



Raquel Busa is a seminary student at United Lutheran Seminary pursuing a Master of Divinity. She lives in Malverne, Long Island, New York with her wife and their senior dog. Raquel is also an illustrator and the creator of Doodles of Devotion, a weekly illustrated devotional that invites families to engage with scripture through art, curiosity, and reflection.



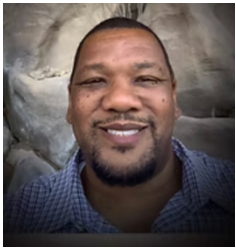
Brendan Nelson is a Hilltop-based community leader, organizer, and founding Executive Director of Empowering People in Communities (EPIC), where he works to connect residents, businesses, and institutions to build stronger, more resilient communities. With more than two decades of experience in community engagement and leadership development, Brendan has led initiatives focused on housing stability, food access, economic opportunity, and resident-led solutions. He also serves as a founding Board Member of Aya Community Land Trust, is Director of Community Engagement and Outreach at Peace Lutheran Church in Tacoma, Washington and serves on the board of the Center for Dialog & Resolution. His work is rooted in building trust, developing leaders, and creating opportunities for communities to shape their own future.



Avery Simmons is an educator and church leader preparing for ordained ministry, with 15 years of service in education. Avery is pursuing a master's degree in Spirituality and Social Change at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley, California, as he prepares to become a Minister of Word and Service (Deacon) in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. He is passionate about education, service, LGBTQ+ inclusion, and building welcoming communities where all people can thrive. Avery lives in Greensboro, North Carolina, with his fiancé and their four dogs.



Yamil Avivi (he/him) is a queer, second generation Colombian American and church leader for St. Stephan's Grace Community Church in the Ironbound Newark. St. Stephan's holds a diverse membership that includes Hispano-, Luso-, and Anglophone speakers while being a longstanding center of community partnership for immigrants, workers, and LGBTQ groups to strategize local and state organizing, empowerment and activism. Avivi organized and hosted a community panel in November 2024 with existing local grassroots organizations that centered LGBTQ life in the Ironbound. Since March 2025, Avivi has helped to start an LGBTQ Mass every first Sunday of the month. As an LGBTQ leader for the church, he continues working with the church to organize LGBTQ life and community in it. As a doctor of American Studies who specializes in Latinx Studies and queer studies, he has published several publications about queer, youth and immigrant Latinx life specifically on U.S. Colombians and Brazilians. He lives in New Jersey.



Pastor Roderick “Pastor Rod” Hines serves as the spiritual leader of Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church, where he was called on August 4, 2024, following a congregational vote. Known for his welcoming spirit, thoughtful preaching, and commitment to building authentic community, Pastor Rod brings a deep passion for connecting faith to everyday life and creating spaces where all people feel seen, valued, and loved.

A gifted musician and creative leader, Pastor Rod has a deep love for worship through music. He is an accomplished pianist who delights in leading congregations in song and cultivating vibrant, spirit-filled worship experiences. Whether directing choirs, collaborating with bands, or creating new musical expressions for worship, he sees music as a powerful way to proclaim the Gospel and bring people together across generations and cultures.

Prior to his call at Shepherd of the Valley, Pastor Rod served as Pastor of Messiah Lutheran Church in Los Angeles from 2016 to 2024. His ministry reflects a unique blend of theological depth and artistic expression, shaped in part by his extensive background in music and education. Alongside his pastoral work, he served as Director of Choral Activities at KIPP Scholar Academy and previously as a Choral and Applied Music Instructor at King Drew Medical Magnet High School. These roles highlight his lifelong commitment to nurturing creativity, mentoring young people, and using the arts as a pathway to connection and transformation.

Pastor Rod holds a Bachelor of Arts in Music and Music Performance from Loyola Marymount University and a Master of Divinity from San Francisco Theological Seminary. He further expanded his theological formation through the TEEM program at California Lutheran University, equipping him for innovative and contextually responsive ministry.

At the heart of Pastor Rod’s work is a dedication to cultivating inclusive, hope-filled communities rooted in the love of Christ. Whether preaching, teaching, or engaging with the wider community, he seeks to inspire faith that is lived out with compassion, justice, and joy.

Pastor Rod has been married to his wife, Shandra, since 2003. Together, they share a deep commitment to ministry, family, and lifelong spiritual growth.



The Rev. Dr. Moses D. Barrios is an Indigenous Mayan pastor, son of Central American immigrants, born and raised in Los Angeles, California. He serves as Assistant to the Bishop for Congregational Renewal, Multiethnic and Intersectional Ministries in the Metropolitan DC Synod, Pastor of St. Matthew’s in Washington, D.C., and leader of the ELCA’s Multiethnic and Intersectional Network, equipping congregations and leaders to cultivate deeper belonging, shared leadership, and vibrant, welcoming communities.

A graduate of Fuller Theological Seminary, his doctoral work focused on confronting the lack of racial unity in the American church. A prophetic preacher and teacher, Moses is passionate about justice, reconciliation, congregational renewal, and helping the church more fully reflect the diversity of God’s people. He is married to his wife and ministry partner, Brenda, and together they have three young adult children.