

# AFACT

ANCHORAGE FAITH & ACTION • CONGREGATIONS TOGETHER



FALL 2010

## School District Initiates Parent Teacher Home Visitation Project

In 2005, AFACT's Alaska Native Organizing Ministry began conversations with the Anchorage School District (ASD) to promote meaningful parent engagement. The Ministry leaders were encouraged in August, when ASD hosted the Parent Teacher Home Visitation Project (PTHVP) training. The impetus for the training grew out of the Alaska Native Organizing Ministry leaders' deep concern about the dropout rate of Alaska Native students in ASD; however the PTHVP will benefit all ASD students by building relationships among parents and teachers.

When introducing the PTHVP trainers from Sacramento, Superintendent Carol Comeau credited AFACT for its perseverance over the past five years in encouraging the District to utilize the parent teacher visitation model to promote healthy relationships. Carrie Rose, the director of PTHVP, noted that the project in Sacramento also grew out of the work of a faith-based community organization, much like AFACT.

According to the ASD, the four pilot schools for the Parent Teacher Home Visitation Project are Scenic Park, Susitna, Lake Hood and Willow Crest elementary schools. Linda Carlson, the Director of Elementary Education, said that each of the schools has a budget for the project and site leaders have been chosen. In recent conversations with the pilot school principals, AFACT leader Gemma Gaudio heard overwhelming enthusiasm and excitement about the project.

Nicole Holta, a teacher and site leader at Scenic Park Elementary School, said that her first three visits "were a very positive

*Trainers meet with school personnel and community members at Central Lutheran Church. From left to right, PTHVP trainers Carrie Rose, Jennifer Garcia, Nancy Fong, Yesenia Gonzalez and Cory Jones.*

Photo by James Murphy.

*Let us not grow tired of doing good,  
for in due time we shall reap our harvest,  
if we do not give up.*

~Galatians 6:9

experience. If a picture says a thousand words, then a home visit says a million...I was also able to meet and develop a relationship with some parents I had not yet met this school year."

Ms. Holta said she thinks

the fruits of the visits will unfold over the course of the school year. She described those fruits, saying, "I think our [parent and teacher] meeting is helpful because with upcoming conferences we have a developed relationship that will help us communicate and focus on our goals for the child. I also feel more comfortable talking with them and calling them on the phone than I did before. I find myself actually communicating with these parents more because I have invested the time to get to know them."

Admittedly, Ms. Holta's first steps in initiating parent teacher home visits were not easy. But, she said, "I am happy I overcame the initial fear of that first phone call. It was well worth it."

Ms. Holta was not alone in her enthusiasm. Lynn Mayberry-Burke, also a Scenic Park site leader, appreciated her initial visits because "there was not a specific agenda other than to talk and get to know one another better. The children... loved being the center of attention, especially since it was not related to academics or behavior. They shared about their pets, favorite toys, and what they like to do out of school."

Ms. Mayberry-Burke

is a strong advocate for the visits. "Building strong connections with my students and their families is critical to me for helping children be academically successful. It is by working together that we can create the webs of support that children need to feel safe and open to learning. The Home Visitation Project provides the opportunities



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# AFACT Budget Forum Reflects on Municipal Priorities

In October, AFACT member congregations hosted a Citywide Municipal Budget Forum to respond to Mayor Sullivan's proposed 2011 budget. Five Anchorage Assembly Members and a representative from Mayor Sullivan's office attended the forum and listened to testimony on public priorities around children, safety and community.



Pastor Scott Fuller welcomes public officials to the budget forum. Seated from left to right: Assembly Members Elvi Gray-Jackson, Mike Gutierrez, Ernie Hall, Paul Honeman, Dick Traini and the Mayor's Chief of Staff Larry Baker. Photo by Ron Nicholl

Pastor Scott Fuller of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church opened the forum with the parable of the house built on a rock, reflecting that the ways in which municipal funds are used dictate the sturdiness of Anchorage's foundation.

Carol Peterson of Central Lutheran Church urged Assembly members to examine how this budget impacts youth recreation throughout the city and to reconsider the municipality's proposed policy of charging Campfire for the use of the Fairview Recreation Center. The new charges could force Campfire to close their doors at the Fairview Recreation Center. A parent with a son in the West Fairview Campfire program housed at Central Lutheran Church praised that program and she could not imagine her son not being able to attend.

Sandy Fazio of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church lamented funding cuts for the Neighborhood Watch program in prior years. She asked, "If engagement of neighborhoods is of any value to making this city just a little bit safer to live in, where is this on the priority list?"

Darla Siver noted that the proposed 2011 budget reflects

a decrease of \$2.5 million to the Anchorage Police Department's funding. According to APD Chief Mark Mew, that means the elimination of 18 sworn officer positions. Those reductions will make it difficult to deliver APD's goal of community policing. Darla further shared that because the Community Action


Patrol unit has been so successful in improving quality of life in the Anchorage community, it should remain a priority.

Carolyn Fuller praised the proactive, rather than reactive, nature of the School Resource Officer program and asked that the program be funded by the municipality and not the school district.

Annette Alleva of St. Anthony Parish responded to the citywide issue of graffiti. Alleva said, "We challenge you to see with new eyes. Look! When you get used to seeing graffiti you are beginning to lose the battle against other social ills. Anchorage can't afford to lose that battle." She asked for appropriate funding to secure the timely removal of Anchorage graffiti.

*"We challenge you to see with new eyes."*

~Annette Alleva

Reverend Michael Keys, Bishop of the ELCA Alaska Synod shared, "There has been a lot of talk about the municipal budget and money. This is not about money. It is a question of commitment and leadership; commitment in keeping children, community and safety a priority and leadership on the part of the assembly and this administration. We cannot use money as an excuse. This is about setting the priorities and honoring the commitments made to children, community and safety." 

## A Message from the Board Chair

### The Rev. Lisa Smith, Central Lutheran Church



AFACT leaders working on the issue of children's health care saw momentum at a Kid's First Alaska Summit October 19 at the BP Energy Center in Anchorage. More than forty people from advocacy organizations and non-profits attended this summit sponsored by the Mat-Su Health Foundation and the All-Alaska Pediatric Partnership. I attended, along with Bob Lincoln of Bethel Chapel and two AFACT staff members.

According to Tricia Brooks, guest presenter from Georgetown's Center for Children and Families, about 22,000 Alaska children are without health care coverage. About half of those would qualify for Medicaid or Denali Kid Care. Brooks provided information about barriers to enrollment and incentives offered by the federal government.

In a brainstorming session, attendees

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*Message from Board Chair continued*


expressed concern about the state of children's health care access in Alaska, using words like "frustrated," "concerned," and "more work to do." The Alaska legislature recently passed a bill expanding Denali Kid Care (DKC) to families at 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). The bill was later vetoed by the governor, leaving Denali Kid Care funding at 175% FPL and leaving Alaska among the bottom three states for coverage.

At the summit, AFACT leaders shared their work on children's health care and connected with other agencies and individuals involved in this issue. The concern is city and statewide. Those attending the summit pledged to communicate as they move forward.

The October 19 summit was just one example of AFACT's ongoing work on children's health care. AFACT leaders have held two large public meetings on this issue and heard the concern rise up from families in hundreds of one-to-one visits. Leaders met with state legislators in the Anchorage area and four leaders traveled to Juneau in March to talk with legislators during the legislative session. Leaders held two prayer vigils to pray for children's health.

AFACT is now recognized as a local and statewide leader on children's health care. In April, AFACT was asked to send one representative to a western states gathering on children's health care, sponsored by the Georgetown Center for Children and Families. Four stakeholders from each state were invited and I attended this conference in Salt Lake City on behalf of AFACT.

Along with advocates from throughout the western United States, I learned about the impact of federal health reform and its implementation. Presenters shared best practices on children's health care in other states. I developed relationships with other Alaskans in attendance and we shared our work on children's health care. It was a time of education, mutual encouragement and relationship building.

Those relationships, as well as the ones formed at the October 19 summit, strengthen our belief that all of Alaska's children will soon have access to affordable health care. 

# 2010 AFACT Leader Retreat

## *Reflecting, Sharing, Rejoicing*

Photos by Choron Ryan




and supports needed to build these connections.”

PTVHP began in Sacramento in 1998 as an effort to address a cycle of blame between parents and school personnel. The emerging partnership between a faith-based community organization, the teachers’ union and the school district is now being replicated throughout the United States.

AFACT leaders first engaged with the PTHVP in 2006, when AFACT leaders were invited to train teachers in home visitations at two pilot schools, Romig and Willow Crest. PTHVP provided consultation to AFACT on the model and method used in Sacramento.

In an effort to further expand the model, AFACT leaders shared a PTHVP video with School Board members and District personnel. In June 2009, the Alaska Native Organizing Ministry presented a proposal to the School District and the School Board, urging them to bring the PTHVP trainers to Anchorage using ARRA stimulus funds. The proposal received overwhelming School Board support, as well as a resolution of support from the Cook Inlet Tribal Council – Johnson O’Malley Native Education Committee.

The training took place in August, with five teacher and parent trainers from PTVHP. They introduced school district personnel and community partners to a model in which teachers visit families outside of the school, in an environment that is comfortable to the parents, in order to build professional relationships as co-educators. A second PTVHP training is scheduled for spring 2011. 

## AFACT Member Congregations

Alaska Native Lutheran Church  
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church  
Bethel Chapel  
Catholic Native Ministry  
Central Lutheran Church  
Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church  
First CME Church  
Gloria Dei Lutheran Church  
Immanuel Presbyterian Church  
New Hope Baptist Church  
Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church  
St. Anthony Catholic Church  
St. Mark Lutheran Church

*For more information contact:*  
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