

OUTREACH

Christ-Perry Reflects Ablaze Spirit with Pursuit of Mission



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Director of Outreach

As you read this mission story you will see a congregation in pursuit of God's mission for them. I hope that you will enjoy seeing the hand of God in the life of this young mission.

Pastor Steven Schave is a young second-career pastor who put his marketing background to use while connecting to Georgia's Perry community. The core group of Christ Lutheran Church in 2005 held interest group meetings at Priesters Restaurant, inviting area residents to come and discuss the need to start a Lutheran congregation.

From there the congregation moved to the local funeral home, worshipping in the 40s with some glimpses at 100-plus on Easter. Leadership realized that some people were not open to worshipping at a funeral home, so another location was sought.

God provided a new location in the nearby Kathleen at the Matt Arthur Elementary School, which served 800 families and a lot of children in a growing area. Family ministry seemed to be the direction the congregation should go. Because school policy allows a congregation to stay for no longer than one year, Christ leaders began to look for a new place to worship.

Pastor Schave recalls, "My leaders were diligently looking for a place to worship with 100 or more people that also had office space and Sunday School rooms. There are not a lot of those kinds of places."

With his leaders became frustrated by this situation, Schave reminded them, "Have no fears guys; I know God has a place for us."

That night a trustee called and said he had found a building in downtown Perry that would need some tender loving care but he thought it might work. (From my vantage point this is a God incident not a coincidence! God does answer prayers and in a mission I always tell our planters, "You also get to see His finger prints!")

The new facility was a vacated building between Carroll and Commerce Streets that had been used by the State Police and other community agencies. Carroll Street is booming with renovations, an internet café, strip mall and "quaint" shops. On the other side of the building is Commerce Street, which is the line of demarcation for abject poverty, gangs, drug use, homelessness and the like.

In one city block are seen both worlds: the haves and the have nots. As a church, Christ Lutheran is here to serve people on both sides of the street — quite literally.



Recently Schave, his wife Kim and Rev. Carlos Hernandez of LCMS World Relief canvassed a section of Perry including a school. One of the school officials voiced the need for the church's help to address gangs and other youth related problems.

"It is great to see God at work, wherever He places us," Schave said. "He makes us so aware of the impact we can have on our community. It's not just social ministry; we are giving a message of hope and of grace. We see the gaping hole that this community would be without us being here."

He continue, "When Thee Lord's Table [a community soup kitchen held at Christ] serves a meal, our volunteers sit down with the people, talk with them, tell them of their worth in

God's eye and pray with them. A devotion is also a part of mealtime. That makes for quite a happy meal!"

Another ministry provided by the congregation is feeding lunch to inmates who are working on the Women's Shelter in Perry.

Schave serves on the Board of Directors for the local YMCA and is chair for their community programs. He is a volunteer chaplain at the Perry Hospital. Kim is a deaconess who serves as the Director of the Crisis Pregnancy Center in Warner Robins.



Pastor Schave said in a recent sermon, "There are still lost sheep who have strayed far... Not yet invited to the table... to the good grazing pastures of the shepherd's love and forgiveness... stuck in the ravine... written off by the world and the church. Never was this more apparent to me than on Friday morning when I went to pass out flyers for Thee Lords Table.

"But do you know what I saw through Christ's eyes? I saw

precious coins that are missing, I saw the sheep that are lost. He sends us to seek the lost and to bring them to His table. He sends us into the muck and mire, reaching into the jaws to rescue, not stopping but seeking well into the night with the light of the Gospel, diligently sweeping no matter how remote the location."

Five years from now what will Christ Lutheran be like? Pastor Schave relates, "We are going to find as many ways as possible to impact our community with the love of Christ. I see us focusing on the elderly and teens. Ideally we would like to have an intergenerational outreach with a community center."

The congregation has grown in worship attendance from the low to mid 40s to the mid 80s and 90s since moving to the new location. I noted that the facility has changed not only the location of the ministry but its focus. As a congregation the members realize they are "sent to serve."

Christ Lutheran is ABLAZE with the love of Christ expressed not only in sermons but lived out in the life and actions of the congregation. They have been sent to serve and to reach their entire community, the haves and the have nots.

Christ Lutheran Church-Perry, GA, is a daughter congregation of Mount Calvary Lutheran Church-Warner Robins. Pastor Schave came as a mission track vicar in 2005 and began initial mission work in 2006. He and Kim were installed in October of 2006. □



Christ Lutheran members serve those in need at Thee Lord's Table.

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