

COME AND SEE: BUILDING UP THE BODY OF CHRIST

By Kristine Bruss

The announcement this April in *Blue News*, Concordia Theological Seminary's daily newsletter, was intriguing.

SMALL CUPS, BIGGER STORY

You may notice your coffee looks a little . . . smaller at coffee hour on Wednesday, April 22. Don't worry—you're not being shorted, just invited into something different. This small cup is a glimpse into a much bigger story we encountered in the Dominican Republic.

The "bigger story" is about a vibrant life together in Christ, as seminarians, pastors, and deaconesses throughout Latin America serve God's people.

Over spring break, Dr. Geoffrey Boyle, professor of Pastoral Ministry and Missions, and Deaconess Susan Knowles, director of Deaconess Formation, traveled with several CTSFW students to the Dominican Republic. Their mission education trip, the third to the DR, exposed them to the work of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's Office of International Mission (OIM) and missionaries in the Dominican Republic.

Boyle and Knowles returned from the trip with enthusiastic encouragement to everyone to "come and see," inspired by what they saw at Seminario Concordia el Reformador (Concordia the Reformer Seminary), a three-level building with an elementary school on the first floor, chapel on the second floor, and meeting spaces on the third floor. They also accompanied seminarians, deaconesses, and pastors on visits to neighborhoods, observed a thriving volleyball outreach, visited church plants, and interacted with residents in the group home right near the seminary.

"There's a way of interaction there that's hard to describe, but you're watching them build up the body of Christ," said Knowles. "Whether it's watching the interaction with people with special needs at the group home or looking at interactions with the children in the school or even seeing the interactions of pastor and deaconess with the congregation, the level of interaction with the body of Christ is just really striking."

"Hospitality is a big part of their life," added Boyle, noting that deaconesses are the face of that hospitality,

opening doors and setting the stage for visitation work and making people feel welcome. "As soon as church is over, the deaconess is coming over with the tray of little cafecitos," says Boyle. (Student Mark Langton noted that the tiny cups appeared everywhere, becoming "the iconic depiction of hospitality.")

Another highlight for Boyle and Knowles was the introductory "Ted Talk" by the Rev. Ted Krey, regional director for the Latin America and Caribbean region of the LCMS, who delved into the threefold theme of OIM's work there: "Spread the Gospel. Plant churches. Show mercy."

"Planting Lutheran churches is clearly not an afterthought," said Boyle. "The Gospel is being preached, churches are being established, and this is where mercy is lived out." He noted that all of the professors serve at church plants, alongside students, who have no vicarage year but do fieldwork all four years.

"Every student is hooked into a church, much like we do in field education here, but for them the duties and responsibilities are more like vicarage," said Boyle. "Their formation is so heavily tied to it. They probably do twenty hours a week at least, including weekly visitation, which they do with the church. So it's the seminary, with the church, going into the community around them."

Both Boyle and Knowles appreciated Krey's clear distinction between evangelism and outreach. "Evangelism is always preaching of the Gospel. Outreach is a bridge for the preaching of the Gospel," Boyle said. "You could have outreach through mercy works or going door-to-door and just meeting your neighbors. That's not necessarily evangelism, but it is a means towards that end."

Boyle readily sees the connection between lessons learned in places like the Dominican Republic and CTSFW's strategic effort to prepare future servants of Christ for evangelism, outreach, and church planting. He said the Seminary was involved with three canvassing events this year, partnering with congregations interested in reaching out in their community.

"We benefit from the experience, and the congregations benefit from having the added workforce," said Boyle, adding that the Indiana District supported the effort with



mission training through the Rev. Dr. Geoff Robinson, executive for Outreach and Human Care. Boyle noted that a committee has been formed to explore the possibility of starting a Hispanic mission in Fort Wayne, prompted in large part by the canvassing visits. “There were so many people who spoke only Spanish who said, ‘Oh, is there a church?’ That confirmed a real need.”

The Seminary will be holding an Evangelism Week in the fall, a coordinated effort to highlight the integrated character of the Seminary curriculum and the faculty’s shared commitment to the evangelical task of spreading and proclaiming the Word of God.

Such local efforts will be bolstered by continued real-world experience in places like the Dominican Republic, filled with vivid images of the mission Krey described in his “Ted Talk.”

“Every touch they’re having with the community is also engaging God’s Word and prayer,” said Knowles. 📖



Dr. Kristine Bruss is Chief Communications Officer at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne.

SEMINARIES REAFFIRM AND EXPAND PARTNERSHIP

On May 27, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (CTSFW), and Seminario Concordia el Reformador (Concordia the Reformer Seminary) signed a new Memorandum of Understanding affirming an agreement initially signed in 2019. The agreement identifies areas of cooperation, including faculty and student exchange and deaconess formation, and expresses an intention to explore the possibility of Concordia the Reformer Seminary becoming a satellite seminary of CTSFW.

“As much as Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne has been able to give to this seminary here in the Dominican Republic, we’ve gained as much, if not more, in terms of understanding the work of mission, and we are deeply appreciative of that,” said CTSFW President Jon S. Bruss, who signed the agreement with the Rev. Sergio Fritzler, director of Concordia the Reformer Seminary. (Photo: Jana Inglehart)

