



Mission Builders

Project manager felt God's call

Veteran Mission Builders see work as building buildings AND community

God'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/

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/

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/

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

For a variety of ELCA resources on vocation and leadership: www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Leadership.aspx and 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

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 offers opportunities for young adults to consider God's call.

Study guides related to vocation are also available at 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/

Todd 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

'My 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." ●