

STORIES OF FAITH IN ACTION

Stories of the New Start Congregations of
the Southwest California Synod

RACHEL'S BAPTISM

Glory Lutheran's student ministry sharing the life changing message of the gospel with students from Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.

KATHI BLOOMS

The community created at Bloom Lutheran helps Kathi not only survive a difficult year but ultimately to bloom.

GOD HEALS

A couple finds healing at ADORE when they find a church that is supportive of the LGBTQ community.

Stories of Faith in Action

table of contents

- 02 **ADORE**
- 03 **Another Level**
- 04 **Bloom**
- 05 **Glory Lutheran**
- 06 **Hollywood Thai Fellowship**
- 07 **Iglesia Santa Cruz**
- 08 **Mission St. Francis**
- 09 **Reformation Pasadena**
- 10 **St. Matthew's Filipino Ministry**

Dear Southwest California Synod,

Enjoy the diversity and energy of our newest communities!

In these pages you'll find the stories of our New Start congregations which include Chinese, Latino, Filipino, Thai and African Descent Lutheran communities from around our synod. All of them are full of the possibilities of the Holy Spirit, engaging their neighborhood in deeply relevant ways. As you read through these pages, listen for the Holy Spirit urging you into a mutual relationship with one or more of these communities. Then, respond to that nudge, and reach out to the developer pastor.

**Yours in the mission of God in our synod,
Marj**

stories of faith in action

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ADORE is an exploration...
... of worship and God out in
the valley.

People of Faith & Struggle

"North Hills Father Charged with Killing His Son for Being Gay." - The 2016 headline devastated the San Fernando Valley LGBTQ community

Support **ADORE**

- Pray for ADORE leaders
- A \$30 donation helps print flyers to reach LGBTQ people & their family

MISSION

To undo hurt and restore the transformational power of God's love, justice, and healing to people of faith, struggle and courage.

Support **ADORE**:

- Refer Valley Latino or LGBTQ people and their families to ADORE
- A \$100 donation provides bread, wine and other materials for 20 worship services.



Joseph Castañeda Carrera is the leader for the Latino LGBTQ worship communities. ADORE worships through **home** church and **hike** church, as pictured above.

All-together in God's Healing

Days before the headline, a mother and father sat quietly in a small living room, holding hands. He read & scrutinized, the ADORE worship aid over and over. She squinted her eyes and knit her brows together, evaluating the room, the content of the message, wondering if she and her husband were really - *verdaderamente* – welcome. **They are.** "I thought I would only find God in my heart now, and not in community with other people. It's incredible. We have left so many churches for telling us they could cure our daughters who are lesbians, but to us, our daughters are perfect. Today, I felt God more than ever by receiving communion from a gay pastor. We wonder a lot why churches can't see anymore. **We don't go into churches anymore, but I guess [ADORE] found us at home.**" The group is 6 large and at the end everyone stays and sits in silence.

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MISSION

Another Level exists to bring people into relationship with Jesus Christ- to enrich people's lives spiritually and socially.

Moving Forward

A poem by FreXinet Johnson

We are Another Level.
We know about journey
and travel. We may even
be considered nomadic,
but without moving
forward our results
would be tragic. Yet, the
fire of the Lord cannot
be consumed. So
whenever, or wherever
we had to stop and
pause, we've always
resumed. The flame of
this ministry was lit with
Bible study, Ignite.
Teaching lessons on
spiritual battles and how
to fight. On ALM went to

Lawndale and
Bethesda's Upper
Room. Although there
was transition, only
without faith would we
be doomed. We made
a tiny jump across the
street to St. John. It was
here that our stay was
quite long—expanding
here with children's
church, block parties
and community
outreach. Requiring
some of us to step up,
and not only follow, but
teach. But like all good
things, our stay had to
come to an end.

However, the Holy
Trinity moved us to
Trinity Lutheran. There
we spread our wings
and shook the dust
from our feet. Created
many new memories,
but the Lord only
placed us there for a
beat. To truly be great,
we must ascend. So the
Most High brought
Another Level to
Ascension. With a new
family and facility to be
great and a new
community to share
food for thought and
soul...C'mon let's spread
the plate and move
forward...

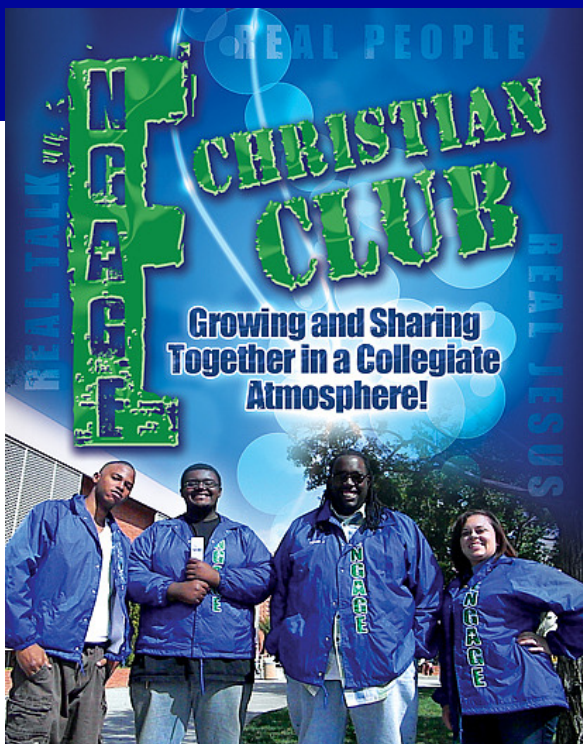


Partnership with ALM

- Prayer for growth and sustainability of an urban new start.
- Financial support would help us to strengthen our existing clubs and expand our Campus Ministry to other Community Colleges.
- Help us develop a weekly program to reach inner city youth.
- Prayer for the Pastor and courageous leadership teams of Another Level.

ENGAGE Christian Clubs

ENGAGE is the Campus Ministry of Another Level & part of Lutheran Campus Ministries in the ELCA. ENGAGE started at El Camino College in Torrance. It was birthed out of a Bible Study called IGNITE and morphed into a Church Plant & was renamed ENGAGE in 2009. In the spring of 2016, ENGAGE successfully started a second (beta) club at Los Angeles Southwest College in South Los Angeles. These clubs mainly consist of commuter college students, & we are one of the only mainline denominations attracting ethnically diverse community college students. We reach at least 100 students a semester through our outreach, & on-campus activities, in addition to working with faculty and staff at each institution to provide spiritual, faith-based, grace-filled programming. We have been invited to hold prayer vigils, offer support to students struggling with family crisis, hold staff Bible studies & are seen by many as a beacon of hope on these two campuses.



To cultivate a home-made worshipping community in which people experience God's love and are empowered to live authentically and love unconditionally.



There is a new and growing community gathering in the valley known as "Awesometown" (Santa Clarita).

When we gather, things happen.

Things and people, Bloom.

This past year, one person in particular who Bloomed is Kathi.

Kathi Giddens experienced tremendous change in 2015 — arthroscopic knee surgery, months recuperating and retirement.

Experiencing such change is not easy for anyone, let alone a seventy-plus year old whose closest family members are hundreds of miles away.

"I'm all alone out here in southern California," Kathi said.

Without Bloom, she says she does not know how she could have thrived — let alone survive — such a year.

"Bloom is my family here," Kathi said. "I don't know what I would've done this year without Bloom."

And it was Bloom, being her local family that helped enable and empower the feisty Kathi to undergo successful knee surgery last winter.

"It touches you to think. After my surgery, so many people came to visit, offering support and love. It get's lonely in those hospital rooms. The company was amazing."

Hilary Skoch, member of Bloom, visited Kathi the day after surgery and continued visiting thereafter, because *ensuring that Kathi felt loved and connected was vital.*

"I wanted to make sure she knew she was loved and supported by her church family," Hilary said.

Kathi also deeply appreciated weekly pastoral visits. "When I was in the rehab center, Pastor Ryan came every week just to check in, chat, keep me in the loop and pray," Kathi said. "That meant a lot."

Knowing that Bloom was praying for her during worship gatherings and Bible studies also gave her strength.

"Our prayers make a real difference. It allows you to be full of hope," she said. "I know people's prayers really helped me during rehab. I know that's why I'm healing."

After her stint in rehab, when it was time to finish healing at home, the church community worked together to provide meals.

"It was so much fun being able to make Kathi dinner and meals and visit with her," Linda Bakkom said.

By springtime, Kathi was back at work as a local junior high school counselor. Back in time to finish the school year and then retire.

At her retirement party, Pastor Ryan and his wife — Melissa — were there to join the celebration of such meaningful work.

During the summer, Bloom held a special retirement party for Kathi after a Worship Gathering.

Kathi is now more busy than ever before.

She devotes much of her time hosting an after school intervention program for junior high school boys, and teaching younger people in the congregation how to knit, crochet and create quilts. She also makes blankets for prematurely born babies.

"This is a really special place. Everyone is accepted. That's huge and that's unique in Santa Clarita.

"This church, means everything to me. The Bible studies really help you connect. The worship is wonderful. The sermons are meaningful. They connect to life."

In other words, Bloom helps people bloom.

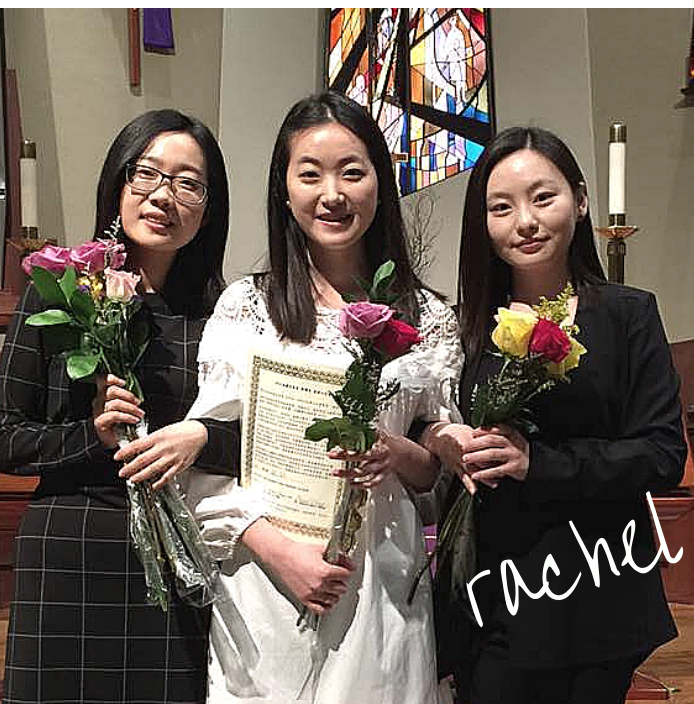
- Pray for Pastor Ryan and Bloom's Leaders

Support BLOOM:

- Financial support allows Bloom to provide even more resources and spaces for millennials and Gen-X'ers, socially conscious individuals and (un)traditional families to find a welcoming church and spiritual home.

SUPPORT GLORY

- Pray for the leaders of Glory and that lives continue to be transformed
- Financial support will allow Glory to provide holistic ministry where Chinese students encounter Christ and form loving relationships



90 Glory has **baptized** nearly people during their seven years, and experienced many miraculous stories such as Rachel's.

GLORY LUTHERAN

Rachel's Story

Glory Lutheran has many stories of transformation, this is one student's path to Christ through Glory's student outreach. Rachel, is from China, & studying at USC. Pastor Newman first met Rachel at a Zion Fellowship gathering at USC about two years ago.

"Rachel was quiet, courteous, friendly, always nicely and appropriately dressed," recalls Pastor Newman. "But she was a bit of a loner, I could never tell her emotion from her face. She's from a very traditional Buddhist family, often worshipping at the Buddhist Temple with her mom. Rachel came to our gatherings, paying close attention to our teaching and sharing every Thursday night.

"During the second semester I tried to talk to her & understand her more, but her only answer was a smile. After a year, Rachel came to me with a simple question: 'Pastor, how can I become a Christian?' **Rachel was baptized on Christmas Sunday, 2015.** Only when she gave her testimony did we learn her story.

Rachel was born during Mainland China's 'one child' policy, & China's traditional values state that only a boy is the root of a family life.

Because she was not a boy, Rachel's father was too disappointed and frustrated to love her. She was sent to live with her grandmother. She hardly remembered her father's face.

Her dad's rejection hurt her heart, damaging her self-image, making her feel she was not worthy of love. Her sole friend and family was her grandmother.

"Three years ago, Rachel's grandmother passed away. Heartbroken, she buried herself in her grief and sorrow. To escape, she came to USC for her Masters degree.

"The first time Rachel came to Zion Fellowship she seemed like a seriously injured patient. She had lost the ability to laugh and love.

She was thirsty for the Gospel's unconditional love, wanting to believe in Jesus Christ, but fearing that there is no true love on Earth. She knew that God was the way, the truth and the life, but her experiences kept holding her back. Her struggle lasted eight months.

"Through Glory Lutheran, God has started to heal Rachel. She has accepted the love of Jesus Christ as her Savior and the Lord of her life. Since she was baptized, she has become a completely different girl. She has a big group of sister friends through Glory and through Zion Fellowship.

"Rachel serves God as a worship team member, and is planning to read through the Bible three times this year. I know Rachel will become a charismatic leader in God's hand. Please pray for her!"

HOLLYWOOD LUTHERAN THAI FELLOWSHIP



THIS FAMILY WAS BUDDHIST FOR A LONG TIME, BUT NOW THEY CAN SEE THE LIGHT OF GOD IN THEIR LIFE. THEY OWN EXOTIC THAI IN BURBANK AND HOSTED SOME OF OUR FIRST MEETINGS AT THEIR RESTAURANT.

AFTER A FEW MONTHS OF PEOPLE COMMUTING FROM THE SAN FERNANDO VALLEY TO WHITTIER TO WORSHIP WITH THE PASTOR GOLF'S THAI MINISTRY THERE, IT WAS CLEAR IT WAS TIME TO ESTABLISH A LUTHERAN THAI FELLOWSHIP IN THE HOLLYWOOD AREA. ACCORDINGLY, PASTOR GOLF AND THAI FELLOWSHIP MEMBERS BEGAN MEETING AT THE BURBANK-AREA THAI RESTAURANT OWNED BY ONE OF THE MEN WHO'D BEEN TRAVELING TO WHITTIER.

WHAT BEGAN AS A HOUSE CHURCH QUICKLY OUTGREW THE HOMES OF THE PARTICIPANTS.

AFTER RESEARCHING THE AREA, PASTOR GOLF THOUGHT NORTH HOLLYWOOD OR HOLLYWOOD WOULD BE THE MOST APPROPRIATE SITE. THE PRESENCE OF A VERY LARGE BUDDHIST TEMPLE IN NORTH HOLLYWOOD - THE LARGEST OUTSIDE OF THAILAND - MEANS THAT MUCH OF THE THAI POPULATION OF THAT AREA IS BUDDHIST, WHEREAS THE MANY THAI'S THAT LIVE CLOSE TO HOLLYWOOD FIND THEIR CULTURAL IDENTITY LESS IN THE TEMPLE AND MORE AT THE NEARBY BARNSDALL PARK, WHICH HOSTS A THAI COMMUNITY CELEBRATION, AND IN THE CLOSE PROXIMITY OF THAI TOWN. HOLLYWOOD LUTHERAN BECAME THEIR WORSHIP HOME.

Support Hollywood Lutheran Thai Fellowship

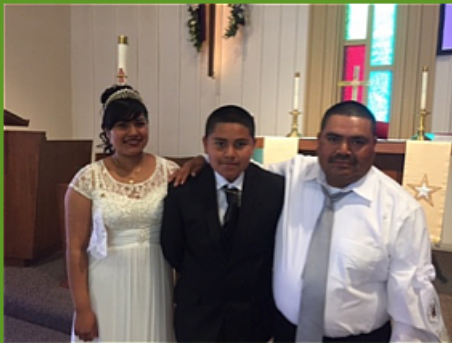
- Pray for Thai Fellowship
- Support them so they can continue to share the food of the Spirit as well as Thai food.

Iglesia Santa Cruz

We struggle, we hope, we try, we pray, and little by little people find a sense of dignity and community here, where strawberry fields go on forever.

SUPPORT IGLESIA SANTA CRUZ

- Pray for Iglesia Santa Cruz as they look for a new developer.
- Your financial support will help sustain this unique trilingual, relational ministry.



"Life at Santa Cruz Lutheran Church is wonderful. We are not the typical Lutheran Church. Our community members are poor and struggling, not middle class. Out of their indigenous roots they hold fast to their version of the American dream, working to make sure their children have a better life than they have had.

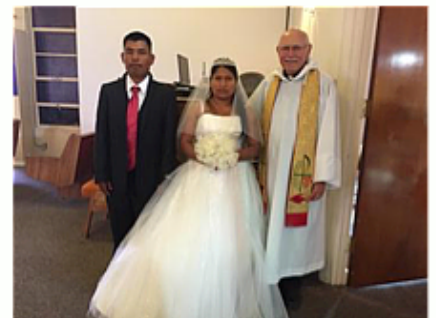
Oaxacan traditions enrich the Iglesia Luterana Santa Cruz community. One of the favorite saints of the Oaxacan people is St. George, a soldier who became a Christian and was martyred in Roman times. Another beloved figure is John the Baptist, whose Saint's Day is June 26. Saint's Days are celebrated in the community with an Oaxacan meal with lots of chicken with mole.

Sacraments and celebrations that involve families and the entire community are central to Iglesia Luterana, which recently celebrated the wedding of members Moises and Judith. As Pastor Ron says, "there is a sense of dignity and sacredness that we find in the wedding liturgy that unites two people who are so committed and devoted to each other."

In May, 11-year-old Gomez celebrated his First Communion.

Gomez's parents had always attended class with him. After

several weeks, they admitted shyly that they themselves had never completed the study or requirement for Communion. "Would we be able to celebrate our First Communion with our son?" they asked. Pastor Ron responded, "It would be an honor and a privilege. With God all things are possible."





MISSION ST. FRANCIS

Every liturgy is led by young boys and girls who are committed to the Risen Christ. They lead the confession of sin, the prayers, the reading of the psalm, the lessons and the creed. They distribute the elements for communion in an ancient liturgy graced with beautiful hymns.

Mission St. Francis offers free GED classes to the public, taught by two retired teachers. It is preparing a series of art shows where local artists may display their works. It hosts a monthly women's group that helps low income and physically challenged women achieve success in their own businesses. It hosts two AA groups, a Korean Presbyterian congregation, and a Church of Christ congregation.

It provides full camperships for El Camino Pines Lutheran Camps to youth and adults who would not otherwise be able to participate. It gathers food for needy families. It provides a safe place for children to play basketball.

It plans to offer "Mommy and Me" in the future. It hopes to turn the sanctuary into a multipurpose room to better serve the community with concerts, theatre, banquets, cheerleading, public forums and Bible studies as well as worship on Sunday mornings.

Mission St. Francis' goal is that members will each be specialized in an area of community ministry, and that the Pastor will know of every existing ministry in the San Fernando Valley, forming friendships in each and offering aid and mutual sharing to independent congregations that may not have the support of a denomination and who may be interested in Lutheran theology.

The five siblings of the Peralta family love this church because of the role they play in the service, as it gives them a sense of feeling wanted and loved, one story among the many examples of why Mission St. Francis exists today and is such a special place.

Peace
and
Justice
for all people



Support Mission St. Francis

- Pray for the leaders of Mission St. Francis
- Financial support towards starting new community ministry opportunities



REFORMATION

PASADENA

Support Reformation:

- Pray for Reformation and their leaders.
- Send financial support to Reformation to further our commitment to bilingual, multi sensory worship.

CREATING A WORLD
WHERE ALL WORLDS FIT

MISSION

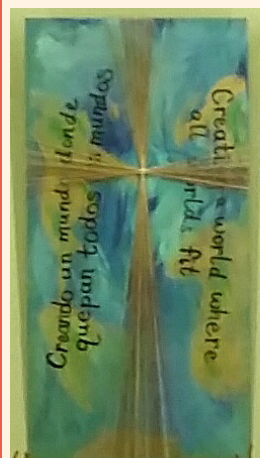
RE-FORMING OUR IMAGE OF GOD

People need a variety of images for God. **The images and art around us shape our faith and our view of God.** Reformation is committed to using a diversity of images in our worship. Each season a new image or



REFORMATION
PASADENA

symbol takes center stage behind the altar. **We do this to emphasize visually that God is not static.** We've had Luther's Rose for Reformation Sunday. A world wrapped in the cross for ordinary time, during Advent we explored the



series Living Gently in a Violent World and used the visual of doves and feathers. For Lent we wove our prayers together in a communal art piece as we looked at prayer in the Psalms.

Intentionally providing different images to center our worship gathering **reminds us that God is dynamic and alive!**

**'We are a house of prayer
for all who seek the Lord.'**

St. Matthew's Filipino Ministry



Felix's Testimony

"My name is Felix Tapongot. I am 57 years old, and a resident of Eagle Rock in Los Angeles. I was an active church member as well as a musician of the Eagle Rock Lutheran Church from 2009 – 2013, where I came to know Pastor Marcos.

"When Pastor Marcos left and was looking for a new church to continue his pastoral mission, I stayed in touch and would offer my musical services whenever needed. When St. Matthew's Lutheran found him, I also found myself in the Glendale Filipino Ministry, along with other musician-members who followed and joined Pastor Marc.



"The reason is simple; it was the communion of people. People want to gather around every Sunday, or any other day, because we want to hear and learn more about God. We want to praise Him and be thankful for whatever trials and blessings that come in our daily lives. Pastor Marcos is not perfect in every thing he does, but his faith counts most. His heart, thoughts, and deeds speak of Christ. We are so blessed to have him as our Pastor, a leader, as a preacher and of course as a friend, in the fellowship of Jesus."

Support St. Matthew's Filipino Ministry:

- Pray for Pastor Marcos and the Filipino Ministry.
- Attend our annual Gospel Concert!
- Send financial support to strengthen our outreach through our home Bible studies