

## Congregations Blessed by New Friends

“We feel devastated if we have to miss a visit with our friends at Hattie Larlham,” says Sandy French of *Rejoice! Lutheran in Hudson*. She is part of a ministry team that leads monthly worship at the Hattie Larlham campus in Mantua, a residential facility serving young people who have multiple disabilities. A number of congregations in the NE Ohio Synod are making similar efforts to reach out to people in their communities who have intellectual and developmental disabilities.

In addition to Rejoice! Lutheran, *Advent Lutheran in Solon* and *Lutheran Church of the Master in Bedford* “companion with” several local group homes that are also operated by Hattie Larlham. *All Saints Lutheran in Olmsted Falls* companions with a local group home operated by Welcome House. In all these cases, a ministry team from the congregation visits the home on a regular, at least monthly, basis to share in singing, study, prayer and fellowship. “The best part is being the family of God together as we spend time with our Hattie Larlham friends,” says Janet Juliano, another member of Rejoice! Lutheran.

*Messiah Lutheran in Fairview Park* has for a number of years offered a Sunday morning Bible Class with the residents of two nearby group homes, all of whom are members of the congregation. *Messiah Lutheran in Lyndhurst* and *Bethel Lutheran in Middleburg Heights* both offer a mid-week Community Bible Class attracting participants from a number of group homes operated by different providers. Tom Fox, pastor of Messiah in Lyndhurst, explains that “this ministry has literally opened the doors for Messiah to become a more inclusive congregation.” Carol Krajewski coordinates ‘God’s Faithful Followers’ at Bethel Lutheran, now in its 31<sup>st</sup> year. “It’s just as much fun and just as rewarding now as when I first became involved in 1990!” she says. “The participants truly are our friends.”

Many of these ministries were started with the help of Eric Kretzmann, Disability Ministry Consultant with Bethesda Ministries. His services are available at no cost to any congregation in the synod wanting to begin, strengthen or expand a disability ministry. He can be contacted at [eric.kretzmann@mailblc.org](mailto:eric.kretzmann@mailblc.org) or 440-222-2477.

## Preparations for Commemoration of the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation: Ecumenical Relations Committee

Your Ecumenical Relations Committee has been working diligently through the year to bring about Synod-wide activities towards the commemoration of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation in 2017. October 23, 2016, there will be a special service at Zion Lutheran, Canton, celebrating the Lutheran-Catholic Covenant of the Youngstown Diocese and the NEO Synod. On October 29, 2017, there will be Evening Prayer at St. Colombo in Youngstown commemorating the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation.

The 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemoration of the Reformation provides a unique opportunity to dialogue with other ecumenical partners and especially the Roman Catholic Church during the coming year. Here in NE Ohio the Synod has engaged in continuing talks with the Roman Catholic churches of the Youngstown Diocese through the Lutheran-Catholic Covenant Commission. We also have churches in the areas of the Cleveland and Steubenville Dioceses. You may already have a working relationship with a Catholic church in your town that would provide a local venue for working together in a prayer service, study group or service of your choosing. The committee would like to know how you are planning to commemorate this memorable anniversary. We already have the following churches that have shown interest: Westlake Prince of Peace; Brecksville Christ the Redeemer; Lorain First Lutheran; Stow St. Stephen; Fairlawn Faith Lutheran; and Ravenna St. Paul. Please contact any member of the Ecumenical Relations Committee, Bob Springer, Chair, to share your plans or questions.

Numerous resources are available to help you prepare for this event, e.g., [Prayer Intentions for Lutheran and Catholic Congregations](#), [Common Prayer](#), and for Book Study Groups: [One Hope: Re-Membering the Body of Christ](#) (available via [www.store.augsburgfortress.org](http://www.store.augsburgfortress.org)), [From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017](#) ([www.elca.org/Resources](http://www.elca.org/Resources)), [From Conflict to Communion Study Guide](#) ([www.elca.org/Resources](http://www.elca.org/Resources)), and [Declaration on the Way: Church, Ministry, and Eucharist](#).