



July 2014

MISSION GRANT STORY

**NATIVE AMERICAN OUTREACH TRAINING CENTER -
FAIRBANKS, ALASKA \$95,000**

For more than 25 years, the Lutheran Indian Ministries, a ministry of Lutheran Association of Missionaries and Pilots U.S., along with volunteers from the lower 48 states, have been reaching out to Alaska natives, bringing the Good News of Jesus Christ through VBS and servant projects. Seeds have been planted, relationships have been watered, and God is giving the growth.

There is a 116 year history of denominational presence in Alaska. The state was sectioned off into regions and five denominations: Episcopalian, Russian Orthodox, Moravian/ELCA, Presbyterian, and Methodist. Each of these established their mission in a designated area of the state. The “Church” partnered with the government through the Residential School system to Christianize and assimilate Natives, and unfortunately, abuses occurred. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod came to the scene much later, yet, there is an opportunity to make a Lutheran contribution to faith communities that have been in existence for 116 years. Today, only 17 of the 6,200 LCMS churches are in Alaska.

Pastor Dave and Rosemary Sternbeck moved to Fairbanks, Alaska, from the

Olympic Peninsula in Washington after making regular trips up for two years prior to the move to lay the groundwork for mission expansion. He is the first Native American LCMS pastor to graduate from the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology (EIIT) program through Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

With the large home that God has provided for the Sternbecks, it has the potential to become the Alaskan Mission Training Center which would provide food and lodging for volunteers heading to villages. It would also serve as a center for cross-cultural training as well as for debriefing upon their return. Volunteers would be given tools to empower them to become effective ambassadors, sharing experiences, and inviting others to partner in the mission that is taking place in Alaska, thus helping to sustain this outreach.

Lutheran Indian Ministries will use their LWML grant for purchasing a vehicle to transport volunteers; to help furnish the Alaskan Mission Training Center with a conference table, chairs, large television, white boards, refrigerator/freezer, washer

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and dryer; and to provide travel and lodging for Pastor Dave and Rosemary to make trips to the villages.

Suicide and depression plague Alaskan communities at an especially higher rate during the dark winter months. Pastor Dave understands the challenges faced by Native people. Most of these individuals do not come from families or marriages that are intact, but rather from brokenness. They did not grow up in the Church or have spiritual leaders or mentors. Instead, most are very familiar with abuse. As Pastor Dave and Rosemary work with volunteers and build connections to the villages, they envision bringing in Native men during the winter months for a time of encouragement, renewal, and equipping so these men may return to their villages with a message of hope to their people.

Other relationships Pastor Dave has developed are with the Wellness Warriors Initiative which seeks to address the devastating problems of domestic violence, abuse, and neglect in the Alaskan Native community. Another program is suicide awareness where through the use of music and cultural expressions, young people are

finding faith and a reason to continue living. Since many struggle with being Christian and Native, this program not only helps them address and understand this issue, but helps others be more attuned to the warning signs of suicide. The Sternbecks believe this program is a tremendous asset to communities where young people are participating.

In Pastor Dave's previous travels to Alaska, he became acquainted with men who are attending Bible colleges in Alaska's interior. In talking with faculty and administrators, he heard that these colleges are lacking a good theological curriculum. Concordia University System is willing to provide curriculum to these institutions by teaching Lutheran theology through their adult education program to those with little biblical knowledge or understanding of Law and Gospel.

"The fields are ripe for harvest," Pastor Dave says. The mission of Lutheran Indian Ministries is to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with Native North American Nations, encouraging them to proclaim Christ's kingdom to their own and to others.