

## Profile **The Rev. Lara Forbes**

Faith Lutheran pastor builds outreach to LGBT and Latino communities

By Richard Schultz

**T**he Rev. Lara Forbes has journeyed from the corporate world in the aerospace industry to missionary work to leading an LGBT welcoming congregation in central Phoenix.

Forbes is midway through her first year as pastor at Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church, where she said her focus includes building bridges with the LGBT and Latino communities.

Faith Lutheran's congregation reflects the diverse population in Phoenix, Forbes said. And the church was the first Lutheran church to incorporate outreach to the LGBT community, something that Forbes said she would like to build upon as the church navigates a period of transition.

Commitment ceremonies have been performed at the church, and Forbes said she looks forward to presiding over more. The church has sponsored booths at the Pride and Rainbows festivals and recently had a booth at the Seventh Avenue Street Fair.

In January, Faith Lutheran observed Reconciling in Christ Sunday with a sermon delivered by an LGBT member of the congregation.

Forbes said that as a Reconciling in Christ congregation, the church welcomes and affirms all people regardless of age, race, ability, financial situation, sexual orientation, gender identity, political persuasion, educational background, marital status, previous denominational affiliations or other differences.

"Faith Lutheran welcomes everyone regardless of their immigration status as well," she added.

Forbes said she is committed to finding new ways to connect all members of the congregation. A multi-cultural Valentine's Day celebration brought together members from the English-speaking service with those from the Spanish-speaking service.

The Rev. Lara Forbes (left) is pastor at Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church (below).



Forbes grew up in Mount Vernon, Wash. In 1991, she graduated from Central Washington University, where she majored in Spanish and political science. She obtained her master's degree in education in 1995 at Northern Arizona University.

Recruited by the Boeing Company, Forbes trained as a manufacturing engineer, but a round of layoffs left her pondering the future.

Raised as a Lutheran, she had participated in spring break ministries in San Juan during her college years. In 2003, during a two-year mission to Costa Rica, a supervising pastor posed a life-changing question: "What nets are you holding on to as you strive to follow Jesus?"

Forbes described her revelation as a "burning bush moment." She prayed for direction, resulting in a restless night filled with "freight train-like inner noise" and a heightened state of anxiety.

Two weeks of physical stress followed, but she said she was left with a sense of acceptance. Her path was clear; she had received her call.

Forbes attended the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, where she completed a master of divinity degree in 2010.

She answered Faith Lutheran's call for a pastor and was officially installed in October 2010. She said she found a rapport with the congregation and its commitment to peace and social justice issues.

She also was impressed by the LGBT ministry and the church's Spanish worship service. Fluent in Spanish, she welcomed the opportunity to minister to the Latino congregation.

"Faith Lutheran is the ideal congregation that meets all of my interests," Forbes said. "I know I am meant to be here. I truly can't imagine being anywhere else." **-E**

### VITAL STATISTICS

Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church  
801 E. Camelback, Phoenix  
Sunday services at 9 a.m.,  
Spanish-speaking services at 11 a.m.  
602-265-3395; [www.faithalive.com](http://www.faithalive.com)

