

2018 Stewardship of Mission ~ devotions for leaders

May: GOOD SHEPHERD SOUTH ASIAN MINISTRY

Good Shepherd South Asian Ministry (GSSAM) was formed in October 2005 at a time of deep sadness and high hope. The deep sadness: Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Fremont, established in 1959, had declined and its ministry was no longer sustainable. The high hope: three congregations, Holy Trinity - Fremont, Christ the King - Fremont, and Holy Redeemer - Newark, were aware that their "neighborhood" was changing, with immigrants from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and Cambodia flocking to the area, and hoped that a Lutheran ministry could be established that would meaningfully connect with these newcomers.

GSSAM has been blessed with gifted professional leaders. In its first years pastoral leader Moses Penumaka conducted three services each Sunday, two in two different Indian languages and one in English. From 2008-2010 seminarian Ray Waespi served as interim leader, and from 2010 - 2017 Pastor Waespi, with specialized training in multicultural church work, served GSSAM. The congregation has grown, but financial independence remains a distant goal.

But the people of GSSAM are deeply grateful for the steady nurture and generous hospitality they have experienced over these 13 years from various partners. The Sierra Pacific Synod, and especially its Bishops and Directors of Evangelical Mission, have been dependably supportive. The ELCA has also been consistently committed to this ministry with and to immigrants, recently providing a significant mission sustainability training. A lay leader, Anand Darla, is enrolled in the TEEM program at PLTS, which prepares lay leaders for pastoral ministry in a particular setting. Finally, the long-time members of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church who remained part of the GSSAM congregation have not imposed their "ways" on the newcomers, but have provided wise guidance and unfailing support.

The GSSAM congregation has been faithful in sharing with others the generous hospitality they have received. They have developed an Easter and Christmas Basket Ministry that reaches out to needy area families, Christmas carol singing at care facilities, and an after school program that sponsors children from low income families. Two recently identified goals are homeless ministry and immigrant welcome ministry. And, while GSSAM church dinners now feature typically spicy Indian food, cooks are careful not to prepare food "too spicy" in consideration for the palates of their Anglo partners! One native of India describes the pervasive sense of welcome, support, and partnership as "Beautiful! Just beautiful!"

Your congregation, by sharing some of its income with the Sierra Pacific Synod and the ELCA (good old "synod benevolence"), is part of the generous hospitality and "beautiful" partnership that has blessed this ministry.

Read 2 Corinthians 8:9-15

1. Imagine that you are an immigrant in a new land. What fears might you have about losing your old ways? About being welcomed as strangers in the new land? What would surprising support and help mean to you?
2. We are now financially supporting GSSAM. Looking years down the road, how might GSSAM some day be a blessing and support to us? (2 Cor. 8:13-14)

3. God's prophets consistently reminded Israel to remember their immigrant story (migrating to Egypt during a famine and sharing in that land's abundance, and then being persecuted by the Egyptians who became afraid of these "foreigners"), and to live out of that story by being generous to and supportive of the "strangers" and "aliens" in their midst. As individuals and as a congregation, what is your "immigrant story?" How does that story shape your response to the immigrants in our midst?