

Engage!

A Publication for the Friends
of the Atlantic District Mission Society

2010

Engaging the world with the gospel of hope

Meet the Missionaries of the Atlantic District



Rev. Sun Woo Leem



Rev. Jimmy Lalljie



Rev. Philip Saywrayne



Rev. Frank Hwang



Rev. Dr. Johnson Rethinasamy



Vicar Patrick Mohan Singh



Rev. James Roy



Rev. David Yusef

I Can Relate

By Rev. Dr. David H. Benke, President of the Atlantic District, LCMS

My life is filled with great opportunities, and most of them have to do with you! As I've been granted the privilege of entering the sanctuaries and meeting places of our Atlantic District parishes, schools and institutions, through the years I've been given a gift of spiritual discernment. Where there is love among God's people and where there is a loving relationship with the pastor, there's this simple sense: "God Is With Us." And that is an attracting, powerful force for Christ's mission in the world. I want to stay, to "schmooze," to inhabit the air you breathe. I'm the same as any newcomer, any visitor, at those times.

Relationships 'R Us. Lutherans can relate because we have been related to. We can serve because we've BEEN served by Jesus, who gave His life as a ransom for us. The horizontal action plane of Divine love is that it extends downward to us, and is our eternal blessing and destiny – God faces us: "May the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace." That's God's parting word every single Sunday – God smiles on us!

I want to encourage that palpable, tangible love in all of our congregations as the primary force of grace in the flesh and blood of real people transforming lives. To me, that's not a burden. It's a natural response, a spiritual version of the autonomic nervous system. It's just the way we are. Because God has loved us first. Because God so loves the world. Because the mystery of Christ in us is our hope of glory.

When you read the Engaged and Engaging stories in our magazine, you can relate. God's love never leaves us to ourselves. It covers us, protects us and sends us forth "with God's blessing" to do and say to our world, "God is With Us." I'm very proud of the Atlantic District's firm mission intent. I'm proud that we now have the full-time commitment of Mission Executive Rev. Johnson Rethinasamy to coordinate the work of our missionaries. Cover them with prayer, support them with your offerings, and continue to BE the mission of God. Blessings!

Rev. Dr. David H. Benke
President of the Atlantic District-LCMS



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Rev. Sung Woo Leem and his wife Sarah pose with President Benke (l) and Synod President, the Rev. Dr. Gerald Kieschnick, after his installation as Korean Mosaic Pastor at St. Peter's, Brooklyn, October 2009.

A Taste of Heaven on Earth

By Rev. Sung Woo Leem, Korean Mosaic Pastor, St. Peter's, Brooklyn

The District's Mosaic Missionaries reach out to people of all backgrounds so that they may live as one in the unity of the Holy Spirit. I was called by St. Peter's, Brooklyn, to be the Korean Mosaic Missionary for Brooklyn, Queens and Long Island. While I serve as pastor at St. Peter's, my special mission is to reach out to the Korean population in those communities and to bring adults and families to the sanctuaries and services of our District churches.

There are Korean, Bengali, Peruvian, Puerto Rican, Dominican, Guyanese, Costa Rican, Barbadian, Trinidadian, Jamaican, Greek, Ecuadorian and Mexican Lutherans at St. Peter's worshipping in one sanctuary with congregation members of European-American descent—often at the at the same time! Is that not the Mosaic pattern of heaven, where many will come from East and West to sit together at the banquet table? And is that not truly the Mosaic mission, to spread the Gospel of Jesus and create a small taste of heaven on earth?

At The LIFE in Old Westbury, too, there is a lot to be excited about for the Mosaic ministry. A new congregation is forming under the leadership of Vicar Justin Vetrano with the help of the congregation of Resurrection, Garden City. Vicar Vetrano and I encourage people to develop relationships. We offer Bible study and prayer groups to get people together and lead them to attend worship services.

God has blessed the Mosaic mission richly. Many people are coming together for the first time to hear of Jesus and to realize the global pattern of salvation. May Jesus be Lord in every heart!



Pastor Adam Wiegand at St. Paul's, Saratoga Springs, leads a Couple's Bible Study

Plant a Seed: An open letter to Atlantic District pastors, vicars and deacons

By Don Streed, Administrator of SonRise Lutheran Ministries, Pottersville

This is a story of actual events, which are still unfolding and which exemplify an important purpose of SonRise and the role it can provide in your ministry.

In October of 2009, SonRise sponsored a marriage retreat and was hoping for a packed house of overnight and day guests. However, only five couples registered, and one of them could only stay for part of the retreat. We considered cancelling, but decided to see what would transpire. The five couples all reported that they enjoyed the retreat, but "wished there was more."

Three months passed. Two of the couples followed up on the "more." They approached Pastor Adam Wiegand at St. Paul's, Saratoga Springs, and asked if he would lead a Couple's Bible Study. They decided to offer a weekly study on Friday nights for six weeks starting in January. The two couples began to promote the event.

Pastor Wiegand had stated that he would consider it a success if five or six couples attended. Needless to say, he was very surprised to find over 22 couples at the first Bible Study. A success many times over! But the story is still unfolding. In the fifth week the count was up to 30 couples.

So what outreach ministry has God placed in your heart? Transforming congregations? Human care? Teens? Family enrichment? Personal finances? The environment?

SonRise will work with you to find the right spot in the calendar, assist with program details, and launch publicity to spread the word of your ministry. Give us a call at 518-494-2620.

Plant a seed and see what transpires.

SAVE THE DATE



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Would Your Church Like To Buy A Table?

Contact Carol Mittelstaedt at (914) 337-5700 X6
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The Atlantic District's Haitian Earthquake Relief efforts are being coordinated by President David H. Benke with the participation of (left to right) the Rev. Joshua Hollmann, Rev. Marvin Griffin, Mrs. Judy Benke, Mr. Duory Marin, Rev. Derek Lecakes and Mr. Richard Lomnitzer

Disaster Relief Initiatives: Investing in Programs for the Long Term

By Judith Benke, Chair, Atlantic District Task Force on Health and Human Care

It has been heartwarming to see the outpouring of support for those in dire need beginning with donations for Tsumani victims in 2004, and then in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Now our hearts and resources are responding to the earthquake victims and survivors in Haiti. Our goal with disaster relief has been, and remains, to provide ongoing assistance for sustaining the victims of disasters at home and around the world for the long term.

After the Tsunami, Rev. Johnson Rethinasamy and Janet George of the subcommittee on South Asian Disaster Relief overcame international barriers to create long-term projects in South Asia. Today, we continue supporting facilities in Thanjavur and Pattukotai, India, to assist children whose families were affected by the Tsunami. Additionally, SADR extended its support in the region with a 2009 grant of \$1,000 to the National Association of Asian Indian Christians for the NIRAS Home for Children in Kanyakumari, India.

What we have done with South Asian Disaster Relief is what we can do for Haiti going into the future. Our intention is to serve as good stewards of the resources entrusted to us from District congregations for use in Haiti. As international relief organizations, including our LCMS World Relief and Lutheran World Relief, have sprung into action, we know that Lutheran communities in the Atlantic District have members whose families and friends have been affected. As we did in the aftermath of the Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina, the District is using contacts in the Haitian Lutheran community to shape a plan for long-term action under the guidance of Disaster Coordinator Rev. Derek Lecakes. Our focus will be to support that which will help alleviate the suffering of the Haitian people now, and sustain them as they work to rebuild their country.



Rafiq Udin

A New Baptism

By the Rev. James Roy, Bengali Mission, Queens

On Christmas day of 2008, Jharna Roy, one of my parishioners at Ozone Park Bengali Church, introduced me to Rafiq Uddin. As time passed, we became close and one day I talked to him about "Who can take us to heaven?" I used the example of three bus drivers, waiting for passengers. Someone wishing to go to Niagara Falls knows that only one of the drivers makes the trip regularly. Then I asked Rafiq, which driver he thought the traveler would choose? Without hesitation, he replied, "The driver who makes the trip regularly." I shared that it was the same with heaven. If Jesus, Krishna or Mohamed are the bus drivers, who would be the best to take us there? Which one knows the way? Neither Krishna nor Mohammed claimed to be from heaven; but Jesus said, "I come from heaven." After this I asked Rafiq, who is to be trusted to take us safely to heaven? He at once replied, "Isa Asalam" (Jesus Christ). So I asked him if he was willing to continue with bible study. He agreed and began to pray with me and I continued to catechize him. He attended both the church services and my catechism classes for a year. He was baptized on the day of the transfiguration of our Lord, Feb 14th, 2010. All Praise be to our Mighty God.

SADR Grant Funds Mission in South East Asia

In November 2009, SADR made a grant of \$1,000 to the LCMS World Mission for the ministry of Rev. Dr. Funghatou Lo, who works to bring Lutheran teachings to un-pastored Christians, many of whom live under repressive governments in Cambodia, Indonesia and Northern Thailand. Rev. Lo also works with Hong Kong-based Concordia Welfare and Education Foundation (CWEF) to meet people's basic needs for housing, economic development, social welfare and education. His ministry is supported by his wife, Kalia, who has a master's degree in school and community health education.

Thank You to All Who Contributed in 2009 to the Mission Society

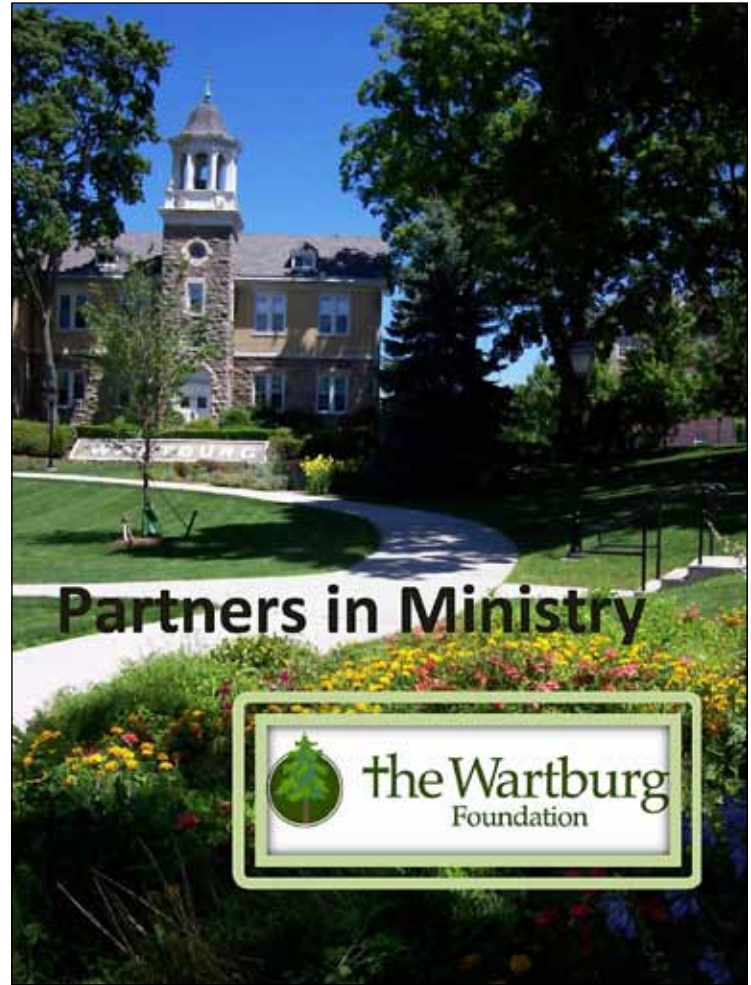
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The Hope of the World

By Vicar Patrick Mohan Singh, Trinity, Schenectady

In Schenectady in upstate New York, Trinity Lutheran Church's Mission Congregation continues to share the good news that Jesus Christ is the hope of the world.

One young man, Jonathan Andino relocated from Pennsylvania to Schenectady with his family. He was attending the Schenectady High School when he accepted an invitation to visit the Youth Ablaze gathering one Sunday afternoon. He heard about Jesus Christ and His love for human kind and today Jonathan is active in this congregation and a candidate for baptism.

"I am happy and blessed to worship the Lord with the people at Trinity Lutheran Church," says Jonathan. "I look forward each time there is an opportunity to be among God's people and I hope to continue to be part of this congregation for a long time."

Jonathan now attends Schenectady Community College. We pray for him to be an ambassador for Christ so that through his life many will come to hear the good news of salvation.

With people like Jonathan and others coming to the faith, our mission congregation is growing. We have seen growth not only in Sunday morning worship, but also at Tuesday night prayer meetings and Youth Ablaze gatherings on Sunday afternoons. We covet your prayers as we reach out to youth in particular.



The children in a session with Mr. Ronald S. Drews, president and CEO of Lutheran Social Services of New York, with Denise Patrick, Fatu Massalle (in black), director of the Christ Assembly Children's Ministry, and me, in pastoral attire,

Bringing Christ to Our Neighbors

By The Reverend Philip S. Saywrayne, AIM Mission Facilitator

2009 was a painful year for people throughout the world as they experienced a massive "global recession." People in our own communities were ill at ease. Businesses shut down leaving many without the jobs that were necessary to support their families. Our African immigrant communities were especially affected by an exodus of people relocating with a hope of finding jobs. If they were unsuccessful in finding employment, they often had to return to where they had lived before. The effects of the recession, therefore, challenged AIM's plan to focus on the development of new Bible study groups.

But to God be the glory! In the midst of all these difficult situations, AIM remained committed to praying for and with everyone, to developing new missions and addressing the physical, spiritual and emotional needs of the people. We helped to reunite families. We made immigration and job referrals. All the while we encouraged people—Christians as well as the unreached and uncommitted—to remain faithful to Christ, to trust in God and attend church services.

In the midst of all these challenges the ministry adopted a holistic evangelical mission strategy, which we called "Bringing Christ to our neighbors." Beginning in Staten Island and extending to Brooklyn, Queens, Yonkers, Manhattan and Long Island, we knocked on doors and visited recreation areas, offering information about free food, clothing and counseling. We rode public transportation and witnessed to other riders and invited each of them to visit a nearby Lutheran Church. At Christ Assembly Lutheran Church on Staten Island we decided to focus on children and young people by creating a department for children's services. It has been blessed to serve over 90 kids!

Today, the children's ministry at Christ Assembly is strong and growing and the parents of the children continue to attend church services.

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Getting to Know the Kingdom of God

By Jessica Ding, member of the Chinese Congregation, Our Saviour Lutheran Church, Rego Park

In 2009 I had a wonderful opportunity to come to the Big Apple for a five-month project at the Metropolitan Museum of Art working with top-notch artists to frame and restore Chinese paintings and calligraphies. What a wonderful experience gaining knowledge at work and getting to know this fascinating city! In time I met new friends and visited tourist spots. Most of the time, however, I was alone and sometimes I felt lonely.

After the New Year, I started attending Chinese worship service each Sunday at Our Savior Lutheran Church in Rego Park, taking in the Word and getting to know the brothers and sisters who are there. After six weeks of actively attending each church activity, I began to understand the Word better, and could feel that I had become a different person. I appreciated things more and could see things from a different perspective. I used to pray to God for what I needed. Now when I pray, I praise the Lord and thank Him for allowing me to feel content and to face challenges.

Our Lord Jesus watches over us Christians and gives us strength, and abundant life. His grace has been bestowed upon me and I am preparing for baptism. God has opened my spiritual eyes and touched my heart to know that accepting Him as my personal savior is the only way for me.

I made a big detour in my life by coming to New York. God led me to Sunday night worship and to know many spiritual partners. Now God is with me all the time.



Jessica Ding (center) with Pastor Frank Wang (rear, 2nd left) and members of the Chinese congregation at Our Saviour, Rego Park

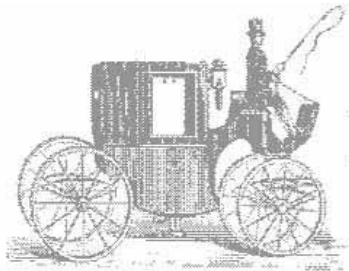
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Finding Support in a Community of Faith

By James Lalljie, Caribbean Church Missionary, Chapel of the Redeemer, Queens

The 20 women of Bethany Mission, who meet in the Chapel of the Redeemer in Queens, understand that everyone goes through the same things. By helping each other and bearing one another's burdens they have been able to find the assistance and support they need within their community of faith.

When Shelly lost her job, she trained in another skill area, got connected and landed a new job, bam! Then Pam lost her job. Shelly took her to the same training, used her connections, and Pam landed a job, too. When Veera needed an apartment, Shelly was on the move again. She knew someone who needed a tenant and now Veera and her family are in their new home. So when newcomer Jillian was unable to work, I introduced her to the ladies. These days Jillian is back on her job and testified that she has rediscovered her faith because of the encouragement and prayers of the ladies of her church.

Now, as the Women's Support Fellowship, they meet every fortnight to share their situations, pray for and encourage each other, study the Bible and develop talents they can use for the work and mission of the church.

This story of women giving and taking from each other and helping to solve one another's problems is a story of liberation from self-centeredness and salvation from indifference toward the plight of others. It's a story of emulating our Savior, who did not think of Himself, but out of concern for us sinners, endured punishment as our substitute. This is a story of faith in action, which is called love.

Opportunity is Knocking

By Michael Jakob, President of Immanuel, Whitestone

Immanuel Lutheran Church is much like many of the churches in the Atlantic District. We are over 100 years old, originally a German-based congregation, and our strongest years were the 1960's and 70's. In recent years we have been challenged by declining membership.

While the congregation struggled to find direction, it remained open to supporting the work of the Atlantic District Mission Society and provided housing to a missionary from India, who was working at a church in Nassau County. This decision turned out to be a blessing for Immanuel and the missionary, Rev. E. Johnson Rethinasamy, who later became our pastor.

Pastor Rethinasamy, in discussion with the Parish Planning Committee, formed a simple plan to make Immanuel open to the community. At first, many of our members found this uncomfortable. However, we soon realized that we would need to get accustomed to the varied ethnicity of the potential new members living in our community.

With a plan in place, we began to move to a mosaic model. Pastor Rethinasamy not only continued to increase membership in the Indian Tamil group, but sought out other leaders to work within the mosaic model that Immanuel was developing. We focused on building up leaders to reach out to people of many different ethnicities with the Gospel message.

Attendance has increased significantly and today we provide worship services and Bible study in 5 languages, at times and places that are convenient for the people we serve. We feel that we are on the right track for the first time in many years. God has blessed us and instilled in us a sense that we can reach out to our community, share the Gospel, and be successful at bringing new people to know the Grace of God.

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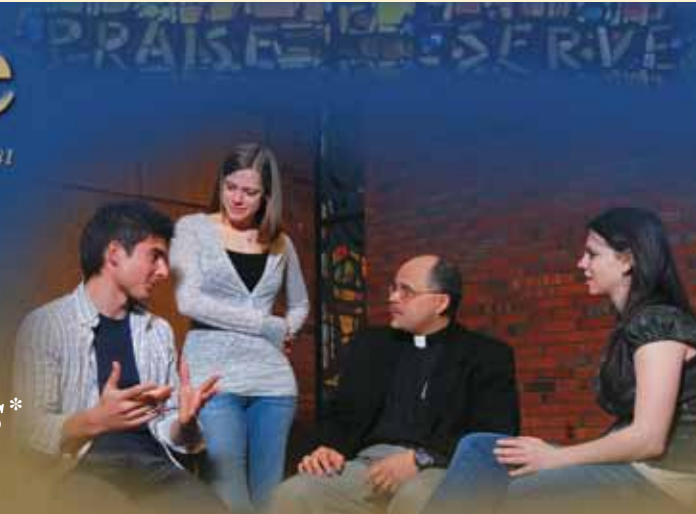
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