



Lutheran Social Services of Illinois

# NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Jo Ann Dollard  
847/390-1446  
Carol VanderMey  
847/635-4604

## **Three Lutheran Churches Receive LSSI's Ministry of Hope Award for Outstanding Community Outreach**

Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) recently presented three Ministry of Hope Awards to churches around the state. The churches are Redeemer Lutheran Church in Hinsdale; Grace Lutheran Church in Knoxville; and Grace Lutheran Church in Champaign. The Ministry of Hope Award is presented annually to one congregation in each of the three Illinois ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) synods to recognize an outstanding congregation that provides leadership in supporting the ministry of LSSI and other ministries in the community. LSSI is a social services agency headquartered in Des Plaines.

Redeemer Lutheran is recognized for its congregation's engagement in a variety of ministries, including hosting a PADS site in DuPage County on Saturday evenings in the summer. Its members also reach out to people in need in the community through collecting "dress for success" clothing suitable for job interviews and creating more than 200 quilts annually for Lutheran World Relief. The church is also active in advocacy through its Social Justice Task Force, which has focused on the easing of world hunger and stopping the genocide in Darfur.

"Mission outreach is the center of what we do," says the Rev. Michael Bradburn, pastor at Redeemer Lutheran. "Outreach is at our core."

Among the ministries it supports, Grace Lutheran in Knoxville has been actively assisting LSSI's Single Parent Program, which is located in nearby Galesburg, for more than 20 years. The Single Parent Program is aimed at protecting children and encouraging a single parent's self-sufficiency and independence through education and one-on-one support. Congregation members donate Christmas gifts to the program, and also mittens for a mitten tree. Church members have collected and delivered such things as furniture, clothing, bedding and household furnishings to program clients, as well as donated money to the program.

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The Rev. Michel Clark, pastor of the church, says he thinks that the church's involvement in the program is, in part, "a function of being in a small town. That brings us a lot closer to the need than people in a larger city," he says. "Here, [the need is] inescapable; it's all around us, which is okay. It's a good thing; people are more aware of what needs to happen," he adds.

Champaign's Grace Lutheran Church is dedicated to feeding the hungry. For more than 20 years, it has maintained a food pantry that is operated weekly and provides food for approximately 30-35 families in the area. The congregation's youth contribute to the food pantry by soliciting donations twice a year – in winter through "Souper Bowl" Sunday and in the fall with a Trick or Treat for Food. Church members buy, stock and distribute the food, as well as donate funds for purchase. The women's group makes 34 gallons of chili twice a year for a men's shelter.

But food isn't the church's only focus. Members make and donate blankets to shelters, provide Christmas gifts for LSSI's foster children, and have raised money for bicycles for pastors in Madagascar and shingles for roofs in Biloxi, Miss. In 2005, the congregation, led by the Rev. Roger Digges, built a house for Habitat for Humanity.

"We are not a mega-church," says member Elizabeth Abraham, "but we are very big where it matters: in community.... Giving is a part of the culture at Grace. No one makes a big deal of it; we just do it."

"I believe all three of these churches to be great representations of what the Ministry of Hope Award stands for," says Lisa Hassenstab, associate director of LSSI's Office of Church and Government Relations.

Founded in 1867, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois is a statewide, not-for-profit social service agency of the three Illinois synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

*For more information on LSSI's Ministry of Hope Award, contact Lisa Hassenstab at 847/390-1447. For more about LSSI, go online to [www.LSSI.org](http://www.LSSI.org).*

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