



*Outlaw Ranch's Connecting Cultures at Camp program brought together longtime camp families with new camp families from Pueblo de Dios, an ELCA congregation in Sioux Falls, S.D.*



# CONNECTING CULTURES AT CAMP

When Matt Rusch, director of Outlaw Ranch, first proposed a family camp connecting cultures, he started from scratch. "We just jumped into this," he said. "[There was] no model. We [thought], 'We know God is in the mix, so somehow it will work out.'"

The idea was to make family camp look like the church in South Dakota, which is both multilingual and racially diverse, he said.

Outlaw Ranch partnered with Pueblo de Dios, a congregation in Sioux Falls, and invited Spanish-speaking families to join with English-speaking families for the camp's weeklong Connecting Cultures program. **Outlaw Ranch is a member of Lutherans Outdoors in South Dakota, which receives funding from the ELCA South Dakota Synod made available because of Mission Support.**

In addition to enjoying faith-based programming, families in Connecting Cultures could hike, ride horses and take trips to nearby Mount Rushmore and travel to Custer High School for fireworks exhibitions. That in itself was a blessing, said Maria Cabello, pastor of Pueblo de Dios.

"[Our] people feel very happy and very joyful with Outlaw Ranch ... and [they] feel very happy with God. Hispanic people don't have a week vacation [often]," she said. "It [was] very exciting to renew our spirit and renew our souls at Outlaw Ranch."

Connecting Cultures also helped some gain confidence. "Especially the kids," Cabello

said. "[Some] speak only Spanish. They feel like a little fish in the ocean. But because others were speaking Spanish, they feel more included at camp."

Instead of being embarrassed to try to use the Spanish they learned in high school years earlier, English-speaking adults utilized bilingual counselors to converse freely with Latino families. And Spanish-speaking adults who had never gone camping learned the ropes from English-speaking veterans who'd been camping for decades.

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"Camp is a wonderful equalizer," Rusch said. "There's not one of the groups who's on unequal footing here, not anyone is not out of their element. ... We all study the same Bible; we worship the same God. We try to address those things instead of the differences at the beginning."

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