



Stories of Faith in Action

YOUR OFFERING AT WORK

OPEN SPACE, OPEN ARMS

There aren't many ELCA congregations with a graffiti mural covering one side of their building, but that's just what members of San Juan Bautista, Tucson, Ariz., asked for when they agreed to host a live graffiti art show for Open Space, a new ELCA congregation in Tucson.

"Open Space is a small group, but about half of our members are graffiti artists, and very good ones at that," said Lars Hammar, Open Space mission developer and pastor of Lord of Grace Lutheran in Tucson.

Open Space started in 2013 and since then members have organized two graffiti shows in partnership with other ELCA congregations in Tucson to spread the word about their ministry.

Citizen Klown, as he is known by his graffiti crew, painted the mural at San Juan Bautista and has become a regular at Open Space, despite his initial reluctance to attend.

"I was never really comfortable in a traditional church setting," Klown said. "Being a graffiti artist, most of society doesn't see a difference between us and gang members, so they usually judge us. But after my first night at Open Space, I felt like I was welcomed."

Open Space members get together for a Bible study on Tuesday nights, and Hammar said they dream of owning a storefront to use as gathering space and as a place to sell art.

"There are guys at Open Space with immense talent, and this church gives them a legitimate place and way to do their art," Hammar said. "This is a place where they're told they aren't pariahs." All are welcome and cared for there.

Klown said Open Space has become a home for him and he wants to see it grow: "I want Open Space to be a place for people who avoid church because they feel they don't fit in and give them a chance to re-establish their personal relationship with God."

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