

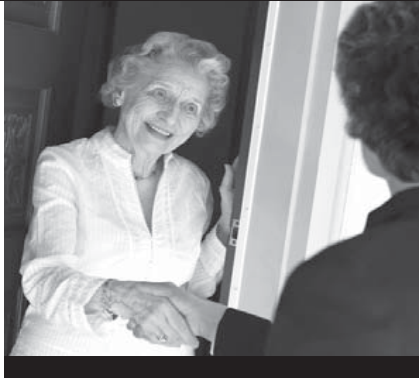
STORIES OF FAITH IN ACTION | 2009

Desert Mission Tempe, Arizona

Desert Cross Lutheran Church in Tempe, Ariz., needed a project. They thought about a new building, but that idea didn't generate much excitement. Instead, they started a mission outpost in Gilbert, 15 miles southeast of their Tempe location.

Mission developer Dorel Meier leads a core group of Desert Cross members

who are transplanting ministries from Tempe to Gilbert and providing an instant infusion of energy and experience. She says, "As a mission developer, I can't imagine a greater gift than having a healthy, strong congregation behind you in prayer, support, and resources. We're not out here alone." The Gilbert and Tempe locations function as one congregation, with a shared vision, budget, and clergy.



Meier, who spent 15 years with the Intel Corporation in strategic planning, organizational development, and marketing, held focus groups to identify three areas of ministry for Gilbert: children's ministries; family support, such as parenting classes; and outreach and service, which includes ministering to the needs of families affected by the economic downturn. Now, Meier organizes the blossoming of the ministries that are attracting new members. Gilbert quickly grew to an average attendance of 80 in less than six months. Ordained pastors from Tempe cycle through to preach and administer sacraments. Lay people lead worship, outreach, and other programs. "What's great about Gilbert is that everyone knows they have to pitch in and do something," says Meier. Desert Cross hopes that Gilbert's lay-centric missionary zeal can be transplanted back to Tempe.

Desert Cross was encouraged to open the Gilbert mission at an ELCA meeting in Minnesota where they heard stories of churches planting churches. Later, Desert Cross hosted their own ELCA conference to help other congregations plant mission sites. It is expected that other congregations will continue to take the lead in planting new ELCA congregations. Meier says, "This model works."

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