

Encuentro 2018: “Fight the Good Fight of Faith / Pelea La Buena Batalla De La Fe”

by [Pr. Keith Forni](#), STS, Lutheran CORE board member and Encuentro Convener

Encuentro Means Encounter

With the partnership of its Chicagoland affiliates, Lutheran CORE again sponsored the inter-Lutheran Hispanic Latino Ministry *Encuentro*, Friday, October 12th, 2018. Hosted by St. Timothy Lutheran Church, ELCA, in Chicago’s Hermosa neighborhood, the day-long conference provided a superb learning environment for those considering or entering bilingual (Spanish and English) language ministry settings. St. Timothy is deeply committed to proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ in word and deed with its neighbors, 90% of whom are Latin-Americans.

Encuentro (meaning “Encounter”) is an experience of fellowship (*convivencia*) and *mutual encouragement in the Lord’s work*.

2018 Theme

This year’s theme was from St. Paul’s exhortation to young Timothy: “Fight the good fight of the faith. (Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.)” I Timothy 6:12*

Tough Terrain

The apostle’s challenge and encouragement are applicable to various dimensions of Christian life. Like Timothy, every believer must traverse tough terrain as the journey of faith unfolds. Satan “prowls about like a roaring lion.” The pathway can be dangerous, diversions from the faith “once for all delivered to the saints” will arise. Pilgrim people press on, equipped with “the whole armor of God” and His eternal promises. (I Peter 5:8, Jude 3, Ephesians 6:10ff)

Fighting May Mean Persisting

Congregations gathering in declining numbers, in challenging contexts of growing secularism or amidst profound demographic shifts, can grow weary and uncertain. “Fighting the good fight” for them can mean persisting in redundant invitational evangelism, learning to tell the old, old story of Jesus and His

* “Pelea la Buena batalla del fe, echa mano del vida eterna, a lo cual asimismo fuiste llamado, habiendo hecho la Buena profesión delante de muchos testigos.” I Tim. 6:12

love in a new language, a different tempo.

Change Can Bring Opportunity

Church doors which have been routinely closed during the week can be swung open, offering new opportunities for relationships with a changed neighborhood — new avenues for sharing Christ. Parishioners may just behold unexpected transformation as those who seemed to be “guests” become the bearers of unimagined gifts, diverse cultural expressions bearing the very “Word that became flesh and dwelt among us.” John 1:14. This has been the experience of the St. Timothy parish through new initiatives of weekly, bilingual worship and after-school outreach programs to grade school students and their families from nearby Nixon Elementary School.

Staying in Place

Mainline church bodies have been fragmented. Progressives and traditionalists aren’t readily found together under the supposed “big tents” of the dramatically altered churchly judicatories. Promises to honor the “bound conscience” of those holding to traditional teachings on Holy Marriage and the naming of God the Father ring hollow. “Fighting the good fight” can mean staying in place, bearing witness in ecclesiastical structures that suddenly seem alien.

Participants

Encuentro provides a distinctive opportunity for inter-Lutheran consideration of our Lord’s Great Commission as it applies to the increasingly multi-cultural context for mission in the United States. Among the participants and presenters were members of the



Mariachi Juvenil Tamazula led the *Encuentro*’s Service of Holy Communion—*la Misa Panamericana*.

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Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, North American Lutheran Church and Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ, as well as ecumenical guests.

Worship and presentations at the *Encuentro* embraced a Day of Pentecost pattern, as two of earth's many languages were utilized. Musicians of *Mariachi Juvenil Tamasula* led the *Misa Panamericana* before the conference dinner. Parish and community mission matters were addressed by long-time, bilingual ministry practitioners and theologians, laity and clergy. Lively dialogue and fellowship were shared. The Annual Resource Fair featured materials from the Bilingual Ministry Resources Center, based in Joliet, IL and Tree of Life imports, offering sustainable development artisan items produced in low-income communities in Central America.

Speakers

Featured speakers this year included:

The Rev. Samuel Nieva, Sr, Pastor, *Iglesia Luterana Pueblo de Dios*, Compton CA, sharing a two-part talk on the Word of God and the Witness of His People in Word and Deed/ *Reflecciones Sobre Misión Integral*, a wholistic approach to neighborhood, urban ministry in Jesus' name.

Professor Marco Kempff, *Centro de Estudios Hispanos*, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis MO shared "Lessons During Our Road To and From Emmaus." He encouraged all to remember that "Christ walks with us so that we learn to listen to Him and receive Him (appreciate the use of the Word and the Sacraments) in order to increase and strengthen our faith (in our good fight of faith) and thus trust in Him and serve as his instruments of peace and hope."

Attorney Mary Campbell, Program Director of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities (AMMPARO) presented on "Accompanying Our Immigrant Neighbors." She extended a call for "Welcoming Congregations" who are "simply willing to be a church home for migrant children and families in the same way that congrega-

Be a church home to migrant children and families the way congregations once welcomed European Lutheran migrants.

tions of several generations ago welcomed Lutheran migrants from Europe and helped them navigate life in their new home." God's call in Matthew 25 calls us to "welcome our Lord Jesus as He comes to us in the stranger."

Pastor Keith Forni of First & Santa Cruz, Joliet and St. Timothy, Chicago presented "*Las Posadas*: Template for Neighborhood Ministry." The celebration of *Las Posadas* — a devotional reenactment of Mary and Joseph's quest for lodging — can be a faith-filled and festive connecting point for Lutherans and their Latino neighbors. Upon reaching a place of welcome after multiple rejections, the Posada participants sing of Jesus coming to dwell in our "own heart's stall" — a song in tune with Luther's "From Heaven Above" hymn verse: O dearest Jesus, Holy Child, prepare a bed, soft, undefiled; a holy shrine within my heart, that You and I need never part!" *Las Posadas* provides a renewed appreciation of Incarnational theology and of "parish as place."

***Las Posadas* is a reenactment of Mary and Joseph's quest for lodging in Bethlehem.**

Vigil for Peace Following Homicide

The Rev. Dennis Nelson, Lutheran CORE's Executive Director, Scottsdale AZ provided an update of the work of Lutheran CORE: A Voice and Network for Confessing Lutherans. The Rev. Myrta Robles, a retired ELCA pastor from Chicago active with St. Timothy's ministry, served as an *Encuentro* chaplain. Prayer at the Close of the Day — *Compline / Oración Al Fin del Día — Completas* brought the event to a moving conclusion with an outdoor Vigil for Peace on Chicago's streets, together with residents of the surrounding Hermosa neighborhood.

Little did the *Encuentro* planners know that the Vigil would take on a poignant tone in memory of Chicago's youngest homicide victim to date: Two-year old Julien was slain just days earlier in an alley located just a few blocks from St. Timothy in the neighborhood called "beautiful" — *Hermosa*, Chicago—by a gang member's stray bullet. City-wide attention was given to the *Encuentro*'s Vigil as it was covered by four television news outlets in both English and Spanish.

Additional information about the *Encuentro* series, including plans for a September 2019 program, can be obtained by calling 815-722-4800 (First—Santa Cruz parish office) or by email: KeithLForni@gmail.com

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All expenses for the day-long event, including a light breakfast, lunch and fiesta dinner, were covered by Lutheran CORE and the hosting congregations.

The following captioned photos were taken during *Encuentro* 2018.



Pastor Samuel Nieva, of *Pueblo de Dios* Lutheran Church Compton CA , presented a wholistic view of parish ministry in Jesus' name.



Professor Mark Kempff, of the Hispanic Ministry Program, Concordia Seminary St. Louis MO shared "Lessons on the road to & from Emmaus."



Forty-five church leaders representing more than 12 congregations and denominational ministries took part in the day-long *Encuentro* conference.



Pastor Myrta Robles welcomed *Encuentro* participants to worship.

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Pastor Keith Forni, *Encuentro* convener and Lutheran CORE board member, preached on the theme text "Fight the good fight of faith." I Timothy 6:12.



Chicago media outlets covered the Vigil for Peace on Chicago's Streets, held at the conclusion of the October 12, 2018 *Encuentro*.



St. Timothy Lutheran Church in the Hermosa neighborhood of Chicago, IL



Vigil for Peace, October 12, 2018