

STORIES OF FAITH IN ACTION | 2009

Building Bridges In Minnesota Northwest Minnesota

Making connections between generations and ethnic groups can be fun and games at Mision Luterana del Valle Rio Rojo (Red River Valley Lutheran Mission) in northwest Minnesota.

But the mission's popular bilingual game night is only one of many new programs designed by mission developer Deb Hanson to bring together the area's diverse population.

Latinos make up more than 25% of northwest Minnesota's population. They have played a vital role in the agricultural economy since the 1940s, first harvesting sugar beets and now working in the poultry, potato, dairy, and other industries.

Yet, despite the visible presence of Latinos in the area for decades, the four area Lutheran churches had not developed specific programming to help integrate their neighbors into the community.

In response, Hanson created an innovative outreach program targeted to increase Latino participation across generations and forge a sense of community among all Lutherans.

Today members and visitors alike enjoy folk dancing at New Hope Lutheran Church in Alvarado.

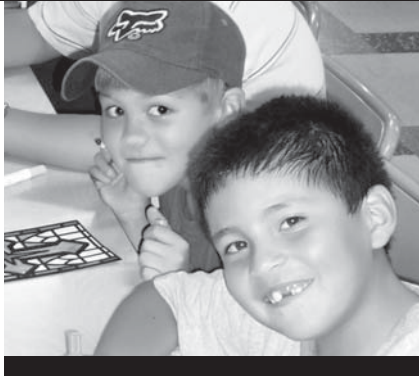
A professional interpreter in Borup visits newcomers with the pastors.

With the help of Bigwoods Lutheran Church, members of First Lutheran in Stephen host monthly Spanish-language worship along with bilingual game night.

Hanson is delighted to see increasing Latino participation in the area's congregations, along with a growing sense of the contributions Latinos can make to worship and programming.

Hanson says that Mision Luterna "brings outreach back on the radar of rural congregations" and has strengthened the area's sense of community. "There's a lot of welcoming" going on in northwest Minnesota.

An ELCA grant helps continue outreach efforts in the area.



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