



Your faith challenged and encouraged

By the Rev. Wm Chris Boerger, bishop



As DeDe and I were leaving Johannesburg, South Africa, to return to the U.S., I struck up a conversation with the young man across the aisle from me on the plane. He was returning from Uganda where he had been working as an engineer to build facilities for mission organizations working throughout Africa.

As we talked, a man in front of him volunteered that he was with a group that had spent three weeks working with churches in South Africa. This led to a conversation with another group returning home from mission trips in southern Africa. I am aware of at least five groups and other individuals who were returning home after serving in Africa.

While none of these groups were Lutheran on this flight, other airplanes, car caravans, buses and trains are carrying our members, as well as other sisters and brothers in Christ, to and from places where they are serving. Service mission trips are becoming part of the normal fabric of our lives together in the congregation. In my early years in ministry we looked for the annual youth service trip. Now we see people of all ages participating in meeting the needs of the world.

This also reflects how the church is changing. Working overseas or even in disaster response was seen as the work of the churchwide organization. Individuals responded to calls from the larger church to serve.

Today, local congregations have developed the relationships that make these trips possible and productive. I would argue that it is still important to use the resources of the churchwide organization in order to accompany the local indigenous church in its work. That being said, it is the work of the local congregation that makes these trips effective and productive.

I also want to speak a word of caution to those going on these trips. You will get back far more than you give. You are going on this mission trip to do the work of God. The reality is that God is already at work in these places before you get there. Expect to have your faith challenged and encouraged as you receive the gift of faith from those who are already working in the places where you are going.

The church of Jesus Christ is a global church. To understand what God is doing today we need to gain this global perspective. We have also been blessed to be a blessing. As we serve the poor, we are reminded of our stewardship of God's blessings.

I give thanks for those who are reaching out to their neighbors. It is the work of Christ in the world. □

God is good

By Glen Aaberg

As the fifth anniversary of the landfall of hurricanes Katrina and Rita and of the levee failures in New Orleans has come and gone, as we see storm after storm cross the maps on the Weather Channel, and as we pray about the work that God may call us to do in the coming year, I am thankful for the opportunity to share

a few of the blessings that God has brought us, the people of Cross and Crown Lutheran Church, Renton, through our connection to our brothers and sisters on the Mississippi Gulf Coast and in New Orleans.

In October 2005 when I returned from Biloxi, Miss., I said over and over again that healing from those

indescribable storms appears to happen one person, one moment, one encounter at a time.

In the years since, as we've traveled, worked, visited and worshiped, we have been repeatedly shown that God always has more in mind for us than we know.

Each time we have returned home

Aaberg is pastor of Cross and Crown Lutheran Church, Renton.

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Northwest Washington



Surrounded by hugs, Kaitlin Torgerson smiles with her new friends at The Dreamer Center School.



David Stariha blows bubbles with a kindergarten class at The Dreamer Center School.



Nichole and Tyler Kurz begin to lay the foundation that will be the home of a Guatemalan family.

Guatemala reflection

By Kaitlin Torgerson

When Sammamish Hills Lutheran in Sammamish began conversations about a mission trip to Central America, I was more than happy to jump right in. But I had no clue as to who would come, what we'd do, or how we'd raise the money.

Through amazing works of the Spirit, on June 21, 2010, we were met at the airport in Guatemala City by the God's Child Project, a nonprofit that supports Guatemala's neediest families through education, building projects, health care and much more.

For the next 10 days, our five adults and six youth put hearts, minds, hands and backs to work volunteering in the greater Antigua area. If we weren't out learning about the

project's schools and programs, we were serving meals at its homeless shelter, handing out food to more than 300 women, distributing clothing to families, or helping at a three-day building project in the pouring rain as we completed two homes from start to finish.

Everywhere we went, we were met with some of the best smiles, hugs and laughs from children. During our first days in Guatemala, we saw what these children called home—houses made of cornstalks, scrap metal and dirt floors. At school the children chased us around the playground, climbing onto our laps and giving smiles that melted our hearts. Amid such brokenness and poverty, their joyful spirits shone through.

Back home, I scanned through pic-

tures of these beautiful children and reflected on our visit. What amazed me the most wasn't the houses we built or the food we handed out—it was the work I knew was still ahead and a call that was louder than ever. This mission trip was far from over.

For us, it wasn't really a "trip" at all. If we are open to it, it's an experience that infects our entire being so we can't stop telling the stories of the people we met.

We are a group that said: "Here I am Lord." A group that teamed up with the staff of the God's Child Project to follow God's call to Guatemala. It took each person, every heart (not to mention muscles and patience much greater than mine) before we even stepped foot on a plane. □

Torgerson is director of student ministries, Sammamish Hills Lutheran Church, Sammamish.

From walls that divide to bridges that unite

The van goes quiet as we cross from the U.S. into Tijuana and travel west along the border. Walls, surveillance and a wide strip of uninhabited land is the stark divide between us and our country.

Trinity Lutheran Church has sent two teams a year for the past 10 years to the Tijuana region of Mexico to build houses with Esperanza International (www.esperanzaint.org). What we have discovered is that our calling is really about building bridges. While fear works hard to separate us from our neighbors, working side-by-side building a house creates friendships, trust and community that results in bridges that connect us. Language, culture and barriers that we humans build aren't enough to separate us when God calls us together.

Fifteen minutes down the road we arrive at Pueblo Esperanza, our home for the week. We are warmly greeted by Victor, the caretaker who lives on site with his family, and Kimber, the

long-term volunteer. The Esperanza staff are good friends we look forward to reconnecting with each time we return.

Monday morning arrives quickly and we are off to our first day of work in the community of La Morita. We are introduced to the Maria Ete family. They share their excitement and thanks, and we share ours with them. By the end of today the family will have a roof on their new home.

As we begin working we suddenly become aware that 20 people from the family and community have joined us. We excitedly greet several whom we know, people we have worked with and some whose homes we helped build. Lucia, Sandra, Teresa, Cecilia, Hosea, Juan and others. Friends and neighbors are reconnected. It reminds me of an old-fashioned barn raising. Together we finish preparations just in time for a lunch provided by the community.

Soon we hear the cement mixer

start up. To complete the roof pour it will take all of us working together. We load the mixer—one bag of cement, four buckets of sand, six of gravel and two of water. Teams fill the sand and gravel buckets. Others load them into the mixer. Then buckets of concrete are passed down the line of people to the house and up to the roof, then down the return line to begin their circuit again.

You get into the zone, the rhythm, and soon you're talking and goofing around. Conversations, smiles, bonding and friendships develop. Twenty loads to complete the roof and when the mixer shuts down the cheers go up. Look at what just happened! Bridges were built.

We return to Pueblo Esperanza. Tuesday and Wednesday we will prepare and pour another roof in the community of Santa Margarita. Thursday and Friday we will begin digging a foundation in Valle Verde—and the process repeats and it is amazing. God works wonders and we get the privilege of being part of God's work. □

Cliff Bronson

Bronson is an associate in ministry at Trinity Lutheran Church, Lynnwood.

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with more stories to tell of new life, new connections and new signs of God's kingdom among us.

We have been blessed to welcome Judy Bultman, former director of recovery ministry at Bethel Lutheran Church in Biloxi, and the Rev. Bruce and Deborah Davenport of St. John #5 Faith Church in New Orleans to Renton and to our neighborhoods. I have seen good and beautiful connections made during their visits—one person, one encounter and one moment at a time.

We have learned to see our neighborhoods through the eyes of these ministers of God who, long before the storms, were put to work by God to reach out to their New Orleans neighborhood to combat HIV/AIDS, violence among youth and hopelessness in many forms.

Their ministry goes on. We are blessed to have a small part in their work, but we are mightily blessed to have a call from God to reach out to our brothers and sisters in our neighborhoods.

The Lord always has more in mind for us than we know. It has been wonderful to see God at work bringing together the people of St. John with brothers and sisters from other congregations, including Kent Lutheran in Kent and Holy Spirit Lutheran in Kirkland.

We are thankful for and amazed by our welcome and by everything that God has called us to do, learning to say, along with our friends at St. John: *God is good all of the time.* □