



Florida-Bahamas Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Global Mission Table

News / Noticias / Nouvel

Spring 2023 — Issue #25

BLEST BE THE TIES THAT BIND

As travel has resumed in 2023 and small groups from our Global Mission Table have made visits to our companions, we are reminded of the ties that bind us — we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. Time and distance do not diminish the connection we share. Trips to Cuba and Guyana in the first quarter of 2023 were experiences of great joy and meaning. We saw old friends, met new ones, and reignited our passion for joint ministry.



IEU Bishop Virgen Laborde and her brother, IEU founding bishop Ismael Laborde, sign the MOU making official the companionship relationship of Cuba and the Florida-Bahamas Synod.

CUBA REPORT

Visit includes signing of memo formalizing companion status

Synodical and ELCA churchwide leaders joined Bishop Pedro Suárez on a trip to Santiago and Havana in mid-February to visit congregations of Cuba's Iglesia Evangélica Unida-Sínodo Luterano (IEU), meet with church and government leaders, and share stories of how God is active in our communities.

Pictures on these pages show highlights of the trip.

Part of our group went first to Santiago de Cuba, where the IEU has its headquarters. During the visit, Bishop Suárez and the IEU's Bishop Virgen Laborde signed a Memo of Understanding (MOU) making official the companion relationship between our two communities of faith.

Two synod congregations sent gifts which were given to IEU congregation members — St. John's Lutheran in Jacksonville provided hygiene products and Hope Lutheran in The Villages sent woven crosses. These were powerful reminders that our relationship with the IEU is nurtured at the congregational, synodical and churchwide levels.

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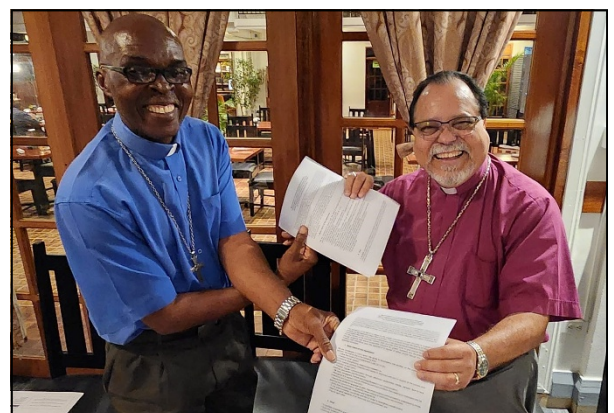
GUYANA REPORT

Sharing worship and ministry possibilities with congregations

For the first time since 2019, a Global Mission delegation joined Bishop Pedro Suárez to visit the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Guyana. The trip involved visiting ELCG congregations in Georgetown, New Amsterdam and the Berbice River area. Joint Lenten services were held in three locations over the course of the week, as Bishop Suárez delivered a message of hope and finding peace.

We experienced spirited worship to the joyful beat of tambourines accompanying the liturgy of Lent. At each worship service, the Florida-Bahamas Synod made a formal presentation of

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Rev. Leroy Nicholson, president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Guyana, and Bishop Pedro Suárez with the MOU formalizing the companionship status of the ELCG and the synod.

CUBA REPORT

ELCA leaders met with Cuba's Council of Churches and with government officials

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Rev. Russell Meyer brought a gift of \$5,000 from the Global Mission Table to be used for providing humanitarian need and repairing the IEU's seminary education space. As this leg of the journey occurred over a Sunday, Bishop Suárez had the opportunity to preach in Santiago.

The group also visited the children's daycare ministry of a Santiago congregation and a church in nearby Dajao where ELCA World Hunger has launched a community garden and pig raising project.

Rev. Khader El-Yateem, assistant to Bishop Suárez and synod director of evangelical mission, and others joined the group in Havana to meet with Cuban government officials and the board of the Cuban Council of Churches. Religious activities are encouraged in Cuba; the visits



Florida-Bahamas Synod and ELCA visitors in Havana with Cuba's minister and deputy of religious affairs; officials of the United Church of Christ and Disciples of Christ; and officials and an interpreter of Cuba's Council of Churches.

were heartfelt and productive.

Bishop Suárez, Rev. Jaime Dubón from churchwide and Rev. Russell Meyer were interviewed for a national television program. The bishop spoke about the solidarity between our churches. Rev. Meyer reflected on the spirituality of Cuban poet and philosopher José Martí, the inspirational voice for Cuban independence through his famous words *Patria es humanidad* ("Homeland is humanity").

Finally, the group visited Cuba's

Seminario Evangélico Teológico in Matanzas, an ecumenical seminary that the ELCA churchwide expression has supported for many years.

Through the love of Jesus Christ we find solidarity and common mission. Global Mission is grateful to all who made the trip, and for the ways our connection to the IEU has been strengthened. May we continue to advocate for building bridges rather than walls, so that all God's people might be reconciled and given the chance to flourish in their land.

Lutheran church In Cuba marks 30 years of ministry with 3-day celebration

On March 23, the IEU launched a three-day churchwide celebration of 30 years of ministry in Cuba. Like all ministries, the church has faced obstacles and setbacks over its history, yet through the grace of God and the commitment of God's people, it has flourished and grown. There are over a dozen congregations in eastern Cuba and a developing ministry in Havana.

Even amid the economic and political difficulties that Cuba faces, the IEU is a vibrant church filled with gratitude and hope for the future.

The celebration featured joint worship services and gatherings to review the history of how the various congregations were established and grew. A forum on the centrality of women in ministry honored the fact that most of the IEU's pastoral leaders, including the



Worship at the church headquarters in Santiago that concluded a three-day celebration marking the 30th anniversary of ministry by Cuba's Iglesia Evangélica Unida.

bishop and assistant to the bishop, are female.

There were formal recognitions of milestones, expressions of gratitude and prayers of hope for the future. Both the Florida-Bahamas Synod and the ELCA churchwide expression made financial gifts to help support this important milestone celebration.

CUBA REPORT

Florida-Bahamas Bishop Pedro Suárez with Cuba's IEU Bishop Virgen Laborde



At a gathering on Transfiguration Sunday in the IEU church office, from left: Marisol Dubón, IEU founding bishop Ismael Laborde, Bishop Virgen Laborde, Rev. Russell Meyer, Bishop Pedro Suárez, Rev. Rosellys Laborde and Rev. Jaime Dubón.

Children at the daycare center of Nuestro Salvador ("Our Savior") congregation in Santiago, which the ELCA has supported. Our Synodical Women's Organization raised funds for supplies for the center.



Right: Rev. Jaime Dubon with three children of the Cristo Vive ("Christ Lives") congregation in Dajao, a rural community near Santiago.



Rev. Russell Meyer (above) and Bishop Pedro Suárez (below) are interviewed in Havana for a national television program.



Below, another view of the congregation gathered for Transfiguration Sunday worship that was attended by synod and ELCA leaders at the IEU headquarters congregation in Santiago.



ELCA bishops speak on behalf of Cuba

At the March 2023 gathering of the ELCA Conference of Bishops, a letter signed jointly by the Conference chair and Bishop Pedro Suárez was approved by the group to be sent to Sen. Bob Menendez, chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The letter requested assistance in reversing the U.S. government's current economic and international sanctions against Cuba.

The letter states: "As the Conference of Bishops for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), a body of 3 million members, we appeal to you on behalf of the Lutheran churches in Cuba, religious people across Cuba, indeed all Cuban people. Whatever the faults

of the Cuban government, we know from the firsthand accounts of colleagues that most Cubans suffer greatly..."

The action stems from the ELCA social policy resolution "Advocacy with the U.S. government – Aid to Cuba." The letter is printed below.

Shortly after the letter was received at the senator's office, the Cuba Team learned that a container full of medical supplies, funded in part by the ELCA, at long last got the Office of Foreign Assets Control license needed to proceed on its journey to Cuba. We are grateful this critical shipment has reached its destination. In our companion relationship, we will continue to use our



Hector Mustelier of Cuba's Ministry of Public Health with the ELCA supplies.

voices to speak on behalf of our sisters and brothers in Cuba.

Bishops' letter seeks U.S. relief for suffering of Cuban people

March 8, 2023, letter from the ELCA Council of Bishops to Senator Bob Menendez, Senate Foreign Relations Committee chair

Dear Senator Menendez:

As the Conference of Bishops for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), a body of 3 million members, we appeal to you on behalf of the Lutheran churches in Cuba, religious people across Cuba, indeed all Cuban people. Whatever the faults of the Cuban government, we know from the firsthand accounts of colleagues that most Cubans suffer greatly under the economic sanctions imposed by the previous U.S. president's administration. We call upon you to help relieve the collective suffering of the Cuban people.

Across the island there are significant shortages of food, fuel, and medicine. These shortages are causing malnutrition in rural and outlying populations. Hospitals lack basic supplies. Patients have had to bring their own bandages and medicines. Cancer patients have been sent home without treatment because standard drugs are unavailable. Rolling blackouts have occurred across the island because energy must be rationed. Families lack access to food sufficient for their households. The crisis has impelled up to a half million people to leave their homes and undertake either the dangerous land journey through Latin America to the southwest border of the United States or the dangerous sea crossing to the Florida Keys. Since the COVID-19 pandemic was declared, over 300,000 Cubans have entered the United States.

What are the direct reasons for this crisis? The United States has included Cuba on its list of State Sponsors of Terrorism (SST), identified it as a state sponsor of religious repression, blocked its oil shipments from Venezuela, blocked remittances, imposed 240 special sanctions under the Trump administration, and failed to act on the 2016 memorandum signed under the Obama administration. The cumulative effect of our government actions is the collective

suffering of all Cubans. This is neither morally nor pragmatically justified.

Right now, the Florida-Bahamas Synod of the ELCA is working with Norwegian church partners to send Cuba a shipping container of medical supplies, but the New York bank acting as agent has frozen funds and demands a special license from the U.S. Office of Foreign Assets Control. Three months have passed since the partners applied for that license. On what grounds should these funds be kept from them, and the license not granted?

The only restrictions to our humanitarian and religious work have come from our own government. We have processed through the streets of Cuba with the cross of Christ and freely engaged people on all manner of topics. Cuba is not a state sponsor of terrorism but has participated in securing the peace process in Colombia. The Washington Post has found no evidence that Cuba used microwaves as a weapon against U.S. embassy employees. Cuba endorses all international accords to combat terrorism, cooperates with the U.S. military in drug interdiction, accepts returning migrants and allows humanitarian flights to Haiti to pass through its airspace.

We implore you to help reverse the current economic and international sanctions against Cuba and initiate a pathway toward normalizing diplomatic relations. We stand ready to assist the people of Cuba in their recovery and to work with your office in creating a future beyond hostility between our nations.

(Signed by Bishop Tracie L. Bartholomew, New Jersey Synod, and chair of the ELCA Conference of Bishops; and by Bishop Pedro Suárez, Florida-Bahamas Synod)

GUYANA REPORT

Partnering possibilities include youth, women's ministries

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the beautiful banner made by Karen O'Brien of Hope Lutheran in The Villages. It depicts the logos of ELCG and the FBS, symbolizing our companionship. The banner will be hung in the ELCG headquarters in New Amsterdam.

The Lutheran Church of Guyana has 43 congregations organized into 13 parishes. The congregations share five pastors and eight deacons — meaning the leadership must provide pastoral support to a number of congregations.

On three consecutive mornings, our synod group met with leaders and members of congregations from all over Guyana. We shared the ways we see God active in our respective congregations and communities; we discussed congregational strengths and needs; and finally, we explored ways we can partner for mutual up-building and support.

A number of exciting possibilities for collaboration exist in youth ministries and women's groups. We look forward to partnering in leadership development and training. The diakonia program in the Florida-Bahamas Synod is one example where we saw possibilities for part-



After a Lenten service at Calvary Lutheran, Georgetown, from left: Bishop Pedro Suárez; Deacon Aura Suárez; Sandra Kurtzious, ELCG Executive Council vice president; Rev. James Jones, Calvary pastor; Rev. Jaime Dubón; Rev. Katie Carroll; Rev. Khader El-Yateem; M Davy Ram, Executive Council treasurer.

nership. We will follow up on these ideas and more as we keep the momentum going and explore all that companionship might mean in shared proclamation of the gospel.

The generous hospitality of ELCG was a vivid expression of God's love. In thanksgiving for our partnership and for the ministry of ELCG, the Global Mission Table approved a \$2,500 gift to be used in ministry as the Guyana Lutheran Church sees fit. We look forward to youth exchanges, accompaniment trips and more. God is doing something new!



Deacon Aura with a young member of Ebenezer Lutheran, New Amsterdam.



Participating in a listening session at Redeemer Lutheran, Georgetown, with leaders of churches in the area, from left: Rev. Dubón, Rev. Carroll, Bishop Suárez, Rev. El-Yateem.



Bishop Suárez, Sandra Kurtzious and Rev. Jones display the banner from Hope Lutheran in The Villages with logos of the ELCG and the ELCA. It was presented at three Lenten services and will hang at ELCG headquarters in New Amsterdam.

Global Mission Table connects the synod with five companions

Companion relationships connect Lutheran churches throughout the world with ELCA synods and congregations. They are expressions of communion and fellowship with the more than 140 member church bodies of the Lutheran World

Federation. Each of the ELCA's 65 synods has at least one companion. The Florida-Bahamas Synod has five: Cuba, Guyana, Haiti, Suriname and Jamaica's United Theological College of the West Indies.

Our synod's Global Mission Table

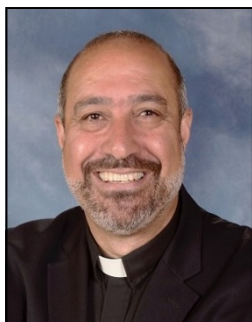
comprises 18 members, including an assistant to the bishop. A synod team for each companion reports to the Global Mission Table at bi-monthly conference calls.

Anyone with a desire to work with our companions is welcome to join in this ministry. For more information about the Global Mission Table or any of its teams, contact Rev. Kathryn ("Katie") Carroll by e-mailing revkhc@gmail.com or calling or texting 305-505-1656.

Here's how to learn more about Global Mission

Is the Spirit stirring you to delve more deeply into Global Mission? Perhaps you would like to share your thoughts about something you read in this newsletter, or maybe you would like to get involved.

To begin that conversation, contact Rev. Katie Carroll, Global Mission Table chair, at revkhc@gmail.com, or Rev. Khader El-Yateem, Florida-Bahamas Synod assistant to the bishop and director for evangelical mission, at khadere@fbsynod.org.



Rev. Khader
El-Yateem



Rev. Katie
Carroll

Civic life: What's faith got to do with it?

The 2019 ELCA Churchwide Assembly called for development of a social statement on "Government and Civic Engagement." Social statements are teaching and policy documents addressing significant social issues. They are developed over a multi-year study and reflection process and then presented to churchwide voting members. There are 13 such statements already.

The task force created to develop this one has put together a six-session study guide on Civic Life and Faith that focuses on key issues and invites feedback. The study process, with a deadline of October 15, is open to congregations, ministry groups and anyone interested. It could be in person or via Zoom.

If you are wondering what faith has to do with civic life from a Lutheran perspective, look no farther than the letter on page 4 sent by the Council of Bishops to the chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. From a faith perspective it urges political action.

To learn more and to access the study guide, go to elca.org and do a search for Government and Social Engagement.



PARTNER IN MINISTRY

Jaime Dubón directs ELCA's involvement in Latin American/Caribbean engagement

The Companion Synods Program is an expression of ELCA Global Mission engagement. We are blessed to work alongside gifted and dedicated partners such as Rev. Jaime Dubón. He is a familiar face in Florida — not only through his current work in Global Mission, but also because he served from 2013 to 2017 as director of evangelical mission and assistant to former Bishop Robert Schaefer.

Rev. Dubón is now director for the “LAC” Region of the ELCA — Latin America and the Caribbean. He facilitates and fosters relationships of accompaniment between the ELCA and its companions in the region. This involves working within a large network: The ELCA relates to 18 churches and 18 faith-based organizations in 19 countries.

What does it mean to “facilitate accompaniment”? Responsibilities include regular communication and visitation; exchange of experiences about being church and doing mission and ministry; and fostering leadership development through seminaries, scholarships, international camp counselor positions and a summer internship program for students of color whose primary language is other than English.

Another component is financial accompaniment, focused in three primary areas: (1) mission and ministry, (2) diakonia and sustainable development, and (3) Lutheran Disaster Response. In addition, Rev. Dubón coordinates the efforts of the LAC region's global personnel including four regional representatives and eight missionaries.

For the Florida-Bahamas Synod, Rev. Dubón's ministry is one of guidance, support and partnership. He joins in many of our meetings and often travels with us on accompaniment visits, including the recent trips to Cuba and Guyana. He hopes to participate in a December trip

to Suriname.

Rev. Dubón is always available to provide perspective and larger context, bringing to bear the experiences he has with companions throughout the LAC region. A total of 24 synods of the ELCA and four of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) have ongoing relationships in 17 different countries. Rev. Dubón is involved in all of them, providing direction in terms of institutional policy and protocols, encouraging active communication, and facilitating bilateral and international consultations whereby companions meet face-to-face to deepen ties and plan for future collaboration.

The Global Mission Table seeks to work closely with churchwide when planning financial accompaniment with our companions. Our projects can have more impact when done with coordination so that we don't duplicate but, rather, complement. The synod's regular communication with Rev. Dubón as well as with ELCA Regional Representative Hellen Rios-Carrillo helps to ensure that we are working in harmony both with our companions and with our ELCA partners.

Rev. Dubón loves his job. He reflects, “I treasure the relationships we foster in Global Mission, both institutional and personal. What's more, through in-person visits, I have the opportunity to learn what it means to ‘be church’ in a variety of contexts and how to do ministry in creative and innovative ways. What a privilege it is to serve!”



Rev. Jaime Dubón with Elocia Smith, secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Guyana Council.

WHAT'S LAC ALL ABOUT?

ELCA active in ministry throughout Latin America, Caribbean

The Florida-Bahamas Synod is active through its five companions — Cuba, Haiti, Guyana, Suriname and the United Theological College of the West Indies in Jamaica. As the profile above of Rev. Jaime Dubón

indicates, the “LAC” Desk of the ELCA is active with more than 30 churches and faith-based organizations in 19 countries.

What else is God up to in Latin America and the Caribbean?

MINISTRY EXCHANGES:

♦ For the past couple of years, the Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil and the ELCA have been involved in discussions
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If you're coming to Synod Assembly, we'll see you there!

Once again this year, Global Mission will be highly visible at Synod Assembly! We will have a ministry table in the Connections Café where you can come for casual conversation about Global Mission and learn about ways that you can be involved. You can sign up for our newsletter, learn about our synod companions, and signal your interest in working on one of the companion teams.

This year, Global Mission is excited to be teaming up with the synod's Just Love, ReconcilingWorks and World Hunger ministries hosting a pair of Hospitality Suites! Everyone is invited to drop by for refreshments, casual conversation and perhaps music and more! Be on the lookout for details of date, time and location. There will be plenty of announcements at the assembly, which runs from 1 p.m. Thursday, June 8, to noon Saturday, June 10. We'll be at the same location as last year — the Caribe Royale Resort in Orlando.

If you'll be at the assembly, don't miss this opportunity to learn about these important synod ministries and the core values that hold them in common — deep listening, inclusion, vulnerability and more.

LAC Regional involvement includes training, youth programs, scholarships and consultations

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about leadership development, mission starts and congregational vitality. The next step is hosting visit exchanges so each group can see first hand how the topics are being addressed in their companion country.

- ♦ The Caribbean Synod and the Lutheran Churches in El Salvador and Nicaragua are working together as Puerto Rico seeks to strengthen its institutional capacity around diakonia with emphasis on disaster response and preparedness, gender justice and climate change.

- ♦ Institutional capacity training on project planning, management and evaluation will be offered in June in Mexico for companions in Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean.

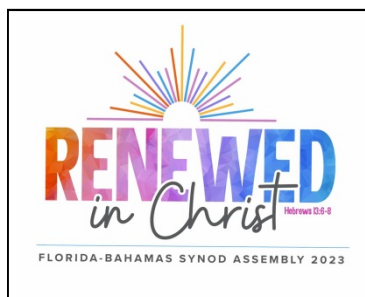
- ♦ Through the International Camp Counselor Program, four young adults from Guyana, Suriname and Argentina will work in ELCA camps this summer.

- ♦ 12 missionaries are deployed and serving in the region as professors and ministry specialists

- ♦ The Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) program will be relaunched in Mexico this year. We have 10 young participants ready for year-round experiences in either YAGM or LAC country programs in Mexico and Argentina/Uruguay.

- ♦ Educational scholarships have been awarded to 36 individuals in the region. These funds cover everything from short-term courses to bachelor's, master's and doctoral degree programs. Two of the recipients are from our companion in Suriname.

- ♦ International companion synod consultations are held every three years to gather all companions for relationship building and joint ministry planning. What will be our 6th such consultation is in the works for November 2023.



Synod helps fund repairs to Cuba's ecumenical seminary



A worker makes needed repairs to the educational space of Cuba's Evangelical Seminary of Theology. The Global Mission Table provided a financial gift to Iglesia Evangélica Unida for the work at the seminary in Matanzas, which has long had support from the ELCA.

Florida-Bahamas Synod Global Mission Table NEWS/NOTICIAS/NOUVEL

The Global Mission Table of the Florida-Bahamas Synod seeks to ignite and empower its congregations in boldly sharing Christ, passionately making disciples, and faithfully doing justice through accompaniment with our companion churches. Through these partnerships, we strive to encourage one another in faith through relationships, education, advocacy and service in witness to God's love.

The Rev. Katie Carroll,
Global Mission Table Chair
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