

# One OLG family's story

*Parishioners give to the campaign "with love"  
toward a vision of building an even stronger community*

Zekariase Woldselassie and Alem Theklu went to church every day in Ethiopia. It was more than a place to pray. It was the center of their community - and their lives.

"We had a place where we could gather together, play volleyball or hide and seek, study the Bible, meet with the priest and sisters. It is such a wonderful way to live," recalls Alem, who came to the United States with her husband in 1996, leaving their baby daughter Bethel behind while they built their new life in Seattle.

She and Zach struggled with the language, the culture, finding work. But one thing was easy: becoming part of the Our Lady of Guadalupe community.

"OLG welcomed us with open hearts," Alem says. "We belong. It's our home. It is a beautiful community full of beautiful people."

"This home fulfills us," adds Zach.

It took seven years for them to finally bring Bethel to join them, by then having added daughter Ruth to the family. Still, life wasn't easy. Zach found work as a nursing assistant while studying to get his degree from Seattle Pacific University. Alem studied cosmetology at South Seattle Community



College. Both girls went to school at OLG - Ruth, 10, is now in fifth grade and Bethel, 15, is a sophomore at Kennedy High School.

"Our children are the best that any parents could ask for because of the church and the school and Father Jack's and Principal Dixon's leadership. We owe a lot to them and to the whole community," Zach says.

Their strong bond to OLG is why they were determined to make a significant contribution to the 2007 capital campaign and to the *Building for Our Future Campaign* today.

"In 2007, I was a student in nursing school. Alem was working part time. It was a tough time for us. But God is good and we wanted to contribute," Zach recalls. "After I graduated in 2009, I was out of work for a year and Alem provided. Now, I have a job (at the Seattle VA Hospital) and she was laid off and is working just part time. Our life is



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a struggle. But the campaign is one of our responsibilities and we give to it with love.”

To Zach and Alem and their daughters, the Parish Life Center/Gym is more than just a building. It’s a chance to build the kind of community they had in Ethiopia.

“When I heard about the new gym and community center, I was so excited. I prayed so hard to make it happen,” says Alem. “I know how important it will be to OLG because we grew up in that kind of atmosphere and that’s what we want for our kids, to grow up like we grew up with love and fun and knowledge and a place to learn more about our faith.”

The couple, who met while doing volunteer work with Mother Teresa’s order in their home country, believes the new Parish Life Center/Gym will be “a magnet” to draw not just OLG students to events and activities, but also seniors, couples, teenagers and broader West Seattle community members.

“After Mass, we can stay and have some fun,” Alem envisions. “Children will want to be there not just for physical activities and fun but to better know their faith. For older people, it will be a place to gather together over tea or coffee, to sit and exchange ideas, or to study. We can build a stronger community and bond even more closely.”

Zach emphasizes how important OLG has come to be to his family – “We miss our country, but this community is now home.”

His wife sums up their commitment to the parish and to the building campaign with equal passion – “We never get tired of OLG because it brings us such joy. It is our responsibility to help in whatever way we can. We want to play a part in growing it, nurturing it.”



*Photos by Chuck Lysen, [www.lysenphoto.com](http://www.lysenphoto.com)*

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