

## One Matters Award

### Chicago: Indo-Pak (Pastor Ernest Singh)

The Rev. Ernest and Mrs. Sheela Singh moved to Chicago in 1982 with a deep desire to start a church for Indian and Pakistani immigrants. Rev. Singh had already served a congregation in India for over five years, and earned a Master of Arts in Biblical Studies and Master of Divinity at Covenant Theological Seminary, as well as a Master of Sacred Theology from Concordia Seminary, both of which are located in St. Louis, Missouri.



Upon arrival in Chicago, this vision was shared with other church leaders who did not see this as a viable ministry. Rev. Singh secured full-time employment as a social worker at Catholic Charities while starting a weekly home Bible study. He began to reach out to the Indian and Pakistani community, and soon the group grew to about 15 people. They began to look for a bigger space in a church and reached out for help. Ravenswood Fellowship UMC was one of two churches which opened up their space for a very small fee. They held weekly Sunday services in the evening there and the group grew to about 40 people in 1989 when they joined Ravenswood Fellowship UMC.

In 1999, Rev. Singh resigned from his full-time job, joined the Northern Illinois Conference, and was appointed with a two-point charge at Grace UMC and Ravenswood UMC. On August 15, 2004, with the encouragement of District Superintendent Martha Scott and Bishop Joseph Sprague, Indo-Pak UMC was chartered with 55 members. Rev. Singh was appointed 3/4 time to West Ridge UMC and 1/4 time at Indo-Pak UMC.

Rev. Zaki L. Zaki encouraged Indo-Pak to step outside their comfort zone to engage in missions and to make Rev. Singh's position a full-time appointment. Both of these goals were accomplished. Indo-Pak began an outreach ministry to refugees and new immigrants in partnership with West Ridge UMC. One recent outreach project raised a little over \$3,000 for the family of an Indo-Pak member's sister. She was killed in a terror attack at Bethel Methodist Church in Pakistan in December 2017.

The presence of Indo-Pak at West Ridge has brought new hope to West Ridge UMC. In addition to contributing to building use fees, Indo-Pak has done several building upkeep projects jointly with West Ridge UMC. Working together, they were able to replace the old heating systems in the sanctuary and fellowship halls. They were also able to install new air conditioning systems, new carpeting, a PA system, and new pew cushions.

Even though both congregations have a warm relationship and jointly engage in ministry, church upkeep, worship, and mission projects, a deliberate decision was made to keep the congregations separate on the advice of the Rev. Martin Lee, Director of Congregation Development. The decision is instrumental in developing both as sister congregations while retaining the individuality and integrity of both churches.

The vision that the Lord laid on Rev. Ernest and Mrs. Sheela Singh has come to fruition. Indo-Pak UMC has grown steadily to 116 members and is a vibrant congregation consisting of roughly half Indian and half Pakistani immigrants and their descendants who worship in the Hindi, Urdu, and English languages.

The Indo-Pak congregation faithfully meets their commitment to clergy compensation, apportionment, and other expenses. Rev. Ernest and Mrs. Singh and the members of Indo-Pak UMC are grateful to God, and to the many individuals and churches who encouraged this church on their journey.