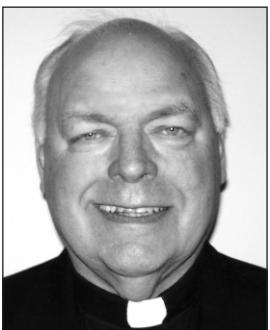


## Phil Hemke named director of Church Relations

The Rev. Dr. Philip E. Hemke of Bloomfield Hills began his new position as director of Church Relations on January 7.

Rev. Hemke serves as the liaison between Lutheran Social Services and the two Lower Michigan synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). The Southeast Michigan Synod comprises 134 congregations with 62,700 members. The North/West Lower Michigan Synod has 130 churches with 52,500 members. Rev. Hemke is reaching out to share Lutheran Social Services' story with



*Phil Hemke*

Lutheran congregations and the larger ecumenical community and will develop programs of shared ministry.

Rev. Hemke served as senior pastor at Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church in Bloomfield Hills since 1989 and previously

pastored congregations in Missouri and Ontario.

He holds a bachelor's degree from Concordia University in Seward, NE; a master's in divinity from Concordia Seminary in Springfield, IL; and a Doctor of Ministry from Christ Seminary-Seminex in St. Louis, MO.

### Refuge School Impact Program

*continued from page 1*

The new program has already produced some positive results. A 14-year-old Bosnian girl's school-work was suffering after the recent death of her father. In fact, she is repeating the sixth grade this year. After she was referred to the program by a Lutheran Social Services caseworker, staff began working with her vice principal and school social worker to find ways to help her. One-on-one visits with the girl helped draw her out of her shell. Now she is attending group sessions and helping the younger children feel comfortable. "She's starting to trust people again," said Cotton.



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# HIS HAND

## Refugee School Impact Program Bridging the communication gap

BY LISA DONOVAN

Starting a new school is nerve-wracking for any child, but imagine being in the shoes of 12-year-old May Alebraheem, whose family fled Iraq for the United States in November. Everything from the language to schoolwork to friendships was unfamiliar and confusing. "The hardest thing is understanding English from other people," said May, a seventh-grader at Unis Middle School in Dearborn.

Refugee children like May face daunting challenges when they enter the American school system. "The language barrier and low levels of parental involvement often lead to high truancy rates for refugee children," said Jessica Cotton, Lutheran Social

Services' senior school impact specialist. In response, Lutheran Social Services' Refugee Services in Southfield developed the Refugee School Impact Program.

Funded by a grant from the Michigan Department of Human Services, the Refugee School Impact Program began in December with orientation sessions for students and parents. Student sessions cover topics such as cultural diversity and expectations, school rules and requirements, building friendships and expressing feelings.

"I help them get comfortable with English by writing about their favorite birthdays and memories," said Rasha Atisha, Lutheran Social Services school specialist, who led a recent session for



Yaqueen Abdullah, 8, and May Alebraheem, 12, are learning English at ACCESS in Dearborn.

May Alebraheem and several younger children at ACCESS (Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services) in Dearborn.

Parent sessions focus on understanding the American culture and school system and how to communicate with students and teachers. At a January session held at Emerson Elementary School in Pontiac, seven parents of Hmong and Iraqi origin learned how to build a good credit history, something they never had to think about in their home countries.

"We knew nothing about the school system," said Sahair Stephan, who arrived from Iraq with his wife three months ago. "They [Refugee School Impact Program staff] helped us a lot with translation and transportation."

Sessions for area teachers will acquaint them with the program and offer tips on understanding the refugee students' culture and improving communication.

*continued on page 4*



Hmong and Iraqi parents gather at Emerson Elementary School in Pontiac to learn about credit and money management.

## Household goods help refugees

Laura Lauer experienced life as part of a minority in a strange culture when she and her husband, a General Motors executive, lived in China for several years. So when she learned last summer that Lutheran Social Services was seeking donations of furniture and household goods for refugees from Iraq and Burma (Myanmar), she sprang into action.

Lauer and her husband, Mark, both 45, canvassed their Dearborn neighbors, friends, work associates and fellow parishioners at St. Cyprian's Catholic Church in Riverview. By fall, Lauer had a garage full of furniture, bedding, pots and pans, and small appliances, which she cleaned and sorted.



*Laura and Mark Lauer of Dearborn helped Burmese refugees in Battle Creek.*

In mid-November Lauer rented a small U-Haul truck, which she and her husband loaded. Then she and a friend delivered the goods to Lutheran Social Services' Refugee Services office in Battle Creek, which is resettling refugees from Burma. There is a small community of Burmese in Battle Creek, a big reason the newcomers are being sent there.

Most of the materials collected by the Lauers have been distributed already, said Kathryn Geller, senior refugee specialist in Battle Creek. Whatever is left will be used for new arrivals. Two families were expected in February. More are in the pipeline, awaiting arrival dates.

## Thrivent supports Midland group home

Thrivent Financial for Lutherans has given \$1,904 to Lutheran Social Services' Foelling Home, a residence in Midland for six persons with developmental disabilities. Thrivent matched the funds raised through Foelling's sales of carrot cakes at Thanksgiving and Christmas and through a soup dinner that St. Timothy Lutheran Church in Midland holds every year. The funds will provide household furnishings, recreational equipment, outings and vacations for residents, as well as birthday and holiday celebrations.

## Kalamazoo appreciates foster parents

As a gesture of appreciation, the Kalamazoo office of Services for Children and Families invited their foster parents to a performance of *Mamma Mia!* at Miller Auditorium February 26. The show was preceded by a coffee-and-dessert reception.

## d winnA of d <) pRT S: Hope Lutheran

If you're over 30, the title of this story probably looks like gobbledegook. But the 800-plus teens at the statewide Lutheran Youth Gathering in Lansing December 28 understood perfectly the cell-phone-style text message on two huge screens: the youth group from Hope Lutheran Church in Farmington Hills won a pizza party in Lutheran Social Services' first youth group fundraiser contest. The group raised \$364 at a dessert party following the congregation's Christmas program. The funds are being used to purchase

clothing for metro Detroit children in the foster care program.



*Ashley Filipowicz (left) and Jessica Bemiss helped the Hope Lutheran youth group organize a dessert party in December.*

## MapleCreek is going "green"

Project coordinators for the construction and renovation at MapleCreek in Grand Rapids are using energy-saving designs and environmentally friendly materials wherever possible.

A storm water management system will capture the rain runoff in several detention areas until it can be naturally absorbed. The builders are using recycled concrete, gypsum board and acoustic ceiling tile wherever possible. The Terraces is installing an inherently efficient "closed loop" water source heat pump system. Staff and residents are recycling newspapers and magazines using a Paper Gator bin.

The community will reduce energy use by replacing nearly 1,000 incandescent light-bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs that last up to eight times longer than standard bulbs, emit less carbon dioxide and can save up to \$47 apiece each year in energy costs. The community is invited to join in the lightbulb exchange by dropping off new bulbs at the reception desk at The Terraces, 2000 32nd Street SE. Donations to replace the lightbulbs are also welcome.

# Shining Stars and Volunteers at Luther Manor

Lucy Orozco works with frail elderly residents at Luther Manor in Saginaw, many of whom suffer from dementia. Orozco can sense the kind of activity each will respond to, whether it's a massage with fragrant lotions or handling textured objects.

"We had one lady with many health challenges," said Nancy Abbott, activities director. "As Lucy worked with her, she started to smile and track movement. She and Lucy would share magazines, and eventually she could turn the pages herself. She started to talk more and startled her husband by talking to him. He was amazed."

Because of Orozco's dedication and compassion, she will be recognized by the Michigan Association of Homes and Aging Services (MAHSA) with its Shining Star Award for a nursing home employee with more than 20 years of service. The award will be presented at MAHSA's annual conference April 29 in Kalamazoo.



*Lucy Orozco with resident Ida Tafel.*

Christmas pageant and making alterations or quick repairs to residents' clothing. When Luther Manor implemented a policy prohibiting the use of restraints, Orozco sewed bolsters to sheets to create a special "nesting" mattress that enhances safety without confining the resident.

"She might not be the first person you think of as a 'shining star,' because she's not flashy," said Abbott. "She is like a constant, gentle glow providing reassurance and comfort to all."

## Individual Volunteer of the Year

Jean Colby and her canine companion have been volunteering at Luther Manor for 15 years. Colby trained two dogs, Libby, now retired, and Beacon, to be certified therapy dogs. Their weekly visits led to Colby's recognition by MAHSA as Individual Volunteer of the Year. She will also receive the award April 29 in Kalamazoo.

"Jean and Beacon are a team who bring joy to many," said Abbott. "Beacon happily plays with the residents, getting

them to smile and reach out their hands to touch her soft fur. Words tumble out of normally quiet residents' lips as they share memories of beloved pets. Beacon seems to be aware of those who are more fragile, moving slowly to them and laying her head on their laps. Even our most confused residents anticipate their arrival."

Last year, Colby and Beacon both participated in Luther Manor's annual Christmas pageant, with Colby playing a shepherd and Beacon prancing onstage in a sheep costume, complete with stubby tail.



*Beacon shakes hands with Jean Colby as Mary McSweyn looks on.*



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*His Hand* tells the story of Lutheran Social Services of Michigan and its impact on the lives of those we serve. These stories of success are possible because of your generosity and caring. Because of your interest in LSSM, we share these stories with you.

