

# Servant event shows God's love to local and global community

St. James Lutheran Church, Burnsville, Minn.

**S**even hundred sixty-nine service hours, 1,300 pounds of food, 32 birthday bags, 49 blankets, 750 sandwiches, 120 cards for soldiers and 1,200 bags of groceries.

And that's just a partial list.

On Oct. 4 after Sunday morning worship, parishioners remained in the pews at St. James Lutheran Church in Burnsville, Minn., a little longer than usual. They were gathered for a sending service that would mark the beginning of their congregation's first "God's Work, Our Hands Servant Event," an intentional day of service to their local and global communities.

Some 255 people—more than half of the congregation's regular Sunday worship attendance—marched into the sanctuary to the hymn "Here I Am, Lord." The crowd, all wearing blue T-shirts to make them recognizable in the community, gathered for a sending service where volunteers were blessed and sent into the community to work on nearly 20 service projects before returning for a time of prayer and reflection and a meal.

"It was fun to be church," said Walt Lichtenberger, pastor of St. James, discussing the energy surrounding the servant event.

St. James' projects ministered to God's children near and far. The work ranged from sending food to alleviate the affects of famine in Tanzania to watching a fellow parishioner's children so the parent could participate in another project.

A few service projects benefited local food shelves, providing handmade quilts, and collecting and delivering produce from farmers at the St. Paul farmers' market. Members also filled bags for Feed My Starving Children and made sandwiches for a local nonprofit to distribute to homeless people on the streets of Minneapolis.

Some projects focused on taking care of the environment by cleaning up parks and highways and by painting little fish next to sewer drains as a reminder that they connect with nearby lakes.



**Lori Johnson, Jesse Stuhr Kurvers and Alan Law packed sandwiches for Project 363, a Twin Cities nonprofit. Law distributes the sandwiches and water bottles to homeless shelters and people on the streets of Minneapolis. St. James made enough sandwiches—750 total—for one of Law's daily routes.**

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# Crossing Bridges supports local outreach and global mission

**A**nother \$60,000 for Bridges to Ending Poverty and \$15,000 for Bridges to Iringa was authorized January 2010 to strengthen ministries in the Saint Paul Area Synod and mission abroad with our partner synod in Tanzania.

### Bridges to Ending Poverty

Twelve grants with funding requests totaling \$94,175 were submitted for consideration for Crossing Bridges grants. Here's a look at the ministries that were recommended and later approved to receive grants that totaled \$60,000:

• **Weaving Communities Together: \$1,125**

The grant will expand collaboration between the Alley Shoppe and the Minnesota Literacy Council to extend job skill-training for adult students that draws upon the traditional weaving art of the Karen community.

• **Daily Work: \$7,000**

The grant sustains service, including support for the executive director, a volunteer from Lutheran Volunteer Corps, college social work interns, and interns from Twin Cities RISE! Daily Work anticipates serving 100 new clients in 2010.

• **Eagan Resource Center: Garden to Table: \$4,825**

The grant allows the resource center to expand food shelf offerings of fresh produce during the summer months by establishing two gardens on its property. One is a community garden to support the fresh produce demand and the other private plots that will be provided to a family in need and a volunteer mentor from the faith community.



• **Love Grows Here Wellness Center: \$10,500**

The grant will address primary health and wellness needs of the long-term homeless and the poor. The center provides meals, blood pressure checks and foot care. It's served by community partners that include Metropolitan State University; the Police Homeless Outreach Project; the Dayton's Bluff Block Nurse Program; Light of the World Lutheran, Farmington, Minn.; and Christ Lutheran, Lake Elmo, Minn.

• **Young Adults' Director: \$5,850**

The grant provides funding assistance for a part-time young adults' director to build relationships, plan Bible study and coordinate fellowship for young adults in the congregation and community.

• **Humble Walk Summer Homework: \$4,900**

The grant launches home repair in the neighborhood around Humble Walk Lutheran, St. Paul, Minn., and builds relationships with neighbors, based on a successful model developed by Peace Lutheran, Lauderdale, Minn.

• **Ministry for Chinese and Asian Women: \$4,500**

The grant addresses the needs of women with limited English-speaking skills who live in poverty or are addressing family crises through



**A Karen woman works on a sewing machine at the Alley Shoppe, a ministry of Arlington Hills Lutheran Church, St. Paul, Minn. The Crossing Bridges grant will expand job skill-training .**

counseling, visitation, resource support and assisting with language skills.

• **Ministry for Low Income Chinese, Korean and Philippine Immigrants: \$4,500**

The grant provides ministry to immigrant restaurant workers, unemployed young adults, and college and high-school students without homes or transportation.

• **Healthy Homes, Healthy Community: \$6,800**

The grant will fund expansion of an existing program that's become a biannual, weekend effort of Peace Lutheran, Lauderdale, Minn. Local businesses and neighborhood volunteers repair homes where owners are unable to do so because of limited income. The program strengthens

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Other projects were simply meant to be random acts of kindness, like bagging groceries at Cub Foods or offering handyman services to people living in neighborhood homes.

## **A stewardship idea grows**

The servant event had its genesis in a Google search. Last year Kim Segar, a member of the St. James stewardship committee, was brainstorming new stewardship initiatives to promote sharing gifts beyond just financial resources. Segar went online to read about what other churches were doing.

When she brought the idea of a day of service to the stewardship committee, they were enthusiastic. So Segar helped form a separate planning team commissioned to spearhead the day of service. It was a diverse team made up of St. James members who usually aren't as involved or as visible in the congregation.

The planning team defined goals for the servant event, outlined values the day should embody and laid out a specific plan of action.

However, it wasn't long before the team began to realize the significant obstacles they faced.

"For one thing, we realized that we had no budget," said Sandy Thibault, a member of Saint James on the servant event planning team. The financial expenses seemed daunting: supplies for 750 sandwiches, gifts for birthday bags, quilting supplies, T-shirts for volunteers and more.

Going to Feed My Starving Children was a big expense because the organization is typically closed on Sundays and had to open especially for the St. James group, meaning supplies used that day weren't in the organization's budget. So the congre-

gation became responsible for a day's worth of costs.

"God found a way," Thibault said. The congregation received donations, held a few fundraisers and received some money from its stewardship committee.

The set-up for nearly 20 service projects also presented its share of challenges. As with Feed My Starving Children, many of the nonprofits with which the team wished to partner don't operate on Sundays.

"We thought it was important to keep the service projects on the same day," said Lori Johnson, a member of St. James on the servant event planning team. "Having everyone work on their projects simultaneously added to the enthusiasm and created a sense of unity."

Holding all of the events on the same day also allowed participants to share their experiences with the whole group while memories were still fresh.

## **Lessons learned**

Pete Segar, member of St. James, traveled with a group that collected 1,300 pounds of produce from farmers at the St. Paul farmers' market and delivered the produce to local food shelves.

"I was impressed [by] how generous these people were, especially given that many of them are probably struggling to stay afloat," Segar said.

Many of the farmers shared stories of times they have received help from food shelves, he added. They know firsthand what an important service food shelves provide and what a blessing fresh produce is to the families who use them, he said.

"The farmers showed me the power of community at work," Segar said. "I feel blessed to have been a part of the servant event, but I am humbled because we only worked

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Sandy Thibault, servant event planning team

one day."

Some participants left with greater self-worth. One young woman who participated in the servant event later expressed her gratitude to the planning team. The woman, who wishes to remain anonymous, shared her struggles with an eating disorder.

"It has been a very difficult journey for me," she said. "I loved being able to succeed in making others happy, especially when it seems like I have been failing for so long."

## **Showing love through service**

Done separately, these service projects are positive experiences that benefit others and leave those who are serving with a sense of fulfillment. Done simultaneously, the experience was overwhelming for some.

"I was moved to tears by our congregation's response," Thibault said. "St. James has always been outreach-minded and community-minded, and the servant event built awareness of the needs in our community. ... It brought St. James members together while allowing us to show others love through service." □

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housing stock in the community, improves the health and safety of homeowners and builds relationships with the church.

• **Intentional Ministry among Youth and Family Who Live in Poverty: \$10,000.** The grant supports the continuation of work with at-risk youth, young adults and families through leadership development, mentoring and relationships with other adults.

### Bridges to Iringa

The Saint Paul Area Synod executive committee authorized \$15,000 in Crossing Bridges funds to be directed to support continued efforts in Iringa:

- Agricultural Institute: \$5,000.
- Ilula Health Center: \$5,000.
- Theological scholarships at Tumaini University-Iringa: \$5,000 (pictures of the students below and more about Tumaini University to the right).



Mary Kakili

**Theology students at Tumaini University-Iringa, Tanzania received Crossing Bridges scholarships.**



Nalogwa Ibrahimu



Aid Kasenegala



Peweni Kikoti



Gesto Luhanda

## Equipping leaders grows from vision into action

Tumaini University-Iringa, Tanzania

When he was elected bishop of the Iringa Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania in 1987, O.W. Mdegella had a vision for an institution of higher learning in southern Tanzania. In 1993, he shared that vision with Arne and Mary Blomquist, members of Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran in Shoreview, Minn. Under their leadership, the first shovelful of dirt was turned on a 32-acre site. The college, then called Lutheran College-Iringa, enabled the diocese to educate and train students for pastoral ministry in a fast-growing church. The first class in January 1994 involved 30 theological students and one multipurpose building. In 16 years, the progress is truly significant. Here is an overview of the university today:

- 3,000 students (55 percent men and 45 percent women).
- 12 areas of undergraduate study, five areas of postgraduate study.
- 200 staff, including 98 full-time and eight part-time faculty, plus a few volunteers that teach each semester.
- A \$6 million dollar budget for 2010, all funded by student tuition (no government or outside funds other than scholarships).
- 28 buildings, all but four funded through donations from the Saint Paul Area Synod and other church organizations or individuals.
- Total cost per year of \$2,500 to \$3,000 for all programs except the theology program, which has a cost of \$2,200 per year.
- 112 students in the theology program.
- 28 students in the bachelor of divinity program (four years of study, one year of internship), 63 in the diploma of theology program (three years of study, one year of internship), and 21 in the wandering shepherd program (two years of study, return to pastoralist groups).
- 61 theology scholarships provided by congregations or individuals in the Saint Paul Area Synod.
- 10 diploma of theology scholarships funded by Crossing Bridges gifts from members and congregations of the Saint Paul Area Synod.

The highest priority of the Iringa Diocese's bishop and leadership is to provide scholarships for theology students. Congregations and individuals in the Saint Paul Area Synod can provide scholarships in the following ways:

- \$2,200 per year for four years of academic study provides a scholarship for a bachelor of divinity student.
- \$800 per year for three years of academic study provides a scholarship for a diploma in theology student.
- \$2,100 per year for two years of academic study provides a scholarship for a wandering shepherd student.

Due to challenging academic standards at Tumaini University-Iringa, graduates have a high degree of success in securing a job upon graduation.

*Thank you to all in the Saint Paul Area Synod who have provided support for this university!*