

# AFACT

ANCHORAGE FAITH & ACTION • CONGREGATIONS TOGETHER



FALL 2006

## Central Lutheran Secures After-School Care for West Fairview Youth

Tackling youth safety and preventing youth violence are on the minds of most Anchorage residents these days. The city has held forums and established task forces devoted to the topic of violence among our young. But prevention can take many forms.

The faith community of Central Lutheran Church is tackling the safety of youth in their West Fairview neighborhood, beginning with 26 elementary age children. Their work has resulted in an unprecedented partnership providing after-school care to children who in the past have gone without.

On July 31, 2006, Central Lutheran, Campfire and the Municipality agreed to a plan that provides after-school and year-round care to the West Fairview children attending Denali Elementary. The plan, implemented on the first day of school, 2006, provides Campfire programming at Central Lutheran Church, funded by the Municipality of Anchorage. Within two weeks of the start of school the program was full, with 26 children enrolled. In addition, Campfire set aside six slots in the program at Denali Elementary, reserving those slots for West Fairview children.

This remarkable partnership was the result of nine months of work by Central Lutheran's Community Organizing Ministry. During the winter of 2005-06, members of the ministry conducted more than one hundred visits with parishioners and neighbors.

Bishop Michael Keys, formerly Senior Pastor at Central Lutheran Church, said, "We learned a lot from the one-to-one meetings. The surprise was how much pain and struggle there is in our community which goes unaddressed."

The visits resulted in a meeting on May 17, 2006, when more than 200 people gathered at Central Lutheran Church to discuss the after-school care needs of the small West Fairview



*Neighborhood youth and friends listen attentively at the Central Lutheran Action. From L to R: Calvin Tom, Carla Hollingsworth, Ritchie Gessells, Dustin Lieb and Richard Noheart.*

neighborhood. Mary Jane Michael, Executive Director of the Municipal Office of Economic and Community Development, was present at the meeting to hear the testimony and the research and respond to questions.

West Fairview families have few options for after-school care. Programs such as Campfire are available at Denali Elementary, but at a high cost to the parents and primarily utilized by families from outside the neighborhood whose children attend Denali's Montessori program.

Programs exist in East Fairview, but crossing Gambell and Ingra is out of the question for elementary-age youth.

A group of West Fairview youth testified at Central's May meeting, outlining exactly where in the neighborhood one could buy drugs, find a prostitute, or encounter public inebriates. Their point was clear: it is not safe for children to play in this neighborhood.

Central organizing ministry members presented their research and testimony to Ms. Michael. After hearing from church leaders, residents and school personnel, Ms. Michael said, "Affordable and accessible daycare and after-school care for the neighborhood is definitely one of the highest priorities, and I want to thank those families and students who testified. Their stories were powerful."

Bishop Keys declared the meeting a solid success, saying, "We accomplished our goal."

Others agreed. Marcus Wilson, Title I teacher at Denali Elementary and a resident of Fairview, attributes the new after-school program's very existence to the "persistence" of the members of Central Lutheran's organizing ministry.

Wilson is grateful to Central Lutheran and notes, "there's more stability now, because you don't have these children hanging around after school lets out. This gives them something structured to do."

# AFACT in Review

*In 2003, Anchorage Faith & Action — Congregations Together was only a vision — a vision for building leadership and creating positive change in Anchorage. The vision is now a reality. . .*

## May 2003

St. Anthony Catholic Church begins a one-to-one listening campaign to build leadership and surface community concerns.

## February 2004

More than 450 people gather in St. Anthony Catholic Church to address public safety concerns. The congregation wins a commitment from two Anchorage assemblymen to support community oriented policing in Anchorage.

## April 2004

St. Anthony Organizing Ministry is presented with a Citation from Alaska Legislature honoring “the grassroots movement dedicated to community outreach and advocacy, bringing people and public servants together to promote civic participation and improve local economies.”

## August 2004

St. Anthony Organizing Ministry mobilizes the residents of Mountain View to seek federal Weed & Seed funding to weed out crime and sow seeds of opportunity. Official Weed & Seed recognition was received in 2005.

## November 2004

The U.S. Attorney presents a \$50,000 check to Anchorage Police Chief for increased police presence in East Anchorage. U.S. Attorney Tim Burgess notes St. Anthony’s critical role “in pushing those of us in law enforcement... to find additional resources.”

## March 2005

AFACT’s 11 member congregations gather more than 400 people



for a meeting on public safety with Mayor Mark Begich and Police Chief Monegan. Both officials commit to include principles of community policing in APD’s strategic plan and begin implementation.

## September 2005

After an eight-month listening campaign and diligent research, Alaska Native Lutheran Church and Catholic Native Ministry hold a meeting at Central Lutheran Church. The organizing leaders win a commitment from School Superintendent Carol Comeau to implement a pilot project addressing the high drop-out rate and low proficiency levels of Alaska Native Students. Superintendent Comeau describes the meeting as “one of the most impassioned and compelling meetings in my 32 years in ASD.”



## March 2006

St. Mark Lutheran Church hosts AFACT’s first Mayoral Candidate Forum. Candidates were questioned about youth violence, homeless camps, substance abuse treatment, and recreation issues.

## March and May 2006

In response to growing gang violence, AFACT hosts two Clergy/Cops/Kids forums to promote positive relationships between police and youth. Held at First CME and Central Lutheran churches, the forums gather pastors, police officers and more than 60 Alaska Native, Samoan, African American, Filipino and Caucasian youth for small group discussion and sharing.

## April 2006

Mountain View is awarded a \$174,300 federal Weed & Seed grant, a successful outcome of St. Anthony Organizing Ministry’s mobilization of Mountain View residents in 2004, and the subsequent work of those residents.

## May 2006

Central Lutheran Church Organizing Ministry gathers 200 people from the congregation and West Fairview to address after-school needs of elementary youth attending Denali Elementary School. The Municipality of Anchorage commits to making the needs of West Fairview youth one of its highest priorities.



Photo by Maria Nolan

## October 2006

Mayor Begich, Central Lutheran Church Organizing Ministry, and Campfire announce an unprecedented partnership to provide free after school care for Denali Elementary youth from 3:30–6:30 p.m. beginning on the first day of school, August 2006.

**2003–2006** During the past three years, AFACT has sent 39 people to national leadership training. Leaders return with the knowledge, passion and skills to build a community in which stakeholders from every race, every religion, and every economic group have a voice.

*The following comments were made at a press conference announcing the after school care collaborative program which resulted from Central Lutheran Church's organizing effort. The press conference was held on October 11, 2006.*

"I'm a single mom and I'm working on my graduate degree, and because I choose to work to make a better life for two of my kids, I'm in a catch-22. I make too much to qualify for this and not enough to qualify for that. So that was one of my concerns: what to do with my kids after school, because their mom has to work? It was such a blessing to see faith work. Central Lutheran called and they said, 'Bring them tomorrow.' It has been such a wonderful blessing. When I pick my kids up, their homework is done, and they feed the kids, and my kids enjoy it here."

"I'm actually seeing a tangible effort. People always talk about what they want to do and what they're going to do, and for the first time, with the help of Central Lutheran, the Mayor's office, as well as Camp Fire, I as a parent get to see what's being done. I'm very appreciative of this. I thank you all. On behalf of all of the parents, once again, thank you, thank you, and thank you."

~Leslie Vines,  
West Fairview Parent



Photo by Maia Nolan

"Central Lutheran Church is really helping to fill a void in this part of town for quality child care for young people....I want to thank the AFACT group for really bringing this issue to our attention and what we could be doing....This is an example where the city government and the faith community and community leaders can get together and figure out what we can do to make better life for our young people, not after the fact when crimes are involved, and youth violence, but now, in the early, formative ages."

"This church is reaching beyond its boundaries and the borders of its facility. They're reaching out to the neighborhood that is adjoining them, which I think is a powerful message. AFACT has been very good about this. They reach way out into the community, everywhere you can imagine....Being part of this celebration today is exciting for me and also for these kids that are sitting behind me and the many other kids that will benefit from this. It is a great opportunity for them and their families."

~Mayor Mark Begich,  
Municipality of Anchorage

## AFACT MEMBER CONGREGATIONS

Alaska Native Lutheran Church  
Anchor Park Methodist Church  
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church  
Bethel Chapel  
Catholic Alaska Native Ministry  
Central Lutheran Church  
First CME Church  
Gloria Dei Lutheran Church  
Good Shepherd Baptist Mission  
Holy Family Cathedral  
Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church  
St. Anthony Catholic Church  
St. Mark Lutheran Church

*AFACT congregation-based community organizing would not be possible without the generous support of our donors. AFACT gratefully acknowledges their generosity.*

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# Creating a Vision for Anchorage's Youth

**A**FACT will host a public meeting on Monday, November 27 at 7:00 p.m. AFACT leaders will present a comprehensive vision for Anchorage's youth and have invited Mayor Mark Begich, Police Chief Rob Heun and Anchorage School Superintendent Carol Comeau to participate.

In the 19 months since AFACT's meeting on public safety at St. Anthony Catholic Church, the local headlines have continued to chronicle the dangers faced by Anchorage youth. Task forces have been formed and public forums conducted to address the myriad issues involved in creating a safe, nurturing environment in Anchorage.

In more than 800 one-to-one visits conducted by AFACT members throughout Anchorage, concern for youth continues to be a dominant issue. In response to the pain and fear AFACT leaders have heard from families, the leaders will bring together church and civic leaders to commit to a broad, comprehensive and collaborative vision that will address many of the concerns. The public is welcome to attend the meeting. For information on location, call AFACT at 297-7731.

## Alaska Native Pilot Project Underway in Two Anchorage Schools

**T**he opening of the 2006-07 school year saw the tangible results of Anchorage School District Superintendent Carol Comeau's commitment to AFACT 11 months earlier. In September 2005, Comeau stood before 300 people at a meeting organized by the Catholic/Lutheran Alaska Native Organizing Ministry, and committed to implement a pilot project in two schools to address the concerns of Alaska Native parents.

Willowcrest Elementary and Romig Middle Schools, both with high percentages of Alaska Native students, were selected as the pilot project sites. The

two-prong project includes Alaska Native cultural education of all school staff and intensive outreach to Alaska Native families. AFACT organizers provided trainings to all teachers on the benefits and mechanics of teacher-home visits with Alaska Native families.

The Institute of Social and Economic Research at the University of Alaska will study and evaluate the program and its outcomes during the pilot year. Results of that study will allow the school district to better address the needs of Alaska Native students throughout the Anchorage School District.

*Dear friends:*

*AFACT is a partnership of parishes working to make our community a better place to live. Our mission flows from a shared faith in God who calls us to serve our neighbors in love.*

*The heart of our ministry is listening to individuals tell their stories and helping people connect with others to make changes in our community they could never make alone. We hope you share our vision for this community.*

*Please support AFACT with your prayers and participation. Become a part of this exciting ministry by making a financial donation to help us expand our work throughout the city.*

*God bless you,*

*Pastor Scott Fuller, Chairman  
AFACT Board of Directors*

***For more information contact:***

**Anchorage Faith and Action –  
Congregations Together**

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*AFACT is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation.*



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