

Lakota Lutheran Center and Chapel Scottsbluff, Nebraska

Faithful, sustained partnerships have fueled ELCA ministries among people in poverty, such as the Lakota Lutheran Center in Scottsbluff, Nebraska.

The center is one of a “handful” of ELCA ministries among American Indians. Since its inception in 1989, the ministry has been supported, in a variety of ways, by a network of Nebraska congregations, the Nebraska Synod, and the ELCA’s Evangelical outreach and Congregational Mission unit.

Pastor Will Voss says that the people the center serves are the backbone of the ministry. “They roll up their sleeves on a daily basis to get things done.” But financially, the ministry will probably never be self-supporting. Incomes for the Lakota are very low—the offering plate is always heavy with coins. And, in tough economic times, those people in lower-income jobs, often suffer even more.

Voss facilitates relief work, matching needs with resources to help people with food, rent, and other necessities when family resources get stretched. In addition to Sunday worship and Sunday school, ministries include community meals, health education, and a youth ministry, which includes organized sports.

The center has had its share of real estate woes. In 2006 they were forced out of their rented space and had to operate out of a completely inadequate building, sandwiched between Nebraska’s busiest railway and the town’s busiest street.

Because the center was so highly esteemed in the community, they received a plot of land from the city of Scottsbluff at nominal cost. With the help of the synod and a variety of other supporters, including an offering from the 2006 ELCA Youth Gathering, they established a building fund. In 2008 they were finally able to construct a modest building. Unfortunately, because of the ever increasing cost of materials, the finances gathered were not enough to completely finish the building. Additional gifts are continuing to be sought to pay off that debt.

Partnerships play a big role in this ministry as it does in many, helping to bridge the gap between soaring real estate prices and congregations’ ability to afford permanent homes.