

## Volunteer Story... by Loel Wessel, First English Lutheran Church, Spring Valley

Happy New Year POBLO friends! I'm Pastor Loel Wessel from First English Lutheran Church in Spring Valley. An interesting name for a church, you might say, but it reminds many of us that it wasn't all that long ago that our grandparents and great-grandparents were the ones struggling to learn a new language. First English Lutheran Church was established in 1938, at a time when the other Lutheran churches in town were using the German and Norwegian languages for worship. Those churches have since merged and adopted the English language, but we were the first!

I grew up in a community between Truman and St. James where *Gesundheit* and *danke schön* and *sauerkraut* were part of our language. We had never heard of such exotic things as *tortillas* and *salsa* and *guacamole* - things are now part of our cuisine and language. I didn't even know what *lutefisk* and *lefse* were until I was 25.

In 1976 our Truman Circuit churches sponsored a refugee family from Laos. This was my first experience with helping immigrants learn English. I was ten. The boy who was my age is now Pastor Yia Vang of St. Stephanus Lutheran Church in St. Paul. He also introduced me to the strange sounds (to my ears) of several Asian languages. It gave me an appreciation at an early age for just how difficult it must be to learn English as second language.

John Gayed came to Spring Valley on a very cold day last January to introduce me to the work of POBLO in Rochester. At that time I pledged him my support in a general way, but gave him no specifics. It wasn't until July that I visited a POBLO class and committed to teaching an ESL class for eight weeks last fall. I am so glad I did.

My class consisted of four women and one man, all of them from China; all of them connected in some way to Mayo Clinic. For the first class, I brought a National Geographic map of China so they could show me where they were from. I also had a Minnesota map to show them where I'm from. The rest of the class was spent talking about our names, our families, and our work.

My best advice for anyone thinking about teaching an ESL class for the first time is this: take time to get to know your students. What they need more than anything is your friendship and love. Together you will be enriched in so many ways. The English learning will follow (and you might learn some new words too). The teaching materials are there to guide you, but be ready to answer lots of unanticipated questions. And always be ready for an opportunity to share the hope that is in you, Jesus Christ.

In Deuteronomy 10:19 the Lord says to His people Israel, "Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt." We who are all descendants of newcomers to this country have an opportunity to do the same through POBLO.

## Thank you...

- ...St. John's Lutheran Ladies Aid Society of Stewartville for a \$100.00 donation
- ...Ernest and Carol Meyer, Jr. of Wykoff for a \$50.00 donation

## Missionary's Update...

The month of December was a very busy but exciting month for John and Mariam Gayed. They visited four homes and had five different dinners inviting people to their home.

John and Mariam delivered gifts for 82 children in 35 families and met some new families through this outreach.

You will recall from last month's article, that John was meeting with a man who desperately needed to talk to someone about his family's situation while one of his sisters is a patient at Mayo Clinic. Before Christmas, John and Mariam met the man's mother and two of his sisters, visiting about the differences between the cultures of their homeland and the US. They miss their homeland but wish to stay here as they appreciate the freedom and openness of the people. The mother has invited Mariam to visit her again. The family will be here for three more months before they return to their country. In the meantime, the man continues to meet with pastor PJ once a week. John, too, meets with the man weekly. In one visit, religious beliefs were discussed, so John shared the huge differences between Islam and Christianity with the message of salvation. Now, each time they meet, John sows the seed a little more. *Please pray for this man and his family that they see the real light and receive Jesus as their personal Savior.*

## To find out more about POBLO....

If you are curious about what POBLO is and does, call to schedule a time to observe our ESL classes and sewing classes.

**"Let none hear you idly saying, 'There is nothing I can do...'"**

## Wants & Needs...

- Winter outerwear (hats, gloves/mittens, scarves)
- Gas cards
- Drivers to transport families to Redeemer for Sunday services
- Gift certificates for office supplies (Walmart, Target, Staples, Office Max, etc)
- Money for English as a Second Language books
- Volunteers for child care during Bible study (Mondays at 4 pm)
- Volunteers for our ESL classes – we now have about 55 students and are holding 15 classes a week. If you can talk – you can teach!
- Volunteers to be receptionists! With the expanding classes, we are in need of more receptionists to be present in the office. Consider giving 2 hours per week of your time!
- Volunteers to help at the sewing classes! 2 hours per week on Wednesdays!