



April 2009 Story
St. Matthew's "EL COMEDOR POPULAR" Soup Kitchen
\$33,000

St. Matthew Lutheran Church is located in Chicago's lower west side, six miles from glamorous downtown Chicago's Magnificent Mile. In response to an increase in unemployment and homelessness in the surrounding neighborhood, the church organized the soup kitchen "El Comedor Popular" under the leadership of Maria Luisa Leal, St. Matthew's Director of Community Services. With the help of the Mexican families in the congregation, funds were raised through rummage sales, Mexican food catering services, donations from friends and other Lutheran congregations.

Over the last 15 years, approximately 216,000 hot meals have been served to the homeless, the unemployed, seniors and children of Chicago's largest Hispanic community. Before meals are served, the Reverend Julio A. Loza shares God's Word, devotions and prayers to nourish the body and souls of the hungry. "We are the poor feeding the poor," Rev. Loza says without exaggeration.

St. Matthew's Word and Sacrament ministry, "El Comedor Popular," was organized as, and remains, a faith-based community mission feeding thousands who are hungry. In September 2005, St Matthew stepped out in faith to organize a soup kitchen in La Barca, Mexico, to feed an average of 130 people, most of them children. Some St. Matthew members have roots in the poverty stricken town. Pastor Loza makes trips to La Barca to conduct worship services for the families. God has blessed a miracle of love beyond U.S. borders where people are hungry for food and God's Word of faith in Jesus, forgiveness and salvation for their souls.

In 1999, St. Matthew Lutheran Church was granted the "Making a World of Difference" award by the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod World Relief and Human Care. At the Northern Illinois District Convention in 2006, Maria L. Leal, St. Matthew's Director of Community Service, was honored with the Presidential Award for helping St. Matthew nourish the body and souls of the homeless and hungry in Chicago.