

Lutheran Social Services Michigan changes name



(Photo: Lynne Golodner)

Lutheran Social Services of Michigan has changed its name to Samaritas - after the Good Samaritan story in the Bible - to avoid confusion about whether it serves or employs only Lutherans.

On Wednesday, Samaritas announced its name change at its office in Detroit, saying that they hope to avoid misperceptions in the future about who they help. Lutheran Social Services of Michigan has been playing a lead role in refugee resettlement in the state, including Syrian refugees in recent years. They said they've resettled about 4,000 refugees over the past year from several countries.

Started in 1934, Lutheran Social Services of Michigan had been named after the denomination that comes out the theology of one of the key founders of Protestantism, Martin Luther.

While the name change will drop the word "Lutheran," the group will remain a social ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the largest Lutheran denomination in the U.S. It will still have a Christian reference in its new name Samaritas, and its official mission statement will be: "Serving people as an expression of the love of Christ."

"Born of the Lutheran faith more than 80 years ago, Lutheran Social Services of Michigan has

been hiring and serving people from all faiths, ethnicities, life stages and lifestyles for generations," said Sam Beals, CEO of Samaritas. "Yet...many people did not seek us out as an employer or service provider, because they were not of the Lutheran faith. We needed to address that perception, if we are to thrive as an employer of choice and continue to drive greater impact in our communities."

In a statement, the group said that "the name Samaritas is the state of being a good Samaritan, or a compassionate and helpful person. It was chosen because it reflects both the people who work at the organization and the continued organizational mission, which is to serve people as an expression of Christ's love."

In addition to refugee resettlement, Samaritas will continue to provide adoption services, foster care, and at-home services and communities for seniors and people with disabilities. It also does property management for third-party affordable living communities.

Its new logo will be purple and gray, with the phrase: "Connect. Empower. Transform."

"We are in the business of dignity promotion," said Vickie Thompson-Sandy, president of Samaritas. "Our focus is on renewing the mind, body and spirit of every individual who crosses the threshold of a Samaritas site."

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