

## FROM OUR MISSIONARY IN COSTA RICA

April 17, 2009

Dear Friends in Christ,

Easter greetings from the Deal-Girón family in Costa Rica as we complete our first week of celebrating Christ's glorious resurrection.

First and foremost, a word of thanks to the members of St. Luke congregation.

Prior to Holy Week, we received a mailing from Rev. Twila Schock in Chicago with a complete report on gifts received for our support in 2008. All together, gifts from 41 different ELCA congregations made it possible for us to serve as missionaries in Central America, including your generous gift of \$1,840.

In such difficult economic times, we were both surprised and humbled to see that St. Luke congregation not only met, but exceeded your missionary sponsorship pledge for 2008. Such generosity not only reflects your strong commitment to global mission but also an exemplary practice of individual and congregational stewardship precisely at a time when the needs of the poorest people in our midst are placing even greater demands on our church, both locally and globally.

Here in Costa Rica, the economic crisis began later than it did in the U.S., but the signs are now plainly evident.

The long lines at Costa Rican banks that previously were a source of frustration have disappeared as a result of a marked decline in economic activity ... more men are going door-to-door in a desperate search for menial work of any sort ... women and men alike get up before dawn to "glean" the garbage that we set out on the curb every Tuesday and Thursday morning ... and all the businesses that depend upon tourism (the most important sector of the Costa Rican economy) are scrambling to fill the huge economic gap left by a catastrophic drop in international tourism.

As ELCA missionaries serving here in Central America, we consider ourselves truly fortunate to have work, and not just work of any kind but rather work that is consistent with our sense of vocational calling and that allows us to respond as best we can to the growing needs that we see all around us. In gratitude for this opportunity to serve, we are also striving to become better stewards of the material blessings that God has given us.

I suspect that many readers of this message are engaged in a similar process. May the Spirit of the risen Christ guide and sustain us all in these uncertain times.

Now a quick rundown of some family news.

Here in Costa Rica, all of Holy Week is both a national and school holiday which made it possible for us to travel to Guatemala for the week. We had not visited Marta's family in more than two years, so we were overdue. It was a restful week, except for the earthquake tremors that hit every couple of days – strong enough on the Richter scale for a momentary scare, but not



strong enough to do any serious damage! Whether in Costa Rica or Guatemala, it's a part of life here.

This year, Easter Sunday also coincided with Marta's and Dilia's birthday (both were born on the same day) which allowed us to celebrate with members of the Girón side of the family while we were in Guatemala, and then with our church family back in Costa Rica on Easter Sunday.

Looking ahead, Dilia (now 17) is one of two youth selected by the Costa Rican Lutheran Church (ILCO) to attend the ELCA Youth Gathering in New Orleans this July. All together, she will be in the U.S. for three weeks: an initial week of orientation in the Chicago area, the second week with a host congregation in the Southwestern Texas Synod (one of ILCO's two companion synods) and the final week in New Orleans. Her excitement is beginning to build as we start dealing with very practical matters like her visa renewal and lots of English practice.

On this particular point, if your congregation is also sending a group of youth to New Orleans, please let us know. Of course, among the mass of 35,000+ youth who are registered to attend, I have no idea how she would find you or be found, but it would be good to have the info. Once again, thank you for all the different ways that you support our work here in Central America. We are blessed to be part of God's mission in this part of the world, working alongside our Central American sisters and brothers – and equally blessed to be upheld by your prayers and financial gifts as we serve in Christ's name.

With peace,

STEPHEN DEAL

Regional Representative in Central America  
ELCA Global Mission

P.S. I'm attaching a couple of photos to this message. The first is a photo of Marta & Dilia in Antigua Guatemala during Holy Week. The second is a recent photo of our ILCO faith community in the San Sebastian neighborhood of San José. I'm on the left end of the back row, Dilia is on the front row just to my left and Marta is just to the right of our Pastor Katarina (a Swedish missionary also serving with ILCO).