

Companion Synod Script

1. Since July 2001, the Saskatchewan Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada has been united as a companion synod with the Iglesia Evangelica Luterana Unida, or IELU, the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Argentina.
2. This logo combines a Saskatchewan coffee cup and an Argentine maté to symbolize our relationship as *compañeros en la fe*, or companions in the faith.
3. When people get together in Saskatchewan, the conversation usually takes place over a friendly cup of coffee. In the same way, when people meet in Argentina, they often share the drink maté, made from a native tea called yerba.

Someone heats the water

and the maté then passes from person to person and each person drinks in turn. It is a fellowship of the common cup. Our companion synod relationship is very much like that friendly conversation, where we share our faith, our joy, our hopes, our concerns, and we try to help each other in any way that we can.

4. This presentation will outline our companion synod relationship in three parts:
first, a brief outline of the program's history;
second a review of the Argentine congregations on which the program focuses;
and third, a discussion of how Saskatchewan congregations can support the companion synod program.

History

5. How did our companion relationship evolve? Mainly through a chain of human contacts that began in 1991 when ELCIC missionaries Ray and Bev Niebergall arrived in Esquel in the Patagonia region of southern Argentina.
Under Ray and Bev's leadership, the congregation at Esquel grew to the point where this new chapel was needed.
6. A new congregation was established at Cushamen, a rural community mainly made up of indigenous Mapuche people.
7. In 1999, the family of Bryan Tastad and Noreen Donald of Saskatoon began a six month Volunteer in Mission assignment in Argentina.
8. Also in 1999, Greg and Marla Kiel and their family were called to succeed the Niebergalls as missionaries in Esquel. As a symbol of the partnership between the ELCIC and IELU, the Kiels were jointly called by both churches – the first such arrangement.
9. In March 2000, the Saskatchewan Synod Convention voted to form a companion synod relationship with IELU. That commitment was taken another step forward at the ELCIC's Global Mission Event in Lethbridge in July 2000. Here you see Bishop Allan Grundahl of the Saskatchewan Synod and Roberto Stein, executive secretary of IELU, signing the document that committed the two churches to developing the companion relationship.

10. Arlene Schick of Estevan, one of the members of the Saskatchewan companion synod committee, visited Argentina over the Christmas holidays in 2000-2001. In this picture she is receiving prayers from Pastor Paul Sartison of Estevan.

Here she is presenting the prayers to President Angel Furlan in Buenos Aires. Note the difference in climate.
11. President Furlan and Roberto Stein, accompanied by Greg and Marla Kiel, visited Saskatchewan in early July 2001. Their whirlwind tour included the signing of this companion institution agreement between LutherCare Communities of Saskatoon and IELU's seniors' home in Buenos Aires.
12. They discussed agricultural issues with members at Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Hawarden.
13. And explored the potential for relationships between IELU's schools and Lutheran Collegiate Bible Institute in Outlook.
14. They also visited Saskatoon Lutheran Native Ministry in Saskatoon
15. And Circle of Life in Regina. IELU's work with the Mapuche people in Patagonia makes a connection with First Nations in Saskatchewan a natural outcome of the companion relationship.
16. The tour was capped at the ELCIC's national convention in Waterloo in July 2001 when Bishop Grundahl and President Furlan signed the covenant agreement that made our companion synod relationship official. The signing was witnessed by left to right, Roberto Stein, Greg and Marla Kiel, and Bob Granke, then the secretary of the ELCIC.
17. The purpose of the Companion Synod Agreement reads as follows: "By the grace of God, we are establishing this partnership in order to share our common humanity and life of faith. While we recognise and affirm our cultural differences, we seek to manifest the unity in the life and mission we have through our crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ."
18. In 2002, the relationship between the ELCIC and IELU entered a new phase, as our missionaries Greg and Marla Kiel, returned home after three years in Argentina. Greg is now serving in Redvers in the southeast corner of Saskatchewan and also serves as a member of the Companion Synod Committee.

Argentine Congregations

19. This brings us to the second part of the presentation, which focuses on our companion congregations in Argentina. Following the return of the Kiels, the ELCIC agreed to support two Argentine pastors serving the Patagonia region in Argentina, rather than place its own Canadian missionary in Argentina. The key locations for IELU's mission are

the congregation at Esquel, and the mission point at Cushamen, which are both served by Pastor Sergio Utz.

And the coastal city of Comodoro Rivadavia, which is served by Pastor Gustavo Gomez.

The IELU congregation in the resort city of Bariloche is served by Pastor Octavio Burgoa. Although the congregation at Bariloche is not supported by the ELCIC, Pastor Burgoa is a key member of IELU's three-member pastoral team that serves the vast Patagonia region.

20. Pastors Utz and Gomez were jointly appointed by IELU and the ELCIC. The intent is for these two Argentine pastors to function very similarly to our own missionaries, providing regular reports on their work and even visiting Canada occasionally so that we can get to know each other on a personal level.
21. The first such visit took place in March 2004 when Pastor Gustavo spent almost a month in Saskatchewan, speaking at most of the conference conventions and numerous congregations.
22. Here he is with Bishop Cindy Halmarson.
23. Pastor Gomez serves the congregation St. John the Baptist in Comodoro Rivadavia, an industrial city of about 70,000 people, located on Argentina's southern Atlantic coast.
24. The congregation has a long history, with roots in the early 20th century.
25. However, the congregation had been without a resident pastor for more than 10 years before the ELCIC's support made it possible for Pastor Gomez and his family to move to the city.
26. Pastor Gustavo is busy rebuilding the health of this congregation, through regular worship services, visiting of members, confirmation classes, and children's activities.
27. He has strengthened ecumenical relations with other churches and is working to start a regular Sunday School program. This photo shows Pastor Gomez's wife Solange working with the children.
28. For many years the congregation has hosted a day care on its property, but has not taken an active part in its operation. Under Pastor Gustavo's leadership, the congregation is looking for ways to become more involved in the day care and to incorporate it more fully into its mission.
29. Another dream of the congregation is to carry out an expansion of its church building to provide separate space for the day care.
30. The City of Esquel, with a population of about 30,000, is nestled at the foot of the Andes mountains.
31. Pastor Sergio was installed as the pastor of congregation Hope of the South in January 2004. He placed his highest priority on reestablishing regular Sunday services.
32. There was also much work devoted to repairing the church and the adjacent building, which had both deteriorated due to vandalism and neglect.
33. The congregation created a diaconal team of 12 people, which meets to develop skills and to reflect on the church's role in diaconal work.

34. Under the leadership of this group, the congregation is moving ahead with a Copa de Leche, or Cup of Milk project for children, similar to the one underway in Cushamen for several years.
35. The congregation will develop the building beside the church as the location for Cup of Milk, for Sunday School and perhaps for other youth-related activities. Pastor Utz writes that there is a need in the community for a day care. Another possible project is a community garden.
36. Another piece of good news is the starting of confirmation classes in 2005 – one class for adolescents and the other for adults.
37. Every two weeks, Pastor Sergio travels to the small rural community of Cushamen.
38. Although the distance is only 200 kilometres, the trip takes four to five hours due to the rough terrain.
39. IELU's mission point in Cushamen has become an important part of the community.
40. It was in Cushamen that IELU's women's group began the Copa de Leche program that has since spread to many other locations. Local women support the program by baking the bread and preparing the milk. The weekly program includes games and crafts, as well as nutrition.
41. In 2004 the program had to be suspended temporarily because of flooding in the region.
42. The church's small chapel was used to lodge two families until they could return to their homes.
43. The rains in July 2004 afflicted many communities throughout Patagonia. With the support provided by the ELCIC and others IELU was able to help the communities of Cushamen and Rio Chico to recover from the devastation.
44. In Cushamen IELU's goals include:
 - To strengthen our mission with the Aboriginal People.
 - To establish a plant nursery.
 - To repair the church's building.
 - To conduct special activities for children during summer vacations.
45. Pastor Utz writes that he gives thanks to God for the blessing of working in these communities, together with the Lutheran Church in Canada of which he feels part despite the distance that separates us.

Ideas for involvement

46. The final part of the presentation is a discussion of how Saskatchewan congregations can be involved with the Companion Synod Program. Some of the suggested activities are:
 - To pray at synod worship services for our companion and its mission and ministry, and encourage congregations and individuals to include such prayers regularly in their worship life.

- To learn about our companion's history, geography, culture, and current affairs.
- To exchange communications, for example through letters, cultural, educational and devotional materials, sermons and synodical mailings.
- To visit each other, including both clergy and lay members of the synods.
- To establish additional congregation-to-congregation or institution-to-institution relationships.
- To support projects mutually agreed by the synods.
- And to share our God-given resources with our partner church.

47. Options for financial support include:

- Companion Synod Fund, maintained by the Saskatchewan Synod to support visits in both directions between Saskatchewan and Argentina.
- Patagonia Mission Sponsorship - Support identified for the Patagonia Mission will help IELU and the ELCIC to maintain resident pastors in the cities of Esquel and Comodoro Rivadavia.
- Copa de Leche - The ELCIC will direct funds to IELU specifically for support of the Copa de Leche program.
- Please indicate how you would like the funds allocated and forward donations to the ELCIC Saskatchewan Synod office in Saskatoon.

48. Thank you for this opportunity to share the story of the companion synod program

Which is connecting Lutherans from Saskatchewan and Argentina with new bridges of understanding and a shared sense of mission.