

WE ARE CHURCH TOGETHER



STORYTELLING ENGAGEMENT

January 2025 Mission Support Memo

Unidad — Unity

A story out of our Metropolitan New York Synod for our ELCA stewardship ministry, in celebration of the *Peterman Award*

As you read this story, what inspires you?

How is your congregation engaging with your neighbors?

Have you ever met a person of faith who shines with the light of Christ even in the hardest of times and places? After meeting the Rev. Leticia Alanis, pastor of [Unidad y Fe Lutheran Mission](#) in the Queens borough of New York City, I was in awe of her experiences, her challenges, her love for others and her profound mission of building community. Those qualities may explain why she won the Peterman Award for Stewardship of Time, Resources, and Advocacy.

Pastor Leticia began her career in Mexico as a nun in the Roman Catholic Church. For 20 years, she provided training, studied theology and ministered to children, young women and families. She knew God had called her to ministry, yet she also felt that God was telling her to seek a different life. Almost thirty years ago, she came to New York City at the invitation of her sister, who had moved there three years earlier. Soon Leticia realized she had been sheltered from many of the realities of an immigrant life. She connected with Mexican immigrants in the churches and heard their stories — of fighting for legal status, of working in low-paying jobs, of searching for adequate housing — and, remembering the God of Exodus, knew she had been called there to get involved. She took ESL classes, got involved in immigrant rights and attended City College of New York, focusing on social work for advocacy and empowerment. Twelve years after arriving in the US, she earned her citizenship. All along, she says, she chose to “study deeply the immigration stories” and sought to turn around the narrative that the “immigrant is the person to blame.” Leticia co-founded La Union, a nonprofit in Brooklyn. Through the nonprofit, she learned the joys and challenges of serving her fellow immigrant friends, and the partnerships necessary to succeed. She also found her spiritual family, first at St. Jacobi Lutheran Church and later at Trinity Lutheran Church, both in Brooklyn. There she felt at home, and the members welcomed not only her but also La Union.

By now you must be experiencing the energy, love and drive for justice, community and inclusion that Pastor Leticia exudes, but this is where the unimaginable happens. Pastor Leticia was diagnosed with lymphoma. She had to close La Union and begin intensive treatments, but Trinity stood alongside her in prayer, visits and care, even allowing her to work some. All the while, the pastors at Trinity supported Leticia’s spiritual discernment, which led to her entering candidacy to become an ELCA pastor. She had already enrolled in graduate school, working for a master’s degree in public policy, and had no time for or interest in another degree. Instead, she entered the TEEM program, serving a three-point parish with an emerging Spanish-speaking ministry.



The Anglo congregations were diminishing, but the Latiné ministry was growing. Then COVID came, but Trinity kept gathering in worship on Zoom and connecting in care. The church's ministry kept going with the support of the ELCA and the Metropolitan New York Synod plus area partners. Soon it was time to find a permanent location. The ministry found one: a diner on a commercial corridor in the Woodhaven neighborhood of Queens, near the subway and multiple bus lines. They began by building neighborhood relationships. As they moved in, the mayor was seeking applications for partners in his Taskforce on Racial Inclusion & Equity with the Civic Engagement Commission, and Unidad y Fe was chosen. The work done has built meaningful connections with libraries, schools, the business improvement district and other organizations, and their neighbors. The diner was converted into a glorious, colorful worship space where church members meet every Sunday morning to gather at the table with God. Just as important, through partnerships and support funds, they house the Immigration Resource Center, five days a week, with warm and personalized attention from specialized staff and a paralegal to provide resources and legal information. The center sees an average of 70 people per week, who know there is a place for them to ask questions and get support. The members care for the whole person and have a deep



desire to improve the health of members and neighbors, so the ministry offers Zumba three times a week with a member teaching, as well as monthly Sunday health talks, led by trained members and leaders. Unidad y Fe leads this health initiative in partnership with and with funding from the Latino Commission on AIDS, a leader in health equity. The ministry offers weekly technology and art classes to foster skills and talents. Engagement in community events is key, so they offer coat drives, Christmas toy distribution, health fairs, community workshops, neighborhood events, youth events and civic leadership opportunities to influence policy and systems, even offering a Civic Leadership Apprenticeship Program for youth.

With Pastor Leticia and the members of Unidad y Fe, are “part of a movement to create a new world where everyone can flourish. Our mission involves not only being a safe gathering space for worship but to give back and be a beacon of resources to the community.” One can see why Pastor Leticia Alanis and Unidad y Fe ministry received the Peterman Stewardship Award: they are a beacon of hope. All around there is despair, yet they seek to hold each other, love each other and live as disciples of Christ, all called and all responsible for living as a community of God with Christ as the guide and compass.

ENGAGE WITH US

[The Generosity of The Generosity Project \(TGP\)](#)

Have you used the Generosity Project in the past, and do you want to reignite it for your community? Have you adapted the curriculum, and do you want to share how it works? Are you curious about the resource, and do you want to explore its potential? On **Monday, Feb. 3, at 6 p.m. Central time**, folks who helped develop the project will gather with practitioners and those curious about the project to discuss how communities can utilize the project in a variety of ways. There's no need to register — just attend! Direct your questions to Karen Kretschmann at Karen.Kretschmann@elca.org.

Mark your calendar: [The Generosity of the Generosity Project](#)

Feb. 3, 6-7:30 p.m. Central time

[Join the meeting here](#). (Meeting ID: 862 3207 6413 - Passcode: 272448)

GRATEFUL

We are grateful for our ministry with you, offering ways for you to share stories across your communities. Some easy-to-access tools are the [2024 Annual Report Cover](#), [2024 Deep Dive Narrative](#), [2024 Mission Support Thank You Certificates](#) (all found within Relevant Resources), plus monthly memos and other resources at *Living Lutheran's* “Stories of Faith in Action” ([SOFIA](#)) page.

Victoria Flood, Senior Director for Congregation and Synod Support

Nick Kiger, Director for Mission Support

Karen Kretschmann, Coordinator for Storytelling Engagement