



INSPIRITUS
REPORT TO THE 2019 SOUTHEASTERN SYNOD COUNCIL
September 2019

Organization Updates

Inspiritus welcomed the following new board members in May: Rev. Dr. Rosetta Ross, Professor of Religion, Spelman College; Ms. Debra McKeever, Supervisor, The Wilbert Group; and Ms. Ann Dettmering, Attorney/Mediator, Smith, Schnatmeier, Dettmering & Reeves, LLP. Also in May, Mr. Ed Ringer, Trinity, Lilburn, GA was elected Board Chair.

In June, Inspiritus welcomed Kirby Nickerson to the executive team as our new CFO. In an effort to be good stewards of our finances, we have hired Kirby to work on a part-time basis, while continuing to serve as CFO of one of our sister agencies, Lutheran Services Carolinas (LSC). Kirby will oversee Inspiritus' finances from his office in Charlotte, NC and will spend time in our territory regularly. We are grateful for the knowledge and experience Kirby brings to Inspiritus and are happy to have him on our team.

In August, Michelle Angalet, who had been serving as the Vice President of Programs, was appointed Chief Operating Officer. This move serves to consolidate the operations and programs functions of Inspiritus as the organization continues to identify ways to direct more of our resources to direct support of programs and services we offer. Michelle is a deacon in the ELCA Southeastern Synod and joined the Inspiritus staff in January 2019.

Following a space study that determined that Inspiritus has 3X more central office space than it needs, the Inspiritus Board, at its August meeting, authorized the CEO to consider sub-leasing the office space at 230 Peachtree Street to another tenant and moving our HQ offices into more appropriate sized and priced space in Atlanta. The potential move will allow Inspiritus to align financial resources being expended on space into programs. In the next several months, our management team will be actively studying where to relocate our offices to best align with the delivery of our programs.

On August 3, Inspiritus joined with other resettlement agencies in the Atlanta area for a 'Rise for Refuge' town hall meeting, which was a part of a national Day of Action designed to bring attention to U.S. resettlement program. 11 Alive ran a news segment covering the event, which featured Inspiritus Program Director and former refugee Aimee Zangandou. This event, along with other similar events around the country, was organized as a response to a report that surfaced revealing that the Trump Administration was considering lowering the refugee admission ceiling to as low as zero for Fiscal Year 2020. Inspiritus has also encouraged its Board, staff and supporters to advocate for a refugee admission ceiling of 90,000.

Programs Updates

- After a thorough evaluation of our program offerings, the Inspiritus Board of Directors and Executive Leadership team made the difficult decision to downsize the programs and services offered in our Children and Family Services program. Due to internal and external factors, it had become increasingly difficult for Inspiritus to deliver adoption services at the level of excellence we believe our families and our partners deserve, so Inspiritus closed its adoption program at the end of June. Our staff worked closely with our funding partners to transition the families and children we had been serving. In addition, Inspiritus shifted its focus in foster care to serving primarily children with significant medical and behavioral needs in the metro Atlanta and North Georgia regions. As of mid-August, we successfully completed the transfer of our foster homes in Albany and Savannah, as well as the transfer of some of our homes in the Metro Atlanta and Rome regions. Our staff has been working closely with DFCS to make this happen as seamlessly as possible for the foster care children we served and for the foster parents who cared for them. Inspiritus also ceased providing Family Intervention Services (FIS) offerings in Savannah, but will continue to offer them in the metro Atlanta region.
- Inspiritus is on track to more than double the number of refugees resettled in Clarkston and Savannah than we budgeted for in FY2019.
- We have almost 30 homes in the Disability Services host home pipeline to increase our capacity to serve more individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities.
- There are now 184 gardens in three counties in Middle Tennessee, providing gardening tools and education as well as fresh fruits and vegetables for families in low-income communities.
- As the crisis continues at the Southern border of the United States, Inspiritus continues to serve unaccompanied minors through our home study/post release program and through our safe release support (fingerprinting). Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) has invited Inspiritus to apply for funding to expand both our fingerprinting and home study/post release work in support of unaccompanied minors. Our proposal would allow us to serve individuals in Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee and Mississippi.
- We are also in conversation with LIRS and other CPA (child placing agencies) in Georgia about a possible proposal to house unaccompanied children in Georgia. Any Inspiritus proposal would provide an alternative to large facility housing of unaccompanied children.
- In Disaster Response, we continue to do long-term recovery work in Savannah and Brunswick following Hurricane Irma and in Albany following the tornadoes and Hurricane Michael. We also continue to be in conversation with our local partners, including local government officials, about the possibility of partnering to do continued construction management through federal dollars set to be released to the communities most impacted by recent hurricanes. In addition, we are pleased to have Ms. Sherry Buresh providing oversight.
- After being chosen as one of the Nashville Predator's featured charity, the MyCanvas program in Nashville has received continued support from the NHL team and its players. Team members spent time this summer helping children with projects during the MyCanvas's summer programs.
- The senior leadership team continues to recognize the organization's need to be more proactive in monitoring the numerous environments in which we deliver programs and services. Each one of those environments is increasingly dynamic and we must be increasingly able to adapt and pivot in response to environmental

changes. To that end, we are actively evaluating a number of programmatic opportunities that would allow us to grow both in numbers served (what we are calling “wide” growth), as well as in the expertise that we have to deliver programs and services (what we are calling “deep” growth). We are working closely with our Board to develop a framework which helps us evaluate these opportunities against our mission and in light of our capacity, but also allows us to move quickly as we are often called upon to do in responding to RFPs and funding opportunities.

Community Engagement Update

- On April 10, Inspiritus hosted its spring Faith Leaders Breakfast on the topic of Immigration and the Welcoming Church with ELCA Bishop Julian Gordy and Episcopal Bishop Rob Wright in a panel interacting with faith leader and clergy guests on ways the church can live out the mandate to love, welcome, serve and seek justice alongside our immigrant neighbors from around the world.
- At the 2019 ELCA Southeastern Synod Assembly in Chattanooga, Inspiritus presented several workshops and hosted a Friday night dinner at which many members and several congregations of the synod received awards for their service to the community in partnership with Inspiritus.
- On Sunday evening, June 16, 2019, Inspiritus celebrated World Refugee Day by hosting the annual international potluck called “Breaking Bread and Building Bridges.” Guests included many of the refugees resettled by Inspiritus during 2018-19, volunteers and faith and community partners, including many from the Southeastern Synod. The dinner was held at Rock of Ages Lutheran Church in Stone Mountain, Georgia.
- On Thursday, June 20, 2019, Inspiritus hosted a deep dive into refugee and immigration issues as part of the Lutheran Theological Center In Atlanta’s Urban Plunge. This day included cultural exchange visits with refugee families resettled in Clarkston, Georgia by Inspiritus.
- On Wednesday, August 21, 2019, Inspiritus hosted its summer Faith Leaders Breakfast on the topic of Wellness and Resilience for Faith Leaders and Clergy with speaker the Rev. Dr. Bill Harkins – therapist, Episcopal priest and pastoral theologian. An ecumenical group including clergy and faith leaders from the Southeastern Synod gathered at Peachtree Road UMC in Buckhead for the breakfast.
- Five congregations from the Southeastern Synod wrapped up a year of walking alongside a refugee family this summer as part of Inspiritus Circle of Welcome initiative: Trinity Lutheran/Lilburn; Lutheran Church of the Redeemer/Atlanta; Living Grace Lutheran/Tucker; Rock of Ages Lutheran/Stone Mountain and Resurrection Lutheran/Newnan. Prince of Peace Lutheran/St. John’s Creek is continuing to walk alongside the refugee family they welcomed in November 2018 in partnership with 2 LCMS congregations in their area.

Development Update

- Inspiritus was once again chosen as a benefiting partner for the Atlanta Community Food Bank’s Hunger Walk/Run in 2019. Together with its partnering churches, Inspiritus raised \$63,114,53 for the 2019 Walk/Run. Hundreds of Lutherans from congregations across the synod walked and ran to raise funds for Inspiritus, their

own hunger-related ministries, and the Atlanta Community Food Bank. The 2020 date has been set for March 15, 2020.

- A recent appeal mailing focused on raising funds for our Refugee and Immigrant Services program was recently mailed to more than 2,000 contacts.

Communications Update

- Inspiritus has launched a paid social media campaign focused on recruiting hosts for our youth host home programs and on raising awareness and funds for our programs serving unaccompanied migrant children, an issue that has been featured frequently in recent headlines.