

## OUTREACH

# Mission of the Month

## Mission Congregation Welcome Place

By Rev. Doug Kallesen, Florida-Georgia District Executive of Outreach

What is it like to worship in a mission congregation? I would like to take you, via this article, to visit and experience worshipping in a mission congregation. You won't see a steeple or hear a pipe organ, but you will find excitement, focus on mission and outreach and a genuine warmth that embraces you and welcomes you in as family.

On this visit we will meet Pastor Jim and Liisa Tino and their children: Sonrisa, Gabriela, Veronica and

Benjamin. The Tinos speak fluent Spanish from their time in South America when Pastor Tino served as LCMS Area Director of Missions.

This month we will visit New Life Lutheran Church-Miramar, FL, near Fort Lauderdale. Jim is the second pastor, following Rev. Paul Hasselbring who founded the congregation in 2000 as a daughter congregation of Holy Cross-North Miami.

I recently enjoyed worshipping at New Life Lutheran Church which holds

Sunday worship services, much as I did in one of my mission starts, at a bank building, Eastern Financial Credit Union. New Life rents two rooms for only \$500 per month; chairs, tables and a podium are included as is a helpful, friendly doorman. The rent money is donated, by the bank, back to the community through United Way so this is a win for everyone!

As I walked from the bank parking lot I was greeted by Pastor Tino and his family. Signs directed visitors to the

worship area, which is set up by a core of volunteers using stacking chairs, banners and a portable altar/folding table along with paraments. The meeting rooms are transformed into a sanctuary weekly by these volunteers.

Music, lead by Liisa Tino, filled the room a few minutes before the service began. A few feet away Pastor Tino robed up while talking with one of the leaders. Laughter, hugs and bulletins were all being passed out as people began to flow in. The service itself was a rare blend of contemporary and traditional that was very easy to follow. The hymnody was a blend of both contemporary and traditional played on a Yamaha portable keyboard. Liisa would later come forward and lead, with Pastor Jim, a new song played on a ukulele. The liturgy was traditional and included the Nicene Creed, three scripture readings, Lord's Prayer and an instructional positive communion statement. You might say the service was formally informal. Pastor Tino's message on being "Fishers of Men," put you in the boat.

Following worship the youth were selling home baked goods to raise funds for the five youth this tiny congregation was sending to the District Youth Gathering. I was glad to also attend Bible class, an interesting study on the catechism. I asked Pastor Tino about his class and he indicated the great need to ground people in the basics of Christianity. He found this to be the most practical way to address his members' every day concerns about life and faith.

New Life recently went through leadership training for officers, readers and altar guild. Their goal is to involve everyone in a meaningful way in the ministry of the congregation. The congregation has also held several outreach events including:

1. Marriage Enrichment course for community (offered through canvassing)
2. Friendship Sunday
3. Reformation picnic
4. Assimilation/follow up
5. Canvass 300 homes
6. Bi-lingual Christmas service
7. Unofficial Friendship Sunday
8. Web page design —  
newlifelcms.teamministry.net

New Life worships around 40 and has 55 members, has nearly 5 acres of land for an advance site and will be selling a portion off in the near future. Plans are to build a simple multi-purpose facility in the near future.

I hope that you have enjoyed this brief visit to one of our 50-plus missions inside the Florida-Georgia District. Keep our missionaries in your prayers. □

## Reaching Out and Touching Within

*Editor's note: This feature was written by Diana Guest and Judy Carter, members of Light of the Glades-Fort Myers, FL, in direct response to a report in the November/December 2004 issue of Lutheran LIFE regarding dwindling membership in the LCMS.*

The November/December issue of *Lutheran Life* reported that the confirmed membership of LCMS congregations continues to dwindle to a new all-time low of 1,894,822 people as of 2003. Up until 1970, the LCMS had seen significant growth. So what is really going on and what are we going to do about it?

Light of the Glades, a new LCMS church plant in Fort Myers, is dedicated to the outreach of the unchurched. Using *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century* by Aubrey Malphurs as a guide, Light of the Glades feels strongly committed to implement new strategies for church growth.

As noted in this book, going to church was part of the American culture in the 1940s and 1950s. Churches did not have to reach out to the community because people naturally came into them. However, this is no longer true. Now we have a culture of Baby Boomers and Generation X-ers, many of whom are not used to going to church at all. This represents a second generation of unchurched people. They feel that the church is no longer culturally relevant.

Moreover, only 15% percent of American churches are really growing. Some 14% attribute growth based on transfer of membership, as opposed to 1% of American churches who base growth on actual conversion. Florida is no exception. How many churches down here experience a "false" type of growth based on transfer of membership? Meanwhile, so many northern churches are thinning out. Florida may be misled that the church is really growing, but as the senior population from the 1940s and 1950s slowly pass on,

this state could potentially see a decline as well.

Light of the Glades has been worshipping in a daycare center for just over a year. In that time, this congregation has reached out to the community in non-traditional ways. For example, we participated in the local community's Centennial celebrations. We attracted literally hundreds of kids to dip candles the old-fashioned way, offering an opportunity to explain how Jesus is the One True Light. Moreover, Light of the Glades celebrated Jesus' birth on Christmas Day right on the beach. This service was so special because beach-goers that day could see and hear the true meaning of Christmas.

More recently, Light of the Glades has participated in a couple of local motorcycle events. The church offered a food booth, games, and a dunk tank, again mingling with everyone who came. A few weeks later, they offered a free breakfast at a motorcycle shop as part of a bikers' gathering/ride.



Light of the Glades Pastor Steve Graebner (on the left in the dark shirt) and members enjoyed dipping candles the "old-fashioned way" while interacting with community members about the "real Light of the world."