

# STORIES OF FAITH IN ACTION

## Reflecting Christ in the Community of the Baptized

**M**artin “Peanut” Jones is an active member of Bridge of Peace Lutheran Church in Camden, N.J., where he regularly attends Tuesday night Family Bible Study and Affirmation of Baptism class.



The fact that Peanut is only 5 years old and has been diagnosed with ADHD and sensory integration disorder in no way interferes with his full participation.

In fact, reports his mother Rose, one of Peanut’s favorite bedtime books is the Wengert translation of Luther’s Small Catechism. “[Reading this together] gave him a sense of comfort,” she reports, “and it helped me to know that Peanut knows that God loves him.”

The Rev. Giselle Coutinho says that Peanut is an example of the vibrant membership at Bridge of Peace. “Peanut reflects Christ to us and we reflect Christ to him in the community of the baptized. It is ‘God’s work. Our hands.’”

Bridge of Peace began as a mission development project of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the ELCA New Jersey Synod eight years ago and became an organized congregation in 2007. Pastor Coutinho has been with the congregation since 2006, first as the mission developer and then as the called pastor.

Bridge of Peace is thriving in a community recognized as the second poorest in the country with the second highest crime rate. At the root lies strong, local lay leadership—people like Peanut’s parents, Rick and Rose. Proud parents of three adult children and three adopted foster children, they have raised awareness about autism and other developmental disabilities among the congregation.

“Bridge of Peace is part of our family,” says Rose. “Here we’ve found a place that not only accepts my differently abled children but loves them unconditionally.”

Unconditional acceptance is the message of Bridge of Peace, which worships in three languages on Sunday: English, Spanish and Portuguese. It’s not about skin color and it’s not about ethnicity, notes Pastor Coutinho. “We are all created in God’s image. We are beautiful. It’s not about what we can’t do but what we can do. This is the congregation’s identity.”

For more *Stories of Faith in Action*, visit [www.elca.org/stories](http://www.elca.org/stories). Do you have a story to share? E-mail us at [stories@elca.org](mailto:stories@elca.org).



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