



A volunteer assists a guest at St. Cyprian Ecumenical Food Pantry where LSSI Care Coordination staff offer other assistance.

# Inspired

“I can do things you cannot, you can do things I cannot; together we can do great things.” – Mother Teresa

## Partnerships Enhance Community Outreach

Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) offers an array of services through nearly 60 locations statewide. Some services are provided in collaboration with other organizations. Last fall, LSSI began a partnership with a food pantry housed at United in Faith Lutheran Church in Chicago.

The partnership formed after a presentation on LSSI's Behavioral Health Services at the 2025 Metropolitan Chicago Synod Assembly. Janeen Devine, food pantry volunteer and assembly delegate, approached LSSI staff about being on-site at the church's food pantry.

Named for the church where it was founded, the St. Cyprian Ecumenical Food Pantry operates two days a week at United in Faith. Guests can shop once weekly. Thirty volunteers stock shelves, dispense food, and make deliveries. “Yet we have guests who have issues

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Responding to the Gospel, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois brings healing, justice, and wholeness to people and communities.

 Lutheran Social Services of Illinois

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# David and Claudia Nelson: Inspired to Give

Through their professions as Lutheran clergy, educators, missionaries, and volunteers, Pr. David and Claudia Nelson have worked nationally and internationally, witnessing the difference individuals make in their communities.

“It’s part of our Christian faith to give as we receive,” David said.

Retiring in 2006, the Dixon couple sought out Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) as an organization that could make a difference statewide and in their community. They began making charitable contributions to LSSI. Maintaining a busy volunteer schedule is an extension of that generosity.

In 2014, the Nelsons made a deeper commitment. They became members of “The Inspired,” LSSI’s monthly giving program. Monthly giving, made automatically through checking accounts or credit cards, provides LSSI with a predictable source of support. It helps the organization plan for programs and respond to needs while also lowering administrative costs, so more resources go directly to services.

“We’re in our senior years and can’t become foster parents, but we can help support those who are,” said Claudia, a retired teacher who continues to volunteer teaching English language learners.

Drawing from his experience as a retired pastor and nonprofit administrator, David said monthly giving helps nonprofit organizations budget better for programs.

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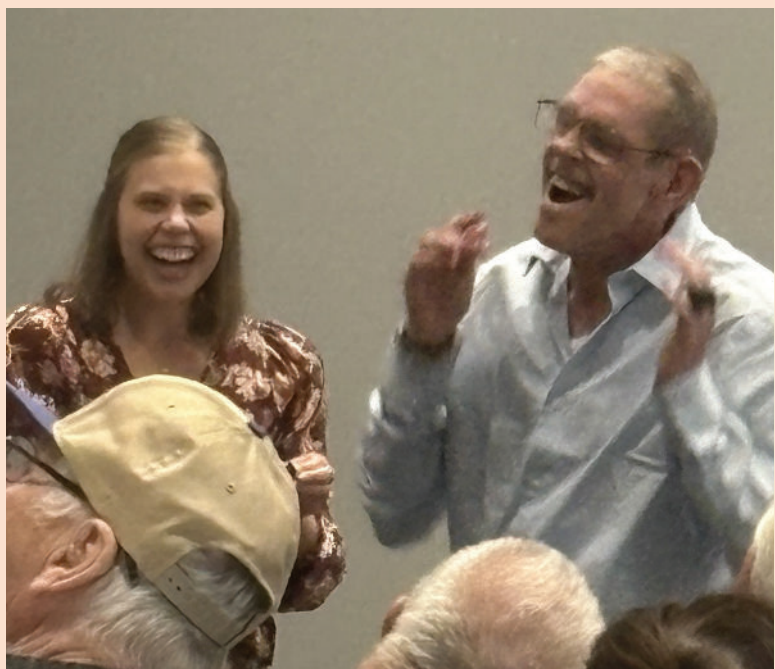
*“It’s part of our Christian faith to give as we receive.”*

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“LSSI staff is the glue that holds it all together,” David said. “We are inspired by them—inspired to give. We don’t do the work, but we appreciate those who do.”

*Right now, joining The Inspired has an even greater impact. A generous donor will match the first monthly gift of every new Inspired member—up to \$1,000. If 50 supporters join at just \$30 a month, the entire match will be met. [Learn more at LSSI.org/MonthlyGiving.](https://www.lssi.org/MonthlyGiving)*

## Collaboration Builds Community for Group



LSSI Sterling Group Home resident Bryan was recognized by Rock River Valley Self Help Enterprises.

Creating a sense of home while helping adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities live successfully in their communities is the goal for LSSI’s 10 group homes across Illinois.

Collaboration with community organizations strengthens this goal. One example: LSSI’s Sterling Group Home has a long-time partnership with Rock River Valley Self Help Enterprises, a nonprofit organization serving individuals with special needs.

Sterling Group Home residents participate in Community Day Services there, where they learn new skills and can socialize. Many clients also secure employment through Self Help.

Self Help, also in Sterling, hosts an annual banquet recognizing participants for membership anniversaries and accolades such as most respectful, best team player, and nicest to peers.

# Monthly



Pr. David and Claudia Nelson

## Home Residents

Sterling Group Home residents, their families, friends, and staff attended the event. Recently, four Sterling Group Home residents received awards for dedicated years of service, MVP of the Year, and significant membership anniversaries.

Sterling Group Home resident Bryan received a service anniversary award for 40 years of membership. When they announced his award, Bryan jumped out of his seat, hands waving triumphantly in the air. Bryan's pride and excitement illustrates that the partnerships LSSI shares with other community organizations help group home residents thrive.

"There's evidence that holding a regular job and attending day services to build skills and having good social interaction are so beneficial," said LSSI Program Director Johnnisha Golden. "It was great to share that moment."

## LSSI Earns Highest Rating in Reaccreditation Report



LSSI received its final accreditation report from the Council on Accreditation (COA) for its review period in November 2025 showing high standards organization-wide.

LSSI was evaluated on over 1,300 standards and earned "full implementation" status—the highest possible rating—on 98% of the standards.

"Reaccreditation upholds LSSI's continuing efforts to always improve how we deliver services to the people with whom we share in life," said LSSI President and CEO Mark Stutrud. "This achievement reflects the strength and quality of LSSI's programs, and the expertise of the outstanding, compassionate professionals who make up our staff."

The COA Reviewers commended LSSI's realization of its mission, culture, and executive leadership. Report highlights included:

- Staff are knowledgeable within their respective programs and "caring, understanding, and patient."
- "LSSI continues to meet the highest standards in human services. Trust and transparency are hallmarks of this organization."
- GenCare, which focuses on the whole person, both those served and people serving, "is very much a part of LSSI's culture."
- Stutrud was praised as a "visionary, professional, experienced leader."
- "Foster parents interviewed had significant longevity with LSSI and feel valued and supported by the dedicated and passionate staff."
- "Mental Health and Substance Use Services have strong, internal collaboration; clients expressed unsolicited gratitude for staff."
- LSSI's strategic and annual plans are "living documents that drive the organization's success and promote retention of employees."

The achievement reflects nine months of preparation. Specially trained reviewers evaluated more than 50 LSSI programs, reviewing 49 client records and conducting 174 formal interviews—including foster parents, clients, staff, and board members. LSSI produced 3,000 pieces of evidence for review.

# LSSI President Recognized for Leadership

LSSI President and CEO Mark Stutrud was recognized with the Paragon Award: The Ken Daly Award for Excellence in Mentorship from Lutheran Services in America (LSA).



Photo courtesy of LSA.

Mark Stutrud, LSSI President and CEO, receiving his leadership award from Alesia Frerichs, LSA President and CEO.

Presented at LSA's February 2026 leadership summit, the award recognizes leaders who help shape the next generation of leadership, thereby producing organizations that are stronger, more resilient, and more deeply aligned with their mission. LSA is a national nonprofit that brings together a network of leaders, partners, and funders to tackle issues that are critical to communities.

Stutrud has led LSSI for more than 11 years through a state budget impasse and a global pandemic, helping the organization emerge from both stronger than ever with a focus on whole-person care.

"It has been my privilege to serve," said Stutrud. "The draw is the call, serving at the intersection of faith and service, trusting in God's provision, and leading."

LSA also recognized several other leaders, including Grace Araya, President and CEO of Concordia Place, Chicago, and Sven Schumacher, Executive Director, Lutheran Child and Family Services of Indiana/Kentucky, Indianapolis.

## Events

Sunday, April 26, 2026

### GOOD SHEPHERD SUNDAY

LSSI invites Illinois ELCA congregations to celebrate their shared ministry with LSSI on April 26 or any Sunday during the Easter season. Visit [LSSI.org/GSS](https://LSSI.org/GSS) to learn more or request resources or contact [Kelly.Nieman-Anderson@LSSI.org](mailto:Kelly.Nieman-Anderson@LSSI.org).

Saturday, October 3, 2026

### 45TH TRUE FRIEND CELEBRATION EPIPHANY CENTER FOR THE ARTS

Planning is underway! For more information, contact [Mariah.Heinz@LSSI.org](mailto:Mariah.Heinz@LSSI.org).

[PARTNERSHIPS ENHANCE COMMUNITY OUTREACH, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1]

we can't address," said Devine. "We don't have the resources or training to help them."

Two LSSI care coordination staff are now on hand weekly. They provide program information, assess needs, and connect guests to LSSI services like mental health, substance use treatment, affordable housing, and other community resources.

"People are getting used to seeing us around, and it's really taking off," said LSSI Care Coordinator Taylor Balagtas-Simon, noting recent positive results.

Food pantry staff originally identified guests who they thought would most benefit from LSSI's services. LSSI staff know it often takes time for people who are facing multiple life challenges to gain their trust and accept help. As one example, LSSI's outreach staff built a relationship with one particular guest that began with providing new socks and chatting about the weather. The individual recently asked about services and met with staff.

"Many of these people don't have regular access to the internet, and may not know about LSSI services," said Balagtas-Simon. "Being stationed in the spaces where they're needed is very fulfilling."



Lutheran Social Services of Illinois does not discriminate in admission to programs or employment in compliance with the law.

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