



Lutheran Social Services of Illinois

# NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
February 23, 2006

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## **Luther Memorial Lutheran Church Reaches Out to Moms Leaving Prison, Receives LSSI Ministry of Hope Award**

It can be a challenge for a woman leaving prison to return to the community – and her children. She must obtain the necessities of life, find a place in the community and reconnect with her children. Project Return, a program developed by Luther Memorial Lutheran Church – and supported by other area churches – works to make that transition smoother for mothers returning to the Springfield area after release from the Decatur Correctional Center.

Because of its efforts with Project Return – and its other community-oriented activities, Luther Memorial will receive the 2005 Ministry of Hope Award on Feb. 26. The Rev. Dr. Frederick Aigner, president of Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI), will present the award during the Sunday service at 10 a.m. LSSI is a statewide human service organization based in Des Plaines.

Luther Memorial is one of three churches in Illinois to receive the award, which LSSI gives to one church in each of the three Lutheran synods in Illinois for its work in addressing community needs. The other recipients of the award are: First Lutheran Church in Galesburg and Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Schaumburg, a Chicago suburb.

“Mothers in prison are a unique population with unique circumstances,” says the Rev. Ronald Moorman, pastor of Luther Memorial. “The ladies come out of prison with [many] obstacles to overcome.” He notes that for these former inmates, recidivism is around 85 percent.

When he came to the congregation 3-1/2 years ago, Pr. Moorman says the congregation indicated that it was “interested and committed to our responsibility in the community.” Church members decided to focus their efforts on a prison ministry.

“We found out in a hurry [that we] couldn’t do that ministry by ourselves,” Moorman

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says. “[We found] that there had to be a connection to our community. So we chose to expand this ministry to [other churches in] the community.” As a result, Project Return involves three other ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) churches in Springfield, as well as some community agencies. Luther Memorial is the headquarters for the program.

But Luther Memorial doesn’t confine its outreach to prison ministry. The church, working with the Atonement Lutheran parish in Springfield and Immanuel Lutheran Church in Colfax, has had a program for two years that brings together people from urban settings and area farmers to benefit the Food Resources Bank. The farmers plant 50 acres, with the urban congregations paying the cost. After the farmers harvest the crops, the profits are sent to the Food Resources Bank, which uses the money to buy tractors and other equipment for farmers in developing countries.

Members of the congregation also have participated in a “build” with Habitat for Humanity, volunteered for Meals on Wheels and supplied helping hands, food and money to local food pantries. The church also houses LSSI offices, including space for LSSI’s Storybook Project, which is a program of the Prisoner and Family Ministry.

“The [Ministry of Hope] award means a lot to us,” Pr. Moorman says. “We’re not doing [our outreach] for any kind of recognition. We’re doing it because the Gospel tells us to.” Still, he adds it is “nice to be recognized and appreciated, especially from LSSI.

“With this Ministry of Hope Award, we are pleased to recognize Luther Memorial’s remarkable contribution in bringing healing, justice and wholeness to its community and are proud to partner with them,” says Pr. Aigner.

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 Linda Brumleve at 217/528-0870; or visit [www.LSSI.org](http://www.LSSI.org).*