

New Urban-based Mission Society in Milwaukee

Thursday, December 13, 2007

Cities have become the next great “mission field.” No longer does the church need to look any farther than across the street to find harvests waiting. The fields are ripe and time is running out!

In answer to this mission call, the South Wisconsin District in partnership with the Metro Milwaukee Lutheran Mission Society (MMLMS) has made it a priority to bring Jesus back into the city in a powerful and dynamic manner.

Utilizing the resources of both organizations, the MMLMS will provide a more adaptable organizational structure that will provide three main functions for the District’s inner city missions and ministries: 1) administrative accountability and generation of funding; 2) reducing redundancy in both form and function of ministry; and 3) a flexible system for feedback and evaluation of its programs. The MMLMS is dedicated to working with the social agencies, LCMS recognized service organizations (RSOs), and the 27 churches of urban Milwaukee. The goal is to resource and equip people in the city so that in both Word and deed they might provide a bolder witness to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus.

Part of this plan involves inner city congregations, mercy ministries and our suburban congregations. The District has made it a goal to create vibrant and progressive relationships between urban and suburban congregations. This vision is unfolding as congregations with needs in the city are matched to suburban congregations with corresponding abilities to help where needed.

Two New Urban Projects Surface

As the SWD and the new MMLMS work together in their unique and separate roles, several SWD ministries are beginning to see how the two arms can work together. Two new SWD urban projects have emerged that will be funded and administered through the MMLMS:

1. Ex-offender ministry – House of Correction

Rev. Gary Ruckman, chaplain at the House of Correction (HOC) located in Franklin, has developed two programs that will assist prisoners leaving Milwaukee’s correctional facilities to establish themselves in society. The first program is called "Basic Backpack." Of the 24,000 prison inmates who go through the HOC on a yearly basis, approximately 75 percent of them will be reincarcerated within the next two years because of the choices that they make once they are released. To help them to be more successful, each inmate upon release will be offered a backpack containing up-to-date information on a variety of resources including shelters, meal programs, health care, food pantries, employment and job readiness training, advocacy and clothing resources. It will also contain necessities such as a Milwaukee city map, food vouchers, a Bible, a basic hygiene kit, nutritional food, several bus tickets, a phone card and a small portfolio with

notepad and pen. It is hoped that with these backpacks, ex-offenders will get the positive help they need to keep them from reverting back to their old habits and friends.

The second program is called "New Life Supportive Care Network." This is the development of a supportive network of churches and agencies that will open its arms to the ex-offenders and their families. They will help newly released inmates deal with the issues they are facing as they look to incorporate themselves back into the community. A key to their successful self-sufficiency is a supportive group that understands where they have been and the struggles they are facing.

2. African immigrant ministry

There are more than 12,000 African immigrants living in Milwaukee, and the numbers continue to increase. Approximately 75 percent of them are Muslim, many of whom are sponsored by various organizations. These immigrants face many challenges adjusting to the American way of life. This is further complicated by those who do not have the financial means to provide for themselves and their families, an estimated 10 percent of those immigrants coming to Milwaukee. One challenge is the issue of meeting the specific diet and nutritional needs of these immigrants.

Rev. Chris Ikanih and the District's African immigrant ministry are trying to help those living in poverty who are unable to get this needed food and supplements. Working with volunteers and Gospel, Milwaukee, they have created a food pantry to help those individuals and families, providing a bimonthly drop off of foodstuffs and supplements along with emergency baskets as needed. With their outreach they have also begun to develop relationships that go beyond food needs—to reach them with spiritual support and teach them about their Savior, Jesus Christ. This need in Milwaukee is so great that two other locations serving African immigrants at Benediction and Hope also want to be part of this specialized food pantry. The potential scope of this ministry can reach 300 families. Out of this great need was born the idea of a coordinated effort among the three churches under the name African immigrant food pantry program. This too, will be administered and funds-assisted by the MMLMS.

Formalized Structure to be Put in Place

In order to accomplish these goals and projects effectively through the new MMLMS, there is a need for strong leadership development and management skills. The board of directors is looking for two individuals who will fill the role of an executive director and a development director. These are contract based part-time (20 hours a week) positions which will eventually move to 40 hours weekly. The qualified candidates must have the ability to utilize and foster entrepreneurial thinking, have great flexibility in both scheduling and time management, coupled with an intense passion for inner city ministry.

Interested candidates may send a resume and cover letter to Rev. Mark Wangerin, chairman, board of directors, Metro Milwaukee Lutheran Mission Society, c/o Mt. Olive Lutheran Church, 5327 W Washington Blvd., Milwaukee, WI 53208-1798, or to mail@mmlms.org. No phone calls please. The closing date for submitting resumes is Jan. 15, 2008.