Luz Soto did not consider herself to be mission-minded while growing up in Catholic and Pentecostal churches, but, after beginning full-time work at Ysleta Lutheran Mission Human Care in El Paso, Texas, she helped organize and plan several servant events and mission trips. This past July, she took her first trip as a MOST Ministries missionary to South Africa, and she is now hooked! The Holy Spirit has worked a passion within her to humbly share her faith and continue to serve God’s people around the world. She has more trips planned and prays God would lead and guide her to help others grow in their faith.

She graciously gives us a peek into her journal from her July trip to South Africa in these excerpts.

July 11, 2022

What a joy to sit face to face as they discovered clear sight through the gift of prescription glasses! Such beautiful faces, young and old, male and female. Zalene, Moses, Elsie, Happy … names of the people before me. A beautiful young woman, serious and solemn, lit up and smiled when I said she was beautiful. A little boy giggled as we played peekaboo around his mother. An old man smiled and said he could see my happy face when we found the right prescription, and my blessing of the day was to hold the hand of a 104-year-old woman. What a beautiful hand she had — soft and wrinkly and missing the index finger. I stroked her hand, telling her that her fingers were beautiful, and I could see she had loved, blessed, and served many with them. I cried because she blessed me with the honor of holding her hand. I pray someday to have beautiful hands like hers.

I can still feel the light weight and softness of her hand, the little ridge of skin on the stub where her index finger used to be. I did not know her story, her sufferings, or her victories, but I knew one thing was true: she was a loved child of God, and I was called to love her, too.

Sometimes, my human nature gets in the way and causes me to forget I am united to every person on this earth. We are all made in the image of God, we are all sinners, and we deserve eternal punishment, but we are all covered by the blood of Jesus. It’s easier to serve those who look as we do, who recognize the need of a Savior, but, during my trip to South Africa, I learned to see people differently — I learned to see Jesus in every single one of them.

Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ … ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me’ (Matthew 25:34–36, 40).
July 12, 2022

Lord, to see the landscape You created ... the resilience of people dealt a life of poverty and drudgery ... the way You have given us the needed resources to survive the struggles of this world ... thank You for the joyful privilege to share the Good News of our Savior alongside Pastor Bafana. Thank You for the joy of meeting Patty and her mama, Mollele, and the joy of serving PauPau. It blessed my heart to have him look at me and say he saw my smile — even more so because I did not need an interpreter to understand, despite him speaking an unknown language! What a blessing it is to come and serve with the joy and certainty of Your love for me!

As we drove on red dirt roads, I saw little shacks made of corrugated tin, tires and sticks serving as fences, and everything covered in a fine blanket of red dust. I was not shocked. This kind of poverty was not new to me — I see it every week in Mexico. At times, I have the task of telling others the shocking details of poverty and financial strain on those living in other countries. To see it in South Africa — we truly are not so different from one another. Whether in poverty or wealth, health or sickness, we are all struggling to make sense of life, to make it one of meaning and purpose — we are all needing Jesus in the worst way.

Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me (Philippians 4:11-13).

July 13, 2022

To see the beautiful faces of those waiting for us was a blessing ... I was overjoyed to meet that sweet little boy ... to watch the blind old man learn to use a white cane, seeing his smile as he found freedom in walking without someone guiding him ... and the sheep, Abba! Both the four legged and the ones wearing clothes! What a beautiful visual reminder it was to know we are all Your sheep, and You will care for us in all things.

At some point in my Christian walk, I realized God does not need me to fulfill His purpose, but He blesses me with the opportunity to be a part of it. The third day, as I returned from lunch, I realized Caring Friends, our ministry partner, did not need us. They were able to run the eyeglass clinic on their own, but what joy it was for them to invite us to join them! We did nothing new and innovative that would receive awards. Instead, we united hearts, hands, and voices with our brothers and sisters in South Africa to further the kingdom of God.

I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd (John 10:14-16).
July 14, 2022

It feels like home, this country called South Africa. And the people — they feel like family.

This was the day my heart broke — and I welcomed it because it let me know I had loved well. Saying goodbye was unexpected, truly, and the hardest thing I have done. A part of every one of them came back to El Paso with me. I continue to serve, reaching out to the people of my community, both in El Paso and Mexico. Watching others experience the eye-opening and life-changing occurrence of mission work is a joy, but I now truly understand the imprint it leaves within me — within any missionary — an imprint with ridges and nodules, felt deep within our hearts and souls when we recall the experience.

I witnessed something in South Africa I had not noticed before: we all form a beautifully divine DNA strand, unique and fearfully put together by God, always proclaiming the truth that we are united as the Body of Christ.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ... As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. ... If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together (1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 20, 26). Q

Luz Soto was born in Illinois and now calls El Paso, Texas, home. She is a member of San Pablo Lutheran Church and works full-time at Ysleta Lutheran Mission Human Care and part-time at a non-profit Christian counseling center. She is a 2007 graduate of Concordia University Texas and received her Master of Arts in Counseling: Crisis Response and Trauma from Liberty University in Virginia in 2022. She loves to read, write, learn, and teach — especially the Bible. She aspires to return to South Africa, as well as other places where she can bring God’s love, grace, and mercy to His people, and desires to live every day of her life seeking Jesus through mission work.