



Mission Builders



Eagle Pass, Texas

Mission Builders takes on its first ministry center-parsonage project

When it comes to serving the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Mission Builders have built, remodeled, and expanded everything from sanctuaries and church camp cabins to education, fellowship, and multipurpose spaces.

Now, in what is believed to be a first, Mission Builders are building a combined ministry center and parsonage with congregational volunteers at Iglesia Luterana San Lucas (St. Lukes Lutheran Church), Eagle Pass, Texas.

San Lucas members operate a food bank, help educate migrant farm workers, and are supporting a mission congregation in Eagle Pass. The congregation also helped start the Cristo Rey congregation in Piedras Negras, Mexico, through which free medical clinics are provided. All of these congregations serve in very low-income communities.

The Rev. Hector Vasquez serves the San Lucas and Cristo Rey communities, as well as the new mission start. While preparing for his future retirement in 2009 after 40 years of ministry, Pr. Vasquez contemplated the calling of a future pastor—possibly with a family—and realized that “something would have to be done” about the parsonage occupied by he and his wife, Mirtha, for approximately 18 years.

The previous parsonage—while well-maintained and clean—faced a variety of structural issues, including termite damage, water damage, and mold.



The Rev. Dr. Ray Tiemann, bishop of the Southwest Texas Synod (on the ladder), joins Patty Weber and Roy Doell, construction manager, at the Eagle Pass construction site.

Repairing wasn't an option; the house needed to be replaced.

Enter the Southwestern Texas Synod and the ELCA's Mission Investment Fund, which provided \$50,000 each. Add to that the ELCA Mission Builders, who contributed project planning, as well as \$17,000 for labor and incidental costs. The “turn-key” project is scheduled for completion in April 2008, with everything provided except the furniture.

“This project is a perfect example of partnership between the people of San



Mirtha and Pastor Hector Vasquez have served in the Eagle Pass area for approximately 18 years.

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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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Eagle Pass volunteers were all smiles, once the structure was all framed out.

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Lucas, the synod, ELCA Mission Investment Fund, and Mission Builders," said the Rev. Dr. Ray Tiemann, Southwestern Texas Synod bishop. "We are able to do together what would have been difficult for any one group to do alone."

Mission Builders volunteers from ELCA congregations in Texas, Wisconsin, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, and Iowa, alongside San Lucas members, are doing everything from adapting construction plans to framing, painting, trimming, and cabinetry. Contractors will do the electrical, plumbing, air conditioning, and metal roofing installation.

"I have been blessed to hammer a few nails myself on the project and would encourage others to do the same," said Bishop Tiemann.

"Yes, Bishop Tiemann worked with us and turned out to be a pretty good carpenter!" said Roy Doell, Mission Builders construction manager.

Doell explained that the new building will have three bedrooms and two-and-a-half baths as well as a good-sized fellowship area. A two-car garage with study and outdoor storage building will also be included. Doell and his wife of 47 years, Elaine, have served with Mission Builders since 1999.

The house is being built with cement panel siding, metal roof, tile floors, heat pump, double-paned windows, quality insulation, and wide doors to be low maintenance, energy efficient,

and handicapped-accessible. Additionally, some of the concrete piers supporting the foundation have been sunk ten feet into the ground to prevent foundation damage from shifting soil seen in other buildings on the property.

"I have been a Lutheran for the last 51 years," said Gary McVey, Mission Builders pre-construction manager for this project, "and Lutherans for the most part have taken care of their pastors. I feel good about that." McVey has worked on seven Mission Builders projects and provided pre-construction planning for a number of others since joining Mission Builders in 1998.

Another thing to feel good about is the building of relationships between people.

"We get to see how the local people live and get to know them because we live here, too," said Doell. In this case, the congregation's young people translate for the older congregation members who do not speak English and for the Mission Builders who do not speak Spanish. All share fellowship during a Saturday meal after working together.

"Our congregation is grateful to all of those involved in building the new ministry center-parsonage," said Pr. Vasquez. This project shows that the synod and others have a real commitment to do what they can to make Hispanic ministry work. How can God's mission continue otherwise?" ●



Rushford, reeling from blow of August flooding, finds God present

Planning underway for long-term spiritual support

Two months after the narthex addition to Rushford Lutheran Church, Rushford, Minnesota, was dedicated in June 2007, it was flooded, along with the rest of the church property and much of the community.

A story on the addition, constructed by ELCA Mission Builders, was featured in the Spring, 2007 issue of *Mission Partners Focus*.

The original church basement was flooded with 14 inches of sewage, which caused over \$22,000 in damage to the



Members hope to have the church kitchen, shown above in the wake of the flooding, rebuilt by Easter.

new elevator. Much of the building was flooded; the kitchen was a complete loss. The parsonage basement was also flooded with sewage and had to be gutted and rebuilt.

"The flood waters came right through the front doors of the new addition. However," says the Rev. Roger Michaelson, pastor at Rushford Lutheran, "God has been present from the beginning. No lives were lost in the

flood. God has been present in the people who have come from near and far to help us in our recovery."

Some of the ELCA Mission Builders involved in originally constructing the narthex addition returned to help with the recovery work. Outside contractors did much of the rest of the church repairs, while volunteers and contractors shared in completing the parsonage repairs.

The flood also damaged the homes and businesses of approximately 115 Rushford Lutheran families. Many of these families are busy with their own repairs or helping their neighbors. "The people of Rushford have worked hard to get their homes and the community cleaned up," says Pr. Michaelson. "The outside volunteers have been fantastic with their physical labor and contributions of food, household goods, clothing, and building supplies."

Assistance is still needed with building supplies, as well as skilled laborers, such as electricians and plumbers. To offer help, please contact Pastor Roger Michaelson at the church office number 507.864.7152.

Pr. Michaelson remains thankful for God's presence during the recovery: "Wherever the church is present in its various forms through Word and Sacrament; through service organizations such as Lutheran Disaster Response, Lutheran Social Services, and other church organizations; through prayer groups, women's organizations, and Sunday schools; God is present." ●



Narthex addition on far left, after its completion by Mission Builders earlier last year,



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Katrina victims resilient, though suffering...

Prayer Pilgrimage turns congregation 'upside down'

Faith Lutheran Church, Bellaire, Texas, had its priorities turned "upside down" when ten members visited Hurricane Katrina-ravaged New Orleans and southern Louisiana during a prayer pilgrimage in March 2007.

The prayer pilgrims prayed, ate, and worshiped with people who continue to suffer but also show resilience after Katrina. The pilgrims went to several churches and neighborhoods—some abandoned. They prayed and reflected on their experiences, journaled, and discussed their observations. Each pilgrim was given a "clinging cross"—carved to be held easily in one's hand—for walking and praying.

"One participant expressed that it humbled her to see the devastation that still remains and to be reminded of what we take for granted," said the Rev. Herb Palmer, pilgrimage leader. "New Orleans' people inspired us. They had so much taken from them, and they could let it go and rebuild."

Faith has been financially supportive to one of the congregations and is planning to share ministry ideas, leadership training, and council retreats with the Lutheran Church of the Galilean in La Place, one of



The pilgrims from Faith Lutheran each received a "Clinging Cross" made from wood that looks as though it was twisted by the wind. The card reads in part, "This cross...is a reminder of the hope you have in Christ Jesus."

the congregations on their pilgrimage.

Meanwhile, Pr. Palmer keeps his clinging cross visible to remind him daily of the people in New Orleans and southern Louisiana. "We began the pilgrimage with prayer and we continue to pray for the people of New Orleans and southern Louisiana." ●