



Sierra Pacific Synod
committed to being re-formed



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Church Together

OUR SAVIOR'S LUTHERAN, FRESNO: DISCOVERING NEW WAYS TO SERVE

Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Fresno is planted in a most diverse neighborhood, composed primarily of low and middle income households. Neighbors include recent immigrants from Ethiopia, El Salvador, Mexico and Guatemala. About 1/3 of the congregation is bilingual, and the rest speak only English.

Our Saviour's has long been committed to serving its neighbors. Their food pantry is open Monday - Friday, and a once-a-month food commodities giveaway often offers free clothing as well. With the leadership of Pastor Bill Knezovich and lay leader Lucy Allen, the church has, for 16 years, offered a Friday Night Kids Club to neighborhood children grades K-6. Kids older than 6th grade serve as volunteers. With outside financial help Our Saviour's has over the years granted several Kids Club members a week at Mt. Cross Camp. Ten of the children have received free orthodontic work provided by the son of a church member. The children at a nearby elementary school all qualify for free breakfast and lunch at school, and when school is not in session Our Saviour's hosts a free lunch. A Reconciling in Christ congregation, Our Saviour's hosts twice each month a meeting between LGBT youth and a licensed therapist. Pr. Bill, Lucy and other church members have also been deeply involved with PICO, a community organizing group working with faith communities to promote justice in specific areas of local concern. But there is one gift some neighbors have wanted that this eager-to-serve congregation has been unable to provide.

Now I ask you to imagine a high energy, multi-talented woman who is a hands-on grandmother, a substitute elementary school teacher, a PICO-trained community leader, a Sunday School teacher, a Church Council President who seems to get reelected every year, and a participant and leader in just about everything her church does. You have begun to get a mental picture of Lucy Allen, who happily reports, "I just don't know how to say no." Oh, and she is newly elected to a three year term on Synod Council. Oh, and she doesn't say "no" because she has a huge heart and loves being God's "hands" doing God's

work in the world.

Born in Mexico, Lucy is bilingual. For many years at food giveaways and Kids Club and elsewhere she has heard neighbors ask for that one thing Our Saviour's has been unable to provide: "Do you have a worship service for Spanish speakers?" Lucy has long wanted her church to be able to offer that gift, too. Now, with a grant from our Synod and the ELCA's Domestic Mission Unit, Our Saviour's plans to offer a bilingual service on Sunday at 8:30 am, led by Lucy, along with the existing 10:15 am English-only service. This gathered bilingual community will form a new Synodically Authorized Worshiping Community. What's more, just last month (August) Lucy participated in the Churchwide Mission Developers Training in order to strengthen her skills in evangelism, outreach and networking with other developers. In addition to Lucy, two other bilingual lay leaders from our synod also received that training. Pastor Tita Valeriano, our synod's new Director of Evangelical Mission (DEM) reports, "We are just trying to catch up with Lucy and the Holy Spirit! She has for a long time had the gifts and the calling to reach out to her neighbors and invite them to Jesus and a worshiping community. At the same time the Holy Spirit has been moving many hearts in this neighborhood, and we want to participate in it. We hope that this partnership will help this community to grow, and help Lucy to continue to inspire us and others."

Please note the source of the financial support and accompaniment that enables us to "catch up with Lucy Allen and the Holy Spirit," and offer Christ and Christian community to some Spanish speaking residents of Fresno. It comes from all of us, from our keeping faith with our Sierra Pacific Synod and ELCA with planned, regular mission support giving from our congregations to and through our synod. And we truly are "supporting mission!" We are supporting Lucy's huge heart, and Pr. Bill's willingness to juggle all these ministry "balls," and Our Saviour's deep desire to always discover new ways to serve their neighbors.

Do you have a story that you would like to share? Send any Church Together story requests to mic@spselca.org.

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