

## RECONNECTING WITH ROBERTO

As someone who has dedicated his adult life to preparing and equipping others for ministry, it is always a joy for me to see and celebrate the wonderful things that those whom I have had the honor and privilege of working with as my students have gone on to do. This past Saturday, June 22, I had the pleasure of attending a family art festival organized by my former student, Pastor Roberto Chávez, at the cultural center of which he serves as Director.



Roberto is a musician and professor of music who also serves as pastor of an independent congregation that he has worked with for nearly two decades. During that time he has also directed his cultural center called the Casa Común, which means “common house” in the sense of “shared” or “belonging to all.”

At the cultural center, Roberto leads a team of instructors who give classes in art, music, foreign languages, psychology, and other subjects. This includes teaching children, youth, and adults to draw, paint, write literature, dance, sing, and play a variety of musical instruments. Many of the instructors were trained by Roberto himself or are former students at the cultural center.



*Centro Cultural La Casa Común*

Both at the cultural center and at the congregation he leads, Roberto’s focus is on building community and strengthening family life through activities that are not only educational but healing and transforming as well. In fact, many of those who are active at the cultural center are also active in Roberto’s congregation and its ministries. These include not only the lay leaders he has trained but also his wife and two children, who work closely with Roberto both at the cultural center and at the congregation.



What makes Roberto’s work especially admirable is that it is self-supporting rather than depending on outside funding. It is truly a grass-roots effort made possible by those who give generously of their time, talents, and resources. Since the pandemic, Roberto and his team have also been active producing videos and podcasts both for the cultural center and the congregation.



From my perspective, Roberto’s work exemplifies the type of community building that we need to be focusing on through our theological education programs. I always tell Roberto that he has taught me just as much as I ever taught him, if not more!

**TRIP TO OKLAHOMA**

Every two years those of us who serve as ELCA missionaries are asked to do home assignment in the U.S., visiting congregations that have supported our work and also participating in other events, such as Synod Assemblies. As part of home assignment this year, I visited congregations in the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod, where I am on the clergy roster, and subsequently attended the Synod Assembly from May 3-5.



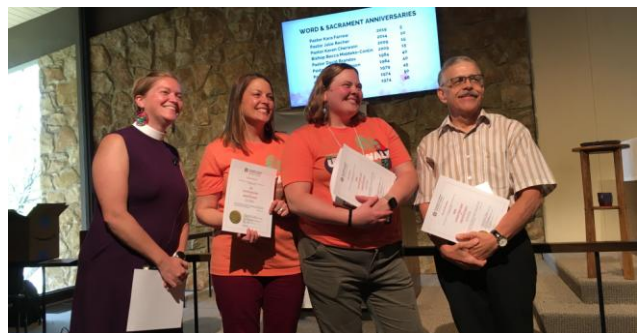
The Sunday prior to the Assembly I was invited to preach and give a presentation on my work in Mexico at Resurrection Lutheran Church in Yukon, OK, where Rev. Mark Borseth is pastor (above). During the following week I especially enjoyed the hospitality of Pastor Tamarreau Evans and her husband Daniel (below) at the church parsonage in Bessie, OK, where I was able to spend time visiting with members of Peace Lutheran as well. Fortunately, we all survived the tornado that did a great deal of damage on April 30 in the neighboring city of Cordell just ten minutes away! The congregation is looking forward to Tamarreau's ordination in August.



The most pleasant surprise I had at the Assembly occurred when I unexpectedly encountered one of my former students, Rev. Edintzon (Edy) Santos, who was representing Wartburg Theological Seminary of Dubuque, Iowa at the Assembly (below). I began working with Edy in our seminary's online program in 2015 when he was living in Australia, and prior to his being received into the ELCA as a pastor a year later at one of our former sponsoring congregations. However, we had never met in person. Neither he nor I knew that the other would be at the Assembly, and we both had to laugh because just the week before the Assembly we had corresponded by email and Edy had ended his message by writing, "I hope that one day God will allow us to meet in person"!



At the Assembly, I also received a recognition for completing 40 years in the ordained ministry (below). It's hard to believe it's been that long! After 40 years, however, rather than thinking about winding down, I'm just getting started!



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