

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Ascension Lutheran and Holy Cross Episcopal Churches receive a \$10,000 challenge grant for their Refugee Outreach Program.** *Thrivent Financial Foundation grant benefits local community outreach.*

APPLETON, Wis. (December 12, 2014) – The Two Churches, Ascension Lutheran and Holy Cross Episcopal Churches, 4252 Breton Rd. SE, Kentwood, 49512, recently received a \$10,000 challenge grant from Thrivent Financial Foundation for their Refugee Outreach Program. The grant is designed to help non-profit organizations find ways to increase their financial capacity to sustain or expand their ministry.

“We are truly grateful to the Thrivent Financial Foundation for their initial grant of \$5,000 which will allow us to continue our English as a Second Language classes for the elder members of the local Bhutanese community, a population that trails the Kentwood community in literacy by *fifty-one* percent. We are also excited at the opportunity to receive an additional \$5,000 through this 2/1 challenge grant,” said The Rev. Mike Wernick, Rector of Holy Cross Episcopal Church and Pastor of Ascension Lutheran Church. The churches have until December 1, 2016 to raise \$10,000 in order to receive an additional \$5,000 from the Foundation.

Ascension Lutheran and Holy Cross Episcopal Churches have been working with the local refugee community to develop and sustain programs that support self-sufficiency for local residents, especially the Nepali-speaking Bhutanese living within walking distance of the church building. The elder members of the local Bhutanese community often have very little formal education, and struggle to learn English and navigate the complexities of life in Grand Rapids.

The classes improve their English language skills so that they may function well within their new community and provide instruction which may lead to employment and citizenship. The churches also provide space for social activities of the elder members of the community and a refugee committee garden, which provides food and a familiar activity for those who were primarily farmers and promotes health and well-being.

Thrivent Financial Foundation’s grant will allow the program time and spur us on to continue its work with the churches, the local Bhutanese community, and local philanthropic organizations to develop a more diverse and sustainable funding stream for the program.

Wernick continues, “Donations are welcomed and appreciated as we work to meet the challenge grant. All donations are tax-deductible and all funds raised as a part of this challenge grant will be designated for the refugee program and will not be used for the religious purposes. Donations can be made to either church and sent to the attention of our fundraiser Joel Flint at Two Churches, 4252 Breton Rd. SE, Kentwood, MI 49512.”

“We are delighted to assist Ascension Lutheran and Holy Cross Episcopal Churches through this grant.” said Richard Kleven, vice president of the Thrivent Financial Foundation. “We trust that this support will strengthen the ministry of these two churches.”

The grant is part of the foundation’s Lutheran Grant Program. This program is designed to assist Lutheran organizations and those they serve in achieving economic security and sustainability. In 2013, the program distributed more than \$1.1 million in grants.

Eligible grant applicants include: Lutheran congregations, regional divisions of the three largest church bodies, small church bodies, high schools, colleges, universities, seminaries, camps, campus ministries, social ministry organizations and other independent Lutheran organizations or institutions.

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