

# Partnership

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## Celebrating the next generation

Have you taken an informal census of the population in the pews of your church? If so, it probably comes as no surprise that grey-haired folks comprise a growing proportion of the faces found there. For some, this demographic trend is unnerving. It begs the question of what the future holds for institutions long cherished by senior members of our churches.

Canadian Lutheran World Relief (CLWR) is not immune to these social forces. It is blessed with a solid core of supporters, many of whom are retired or approaching that phase of their lives. Will youth and young adults, though, be ready and willing to fill what many see as an inevitable void?

If the youth and young adults featured in this issue of *Partnership* are any indication, we think the answer to this question is a resounding yes. In developing this issue, we set out to find examples amongst younger generations of an evolving passion for and commitment to learning about and taking action to address the gaps that exist between developed and developing nations. It turned out to be an easy task.

Last fall and winter, CLWR enthusiastically partnered with the Saskatchewan Children's Choir to



On the outskirts of Bogota, members of Ascension Lutheran, Edmonton, explore Caracoli, a neighbourhood where the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia runs an outreach ministry for single mothers. Photo: N. Lizarazo.

promote a youth-sponsored We Care shipment to South Africa and through its Leadership Development program, assisted some 25 youth and adults from Ascension Lutheran, Edmonton, to travel to Colombia to experience first-hand outreach ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia. An appeal to Synod and District offices unearthed not only additional stories of efforts to engage and immerse youth and young adults in international development work but also of youth and young adults themselves taking on leadership roles in their peer groups and congregations to raise awareness of development issues.

This issue also includes stories written by two young members of the CLWR staff, Kristy Bergman and Jennifer Clark. Kristy is completing a year-long internship at CLWR; Jennifer is a program assistant in the Community Relations Department. Each have provided some reflections on opportunities they have had to interact with CLWR partners in the Canadian and international arenas.

We hope you enjoy a glimpse into CLWR's engagement of our younger generation! May we all be inspired by God's love for humanity to challenge the causes and respond to the consequences of human suffering and poverty.

# The view from here



CLWR's vision is 'a world where people live in justice, peace and dignity, united in diversity, and empowered to achieve their universal rights to basic needs and quality of life.'

The programs supported by CLWR are all geared to achieving this vision. The global reality today is that

key sectors of society are excluded from full participation in the process of change. Youth (and women) are among the important actors who are often prevented from contributing to social change.

CLWR is taking steps to secure a more positive future for all through the engagement of young people around the world and within Canada. Given that nearly 25% of the populations which live in our countries of focus (e.g. Mozambique, Bolivia) are adolescents, it is imperative that our interventions engage young people and empower them to build sustainable futures filled with peace and prosperity.

This ideal also needs to be better applied in our own country. Many youth in our churches and country are keenly interested in learning, experiencing and supporting the mission of CLWR. In recent years, this has been made possible through internships, both globally and in Canada.

The Board of CLWR has declared 'engaging with a younger demographic' a strategic priority. In the coming years, we will take further steps to provide opportunities for young people to assume their rightful place alongside decision makers who make choices about future directions that make the achievement of our goal possible and a reality.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Granke". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Robert Granke  
Executive Director

# Showing We Care



Saskatchewan Children's Choir member Dale Wilson makes a new friend at the Siyabonga—Helping Hands for Africa Centre located in Natal Province, South Africa. Photo: I. McKenzie

For 42 choristers and eight staff of the Saskatoon Children's Choir (SCC), packing up 350 We Care Living and Learning Kits was just the first step in a rich cross-cultural connection.

In July 2011, during a concert tour in South Africa, the choir visited the Siyabonga—Helping Hands for Africa Centre which supports South-African children, most of whom have lost one or both parents to AIDS. The SCC and the centre's own choir shared a few musical selections, taught each other a piece of music, and enthusiastically performed music together. It was a day filled with broad smiles as they shared lunch and some traditional playground games.

Later, the Siyabonga children each received a Living and Learning Kit which the SCC had carried with them to South Africa and eagerly anticipated sharing. It was like Christmas as the Siyabonga children shrieked with excitement. Faces beamed as they discovered the contents of their We Care Kits before bidding farewell to their new-found Canadian friends—friends who will long remember this experience and the children they met at the Siyabonga—Helping Hands for Africa Centre.

# Together in development

*[Ed. Note] As the daughter of a Lutheran pastor, Kristy Bergman has called a few places home, including Langenburg, Saskatchewan. She is nearing the end of the first year of a two-year internship at CLWR's Winnipeg headquarters. She agreed to share some reflections on how her values and beliefs have meshed with those of CLWR.*

**T**he women with whom I am standing atop a sun-scorched hill overlooking their eastern Ethiopian village are jubilant and radiant, talking and laughing back and forth. Proudly, they recount their pivotal role in a tree-planting initiative and how their husbands increasingly recognize and appreciate their contributions. It is wonderful, they tell us warmly, to see young women, like myself and my colleague, involved in the work we are doing. We can only return their praise; their commitment to their community is inspiring!

Six years earlier, I wouldn't have imagined I would be standing on that hilltop. I pursued teacher education after high school in hopes of making a difference in the lives of youth. It took a year of feeling drawn towards service of a different sort for me to drop all my classes a week before the new academic term began and enrol in the International Studies program at Luther College, Regina.

CLWR seemed the quintessential vehicle through which to live out my commitment to social justice. After a serendipitous meeting in a Budapest coffee shop while serving as a volunteer in Eastern Europe, I found myself bound for Winnipeg for a position as an intern at CLWR.

As my university professors underlined the importance of development that is grassroots, participatory and attentive to gender and environment issues, I was pleased to discover that CLWR was rooted solidly in such principles. With faith as a key force driving my own social conscience, CLWR's conceptualization of its work as



**Kristy Bergman (left) during a visit to Sheder refugee camp, eastern Ethiopia, saw first-hand what the gift of water can bring to drought-stricken communities. Photo: H Pryse.**

“inspired by God’s love for humanity” resonated with me deeply.

I was soon immersed in the rich diversity of CLWR’s work. Particularly eye-opening was a trip to the Horn of Africa in March 2011. In eastern Ethiopia, Somalis living in refugee camps and local Ethiopians alike were already struggling with devastatingly dry conditions, months before drought became front-page news and the UN declared famine in Somalia.

Even then, CLWR was committed to bringing water to these communities. A refugee woman in beautiful red headscarf smiled brilliantly as she showed us what the gift of water had given her family: a tree shading their home in an otherwise tree-less landscape and a small vegetable garden.

We visited a rural community in Kenya where women and girls once walked up to 20 kilometers a day to fetch water. In a beautiful act of solidarity, local Muslim and Christian women joined together to have a safe water source developed in their village. Girls now attend school rather than undertake the arduous and even dangerous journey for water. The project was supported by Interfaith Action for Peace in Africa, which brings together people of seven different faiths to work towards peace and development.

What I saw in Africa epitomized the fact that positive change requires people of many backgrounds, faiths, and walks of life from around the world. We are all in it together.

# Learning and living food justice

*[Ed. Note] Jennifer Clark is CLWR's program assistant for community relations. In June 2011, she attended the Canadian Foodgrains Bank's (CFGB) Atlantic Food Justice Camp, a three-day event held in Oxford, Nova Scotia. Canadian Lutheran World Relief is a member organization of CFGB, a partnership of Canadian churches and church-based agencies working together to end global hunger. Here are some of her reflections on this experience.*

As a CLWR staff member I am very aware of the food rights issues our development projects work to combat in countries like India, Ethiopia and Bolivia, where farmers struggle to feed their families for reasons that include lack of water and the high price of seeds and tools. Attending the CFGB camp gave me an opportunity to learn about food rights from a local perspective and discuss with other Canadians of varying ages, denominations and backgrounds how we can foster food justice at home and

work toward making access to food fair for everyone.

One of the highlights was the immersion group field trips we participated in on the camp's second day. My group visited a farmer whose spiritual beliefs are central to the way he grows his food; a popular independent market that stocks regular grocery store fare as well as locally produced food; a cheese producer with decades of experience; and an independent blueberry farm run by a couple who see themselves as an alternative to large blueberry processing companies. Other groups visited fisheries, food banks, a Sobeys grocery store, and an agricultural college. Every group brought back food to contribute to what was an amazing supper—just one out of a weekend's worth of fantastic meals prepared with local food by camp staff and the CFGB coordinators.

Back at the camp we talked about the many perspectives of the food system we experienced on our field trips and

explored in short worship services how faith informs our commitment to food justice. We brainstormed ways we can contribute to food justice in our communities, like eating locally produced food (it's fresh, healthy, supports local producers and workers, and has a low environmental impact because it doesn't need to be transported long distances).

Like the 30 other participants, I came away from the camp enriched by the people I met and their enthusiasm for food justice, and armed with greater knowledge of why so many people go hungry and how I can contribute to the movement to make food access fair.

The Foodgrains Bank also conducts international food study tours to build appreciation for member programming, to cultivate North-South relationships and solidarity, and to learn about food and hunger issues. Participants return to share their learning with members of the public and to promote actions to end hunger.



Participants in the Atlantic Canada Food Justice Camp gather for a group photo. Fostering food justice at home and working toward making access to food fair for everyone were two themes of the three-day event. Photo: courtesy of Canadian Foodgrains Bank.

# Learning to serve... in Colombia!

*[Ed. Note] This past July, 25 youth and adults from Ascension Lutheran, Edmonton, traveled to Colombia to connect with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia (IELCO), the companion synod of the Synod of Alberta and the Territories. Partial funding for the trip was provided through CLWR's Leadership Development program. Below, two youth members of the group, Connor Dear and Meryn Severson share some of their experience.*

Our mission trip this summer took us to Colombia, allegedly one of the most dangerous places in the world. It was a different kind of mission trip. We didn't build a school or houses. What we did was build relationships with the people and congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia. The ministries and congregations we visited were often not only surprised by the sight of our group, but by the presence of us as youth.

Our journey within Colombia started in Bogota, the capital city. Here we saw startling contrasts between poverty and affluence, and risk and security that brought to light similarities and differences between our geographically and linguistically separated countries. We visited two ministries in two communities on the outskirts of Bogota that are home to people displaced by the country's internal conflict. One provides a safe haven for children while teaching life skills to the moms while the other runs a day program for seniors. While great poverty was evident everywhere we looked, we quickly realized that the Colombian people live with great faith and are just plain happy. We were also quick to realize that wherever we went—Villavicencio, Paz de Ariporo,



Ascension Lutheran mission trip participants gather for a group photo around the baptismal font at El Consolador Lutheran Church in Sogamoso, Colombia. Photo: courtesy of T. Hoepfner.

Sogamoso and Bogota—our brothers and sisters in Christ were eager to welcome us into their homes, their families, their congregations and their schools. Their generosity was overwhelming.

In Sogamoso, we visited a Lutheran school started by Joyce Bergh, a missionary from Alberta. Students and teachers performed a grand presentation for us, taking time out of their school day. We were then welcomed into their classrooms for more personal visits. This was especially inspiring as both cultures were able to get a glimpse of each other's lives.

In Villavicencio, at Mission La Victoria, we were welcomed and greeted by Pastor Luz Marly and several of the youth. We as youth were

able to form a special connection with their youth, which led to a night of dancing and laughter.

All of these opportunities to see and be a part of the passion of the Colombian people have no doubt changed all of our lives. We are certain that at least one member of our youth group will go back to help with English programs at some of the schools we visited.

It was such a privilege to have been blessed to go to such a beautiful and generous place, despite its internal conflict. The stigma of Colombia has been erased from our minds.

We did not serve; we were served with all the graciousness and generosity possible. We can only hope to now serve here in Canada as they do in Colombia.

# 3-2-1 Action! Developing a passion for international development

**E**nthusiasm and creativity are never in short supply when youth and young adults take ownership of an issue. Take Josh Gillingham for example, a member of Bethel Lutheran in Sherwood Park, Alberta.

Josh is in his second year of mathematics studies at Edmonton's Concordia University College. When he arrived on campus in the fall of 2010, his interest in international development had already been tweaked by a mission trip to Nicaragua he had participated in during the previous summer. "The trip took me out of my comfort zone. I witnessed how people live and cope with poverty. We went there to build a church but I realized that I had received as much if not more than what I had given. Experiencing Christian community and being able to live out your faith intentionally and grow personally was a blessing."

On the Concordia campus, Josh searched for an outlet for his interest in social justice. Finding none, he and another student formed Loveglobal, an extra-curricular campus club for those wanting to explore and be actively engaged in international justice work. As Josh explains, "the goal of Loveglobal is to awaken students to the world beyond their backyard. Modestly, Josh describes the club's membership as small, but in total, between 30 and 40 students have become involved in one way or another.

Their visibility on campus has been heightened by several fundraising drives for international development and relief efforts in Haiti and Japan. As well, the club has organized a "Global Village Week" featuring music



Through a student club, Loveglobal, Josh Gillingham is working to raise awareness of international development issues on the campus of Concordia University College, Edmonton. Photo: courtesy of J. Gillingham.

and food from different cultures, all as a means to raise funds for mosquito nets to combat malaria.

## **WALNUT GROVE — A MISSION-FOCUSSED CONGREGATION**

As Director of Youth and Family Ministry at Walnut Grove Lutheran Church, Langley, British Columbia, Lynn Gergens is making the most of her extensive experience in organizing international mission trips. In recent years, she has helped the church's young adults group make two trips to Nicaragua. A third trip is planned for 2012. For participants, committing to these trips means being involved in fundraising efforts at home to cover travel costs and to purchase school

and craft supplies that are taken south. Once there, they have assisted with the construction of a church and a school in the village of La Joya, brought VBS classes to neighbouring villages as well as being involved in health care and water system projects.

Stephanie Roller, now also a student at Concordia, thinks herself fortunate to have been amongst the approximately 26 Walnut Grove young adults who have made the trip to Nicaragua. When asked what advice she would give to anyone considering joining a mission trip, she emphasized the importance of being prepared to give and receive. "The people are really open and welcoming. They are also very proud of what little they have. They taught me how to be thankful."



Caleigh and Briana Pokrant along with their youth group at Sherwood Park Lutheran, Winnipeg, are raising awareness of and funds for CLWR's community development projects. Photo: J. Elder.

## SHERWOOD PARK LUTHERAN YOUTH SET A CHALLENGE

It was a plan hatched by Brianna and Caleigh Pokrant at their kitchen table. Brianna and Caleigh form one-third of "Our Testament," a youth-led worship leadership team at Sherwood Park Lutheran, Winnipeg. They, along with about 30 other youth from the congregation, had set a goal to raise \$5,000 for CLWR in conjunction with the current ELCIC National youth project, "12 for 12." Considering the national target is to collect \$60,000 over 12 months to support development work in 12 overseas communities, this would be no mean feat.

Brianna and Caleigh's plan relied on simple mathematics. Challenge households from the congregation to give \$12 a month over 12 months. If 35 households accepted the challenge, the goal would be reached. Youth would also be challenged to contribute what they could from their more modest financial resources.

Regular announcements over the summer months—some crafted into

short drama presentations—helped launch the challenge. To carry momentum into the fall, a fundraising luncheon is scheduled for October, and Our Testament will take advantage of a worship service they will lead in late November to encourage continued participation of congregation members.

CLWR's *One Community* resource package is being used to update the congregation on the progress of the challenge. It includes a poster-sized

schematic map of a community that now has a prominent place in the church narthex. As donations build up, the youth add various gifts such as livestock, school supplies, a well and medical equipment to the poster. As of late August, the challenge had raised almost two-thirds of its financial goal.

At Sherwood Park, the extent to which the project has been embraced is testimony indeed to the leadership potential that resides within the youth of our churches.



Photo by Sue Edison-Swift/ELCA.



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### ADVENT ONLINE

Coming December 1. An interactive online Advent calendar on the CLWR website. A new way to learn more about CLWR while preparing for Christmas.

### MEMORIAL GIFTS

Please visit [www.clwr.org](http://www.clwr.org) for a list of persons for whom memorial gifts have been received by CLWR.



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