

# Mission Interpreters Newsletter

Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana  
Mission Territory



## 250-year-old congregation still going strong

St. Benjamin Lutheran Church in Westminster, Md., is celebrating its 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary Oct. 30.

Founded in 1761, the congregation was one of many being organized along a well-known trail traveled by German immigrants "as they pushed their way from the port at Philadelphia," according to St. Benjamin's history.

Today St. Benjamin is a country church fast becoming a suburban church, according to Pastor David Shafer. "We have housing developments on land that was once corn fields. This has become our mission field," he says, adding that the congregation is reaching out to "people looking for a church home or seeking a closer walk with God. We are a growing church."

David is the 21<sup>st</sup> pastor called to the congregation. "There are not a whole lot of us pastors, given the congregation's 250-year history," he says.

To help the congregation celebrate the anniversary, ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson will preach at Sunday worship and Bishop Wolfgang Herz-Lane of the ELCA Delaware-Maryland Synod will preside. Later in the day the congregation will gather for a banquet dinner.

There are 400 members "on our books with 150 people who regularly worship on Sunday, and there's always room for more," says David. "We're a church that cares deeply for one another as family."

missioninterpreterscoordinator@ntnl.org

NOVEMBER 2011

"We cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard!" Acts 4:20

## Santa Maria, Irving TX

Santa Maria Lutheran Church is located in Irving, Texas, a Hispanic congregation with 2500 members. Santa Maria has a great commitment to the local social services and the community in Irving.

Pastor Pedro Portillo is not only recognized as a religious leader, but also as a community leader. He is part of the Irving Police Committee, a member of the Irving Committee of Firefighters, and he is also a member of the Advice Board for the Irving public schools. He has been recognized by the *Dallas Morning News* as the Community Leader of 2011. He says it wasn't him that won the award however, but the whole congregation. He is a leader, to be sure. But, he says, it has only been possible because of the congregation's support. Today his leadership is well-known, and Santa Maria has been recognized as a congregation with credibility to better serve the community.

Santa Maria has also developed an important relationship with the people of El Salvador who are victims of the storms that completely destroyed not only the homes but also the agriculture and cattle that they depend on. Santa Maria's goal is to raise \$15,000 by the 22 of November. The funds will benefit 30 families, helping them to construct houses, or it will be used to benefit 100 families, purchasing food for one year.

## Advent Lutheran, Arlington



Advent Lutheran Church in Arlington recently developed a strategic plan for ministry. One facet of the plan is focused on building relationships. As this plan is put into place new ideas for mission and ministry begin to emerge. One of those ideas came to light as members of the Parish Life Committee reflected upon how the congregation celebrates various life stages and transitions among the members. A lot of celebration takes place in the early part of life but what about later in life? This question led to the establishment of a birthday party for octogenarians and nonagenarians.

Invitations were sent to all members 80 years and older and their families to attend the first birthday celebration which was held on September 11<sup>th</sup> following worship. About 45 people in this age group were treated to a semi-catered meal which was followed by a slide show made up of pictures of the participants along with a few stories.

In order to make this event truly intergenerational the Sunday school children made party hats for everyone and the confirmation students conducted faith interviews with the participants who helped them to see and better understand the role that faith has played in the lives of these older members.

The event was a success and plans are in the works for more celebrations like this one in the future.



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.