

Sow the Seeds Grant Report 2024
“Poetry as Theology”
Lutheran Campus Ministry of NM, Inc.

In the Fall of 2023, Lutheran Campus Ministry of NM, Inc. (Luther House) was awarded a \$2000 “Sow the Seeds” Grant from the Southwest Conference of the United Church of Christ. (Please see attached Grant Application). Following is a narrative report on the activities of the “Poetry as Theology” program, along with picture and videos.

Goals:

Lutheran Campus Ministry of New Mexico and First Congregational UCC of Albuquerque want to provide our young adult community with the opportunity to learn how to write and perform spoken word (or slam) poetry. Spoken word poetry is a popular form of public poetry in our region. This form of poetry is dominated by young adults and allows them a means and a platform to express themselves and their perspectives in a supportive environment. Poetry in general helps people express their thoughts, desires, and perspectives in a creative and insightful way. Combining spoken word poetry with theological and pastoral reflection will allow our young adults to explore and strengthen their own theological imaginations. Providing a means and platform for the expression of their theological perspectives will benefit the participants, our local community, and the wider church community of knowledge, wisdom, and inclusion.

Overview

First Congregational United Church of Christ Abq and Lutheran Campus Ministry of New Mexico (Luther House) are proposing to host a collaborative series of poetry workshops called "Poetry as Theology".

Our goals for this project are to:

- Continue to build and support a collaborative community of young adults within Luther House and First Congregational UCC.
- Listen to, learn from, and invest in the theological perspectives of young adults, the LGBTQIA+ community, the neurodivergent community, the International community, the BIPOC community, and other historically marginalized perspectives.
- Encourage the development of theological and pastoral reflection within our young adult community.
- Provide mediums and platforms for the theological perspectives of our young adult community.
- Offer young adult theological perspectives to the wider church community as an opportunity to listen to, learn from, connect with, and invest in our young adults.

We will accomplish our goals by:

- Hosting a 4 week series of poetry writing and performance workshops. The series will be led by members of the Albuquerque Slam Poetry community. These poets are young adults themselves and are professional poets and authors. We will hire 2-4 poets to teach our workshops on a weekly basis. Poets will guide participants in reflection, writing, and performing poetry from their own perspective.
 - We will gather weekly on Wednesday evenings from 5pm-7pm.
 - Luther House will provide the gathering space and dinner for our participants.
 - Luther House will provide all supplies necessary for the workshops.
- Rev. Rhonda Newby-Torres, Pastor of Luther House, will work with our young adults by exploring theological and pastoral reflection focusing on the doctrine of “Imago Dei” and the “Great Commandment” using scripture from Gen 1:26-31 and Matthew 22:34-40.
- We will perform our poems at an open-mic poetry event in Albuquerque.
- Rhonda Newby-Torres will organize a co-preaching series in local Albuquerque churches in which the participants will be invited to perform their “Poetry as Theology” poems throughout the year.
- The “Poetry as Theology” group is already scheduled to co-preach using our poems at First Congregational UCC ABQ on November 19, 2023.

Accomplishments

“Poetry as Theology” began on October 11, 2023. Young adult participants of Luther House attended the Burque Revolt Poetry Slam hosted at Canvas Artistry. We watched over a dozen slam poets perform and one of our participants performed an original piece of poetry. The following is a list of our “Poetry as Theology” activities.

- October 11, 2023- Burque Revolt Poetry Slam
 - 10 young adult participants attended the poetry slam and one of the participants performed an original poem during the open mic.
- October 18, 2023- Poetry Writing Workshop hosted by award-winning slam poet Mercedes Holtry
 - 10 young adults participated in a poetry writing workshop hosted at Luther House.
- October 22, 2023- Pastor Rhonda and 1 young adult co-preached using “Poetry as Theology” at Church of the Good Shepherd in Albuquerque, NM
- October 25, 2023- Poetry Writing Workshop hosted by award-winning slam poet Kristin Patton
 - 8 young adult participants attended a poetry writing workshop hosted at Luther House.
- November 1, 2023- Poetry Writing Workshop hosted by award-winning slam poet Kristin Patton

- 8 young adult participants attended a poetry writing workshop hosted at Luther House.
- November 8, 2023- 10 young adult participants attended the Burque Revolt Poetry Slam hosted at Canvas Artistry.
- November 19, 2023- 2 young adult participants and Pastor Rhonda co-preach at First Congregational United Church of Christ in Albuquerque, NM. (See attached video)
- Ongoing- Pastor Rhonda and participants of Luther House continue to co-preach throughout the Spring semester at local and partner churches.

“Poetry as Theology” was a formative program for our community. Participants were able to explore alternative preaching techniques and express their unique theological perspectives. The poetry that was developed during our workshops was surprising to Pastor Rhonda and to the participants. There was consistent discussion about how exciting it was to listen to and learn from each other. Participants were surprised by their own voice and ability to produce impactful theology. Participants expressed excitement about the level of intimacy and connection. Participants asked for another series of workshops as soon as possible.

We consider “Poetry as Theology” a wonderful success. We are deeply appreciate to the Southwest Conference of the United Church of Christ for their support and encouragement in this formative project.