

# Michigan District joins with by Rev. Gary Rohwer **POBLO to Plant Churches**

*“Let none hear you idly saying, ‘There is nothing I can do.’”* - so goes the famous mission hymn. But wait, there really is a lot that we can do ... together. “Let’s plant churches,” has been the united response of the District and People of the Book Lutheran Outreach (POBLO) for the past 10 years. Planting new churches has proven to be an effective strategy in reaching the un-churched. POBLO began in Dearborn in 1992 by concerned Lutherans who said there must be something that can be done to bring the Gospel to Muslims. Through this effort, 6 congregations have been planted for the Michigan District, with two more in progress.

Some of the believers who are becoming part of these newly planted LCMS congregations are from India, others from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran. Some are Liberian, while others Sudanese or Arab. Some were formerly Muslim, others Hindu or Sikh. But now, through the hard work of field evangelism and teaching, they are fellow Christians as well as fellow Lutherans.



Rev. Khurram Khan

All Nations Lutheran Church in Troy was the first church planted in 1996. This happened as Rev. Khurram Khan and his wife Cynthia identified the many un-

churched Pakistani and Indian Christians living in Wayne, Macomb, and Oakland counties.

“They were here, but they weren’t going to any church,” Rev. Khan says. “There was no place where most of them really felt at home as far as language and cultural background.”

So Rev. Khan, the executive director of POBLO, gathered people together, catechized them, and planted the church. Both the leaders and the laity of All Nations have the linguistic and cultural background which enables them to naturally connect with Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs. The most recent example of this is the baptism of a student from a local university, a 22 year-old woman, formerly Muslim, who connected with a POBLO missionary, and was baptized at Faith, Troy. POBLO is already seeing a flow of Westernized converts and second generation immigrants from the churches it is planting into mainstream congregations (like Faith, Troy) which host these ministries.

Demographics, location, as well as the linguistic ability and vision of the missionary, all play a role in what kind of church is planted. First Arabic Lutheran Church, planted in 2000, for example, ministers to Arabs.

Rev. Amer Khan planted a different kind of church in Lansing in 2005. A multi-ethnic church, Living Word, was the result of Pastor Amer’s natural intent not to exclude anyone. The



Rev. Amer Khan and his wife, Mercy.



*Tamil Church choir in Troy.*

membership there is Liberian, Sudanese, and Ghanaian as well as Afghani, Indian, and Iranian.

Tamil Lutheran Church, Troy, planted in 2006, is a mono-ethnic church (Tamil speakers from South India.) Pastor Arul Alexander has gathered Tamil people from all over metro-Detroit. In addition to this ministry, Rev. Alexander is helping to bring about an international ministry at St. John, Rochester. Through his efforts, St. John hosts an English as a Second Language class with 50 or more students from a dozen nationalities. Pastor Arul ministers to many of these students through an international Bible study and worship.

This year, International Lutheran Church in Grand Rapids was planted. There, Pastor Afzal Masih is bringing together a variety of nationalities. A recent worship service was attended by a Muslim convert as well as by a Muslim and a Hindu seeker.

Two other POBLO missionaries are working hard to plant congregations. Rev. Vincent Iqbal is gathering Indians, Pakistanis and others for international worship services held at St.



*Rev. Vincent Iqbal of St. Paul, Battle Creek.*

Paul, Battle Creek and St. Michael, Portage. He daily visits Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs from Battle Creek to Kalamazoo in order to bring them the message of salvation.

In Pontiac, at St. Paul International, missionary Dietrick Gladden is working hard creating new life and a new vision into the multi-ethnic church.

Mrs. Nooria Popal, a convert from Afghanistan, Mrs. Shahira

Mancini, and Mrs. Cynthia Khan make numerous contacts and provide instruction to women, bringing them into the body of Christ at these newly planted congregations.

Concerning this joint effort between POBLO and the Michigan District, Rev. Roosevelt Gray, District Mission Executive, says, "POBLO missionaries are hard-working men and women who care so much about these lost people. They are doing all they can to create partnerships with our local LCMS churches, leading them into ministry to these new people groups."

As the number of immigrants to Michigan continues to grow, District and local congregations work hand in hand with mission societies like POBLO to capitalize on the myriad of opportunities to reach the lost.

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*Rev. Dietrick Gladden and his wife, Rebecca.*