



Lutheran Social Services of Illinois

NEWS RELEASE

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First Lutheran Church of Galesburg Receives LSSI Ministry of Hope Award for Outstanding Community Service

First Lutheran Church's involvement in social ministry within the Galesburg community has earned the congregation the 2005 Ministry of Hope Award from Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI). The award will be presented Feb. 5 by the Rev. Dr. Frederick Aigner, president of LSSI, at the church's services at 9:00 and 11:00 a.m. LSSI is a statewide human service organization based in Des Plaines.

First Lutheran is one of three churches in Illinois that will receive LSSI's 2005 Ministry of Hope award. The winners of the award were originally announced last November. The award is bestowed upon one church from each of the three Illinois synods of the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) for its work in addressing needs of the greater community. The other award recipients are Luther Memorial Lutheran Church in Springfield and Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Schaumburg.

"We are very delighted with the relationship [our church has] with LSSI and with having such a caring, compassionate organization in our community to help care for God's people," says Pastor Paul E. Johnson, senior pastor at First Lutheran. "Our philosophy is that we are called to share the good news of the Gospel, not only in word but also in terms of service in the community."

He notes that his congregation is "deeply involved in the life of community," adding "there is always more that needs to be done."

First Lutheran is doing its part to reach out. The church, which has been located on the same corner of Seminary and Water Streets for 155 years, has its own food pantry and also contributes to another community pantry. Through its Christian Home Mission Fund, the church

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helps individuals or families that have temporarily fallen short of resources. Normally, the fund provides financial assistance to an average of about 50 families a year for immediate needs such as food, utilities and prescriptions. However, last year the church assisted 150 families, according to Pr. Johnson.

The church also sponsors a weekly radio program, “Grace Matters,” which is “our gift to the community,” he says. Grace Matters is the weekly 30-minute radio program of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

First Lutheran has a strong relationship with Lutheran Social Services of Illinois, stretching back to its support of The Lutheran Home for Children in Andover, which was founded in 1867. This was the first program of what would later become LSSI. Currently, First Lutheran is home to LSSI’s Galesburg office, which provides foster care services and houses a Single Parent Program. “We see this as a part of our ministry,” says Pr. Johnson.

“The [First Lutheran congregation] is heavily involved in the community,” says Paula Graves, program director at LSSI’s Galesburg site. “And they are very passionate about [LSSI]. They have donated money and in-kind gifts, and have allowed us to use their facility. It’s a very strong relationship.”

In fact, the church had to update the building for LSSI, when it moved there in 2004, to make the building more accessible and meet building requirements. “It was real affirming to me to find that our congregation wanted to provide a home for LSSI here,” Johnson says, noting that the congregation was willing to commit a substantial amount of money to do so.

“At a time when the community is facing economic instability, First Lutheran is there for its congregation, LSSI and the most vulnerable persons in the community,” says Aigner. “With this award, we recognize this congregation’s remarkable contribution in bringing healing, justice and wholeness to its community.”

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. LSSI’s services include counseling, mental health programs, substance abuse treatment, residential treatment for children and adolescents, early childhood education and child care services, programs for adults and children with developmental disabilities, foster care and adoption, housing and services for older adults and individuals with disabilities, nursing care, and programs for prisoners and their families.

For more about LSSI, call 847/635-4600 or visit www.LSSI.org.