

# SHARING

## newsletter

## Helping Kyrgyz People See — and Hear about Jesus

By Kim Krull

In 2003, an optometrist and evangelist began traveling to poor, remote villages of Kyrgyzstan, checking people's vision and distributing eyeglasses. Whenever a person expressed interest, the evangelist provided reading materials, such as Luther's Small Catechism, prayer booklets, and information on what Lutherans believe.

Some 20,000 of the Kyrgyz people have benefited from these eye tests, a rare opportunity in this destitute Central Asian country. Many also heard about Jesus through the mobile clinic, a project supported in part by LCMS World Relief and Human Care (WR-HC) through a grant to Concordia Lutheran Church in Kyrgyzstan. Concordia Mission Society also has provided funding.

But today, project coordinator Elena Bykova sadly reports that the longtime clinic faces challenges because of the country's political tensions and ethnic violence. Anti-government protestors overthrew the Kyrgyz president in the spring. Riots erupted between the Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities, displacing thousands of people. In June, Bykova said that instability had prevented church leaders from sending the eyeglass clinic into villages where it is most needed.

The clinic began five years after LCMS World Mission began partnering with Concordia Lutheran Church in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan's capital and largest city. Ongoing outreach work focuses on planting churches and training pastors and church leaders. Programs also include orphanages, women's ministry, health education, and agricultural projects.

In the months before the violence began, the mobile eyeglass clinic worked in Bishkek

and traveled to 15 villages. Most stops were near a Lutheran church or in communities with a Lutheran presence.

"In several villages where we had only [small] groups or home churches, the church members willingly offered their houses for the work of the eyeglass clinic," Bykova said in her report. "The eyeglass clinic stayed overnight in remote villages in order to save time and transportation money and to be able to see more patients. In such cases they worked long hours and saw about 30 people a day."

Along with touching the lives of thousands of clinic patients, the project also earned the support of the project's eyeglass supplier — a wholesale company run by three brothers who are Muslim. When the brothers learned about the program's humanitarian service "they showed a respect to us," Bykova said in her report. "Our relations with them became closer after the eyeglass clinic worked in their native village of Serafimovka where we had a church."

One day, one of the eyeglass suppliers called the clinic, saying the brothers wanted to help so that "the eyeglass clinic could serve more people." On the day that Bykova wrote her project report for WR-HC, another brother delivered some 1,000 pairs of eyeglasses!

Although the political and ethnic climates remain uncertain in Kyrgyzstan, Bykova and members of Concordia Lutheran Church are strong in their hope that the mobile clinic can soon continue to help people see — and hear.

"The eyeglass clinic project is a wonderful instrument of evangelism and rendering humanitarian aid to the poor and needy," Bykova wrote. "We pray God [will] allow the eyeglass clinic to continue its work."



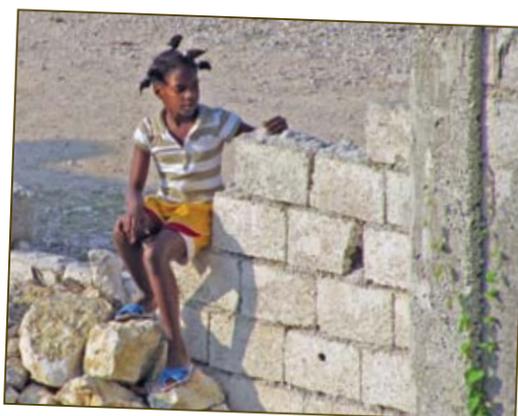
Since 2003, a mobile eyeglass clinic sponsored by Concordia Lutheran Church in Kyrgyzstan has served this woman and some 20,000 people, providing the rare opportunity for a vision exam.



The clinic distributes eyeglasses and, when a person expresses interest, reading materials such as Luther's Small Catechism and prayer books.

## Give God Glory...

... for caring donors who, to date, have given \$5.3 million to LCMS World Relief and Human Care for earthquake relief in Haiti! The **Lutheran Laymen's League Zone #3** designated a portion of each ticket sold from their spring rally at **Grace Lutheran Church, Monroe, Mich.**, to help in Haiti. Combined with additional donations, they collected a total of \$275! Students at **Bethlehem Lutheran School, Saginaw, Mich.**, also raised funds for Haitian relief by waging a "penny war." Pre-kindergarten through eighth grade classes "battled" to collect the most pennies while "sabotaging" each other with silver coins and paper money. Their donation: \$1,341.68! Recovery efforts in Haiti continue. You, too, can lend a hand. Visit [www.lcms.org/worldrelief](http://www.lcms.org/worldrelief) to learn more!



### How Your Gifts Support LCMS World Relief and Human Care

You can help make projects like these possible with your continuing or new gifts to "Where Needed Most." Please use the envelope provided in this issue to send your gift to help LCMS World Relief and Human Care continue to reach out with Christ's mercy around the world. (Note: Thanks to your generous gifts, this publication may occasionally feature projects that have been fully funded.)

The mission of the church through LCMS World Relief and Human Care is to reach out in mercy and compassion to those in need, motivated by Christ and His Gospel, according to the Lutheran confession of the faith.

SHARING is the bi-monthly newsletter of the disaster response and self-help development ministries of LCMS World Relief and Human Care. It is available free to individuals and in quantities to congregations and other groups. Published by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295; 314-965-9000 or 800-248-1930. Website: [www.lcms.org/worldrelief](http://www.lcms.org/worldrelief)

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# Delaware Agency Inspires Woman's Goal to Help Turn Around Lives

By Kim Krull

Michelle DeJesus was turning her life around and “clean” from drug addiction for more than four years. But as she struggled to make ends meet, she worried about falling into old bad habits.

At a bus stop, DeJesus met a woman who talked about her own struggles — and the support she found at Lutheran Community Services (LCS), an LCMS social ministry organization based in Wilmington, Del. The woman gave DeJesus the agency's phone number.

“I was really ashamed to admit that I didn't have enough money to feed myself, but times had gotten hard and I was desperate and hungry,” said DeJesus, who called LCS. After getting a caseworker's referral, DeJesus went to the food pantry at St. Stephens Lutheran Church, one of three stationary food pantries operated through LCS.

DeJesus calls that first visit “a surprising experience.” “The volunteer who served me gave me such a nice smile that the ashamed feeling left,” said DeJesus, who shared her story at an LCS fund-raiser last year. She told how she learned about programs through LCS, including a fresh fruit and vegetable giveaway that strengthened her resolve to eat healthier. The agency also connected DeJesus with a program to help her stop smoking.

Today, Michelle DeJesus is one of thousands of people whom LCS has assisted. In February, LCMS World Relief and Human Care (WR-HC) helped reinforce that assistance, awarding the agency a \$7,500 grant for its “Housing and Healthy Food for Families” program.

“Our mission is ‘sharing God's blessings by helping others in need,’ and we consider every instance of service, every time we are able to help someone in need, to be an accomplishment,” Dara Snyder, a former LCS program director, wrote in a grant report to WR-HC.

Founded in 1959 to help senior citizens with independent living needs, LCS has evolved into a multifaceted social service agency with

programs and locations to serve people of all ages. Those programs include food and housing assistance as well as clothing, transportation, and smoking cessation programs.

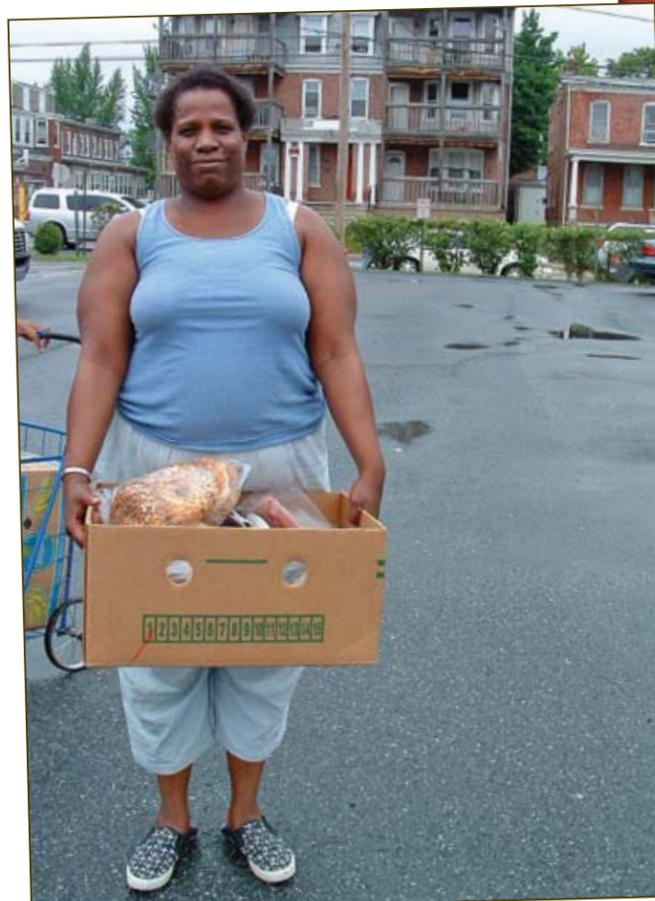
Along with physical challenges, LCS strives to meet spiritual needs. Through its FAITH Center, the agency connects the greater Wilmington religious community with opportunities to serve people through counseling, referrals, and financial assistance.

Food bags include prayers written by pastors from partner churches. “Pastors also pray about LCS clients to encourage congregational support and ministry involvement because we feel it is important to nourish our clients' spiritual health as well as the health of their physical bodies,” Snyder wrote.

When Michelle DeJesus spoke at that fundraiser, she told about how she was employed and taking classes to complete her GED. Her goal: to work as a drug and alcohol counselor and help other people change their lives for the better.

“I'm very grateful that LCS has been here as an important part of my support system,” she said. “I really believe that in the future, I'll be able to be a support system for others.”

To learn more about Lutheran Community Services, visit [www.lcsde.org](http://www.lcsde.org) or call 302-654-8886.



Through healthy food programs, Lutheran Community Services in Wilmington, Del., assists people such as Myra (pictured) and Michelle, who calls the social ministry organization “an important part of my support system.”

## Mercy Medical Teams Gear Up for Three Treks

Despite church structure changes mandated at the Synod's convention in July, LCMS World Relief and Human Care's popular Mercy Medical Team (MMT) program continues and is preparing to serve even more people. Three teams of medical volunteers are gearing up to serve in needy communities before the year's end in:

- the Antsirabe, Madagascar, region, Sept. 30–Oct. 11
- the Poto, Haiti, region, Oct. 17–26
- Matongo, Kenya, Nov. 4–15

Openings remain for MMT volunteers to provide care and work in collaboration with local Lutheran partners. For information, visit [www.lcms.org/mercyteams](http://www.lcms.org/mercyteams) or contact WR-HC's Jacob Fiene at [jacob.fiene@lcms.org](mailto:jacob.fiene@lcms.org) or 800-248-1930, ext. 1278.

## Mercy Work Will Continue to Help People in Need

As most of you no doubt know by now, delegates to the Synod's 64<sup>th</sup> Regular Convention held this July in Houston approved many changes. But please know that one important aspect of our church remains strong: our LCMS mercy work.

As we strive to implement the restructuring mandated at the convention, the many generous donors, supporters, and partners of LCMS World Relief and Human Care (WR-HC) can rest assured that the Synod's mercy work will continue and even expand. The ministry of mercy will saturate and affect virtually all of the Synod's life.

Certainly, we all have questions as a result of the convention actions. Huge changes in the church's structure were passed. The newly elected Synod president is now responsible for working through and implementing changes voted on in Houston. Today, the LCMS president is also responsible for the direction and implementation of all the work of the church's national office. We will need a great deal of help in these monumental tasks.

But here's something else I want my fellow LCMS members to know: At heart, I am a pastor. Pastors listen and slowly, prayerfully, make decisions. We'll take a deep breath, tackle restructuring, and continue to move forward in mission and mercy.

Whether serving as WR-HC executive director or as LCMS president, I can say with confidence that our Synod will continue to do what we Lutherans are called to do — reach out in mercy and in mission to body and soul needs. Orphans still need loving homes and congregations. People throughout the world still need physical assistance and spiritual care when disasters turn lives upside down.

During this decade, WR-HC donors provided more than \$125 million in gifts that enabled the Synod's mercy arm to reach out to people in need, motivated by Christ's love. On behalf of all the people you helped WR-HC assist, I thank you. With your prayers and ongoing support, our church's work of witness, mercy, and life together will grow!

Pastor Matthew Harrison

Rev. Matthew C. Harrison becomes the 13th president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod on Sept. 1, following his election at the LCMS 64th Regular Convention in July. Since 2001, Harrison served as executive director of LCMS World Relief and Human Care, the Synod's mercy arm.



Mercy forever.