



Harbinger

www.graceevanston.org • churchoffice@graceevanston.org

February 2014

**Affirming,
Courageous,
Caring**

**Grace Lutheran
Church of Evanston
1430 South Blvd.
at Wesley
847.475.2211**

**Grace Is An Open
And Affirming RIC
Congregation**

OUR MISSION:

To courageously live out our faith by sharing grace with each other and the communities we serve.

OUR VISION:

All God's people will feel accepted, challenged, and cared for by Grace Church.

Rev. Daniel Ruen
Pastor
pd@graceevanston.org

•
Mark Bowman
Music Director

•
The Rev. Kaari Reiersen, The Rev. Jen Rude, and The Rev. Raquel Rodriguez,
Colleagues in Ministry

•
Marie O'Brien
Parish Administrator

•
Steve Brunger
Sexton

Pray The Teeth Sink In

by Pastor Daniel Ruen

When I was in seminary I took a course on Buddhism and Christianity. One day the professor was telling us about the remarkable correspondence between Thich Nhat Hanh, the famous Vietnamese Buddhist monk, and The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King.

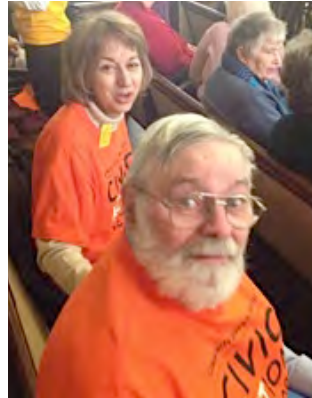
King would go on to nominate his friend for the Nobel Peace Prize because of his great admiration and respect for Hanh's courageous work in Vietnam.

I'll never forget when this same professor said, "We don't often allow our Gospel to speak with the bite it possesses. According to my experience, it hasn't been since the Civil Rights Movement that the American Christian Gospel showed its teeth."

It's a provocative image: a Gospel with teeth. The Gospel with a bite. Since my professor used this expression in relation to the Civil Rights Movement, I don't think he was referring to a particularly fervent brand of proselytizing.

No, I'm pretty sure he was talking about the bite of justice. He was referring to how we American Christians almost exclusively emphasize the soft hearted, 'I've-Got-Jesus-In-My-Back-Pocket' cheap grace portion of the Good News—not the part that got someone like Jesus tortured and crucified.

Every year, many of us go to some sort of MLK celebration. At the celebrations—or maybe at home during the evening news—we may watch archival footage of the "I Have A Dream" speech.



Top: Bob and Gail Lamont



Bottom: Bottom to Top: Ava and Joanie Daye, Sadie Vinson, Zora and Isaac Ruen, Meghan and Ruby Vinson, Clare Ruen at the MLK Day of Faith In Action at Kingdom Baptist church

As I've grown up attending such celebrations and watching the media portray the Civil Rights movement I am more and more convinced of something: our brother, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, has gone through a kind of painful, national-holiday-dental-procedure; he has been almost completely defanged by the establishment.

There's footage of MLK out there that they don't want you to see: the newsreels of King angry and defiant after his followers were killed, jailed and beaten; the photos of King in the hospital after being struck by a rock while marching in Chicago; the images of King after being stabbed with a knife. There is a MLK that is not-quite-ready for Prime Time, an MLK who spoke boldly for a mass movement of change that disrupted entire cities, unmasking the violence and power of Jim Crow—an institution of murder and oppression that would not go quietly.

On Monday, January 20th, seventeen Grace members attended the Community Renewal Society's annual Day of Faith in Action at Kingdom Baptist Church on the west side of the city. Over 800 people of faith from all over

the larger Metro Chicago Area were in attendance.

We didn't watch any films. We didn't hear any of King's speeches.

What we did do was call several elected officials to the assembly and got them to sign on to things like restorative justice programs to address the roots of violence, to reduce the costly time (both for taxpay-

Continued on next page

Pray, Cont.

ers and the human beings who are warehoused and disregarded) of those held in jail before their preliminary hearing after an arrest, and to expand employment opportunities for people with non-violent felony charges in their past.

The quote on the cover of the assembly program read:

“Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through constant struggle. And so we must straighten our backs and work for freedom.”

‘Constant struggle’ is not something many of us sign up for in life. In fact, everything sold to you (and here I also include what most organized religion is selling) is about how to get off the merry-go-round of constant struggle. We are tempted with and sold an imaginary finish line, an endpoint, a release.

What did MLK mean when he signed us Christians, and all people of conscience, up for a life of constant struggle? How are we to live with such a challenge?

Over the years, Grace’s involvement with the Community Renewal Society has reflected the constant struggle for justice both within our hearts and without. When one gets one’s hands dirty in the constant struggle King was referring to, ideals of change and pure calls for ‘justice’ quickly fade away.

That is why, I believe, King called for ‘straightening our backs’—an expression that implies walking tall and with confidence in order to dig in for the continued work ahead.

For King, this straightening, this constancy of struggle, could only happen through a non-violence of the soul. This was one of the ways his theology, the Buddhism of Thich Nhat Hanh, and the Hinduism of Mohandas Ghandi, reinforced one another and spoke in concert.

At root, King’s message ‘bit’ his followers internally as much as it did externally. While his actions and organizing techniques exhibited the public teeth of Jesus’ message in marches, sit-ins and jailings, King likewise implored his followers to be mindful of how their private hearts were also bitten by Jesus’ higher power of love—a love for themselves and their inherent dignity, a love for this country and the ideals it strives for and, most controversially of all, a love for even our most bitter enemies.

I don’t know the way forward through all of this. Actually, I think I do know it, but to actualize it is too terrifying for me. I believe that’s why to memorialize King and whitewash his life in the way we do is so damaging; by putting him on such a high pedestal we let ourselves off the hook. If MLK is really so amazing and so pure and so loving, how could we possibly do, or even attempt, any of the things he did?

We must always remember this as a people of the Holy Spirit: Our brother Martin was able to be who he was and what he was because of the thousands and thousands of everyday people who felt a higher power of love and possibility in their lives. Together, they were able to sponsor and uplift someone like MLK.



I think it could be said that, like a virus spread by an insect, those everyday Christian sisters and brothers were bitten by the offensive Grace of God, a grace that moved the world forward toward full equality, greater compassion and astounding partnerships.

Every Sunday we subject ourselves to the same bite of God’s grace. We are affirmed and cared for, yes, but the third pillar of our mission statement is that everyone who walks into our community will also be challenged. We will be challenged to bare the teeth of Jesus’ Gospel in ourselves and to the larger world.

What a commission! What a map we are dared to sketch out and to walk. It is only by listening deeply to the Holy Spirit working within us, with the power of God to draw us to one another, using our gifts of intellect, passion, humor and resiliency, that we are prevented from laughing one another out of the sanctuary each week.

Instead: We confess.

Instead: We try our best to forgive as we have been forgiven.

Instead: We dare to act in ways both tender and courageous...all the while hoping and praying that the teeth of Jesus’ Gospel sink in.

**The Peace and Joy of Christ,
Pastor Daniel**

Grace and Threads – Happy Publicity

You can find the following article on page 15 of the January 16, 2014 issue of the Evanston Roundtable or in the online version of the newspaper. See the Art & Life section. The article was sent in by a member of Threads of Grace.



Grace Lutheran Church Provides Gifts to the Homeless on 75th Anniversary

In this year of the congregation's 75th Anniversary Celebration, Grace Lutheran Church gave early Christmas gifts to homeless people to match the anniversary number. Total: 75+ handmade and fleece-cut scarves, 75+ hats, and 75+ pairs of heavy, winter gloves. Blain's Farm & Fleet supported this project by lowering the price of the gloves. The gifts could not have been as abundant without the help of the company's generosity.

All of the items were divided equally between Chicago Uptown Ministry and Interfaith Action of Evanston's Hospitality Center. When the gifts were delivered, the staff at each location were overwhelmed and delighted. The amount of warmth preserving accessories was far beyond previous years. Within this project, everyone involved wanted to remember that 20-25% of homeless people are Veterans.

For the last five years, Threads of Grace, the congregation's needlework ministry, has knit and crocheted scarves and hats and added a few gloves purchased with funds from a bake sale. This year because of the assistance of Blain's Farm & Fleet, "Threads" members set up a Christmas tree decorated with Glove-Adoption tags in a hallway of the church. The congregation "adopted" gloves and made donations so enthusiastically that the trees tags needed to be replaced several times.

The whole congregation got involved. Some members crocheted and knit throughout the year. Others cut carefully chosen fleece, or shopped and brought items. Many members "adopted" pairs of gloves with Thinsulate and waterproofing.

Additional Gifts for Students

Threads of Grace also delivered 33 handmade "fun" scarves and 14 hats for the children served by ESCCA, Evanston School Children's Clothing Association. These scarves and hats were big on fuzz and color. It's been a bountiful year. All gifts were sent with blessings and prayers for the health and wellness of their wearers. For further information please contact: Rev. Daniel Ruen, Grace Lutheran Church, 1430 South Boulevard, Evanston, IL 60202, (847) 475-2211 or visit pd@graceevanston.org

GRACE NEWS & EVENTS

Book Group

In March, we will discuss *Little Bee* by Chris Cleave.



Threads of Grace

We will again be crocheting and knitting for Uptown Ministry and Interfaith Action of Evanston's Hospitality Center with breaks for "fun" scarves for ESCCA (the Evanston School Children's Clothing Association).

From January to May 31 we will be blending two projects, first, we will be making items – sewn, crocheted, and knit - for sale at a booth in the fellowship hall.

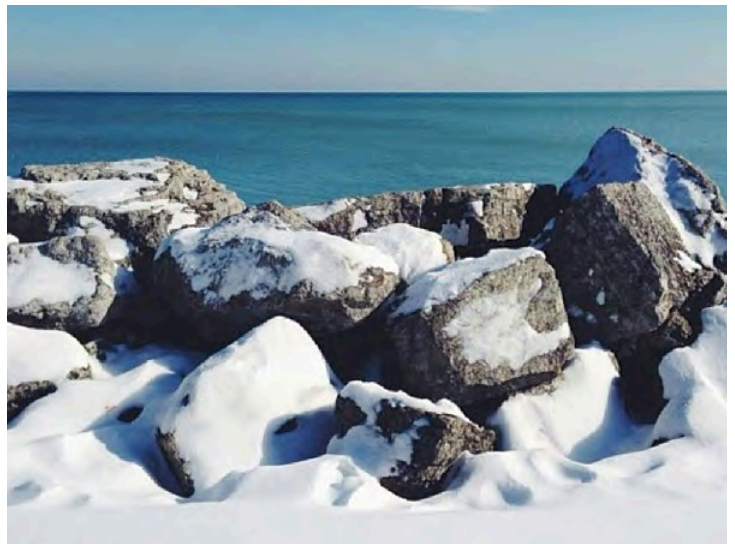
Second, those interested will join the Mother Bear Project in making teddy bears for children orphaned by AIDS in Africa and throughout the world.

If you have any questions, ask Nancy Starkman, Steve Mosco, Helen Yarbrough or Gail Lamont during Coffee Hour.

Everyone is welcome. We offer lessons and encouragement!

February Birthdays

02/01	Julia Shoaf
02/02	Deb Derylak Emily Mathyer Jen Rude Caitlin Sellnow Brian Vinson
02/03	Cerina Schiffer
02/04	Marianka Fousek
02/10	Marilyn Grinager Mason
02/11	Johanna Haar
02/14	Steve Mosco
02/16	Ali Schwarz Utech
02/17	Kayla Mosco Flint Jan Blackburn
02/19	Christopher Brunger
02/22	Ruby Vinson
02/23	Dawn Steele
02/26	Soren Koh
02/27	Robert Sokol
02/28	Laura Wally



The lakeshore in Evanston... remember, Spring is coming...

FEBRUARY WORSHIP SCHEDULE

February 2

Presiding Pastor Daniel Ruen
Preaching Pastor Daniel Ruen
Assisting Minister Kim Brown
Music Director Mark Bowman
Lector Nina Alvarez
Cantor Reggie Bruce
Acolyte Zora Ruen
Ushers Sarah Carson, Nate Brown
Coffee Hour Kim Brown, Danny Brown
Altar Care Danielle Keifert, Lisa Kosnik
Godly Play Clare Tallon Ruen
Nursery Care Ann Stevens
Flowers Dee Johnson

February 9

Presiding Pastor Kaari Reiersen
Preaching Pastor Kaari Reiersen
Assisting Minister Rosario Thacker
Music Director Mark Bowman
Lector Claudia Perry
Cantor Caitlin Sellnow
Acolyte William Thacker
Ushers Sarah Carson, Nate Brown
Coffee Hour Carolyn Utech, Dave Utech
Altar Care Ann Stevens, Nancy Mathyer
Godly Play TBD
Nursery Care Nina Alvarez
Flowers Dee Johnson

February 16

Presiding Pastor Daniel Ruen
Preaching Pastor Jen Rude
Assisting Minister Ron Graef
Music Director Mark Bowman
Lector Randy Warren
Cantor Bonnie Gunzenhauser
Acolyte Julia Shoaf
Ushers Jan Blackburn, Bob Shoaf, Cecilia Galicia
Coffee Hour Ann Stevens, Lonny Miner
Altar Care Ann Stevens, Nancy Mathyer
Godly Play Clare Tallon Ruen
Nursery Care Nancy Schubert
Flowers Jill Flaherty

February 23

Presiding Pastor Daniel Ruen
Preaching Pastor Daniel Ruen
Assisting Minister Carolyn Utech
Music Director Mark Bowman
Lector Brian Vinson
Cantor Jan Blackburn
Acolyte Logan Spies
Ushers Jan Blackburn, Bob Shoaf, Cecilia Galicia
Coffee Hour Clare Tallon Ruen, Karla Daye
Altar Care Christian Lantry, Deb Mitchell
Godly Play Stephanie Kulke
Nursery Care Deb Mitchell
Flowers Ann Stevens

Pastor Daniel and Clare Tallon Ruen at Holden Village, Washington - Feb. 3-15

Harbinger readers will know that Clare Tallon Ruen was invited to teach for Holden Village's annual Women's Retreat.

Pastor Daniel was also asked to lead Bible study during that time, so the entire Tallon-Ruen family will be in Washington State for a portion of February.

As always when PD is gone, there are local Pastors on call for any pastoral emergencies. Pastor Betty Landis of St. Paul's will cover Feb. 3-9; Pastor Tim Brown of Trinity will cover Feb. 10-15.

You may also contact Marie at the Grace office, Music Director Mark Bowman, or Council President Les Inch during this time if anything arises.

We look forward to hearing back from Clare and PD about their experiences at Holden.



More Photos from the Community Renewal Society MLK Meeting.

A number of State Representatives and State Senators were invited to the meeting and were asked to state their positions on issues important to about 800 representatives of area churches. Before the legislators are asked anything, the congregations identify themselves and state how many report cards they will take back to their congregation.



In the photo, Ava Daye, Sadie Vinson, and Zora Ruen return from the microphone after representing Grace.



L to R: Ruby and Sadie Vinson, Ava Daye, Zora Ruen, Joanie Daye



L to R: Ginny Ayers, Clare Ruen, Meghan Vinson, Felipe Encarnacion-Rodriguez, Isaac Ruen, Jonathan, Victor, Taina and Joel Encarnacion-Rodriguez, Gail Lamont, Bob Carroll have lunch together after the assembly

The Brownell Family

We are very excited to be joining the Grace Lutheran family. Our daughter Amelia is in fourth grade at Dawes Elementary School. She is in the Two-Way Immersion Program where Spanish is integrated into the classroom. She loves reading and writing stories about her friends and family. She takes piano lessons at the Musical Offering and dance lessons at Dance Center Evanston. She also participates in Girl Scouts and started playing trumpet this year.

Our son Sam is in first grade at Dawes. He also is an avid reader. He wants to be an architect or engineer because he loves projects where he builds things. He also participates in the Chess Club and takes piano lessons at the Musical Offering.

Our son Henry is finishing his last year at Total Child Preschool. He loves to make "set ups" with his toys and books. He participates in gymnastics and story time at the library.

Jeanine is an early childhood educator who is currently working on a project at Erikson Institute in Chicago that seeks to improve math teaching in the early grades. She also serves on the board for the Total Child Preschool and on the School Improvement Team at Dawes.

Carl is the Social Science Department Chair at Maine East High School in Park Ridge. He teaches two freshman classes on the History of Western Civilization while also supervising the department of 15 teachers. He previously taught for 13 years at Evanston Township High School in their history department. Though he hates to admit it, Carl is a bit of a sports nut.

Both Jeanine and Carl are graduates of Northwestern University and have lived together in Evanston for fifteen years. They decided to join Grace Lutheran because of its diverse, welcoming congregation as well as wanting to belong to a church from our neighborhood (we live in the 300 block of Florence). We look forward to getting to know everyone at Grace and becoming a greater part of its spiritual and purposeful life.



Carl and Jeanine Brownell

Henry, Sam, and Amelia Brownell



The Okrzynski family

Hello Grace! Greetings and Happy New Year from the Okrzynski family. Our family of four, Maren, Jason, Dylan (6) and Soren (3), are excited to have joined the Grace community of faith this past fall. The four of us journeyed to the Evanston area four years ago from Minneapolis, MN.

When not worshipping with Grace, our family is a typically busy family. Maren works full-time as a paralegal for United Stationers, plays soccer in a women's league, and has just recently taken up the banjo. Make sure to ask her about American Idol! Jason is a full time PhD Candidate in Christian Education & Congregational Studies at Garrett Theological Seminary on Northwestern University's campus, and an avid runner, song writer and gamer. Dylan is in kindergarten at Open Arms in Glenview and plays soccer, t-ball and loves reading Harry Potter and building Legos. Soren is in pre-school at Open Arms and plays soccer and loves exploring. Together we love hiking, movies and playing games. It is our joy to worship and grow in faith in Christ with you.

Celebrate Black History in Evanston

From the City of Evanston website , some events and programs held across the city throughout the month of February.

Saturday, February 1

Restoring Voting Rights, Political Power in the Community

10 a.m., Levy Senior Center, 300 Dodge Ave.

The first installation of the Black History Discussion Series will be moderated by George Mitchell. Admission is free.

Sunday, February 2

African Marketplace and Culture Fair Kick-off Event

1 p.m., Fleetwood-Jourdain Community Center, 1655 Foster St.

This family-friendly event will feature a lively African American marketplace, entertainment and African American cuisine. Admission is free.

“Unforgettable” Viewing Party

4 p.m., Fleetwood-Jourdain Community Center, 1655 Foster St.

Produced by the McGaw YMCA and Filmmaker Susan Hope Engel, this documentary honors the legacy of the Emerson Street Branch YMCA which grew to become an anchor for the social and civic life of Evanston's Black community between 1909 and 1969. Admission is free.

Monday, February 3

Still I Rise: Celebrating African American Poets

7 p.m., Noyes Cultural Arts Center, 927 Noyes St.

Black poets have created verse that captures the sorrows, joys and triumphs of the African-American experience for more than two centuries. To honor the contributions of black poets, the Fleetwood-Jourdain Theatre and Next Theatre Company will present a theatrical reading of poems by famous African-American poets, including Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou, Arna Bontemps, Nikki Giovanni, W.E.B. Dubois, Alice Walker and more! Admission is free.

Wednesday, February 5

3 Critical Black History Talks on Racism: Part One

6:45 p.m., Room 122, University Hall, 1897 Sheridan Rd.

Thursday, February 6

Black History Month: Its Relevance to You

6 p.m., Elder 1st Floor Lounge, 2400 Sheridan Rd.

Changing Your Mindset

8 p.m., Conference Room, The Black House, 1917 Sheridan Rd.

Saturday, February 8

Valuing Creative Arts in the Black Community

10 a.m., Levy Senior Center, 300 Dodge Ave.

The second installation of the Black History Discussion Series will be moderated by Dino Robinson. Admission is free.

Sunday, February 9

Alice Millar Birthday Concert: 50th Anniversary Celebration

7 p.m., Alice Millar Chapel, 1870 Sheridan Rd.

Monday, February 10

Northwestern Community Ensemble Presents:

Black History Month

6 p.m., First Floor Lounge, Bobb-McCullough, 2305 Sheridan Rd.

Wednesday, February 12

Escape from New York: Discussion with Minkah Makalani

12:30 p.m., Room 2-425, Kresge Hall, 1880 Campus Dr.

Thursday, February 13

“She Was His Cook, But He Built Her House.” - Race, Gender and Reproductive Labor in 20th Century Evanston

7 p.m., Evanston History Center in Dawes House, 225 Greenwood St.

Saturday, February 15

The Continuing Legacy of Pan-African Resistance

10 a.m., Levy Senior Center, 300 Dodge Ave.

The third installation of the Black History Discussion Series will be moderated by Lionel Jean-Baptiste. Admission is free.

Alice Tregay Presents Alice's Ordinary People Documentary

3 p.m. Family Focus Theater, 2010 Dewey Ave.

Please join us as we spend the afternoon with Alice Tregay, an Evanston native known for her commitment as a longtime civil rights and voter registration activist, and view her documentary about ordinary people who made things happen. The documentary was filmed by Craig Dudnick. Admission is free.

Celebration of African American Spirituals

4 p.m., Family Focus Theater, 2010 Dewey Ave.

Spirituals not only expressed the hopes of generations of enslaved African Americans for over 350 years in the United States, they also provided inspiration for and gave voice to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Join us as we celebrate the spirituals heard all around the world, featuring Rev. Kenneth Cherry, Pastor Christ Temple Church. Reception will follow in Norwood Hall, lower level. Admission is free.

Saturday, February 22

My Black is Beautiful - A Conversation on the relevance, power and image of the African American girl

11:30 a.m., Family Focus Theater, 2010 Dewey Ave.

Friday, February 28

African American Youth Achievement Awards Ceremony

6 p.m., Evanston Township High School, 1600 Dodge Ave.

This program is a Black History Month initiative sponsored by the City of Evanston, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Family Focus, First Bank & Trust, McGaw YMCA, NAACP, Northwestern University and Shorefront, in conjunction with School District 65 and District 202. Admission is free.

Fred Biederman gave a Temple Talk at Grace on Sunday, January 12th.

Here is the text of his talk.



Good morning! My name is Fred Biederman and I'm honored to serve with our synod's Hunger committee. Thank you, Grace Church, for inviting me to speak with you all today.

I'm here today for three reasons. First, to thank you for all you do to respond to those who are hungry in this community, around the country, and around the world. Second, to thank you for your generous giving to ELCA World Hunger. And most importantly, to give thanks to God for all the good that has been brought about in this world through your prayers, your words, your actions, and your generosity.

Last year, through your congregation, you provided \$1,750 to ELCA World Hunger—that is, the equivalent of \$8.66 per baptized member of this congregation.

Last year, through your congregation, you provided \$1,750 to ELCA World Hunger—that is, the equivalent of \$8.66 per baptized member of this congregation.

ELCA World Hunger works to address the root causes of poverty and hunger through a comprehensive approach of relief and development activities, but also through education about the causes and solutions of hunger and through advocacy—or lasting systemic change.

Each year, through gifts of support like yours, ELCA World Hunger helps us as a church respond to God's call and make a bigger difference — together. We walk side-by-side with other communities and churches through programs focused on sustainable agriculture and food security, income generation, education, healthcare and access to clean, safe water.

When the ELCA was birthed in 1988, 1 in 4 people in the world were living with extreme hunger. Since that time, alongside other faith-based and secular groups of good will, Lutherans have been part of cutting nearly in half/halving the number of people experiencing extreme hunger in the world-- from 1 in 4 to 1 in 8 today. This is truly made possible through all of our generous gifts. In 1974,

when our predecessor church bodies formed the basis of what we now know as ELCA World Hunger, gifts totaled just under \$4 million dollars—and we have been growing ever since. With your support and encouragement, in 2012, gifts to ELCA World Hunger totaled almost \$19 million.



What amazing, grace-filled generosity! Your gifts were put to work through the ELCA's church-with-church and companion relationships around the globe in 50 plus countries, including the United States.

Your gifts are at work in places like Quibdo, Colombia. Jency has a bright future thanks to her mother's hard work and your generosity to ELCA World Hunger. It wasn't long ago that Jency's mother, Aida, and her friend Jenny were driven from their villages by guerilla raids and made their way to the city. Through your gifts, these women learned small business skills – and now the customers of their spa, Tesoro de la Selva (Treasure of the Forest), enjoy the natural produces the women make, as well as the flowers they grow for sale.



Aida is pleased with the organizing and business training she and her friends received, saying, "This is a huge success. We were helped with personal growth, how to run a business and made aware of our rights as women."

Another woman in the business group, Vianney sums it up: "Our quality of life and the lives of our families improve," she says. "Without this business and income, life would be very difficult."

The women are constantly improving their products and services. They are also looking forward to certifying their products for sale in mainline supermarkets and stores. Thanks to your gifts to ELCA World Hunger, Jency and children like her can look forward to a more secure future.



"Our quality of life and the lives of our families improve," she says. "Without this business and income, life would be very difficult."

-Vianney

Your gifts are also at work at Gift of Grace Lutheran Church in Seattle, Washington. Meet Harold and Debra. Harold and Debra were experiencing homelessness—they had fallen on hard times. Harold and Debra would sleep in an alcove on the street and sometimes at the overnight ministry hosted at Gift of Grace. Around the same time, congregation members of Gift of Grace wanted to start eating together after service. Then, they decided to make an even wider invitation and host a community meal for church members and community members alike. Harold and Debra began to come and eat with the church community. Harold now serves as a cook for the meal called Grace Feast. He and Debra are now a couple, and they attend church together at Gift of Grace. When asked why he cooks, Harold likes to say, "I'm just giving back."

In this story from Gift of Grace, we see so many examples of service—of Harold's gift of service, but of the congregation's service to open themselves up to new and deeper relationships amongst themselves and the greater community. In many ways, it's about the fellowship that is created, which is part of our Christian call and witness supported by gifts to ELCA World Hunger.

The Gospel of Luke tells us that Jesus blessed the hungry: "Blessed are you who are hungry, for you will be filled." Yes, Lord, but how will that come about? He tells us disciples precisely: "You give them something to eat," he says in Luke 9:13. Amen.



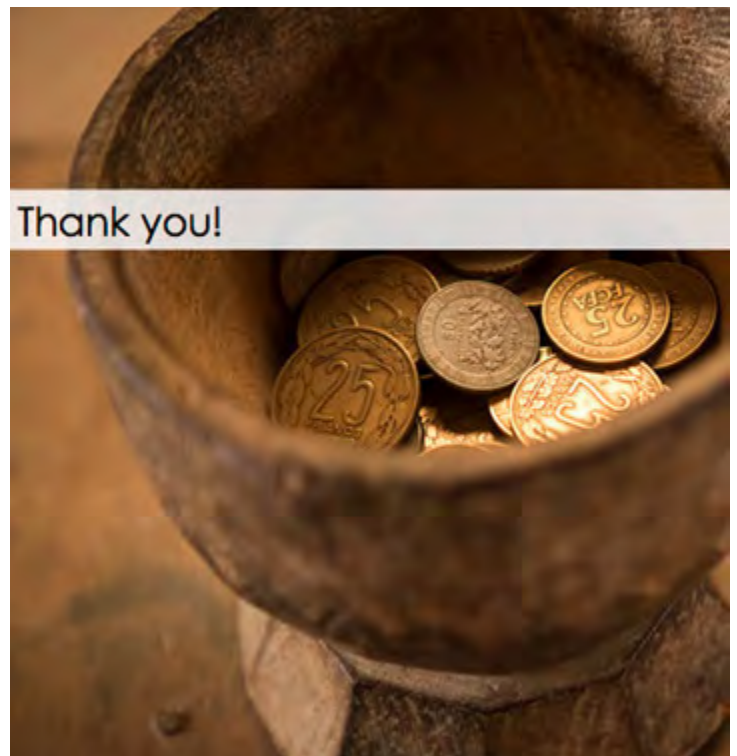
Harold
Seattle, Washington

 **ELCA World Hunger**
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

The disciples in this congregation have stood up in joyful obedience to Christ's command. You respond in many ways to the needs of our brothers and sisters who are hungry, and thanks be to God for everything you do.

Our goal in this synod is that ELCA World Hunger would be given the equivalent of \$5 for each baptized member. Grace/Evanston has exceeded this goal. And so I am honored to present Grace Lutheran Church/Evanston with this star, which commemorates your generous response to Christ's Gospel command to love our neighbor as ourselves, to love one another as he has loved us.

Thank you for your support of our shared ministry in ELCA World Hunger.



Thank you!

To Suffer and...to Love. The Spiritual Pilgrimage of a Missionary

by Carmelo Alvarez

I would like to invite you on my journey in faith. It is a journey nurtured and inspired by prayers, songs, reflections, confessions, doubts and assurances. My spirituality has been shaped by a prayerful life that includes the church, a Christian home, and an ecumenical pilgrimage that expands more than three decades. I have lived in different countries, as a missionary, working with different denominations and experiencing the ecumenical life with all its joys and frustrations.

By prayerful life I mean the experiences and reflections that inform and transform my existence in the world as a child of God. It is a spirituality of pilgrimage, always searching, often doubting, most of the time struggling and definitely being blessed by others.

Personal Journey

This journey starts at the personal level and moves into different stages and moments, through multiple conversions, aiming at maturity and completion.

At the personal level I have to mention the early discipline received from my mother, Elizabeth. She was a person of solid and deep Christian convictions, who believed in the power of prayer as a basic component in Christian life. She understood that talking to God and being in God's presence was fundamental to a solid life in faith. This spiritual discipline has been very important in my ministry. When I have been confronted with crucial decisions and challenged by serious temptations and doubts, a prayerful moment provides the necessary stability and wisdom.

Prayer moments for me are often accompanied with Bible reading and meditation. I see in the Bible enough elements to focus and concentrate in an adventure in faith. I can start with a question, some deep doubt, but also just trying to be in God's presence, and in silence. I find silence to be refreshing in a prayerful life. It provides for some sense of peace and tranquility. Silence gives me an opportunity to wait for God's presence and response, knowing that many times in life there are no easy and quick answers.

Ecumenical Life

My experience at home and in church provided the first exposure to ecumenical life. My father was very active in the ecumenical movement in Puerto Rico. I learned early in my life how to relate my own Disciples tradition with a larger ecumenical world expressed in different Protestant denominations. Comprehending a larger ecumenism including the Catholic tradition and other non-Christian religions came later in my missionary life. But the seeds of ecumenism were planted during that early period. I developed a theological sensibility to diversity, pluralism and tolerance during those years. I added a dimension of hospitality and compassion as I became committed to the struggles, aspirations, dreams and frustrations of the persecuted, tortured, displaced and marginalized people of the world. This ecumenical experience was enriched by the liturgical diversity shared through the World Council of Churches, the Latin American Council of Churches and other ecumenical organizations in which I actively participated over the years. As I was exposed to cultural diversity, I expanded my own vision of the human race, the human condition and human potential.

I have discovered that these early influences were very relevant in my theological pilgrimage through today. They shaped my theological understanding and helped in my development as a preacher. My own journey as a missionary in Latin America and the Caribbean was nurtured and matured, as I reflected on these ideas through so much suffering and struggle in the 1970s and 1980s. I developed what one may call a *theologia viatorum*, a theology on the way, enriching, expanding my commitment as a missionary, pastor and theologian.

Visiting Professor, Union Seminary & Theological Community of Mexico

I was visiting professor at the Union Seminary and at the Theological Community of Mexico, a cluster of Protestant seminaries, the academic year of 1974-1975. Mexico was an eye-opener to Latin America and the Caribbean. The opportunity and privilege of sharing with students and professors from so many countries, including Germany, Spain, Sweden and the United States paved the way for our incorporation in Costa Rica.

Latin American Biblical Seminary, San Jose, Costa Rica

In 1974 my wife Raquel and I received a letter from the Latin American Biblical Seminary in San José, Costa Rica, a prestigious ecumenical institution in Latin America, inviting me to be professor of Church History. My wife Raquel was assigned to work with the Counselling Department of the Seminary. Her Master in Education, with a major in counseling was welcome at an institution dealing with so many cultural traditions. We were embraced by colleagues and friends, and had the opportunity to see a different expression of the Church.

The rich diversity manifested at the Latin American Biblical Seminary was a blessing and a challenge. It was a blessing because the Seminary was at the crossroads of a dynamic and creative situation. We had students from more than thirty countries and more than forty denominations. The Seminary was a real laboratory of theological initiatives, reflections and liturgical innovations. It was a challenge



Alvarez-Rodriguez family: (L) Nina, Naia, Pastor Raquel, Dr. Rev. Carmelo

because everything was moving so fast, with so many changes. An intense exposure to cultural diversity, and the crude reality of poverty and oppression shared by students coming from concrete struggles for justice and peace, usually survival, demanded lots of spiritual and emotional energy. Latin America and the Caribbean were dealing with economic crisis, political instability, social unrest, civil wars, extreme poverty, and cultural oppression. Raquel and I were touched and changed forever. For the first time we identified clearly our Latin American-Caribbean identity, which enriched our Puerto Rican roots and heritage. Our pilgrimage was taking us to a spiritual and theological level never experienced before.

Central America

The first shock we experienced in Central America was the crude reality of oppression and suffering. The years 1975-1978 were crucial in this learning process. Central America was experiencing a deep political and military process. The war was escalating in Nicaragua and El Salvador, with another civil war in the making in Guatemala. Costa Rica, Honduras and Panama were involved in the conflict. Nobody was neutral in Central America during these years.

The immersion process was painful and joyful simultaneously. How can people that suffer so much have hope and joy in the midst of war, poverty, racism, marginalization, torture, displacement, exile?, is a question that haunted me always. In suffering and hope I rediscovered the deepest meaning of the Cross and Resurrection. I came to Central America with deep frustration and pain, almost bitterness, with the Church and a profound transformation occurred. I call it my second conversion. Some of my colleagues at the Seminary and friends from Puerto Rico noticed that my preaching was more contextual, more pastoral and concrete. I regained a sense of confidence and trust in God and the Gospel. I used to work long hours in solidarity with refugees and human rights commissions in Central America, and often did not feel the heavy load of work. It was a time of blessing and rejoicing! I realize today that a "faith seeking understanding" process was coming to a mature stage.

Our original plan, when we accepted the invitation from the Latin American Biblical Seminary in Costa Rica, was to return to Puerto Rico in less than three years. I was waiting for an opening at the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico. By late June 1978 it was clear that we were going to stay in Costa Rica for a longer period. In July 1978 the rectorial search committee at the Biblical Seminary asked me to be interviewed for the position of Rector. After my first interview with the search committee the chairperson called me saying that they wanted to recommend my candidacy to the Board of Trustees and to the Civil Association of the Latin American Biblical Seminary (the legal entity in Costa Rica). I was both surprised and in shock. Although that had not been my plan, God had other plans for me. On November 1978 I was installed as rector (president) of the Latin American Biblical Seminary.

During my tenure as president of the Latin America Biblical Seminary in San José, Costa Rica, I experienced some painful situations. Surrounded by a daily reality of war and instability affecting many people, being president of the Seminary became a real burden. The students and the churches that sent them to our Seminary were confronting too many dilemmas and limitations. They suffered human rights violations, persecution, torture, the disappearances of pastors and lay leaders and the martyrdom of many people.

Turning Point in Pilgrimage

Being in Central America became a turning point in my pilgrimage as missionary and theologian, one in which I learned to resist and be creative in the midst of crisis and challenge. The year 1983 was crucial in Central America: The escalation of the war in El Salvador, the Contras in Nicaragua, the Honduran involvement, and Costa Rica's involvement in a regional conflict. We took a sabbatical year after completing my tenure as president of the Biblical Seminary and spent six months in Chile. The Chilean experience provided the necessary transition and in 1984 I accepted the position of secretary for the Pastoral Ministry of Consolation and Solidarity and Regional Secretary for the Caribbean of the Latin American Council of Churches. The next three years I traveled constantly throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, from one country to the other. It was the continuation of my pilgrimage that now included the whole Latin American region.

During these three years the Latin American Council of Churches provided the necessary accompaniment to the churches and helped in promoting a peace movement in Latin America and the denunciation of human rights violations in Chile, Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil. I participated actively with the churches in these movements. The signing of the Central America Peace Accord in 1987 was the climax to the whole process.

The Year 1987

The year 1987 provided the next crucial moment in my ministry. I wanted to take some time to teach and write and accepted an invitation from the Ecumenical Research Department of San José, Costa Rica to be the Executive Director. I could do some teaching and writing, but the administration of the institution and the political situation in Central America caught me in the middle of the conflict again. This time I was involved as a consultant on human rights issues with the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights, the Central American Association of the Relatives of the Disappeared and Detained (ACAFADE), the Central American Commission of Human Rights and the Costa Rican Ecumenical Commission of Human Rights.

A Global Dimension

The Central American experience took me to yet another fascinating and demanding project. This time I accepted the position of General Secretary and Treasurer of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT). EATWOT gave me a new dimension in this ecumenical pilgrimage: a global dimension. During the next four years (1992-1996) I had the immense privilege of sharing in the struggles of men and women theologians in six continents. My vision of the world was expanded. My theology was challenged by new issues and new struggles. I was aware of a world in crisis clamoring for justice, but also living in the rich experiences of a spirituality of life. It was a new conversion. I realized that being global and ecumenical was more than a slogan or theological fad. To be in solidarity with women in their struggles, the indigenous people in their cry for justice and with children in their daily struggle for survival changed my perception of the world, the human condition, the potential for human deprivation and corruption, but also the potential for love, peace and justice.

All these experiences became a process of conversion toward a new just world order based on friendship, solidarity and peace: A globalization of hope toward a new humanity.

February Calendar

Every Sunday 10:45 Worship followed by coffee hour
Sunday School During Worship

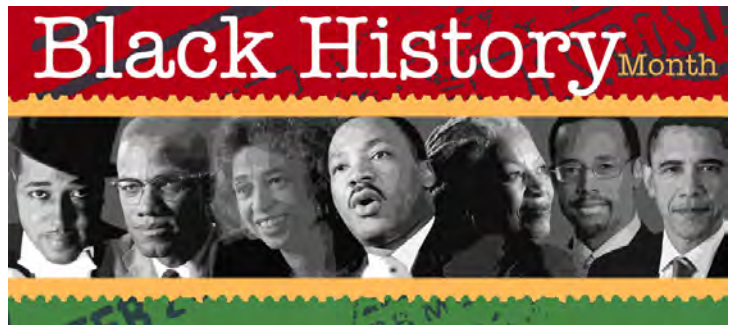


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