



Doing Urban Ministry
in an Old Immigrant Town

Lutheran Disaster Response:
Putting Lives Back Together

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Christians Rocked the Mountain
with Shawn Smith

Slovenia: A Magical Place

A Justice- and Mission-Friendly
VBS

Edith Roberts Awarded the
Henry Melchior Muhlenberg Medal



Pastor Bruce Osterhout, Christ and St. Luke's Lutheran Churches, Reading, Pa

It's 7:55 a.m. on an already hazy, hot, and humid day in the old immigrant town of Reading, Pennsylvania. I have just pulled up in front of St. Mark's Lutheran Church with our old diesel short school bus to pick up kids for day camp.

No one is around. There are a few high school youth dragging along, heading up the hill to Reading High School for summer school. They are not enthusiastic.

And then the row-house doors start opening, up and down Windsor Street, and up and down Tenth Street. Excited kids came out wearing backpacks and getting goodbye kisses from their moms. They were ready to roll. They don't need television or video games today. They've got day camp!

Veteran urban pastor that I am, I recognize that Pastor Katie Lyon has clearly been practicing "parish as place." Katie knows the kids in her neighborhood. Katie knows their moms. Katie speaks their language, the language of Christ. The children and the moms are responding to her invitation to come and meet Jesus.

On this morning, I wish I had a video camera. My partnership in ministry has placed me here this morning, gathering up these children of God, and transporting them a few blocks up to St. Luke's.

Pastor Katie is my colleague. She is a new mom. She has been a pastor for a little more than 3 years. And Pastor Katie gets it. She gets this neighborhood ministry "thing" that has long been a



hallmark of the Lutheran practice of urban ministry in so many old neighborhoods in the northeastern United States.

It isn't complicated, really. We Christians make it so complex sometimes. It is the human side of life. It can't be learned fully in any school. It is learned in the classroom of life. Being present for people with the love of Christ means living with them, sometimes amongst them, but always sharing with them the joy that is ours in following that street-walker from Galilee.

On the street, in close living, in face-to-face reality that stands in such stark contrast to the I-Phone/Internet world where you don't know the person who lives next door but you talk regularly with people far away, there still is no substitute for face-to-face, hand-to-hand, heart-to-heart contact. Sometimes it appears that technology is putting that tried and true method on the run, but not really. It is an illusion.

On this bright June morning, I say a prayer of thanksgiving for a colleague with whom I am proud to be in ministry in this old immigrant city.

God's Spirit is alive and active in the back alleys of life, moving across the cracked brick sidewalks of early morning, silently searching the world for the lost and hungry, for those who are thirsty for fellowship with the Almighty. Sometimes we get to help out in that search and in that gathering.

Thanks, Katie, for doing such good job in your calling as "pastor" at Tenth and Windsor Streets. May God multiply our efforts. May all the glory be God's.



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Eric Riedinger , Zion United Lutheran Church, Brodheadsville

Musician and worship leader Shawn Smith not only lit the campfire but also lit a fire in everyone who heard his message at Zion United Lutheran Church's Christians Rock the Mountain Youth Retreat.

The retreat was held July 27-29, 2007, at Zion United, with tents set up on part of the congregation's acreage for the sleepover. The concert took place in the church; meals and other activities were held in the parish hall.

The idea for the retreat came from Deb Schaeffer, a congregational member whose daughter had attended the 2006 youth gathering. Deb asked a group of youth from Zion if they would like to bring Shawn Smith to our church for a weekend. Having seen Shawn perform before, the youth knew how great he was and agreed without hesitation.

After months of planning and hard work, July 27 finally arrived and that's when it all began. Twenty youth from Zion, Weatherly, and Zion, Brodheadsville, attended the retreat, along with 23 adults who helped with everything from cooking to registration to transportation to chaperoning.

Friday night was kicked off by an awesome concert that rocked the mountain – along with rolls of thunder. But even the torrential downpour could not put a damper on everyone's spirits.

The concert was also attended by youth and folks from other congregations, including Salem-St. Paul, Kresgeville, and St. John, Jim Thorpe.



The next day was devoted entirely to service. The campers split up to tackle four different service projects. A group of youth went to the Pocono Township Habitat for Humanity house, where they put on siding. Another group of youth held a carwash and, with the help of Thrivent's matching funds, raised about \$600 for the Pleasant Valley Ecumenical Network (PVEN). The third group of youth baked cookies for the residents at Getz Nursing Home in Effort. The last group of youth delivered the cookies to the nursing home and visited with the residents.

Finally, on Sunday, Shawn Smith helped lead the worship service with song and dance, and the weekend came to a close, leaving everyone with a newly lit spiritual fire.



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Carol Weiser

In a surprise ceremony during the **LIFT (Lutherans in Faith Together)** event at Muhlenberg College on June 9, the Rev. Edith Roberts, pastor of St. Peter Lutheran Church, Bethlehem, was awarded the Henry Melchior Muhlenberg Medal for exemplary congregational ministry. The medal is an honor conferred by the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia.

The medal was established in 1992, the 250th anniversary of the beginning of the ministry of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg on the shores of the North American continent. The Rev. Dr. Philip D. W. Krey, president of the seminary, noted that, "from his time until this, Muhlenberg's ministry has served as a model for the Lutheran pastoral ministry." Therefore, it was altogether fitting that the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, as a conclusion to the 1992 anniversary, should inaugurate the Henry Melchior Muhlenberg Medal for exemplary service in congregational and campus ministry in Regions 7 and 8 of the ELCA.

"In awarding this medal, the seminary hopes not only to salute and thank recipients but also to honor all those who preach and teach the gospel faithfully," Dr. Krey stated.

Nominations are by pastors and synodical leadership with the bishop's endorsement. Selection is by a secret and select committee of pastors in equal numbers from Regions 7 and 8.

Pastor Roberts has served the Lutheran church in a variety of settings. From 1979 to 1984 she served as the assistant pastor of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Easton. Following that, she was appointed assistant to the bishop of the Northeastern



Pennsylvania Synod, where she served with distinction on the synod staff for eight and a half years. While working on the synod staff, Pastor Roberts was a mentor and teacher to countless seminary students, a practice she continues to this day by engaging seminary interns in her congregation.

Desiring to return to the parish, Pastor Roberts was elected in 1992 to be senior pastor of St. Peter Evangelical Lutheran Church, South Bethlehem, a post she currently holds.

Challenges faced her in this new pastorate. She led the congregation to see its mission in a downtown setting and enriched the church's physical facility with much-needed restorations and handicapped accessibility.

At the conclusion of his remarks, Dr. Krey said, "It gives me great pleasure to recognize and honor [Pastor Edith B. Roberts] for almost three decades of such diverse ministry and for exemplary service to the Church and the community."



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Ruth Doty, Lutheran Congregational Services

“Don’t make it all about me,” Paula said. “Whatever you write or say, don’t make it all about me. You can tell my story, but make sure people understand that there are many others who are still struggling to put their lives back together after Katrina.”

Denise and I first met Paula and her 17-year-old son in June. I had been told about her situation by a FEMA worker in April and had made phone contact, but did not meet Paula and Ashton until June, two days before Ashton would graduate from high school.

Graduation – this was what Paula and her son had been working toward for so many years and despite so many obstacles. It was finally going to happen!

Thanks to the generosity of people in our synod, Ashton had been able to attend his senior prom. He also received a camera for graduation and a small sum to develop the pictures.

Ashton thanked us profusely, then said that he had used the money instead to buy a pair of pants so he could go to graduation. That’s when we began to realize just how serious the needs of this family were.

Alone with Paula after lunch, we asked her directly whether she had food. She reluctantly admitted she didn’t. At first, we weren’t sure how we could help; then we remembered the gift cards donated by a congregation at Christmas. “Christmas in June!” I told Paula as I handed these to her.

“Another family in need! There are so many,” you might say. And



you would be right. But let me tell you a little more about Paula.

Paula graduated from college with a degree in political science and received additional training in information systems. She married, they purchased a home in New Orleans, and they had two children. Then, four years ago, Paula's husband died suddenly. The day after his funeral, their daughter left to serve in Iraq.

After her husband died, Paula's major goal was to see that Ashton graduated from high school. Then Katrina hit New Orleans.

Paula and Ashton escaped with nothing but the clothes on their backs. The only thing Paula has by which to remember her house is a picture of its rubble, shoved blocks away from where it originally stood. The neighborhood – not just the houses, but the community – is gone forever.

During the fall of 2005, Paula and Ashton made their way to Baton Rouge, then to a motel in Mississippi, where they eventually discovered they could get a free plane ticket to anywhere they had someone who would help them. Somehow they connected with a group that brought them to the Lehigh Valley.

It has been a very difficult struggle for Paula and Ashton. Even when a flood washes away everything you own, you still have the debts and obligations you had when you possessed a house, clothes, and a job.

Not only did Paula and Ashton have only a change of clothes and three dollars when they got here, but their whole way of life had changed. There was no close-knit community of lifelong friends who supported one another emotionally. And it was cold, much colder than New Orleans.

In addition, the salary Paula earned at temporary jobs was technically “too high” for them to qualify for medical assistance or food stamps, so they could not afford medical care.

People and organizations who know the situation have helped as they can, but the needs go beyond the tangible. One important dimension in helping survivors is honoring their need to maintain as much control over their lives as possible.

As your **Lutheran Disaster Response** representatives at **Lutheran Congregational Services**, we had the privilege of sitting with Paula and listening to her story, supporting her as she clarifies and prioritizes needs, and brainstorming ways to address some issues. We are also able to link her to services and to advocate for her.

Many individuals have assisted Paula with items they knew or thought she needed (some even handed her money), but Paula seemed relieved when LCS offered to serve as the collection point for materials and, particularly, funds to help her with medication and food.

She also asked me to help her prepare for interviews if newspapers and TV reporters want to talk to her around the second anniversary of Katrina, the way they did a year ago. She doesn't feel she can give them the "success" story they might be looking for and wants to "tell it like it is" without seeming ungrateful for all the assistance she has received

Paula is a hard worker and follows through on every lead she gets. She has a college degree plus additional training and a lot of experience in information systems. We would be happy to share her impressive resume detailing 16 years of work for an energy company in Louisiana and the development of her own business, Miss Paula's Candies. Since moving to Allentown, Paula has worked three temporary jobs while searching for a permanent position with benefits. In addition, she is working to reestablish her pie and candy business.

Through contributions to Disaster Response at Lutheran Congregational Services, you have already helped Paula by enabling LCS to provide additional cards for food and, when she was between jobs, pay a few essential bills.

You can help even further by—

- identifying other Katrina survivors in need;
- telling us about opportunities for Paula to sell her pies and candy;
- letting us know about a possible local job with good benefits; and
- replenishing our funds so we can continue to help with medication and ther basic necessities.

Funds will be shared with other struggling Katrina survivors in our synod. Any excess will be channeled to assist survivors in another territory.

No, it's not all about Paula. Hopefully, however, Paula's story helps all of us to better understand what survivors of disaster face and how we can help.

Donations should be made out to Lutheran Congregational Services and the memo should designate: "Local Katrina Survivors' Fund."



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Barbara Taylor, St. Peter, Bethlehem

Slovenia is a magical place and an amazing part of God's creation. It seems so small that most people don't even know where in the world it is located. Yet it seems so big because of the kindness and warm hospitality of our sisters and brothers in Christ who live and serve there! In this one tiny country, we were able to swim in the Adriatic Sea on a Saturday and take in the glory of the Alps from high atop a mountain pass the very next day.

The "we" included chaperone Kevin Remaly, eight wonderful teens, and me on the trip to our companion synod from July 1–21, 2007.

We left from Bethlehem in a van, traveled to Dulles Airport outside Washington, DC, and made the nine-hour flight to Vienna, Austria. Our host families brought a huge bus there and took us to our individual homes in the Murska Sobota area of Slovenia. From that moment on, the adventure was nonstop.

Most of the host families had sent a young person to a home in our synod last summer, so for many of our teens, it was a reunion with a young person they knew. I stayed with a family of six people whom I had never met, and it didn't matter at all! That's the thing about the Church — my sisters and brothers in Christ welcomed me into their home and by day two I felt like part of the family.

Each traveler was totally immersed in the life of his or her Slovenian family, so each person had different experiences. I met with the Lutheran bishop and the local pastors. I met with the mayor and had an opportunity to be interviewed on radio and for



the newspaper. I visited Lenti, Hungary, and Bad Radkersburg, Austria. I sat in the chancel area with the pastor of “my” family’s Lutheran church, led prayers, and brought greetings from Bishop Strobel and from all of you in the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod. And much, much more!

We also met as a group to tour museums and castles, to share a picnic, and to tour Vienna, Austria, and Venice, Italy. I could never have dreamed that I would find myself in a gondola in the canals of Venice! Our two-day tour through Slovenia took us to the sea and the mountains, to the creamy-blue Soca River, to the capital city of Slovenia — Ljubljana — and even to a museum where we learned about the “Forgotten Front” — the city of Korabid, where some 700,000 people lost their lives during World War I.

The human-made sights were fascinating, the natural beauty of God’s world was astounding, but the most important part of the trip involved the people. Our Lutheran sisters and brothers comprise only one percent of the population of Slovenia. They need our prayers and support to do God’s work in their country. They also have much to teach us about the work of the Lord. Their faith and commitment are unwavering. Their work to help the poor is never-ending. They are, indeed, the hands and feet of God in their part of the world.

We returned to Bethlehem safely to a warm welcome from our families and with memories to last a lifetime. I pray that the companion synod relationship between Murska Sobota and the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod may continue to grow and that more student exchanges can occur in the future.

For the gift to us of the Church in all its expressions and in all places, I say, “Thanks be to God!”

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The Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod

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Pastor Jane Kropa, Huff's Union Church, Huffs

Huff's Union Church (ELCA and UCC) recently held vacation Bible school for all ages with a focus on mission and justice.

Using the curriculum from Augsburg Fortress, "Great Bible Reef," Huff's worked with the themes of conserving water, using fair trade products, and supporting the creation of fish farms.

Attendees and staff were given a handout on the first day that talked about the precious nature of water. The adult class watched part of the DVD, "Troubled Waters," produced by the UCC for the Interfaith Broadcasting Commission (available for purchase through www.ucc.org). The video tells about water as important to the three Abrahamic faiths: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, as well as to other religions throughout the world.

Children were encouraged to think about ways to conserve the precious resource of water, for example, by turning off the faucet when brushing teeth. The congregation's Fair Trade coffee, tea, and hot chocolate products (sold at cost) were described (see www.lwr.org or www.ucc.org), and a Fair Trade soccer ball was used in games for the teenage class.

These soccer balls come from the Evangelical Church of Westphalia and the Evangelical Church of the Rhineland, Germany, whose names are printed on the balls. They were available at the 50th anniversary gathering of the UCC through the Justice and Witness Ministry Team.

Fair trade soccer balls are produced by people who earn a fair wage for their work. Most soccer balls are sewn in Sialkot in Pakistan. Workers sew them together by hand from hexagonal

shaped pieces of leather—stitch by stitch. They work on the individual honeycombs using a fork that is squeezed between their legs. A ball consists of 32 pieces. The workers can make three to five balls a day. Without fair trade prices, the typical worker earns less than \$3 a day for such work. With fair trade prices, workers get a fair wage, which means good education for children, regular working hours, health protection at places of work, safe jobs, and money to cover illness.

Huff's VBS offering has traditionally been given to support a mission project chosen each year by the VBS staff. This year the staff chose to support the ELCA Good Gifts project of fish farms. (www.elca.org/goodgifts) Each evening we talked about how this related to clean water and food for all, and added 4 small fish to a large poster for each \$20 increment of giving. Our final total was \$452. Our top day's attendance was 94, which included all pupils and a variety of volunteer staff.

Huff's continues supporting the Good Gifts project during Advent, when its junior youth group, the Christian Kids Club, offers Good Gifts catalogs and Christmas cards, and encourages people to give a gift to someone in need in honor of a loved one, teacher, or friend.

A skit for Advent gift giving is available from Pastor Kropa (krosmart@enter.net), where kids show what sorts of gifts they might receive (a bag full of socks, a much-too-large or much-too-small sweater, and a mysterious baked something no one wishes to eat) and encourages people to give something meaningful for Christmas.