund for Leaders ([www.elca.org/fundforleaders](http://www.elca.org/fundforleaders)).
- Gift Mission Partners ([www.elca.org/mp](http://www.elca.org/mp)).
- Surround developers and redevelopers in your community with prayer, encouragement, volunteer support, and the finances necessary to develop faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

God calls all of us in baptism to be faithful disciples and utilize our gifts to accomplish God's work wherever we live and work. God calls some of us to use our leadership skills in the church as rostered leaders. And, God calls still others, both clergy and lay, to work in areas of mission development.

In this issue, we hold up those who have said "Yes" to God's call to mission development and are now calling others to discipleship.

## Fueling up on God moments

*Pastor Connie Thomson • New Joy, Westfield, Indiana • [www.newjoy.org/](http://www.newjoy.org/)*

Pastor Connie Thomson brings to her nine years at New Joy, Westfield, Indiana, the ability to apply theology to everyday life.

"At the gas station," Thomson says, "I see unhappy people. They are fueling up with what they need right now—not with what lasts. I think of God fueling people with grace and redemption. If we can train people to get their joy from the inside—how cool would that be!"

**Q: What has been your greatest joy as a mission developer?**

**A:** "We have had 'God moments,' as when a boy with cerebral palsy climbed a ladder on the playground. All the children patiently waited until the boy reached the top and then applauded him. The boy's parents cried."

**Q: What have you found to be the qualities and skills most needed for this work?**

**A:** "I believe that a certain quotient of craziness, a deep love and trust of God,



**Pastor Connie Thomson**

and an entrepreneurial spirit are needed. When I knocked on 3,800 doors to invite people to New Joy, I learned to pray humbly for the person on the other side. I prayed that the God in me and the God in them would find one another and that we could celebrate the God already at work."

**Q: Please describe your sense of call.**

**A:** "I love God and I love people. People are on sacred, wonderful journeys. I want to be a part of cherishing and honoring that."

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## Listen! God is calling...

**A**s we highlight and honor mission developers, we must also acknowledge that the ability of the ELCA to start new congregations has often been impeded by the lack of these “domestic missionaries.”

“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2).

Fortunately, many in the ELCA have begun to address this mission opportunity:

- The Fund for Leaders provides tuition scholarships for some seminary students. And, thanks to a \$1.5 million challenge gift from the ELCA Mission Investment Fund, there will soon be opportunities for people to financially support those who want to be mission developers.
- Synods are offering Invitations to Service events, which allow participants to explore their sense of call, as well as lay training programs, such as Diakonia.
- Seminaries are inviting people into their Master of Divinity programs as well as creating initiatives, such as Project Connect, for young adults to discern their place as baptized leaders in church and society.
- Congregations are helping people assess their gifts and prayerfully consider how those gifts might be best utilized in God’s world.

Your involvement is needed, too. Listen with an open heart to the experiences of the mission developers featured in this Mission Partners Focus. Pray for them and their ministries. Listen to what God might be calling you to be and do. Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers.

—Deaconess Marlys Waldo, Director for Mission Resources, EOCM



Mission

**Our Mission** The ELCA Mission Partners program establishes reciprocal relationships between congregations of the ELCA so that all partners might become strong centers for mission. These connections include various types of support and may occur within the same synod or across synod boundaries.

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ELCA congregations may reprint this newsletter in part or in its entirety.

## Mission developers are. . .

**People who—**

- \* proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ,
- \* draw others into Christian community, and
- \* respond to need with care.

**People who—**

- \* want to build relationships and community,
- \* want to reach out to the unchurched, marginalized, and alienated, and
- \* have dreams for what this church can be.

**People who—**

- \* demonstrate a strong Christian faith,
- \* are motivated self-starters, and
- \* are committed to a growing ELCA.

**People who—**

- \* are excited by Jesus’ call to ministry,
- \* use their God-given gifts, and
- \* become catalysts for growth and transformation.

Pastor Connie pours oil where the communion table will eventually stand.



## God moments at New Joy from page 1

### **Q:** How are things going at New Joy?

**A:** “We start every meeting with people describing where they see God at work since the last meeting. Everyone is running around looking for God moments.”

“We started knocking on doors in December 1999, began worshipping in an elementary school in January 2001, and moved into our new building in Summer 2008. Now we have 130 to 140 at worship! It is really exciting to move into the new building. God calls us forward.”

### **Q:** How have Mission Partners been supportive?

**A:** “The Mission Partners relationships have been mutually supportive. A local congregation let me use their office equipment. One congregation gave grant money to help pay off the land. Another congregation sponsored 11 or

12 New Joy partners [members] in attending a Via de Cristo spiritual renewal weekend. In exchange, I have preached in other pulpits and led workshops on effective door knocking and Vacation Bible School evangelism.”

### **Q:** What would you advise someone discerning to become a mission developer?

**A:** “I would tell them to do it. It is the coolest thing in the world. Also talk to other mission developers to see what their experience has been like. Keep praying, and ask other people if they see the gifts for mission in you.” ●

Connie Thomson, pastor of New Joy, was raised in Fairfax, Virginia. She attended Capital University, Columbus, Ohio, and the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. She was ordained in 1993.



*Above, members stand in the shape of their anticipated building on groundbreaking day and pray that the Holy Spirit will bless the land and structure for God's mission.*

## Spreading family: Mariana and Moises Mendez

*The Lutheran Mission, Laredo, Texas • [www.missionlaredo.org/](http://www.missionlaredo.org/)*

**P**astors Mariana and Moises Mendez coordinate the ministries of the Lutheran Mission and six preaching points in and around Laredo and El Cenizo. “God works through the people at the Lutheran Mission and the six mission sites,” Mariana said. El Cenizo is the second or third poorest town in the United States, and the ministries help 500 people daily. “We have different programs of holistic evangelism in homes and at the preaching points. We also see God at work in the recognition and support of our ELCA brothers and sisters in Christ.”

Mariana has learned from her ministry that people should “develop their own spirituality and train other leaders for a multiplying effect.” ●



Pastor Moises leads a Bible study.



'God's call often comes through other people. Know that the mission is not about you. . .'



## Responding to God's Call: James Capers

*Lamb of God, Indianapolis, Indiana • [www.lambofgodchurch79.org](http://www.lambofgodchurch79.org)*

James Capers sees God at work in the mission field in which he serves. "God is bringing together people from every 'tongue and tribe,' just like the people worshipping the Lamb of God in Revelation 7:9. Lamb of God Lutheran Church has Haitians, African nationals, Latinos, African-Americans, and German-Americans."

For those discerning a mission developer call, Capers advises, "God's call often comes through other people. Know that the mission is not about you. Do not take things personally. Make sure that you have your spouse's full support. Do not force anything on the people that does not speak to them worship-wise, and stay in touch with God in prayer."

Capers has served the ELCA and its predecessor bodies since 1970 as a lay associate; parish pastor; director for evangelism, ELCA; assistant to the bishop/mision director for the Southeastern Synod, ELCA; member, Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission African American Strategy Team; writer, *Proclaiming the Power and Planning Revivals*; and composer, *Liturgy of Joy*. ●



James Capers, at right, officiates at baptism.

## Raising Up Living Stones: Eric Wangen-Hoch

*Living Stones Prison Congregation, Shelton, Washington*

"We want this congregation to shrink!" said Eric Wangen-Hoch, speaking of his congregation within prison walls.

However, Wangen-Hoch does want to grow his synod's involvement in the ministry even more in the form of volunteer re-entry teams to begin preparing prisoners and their families two years in advance of release.

"The waiting list for Southwestern Washington Synod congregations to come into the prison and participate in worship with the prisoners is now a year-and-a-half long," Wangen-Hoch said. "Those who participate feel like it is something that they can 'really feel good about.' Prisoners are seeking God, and they need someone to listen non-judgmentally, to love them, and to agree to disagree."

Wangen-Hoch's advice for anyone wanting to become involved in this type of "raw and real" ministry? "Be yourself. Be authentic. Give ownership away. Get people involved." ●



Pastor Wangen-Hoch





# Mission Builders

## Project manager felt God's call

### Veteran Mission Builders see work as building buildings AND community

**G**od's call and care have sustained Howard and Ann McCartha of Lexington, South Carolina, through 12 ELCA Mission Builders projects in nine states over 13 years.

"I once questioned God a lot," said Howard. "I questioned the Bible and the stories about the people of the Old and New Testaments. I wanted to experience what they did."

Howard felt God's call to serve. Scared, Howard backed away and promised that if God waited until he turned 50 and his children were grown, he would give up everything, go anywhere, and do anything that God wanted.

Twenty-some years later, Howard owned a promising construction business. He volunteered on a church mission building project through the South Carolina Lutheran Men in Mission, and was invited to join Mission Builders.

Howard considered the risks of discontinuing his business. "God reminded me of my promise 25 years earlier," Howard said. "I could not rest, so I mailed the application not knowing if Ann would go because we had just had our first grandchild. Two days later, she said that she would go, and I was happy. Her role in our ministry has been most essential."

Ann added, "I asked all the way to that first project what I would be doing, and Howard couldn't answer me. Once I got there, though, I was put to work right away."

Howard turned 50 in April 1995. By June, Howard and Ann left for their first Mission Builders project, Calvary, Grand Island, Nebraska. "The timing was part of God's plan," Howard said. They have since served on 11 other projects in Nebraska, North Carolina, Georgia, South Carolina, Colorado, Idaho, New York, Wisconsin, and South Dakota.

Howard is now a Mission Builders project manager. He also serves on the Mission Builders advisory board, which creates the Mission Builders budget, plans the annual Mission Builders managers' conference, and tithes to ministries in need.

Ann has coordinated meals and snacks with congregations, worked on buildings with Howard, helped in the church office and with Bible school, attended ladies' groups and Bible studies, and quilted.

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Howard, on right, obviously not awed by heights, stands tall on one of his early projects at Messiah Lutheran in Aurora, Nebraska.



Howard McCartha, project manager during construction of the addition to Trinity Lutheran Church, Platte, South Dakota,



Worship and Bible study are integral to the Mission Builders life together. Here Howard and Ann McCatha lead devotions for the Mission Builders crew and church volunteers.

### Our Mission

The ELCA Mission Builders are dedicated Christians who work for their Lord, helping congregations, schools, camps, and social ministry organizations of the ELCA build their facilities.

A typical project includes Mission Builders, members of the congregation, and various professionals working side-by-side.

While building structures, Mission Builders also build up the kingdom.

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## Building friendships, community from page 5

God called Howard and Ann and cares for them. "After 13 years, our bills get paid and we survive," Howard said. "I would never trade the wealth of our experiences and friends for any amount of money. We do not know where God will call us next, but I always wait with anticipation."

One can never anticipate how God

will act. Ann recalls that first Sunday at a project site, when 30 people attended worship—10 of them Mission Builders. The Sunday before the Mission Builders left, 130 people attended. "We had a part in getting this congregation to come together!" said Ann. "God works in many ways, and Mission Builders is God's plan for us as long as we are able to work." ●

## Keeping God's Light Shining: Chi-Shih Chen

*New Light Christian Church, ELCA, Palatine, Illinois • [www.newlightchristianchurch.org/](http://www.newlightchristianchurch.org/)*

Before coming to New Light Christian Church eight-and-a-half years ago as pastor, Chi-Shih Chen worked as a commodity and stock options trader and as a physicist and had considered doctoral work in microbiology. Now he mentors people through year-long discipleship training.

Chen speaks from experience when he describes the wonders that a life of discipleship can work: "God has changed my attitude so that I can deny myself and pray for others and pray ahead of problems. I enjoy ministry more, and people can sense it. I don't worry about failure because I let God take me out of the trouble."

Chen advises, "Develop a spiritual life with God, or you will burn out. Pray. Get in front of God. Think of God as your boss. Who works for their boss without communicating? If you love God, you can love people and minister to them." ●



Pastor and Mrs. Chen

## Loving Jesus First: Teka Obsa Fogi

*Oromo Christian Fellowship, Kensington, Maryland*

"My love for the Lord Jesus Christ trumps all other desires I have," said Teka Obsa Fogi, pastor at Oromo Christian Fellowship, Kensington, Maryland.

Prior to coming to the United States from Ethiopia in 2001 as a first generation Christian, Fogi taught for three years at the Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary. His current congregation has 70 committed members with 36 children.

Throughout his ministry, Fogi has seen God change lives: "I have met people who had regrets and hated themselves. I have seen God convert these people into passionate Christians who love God, themselves, and others."

"This ministry is exciting," Fogi says. "Winning over one person gives you overwhelming joy. Mission development is also challenging. People have their own ideas, their own upbringings. Sometimes they do not understand your passion. Teaching and training and making a support group is fundamental." ●



## Shining the Light of the World: Deb Stehlin

*Light of the World, Farmington, Minnesota • [www.lotwl.com/](http://www.lotwl.com/)*

Five years after her ordination and on the first anniversary of Light of the World's (LOW) formation, Deb Stehlin remembers that LOW is to "create light within Christian community. It is not about me but about my neighbor." Stehlin discovered the power of community while working part-time in a congregation after leaving her job in corporate communications. One day, a voice that she could hear ordered her, "Go to the seminary!"

Stehlin not only heard God speak that day, she sees God active today: "God works through relationships. God works through people who are sent out. God works through money and gifts that arrive when needed."

Stehlin said of working with what God provides, "Seekers come with big questions. Be welcoming. Don't set up walls of orthodoxy or belief. Build a support community around you. Read books, but trust how God works." ●



Pastor Deb Stehlin officiating at the Lord's Supper.

## Bringing God's Peace: Khader El-Yateem

*Salam Arabic Lutheran Church, Brooklyn, New York • [www.arabicbible.com/salam/](http://www.arabicbible.com/salam/)*

Pastor El-Yateem has served as pastor at Salam ("Peace") Arabic Lutheran Church, Brooklyn, New York, for 12 years. El-Yateem, a native Palestinian, worked at Bethlehem Bible College before moving to the United States. Of being a Palestinian Christian in an Israeli-occupied, Muslim area, El-Yateem said, "I was a double minority, which helped me to understand the cost of discipleship." He credits his grandmother and great-grandmother with encouraging his church-going and teaching him the importance of faith.

Today, El-Yateem's congregation lives up to its name—sake of peace—in an environment influenced by memories of 9/11, daily news of the Iraq war, and the on-going Israeli-Palestinian unrest—by providing a peaceful environment for worship, mutual support, and social services to immigrants. Congregation members represent eight Middle Eastern countries as well as others.

"Mission developer work can be demanding and frustrating," says El-Yateem. "It's exciting, though, to see unchurched families or ones who have fallen away getting connected or reconnected and becoming enthusiastic about their Christian callings." ● more on page 8



Pastor El-Yateem

## RESOURCES

For more information about mission development, please contact the mission director/director for evangelical mission working with your synod.

For a map of congregations-under-development, see [www.elca.org/newstarts/map](http://www.elca.org/newstarts/map)

For a variety of ELCA resources on vocation and leadership: [www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Leadership.aspx](http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Leadership.aspx) and [www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Vocation.aspx](http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Vocation.aspx)

Read *Listen! God is Calling: Luther Speaks of Vocation, Faith, and Work* available for purchase from Augsburg Fortress. [www.augsburgfortress.org](http://www.augsburgfortress.org)

*What Shall I Say?* is available in either English or Spanish from Augsburg Fortress. It provides guidance and direction for reflecting on your potential call to leadership.

[www.projectconnect.org](http://www.projectconnect.org) offers opportunities for young adults to consider God's call.

Study guides related to vocation are also available at [www.ptev.org](http://www.ptev.org)

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God's work. Our hands.

## God's Well: Todd Zielinski

*The Well, Charlotte, North Carolina*  
[www.the-well.org/](http://www.the-well.org/)

**T**odd Zielinski has served at The Well (Well of Hope Lutheran Church) since July 1999. "When discerning whether to serve as a pastor, God's voice through scripture and those who passed on the faith urged me to realize that God had a use for me, no matter my failures and faults," said Zielinski.



Todd Zielinski

Zielinski recalls a homeless man stealing from the congregation and then being charged and convicted with involuntary manslaughter. "He confessed and sought and received forgiveness from the congregation and the community," said Zielinski. "The freedom of the gospel to be honest in our weakness and discover strength in Christ changed not only his life, but the lives of the people in our church."

Zielinski's advice for mission developers? "Don't see large buildings, crowds, and programs as the measure of success. Be willing to be the seed that falls to the soil, dies, and becomes a means through which God brings new life. Pray. Pray. Pray." ●

## Standing for Others: Jennie Lightfoot

*One in the Spirit, St. Paul, Minnesota*

**'M**y spirit name is 'Wawash-kishshigabow-equay,' which means 'Standing Deer Woman,' said Jennie Lightfoot. "I am to stand for others."

An Ojibway American Indian and former human resources director, Lightfoot added, "God called me to preach the Word and to offer the Sacraments." Lightfoot also feels called to create a space where an American Indian wake and a



Jennie Lightfoot

Christian burial can be held in the same location: "The Native spiritual traditions and Christian faith are compatible. There doesn't have to be a split in the blended walk that we share."

One in the Spirit is based out of First Lutheran Church and works with local congregations and religious organizations to provide residential elder care and inter-generational programming with children from the local Mounds Park American Indian Magnet School and the children's shelter. "God keeps providing the right people and funding for our ministry," said Lightfoot.

"Keep listening to God. He will tell you what he wants." ●