

# Bethany Fund Report – June 2016

*Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*

*John 12:23*

In 2011, Bethany Lutheran Church in Forestville, MD made the difficult decision to close its doors. At that time, the faithful members of the congregation decided that the proceeds from the sale of their building would be designated for mission work. After tithing, the synod received 1.43 million to seed new churches and support renewal efforts in existing congregations. The synod is grateful for the bold generosity of the people of Bethany and excited about the ministry that is being made possible through that generosity.

Currently we have spent just under \$500,000 of the initial 1.43 million. This money has gone to support a variety of efforts at renewal and revitalization around the synod.

Grants have ranged in size from \$5,000 to almost \$200,000. They have allowed us to develop new ministries and to help existing congregations experiment with new and creative ways of being church. Some efforts have been successful, some have not. Many are still taking shape. We have learned from all of them. Below you will find a description of each of the ministries and projects that have been supported thus far.

## Congregations and New Ministries Supported

**River of Grace, Dumfries (\$191,322)** River of Grace is a new start that came about when Christus Victor was no longer self-sustaining and sought help from the synod. We brought in a mission developer who had successfully developed a congregation in Indiana and have supported the ministry developing there over the last 5 Years. This past year (2015), the congregation officially organized as a new congregation in the ELCA and they show every sign of being able to be self-supporting within the next 3 years.



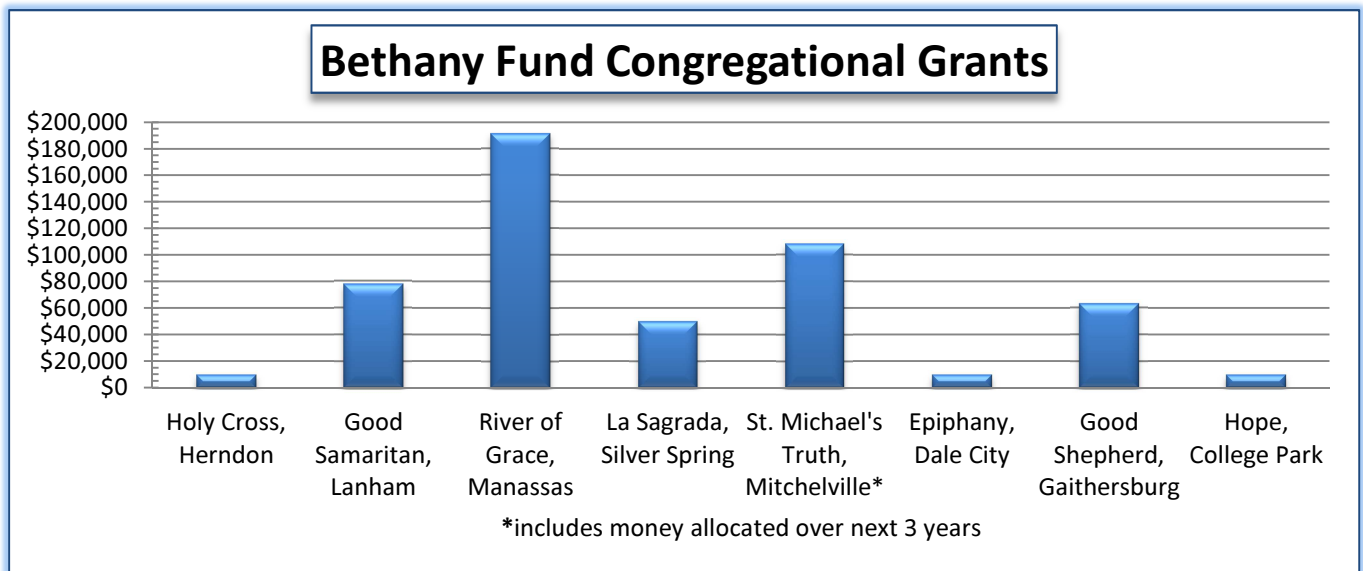
*Bishop Eaton welcomes River of Grace as an official congregation of the ELCA (above). River of Grace members participate in the local Christmas parade.*

**Epiphany, Dale City (\$10,000)** –Epiphany was struggling and the money was used to help them call a more experienced pastor than they could otherwise afford with the hope that they could revitalize their ministry. After showing initial promise, it appears that the effort is not succeeding and the congregation is looking at closing or merging (possibly with River of Grace).

**Good Shepherd, Gaithersburg (\$63,250)** Good Shepherd received money from the Bethany Fund in conjunction with a grant that it received from the ELCA. The money was used over a 3 year period to help Good Shepherd achieve growth in 3 areas, 1) mission support to the larger church, 2) program involvement from members and 3) weekly attendance. Thanks to this grant, in 2014 the congregation was able to call Pastor Leila Ortiz to help them grow. The added pastoral capacity also enabled them to partner with Epiphany in Burtonsville MD in order to offer administrative and pastoral support. In addition, Good Shepherd has been able to grow their mission support to the synod significantly in the last 3 years and they have seen a good increase in congregational ownership and involvement in programs outside of Sunday morning (particularly with woman and young adults)



*Women's ministry at Good Shepherd*



**Good Samaritan, Lanham (\$78,051)** Good Samaritan was placed under synodical administration in 2013 when they could not afford to continue on their own. We used Bethany funds to hire

an African national pastor to redevelop the congregation. The congregation did not meet the synod's attendance goals and so the decision was made to end synodical administration and financial support in 2015. However, the congregation has now managed to become self-supporting. With the pastor/redeveloper that we helped place there, the demographics of the congregation have shifted and its membership is now primarily made up of African nationals.

### Hope, College Park (\$10,000)



\$10,000 was used as seed money to help support a new partnership between the congregation and campus ministry. This partnership has allowed Hope to have stronger pastoral leadership than they would have otherwise been able to afford. The partnership is off to a good start and shows strong promise.

*The installation of Julie Bringman as pastor of Hope in College Park.*

**La Sagrada, Silver Spring (\$50,000)** This ministry is an important outreach in one of the poorest areas of our synod. They are a worshipping community with a strong advocacy and education ministry among new immigrants (primarily from Central America). Our hope was initially to help them become an ELCA congregation with a called pastor. However, given the poverty of the people they serve, we realized that this would not be possible and so we shifted our focus to helping them find a way to partner with another congregation to become self-sustaining. This money has helped us transition them to their new partnership with St. Luke where they can continue as a thriving and vital ministry, supported by St. Luke and by other partners in the synod.

### St. Michael's Truth, Mitchellville/Our Saviour's Temple Hills (\$5,058)

St. Michael's Truth is one of our few African American worshipping communities in the synod. The initial grant that they received was to purchase hymnals and bibles for their congregation. We are also partnering with them in a new outreach effort in Temple Hills. The congregation of Our Saviour's in Temple Hills had declined to the point where they were



*Youth basketball team from St. Michael's and Our Saviour's*

worshipping about 12 people each week. In 2014, St. Michael's Truth agreed to take over the campus at Our Saviour's to develop a new ministry there that would better reflect the demographics of the primarily African American neighborhood that it was located in. We have committed \$103,405 over the next 3 years to support this new partnership and are excited about the possibilities it offers.

*New dance and drum ministry at Our Saviour's*



**Holy Cross, Herndon (\$10,000)** Holy Cross received \$10,000 in seed money to help start a ministry with 2<sup>nd</sup> generation latinos in the area. Although we felt that the idea had promise, the effort was ultimately not successful.

**Shepherd of the Hills, Haymarket (\$0)**

Shepherd of the Hills was experiencing rapid growth and they needed a new facility. Money from the Bethany fund was used to guarantee first the construction loan for their new facility and then the mortgage that they currently have. At present, the synod has \$300,000 of the Bethany fund in an



investment account with the Mission Investment Fund. As Shepherd of the Hills continues to pay down their mortgage, this money will again become available to the synod for other ministry opportunities. \$100,000 will be released every two years with all the funds being released back to the synod by 2021. They continue to grow as they enjoy their new facility (above and left)

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## Leadership Development and Renewal Efforts

### **The Journey (\$36,068)**

This 3 year process was led by Chris Nelson, Senior Pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Minneapolis. 28 congregations that showed good potential for growth were invited to participate. Over the course of 3 years, the participating congregations sent pastors and lay leaders to bi-annual events where they were invited to explore different ways of being church and revitalizing ministry. This process was energizing for many of the congregations and ended in the spring of 2015.



*Good Samaritan in Lexington Park, a Journey participant, welcomes new members*

**Intentional Impact Training (\$28,630)** – This process began last year and is showing great promise. 14 congregations with the potential to start new ministries have been invited to participate. They are being trained by Brian Zehr, a pastor and leadership coach. The training is focused on the multiplication of leaders in congregations and the hope is that many of the new congregations we plan to start in the next five years will be birthed out of these 14 congregations.

