



Mission Partners

Spring 2008

FOCUS

Congregations Encouraging One Another

Accompaniment

Walking together in solidarity, practicing interdependence and mutuality.

Gifts, resources, and experiences are shared with mutual advice and admonition to deepen and expand all efforts within God's mission.



Members of the congregations have walked with each other, developing a relationship of support, encouragement, and fellowship.

St. Paul's Hmong Central and Christ the King practice accompaniment

At 4 a.m. the second Sunday of each month, the young people of Hmong Central Lutheran Church, St. Paul, begin preparing 600-800 egg rolls for Christ the King Lutheran Church in New Brighton, Minnesota. By 8:30 a.m. the smell of egg rolls greets members and guests as they come to worship. By the end of the third service, all the egg rolls have been sold at \$1.00 each. Funds raised have sponsored Hmong youth and young couples on mission trips and retreats, as well as refurbishing the youth room at Hmong Central.

This is just one of several activities that bind these two congregations in a commitment of Prayer, Presence, and Presents, the three hallmarks of the Mission Partners ministry of the ELCA.

Hmong Central, with a membership of 375, is located near the center of the

city of St. Paul, which has one of the largest Hmong populations in the United States—all of them refugees after the Vietnam War. Christ the King is a 2,000 member, mostly Caucasian congregation, in a first ring St. Paul suburb.

Monthly, the Rev. Vern Rice, retired pastor and chair of the local Mission Partners committee, prays and discusses ministry challenges with Pastor William Siong of Hmong Central. They have co-taught a seminary intercultural course for two years.

Last year, Pastor Rice led a Hmong Central congregation council retreat on faith and stewardship growth.



Fellowship events often include music and dancing.

continued on page 2



Two are better than one . . . Eccl 4:12

Consider a single string.

It can hold a very limited weight. Five pounds? Ten pounds? When that string is combined with hundreds of others into a strand and then braided with other strands, the resulting rope can hold thousands of pounds in weight—or pull a large vehicle.

Congregations are “braided together” into synods . . . and synods into the ELCA so that we might more effectively carry out God’s mission. Together—as the whole ELCA—we can do more than we could each do separately. Together, we can encourage, support, and challenge each other . . . **for the sake of the world.**

Some ELCA congregations have also chosen to specifically accompany one or two other congregations. This Focus shares a few of those stories—
of congregations who intentionally walk together. . . with God . . . **in mission** . . .
of congregations who learn together, become stronger together, and are transformed together . . .

of congregations who both challenge and build each other up . . .

of congregations who both give and receive.

Consider what “walking together” might mean for you and your congregation. Please call if we can be helpful in your discernment.

—Marlys Waldo, Director for Mission Resources



Hmong speakers often share aspects of Hmong life and Christian spirituality with their guests.

Practicing accompaniment from page 1

Hmong Central annually celebrates a Hmong fellowship meal with approximately 100 Christ the King members and guests, featuring Hmong foods, dancing, and music. Speakers often share their journey to Christianity, their congregation’s current mission, and the members’ service in the world. A Christ the King music group also participates.

Pastor Rice says, “We pray for each other regularly. We love each other and rely on each other for inspiration and help. Many people in both congregations cherish our relationship and have experienced what the theologian Emil Brunner said: ‘The Church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning!’”

www.ctknb.org/partnercongregaa.html

Mission Partners Focus

Our Mission The ELCA Mission Partners program establishes reciprocal relationships between congregations of the ELCA so that all partners might become strong centers for mission. These connections include various types of support and may occur within the same synod or across synod boundaries.

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ELCA congregations may reprint this newsletter in part or in its entirety.



Ohio congregations accompany Rejoice Lutheran in its journey to own building

ELCA organizations also lend support, funds

This building project has been a long time coming," said the Rev. Michael Conklin, pastor at Rejoice Lutheran, Hudson, Ohio, 30 miles southeast of Cleveland. "The congregation has been around for almost 10 years, and this is the first phase of our first facility."

Rejoice Lutheran's members are accustomed to meeting in a variety of places, including a community center, racquetball courts, an American Legion Hall, and an elementary school.

Now, with the material and monetary help of a number of Mission Partners congregations, the Northeastern Ohio Synod, ELCA Mission Builders, and the Mission Investment Fund of the ELCA, Rejoice is about to break ground for a multipurpose facility. Eventually the building will expand to include a sanctuary, narthex, kitchen, nursery, offices, and classrooms.

A number of Ohio congregations have accompanied Rejoice during its development: Advent, Uniontown; Celebration, Chardon; Christ the King, Twinsburg; Christ the Redeemer, Brecksville; First, Canton; Grace, Wadsworth; Holy Trinity, Mansfield; St. Jacob, Massillon; St. Paul, Bellville; St. Paul, Massillon; St. Paul, Sharon Center; Trinity, Ashland; Zion, Loudonville; and Zion, Wooster.

Pastor Conklin, in turn, preaches at supporting congregations or dispatches congregation council members to provide temple talks.

In other cases, Rejoice also accompanies other congregations. Rev. Conklin described how Rejoice members donated money, a computer, and a DVD/VCR unit and worshiped with members of Iglesia Luterana La

Trinidad, Canton. They donated money for gift cards to support Mississippi hurricane cleanup efforts undertaken by New Covenant, East Cleveland. In addition, Rejoice members have donated their "church in a trailer" equipment hauler to another mission congregation, Spirit of Joy, North Ridgeville.

"We should all pool our resources," said Rev. Conklin of building up new congregations. "We get in trouble when we try to do our own thing."

Within the congregation, Rev. Conklin encourages Rejoice members to disciple one another, particularly in sharing their faith. "It's all about Jesus," said Rev. Conklin. "We're a church for others, and we have to be tenacious to build up visibility in the community."

Rejoice members, to this end, participate in the community Memorial Day parade. They also have rented a Knights of Columbus hall in a neighboring community during the summers to provide free games, pony rides, and refreshments to the neighborhood. The congregation offers opportunities for people to get to know its members in other locations, too.

"When we first reached out, people didn't trust the congregation," said Rev. Conklin. "They thought we just wanted to get them to be members. Trust takes time. We've just got to keep after it."

Indeed, accompanying and building trust between congregations and communities, between church agencies and congregations, and between congregations takes time—and the results are well worth it in building up God's Kingdom. ●



Top photo: Rejoice members enthusiastically participate in many community activities. Bottom photo: Rev. Conklin shows off trailer Rejoice uses to store everything—requiring unloading and reloading before and after each service.

Note: The ELCA Mission Builders couple featured on page 5 are involved in the Rejoice project.



Light of the World members, shown studying together, have committed themselves to growing in faith.



As their Web site www.lotwl.com indicates, “Learning isn’t just for kids, and discipleship isn’t just for perfect people—all of us are learning how to live into faithful lives.”

Twin Cities churches grow Community of Hope, then shine Light of the World

It is the holiest cafeteria you have ever seen when you fill it up with God’s people,” said the Rev. Deb Stehlin, developer at Light of the World, which began meeting in December 2007 in an elementary school. Eighty-five attended the first worship service, and approximately 200 are part of the new mission now.

A group of ELCA congregations in the southern Minneapolis-St. Paul suburbs, known loosely as the Dakota County Mission Partners, organized in 2001 to begin the Community of Hope congregation in Rosemount, Minnesota. Community of Hope grew to 600 people in worship under the leadership of the Rev. Per Nilsen. The congregations then decided to plant Light of the World.

“People, who perhaps might not go to more established congregations, are drawn to Light of the World,” said Rev. Stehlin. “The barriers seem lower.”

Rev. Stehlin recalled a young mother raising two children by herself after their father died. A coworker invited the family to a Light of the World pizza night. “The mom hadn’t been to church in 12 years,” said Rev. Stehlin. “Now, she’s addicted to Light of the World, and her kids have become our kids.”

Light of the World enjoys the accompanying financial support of Shepherd of the Valley and the Dakota County Mission Partners congregations, including Community of Hope, Easter, Hosanna, Prince of Peace, and Grace.

Rev. Stehlin, formerly a pastor at Shepherd of the Valley, described how Shepherd of the Valley continues to pay her salary two years after leaving there, “sends musicians over,” publishes Light of the World items in its newsletter, and will share a summer mission trip with Light of the World youth.

“Shepherd of the Valley began as a mission congregation in 1981,” said the Rev. Chris Smith, Shepherd of the Valley senior pastor. “We are excited now to work with church partners in Dakota County to help develop and expand new congregations, such as Community of Hope and Light of the World. It is important not only to receive, but to reach out with the gospel.”

Said Rev. Stehlin, “We are getting such wonderful support from so many congregations. Light of the World will help support the next congregation.” ●

More photos on page 7.