

Team Russia update

By Kathi Cooley

In May 2012 several members of Morning Star Lutheran Church, Monroe, Wash., attended the 2012 Northwest Washington Synod Assembly and learned about a partnership with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in European Russia (ELCER). In November of that year, Morning Star voted unanimously to enter into a partnership with a Lutheran church in Smolensk, Russia.

Morning Star was paired with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Smolensk in December 2012. The congregations share a remarkably similar background: Smolensk meets in a small room donated by a Baptist congregation and Morning Star shares a building with a Methodist congregation.

In October 2013 two Morning Star members and a group from the Northwest Washington Synod traveled to Russia to visit our sister church. In Smolensk the delegation met with Morning Star's sister congregation, whose members graciously gave a tour of their city. The delegation also worshiped with them in their temporary church home and shared a wonderful meal following the service.

Through the International Companion Program, which will bring youth from companion synods throughout the world to the ELCA Youth Gathering in Detroit, Morning Star has the opportunity to host Vera Tkach in Monroe this summer.

Tkach, a member of the Smolensk congregation, is an English teacher at a private school and serves as a youth coordinator for the ELCER. That position has taken her many places around Europe for youth gatherings. Now she is busy "trying to breathe new life into youth development."

Morning Star, which has eight youth who are traveling to Detroit on July 14, is looking forward to Tkach's visit to our region in early July. Allison Tompkins, a youth member of Morning Star, was chosen to attend the orientation for the International Companion Program. She will be traveling with Tkach to Chicago prior to the Youth Gathering.

Team Russia, the synod's task force responsible for the companion synod relationship with the ELCER, donated \$2,000 from the synod's Russia youth fund to enable Tkach

to participate in the International Companion Program.

Personal encounters and the sharing of ideas are essential for a success-

ful partnership, but the costs involved are prohibitive for the church in Russia. It is, therefore, essential and much appreciated when our congregations make contributions to the "Synod Russia Fund" at the synod office in Seattle. □



Marla Wardell (right), a member of Morning Star Lutheran Church, Monroe, Wash., with two new friends at the Lutheran church in Smolensk.



Vera Tkach (front row, second from left); Dietrich Brauer, archbishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in European Russia; and the Rev. Lena Bondarenko, dean of the Central Deanery, which includes the Smolensk area, attend the Youth Conference in Smolensk.

Author bio:

Cooley is parish administrator at Morning Star Lutheran Church, Monroe, Wash.

Eighteen countries, one Lake City

By Terry Vogel

Maple Leaf Lutheran Church resides in the neighborhood of Meadowbrook, Northeast Seattle. Meadowbrook, Cedar Park, Olympic Hills, Victory Heights and the Matthews Beach neighborhood all reside within the Lake City boundary, as defined by the city of Seattle.

The variety of neighborhoods can be confusing for the unaware. Successful self-identity can also bring together a large community (Lake City) around a host of urban issues and challenges. Similar dynamics of smaller neighborhoods searching for a role within a larger community can be seen in such areas as West Seattle, Northgate and Ballard.

For Maple Leaf, defining its outreach and supporting a community with many needs is, on many levels, rewarding but hard work. Rolling up one's sleeves, funding programs and being intentional in serving the local population can be a formula for successful engagement. The effort has the congregation working with many other partners to engage on the many local urban issues before them.

For many years the church hosted the successful World Vision-Kid Reach after-school tutoring program. With funding issues at World Vision, the program was discontinued at Maple Leaf. Where did the church go next? And how does a faith community speak to such a diverse population?

In 2007, Maple Leaf formed a community nonprofit named "Meadowbrook Community CARE" (MC2). Its board of directors is made up of community members and church representatives. The formation of MC2 allowed the church to develop strong relationships with many partners—none stronger than the mutually aligned effort with Seattle Parks and Recreation. The new designation also increased funding opportunities as well.

There are several Seattle Parks and Recreation projects ongoing with MC2, but the one highlighted here is the Lake City After School ELL (English Language Learning) Program.

Initial funding for the project was provided in 2013 by the Meadowbrook Community Center's Advisory Council and Maple Leaf's neighbor, Lamb of God Lutheran Church. The Lake City Community Center's prior leadership group also



helped support the kickoff with the funds necessary to buy 10 reconditioned laptops for the program.

With funds in hand, the inaugural tutor-based ELL program got its start at the Lake City Community Center, located next to the Lake City Library.

With a host of site challenges, MC2 received an invitation in fall 2014 from University YMCA. In partnership, MC2 offers the volunteer tutor-based language learning program at Olympic Hills Elementary School in the Lake City neighborhood. With stable levy funding, the YMCA also offers an academy-style after-school program to the larger school population as well.

How's the ELL program doing? With 13 students enrolled, the effort now has more than 10 adult volunteers providing tutoring twice a week. Prior to the University Y's invitation there was no after-school support for young language learners.

Eighteen countries are represented at Olympic Hills Elementary School, which makes for a very diverse population. The numbers at the school reflect a great need—77 percent of the students qualify for free or reduced lunches. As the community grows, language is but one great need among many facing the larger Lake City community.

Connecting as partners gives Maple Leaf and the community strength to address challenges of homelessness, family health and welfare, urban gardening and language education support.

Highlights of MC2 community nonprofit efforts can be seen at www.mc-care.org.

Supporting, Educating and Engaging the community helps the Maple Leaf "SEE" the need. Faith, prayer and humility give us the focus needed to live locally in Christ. Thanks be to God. □

Author bio:

Vogel is a board member of Meadowbrook Community CARE and a member of Maple Leaf Lutheran Church, Seattle.

Faith House

By Lilia Cabello Drain

Faith House isn't your average independent living home for foster youth. The stylish interior, the laid back housing manager, and the genuine excitement of Faith Lutheran Church's members epitomize the phrase "*mi casa es su casa*," or "my home is your home."

This collaborative project gained momentum in the spring of 2014. The members of Faith, Seattle, wanted to take their community impact to the next level. Already invested in creating healthy communities, the congregation had owned a small house adjacent to the church for 40 years, using it as a home for refugee families, pastoral interns, youth groups and others.

As the Rev. Kris Ostrem, then pastor of Faith, continued prompting the council and congregation to find a good match for use of the property, an estate legacy gift was received. This gift came from a former member who had been a foster child himself, as well as a professional social worker, and had been aware of the need for this kind of program. With the support and approval of his family, the congregation used the legacy for extensive remodeling expenses within the home.

Creating a welcoming home

As the time came to consider a new venture for the property, congregation members felt it was only natural to consider the option of providing a semi-independent living home for foster youth.

According to law, youth can stay within the foster care system until they are 21. The focus of Faith House is to provide a transition for youth moving toward independence. They learn group dynamics, work, go to school, become responsible for cooking, cleaning and other household chores, and gain valuable life skills.

It was with young people like this in mind that the congregation decided to create a welcoming home that would provide stability and guidance to youth in foster care. A few key members of the congregation met to discuss how this dream could become a reality, and it was then that Lutheran Community Services Northwest (LCSNW) was mentioned.

A leader in children's services, LCSNW is known for the work it does through its Refugee and Immigrant Children's Program and Permanency Planning Foster-Adopt Program.

"We wanted to make this a workable, concrete project," said Suzanne Phillips, a member of Faith's executive council. "It was a high priority for us to partner with an experienced agency, and we knew LCSNW would not only have expertise in the field, but could help us maneuver through making this happen."

It was 'meant to happen'

As the congregation began working with LCSNW to put this project together, the logistics and details began easily falling into place. "It felt like this was just meant to happen," Phillips said. "The congregation was thrilled and so eager to help with everything. There was not one complaint."

Nancy Estill, a former church council member, added, "There weren't any naysayers because LCSNW has a good reputation."

Estill and Faith had already been part of a longstanding collaboration with LCSNW by providing Christmas gifts to foster children for 17 years. This is just one of the many reasons the congregation was so successful in creating Faith House, she explained.

"LCSNW is familiar with providing these services and is a multifaceted organization. It has plenty of experience because it is active in the community," she said.

LCSNW staff member Ryan Guinnip began serving as the residential housing manager when Faith House opened in July 2014. His role as a live-in manager is to provide support and guidance for foster youth living in the house, each of whom has been selected by LCSNW staff as individuals ready for semi-independent living.

"Helping these young people become independent impacts their lives in such an important way," Guinnip said.

While not part of the ini-

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tial partnership building process between the congregation and LCSNW, Guinnip appreciates the impact of such a solid foundation for the program. “You can feel the compassion coming through the walls. A lot has been done to prepare the house for us,” he said.

The congregation did a massive amount of remodeling—putting in new floors, fixing the plumbing, repainting the interior—to make the home comfortable and safe for its residents.

The role of the church in this partnership has been integral. “We didn’t want it to feel like we were just landlords to the youth in the house,” Estill said. “And with LCSNW as a partner we knew we could be open and honest with them.”

Phillips said, “We had many connections within the congregation to help put this together—cleaning the house, remodeling, painting walls, legal assistance—which is why it gelled together so quickly. LCSNW made it a practical partnership. Working with another organization that may not have supported our church mission and values so well would have been difficult.”

The sentiment that LCSNW has affected not only the outcome of the partnership but everyone directly involved echoes throughout the project. “We are helping the youth become part of something larger,” Guinnip said. “In the next six months I’m looking forward to some relationship building and bringing these two groups together: the youth still getting used to living independently and the church, along with LCSNW, is helping them succeed.”

The LCSNW’s Refugee and Immigrant Children’s Program has been placing unaccompanied refugee and immigrant children in loving foster homes since 1980. Fleeing war, extreme poverty, abuse, neglect or abandonment, these



The living room at Faith House, which provides a transition for youth in foster care to independence.



Suzanne Phillips (left) and Nancy Estill, members of Faith Lutheran Church, with Ryan Guinnip, a Lutheran Community Services Northwest staff member who serves as the residential housing manager for Faith House.

children have no adult to care for them and face a bleak future. Foster families in King and Snohomish counties give them security, hope, love and family. Individuals and families interested in becoming foster parents are always needed.

For more information visit www.refugeechildren.net. For more information about LCSNW and the impact it makes in providing communities health, justice and hope, visit www.lcsnw.org. □