

Report of the Mission Strategy Table

The work of Mission Strategy in our Synod continues to be very exciting. The table is chaired by the Rev. Kevin Woestehoff (Farmington Lutheran) and filled with people who have a passion and a desire to cultivate, expand, and support local mission in our congregations. This work comes into being through renewal of existing congregations, redevelopment of congregations, and new mission starts. This year we have launched a “Year of Renewal” cohort where eight congregations are wrestling with where God is calling them to go next, as well as micro-grants awarded to give eleven congregations a financial boost as they live out their identity of people of God in their unique setting. In addition, the Congregational Vitality Assessment has been conducted and utilized as a tool to begin conversations around renewal in twenty congregations. Renewal is happening! And God continues to surprise and challenge along the way. Below, you will find brief reports of what God is up to in our mission starts and explorations. The developers were asked to respond to the question, “*Where have you seen God active in your ministry?*” I hope the stories remind you of the way God is working and that you know you are part of this work through your financial support to the synod and in mission partnership to these congregations.

We are hoping to inject even more support to our new and redeveloping efforts and are on our way of meeting our goal of \$100,000 in new partnership support. I ask you to consider being part of this effort if you are not already! Thanks for all you do and for your continued prayers, support, and love for these efforts.

Justin Grimm
Director for Evangelical Mission
Assistant to the Bishop for Next Generation Ministries

LydiaPlace

The Rev. Scott Simmons, mission developer

It began with a simple invitation: “I live in the public housing facility one block away. We haven’t had worship in over two years there, and when the last church left, they took their damn piano! You do worship. Would you do worship with us?” Without hesitation, we said “yes” to her offer. And on Memorial Day weekend 2014, Lydia became a weekly guest of the residents of Seal Hi-Rise. That invitation soon led to others. A local pub invited us to move our monthly beer and hymn event, Hymntap, to their place. A local entrepreneur offered his art gallery for worship and as a place to develop a local meeting and event space. The South Anthony Park Community Council invited me to serve on its board, and eventually to lead a new committee focused on equity and diversity awareness. The local community garden invited Lydia to share the weekly bounty of several large plots with the residents of Seal. And we’ve been invited into a community-wide effort to create an affordable and accessible food option for the poor and needy in the neighborhood. In the past few years, the Spirit has led LydiaPlace to take up residence in our South Saint Anthony Park as guests who are blessed to

receive the hospitality of others. And in doing so, to share the love of God in Christ Jesus from a position of vulnerability, of thanksgiving, and of gratitude.

Shobi's Table

The Rev. Margaret Kelly, mission developer

This past year has been an adventure at Shobi's Table. We received a donation of a food truck that is to be a 'mustard seed to build the kingdom.' We had been dreaming and the spirit supplied for our dream. We continue to see the body of Christ show up repeatedly for us and with us. Synod partners have been gracious and we are hopeful for the next phases in our development. We know we are in the right place. Week after week, we encounter our sisters and brothers who long for community. Mothers who ask for blessings on their sons. Neighbors who smile when we remember their favorite type of Shobi's Pocket. Trust gained as folks share the exact location of their campsite. A friend whose medical crisis seemed impossible to overcome and he is now worshipping with us again. It is in first communions received and communion received for the first time in decades. We see God in all these places. We give thanks to God for the ongoing support from the Saint Paul Area Synod. This is the Synod's ministry and we are privileged to do it on your behalf.

Good Samaritan Lutheran Church (Hmong Ministry)

The Rev. William Siong, mission developer

Greetings from our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the love of God. It is an honor and privilege to serve as a mission developer since 2010 to the present. Beginning through the new year of 2017, good things began to happen inside the congregation. People continue to visit and worship with Good Samaritan regularly. As of today, I am still working with a family; last Sunday, I walked with them through our membership class, so this Sunday I will be teaching them the baptism session. The baptism was already set for the 30th day of April 2017; if nothing changes it will be baptizing and welcoming a new family to join worship in the congregation.

On January 1, 2017, Good Samaritan Lutheran Church continued to baptize and welcome new converts into the congregation. Our weekly attendance went from 40 people to 70 people, so praise the Lord for that. Then on February 5, 2017, Good Samaritan Lutheran Church baptized and welcomed Ger's family into the congregation; altogether there were a total of nine people in his family who became members of our church. With God's help, I believe that Good Samaritan will continue to share the Good News of our Lord Jesus Christ with our neighbors who reside on the Eastside of St. Paul.

Pueblo de Fe (Latino Ministry)

The Rev. Jacqueline Belzer, mission developer

God's love unites us through friendships and relationships that can be human and divine.

God's virtue of Love is reflected in everybody's struggles, illness, injustice, poverty, sin, racism, etc. in my congregation. I can see God in their faces during processes to overcome painful situations, but God is there filling us with Love that can be seen through our deeds and longings.

God's love is reflected in the love of our brothers and sisters towards me and towards each other. There are great feelings in our hearts knowing people's love. I know that people love me; even as the sinner I am and they fill me with hope. And the source of the hope is the knowledge that people at Pueblo de Fe's love for me and each other is a tiny speckle of the love of God. Because God is Love and His love is sweet beyond words.

El amor de Dios nos une a través de la amistad y relaciones que pueden ser humanas y divinas.

El amor es una virtud de Dios y se refleja en las batallas de cada uno de nosotros en, enfermedades, pobreza, injusticia, pecado, racismo, etc. En mi congregación. Puedo ver a cara de Dios en sus caras durante procesos para sobrepasar dolorosas situaciones, pero Dios se encuentra en medio de nosotros llenándonos con su Amor que puede verse a través de nuestras obras y anhelos.

El amor de Dios se refleja en el amor de nuestros hermanos y hermanas hacia mí y los unos a los otros puedo describir un gran sentido en nuestros corazones conociendo el amor de la gente. Puedo estar consiente cuando la gente me ama; aun como la pecadora que soy ellos me llenan de Esperanza. Y el recurso de la esperanza es el conocimiento de que el amor de Pueblo de Fe hacia mí y los unos a los otros son un pequeño punto del amor de Dios. Porque Dios es Amor y su amor es dulce más allá de lo palabras puedan expresar.

Lowertown Exploration

Miriam Samuelson-Roberts, mission explorer

The Lowertown Exploration is a young ministry – just a few months! – and God has been present the whole way through. As the synod explores whether there are stirrings of the Holy Spirit for a new ministry in Lowertown [a neighborhood in St. Paul], I have been meeting with residents, business owners, artists, and others connected to the area. I have seen God in the joys and struggles of each person I meet. I have seen God in the yearning for connection among artists, young people, and empty nesters. I have seen God in the way people feel rooted in a place and are dedicated to building sustainable community. As we continue to discern what is next for Lowertown, I have seen God guiding along the way.

Cristo Rey (Latino Ministry)

Ana Becerra, mission developer

A couple weeks ago a Cristo Rey member asked me if we could help a family who's father was in an ICE facility. The family had been part of VBS, Block Party, and attended church a few times. I was moved to tears the Sunday when the family attend Cristo Rey Service and we prayed for them and a 5 year old cried out his pain. Right there we witnessed the face of pain. After communion we all gathered at the Cross and the tears came back as we all "carried" the cross together. From this, Cristo Rey members came up with the idea of grocery baskets to support this family in their time of need. God works through us! Thanks be to God! As we try to figure out how to explain what is "church" our members finally know and we say "we are a church let's help people!" At this point I cannot find a better way to explain what Cristo Rey Church is – we are a people that care for those in need.

We all stay together to pray, have fun, learning the Bible, we are the hands of God.

Hace unas semanas, un miembro de la Iglesia de Cristo Rey se acercó a preguntarme si podríamos ayudar a una familia, en la cual el padre había sido detenido por ICE. La familia ha sido parte de “Vacation Bible School”, el “Block Party”, y han participado en misa algunas veces. Me conmovió mucho el domingo en que la familia asistió a misa en Cristo Rey, porque mientras orábamos por ellos, un pequeño de 5 años comenzó a llorar su tristeza. Justo ahí todos fuimos testigos del dolor. Después de la comunión nos reunimos bajo la cruz y las lágrimas regresaron, con la sensación que todos cargábamos la misma “Cruz”. De esta experiencia, los miembros de Cristo Rey tuvieron la idea de juntar despensas para la familia en éstos momentos de necesidad. Dios actúa a través de nosotros! Gracias a Dios! Mientras intentábamos descifrar el significado de la palabra “Iglesia”, nuestros miembros lo descubrieron y ahora decimos “NOSOTROS somos la Iglesia, vamos a ayudar a la gente!” En este momento no puedo encontrar una mejor manera de explicar qué es la Iglesia de Cristo Rey: nosotros somos gente que se preocupa por quienes necesitan de ayuda.

Nos reunimos para orar, divertirnos, estudiar la Biblia, nosotros somos las manos de Dios

Minnesota Faith Chinese Lutheran Church and Joy Fellowship

The Rev. Shen Lin, mission developer

In the past year, I have seen how each person in Joy Fellowship brought their gifts, which helps to build a fellowship focus on worshipping God through music. I have also seen people who just got baptized in our church growing in their faith. Some went back to China, some went to other states, no matter where they are, seeing them keep growing in their faith is a big encouragement for me.

Linqing Chu, seminary student

Campus ministry has been such a passion in me since when I was in college back in China, and I have seen that in the past few months, God keeps bringing young people to us. Through working with the Hospitality Center for Chinese, I’m learning how to talk about Jesus to Chinese students at the U of M, as well as growing up to be a leader in campus ministry.

Humble Walk Lutheran Church

The Rev. Jodi Houge, mission developer

Palms. I’m terrible at details. There are too many and I forget most of them. Like – ordering palm branches. That’s a thing that churches do – weeks and weeks before Holy Week. I think typically church admin folks do it – and you know, we’ve been a little light in that area. Anyway, I forgot to order palms for 6 years straight. And then on the eve of Palm Sunday, I’d remember and send out a panicked email to my colleagues. One of them would graciously volunteer their left over pile which I would drive over and pick up on Sunday afternoon in time for our evening service. It’s a fraught system – but one that I was destined to repeat 6 years in a row. UNTIL we moved into Sholom Home – the local Jewish nursing

home – and the dear rabbi left me a message a couple weeks before Palm Sunday. “I figured you might need palms for your service so I ordered them for you. They will be here waiting for you on Sunday.” Take that in. I cried when I listened to his message because that grace was so big. Last month, Catrina remembered the rabbi and the fact that I never remember the palms and messaged, “Playing the role of rabbi this year. I’ll get the palms.” You see? You see how lovely it is to grow up a church together? It’s this sort of thing every single day.

Anuak and Oromo African National Ministry

Gilo Gora Agwa, mission developer

First of all thanks be to God almighty who enables us to be welcomed with open arms and hearts that we could serve the Lord hand-in-hand in this new home, the United States of America. We also thank sisters and brothers who by the will and love of God, did not keep their human and financial resources to themselves, but shared what they have with us to expand the mission of God nearby and those who are far.

The Anuak refugees are a people who by the force of evil were pushed out from their countries of Ethiopia and Sudan. The willingness of both Saint Paul Area Synod and Twin-Cities Presbytery to collaborate and work jointly with us give us a bright future. This ministry is new and serves the Anuak refugees and will include many other people and teach them the word of God, which is love. It helps the refugees to love their neighbors and be thankful to this people’s centered country that welcomed us from our countries’ disasters. This joint effort of both churches that started in February 2017, sent me to training in Chicago, which was a powerful tool that gives spiritual energy to this new ministry to have a better ministry in this changing world.

This ministry was started in the right time, providing a part time position with time for sermon preparation, and visitation to the suffering community. We the Anuak refugees, physically we are in the United States, but mentally we think about our suffering people in their motherland and in the other refugees’ camps in other African countries like Kenya, Uganda and others. For the last 60 days until the 4th day of April 2017, more than 155 Anuak children were abducted in Ethiopia and South Sudan by their neighborhood tribes and many more families were killed and homes burned into ashes. This ministry, even though it is very new it gives hope for better future through prayers, awareness, peace building, and other humanitarian efforts.

Finally, as we move from the darkness of Good Friday to the light of the resurrection of Christ on Easter, may you also pray for us and for the success of this ministry.