



December 09

NEWSLETTER

The mission of the Outreach for Hope, Inc. is to provide financial support to congregation-based Word and Sacrament ministries with the poor in the Greater Milwaukee Synod - ELCA.

December 2009

Dear Friends

Did you have a good Thanksgiving? Were you well fed and surrounded by the love of family and friends? Did you get to relax and enjoy conversation, maybe play a family game, or watch a football game or two? I hope all of that was true for you, and you had time to consider the bounty of blessings that come from God.

I want to give thanks with you for all the congregations and ministries of the Greater Milwaukee Synod, and especially those working among people faced with poverty in the cities of our Synod.

I began my new role as Director of Outreach for Hope just weeks before this year's Thanksgiving, good timing for a personal Attitude of Gratitude boost. I immediately had a chance to get up close to amazing ministries in the Greater Milwaukee Synod at work

thanks to your support of Outreach for Hope.

~ **Men and women of all ages are hearing a Christian message of hope and the reassurance they are valued.**

~ **Children are welcomed into a safe and loving place.**

~ **People are fed not only with nutritious food but with the nourishment of community and fellowship.**

I'm including a story of one of those churches, St. Paul's Lutheran Church on Wisconsin Ave. in Milwaukee. It has the strength and the challenge of being an English speaking community and a Lao community. But it is one congregation, one family of faith, pastored by Donna Brown and Ajan Phetsamone.

Will you respond with a thankful heart between now and Christmas?

~ Please **GIVE THANKS** for the Outreach for Hope ministries and churches and those who serve them.

~ Please **PRAY** for the work they do that it would be a blessing and a sign of hope, especially through the challenging winter months.

~ Please make a **GENEROUS DONATION** to Outreach for Hope as it provides financial support to keep ministries to the poorest parts of Synod alive and vital.

With gratitude for you,
Rev. Jim Bickel

Director of Outreach for Hope
Greater Milwaukee Synod - ELCA



Saturday Enrichment Gathering



Pastor Phetsamone

St. Paul's Lau Community

Everyday Life in God's Big Family!

This isn't the stuff of blockbuster movies or book club novels. This is just **everyday life** of first, second, and third generation immigrants from Laos and the ministry of St. Paul's in Milwaukee, at 28th and Wisconsin Avenue.

It's been a long morning

Twenty some youth-- some Lao, some African America--have been in Worship. They've made lunch, and now they are gathering in small groups. The topic for the day is prayer. We discuss why we pray and how we pray. Prayer is not new for some of the youth. Their parents and grandparents have been turning to God for generations. But for others prayer is curiously new. The morning passes quickly and now we stand in a circle, hand in hand, being led in prayer by one of the teen Lao boys. He is thanking God for the time, the safe place, the sharing, for helping us to pray always, to not give in and give up.

It's the middle of the day

Five men without work are sitting around a TV. They each have a beer; a plate of squid is on the table; a young woman is singing and dancing on the screen. Viengsavanh has opened his home to these men who know very little English and who are currently out of work. They are discussing the stuff of life, the struggles of being American, of being fathers, of looking for work. They are asking questions because they know Viengsavanh is a Christian; he goes to church at St. Paul's; he works with Pastor Ajan Phetsamone. They know that Pastor Phetsamone helps anyone in the Lao immigrant community. They know he'll take them to a doctor, help them with paperwork, visit them when they are sick. God's Word is spoken in an apartment, around a table, around the stuff of life.

It's another night

Pookie's mom and dad will open their home to a Lao teen or two whose families are struggling. Extended families are moving in together. Pookie's family is big. They bring these cousins to worship and youth activities at St. Paul's. Soon after her baptism in 2008, Pookie was hospitalized. Pastor Ajan Phetsamone and Pastor Donna Brown visited often. Her family of faith sent cards and prayed for Pookie and her family. When she was able to return, Pookie felt the arms of Christ, as her family of faith welcomed her back to Sunday School and Worship. God's family is bigger than we can even imagine.

Pastor Donna Brown



Saturday Gathering Musicians



God's Big Family at St. Paul's



1212 S. Layton Blvd.
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A Call to Serve with OFH

Rev. Jim Bickel



At age five I announced to my parents that I wanted to be a missionary. My decision was probably influenced by the fact that my father was a pastor and often people in non-traditional ministries came to stay with us. The Lord never called me to a foreign land, but a call did come as I left seminary to

serve in the central city of Cleveland, working with the poor, the disenfranchised, and the voiceless.

As the Assistant Director of Lutheran Housing, part of a broader agency called Lutheran Metro Ministries, I worked with people going through the devastating loss of their homes through foreclosure, people for whom Lutheran Housing provided quality rehabbed homes, and I worked with the men and women of Cleveland churches who supported the ministry through their donations and their volunteering.

In 1982 I was called to serve at Ascension Lutheran Church in Waukesha, Wisconsin. Along with the privilege of

serving with a wonderful congregation of people I continued my calling beyond the parish by involvement with Lutheran Human Relations Association, the Peace and Justice Committee of the Greater Milwaukee Synod, the Ecumenical Partnership for Peace and Justice of the WI Conference of Churches, and most recently with advocacy work through Wisdom and its affiliate, SOPHIA, in Waukesha County.

My call to serve with Outreach for Hope has taken me back into a non-traditional ministry. It's not a call to a foreign land, but it connects me with people across the spectrum of the Synod, wonderful people of God at work being the church.

My wife, Paula, teaches seventh grade for the Catholic School System in Waukesha. We have three adult daughters scattered from one coast to the other. When there is free time and great WI weather I love to be out on a bicycle.

Thank you for your support as I begin this new calling. I welcome your thoughts and your prayers.

Called into Christ's service,

Rev. Jim Bickel