

MEXICO CITY IMMERSION PROGRAMS

I am now back in Mexico after two months of home assignment in the U.S. It was great to visit many of you and get to know you better! I started classes on August 20, the day after I returned, while Alicia began school on August 9.

During my congregational visits, I encouraged people to come to Mexico City to do one of the immersion programs at the Lutheran Center here. The programs, coordinated by Bethany Ulrich of AMEXTRA (the Mexican Association for Urban and Rural Transformation), are open not only to congregational and Synodical groups but now to individuals as well. The pre-designed programs include "Lutheran Identity in a Latin American Context" (Mexico City, October 24-31 2012), "Sustainable Economics" (Chiapas, February 15-22, 2013), and "Faith, Food, and Justice (Oaxaca, March 23-31, 2013). For more information, see the website seedsoftransformation.org.

While in the U.S., I was often asked how safe it is to be in Mexico. Although certain areas of the country are problematic, safety conditions in the places where the programs are carried out are virtually the same as they were prior to the outbreak of violence in other areas of the country.



Bethany writes that the trips "deepen discipleship through opportunities for mutual transformation, hands-on service learning, stimulating site visits, cultural exchanges, and lectures," connecting participants to current struggles for justice in Mexico.

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RECYCLING AND WASTE IN MEXICO

From August 13-15, I participated in the Convocation of ELCA Teaching Theologians at Trinity Lutheran Seminary and Capital University in Columbus, Ohio, which focused this year on the theme of ecology and environmental justice. Following the convocation, one of the other participants, David Rhoads (a member at St. Andrew Lutheran Church in Racine, Wisconsin—one of our sponsoring congregations) suggested to me that I include some short articles on this topic in our missionary newsletter. So I will do so.

I will begin with the subject of waste and recycling. We usually throw out our waste with the street sweeper, who sweeps our street and collects garbage daily (see image below), though sometimes we take it out to the garbage truck that comes by. The street sweeper separates out what is recyclable (paper, plastic, glass, etc.), as you can see in the various bags he has on his cart. While he receives a small salary, he also earns money from tips (we usually give him a little over a dollar) and from selling what is recyclable.

Only about 12% of the waste in the Mexico City area is recycled, compared to 32% in the U.S. There are various reasons for this, but the main one is lack of funds. Two years ago we were told that we would need to separate our garbage into organic and non-organic waste, but this has not been implemented in many places (like our area) because the government has not been able to afford the trucks and equipment necessary. Most of the separating and recycling is done by street sweepers or people at the garbage dump who make their living by sifting through what is deposited there. Thus the lack of funding and infrastructure tends to prevent countries like Mexico from making large advances in areas such as ecology, recycling, and environmental justice.

