



Elizabeth and Ellie Gaul helped pile and sort 1,500 cans of soup for Faith Lutherans' Souper-bowl soup can offering.

By Kenzie Stroud

In Clive, there are many churches that reach outside their walls and respond to needs in the community. Some reach out by helping others develop a relationship with God, while others

provide services to meet the basic needs of area residents.

Though Clive may be blessed with good fortune and is seemingly sheltered from poverty, the reality is that, according to the Interfaith

Hospitality Network, each night in Polk County more than 400 people are homeless; half of whom are children. There are families in Clive that need assistance, and thankfully, area churches are there to help.

Faith Lutheran Church in Clive is a part of the Interfaith Hospitality Network (IHN). As a member, Faith Lutheran hosts four families for one week every three months in an onsite facility they call the Gathering House. The church provides guests a clean, safe, overnight place to stay as well as meals for the families. During the day, guests are transported from the host church site to a day center where they can shower, do laundry and receive social assistance, which is available to anyone who turns to IHN for assistance during tough times.

Since 2006, the Network has

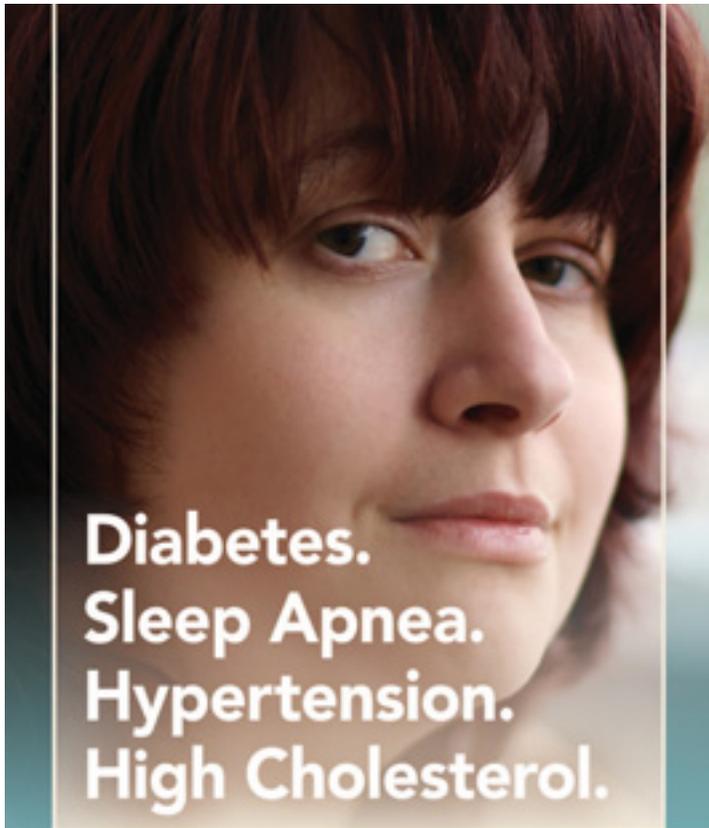
aimed to create a stable environment to help nurture the children and help their parents get back on their feet by securing employment and housing. The Des Moines Area Interfaith Hospitality Network is made up of 13 area religious congregations, each providing similar shelter and nutrition during the guests stay.

During a host week, volunteers from a congregation work to create a home-like environment so that each guest can rest, regain hope, respect and confidence. The network has more than 1,000 volunteers and provides 3,000 nights of lodging and serves more than 9,000 meals a year.

While the number of families served has remained steady, the average stay for a family has increased to 55 days due to the poor economic conditions and lack of job opportunities. The



Faith Lutheran members Jake Bowma, Mark Saline, Sherry Koczek, Melinda Littler and Tina Tessier participate in community outreach programs.



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Volunteers help stock and gather food at the Pantry at Westview. From left: Melissa Stimple, Cindy Macarthy, Blaine Bristow, Carl Van Farowe and Vivian Wilson.

group has housed 246 children — 105 are under the age of 5.

Outreach

In addition to working with the IHN, Faith Lutheran supports many local and national outreach programs.

One that is dear to the congregation and Pastor Dave Nerdig is the Beloit Youth Residential Treatment Center. Beloit is an intensive rehabilitation center that provides psychiatric treatment to help children and teens who have severe emotional and behavioral disorders.

A few years ago, the church raised more than \$180,000 for the center, and today there is a wing of the treatment center named after the Clive congregation. Church members continue to interact with the children at the facility through pen pal and prayer programs.

Mark Saline, associate pastor at Faith Lutheran Church for two years, says members constantly invite and challenge each other to be involved and support the community beyond our walls.

“We are acutely aware of two powerful influences shaping our lives: our affluence and assets and the call of the Gospel of Christ to assist ‘the least of these’ with

ongoing material support,” he says. “We believe that the church must be constantly pointing away from itself to the community beyond our walls where there is deep need and where God is constantly present and at work to bring hope and help.

“We at Faith uplift, name and celebrate these many ministries to the community beyond in worship services so as to balance our call to a ministry in the church and a mission in the world beyond.”

For more information, visit www.faithlc.org.

Growing for God

Another Clive church has a similar aim.

For the third year, Westview Church is preparing to plant its large community garden. All of the produce goes to the Waukee Area Christian Food Pantry, housed in the lower level of the Church. The food pantry is a cooperative effort of area churches and benefits individuals and families.

Each year, volunteers have turned out to help plant, weed, water and harvest the garden.

Angie Schmitt began working there in 2009 as a member of the planning committee. The idea to

build a church garden had been floating around for awhile, but no one had gardening expertise.

Out of the blue, the church received a phone call from a member of the Dallas County Master Gardeners who asked if the church would be interested in starting a garden to benefit the food pantry.

"We took that as a good sign that we should break ground, and we haven't looked back since," says Schmitt.

The garden is grown chemical-free and with a large variety of produce.

"Last year we harvested roughly 1,000 pounds of produce, which was about double the amount from 2009. This year we are taking the same general approach to the garden — all volunteer gardeners and all produce go to the food pantry," Schmitt says.

With each season Schmitt has learned more about gardening, fruits and vegetables.

"It's so enjoyable," Schmitt says. "I still see the miracle of putting a seed in the ground and watching food grow from it. My family is involved, as are so many other families from Westview. To be able to provide produce to people who might not normally be able to afford fresh fruits or vegetables makes it all worth it."

The garden recently received a donation that will be used for the eventual construction of an improved fence as well as a storage shed.

"We are also hoping to add compost bins, a rain barrel and a meditation garden, but we'll see how far the funds go," Schmitt says. "The whole project continues to develop in stages, so each year sees a little more progress."

Westview aims to provide assistance and resources that will help the community become healthier in mind, body and spirit. The Waukee Area Christian Free Clinic helps to make this mission happen.

The clinic works on a first come, first served basis with no appointments needed. Currently, the clinic runs out of the church's nursery. They were given a grant from Iowa Health Foundation and will soon begin an expansion that will give them their own permanent space in the lower level of Westview. The expansion is set to be completed in the fall.

The clinic provides a variety of services from injury care, to well child exams, to physicals and testing. It is open to anyone regardless of geographical location who would otherwise have trouble getting medical attention, whether underinsured or uninsured. The group is greatly in need of more volunteer doctors and nurses.

The food pantry program and the free clinic are overseen by Melissa Stimple.

"We are so blessed to have such great resources available to the community around us," she says. "A lot of people don't realize that there is help so close by. We are always looking for volunteers and donations to keep us running and growing."

The pantry's mission is to provide non-perishable food and personal items to those in need.

"We are really light right now in the pantry," Stimple says. "Hopefully we get an influx of donations soon. The community garden will have produce for us again as soon as things get growing."

"Area businesses, individuals and churches donate food to us, which we then redistribute to the families and people in need."

Stimple added that the services are confidential. Each month the pantry feeds 85 - 90 people.

"I think that it's great that our community of faith is united in sharing with those in need," she says. **CL**



Produce raised in the Community Garden at Westview for the food pantry.

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— Melissa Stimple, Westview Church