

CELEBRATING THIRTY YEARS OF LEARNING AS PROFESSOR AT THE THEOLOGICAL COMMUNITY OF MEXICO

This fall marks my thirtieth anniversary of serving as a professor at the Theological Community of Mexico, the ecumenical consortium of seminaries where I teach in Mexico City. I began teaching there in the fall semester of 1996, shortly after finishing my PhD in systematic theology at King's College, University of London.



One of the things that I always stress when sharing with others about my work as an ELCA missionary involved in theological education is that according to my understanding of my call, I am sent to this context not only to teach and prepare others for ministry but also to learn on behalf of the ELCA. As you can imagine, over these thirty years I have learned a great deal from teaching and working closely with students and others at my school.

While I could go on for quite a while mentioning many of the things I have learned, I would stress a couple of things in particular. As a result of working with students from such a wide variety of church bodies, including Lutherans and other Protestants as well as Roman Catholics, Evangelicals, and Pentecostals, I have come to appreciate very much the beliefs, practices, gifts, and experiences that each particular church and tradition has to share with others. While some people might think that learning alongside students from so many different churches and traditions would be confusing for students, my experience has been the opposite: like the students themselves, I have come to appreciate and understand even more my own church and tradition at the same time that I have grown to value and appreciate the wealth that is found in other churches and traditions.

The other point I would stress is the power that good theology has to touch and transform people's lives, as well as the tremendous pain and harm that bad theology can cause. Time and again I have heard from my students how they and others whom they know have been hurt very deeply by theologies that promote and legitimate violence, injustice, and exclusion of many different types and destroy people's lives and relationships in the name of an oppressive God who is fundamentally different from the liberating and transforming God that I and many others find in the biblical texts and the Lutheran tradition. It is so important to work with students in challenging and questioning so much of the theology that is being taught and proclaimed today.



At the same time, there is nothing more satisfying than seeing the joy and excitement of students who encounter and discover a God who fills them with strength, hope, and above all a profound love and compassion for others and a passionate desire to share their faith in that God with others. For that to happen, it's extremely important to dedicate time to listening to the students and learning about the contexts in which they live and work, since only by reading the Bible and doing theology from within those contexts can the gospel truly speak to the concerns and needs of people in ways that are life-changing for them. Over the years I have come to see my work in terms of teaching people to listen and learn from others as they listen and learn themselves, as well as preparing others to teach those whose lives they seek to transform with the gospel to do the same. Just as we learn by teaching, so also we teach by listening and learning.

YOUNG ADULTS IN GLOBAL MISSION PROGRAM IN MEXICO CITY

Earlier this month I had the opportunity to meet with the new group of seven participants in the Young Adults in Global Mission Program (YAGM) here at the Lutheran Center in Mexico City. The young people participating in the program recently arrived in order to spend a year in Mexico City and the surrounding areas serving as volunteers with organizations and programs that work with people primarily from marginalized communities and contexts, including especially migrants, women, children, and youth.



The Coordinator of the YAGM Program in Mexico is Rev. Soliette López, who has served in this position since 2023 (below in middle alongside me). In addition to finding Mexican families for the young adults to live with and making arrangements for the volunteer work they do, Pastor Soliette provides them with pastoral accompaniment and support. The students spend a few weeks together doing an orientation at the Lutheran Center and working on their Spanish skills at the beginning of their year before departing to the homes where they will be living the rest of the year.



In most cases, the YAGM participants have recently finished their college or university degree and want to take a year to have the type of transformative immersion experience that the program provides. In addition to becoming as fluent as possible in Spanish, the young adults learn to see the world in new ways from the perspective of people whose culture and background are very different from their own and gain a much greater appreciation of the problems and challenges that so many people in places like Mexico face every day. It is by giving of themselves that they receive a great deal more in return, and by receiving from others that they give to them as well by growing in their ability to value and appreciate them and their gifts. At the same time, the young adults are able to discern more clearly their own gifts and calling in life.



The YAGM Program run by the ELCA in Mexico and other locations around the world is thus a very powerful experience for those who take part in it. If you or someone you know would like to find out more about the program and explore the possibility of participating in it, you can visit the ELCA YAGM web page by clicking [HERE](#) or contact me so that I can put you in touch with Pastor Soliette or others who can provide you with the information you need.

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