

Liberty Line Provides Freedom for Those Without Means of Transportation

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2/22/2017

When a second millage proposal in Montcalm County failed to provide a transportation service for those who, for physical or financial reasons, have no means of transportation, the members of Hope, Stanton and Holy Trinity, Lakeview (English District, LCMS) began to consider how they could serve their community. There was no public transportation in the county outside of a bus service in the city of Greenville.

Dual parish pastor Rev. Steven Voelker viewed this as an opportunity for the two LCMS congregations to more closely interact, and encouraged the members of both congregations to form a board to investigate the possibilities of providing transportation for those in need. The board met with community leaders and social and government agencies to gather input and suggestions. They also met with several nearby counties that have such transportation services to learn more and discover ways they could implement the same for the Lakeview/Central Montcalm school district areas.

In November 2016, *Liberty Line* was dedicated. Its mission, as the grace of God has directed, is to provide freedom of movement for all those in the community. The ministry also serves as an avenue to develop relationships, which opens the door to share the Good News of God's love through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus. Staffed by volunteer dispatchers who match drivers with riders in Stanton and Lakeview, it is their hope to expand to the entire county as volunteers and funding becomes available. Most of the board members, dispatchers, and drivers are from Hope and Holy Trinity; others come from area churches.

Establishing the ministry hasn't been a completely smooth road. In fact, the biggest challenge seemed to be the time it took between putting all the pieces together and getting the ball rolling. It took over a year from the initial concept to getting underway. During that span of time, some volunteers' interest waned. When asked if there was anything in the process that could have been done differently, Rev. Voelker states, *"It would have been to recruit volunteers, train them, and get them working right away while it was fresh in their minds. Also, finding an expert in grant writing would have helped us tremendously."*

But despite the struggles, *"It has been amazing to see how God has opened doors and blessed this ministry,"* shares Brenda Smith, Liberty Line Director. *"There is one woman who is transported three times a week. Her husband suffered a stroke and is in a long-term care unit. Three drivers take turns dropping her off and picking her up."* This client shares, *"Everyone is so nice and I don't know what I would do without these rides."*

Rev. Voelker suggests that, if your congregation is seeking to serve the community, the first step would be to consider its needs, then set a mission statement, goals, and keep the momentum going forward. He states, *"It may have taken us a year, but the time and effort was truly worth the wait. We have seen many blessings for our volunteers, church members, and the community. As they have taken part in Liberty Line, they feel connected to something worthwhile and beneficial for their fellowman."* He adds, *"Please keep Liberty Line in your prayers and ask that the Holy Spirit use this ministry to do great things for the Kingdom of God in Stanton, Lakeview, and Montcalm County."*



This client needs a ride three times a week to visit her husband in long-term care. Photo courtesy of Liberty Line.

