

Notes and Agreements from the 2017 Fall Puerto Rico Foro

Location: Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church, West Des Moines, Iowa

Participants: Richard Schuller, Michael Tanney, William Torres, Matthew Ruesch, Tracie Becker, David Becker, Lyn Menz, Ellie Menz, Brent Smith, Jeff Lee, Blake Warren, Natalie Howard, Gustavo (Arturo) Maita, Ted Krey, David Dahlke, Ross Johnson, Charles St-Onge. For roles, see below.

MONDAY, November 6, 2017

9:00 Welcome

9:30 Opening Worship (C. St-Onge)

- Matthew 24:3-14: "See that you are not alarmed."

10:00 Round Table Introductions

- **RICHARD SCHULLER:** *missionary*. OIM missionary in Ponce, Puerto Rico.
- **MICHAEL TANNEY:** *pastor*. Ministered in PR as evangelist six years. Pastor in St. Louis, MO.
- **WILLIAM TORRES:** *President, Principe de Paz, Mayaguez, PR*.
- **MATTHEW REUSCH:** *pastor*. Outgoing OIM missionary in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico.
- **TRACIE BECKER:** *educator*. Lives in Aitkin, MN, works at an elementary school.
- **DAVID BECKER:** *pastor and circuit visitor*. Serves Saint John in Aitkin, MN, pastor, circuit visitor.
- **LYN MENZ:** *retired*. Husband to Ellie Menz, from Jefferson, Iowa.
- **ELLIE MENZ:** *IOWAY director, Iowa West District, LCMS*. Organizes short term teams.
- **BRENT SMITH:** *Mission Central*. Works with Mission Central, Gary Thies and up to 97 volunteers.
- **JEFF LEE:** *MMF Minnesota North District*. Lives in Baxter, MN.
- **BLAKE WARREN:** *Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) Business Manager*. Santiago, DR.
- **NATALIE HOWARD:** *GEO LAC Regional Business Assistant*. Santiago, DR.
- **GUSTAVO ARTURO MAITA:** *Disaster Response Coordinator*. Santiago, DR.
- **DAVID DAHLKE:** *pastor*. Shepherd of the Valley, West Des Moines, IA.
- **TED KREY:** *missionary*. Regional Director, Latin America and the Caribbean. Santiago, DR.
- **CHARLES ST-ONGE:** *missionary*. Area Facilitator, Puerto Rico. Montreal, QC, Canada.
- **ROSS JOHNSON:** *Director, LCMS Disaster Response*. St.Louis, MO.

10:30 Bible Study: Mercy and the Gospel (C. St-Onge)

- Mark 1:29-39: Mercy leads to sharing the Gospel leads to churches being planted

11:15 What is a Foro? (B. Warren)

- Presentation on how Foros work and why they have been formed in Latin America
 - **Foro Basics:**
 - **Niche partner** who supports a specific project versus that of a **managing partner** who supports the overall strategic plan and vision.
 - **Nine active FOROs** currently exist.
 - Meetings held twice a year.
 - **Agenda includes** teaching the culture, tour of mission sites, worship together, theological presentations, and a management meeting.

- **Vision for FORO:**
 - Near term- identify who is working in the country. (requiring little or no investment)
 - Medium term (High Impact initiative requiring low to moderate investment) look for strategic partners and what are resources around the synod that could help us.
 - Where do we want to go (long term)- How do we get feedback, how do we get buy in) How do we have folks become advocates for us.
 - **FORO Strategic Plan:** Core strategy is planting Lutheran churches.
 - **FORO Operational Plan:** Missionaries take the strategic plan and form SMART goals as part of an operational plan.
 - **Mission Supporters:** spread the word, look for other partners, assist with human resources needed.
 - **Role of Missionary Team:** put together the agenda, communications with donors, send out invites. Missionaries- be present, tell your story, host or attend meals with supporters, provide follow up, financial information, photos, videos.
- ***ACTION: presentation to be posted and made available to the group.***

11:40 State of Puerto Rico (M. Ruesch, R. Schuller, W. Torres)

Cities are operating more or less as before. Greater needs are rural. Bridges washed out, telecommunications are still spotty, and water is limited to daily basis. Tesla has put solar powered batteries in place in San Juan children's hospital in one week. 47 days without power and still 75 percent still without power, 63 000 poles) Main highways are cleared from north to south. Going to the central of the island is still a challenge. 65 000 electrical poles are needed. More than 50 bridges are washed out. Country is stabilizing. Some college campuses are closed until January.

13:00 LCMS Disaster Response: Puerto Rico (R. Johnson)

Mercy work breaks down false barriers. It is not Gospel work. Often it precedes or flows out of the Gospel. The Gospel is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. We desire that others would come into the church through Holy Baptism, be redeemed children of God and live their new lives in Christ. Our approach to mercy is one that is cross centered and not that of glory. It is a deeply theological task. It is not simply cooperation in externals. We seek to serve a person in tragedy and address their deepest needs.

Direct victims are impacted with personal property damage. Indirect victims is what stands out about Puerto Rico-someone who has had substantial loss but not directly to their property. Things have gotten worse due to a reliance on tourism, service and without being able to open, there is not work, and many are living paycheck to paycheck. Now an enormous fear and crisis as folks are thinking what I can liquidate and what can I sell to make more money. There is an enormous exodus of Puerto Ricans who have left the country. (around 100 000 people) Infrastructure damage- Whether in Florida or Texas, dozens of electrical companies with 1000s of vehicles have assisted in recovery, how to get these resources to Puerto Rico is the challenge. Close to 12 000 FEMA workers are in Puerto Rico at this time. It will simply take time. Doctors are leaving the country.

Concepts to Keep in Mind in Disaster Response: 1) Constant assessments, 2) Action plan, 3) Stay flexible- needs are ever evolving.

Perhaps reach out in a 50-mile radius. Begin with needs of church community first and foremost. Disaster Response of course helps Lutherans, but the greater assistance is to the community at large. Mercy centers can be used as places whereby preaching stations can be established.

13:30 Puerto Rico Mission Update (C. St-Onge)

What is Puerto Rico? Think of it as a nation that is also a commonwealth of the United States.

1. Things Have Changed

- Ruesch leaving
- Some leaders of the congregation off island.
- Building mortgage is under \$10 000
- Desire to assist has increased exponentially
 - In donations (LCMS-DR)
 - In time (volunteers and short term teams)

2. Challenge

- Local congregation wants Head Start program out.
- They owe back pay, some \$1700 US/month for 7 months.
- Asset is the building which is in excellent condition.

3. What hasn't changed

- St-Onge remains Area Facilitator
- Principe de Paz stands strong
- Schullers remain in Ponce
- LAC remains committed
- Christ's mercy remains

4. New Folks on the Ground

- Bill Lohmeyer- Two month commitment
- Gustavo Maita- Disaster Response coordinator 1-2 year
- Natalie Howard- Business administrator
- **ACTION: presentation to be posted and made available to the group.**

14:00 Discussion: What Next?

William Torres

- Face book page to the community.
- Need for the members to feel commitment to the church.
- This would allow for an opportunity to reach out into the community. (There is a large community immediately behind the church building)
- Need to start from scratch: church planter, evangelism.

Potential ways to serve Mayaguez

- Water purifier-Reasons for people to come to the church.
- Head Start-These people have been served over the past month with canned food, diapers, batteries, water, soap, wipes. (reaching people who are in the Headstart program and also their extended families)
- Principe de Paz-People from the congregation are being served by what is there as well.

Limitation:

- Three retired individuals leading congregation.
- Small congregation.

Ponce

- Cost is \$600-\$1000/month for a locale
- ELCA congregation in Ponce for sale.
- Need for water purification
- Serving young families.

Six Months out

- Rebuilding-(Paying for repairs on homes)
- Short Term teams
- Medical Needs (3-4 teams)

Mercy Center

- At PoP
- Elsewhere in Mayaguez)
- Ponce? Aguadilla?
- ***ACTION: presentation to be posted and made available to the group.***

15:30 Closing Worship (M. Ruesch)

- Revelation 7:9-17: saint and sinner at the same time.

TUESDAY, November 7, 2017

9:30 Opening Worship (D. Dahlke)

- Matthew 6:1-4: Doing the Hard Thing

10:00 Continued Discussion: Where We Go from Here

What Support Has the Lord Brought To the Table

- \$25k lump sum coming from MN North any day
- Becker 14 congregations in MN North, want to see the work promoted in Mayaguez. Willing to see their money go toward Spanish arch books, etc.
- \$500 for sports after school program
- \$132,579 from LCMS-DR
- Iowa West bringing teams, maybe \$20k for Puerto Rico? Water filters.

- <http://lcms.org/givenow/puerto-rico-foro> to support through the FORO through an online gift

What Can Be Done Short Term (Now to six months)

Ponce:

Five Identified Needs:

- 1) Water filtration,
- 2) food distribution,
- 3) young family needs,
- 4) first aid kits,
- 5) bug repellent

- Schuller: how to distribute, how to track names, what materials to distribute, how will the Gospel be intentionally spread.

- Fuente de Vida: legal issues addressed, dollars not yet available. Warehouse / preaching station local to rent. Mercy / Spread the Gospel. - As a one-year lease; could we rent a church building or commercial with the option to buy? (**ACTION: Schuller to identify a possible lease location and / or possible purchase location**)

Prince of Peace:

- Schuller 2x a month, Arturo 1x, Charles or substitute 1x a month for Sunday services. (**ACTION: C. St-Onge to coordinate**)

- Website needed. Beckers have a son who could set up for \$65 a year. Add 1) sermons, 2) devotions, 3) prayers. Beckers have agreed to cover one year cost and link Torres with their son. (**ACTION: W. Torres and D. Becker**)

- **ACTION: To be Investigated by W. Torres, B. Lohmeyer, G. Maita**

- Setup text / MailChimp message with the LCMS DR Spanish devotions.
- Website, doorhangers, vehicle with loudspeaker
- Head Start: chapel devotion Friday with kids and families, get names and numbers
- Invite head start families one class at a time to come to a Sunday meal at the church.
- Refugee camp in Mayaguez. Many neighborhoods destroyed so people in a camp there and in stadiums in Mayaguez and in San German. FEMA / Red Cross. Go in with arch books, clothes, hygiene items, offer simple Bible study.
- Brand handouts with a church bag (.67\$). Richard had them made in San Juan.

Roles:

- 1) Arturo
- 2) Second Evangelist
- 3) Schuller

- Bill Lohmeyer to get the 5 items we've identified up and running for continued work by these three.

- Tanney has offered help as a substitute (**ACTION: C. St-Onge**)

- Dave and Tracie offered to work with Minnesota North LWML for a possible grant (**ACTION: T. Becker**).

What Can Be Done Medium Term (6-12 Months)

- care needs 1-5 would change
- evaluate and report at next FORO (ACTION: Puerto Rico Team)

Location for Work

- Ponce (FORO agrees to pursue a 1-year lease, investigate the option of purchase)
- Mayaguez / PoP (FORO agrees to pursuing a bldg on property that could lead to a parsonage) (**ACTION: B. Lohmeyer**). A contractor needs to be found (**ACTION: M. Tanney to pursue a lead**)
- Refugee Camp (short term)

Short-Term Teams

- Gustavo & Ruth can serve as host
- possibilities: 1) Camp Courage, 2) Medical, 3) Roofing, 4) Distribution

13:00 Commitments for the Future

Growing Partnerships

- 1) Iowa District West
- 2) Minnesota North
- 3) Brainerd Circuit
- 4) Saint John, Aitkin, MN
- 5) Shepherd of the Valley, West Des Moines, IA

Funds

- \$25k MN North
- \$20k IA West
- \$12k PoP
- DR \$132578

How to move forward in Mayaguez?

- Arturo
- FORO agrees to search for a second evangelist
- B. Lohmeyer
- N .Howard
- C. St-Onge
- W. Torres

Further Needs from Partners

- 1) Your participation
- 2) Your advocacy

Next Foro Dates

April 14-15 in Mayaguez, PR

TO DO: Action Items

1. Warehouse / preaching station local to rent. Mercy / Spread the Gospel. - As a one-year lease; could we rent a church building or commercial with the option to buy? (Schuller to identify a possible lease location and / or possible purchase location, funds to come from MN North Contribution) (**R. Schuller**).
2. Sign contract with Arturo Maita (**C. St-Onge**)
3. Follow up conversation with William Torres (**C. St-Onge**).
4. Transfer of Car (**B. Lohmeyer**).
5. Purchase of second vehicle (**B. Lohmeyer**).
6. Explain plan to Principe de Paz members (**C. St-Onge**).
7. Explain plan to Torres, Maita, Lohmeyer together (**C. St-Onge**).
8. Have Lohmeyer contract an architect for building of mercy center keeping three needs in mind in use of building. A. Room for distribution B. Space for short term teams. C. Parsonage (**B. Lohmeyer**)
9. Establish form of pay (**B. Warren**).
10. Rent locale in Ponce. (**B. Lohmeyer**)
11. Check on the nature of Lutheran church for sale in Ponce. (**B. Lohmeyer**)
12. Review housing amount for Maita and verify its adequacy. (**B. Lohmeyer**)
13. Inform partners not present of next FORO date (**C. St-Onge**).
14. Send minutes to FORO partners not present (**C. St-Onge**).
15. Send St-Onge presentation to all partners (**C. St-Onge**).
16. Include alliance missionary for Puerto Rico in budget (**B. Warren, T. Krey**).
17. Work with Minnesota North LWML for a possible grant (**T. Becker**).