

Living Waters Lutheran church began as a mission congregation of the North Carolina Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in 1985. The church is located on the Qualla Boundary, also known as the Cherokee Indian Reservation. It is one of the twenty-three (23) ELCA American Indian/Alaska Native congregations, the only one east of the Mississippi River. Living Waters embraces their Native traditions while maintaining their Lutheran identity, offering songs in their native languages and other native traditions in their worship services.

Pastor Jack Russell and Lisa Russell began their ministry at Living Waters in 2010. The Food Pantry/Resource Center, under Lisa's direction, is a vital ministry of the church, serving some 500 families each month, as well as about 50 "walkers" (people without homes).

In September 2017, approximately 20 people - including members of Good Shepherd - attended a meeting of NC Synod congregations held at Living Waters. This was the start of Good Shepherd exploring the possibility of a partnership with the Living Waters congregation.

The emphasis of the partnership has been on *accompaniment*, or walking with and working with others "in a solidarity that practices interdependence and mutuality." Good Shepherd has sought to learn with and from the members of Living Waters, and become educated about Cherokee history, tradition, and culture. Our goal has been and remains to develop relationships with people of Living Waters church and community and support their vital ministry. To this end, we have attended their worship services; supplied food and other items for the Food Pantry/Resource Center; participated in Blue Ridge Community College classes on Cherokee history, heritage and culture; visited the Cherokee heritage exhibit at Mars Hill; prayed for the church, its members and those they serve; learned the stories of some of the individuals Living Waters has served; used the First Nations Version of the New Testament in worship; and held worship services to acknowledge and lament the ways in which the Indian Boarding schools were destructive to Native American families.

We strive to remember and live out the words of both Pastor Jack and a Good Shepherd member who had the opportunity to worship with the Living Waters congregation:

*"Walk alongside, in silence. Walk as slow as the slowest person in the group."* - Pastor Jack

*"Accompaniment becomes real when you are standing in a prayer circle, holding hands with Native American brothers and sisters. It becomes real when a sister sings, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" in Cherokee as we hum the accompaniment. Being there, meeting the members of Living Waters, sharing in their worship made our partnership come alive."* - Good Shepherd member, after attending worship at Living Waters Lutheran Church