

# THE BETHEL BEACON

**FROM MANG SONNA**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The recent collaboration between Bethel Center and the Kansas Office for Refugees (KSOR) to provide support services to refugees who have not completed five years in the US serves as a powerful reminder of the phrase, ***"When God closes one door, he opens another."*** When the refugee resettlement program was terminated at the end of March, our hopes of welcoming and resettling refugees were severely damped, and we were concerned that the training we received from the International Rescue Committee (IRC) would be rendered useless. Nonetheless, this experience has reinforced our conviction that God's timing and ways, though distinct from our own, are always right and better!

**Who is a refugee?** IRC defines a refugee as a person who has fled their home country due to war, persecution, or political upheaval, and who has crossed an international border seeking safety. They are unable or unwilling to return home because they have a well-founded fear of persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Refugees are legal immigrants who seek safety and security outside of their homeland. As such, they need our help to become self-sufficient in their new country.

In accordance with our agreement with the KSOR, we will be working with refugees who have not completed five years in the US. The five programs Bethel is committed to providing are: (1) Adjustment and Referrals, (2) ReConnect/Youth Mentoring for ages 15-24, (3) Early Refugees School Impact for ages 0-5 years, (4) Refugees School Impact for school-age children/youth, and (5) Services to Older Refugees for 60 years and older. We are thrilled to play a significant role in the lives of these new refugees as they are our new neighbors! If you share our excitement and would like to be more involved in the work we do, please feel free to reach out to us. You can participate in various ways to make our new neighbors feel welcome and assist them.



## SENIOR ADVENTURE: PONTOON CRUISE, BUFFET DELIGHT AND SERVICE



The seniors continue to enjoy coming to Bethel to participate in the Senior Program. Their daily activities include bingo, arts and crafts, chair yoga, and fellowshipping with other seniors, among other things. The friendship and love between them is a beautiful thing to witness.

Thanks to a partnership with the Wyandotte County Area Agency on Aging, the seniors receive a hot meal each day. They also receive a bag of groceries every Tuesday through our partnership with Harvesters and Feeding America.

To show their gratitude and appreciation, the seniors are quick to help when needed. They assist the food pantry by sorting donated food items, organizing and bagging diapers, and breaking down empty boxes.

It is always fun when we have an opportunity to take the seniors out on a field trip. On August 11th, they enjoyed a lunch outing at the Golden Corral, along with a pontoon ride at Lake Jacomo. Laughter and meaningful conversations filled the boats. The weather was perfect! We are looking forward to take them out again in the very near future.



## CHILDREN AND YOUTH CORNER

At Bethel, August marks the end of our student programs, providing our dedicated staff with a well-deserved break for a few weeks. After completing three days of training and a CPR course later in the month, we are all set to welcome students back on September 2nd. We are absolutely thrilled to see our hallways bustling with energy once more!

A testament to our impact within the community is the high return rate of our summer students to the after-school program. Over 90 percent of our after-school participants are children and youth who have been in our programs for many years. This clearly demonstrates the positive influence we have on our students and their families. Additionally, we have elementary students who are children of parents who were program participants a decade or two ago.

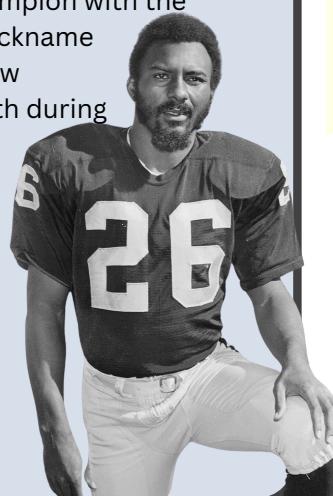
On a different note, and quite alarmingly, a study by the SMUUCH FUUD Pantry highlights that 61% of families in less advantaged areas, such as our own community here in Wyandotte County, don't have children's books at home. In response to what the study terms the "book desert" issue faced by our community, this academic year, our student programs are committed to launching activities that foster positive behavior and academic success for students of all ages.

If you're in the area and would like to volunteer, we could use assistance with organizing activities, picking up food, or driving our vans for the after-school program. Please reach out if you can help.



### DID YOU KNOW?

Before becoming a Super Bowl champion with the Oakland Raiders and earning the nickname *Dr. Death*, Alonzo Skip Thomas grew up in Kansas City, Kansas. As a youth during the 60s, he would play basketball at Bethel Neighborhood Center with his friends and later starred at Wyandotte High School, helping lead them to state championships in 1967 and 1968. His journey from local courts to NFL fame is a proud part of Bethel's history.



## AUGUST PANTRY UPDATE

In August, the growing need for assistance due to food insecurity in our community continues to be evident. Our Food Pantry was able to serve a total of 435 households, providing nourishment to 554 adults, 243 seniors, and 447 children. Additionally, we supplied diapers to 51 infants. This number was considerably lower than previous months due to a lack of diapers. On-site, we served nearly 240 meals through our community meals, the Summer Youth Enrichment Program, and various ministries.

The demand from the community remains high. If you would like to assist with a food donation, diaper donation, food drive, diaper drive, or contribute other essential items, please reach out to us for a list of supplies that are currently needed.

### PRAISE & PRAYER REQUESTS

- Praise God for blessing us with a large donation in late-August of diapers, non-perishable items and canned goods from local churches, individuals and community partners.
- Praise God for the men and women who have come through the food pantry and are now joining us at the Bethel Wednesday evening Worship and Fellowship Meal.
- Praise God for the men and women who have recently joined the Bethel Senior Program.
- Pray for Bethel's Afterschool Program that is set to resume on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September.
- Pray for the people Bethel has touched through the different outlets, like our food pantry, student program, and beyond.
- Pray for Bethel staff as we work in partnership with the Kansas Office for Refugees (KSOR) and other local agencies to launch a Refugee Support Services Program on October 1, 2025.

### To Donate or learn more about us...

Bethel Neighborhood Center



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