

Sawubon: "I see you"

Sharing a love of sports, they bring teamwork to their ministry. Pastor Brian and Kristen Konkol are ELCA missionaries in South Africa where they coach a team of 11 ELCA Young Adults in Global Mission. "We are complementary in our work," says Kristen.

"Kristen's more of a shooting guard, and I'm a point guard," laughs Brian. More seriously, he adds, "When a young adult missionary is sick, my pastoral side kicks in. I ask, 'How are you doing? Will you be OK?'" Kristen asks the more clinical questions, "What are your symptoms? Do you have a fever?"

The Konkols moved from missionary service in Guyana two years ago to Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. Together, they mentor young adult missionaries serving in education, social justice projects, community development, health and wellness, music, the arts and children's ministry.

"As a team, we try to model healthy routines and patterns for the young adults. We want them to engage South Africans in their ministry holistically," says Kristen. "Here we greet each other with the word *sawubon*. It means, 'I see you.' We want them to see the whole person."

Brian and Kristen are two of nine ELCA missionaries mentoring young adults serving in Mexico, United Kingdom, Malaysia, Slovakia-Hungary, Jerusalem-West Bank, South Africa and Argentina-Uruguay.

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The Rev. Twila Schock is director, Missionary Sponsorship.

"Ubuntu! I am because we are!"

ELCA member Valerie Rivas serves as an ELCA Young Adult in Global Mission in Umphumulu, South Africa, where she makes rounds with physicians at a local hospital. Valerie reflects on the word *ubuntu*, which means "I am because we are." "Being present here is so important," reflects Valerie. "The electricity may be down. The water supply may be down. But, I am here with you."

Pastor Brian Konkol, missionary coordinator for the young adult program, observes about Valerie's ministry of presence, "She is here, walking up and down the hills with everyone else."



Pastor Brian and Kristen Konkol, ELCA missionaries in South Africa, model healthy routines and teamwork for the young adult missionaries they mentor.

Michael Lengel, an ELCA Young Adult in Global Mission, serves in Durban, South Africa. Reflecting on his experience working with refugee children, Michael says, "I had no experience with kids before. I know that I am making a difference. And, these little children teach me so much about myself. My faith needs to inform who I am on a daily basis."



ELCA Young Adult missionary Michael Lengel teaches the creation story to refugee children in Durban, South Africa.

A local church leader lovingly teases Valerie about her ministry of presence. "Valerie, you are worth 33 cows! You are a nice person and a good cook. You have an American family. And, now you have an African family!"

ELCA missionary Brian Konkol mentors Valerie Rivas, a Young Adult in Global Mission serving in South Africa.



“Pastor, if you want to help our church. . .”

by the Rev. Arden Strasser, ELCA missionary in Zambia



Pastor Arden Strasser, ELCA missionary in Zambia, meets with Alfred Chana, senior pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zambia, to discuss funding for the church's HIV and AIDS strategy.

Only one year in Zambia, I was asked to accompany the senior pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zambia as he resolved a crisis in a distant congregation. This entailed meeting with the chief of the Lunda people.

We traveled together to the chief's palace and asked his headman for an audience. After spending a few hours waiting under a shade tree, we were allowed inside his walled compound. As the chief entered, his headman instructed us to lower our stance. Everyone got down on one knee, heads bowed and began to clap in rhythm. Astounded, I hesitated, not comfortable with this. I'd never kneeled before a chief before.

The senior pastor told me, “Pastor, if you want to help our church, kneel! Even the president of the nation kneels when he visits the chiefs. It is our tradition.” Forcing aside my reluctance, I kneeled and clapped the rhythm of respect for the chief standing before us.

What was the correct thing to do? What would my refusal to kneel have accomplished? How would it have been understood? What does kneeling really mean to Africans? Does kneeling imply my agreement with things contrary to my faith?

As I struggle with such questions personally, I see African Christians seeking to find their own answers to such questions. African churches are best capable of discerning the relationship between cultural practices and their Christian faith.

Called in 2006 as an ELCA missionary with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zambia, I focus on leadership development in the church. In workshops that I am invited to lead, the church's pastors and evangelists debate the relationship between Christ and culture.



Judith Moyo is the instructor for the Zambian church's program for children from households made vulnerable to poverty resulting from AIDS deaths. Arden Strasser assists the church in securing funding for its ministries.



Pastor Strasser, occasionally invited by local pastors to participate in worship leadership, blesses a Zambian child at baptism.

I am privileged to join this Zambian church as it matures into its identity. Knowing that the ELCA cares enough to share one of their pastors with them is a powerful sign of a steadfast, alive and active partnership.

Thanks for your support of our ELCA global mission personnel.

P.S. Since that first meeting, I've met other chiefs over a cup of tea and learned more about the social value chiefs provide in a changing world. For official decisions from a chief, the visitors kneel. When the chief comes to take communion in his congregation, he kneels like everyone else!

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