

# Reflections on This Year's Transition from Lent to Easter

Easter Monday 2026

Easter greetings from Costa Rica to you, to your family and to your family of faith.

Since last Saturday – “Sabado de Gloria” here in Central America – Christians in our respective contexts have been making a dramatic liturgical, theological and spiritual shift.

From Palm Sunday to Good Friday, we focused on Christ's passion and death. Then came the shift. Starting with Easter vigils on Saturday and our Resurrection celebrations yesterday, our reflections have refocused on the new life, vocational calling and missionary sending that we receive through our faith in the Resurrected Christ.

Nevertheless, so many of my personal experiences as an ELCA missionary remind me that these shifts between darkness and light, despair and hope, death and life are both unexpected and recurring. How convenient it would be if they always occurred on the “right” dates in our liturgical or personal calendars, but they don't.

At those “inconvenient” times, life circumstances often prevent us from reflecting on the spiritual significance of all that's happening to us and around us. This update is a personal reflection on some memorable Lent-to-Easter moments that I just experienced.

## Anniversary Celebrations in El Salvador

Three weeks ago, I found myself in El Salvador for an intense week of global mission activities. It was the week between the final two Sundays of Lent (March 15-23); not Holy Week yet, but it certainly turned out to be **a week full of holy moments** as I helped

organize, facilitate and participate in **three important anniversary activities**.

The first was a **regional gathering of migration ministry leaders from our AMMPARO companions in the Americas**, from Mexico to Chile. This gathering took place at the beginning of AMMPARO's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary year – an historic event because it was only the 2<sup>nd</sup> time that key leaders of all our AMMPARO companions have been in the same place for an in-person gathering (the first time was in May 2017).



Photo by Fernando Roa

From the outset, there was a consensus among us that this would not be a typical anniversary gathering. The suffering of our migrant brothers and sisters in the Americas is no cause for celebration.

The principal drivers of forced migration in our hemisphere – violence and conflict, extreme poverty, deepening inequalities, extreme climate events and repressive governments – persist. The tireless efforts of our AMMPARO companions to offer holistic accompaniment to vulnerable migrant families and individuals are being met with governmental indifference or, even worse, with xenophobic political rhetoric and anti-immigrant measures like militarized

borders, indiscriminate detentions and mass expulsions.

On the opening morning of our gathering, everyone was painfully aware of the pandemic of legal, social, economic and political barriers that migrants and refugees now encounter in the countries where they sojourn. It was important to name those contextual obstacles. Yet, this gathering also gave each of us the opportunity to identify key achievements and milestones in the compassionate accompaniment we have been providing to vulnerable migrants during AMMPARO's first decade. Here's an example of what we heard from one of our AMMPARO companions:

***“With ELCA’s support, we have helped reintegrate hundreds of returned migrant children and adolescents (the majority indigenous Mayans) ... we offer them hope through our holistic model of attention which includes physical and emotional health, school reintegration and other training possibilities, humanitarian aid, legal aid, reinforcement of their (cultural) identity and rootedness, and the search for economic alternatives.***

***“We have encountered true solidarity and ecumenism in the AMMPARO network ... the worldview of our Mayan ancestors is respected – a worldview that coincides with Christian principles and values ... AMMPARO has been a network for mutual learning with a sense of community. Located in different countries and territories, we . . . strive to learn from one another.”***

Reflecting on our shared history, identifying the perils faced by vulnerable migrants in today's world and exchanging ideas on how the AMMPARO network can more effectively accompany them – these were our principal tasks during an intense 3½ day gathering in El Salvador.



Photo by Fernando Roa

On our final evening together, it felt as if a bit of light broke through what often feels like a spreading plague of hatefulness and cruelty in our hemisphere. A firm foundation of guiding principles was laid for the coming years – a programmatic framework for joint ministry by the churches and ecumenical organizations that are part of the AMMPARO network.

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Just as I began processing all that took place during our AMMPARO gathering, I received an unexpected invitation to take part in the **30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of “Heroes en la Fe” Lutheran Church, located in the municipality of Tonacatepeque** just north of San Salvador.

The Gospel reading for that 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent was John's dramatic account of Jesus' resurrection of Lazarus (John 11:1-44). It was so very appropriate for the anniversary worship service of a faith community that has endured so much suffering.



The local pastor, Santiago Rodriguez, shared a special reflection. Until two years ago, gang-related violence was wreaking havoc in Tonacatepeque. Many people emigrated. Others fled and sought refuge elsewhere in the country or went into exile. A few brave souls remained. What Pastor Santiago said next was particularly moving:

**“Here (in Tonacatepeque) as in Bethany, when Jesus saw the suffering of so many women, mothers and wives . . . when he saw entire families weeping, entire families torn apart by the deaths of their sons, brothers and husbands, Jesus was deeply moved and wept with us.**

**“Here today, as he did with Lazarus, Jesus wakes our community. He encourages us to roll away the stones of our tombs and to come out. He calls us to remove the burial cloths from our eyes and sends us forth to begin a new life. Today, we are in a new phase of recovery. With faith, we hope in the promise of the Resurrection.”**

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One final anniversary celebration: Some of you will remember the missionary update that I sent last year, shortly after the death of Salvadoran bishop Medardo Gomez on March 27, 2025.

A year later, at the very beginning of my recent visit to El Salvador, I learned that the pastors and lay leaders of the Salvadoran Lutheran Synod (SLS) were planning an **anniversary worship service on March 23 to celebrate the life and ministry of Bishop Gomez**. This was an unexpected but welcome turn of events. Instead of the weekly devotions that take place in the sanctuary of Resurrection Lutheran Church every Monday morning, I was able to take part in a joyful Eucharistic celebration.

The presiding minister was Bishop Guadalupe Cortez, assisted by other SLS pastors and some special ecumenical guests. She opened the service with an Easter proclamation of faith:

**“Dear brothers and sisters, we gather today in God’s presence as a community whose members still share a sense of absence but with a firm faith**

**that sustains us. We’re here not only to remember our beloved Bishop Medardo but to proclaim a life-giving truth: that in Christ, death doesn’t have the last word. Our Lord promises that whoever believes in Him, even after dying, will live. It is this hope that we embrace today, a hope that consoles us and encourages us to move forward in faith.”**



Photo by Fernando Roa

The closing prayer was led by a close friend and ecumenical colleague of Bishop Gomez:

**“Lord God, in this time of violence, division and suffering, we once again cry out to you: Give us your peace! ... Give us courage to be peacemakers, to be bridgebuilders, to listen to the voices of those who cry out and to love those who are wounded. May the example of your servant Medardo continue to show us the way, not to be silent in the face of injustice and to work tirelessly for a reconciled world. May we, your Church, be an instrument of your peace and may each one of us be sowers of hope. Lord, we put our trust in you, because only in you can we find true peace.”**

I close with these words in the hope that they will speak to you as they did to me, and that they might help us discern our vocational calling to Christian discipleship in a deeply troubled world.

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