

Sometimes you end up easily where you need to be, and sometimes it takes a while. Steve Zielke has experienced both. Born and raised in Baltimore, Maryland in a mixed faith household – Lutheran dad and Unitarian mom – Steve valued both but gravitated toward Unitarians as he became a teenager. He and his questions were readily accepted by his mom's community. Not so much by folks in his dad's community. He came west to UW for college and stayed. He studied architecture but found construction a better fit. His job as a superintendent for high-end residential construction employs his multitude of talents and his passion for creating beautiful spaces.

Fast forward 20+ years from UW and Steve was searching for a faith community in his Columbia City neighborhood with the acceptance he had experienced in the Unitarian church and the structure he had experienced in the Lutheran church. He decided to give the Lutherans another chance and visited Columbia City Church of Hope (COH). The pastor was a woman; COH welcomed all as a reconciling in Christ congregation; the congregation was diverse in race, gender, and age; the worship included the right balance of freedom and structure to fit his needs; he had found a home at the first neighborhood church he tried. Hallelujah!

Church of Hope was just as blessed to welcome Steve as Steve was to be welcomed. With his connections and experience in the world of construction, Steve has been an integral part of COH's journey to replace their falling apart building with 87 units of affordable family housing, an early childhood learning center, and a new church home. The housing part of the project has been built and is run by El Centro de la RaZa. Along with architectural services provided by Mark Wilerson (Pastor Darla's neighbor), Jay Edgerton, synod property expert, and fellow COH member Marinko Kordich, Steve has stewarded the project. The four-person team is now in the thick of the work of finishing the interior space. A huge challenge has been increasing costs due to circumstances beyond their control. At one point, there was the possibility that El Centro de la Rasa would finish the space for them, which would have meant being a Sunday only tenant, rather than a full-time owner of the space. He is grateful they stayed the course so COH could both control the design and resume their role as a community "living room," welcoming back 12-step groups, community organizations, live music events, and more after completion. Current work includes framing, and getting the next set of permits -- ductwork and the fire suppression system.
The experience has been so positive and rewarding that Steve may consult on similar future projects...after COH's project is complete, and he takes a much-needed break! Working full time and helping coordinate a project of this scope as a volunteer has been challenging, but he has no regrets. Envisioning the day when Bethlehem Lutheran's mission, adopted by COH, comes to fruition brings him great joy. (You can find more information about the project here.)

Steve has most future contractors lined up, but if you know of a finish carpentry, or painting business willing to donate services or give COH a discount, he would love to hear from you (Szielke@schultzmiller.com). You can also support the project by helping to close their funding gap – go here to offer your financial support: https://www.lutheransnw.org/news/support-church-of-hope

Joyfully,
Cindy Shultz
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