

Rev. Dr. Neddy Astudillo is leaving San Jose Fellowship this month to become the Latin America Director for Green Faith. She invites everyone to her last worship and the celebration that follows this Sunday, March 11, at 11:45 am. Neddy shares the following reflection:



I will always cherish the moments God whispered into my ear and guided me to meet the right people, so I could do my work as pastor of San Jose. As I look back 14 years, it is the many relationships made and nurtured, what has made my ministry possible.

While I was hired to build a Latino congregation, I was also asked to provide pastoral support to what is mostly an immigrant community, who saw laws changing for the worst after 911, family members being deported, fined or jailed for not being able to have or renew their driver's license. I entered a community without rights to ask for social security even though they pay taxes. Adults unable to receive health insurance, even though their US born children depend on their parent's wellbeing. I encountered young people leaving schools because of an uncertain future, making them easy preys to others who did listen, but for the wrong intentions. Very quickly I learned the only way to do ministry with San José was in partnership with many others whom could have a say, a resource, or power to make the lives of our immigrant brothers and sisters a little easier.

Very quickly into my ministry, empowered by a community organizing training I was led to take, and in partnership with other churches, anglo and latino individuals, leaders, lawyers and educational and service organizations who cared, we began to build relationships with the Beloit Police Department so immigrants would not be stopped while driving for the sole fact of not being able to renew their driver's license. Together we called on the Sheriff department when it began to discriminate against Latinos, and the racial profiling stopped. We co-founded the Latino Service Provider's coalition, an agency which provides latinos with referral information, and thousands have been served since.

As relationships built, the need for local information lead us to create the only Latino Newspaper in/from Beloit, where more than 30 diverse organizations have published information, events, services for the good of the community. San José opened a legal Clinic with support from an Immigration Lawyer, member of another sister Lutheran congregation in Madison. The health reality of our people lead us to offer parenting and nutrition classes in partnership with UW Extension, day camps a local organic farm,

and train San Jose's members feeling called to the ministry of healing, to accompany the sick, providing needed medicine and medical supplies in partnership with a local community clinic in Janesville.

When crisis arose, and we needed a new place to worship, several congregations, Presbyterian and Lutheran offered space for us to move in and continue our ministry: Calvary Lutheran Church, First Presbyterian Church, the Mission Investment Fund of the ELCA, and most recently Saint Paul Lutheran Church, provided us places to worship and grow. Other churches also provide guidance, oversight, financial support and space for special events, like hosting the Mexican Consulate every year, to issue Mexican passports and IDs to thousands of immigrants; forms of identification recognized by local authorities. All of the above, provided mission and healing opportunities for all involved.

When I look at Beloit now, after 14 years of ministry, I find myself in a new community. While the national environment may still appear hostile to most San José's members, they know their voice is heard in Beloit, and there are many people who care. Building community takes time, but it is worth it. Relationships are the first step for miracles to happen, it is the place where a better world is possible. I pray and hope that San Jose will continue building new relationships for the good of God's Kingdom. It is our calling, as children of God in God's world.