

## **Who exactly are the Lake Superior Bridge Builders?**

Sometime in July I received an invitation from a friend of mine who is a member of an ELCA church in Eau Claire to attend the Texas Border Sponsorship Forum. I passed this invitation along to some other interested members of Bethesda and to a new friend who was also interested in immigration. She now co-chairs the meetings with me.

I will read from the August minutes of the joint councils where Bethesda council member reports: "A forum of presenters from West Texas Episcopal Diocese and the ELCA Southwest Texas synod are heading up the effort to assist immigrants seeking asylum. There are hundreds here in the US in detention centers that have court dates and need a sponsor in order to be released. Bethesda and Immanuel are at the beginning process of sponsorship and also inviting people from outside our communities to help us with this sponsorship. There is a need for sponsors for these asylum seekers in detention centers and Bethesda and Immanuel are looking into the possibility of assisting by providing accommodations while they wait for a court date."

You can follow the path of LSBB by reading the Council minutes (in the newsletter), newsletter articles or you can join a meeting of LSBB. Go to [Bethesdalutheranbayfield.com](http://Bethesdalutheranbayfield.com), click on the calendar. The LSBB group meets every Tuesday night at 7:00. Click on the zoom link and you're in. The best place to learn and discuss the happenings of LSBB is to come to coffee hour following worship each Sunday. Again go to the calendar on the website click on the coffee hour and you're in. Eight of the nine members of LSBB that are members of Bethesda are at coffee hour pretty much every single Sunday and we talk about LSBB and the family every single Sunday.

## **How many people are in the group and who is the group composed of?**

At this time LSBB has nineteen active members, nine members from Bethesda, one member from Immanuel, one member of the Bayfield Presbyterian Church, and eight community members including one dedicated gentlemen from Altoona.

## **What is Bethesda's roll in this project and is LSBB total financially responsible for this project?**

LSBB is under the larger umbrella of Bethesda just like all of the other committees, only this is more of a task force. Yes, LSBB is totally financially

responsible for the group. This isn't saying that Bethesda or Immanuel couldn't contribute from their investment funds.

Let me tell you a little about our finances. LSBB has its own separate checking account.

Expenses: It cost roughly \$2,000 to get the family here from Texas. The families budget is approximately \$2,400 per month. Rent is \$500, family allowance \$350, the cost of utilities, and about \$1,000 per month for our translator. We have been gifted with a wonderful young man from Cornucopia who speaks fluent Russian. He came to this country as an immigrant with his family when he was 10. He recently spent two days and nights translating documents that had to be sent quickly to the attorney. If we hired someone through the attorney for this task it would cost about \$300 an hour we pay \$25 an hour.

We have paid the families attorney a \$5,000 retainer fee. The first immigration attorney we approached (a friend of a member of LSBB) took the case and it just so happened she also spoke Russian.

Revenue: We have received a little over \$2,000 from Bethesda's endowment interest plus around \$1,000 from the meatball fundraiser. We have received \$3,000 from Immanuel in Cornucopia to cover the first 6 months rent and another \$800 from their mission account. Currently we have received about 125 donations from all over the country. The balance in the checking account is about \$11,000. A little over \$3,000 is in our GoFundMe Account.

We are in the process of receiving a grant from AMMPARO (Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Resources and Opportunities) for \$5,000. Bethesda and Immanuel councils voted unanimously to become Welcoming AMMPARO churches in October, 2020.

LSBB will hear this week if our grant from Immanuel Lutheran Church in Eau Claire is approved for another \$5,000. A member of LSBB continues to look for and write grants. We are considering a bulk mailing in Bayfield, Washburn, and Ashland and are planning other fundraisers.

### **What if the financial goals are not met?**

I, myself, leave that worry to other members of LSBB. I just can't go there. I trust a God who provides and try my best to live out of our abundance and not our scarcity. "Give and it will be given unto you." That's from Luke. It has been amazing the little and sometimes big serendipities/blessings that

take place. I am serious that there have been several times when the group on zoom has just looked at each other and thought what just happened. It's felt like this is something that we are supposed to be doing because things just fall into place. Now today may be different, but it doesn't change my knowing that God provides. So the bottom line is we have resources they do not.

### **Are other organizations supporting this venture?**

At this time North Lakes Community Clinic is providing free dental work for Pavel and free counseling services for the family. The only government services received is through the WIC program. At this time if an asylum seeker accesses any help from the government they will never be able to become a citizen of the United States. During the past year or so the law changed as to when an asylum seekers can receive a green card and legally work from 180 days to 365 days. I'm not exactly sure where these laws are now with a new President. Despite who is President these laws change often.

### **What about housing?**

From the very beginning LSBB made a commitment to sponsor one family at a time until there is no one left to sponsor. Everyone living in Bayfield knows that rental properties and housing are scarce. The house we are currently renting for the family is available until sometime in April. The only other place we have found to rent would not be available until August and then only for about a year. We are in touch with owners of rental properties and local Realtors who are also keeping their ears open and eyes peeled because they believe in this ministry. We have briefly visited the possibility of renting in Washburn and Ashland and each time came to the conclusion that it would make our work much more difficult and the family would not have the same kind of support available to them if they lived in a different community then where members of the group lived.

From the very start I invited more than once other local churches and ELCA churches in our Lake Superior Conference to join us in this venture of sponsorship. I have received words of encouragement and that our ministry is inspiring but no takers to actually commit to the project. Are other churches watching us, especially in our synod. You better believe they are. Can these two little churches really do this? And then we remember about 45 years ago Bethesda did resettle a Vietnamese family.