

January 19, 2010

Benjamin Judd Ulring Splichal Larson, 25, died in the earthquake in Haiti on January 12, 2010. Ben, his wife, Renee Splichal Larson, and his cousin, Jonathan Larson, all three Wartburg Theological Seminary students certified for ordination, were in Haiti learning from and walking with the people of the Eglise Luthérienne d'Haiti (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Haiti). Renee and Jon were able to escape after the top two floors of a six floor building of the St. Joseph's Home for Boys (up the mountain from Port-au-Prince) collapsed upon them all. Ben was buried in the collapsed ceiling on the resurrection dance theater floor and died after singing a verse of a hymn. Ben, along with hundreds of thousands of Haitians, is still buried in the rubble. After spending the night in a trash-filled lot with faithful, singing and praying, surviving and dying Haitians, Renee and Jon safely returned to Minneapolis on Friday, January 15.

Ben was born February 27, 1984 in Storm Lake, Iowa. His early years were near Waterville, IA, Rochester, MN and then La Crosse, WI. He is a graduate of Central High School, La Crosse, WI, and of Luther College, Decorah, IA. Ben was to graduate this May from Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, IA. Ben married Renee Splichal on December 29, 2007 in Garrison, ND.

As an infant Ben was wrapped in the arms of God in the waters of baptism, and from those waters, his life was an outpouring of love and joy, laughter and play, in response to God first loving Ben. Ben's love of God, walking in accompaniment, passionately loving others, listening and learning from those who are poor across the globe, drove his serving.

Music oozed out every fiber of Ben's body. His passion was to sing Global songs of faith with the people of God. He played guitar, mandolin, trombone, cello, piano and any other instrument he could get his hands on. Ben picked up drumming—African and Latin rhythms especially. He sang in Central High School Robed Choir and Grand Central Station show choir. He sang in Luther's Nordic Choir for three years. But all who knew him loved when he picked up a guitar and sang one of the hundreds of songs he had written.

Ben also loved playing table tennis, baseball, and football. He was a diehard Vikings fan, always saying, "This year they're going to the Super Bowl." He enjoyed canoeing, hiking and outdoors, in-the-woods activities. Ben was always playful, ready for some fun.

Ben expressed his music, joy, and love for God through the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Lifting up the new worship book of the ELCA, the ELW, Ben promoted inclusive and expansive language for God and human beings and was strengthened for service through liturgy and hymnody. With an appreciation of the all encompassing body of Christ, Ben proclaimed unity not uniformity, and paid close attention to those who were excluded and disenfranchised, drawing them into the body through the Spirit with transformational love. Driven by the Gospel, Ben challenged people to be mission driven by entering into deep theological discussions that reached beyond division into the Word through which all came into being.

We give thanks to God for the incredible joy of knowing Ben. His laughter, playfulness, passionate heart for those who are hurting was manifest in his daily life. He

delighted in the privilege of serving and knowing God, laying out his life in joy. Christ's light radiated through Ben and pointed people to God's love.

One cannot think about Ben anymore apart from the thousands of Haitians who died in this deadly earthquake, who are the poorest of the poor in this hemisphere. In his young death his life joins the bodies of the poor. In the Haitian rubble Ben's life joins these dear beloved people of God: all those parents crying for their children; young widows calling out for their husbands; new orphans searching for their parents.

Ben is survived by his wife Renee Michele Splichal Larson, his grandmother Marilyn Larson of Prairie du Sac, WI, his parents Judd and April (Ulring) Larson of Duluth, MN, his sisters, Katie (Seth) Larson Ode of Lauderdale, MN and Amy (Peter) Larson Calhoun of Salt Lake City, UT, his nephew Paul Ode, his niece Rachel Calhoun, a soon-to-be-born niece, numerous aunts, uncles and cousins. He was preceded in death by his grandfathers, George "Judd" Larson and Joseph "Joe" Ulring, and a grandmother, Aleta (South) Ulring.

A memorial service for Ben Larson will be Friday, January 22, 2010 beginning with a song fest at 1:30 and service at 2:00 in the Center for Faith and Life (CFL) at Luther College, Decorah, IA. Visitation with Ben's family will be 7pm Thursday at Marty's in the Centennial Union of Luther College, closing with a 9pm Vespers service. Renee and Ben's family would love written memories of Ben for keepsake.

Thank you to all who have posted memories, photos, music, and videos, and have held prayer vigils in honor of Ben and his love for us all.

The family asks that memorials be directed to the ELCA Disaster Response for Haiti, ELCA Global Mission for the Eglise Luthérienne d'Haiti (www.fbsynod.com), St. Joseph's Home for Boys (www.heartswithhaiti.org), or Wartburg Theological Seminary.

I will sing to the Lord as long as I live;

I will praise my God while I have my being. Psalm 104:31-33