

LUTHERAN LIFE

2016 | Volume 3

The Newsmagazine of the
Florida-Georgia District
of The Lutheran Church
Missouri Synod

COME, HOLY SPIRIT!



The Mission of the Florida-Georgia District is to serve, assist, and encourage congregations in the ministry of Jesus Christ. People of the Florida-Georgia District are equipped, empowered, engaged in the Master's business ... connecting people to Jesus. Lutheran LIFE is the official newsmagazine of the Florida-Georgia District of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Lutheran LIFE is designed to inform LCMS church and school members of the activities, personalities and resources offered by the Synod and the District. Lutheran LIFE may also provide a forum for Lutherans to express their views and ideas on a wide range of topics. Lutheran LIFE is published bimonthly. News items and photos are encouraged. Please send scanned photos as a .jpg attachment rather than embedded in your emails. Or mail your photo print in a good quality resolution to our address below. Advertising is welcome and encouraged; rates and information are available from Lutheran LIFE's office. Changes of address including e-mail changes, additions or deletions should be directed to our office — if possible via e-mail: LutheranLife@aol.com

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District Pastors will be Engaged in Action

Continuing the Florida-Georgia District theme of "Engaging in the Master's Business," pastors will gather in conference to focus on how they and other congregational leaders guide people to Gospel-motivated action.

The September 19-21 event will include plenary and break-out sessions. Dr. David R. Schmitt, the Gregg H. Benidt Memorial Professor of Homiletics and Literature at Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, will be the featured presenter.

The conference is being held at The Rosen Plaza Hotel in Orlando. Registration information will be available on the District website, fgadistrict.org. ■



District Welcomes New Pastors, Vicars

April 26 was Call Day for 149 Concordia Seminary/St. Louis students who learned their assignment of first calls to pastoral and diaconal ministry, vicarage placements and deaconess internship positions.

Of that total, 78 students received their first calls to serve as pastors, chaplains and missionaries for The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. One deaconess received a call and one deaconess has a call pending. Another 65 students who will serve as vicars and three deaconess interns received their assignments; one deaconess internship is pending.

"What is happening now is that ... we are passing the earthly leadership of our Lord's Church to a new generation," said Seminary President Dr. Dale A. Meyer during the Call Service.

"This generation is different. They form community in different ways. They are keen about worship, about receiving God's grace and returning praise — they are focused on Jesus and His ministry. ■

Nine vicars and pastoral candidates were assigned to the Florida-Georgia District. Shown here with District President Greg Walton (far right, middle row) are (front l-r) Hannah and Joshua Obermann, Pastor of Grace/St. Cloud; Brittany and Mark A. Harris, Associate Pastor of Grace/Winter Haven, FL; (middle, l-r) Melissa and Devin Murphy, Vicar of Bethlehem/Jacksonville Beach, FL; Shea Pennington, Associate Pastor of Hope/Plant City, FL; (back, l-r) Aaron Sterling, Vicar of Mount Calvary/Warner Robins, GA; Noah Kegley, Vicar of St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL; Douglas Hudson, Vicar of Trinity/Albany, GA. Not pictured are John Cobos, Vicar at Family of Christ/Tampa, FL; and Miguel Sanabria, Jr., Vicar of Family of Christ/Tampa, FL.



CALENDAR

2016 Hearts for Jesus Project
February - June, 2016

LCMS Triennial National Convention
July 9-14, 2016 • Milwaukee, WI

National LCMS Youth Gathering
July 16-20, 2016 • New Orleans, LA

District Stewardship Summit
August 19-20, 2016
St. Paul Church & School/Boca Raton, FL

Florida-Georgia District Pastors Conference
September 19-21, 2016
Rosen Plaza Hotel/Orlando, FL

Saturday Night LiveUCF
September 24, 2016
Prince of Peace/Orlando, FL

Florida-Georgia District Educators Conference
September 28-30, 2016
Wyndham Orlando Resort/Orlando, FL

Florida-Georgia LWML District Convention
September 30 - October 2, 2016
PGA National Resort and Spa/Palm Beach Gardens, FL

499th Anniversary of the Reformation
October 31, 2016

Middle School Youth Gathering
November 4-6, 2016
Lake Yale Baptist Conference Center/Leesburg, FL

Calling Congregations

Faith/Dunedin, FL.....Sole Pastor
St Paul/Lakeland, FL..... Associate Pastor
Faith/North Palm Beach/FLSole Pastor
Faith/Parrish, FL.....Sole Pastor
LC of Cross/Port Charlotte, FL Assoc. Pastor
Trinity/Orlando, FL..... Senior Pastor
Trinity/Summerfield, FL..... Assoc. Pastor
Our Savior/St Petersburg, FL..... Assist. Pastor
Trinity/Toccoa, GA.....Sole Pastor

Calls Issued

Faith/Dunedin, FL
Rev. Jerrell Simmerman as Sole Pastor
Faith/North Palm Beach, FL
Rev. Paul Ferguson as Sole Pastor
Faith/North Palm Beach, FL
Rev. Mark Stillman as Sole Pastor
St. John/Ocala, FL
Rev. Jeffery Shanks as Senior Pastor
Faith/Parrish, FL
Rev. Donald Haselhuhn as Sole Pastor
Trinity/Summerfield, FL
Rev. John Blair Clark as Associate Pastor

Calls Accepted

St. John/Ocala, FL
Rev. Jeffery Shanks as Senior Pastor
Messiah/Tampa, FL
Rev. Mark Adrian as Senior Pastor

Calls Declined

Faith/North Palm Beach, FL
Rev. Paul Ferguson as Sole Pastor
Faith/Parrish, FL
Rev. Paul Biber as Sole Pastor

Candidates Placed

Hope/Plant City, FL Candidate
Shea Pennington as Associate Pastor
Grace/Saint Cloud, FL
Joshua Obermann as Sole Pastor
Grace/Winter Haven, FL
Mark Harris as Associate Pastor

Vicarage Assignments

Trinity/Albany, FL
Doug Hudson
St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL
Noah Kegley
Bethlehem/Jacksonville Beach, FL
Devin Murphy
Mount Calvary/Warner Robins, GA
Aaron Sterling

Transferred to Other Districts

Mr. Mark F. Thorsen / Southern (C)
Rev. Alston Kirk / Texas (O)

Transferred from Other Districts

Rev. Robert C. Cooper / Mid-South (O)
Rev. Thomas Ramsey / Oklahoma (O)

Church Changes

New Church Start
Thrive Community Church/Estero, FL

Commissioned Minister Initial Assignments

Mr. Justin Tayon/Concordia Seward
Teacher, Trinity/Orlando, FL

DISTRICT CAPSULES

by Greg Walton District President

Ordained/Commissioned Minister Installations

Rev. Mark Eisold, Pastor
Grace/Naples, FL (O)
Rev. Mark H. Abram, Pastor
Our Savior/Plantation, FL (O)
Mr. Michael Rottmann, Teacher
Trinity/Orlando, FL (C)
Rev. Kenneth Fuehler, Pastor
Peace/Naples, FL (O)
Rev. Mark Adrian, Pastor
Messiah/Tampa, FL (O)

Emeritus

Rev. Alston Kirk (O)
Rev. Russell Johnson(O)

Called to Glory

Rev. Andrew Vazquez (O)

Resigned/Removed from the Roster

Rev. Stephen Zehnder (O)

Change of Status

Dcs. Sara Perez-Arche: Active to Candidate (C)
Rev. Richard Carlton: Candidate to Emeritus (O)
Mrs. Emily Moss: Active to Candidate (C)
Ms. Julie Garland: Non-Candidate to Candidate (C)
Mr. Scott Nelson: Active to Candidate (C)

LIFELINES

We see some exciting things going on across this Florida-Georgia District. God is at work in some amazing ways through His people. Lives are being transformed through the power of the Gospel as Jesus is proclaimed. Day by day I meet people and hear about churches and members who are engaged in the Master's business. I am seeing people equipped, empowered and engaged to connect people to Jesus.

However, all is not rosy in the church today. Certainly our Lutheran Churches are not immune to the cultural battles all around us. Life in the church has changed. Things aren't the same as they were 40 years ago in many ways, and the church is no exception. There was a time when the church held a position of honor and respect in a community. Today, it is considered one among many institutions in a community, no better, no worse than any other. It is considered on par with the synagogue, the mosque, but also with the YMCA, the health club and the country club.

Denominational loyalty among our younger adults is by and large a thing of the past as many congregations age and lose a sense of vision and sometimes the passion or ability to attract a younger generation. In the Florida-Georgia District, Mission Executive Douglas Kallesen reports that 65% of our congregations worship fewer than 125 on a given Sunday. We may often feel like sojourners in a foreign land. Yet, it is for this purpose that God has called us to faith in Jesus. We have an opportunity to reach many in the name of Jesus.

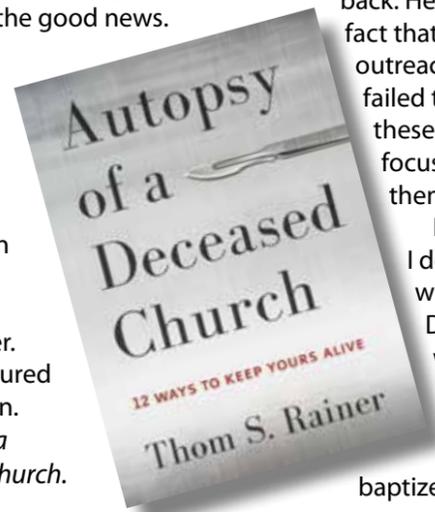
In 2 Timothy 4 the Apostle Paul writes prophetically: "For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off

into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." It seems like we are living in these days.

Look at the way Satan has lulled us into a false sense of security. The church is like the frog in the kettle. If you bring a pot of water to a boil and place a frog in it (I know, it's a mean idea, but it's an illustration) it will hop out. If you put a frog in a pot of cool water and slowly bring it to a boil the frog will get used to the circumstances and will eventually boil to death, not recognizing the need to change. Often the church has been so slow to recognize the changes around us in the world, and some are still unwilling to see them and adapt, but the water is rising and getting hotter, so to speak.

In the midst of this, God has called us for this time to reach the people all around us with the hope of life and salvation that can only be found in our risen Savior, Jesus. Peter, in Acts 4, pointing us to Jesus, writes, "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." The precious name of Jesus still has power to change and transform lives! We hold on to this hope. It's what drives us as a church. Yet, often we've lost sight of this calling to reach the world with the good news.

A few months ago my father-in-law gave me a book he had been reading written by Thom Rainer. Its title captured my attention. *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*.



It's a short book, not particularly theological but very practical. Rainer surveyed a number of churches that had closed from across denominational boundaries, of all sizes and ethnicities to find commonalities. He discovered some fascinating things that I believe hold some insights for churches headed in that direction, and even those that are healthy.

Rainer points to very common sense information, including things like the church stopped praying together beyond the Sunday morning formal prayers. He focused on how the church idolized another era, usually a golden age, hoping to achieve that once again — but with no real plan to get there and a failure to acknowledge that you can't go back. He touched on issues like the fact that there was little evangelistic outreach or plans; that churches failed to look like their community; these churches had no community focus — everything was about them and their survival.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, I don't know a community within the boundaries of our District that is so saturated with believers in Jesus that they don't need the message proclaimed! God has called each of us, His baptized, to connect people to

Jesus. This is what we, as a Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, have always been about, sharing the love of Jesus and the power of His forgiveness and life. This is why we are engaging with Lutheran Hour Ministry's Outreach Initiative, and working with the Southeastern District and Dr. Bruce Jaeger to introduce iNeighborhood to our congregations.

This summer the Synod will host its 66th Regular Convention in Milwaukee, WI. There are many important issues to be discussed and elections to be held. Nothing could



instead of boldly reaching into our communities as the incarnation of Jesus we have set up fences to protect ourselves from a harsh and cruel world, choosing not to understand and change? This was never God's plan for His people.

A number of years back former President Bill Clinton said, "There is nothing so wrong with America that cannot be cured by what is right with America." I wonder if that couldn't be translated to our situation. There's nothing so wrong with the Church that it cannot be cured by what is right with the Church! After all, the biggest thing we have going for us is Jesus — and what could be

better than that? As someone has aptly said, "The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing—and that main thing is Jesus!" He has always been God's plan for His people!

Hebrews 12:2 reminds us, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." May that be our aim and goal in all we do, not just for the sake of the church, but for the sake of a dying world. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, and now He calls us to be His hands and feet, sharing this wonderful good news through the church in the communities He's placed us.

The Church, from its earliest days, has always thrived in the midst of challenge. In this post-Christian environment, Jesus is still Lord, and we look to Him for wisdom and

strength. As we stand in partnership, passionate about His death and resurrection, He promises to continue to work through us, individually and corporately.

Let's get back to the basics, commit ourselves to God's Word and make regular use of the Sacrament for the strengthening of our faith and assurance of our forgiveness.

Then let's engage in the Master's business and connect people to Jesus.

That's His call on our lives, isn't it? How will you respond? His Spirit promises to empower you as you go in His name! The state of the Church is one of constant change externally, but secure and steadfast in what we believe, teach and confess.

As partners in ministry let's share that with the world for the sake of Jesus.



In His Peace!
GREG

Ministries “Bearing Fruit” in Florida-Georgia

Members of the Florida-Georgia District met via conference call on April 8.

“God is bearing fruit all around us in the ministries He has planted among us,” District President Greg Walton told board members.

“It’s an exciting time to be part of the Florida-Georgia District.”

Noting that the District would be assigned new pastors and vicars later in April, Walton continued, “We have the opportunity to help shape tomorrow’s leaders as they serve in congregations and do outreach to engage in the Master’s business. This is also our privilege.

“That’s why these are critical targets!”

Leadership: *District and congregational leaders are loving, visionary people of the Word, models of healthy Christ-centered living and life-long learners committed to equipping and empowering others to join in fulfilling the Church’s role in God’s Mission.*

• A third session of Emergent Leaders, concluding in May, included 12 participants. “This training has had a great impact on those who have participated,” Walton said. “We hope to continue it as well as broaden it to other East Coast Districts of the LCMS.”

• Executive Director Missions-Outreach Doug Kallesen and several others from the Florida-Georgia District attended the April 25-28 Church Planters Conference, called the largest church planting conference on the planet.

• Fall Pastors Conference is set for September 19-21 under the theme “Engaged in Action,” exploring the action side of the Master’s business. “The focus will be on better ways to proclaim the Gospel to motivate our people and ourselves to action, to connect people to Jesus,” Walton said.

• Fall Educators Conference, themed “All Things 2 All People,” will zero in on the opportunities Lutheran schools have as the diversity of our nation continues to expand.

• In preparation for the upcoming LCMS convention, regional conferences were scheduled around the District.

Congregations: *Congregations of the Florida-Georgia District are growing communities of welcoming, vibrant and faithful followers of Jesus Christ.*

• Operation Barnabas, the Synod’s ministry to the armed forces, is on track in Florida-Georgia will Dr. Mark Schreiber collecting names to form a task force. Rev. Gary Danielsen, OB project manager, is “very willing to assist our District in serving our vets,” Walton reported.

• More than 70 participants attended the training conference on Islam presented by the Muslim Ministry Task Force at Living Faith/Cumming, GA. Plans are under way for a similar training session in Orlando.

• Reconcilers Training on May 2-7 in Charlotte, NC, was attended by

many District Circuit Visitors. The training was done in conjunction and partnership with the LCMS’ Southeastern District.

Outreach: *Living out their faith in Jesus with urgency and joy, the people of the Florida-Georgia District eagerly invest, both individually and corporately, in bold and intentional service and witness to make know the love of Christ to all people.*

• Lutheran Hour Ministries Outreach Initiative is being refreshed. New outreach resources are being developed and will be presented online.

• A District-wide Outreach Conference is under consideration. The event would be held regionally in multiple locations.

• Also under consideration is a Small Church Conference for ministries worshiping fewer than 125. This would include presentations on best practices to help sustainability and vibrancy of ministry.

The next scheduled meeting for the Board of Directors is August 26-27 in Orlando. ■

Marchers Bring Attention to Persecuted Christians and Jews

An hour-long prayer march at Orlando’s Lake Eola Park on Sunday, April 17 brought attention to persecuted Christians and Jews around the globe.

“Religious persecution of Christians and Jews has reached epidemic proportions in the Middle East, Africa, North Korea, Iran, Europe and Asia,” said Rev. Bruce Lieske of Burning Bush Ministries, sponsor of the third annual event.

After the silent march, participants heard from an international panel of guest speakers that included Austrian Elisabeth

Sabaditsch Wolff, a board member of Pax Europa. She focused on the ongoing struggle against religious persecution on both sides of the Atlantic.

“Christians and Jews must march side by side against the persecution and abuse,” she emphasized. “We must not allow the persecution of people and their religious beliefs in the guise of misconceived tolerance and suppression of freedom of speech.”

Prayers for the persecuted and their persecutors were part of the event. ■

Nominations Open for 2016 District Educator Awards

A highlight of the annual Florida-Georgia District Educators Conferences is the presentation of the Dr. Ben Eggers Outstanding Educator awards.



Named after the late Dr. Ben Eggers (pictured), District Parish Services Executive from 1979-1986, the award originated in 1986 at the annual conference as the Teacher of the Year Award.

“We have so many dedicated, outstanding educators in our District that it became increasingly difficult to choose only one for this honor,” said Mark Brink, Florida-Georgia Executive Director for School Ministries. “In 2001 additional categories were added to recognize teachers at various grade levels and administrators, and in 2009 we recognized educators from different Christian denominations teaching in our Lutheran Schools.”

For more information on submitting nominations, visit the District website: fgadistrict.org and click on the Ben Eggers Award link under the schools tab. ■

It’s a jungle out there . . .



and a fishing expedition could cost you an arm and a leg.

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New Rostered Worker Data Base to be Launched

by Mark Brink
Executive Director for School and Youth Ministries

When congregations and schools are looking for Rostered teachers, school administrators, DCEs, Directors of Family Life and other professionals, they want to be able to access a reliable data base of worker "resumes" to find potential candidates. Presently, we have the LEIF data base on the Lutheran School Portal.

As of 12:00am on July 1 that data base will no longer exist.

The good news is that a brand-new site with newly submitted "resumes" that will be called Commissioned Minister Information Forms (CMIF) will replace the old site. The forms will be "ministry specific," so DCEs, teachers and so on will have forms that are appropriate for their area of ministry.

And here's the challenge: nearly 12,000 workers will need to complete and submit new CMIFs. That is a lot of CMIFs!

Workers involved have been informed that it is time for them to go online to complete their CMIFs. The information included a video "walkthrough" that took them through the process. If you are a Commissioned Minister of Religion...go online and complete the form! If you are in a supervisory position to a CMR, give them a deadline for completing the new CMIF and make sure they follow through!

This is very important for our church body. When congregations, schools and ministries are seeking candidates to fill vacant positions, they want the most complete and up-to-date information possible, and they want to have an easy process at their fingertips to search for them. This is only possible if workers complete the task they will be given very soon.

We want the Florida-Georgia District to be the model for others to follow, and that will only happen with the partnership of our commissioned workers and supervisors.

Thank you in advance for helping to get this fantastic new resource up and running as it was envisioned. ■



LWML 2017 Convention Moves to Albuquerque

The 37th Biennial Lutheran Women's Missionary League Convention will be held Thursday, June 22-Sunday, June 25, 2017, at the Albuquerque Convention Center in Albuquerque, NM.

After ongoing difficulties finalizing contracts in Salt Lake City, the LWML Executive Committee met in emergency session and voted to change the site of the 2017 convention to Albuquerque with the same dates of June 22-25.

LWML President Patti Ross stated, "We are happy this location remains in the hosting districts that are working so hard on our 2017 Convention with our 75th Anniversary celebration. The move will not change convention programming. We continue with the exciting business of selecting mission grants, new

officers, hearing great speakers, and celebrating God's blessings received and shared by the LWML over our 75-year history."

The theme for the convention is "Jesus Christ Above All." The logo



FUTURE & HOPE

by Joan Koch
LWML District Vice President
for Communications

and the convention theme are based on the Scripture verse from Philippians 2:9, "Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name."

Up-to-date convention information will be included in upcoming issues of the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly* and online at www.lwml.org/2017-convention. ■

Registration Opens for District Convention

It is time for the registration to begin!

The registration form for the LWML Florida-Georgia District Convention is now online! *The Evangel* will also have registration forms and lots of information in it about the convention.

When is the convention, you ask? September 30

– October 2, 2016, and it will be held at the PGA National Resort and Spa in Palm Beach Gardens. Yes, we have been there before, and I have heard that it is fantastic.

What will we be doing? Lots of wonderful things! We have elections to hold. We will be voting for a new President, Vice President Spiritual Growth, Financial Secretary and, of course, Pastoral Counselors! We will also be voting on new Mission Grants!

We will be having Lunch and Learn Sessions which will be very exciting and informative. Jan Wendorf will be speaking on her mission trip to Tanzania; Linda Gage will be speaking on the LWML Gifts of Love; Pastor Eisold will be speaking on his mission trip to Peru; and Pastor Jeske will be speaking about his show, *Time of Grace*.

All hotel reservations must be made directly with the PGA, but let them know you are with the Lutheran Women's Missionary League so that you get our rate! Not only do we have single rooms (up to four people in a room), but a limited number of Junior Suites and two-bedroom cottages will be available as well, if you need more room or want to share with more people.

So make your reservations now! It's going to be a great time! See you at the PGA! ■



TEAM BUILDING: The Florida-Georgia District team recently gathered for a retreat planning session, focusing on moving forward ... engaged in the Master's business. (l-r) Doug Kallesen, Executive Director Missions-Outreach; Laura Zirbel, Bookkeeper, LCEF Loan Consultant; Kathy Keene, Administrative Assistant to the President; Debbie Talbot, Administrative Assistant LCEF; Daniel J. Reichard, Vice President LCEF, Finance & Administration; Lynda Voss, Administrative Assistant School Ministries; Cindy Hammerstrom, Administrative Assistant Missions-Outreach; Mark Brink, Executive Director School Ministries; John Elliott, Business Manager; Greg Walton, President.

God's Power Reflected in Miraculous Survival

Tracy is a member of Hope/Orlando, where I attend. I share her story of God's presence in her life. It's touching, and it is powerful! I hope that you enjoy it.

— Doug Kallesen

On January 3, I had a 9-cm thoracic descending aortic aneurysm burst and repaired. It is very unusual, even miraculous, to survive what I did. My doctor and I attribute my survival to God. Here is my story.

I went to church in the morning and a Hopefest meeting immediately after services. I drove home, had a drink of water go down the wrong way that caused me to cough long and hard to stop choking. After finishing coughing the muscles along the middle of my back felt like someone was twisting them like you twist a towel to squeeze out water. I assumed it was just a muscle spasm that would pass, but it didn't.

right ear. It wasn't painful, but it was the thing that made me decide to tell my husband to call 911 and that I needed to go to the emergency room.

We went to the living room to wait for the EMTs. They came quickly and took my vital signs. They were all normal! They gave me the option of being driven or having them take me to the ER. I chose them: they are a fast pass into the ER, no waiting.

I got to a room; the nurse and the doctor (a resident) came in and got me pain medications, an Xray and then immediately a CT scan. The doctor saw something that made her decide to transport me to Florida South. She would have had me taken by helicopter, but since the weather prevented it, I went by ambulance. She told my husband it was for further tests by a specialist, and even told him what room I would be in at Florida South.

Upon

arriving at the hospital, the aneurysm had burst and I had a barely discernible pulse. They rushed me into the operating room where I apparently talked with Dr. Varnagy before surgery; I do not remember this. I do remember hearing the nervous people around me getting ready for surgery and the anesthesiologist

telling me I was going to go to sleep before putting the mask on me. I was not scared or nervous. I was perfectly peaceful, the peace that passes all understanding the Bible speaks of.

I woke up later in my room all fixed up. Meanwhile, my poor husband arrives at the hospital, goes to the room he believes I will be in — only to find someone else! He did find me, and the doctor told him and my other family members, "Well, she is a miracle. Only 10% of people survive what she went through." He likened the size of my aneurysm to an indoor soccer ball...WOW!!

That's the reaction of any person with medical training when they hear this story. Me, I just let God and the people taking care of me do all the hard work. I was in the hospital for a week, went home and two weeks later discovered I had five to six blood clots that had developed because of being active after having been in bed for a week.

I am on blood thinners for a short time (hopefully), and have regained my strength and lung capacity over the last few months. The aneurysm left quite a bit of blood in my chest that my body has had to absorb over time. I no longer smoke and my lungs are not quite sure how to react to that either.

I am very grateful to all the friends and family who prayed me through this (and it was a lot). God certainly showed me His power that day as I am convinced that if even one situation had been off by even a minute or two, the outcome would have been very different. The EMTs who transported me, the resident who recognized the aneurysm and sent me to South, the fifth best vascular surgeon being on call and in the hospital on a Sunday of a holiday weekend and who gives God all the glory every time I talk to him.

God was everywhere, interceding and making miracles happen.

As my doctor said to me the first time I remember meeting him, "Young lady, God must have something important for you to

do for Him, because otherwise you would not have survived this." He took none of the credit for himself, just gave it all to God. I am truly blessed and am currently listening to God to try to figure out what He has planned for me. ■

Note — Tracy has now printed and laminated her story, sharing it with her customers at Longhorn. Soon she will be sharing her story at church. Several of her customers have said, "Let me know when you do because I want to be there!" It reminds me of another

woman who left her water jars at the well with Jesus. She ran back and told everybody in her town that she had met Jesus and the town came out to meet Him for themselves. Who can you tell your story of HIS STORY in your life to? — Doug Kallesen

Learning to Connect in Our Neighborhoods

by Rev. Doug Kallesen
Executive Director for Missions

iNeighborhood training was conducted at the Pastors Conferences in Florida-Georgia District Regions 1, 2 and 4. iNeighborhood is based on living life, "loving God and loving our neighbor as ourselves." (Matthew 22:37-39) It is hoped that training will be provided for lay members in the near future.

iNeighborhood is about making disciples, who in turn make disciples. I am excited about the District working with Dr. Bruce Jaeger, our trainer for this outreach ministry, which began in the Southeastern District. I see such promise because this actually leads to action – starting in the classroom and going out into my neighborhood.

I told President Walton that if we are going to engage in this as a District, I want to be a practitioner not a student. I am beginning this process and am connecting with people in my everyday path intentionally, sowing seeds and I am enjoying it!

Dr. Jaeger has already coached and trained us to look at where we live, work and play — this is our neighborhood. These are the people with whom Jesus is already at work. I am there living out my life in my live, work and play neighborhood as God's missionary to B.L.E.S.S. them.

B.L.E.S.S. is an acronym used in iNeighborhood to remind us:

1. What are the BONDS that I have with my neighbor?
2. What have I LEARNED about my neighbor that may be helpful?
3. How can I further ENGAGE in my relationship with this neighbor?

4. In what ways may I SERVE this neighbor?
5. When and how might I SHARE my faith with this neighbor that I now know pretty well?

I hope that you may be stirred to step up and find out more about iNeighborhood! If so contact me at the District Office: phone 407-857-5556 ext 6 or email DKallesen@flgadistrict.org. ■

Shown in photo below with Dr. Bruce Jaeger (front, right) are Florida-Georgia executives and Region 1 pastors (l-r) Rev. Eric Estes, Lutheran Church of the Redeemer/Augusta; District President Greg Walton; Rev. Dr. Victor Belton, Peace/Decatur; District Executive Director Missions-Outreach Doug Kallesen; Rev. David Wesche, All Saints/Blairsville; Rev. Zachary Hoffman, Good Shepherd/Gainesville; Rev. David Brighton, Mount Calvary/Warner Robins and District First Vice President.



I walked around trying to relax the muscles, eventually calling off at work. Next, I lit a cigarette, the last one I will ever have, took two puffs, and felt a "zing" travel up behind my



New Survey Offers Insights on District Youth Ministries

by Jeremy Becker

Director of Christian Education at St. Paul/Weston and Chairman of the District Youth Ministry Council

The purpose of the District Youth Ministry Council is to equip, empower and engage the youth of the church for lives of Christian Discipleship. The DYMC asked volunteers and professionals in the District how they thought we could best equip, empower and engage the youth. Your responses were great, and we are so thankful for the time that Pastors, DCEs, teachers, parents and other volunteers took to provide this feedback.

We learned that out of the 84 responses, 77% have active youth ministry in their congregations with groups ranging from 5-30 or more and with the most common size being 6-10 active youth (33%). We also learned that the person most responsible for youth ministry in our District congregations is a part-time volunteer (41%) followed closely by full-time paid professionals (31%). Of those who responded, 13% have no youth leader at all.

It was made clear that the DYMC could support youth ministry, youth and those working in youth ministry in our congregations in four different ways:

1. Training Events for Adult Leaders;
2. Events for Youth (i.e. Gatherings, Leadership Training, Servant Events, etc.);
3. Consultations With or Advising Congregations in the area of Youth Ministry;
4. Networking Congregation Youth Leaders.

Only ten percentage points separated these answers with Events for Youth and Training Events for Adult Leaders rising to the top.

The District Youth Ministry Council will continue to explore ways to provide this leadership and support but will start by providing

the following youth events and adult leader training:

◆ The DYMC is working to ensure planning for District events for Middle School and High School Youth are under way by the proper committees.

◆ The Middle School Youth Gathering will take place again at Lake Yale on November 4-6, 2016.

◆ The DYMC will host a webinar in August to help leaders in the District learn more about taking a group of middle schoolers to the Gathering. In this webinar, members of the Middle School Gathering planning team and the DYMC will talk about important topics identified as needs from the survey including funding, traveling ideas, and recruiting leaders to go to the Gathering.

◆ The High School Youth Gathering date (spring 2017) and location are TBD.

◆ The DYMC will have a deliberate presence at the Middle School Gathering and High School Youth Gathering, providing training and learning sessions for adult leaders.

◆ The DYMC is exploring locations, dates and service opportunities for a High School Summer Servant Event for 2017. More information will be available in the fall of 2016.

We want to connect more with our pastors in the District. More than 45% of the survey responders were pastors. Members of the DYMC will be present at the Pastor's Conference this fall in order to share more information and provide support and connection between churches regarding youth ministry.



The DYMC members are keenly aware that the size of our District creates obstacles for many congregations to participate in District events that are as much as nine hours away. The Council is committed to exploring new ways of effectively serving them.

If you have more thoughts or ideas that might help our efforts, please do not hesitate to contact us at jbecker@stpaulweston.org. Thanks for your feedback and support. It is an honor to serve the youth and youth ministry in the Florida-Georgia District. ■



Authentic Youth Ministry, written by Florida Georgia District DCE Cassie Moore, is a new release from Concordia Publishing House. In *Authentic Youth Ministry*, Moore shares how to gently lift kids up when they fall to their knees — and to remind them that no matter what, they have a loving God who walks with them, saves them and loves them. Moore is on staff at Our Savior/St. Petersburg where her husband, Rev. Tyler Moore, serves as Assistant Pastor. ■

Fitch Upgrades Thrivent Financial To AA+ Rating

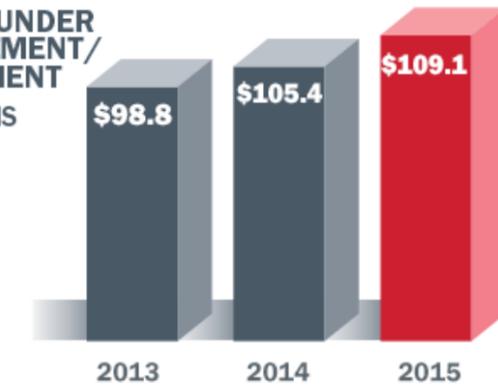
Fitch Ratings has upgraded Thrivent Financial's Insurer Financial Strength rating to AA+ (Very Strong), the second-highest of 19 categories, and given the organization a stable outlook.

Fitch cited Thrivent's extremely strong level of capitalization, which was enhanced by the material growth of surplus in recent years. The organization is committed to maintaining statutory capital levels in excess of rating guidelines.

As part of the upgrade, Thrivent was also recognized for its consistently solid profitability and favorable position within the Lutheran market as well as its growing franchise within the broader Christian community.

"As a membership organization, we know that our members count on us to fulfill our promises, allowing them to be wise with money and live generously," said Randy Boushek, Chief Financial Officer for Thrivent Financial. "This ratings upgrade from Fitch recognizes our commitment to

ASSETS UNDER MANAGEMENT/ADVICE IN BILLIONS



Thrivent's expanding assets under management/advice — more than \$109 billion at the end of 2015 — reflect the trust of its members. Today Thrivent has \$188.7 billion of individual life insurance in force with an annual surplus of \$8.3 billion in 2015.

serving our members from a position of strength and stability."

These ratings reflect Thrivent Financial's overall financial strength and claims-paying ability, but do not apply to the investment performance of investment products. The ratings were affirmed May 6, 2016.

Thrivent Financial is a financial services organization that helps Christians be wise with money and live generously. As a membership

organization, it offers its more than 2.3 million member-owners a broad range of products, services and guidance from financial representatives nationwide.

For more than a century Thrivent has helped members make wise money choices that reflect their values while providing them opportunities to demonstrate their generosity where they live, work and worship. ■

CCNY Outgoing President Viji George Addresses Grads at 135th Commencement

Concordia College's outgoing President, Dr. Viji George was the featured Commencement speaker at the school's 135th Commencement exercises on Saturday, May 14.

George, who is in his 17th year as Concordia's President, will end his tenure on June 30th.

Under his leadership, the College has experienced dramatic enrollment growth along with the addition of many academic programs. Overall student enrollment is up 11.5% over last year, and the College has experienced a 33% increase in total

enrollment in the last six years. This year's graduate program enrollment is up 113% and the overall student population has become a very diverse group — with students hailing from 30 states and 31 countries such as China, India, South Korea, Spain, Norway and Italy.

Along with this, during George's tenure new Master's Degree programs have been introduced in Accounting, Analytics,

Digital Marketing, Digital Media and new online programs in Early Childhood Education, Childhood

Education and an RN to BS program for registered nurses to complete their bachelor degrees. The College has also recently created eleven new academic program transfer pathways through articulation agreements with Westchester Community College. ■



Defining the Coaching Leader

The last two columns addressed leadership in the church and the helping skill we call “coaching.” In this article we will put the two together and explore what it means to be a coaching leader.

The coaching leader is someone who is clear about where they are going and value the blessing of the whole body of Christ. They realize that other approaches to leadership can create passive or dependent followers who sit back and wait on the leader to



The
COACHING LEADER
by Rev. Scott Gress
Lutheran Counseling Services
Leadership Coach

that without everyone in the Body of Christ engaged in the mission of God the church will be handicapped. (See Romans 12, Ephesians 4 & 1 Corinthians 12) So they intentionally engage a person’s thinking, inviting them to take small steps of responsibility. They keep in touch, provide support, and celebrate along the way – all while they have the preferred future, God’s future, in mind. “So that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the

faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (Eph 4:12-13)

So what does that look like

even a few to do it. Other approaches to leadership run over people or have other unintended consequences.

In the church setting though, leaders may include a variety of people and positions. It may include the pastor, the head of a board or committee or a leader may not hold any formal office at all! Leaders in the church are very likely people of faith engaged with others in the body of Christ, seeking to be supportive and a positive influence.

So the coaching leader wants to avoid the pitfalls of other approaches to leadership.

The coaching leader takes a stance of valuing people. They view others as gifts of God who are gifted by God. They understand

practically?

It means that whether you are a pastor or layperson, whether you have



a formal leadership position or not, there will be less talking and more listening. It means less telling what to do and more asking questions. It means less solving problems for people and more creating awareness and giving permission for people to

“own” the problem and creatively address it themselves as people gifted by God. It means less “making it happen” and more facilitating the action and ownership of others. It means less taking responsibility from people (or hoarding it for yourself) and more giving responsibility to others and supporting them along the way so they will grow through the experience.

The coaching leader will exercise leadership by asking questions, not to manipulate but to guard the values and purpose God has given the church and to encourage responsibility and taking action. The coaching leader carries him or herself in a way that values people, seeks to empower and strengthen them, so the mission of God can powerfully be accomplished. For example, “in the moment” the coaching leader may ask:

“How can we involve more people and the gifts God has given them?”

“How will this (what is being decided) help to make disciples?”

“How can we involve those who are new or inactive in our fellowship (while we do this)?”

“How can we be a blessing to the community?”

“What is your dream for this (board, committee, task force, involvement etc)?”

“How is it going and how can I help?”

Rev. Scott Gress is called by Lutheran Counseling Services as an independent contractor in the areas of leadership training, consulting and coaching. Contact Scott through LCS (407- 644-4692) or through email, scottgress@me.com or his blog page scottgress.com. ■



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LCEF National Competition Offers Students Marketing Experience

Nine LCMS universities from across the USA participated in the fifth annual National Student Marketing Competition sponsored by the Lutheran Church Extension Fund. During the all-day competition school teams presented marketing plans to a group of prominent judges.

The 2016 competition assignment asked students to develop a comprehensive plan to raise the awareness of LCEF and how it impacts the LCMS and ultimately communities and individuals — how LCEF is a catalyst for empowered ministries and people sharing the Gospel. The

challenge was to develop a campaign that would motivate LCMS members to actively become an LCEF partner through an investment, a loan, a gift or the use of a support service. Presenting their plans on April 15 at the LCMS International Center were teams from:

- Concordia University Ann Arbor
- Concordia University Chicago
- Concordia University Irvine
- Concordia University, Nebraska
- Concordia College New York
- Concordia University Portland
- Concordia University St Paul
- Concordia University Texas
- Concordia University Wisconsin

Winner of the \$5,000 first prize was Concordia University Texas. Second place honors went to Concordia College New York, with Concordia University St. Paul finishing third. "LCEF looks forward to the opportunity to interact with

Concordia University students and providing them with a unique 'real world' educational experience," said LCEF President/CEO Rich Robertson. "We also look forward to the reverse mentoring the students provide when they share their view of the world." ■



The team from Concordia University Texas took first-place honors in the LCEF national competition.



LCEF President/CEO Rich Robertson addresses marketing competition participants before the winners are announced.



Competition judges — including Florida-Georgia District President Greg Walton (center) — listen to the first presentation of the day.

"Stewardship is Everything We Do in Life"

That's right – everything we do in life is connected to being Good Stewards of God's gifts. The challenge we face today is sharing this fact with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

That's where the District Stewardship Advisory Council — along with partnering with the Lutheran Church Extension Fund — comes in. We are here to partner with you and your congregation to make sure you have a Stewardship emphasis planned for your congregation.

The Importance of Stewardship Emphases

- Members will grow in their appreciation that they live as children of a loving and generous God.

- Members will better understand they are stewards, not owners, of all God entrusts to them.
- Members will understand they are God's stewards by His grace.
- Members will understand that faithful stewardship involves much more than just money.
- Members will discover joy as they serve and give in Christ's name.
- Members will grow in their involvement, commitment, and generosity.
- Members will give approximately 30% more when churches offer an annual emphasis and ask for commitments. (From the book "Generous People" by Rev. Eugene Grimm)

Opportunities

- District Stewardship Summits. Two have been held — one in Orlando and one in Atlanta — and the next one will be in South Florida at St. Paul/Boca Raton, August 19-20. More information to come on the District website. This is a free event with all meals included. More than 250 individuals have been a part of these events to date, and we thank LCEF for their partnership in making them happen. Mark your calendar to be a part of the next one.
- Consecrated Stewards, an LCEF program that has been used by many



churches over the past 10 years. It encompasses the above points which will edify any congregation's stewardship program. Consecrated Stewards has recently been revised and offers new insights into individual giving putting emphasis on the need of the Giver to Give. Many congregations have been blessed through this program. Designed for any size congregation. It comes complete with all materials: Bible Study's; Children ministry lessons; job descriptions for committee members and support staff within the District to help get you started. Presently

there are 14 trained leaders in the District and we are planning to train more. The Lutheran Church Extension Fund has been listening and recognized that the materials for some congregations were a little pricey, and as of April 1, 2016, there has been a price reduction. This program is now very budget friendly — for more information please contact the District Office and talk to Debbie Talbot at (877) 457-5556 ext 4. Don't be afraid of stewardship, and make sure something is planned in your church in the coming months. If you need help or have questions – ask. Doing nothing is where we often fail. We must help others to see the many blessings of God. ■



This special column was written by Rev. Dennis Bartels, Chairperson for the District Stewardship Advisory Council. For more information contact him at fasterpastorb@yahoo.com or go to <http://lcef.org/financialplanning/#consecrated>

TIMOTHY LUTHERAN/WOODSTOCK celebrated members who have and are currently serving in the Armed Forces at the May 1 worship services. A video presentation of members who have served was shown at the beginning of the services. The congregation was encouraged to wear red, white and blue. Shown here are flagbearers Richard Wiese and Brian Howe, acolyte James Constien and crucifer Ried Peykoff. ■



REGION 1

Vice President:
David Brighton
Mount Calvary/Warner Robbins

Laity Board Members:
Jay Wendland | Living Faith/Cumming
Robert Chambers | Grace/Atlanta

Commissioned Minister Board Member:
Lamar Stewart | Our Redeemer/Augusta

NE Georgia Circuit Visitor:
David Wesche | All Saints/Blairsville
Atlanta N Circuit Visitor:
Jeffrey Jordan | Rivercliff/Atlanta
Atlanta S Circuit Visitor:
Larry Townsend | Christ Our Savior/Hampton
E Central Georgia Circuit Visitor:
Roger Schwartz | Our Redeemer/Augusta



NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER — Students, faculty, staff and parents of St. Paul Lutheran School/Peachtree City gathered at the flagpole on May 5 for a special service to celebrate the National Day of Prayer. Students were among those offering prayers. ■

New Church Logo Debuts at All Saints

All Saints Lutheran/Blairsville has introduced a new logo representative of its ministry in North Georgia. The logo was designed by former Media & Outreach Secretary, Heidi Stewart.

"All Saints is a people established in our belief of the Triune God," said Pastor Dave Wesche. "The Father is shown as the light cast from above; the Son is represented by the Synod cross in the name of the congregation; the Spirit takes the form of the white dove hovering above the waters."

"We are a people fed, nourished and empowered by the gifts of God's grace," Wesche continued. "First, these gifts are indicated by the form of the Bible along the outer edge of the logo from which the light of God's Word is cast. Then the gift of Baptism



is highlighted in the blue waters with which the Spirit is entwined. As we obey the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20, 'While you are going...,' we live this ministry among the environs of mountains and streams in North Georgia."

He concluded, "As our lives intersect with a variety of people, our prayer is that the logo may be used in a way to engage them with the identity of All Saints in the mission and ministry of Jesus." ■

Great Gatsby Dinner Generates NYG Funds

Good Shepherd/Gainesville was temporarily transformed into a 1920s speakeasy on April 23 for the annual youth dinner. Proceeds this year will go toward expenses for congregation youth attending this summer's LCMS National Youth Gathering in New Orleans.

The evening included an Italian dinner, games and dancing. A silent auction with a 20s flare was a highlight. ■



Great Gatsby party goers included Good Shepherd Pastor Zach and Tracie Hoffman with their children.



Bethlehem Opens Campus for Block Party



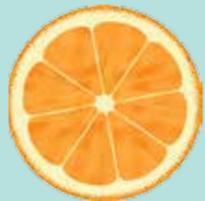
Members of Bethlehem/Jacksonville Beach hosted a neighborhood Block Party on Sunday, April 17. The 12:30-3pm event was open to the public.

The event featured food, games, pony rides, a petting zoo, face painting, a bouncy house and music. Tables and chairs were set up to provide an opportunity to relax, talk and meet neighbors. ■



LWML members from St. Peter's/Middleburg prepared and delivered 56 Mother's Day gifts for clients of the Food Pantry of Green Cove Springs. The bags were stuffed with an

assortment of hygiene and pampering products. For several years the St. Peter's LWML has honored Pantry clients with these donations. ■



REGION 2

Vice President:
Frank Marshall
St Paul/Jacksonville

Board Secretary:
Jay Winters, University Church
Student Center/Tallahassee

Laity Board Members:
Donald Kaufman | St. John/Ocala
Lois Schaefer | Amazing Grace/Oxford

Tallahassee Circuit Visitor:
Mark Schultz | Epiphany/Tallahassee

First Coast Circuit Visitor:
Dana Brones | Bethlehem/Jacksonville

N Central Florida Circuit Visitor:
James Rockey | Amazing Grace/Oxford



SAINTS ON STAGE – Students from St. John Lutheran School/Ocala presented "Charlotte's Web" in mid April, earning rave reviews and local press coverage. ■



Peace/Dunnellon hosted its annual spaghetti supper on Friday, May 20, in the church fellowship hall. Members prepared and served salad, 'al dente' spaghetti with an authentic sauce, beverages and a large variety of desserts. Spaghetti chefs Sheryl Lutz and Cindy McKee and their helpers prepared the supper. Tickets were available advance and at the door. ■

Downtown Trinity Honored by City of Orlando

Trinity/Orlando was awarded the 2016 City of Orlando Historic Preservation Annual Awards during the May 9 City Council Meeting.

The City of Orlando Historic Preservation Annual Award program recognizes property owners who have taken an active role in preserving and protecting the integrity of the City's historic districts landmarks through appropriate additions and renovations to existing historic structures and compatible new construction within those districts.

Trinity's New Century Center, which was dedicated on March 13, was designed to seamlessly fit within the Lake Eola Heights Historic District. The church worked closely with area residents and city officials to ensure a streetscape look that reflects the neighborhood's character.

At the meeting to receive the award from Mayor Buddy Dyer and Commissioner Patty Sheehan were Trinity representatives Matt Wheeler, Bob Blackwood and Maggie Bowles. ■



Trinity/Orlando was awarded the 2016 City of Orlando Historic Preservation Award on May 9.

Outreach Ministry Celebrating Milestones



Risen Savior/Palm Bay commemorated four years of service to the community through God's Pantry on Sunday, April 3.

During God's Pantry's opening week in March of 2012, six meals were distributed. The week of April 14, the Pantry served 1,022 meals – a new

record. As of the end of April, 987,500 meals had been distributed.

"This past year we have increased by an average of 100 people per week over the past year," reported Fred R. Anderson, Risen Savior Council President. "In May we will be hitting our one millionth meal.

"To put this in perspective, if a meal is worth \$2, this is \$2 million in food," he continued. "Again, if a meal is worth \$2, one of our local grocery stores sells 30,000 meals a day, about three times what we hand out on a Wednesday.

"Think of the staff and size of the grocery stores. What happens here each week is truly the story of loaves and fishes."

The congregation marked the Food Pantry anniversary with lunch after the April 3 worship.

"At a time like this, we have to give thanks to God for putting this all together," Anderson concluded. "He has brought a facility, the food, the volunteers and the clients together at one place and time."

In photo above, members of recently spent a morning assembling blessing buckets and help bags for their livegenerously ministry. Along with God's pantry, Risen Savior does a toiletry ministry as well. ■

Redeemer LWML Launches Project to Aid Children

The LWML group at Lutheran Church of the Redeemer/Sanford has begun a new service community service project to benefit the Sanford Police Department and the children they encounter in the course of their work.

"In loving memory of Officer Kate Walsh – a friend to Lutheran Church of the Redeemer and Redeeming Life Maternity Home – Kate's Hope was started in April 2016," said Sheryl DeWitt, who with her husband Redeemer Pastor Ed DeWitt founded Redeeming Life Maternity Home.

"The project was started to benefit children caught in domestic violence situations or other traumatic events," Mrs. DeWitt continued. "We will provide backpacks to the Sanford PD to keep in their patrol cars for distribution to children as needed. The packs are meant to provide the officers with items of comfort for the children and can be used as a tool to create a positive relationship with the officer."

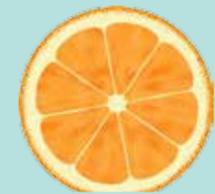
The packs will include such items as a small blanket, snacks, coloring books and crayons, small toys and stuffed animals.

"Many children view the police as scary," DeWitt concluded. "Many children see the police take mommy or daddy away in their car. Our hope is that this small gesture will provide comfort to the kids caught up in these situations and to create a positive relationship between our police department and the children of our community."

This new project has been funded in part by Thrivent Financial and from donations from our community. ■



Sheryl DeWitt (left) presents backpacks to Officer Brown of the Sanford Police Department.



REGION 3



Vice President:

Brian Kneser | Woodlands/Montverde

Board Treasurer:

Renee Varga | Woodlands/Montverde

Laity Board Members:

Tom Reagin | Hope/Plant City
Katie Abercrombie | Prince of Peace/Orlando

Commissioned Minister Board Member:

Lois Ford | Faith/Eustis

Space Coast Circuit Visitor:

Gary Held | Risen Savior/Palm Bay

Orlando East Circuit Visitor:

Ken Green | Prince of Peace/Orlando

Orlando West Circuit Visitor:

Milan Weerts | Emeritus/Clermont

Winter Haven Circuit Visitor:

Dean Pfeffer | Hope/Plant City



READY FOR FUN — Dedication services on March 30 signaled the opening of the new Faith Lutheran School/Eustis playground. Principal Steven Hoffschneider was the first person down the slide.



Messiah/Tampa Welcomes New Senior Pastor

Rev. Mark Adrian was installed as Senior Pastor of Messiah/Tampa on Saturday, May 7 during a special afternoon service.

Florida-Georgia District President Greg Walton was the guest preacher and performed the Rite of Installation. Rev. James Guelzow, Messiah's Pastor Emeritus, and Rev. Kevin Yoakum, Pastor of Christ the King/Riverview, read the scripture lessons.

Rev. Gil Kuehn, who had served Messiah as Vacancy Pastor, offered the invocation. Also participating in the service were Rev. Miguel Sanabria, Pastor of Messiah Hispanic; Abby Moss, Messiah's Director of Family Life Ministry; Joel Mathews, Congregational President; Mike Castro, Chair of the Board of Elders; and Messiah Hispanic Vicar John Cobos.

A congregation celebration in the Ministry Center followed the service.

Adrian, who grew up in Lake Mary, earned his bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of Florida. He graduated from Concordia Seminary/St. Louis in 2011. For the past five years has been serving in Bremerton, WA.

He and his wife, Amy, welcomed son Mark III in April of 2015. ■



BAPTISMS IN IMMOKALEE — On Sunday, March 6, at Immokalee Lutheran Church, Virginia Herrera and six of her children were baptized into the Christian faith. "This was a big step for her and her children, one that they did not enter into lightly," said Rev. Robert Selle. "Virginia and her family have participated in our Immokalee worship community for several years. We studied Scriptures and talked often about baptism and what it means to be a child of God." ■

REGION 4

Vice President:
Jon Zehnder | St. Michael/Fort Myers

Laitly Board Members:
Jeff Richards | Hope/Brandenton
Evita Gonzalez | Beautiful Savior /Lehigh Acres

Commissioned Minister Board Member:
Jesse Crosmer | Our Savior/St. Petersburg

Suncoast Circuit Visitor:
David Brockhoff | Holy Trinity/Masaryktown

St. Petersburg Circuit Visitor:
Arnold Piering | Emeritus/New Port Richey

Tampa Circuit Visitor:
Kevin Yoakum | Christ the King/Riverview

Sarasota Circuit Visitor:
Rossetter Leavitt | Beautiful Savior/Sarasota

SW Circuit Visitor:
Richard Browning | Hope/Bonita Springs

Thrive Celebrates Charter Sunday

Thrive Community Church/ Estero chartered as a congregation of the Florida-Georgia District on Sunday, April 17, at its new rented space.

Thrive recently transitioned from being a "portable church," setting up each Sunday morning in rented space at Florida Gulf Coast University, to a "storefront church," now renting for three years at Estero Ridge shopping center on a busy corner of Tamiami Trail and Estero Parkway. Thrive occupies three storefronts with about 5,400 square feet of space for ministry.

According to Thrive Mission Pastor John Roth, congregation goals are to increase worship to 120 by the end of 2016; have six to eight home huddles (a version of small groups) meeting regularly in

the community; grow its campus ministry to 60 students meeting weekly and 24 in discipleship huddles; and increase its youth ministry to 20 per week.

Noting that "these are challenging goals," Roth said he "believes God is blessing our efforts and will extend His kingdom through Thrive."

Thrive has one Sunday service at 10 AM; however, with attendance now near 90 per Sunday, Roth anticipates going to two worship services in the fall.

Thrive began worship at FGCU in August of 2014, just 18 months prior to the move to the new rented space. Circuit churches and many members have contributed to the financial support of this mission along with the District. ■

Quilters' Efforts Benefit Community

Known as Lydia Quilters of Zion Lutheran/Fort Myers, 12-15 women under the leadership of Connie Junghans meet the second and fourth Fridays of the month to sew charity quilts, placemats and clothing protectors.

The quilts were blessed by Pastor Curtis Deterding at the church services on April 10. The following day, 77 quilts were delivered to Hospice House, Hospice Veteran's Program (red, white and blue quilts), Arden Courts Alzheimer's Care, Children's Advocacy and Golissano Children's Hospital. The women put labels on the quilts which say, "May God bless you, Lydia Quilters, Zion Lutheran Church."

The 92 placemats were delivered to Meals on Wheels in Lee County and the 80 clothing protectors to Fort Myers Hospice House.

The fabric and batting for these quilts are provided through donations from people of Zion and friends. Thrivent Financial also provides funding through their Action Team program. ■

Pictured here are some of the Lydia Quilters: Carlie Zweig, Sue Krug, Connie Junghans, Janet Fraver, Sheila Gnat, Jackie Koepchen, Sherri Fischer. Missing from this picture is Sharon Hatch.



Abram Installed at Our Savior/Plantation

Rev. Mark Abram was installed Pastor of Our Savior/Plantation during a special service on April 3.

Among those participating in the service was Florida-Georgia District President Greg Walton.

Abram was just four months old when in 1956 his father accepted the

call from the Florida-Georgia District to begin a new church in "sleepy" Orlando. After graduating from UCF in 1978, Abram attended Concordia Seminary/St. Louis. He met his wife Dawn, the daughter of his supervising pastor, the late Rev. Ernst Pflug, during his vicarage in Queens, NY.

The Abrams spent the first seven years of his ministry in Florida, serving Peace/Okeechobee and Good Shepherd/Titusville. In 1989, Abram accepted a call from the New Jersey District to serve as a mission developer. Abram was pastor of Christ The King/

Danville, VA from 1991-93 and was one of three pastors of Faith/Appleton, WI, a congregation of nearly 4,000 members until 2005 when the family returned to Florida.

Abram's father participated in his installation as pastor of Trinity/Summerfield. Just four days later, Pastor Henry Abram passed away suddenly after a fall at home.

The Abrams have two children: Jillian Wojcik, who lives in Plantation with her husband Bobby and their children; and Marcus, who lives with his wife Sarah in New Berlin, WI. ■

Pictured at the installation service are Pastors Scott Gress, Ed Nicklas, Mark Abram, Elmer Medley, Greg Walton and Al Kirk.



Hirst Celebrates 25 Years at Peace

On Sunday evening, April 17, members and friends of Peace/Okeechobee gathered to celebrate Rev. John Hirst and his 25 years of service to the congregation. A banquet was served in the congregation's Fellowship Hall.

A native of McKeesport, PA, Hirst earned a bachelor of arts degree from Concordia College Bronxville. He graduated from Concordia Seminary/St. Louis in 1981 and served his first call as missionary at large and Pastor of Messiah/Aspen, CO.

Hirst came to the Florida-Georgia District in 1985 when he accepted the call to Redeemer/Miami, where he served until 1991 when he came to Peace.

Hirst and his wife, Dorcas, are the parents of three grown children: John, Stephen and Timothy. ■

Below — Among those attending the celebration were pastors (l-r) John Hirst, Peace/Okeechobee; Darrell Stuehrenberg, Bethlehem/Fort Myers; Juan Gonzalez, Beautiful Savior/Lehigh Acres; Robert Maulella, Faith/Sebring.

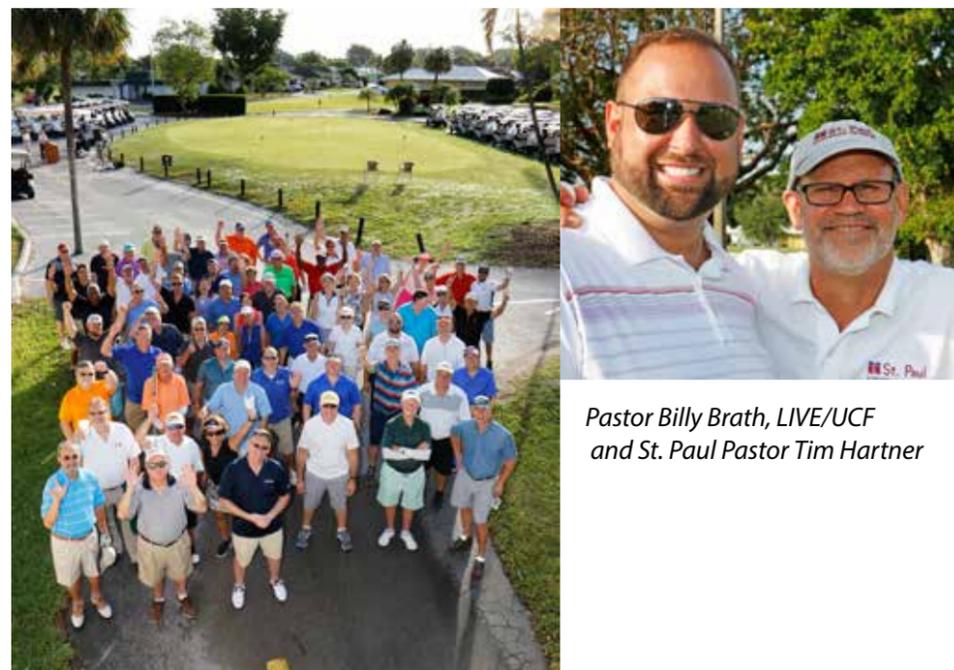


LENTEN COLLECTION — During the Lenten season, Redeemer Church & School/Stuart students and members collected more than 1,800 pounds of food for the House of Hope. Founded in 1984, House of Hope fights hunger and hardship in Martin County by providing food, clothing, furniture, financial assistance and life changing case managing services. The non-profit has four locations plus a thrift store.

Below — REDEEMER/STUART member Lisa McLendon Navarro crafted this rendition of the Holy Spirit to be used during Pentecost. Navarro made the dove to commemorate the presence of the Holy Spirit that presided in the heart of her mother, Denise McLendon, and inspired her dedicated service to the Lord and her church.

St Paul/Weston Hosts Seminarian Golf Tourney

Members and friends of St. Paul/Weston gathered at Woodlands Country Club/Tamarac on April 30 for the congregation's 11th Annual Seminarian Golf Tourney. Among those participating in the fundraiser were Rev. Billy Brath of LiveUCF – who grew up at St. Paul where his parents are still members – and St. Paul Pastor Tim Hartner.



Pastor Billy Brath, LIVE/UCF and St. Paul Pastor Tim Hartner



REGION 5

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Alan Sielk | St. Paul/Miami

Sharing the Love of God Through Word and Deed



MISSION HAITI

by Helen Roenfeld
Executive Director
for Mission: Haiti

More than a thousand children and adults in Haiti have heard the Good News of Jesus Christ since the beginning of 2016. Imagine that! More than 1,000!

Many of those had never heard the message of salvation by grace through faith until a team of folks from California or Florida or Texas or Wisconsin, Michigan, Nebraska, Indiana and North Carolina came to their school or village and shared through word and deed, showing and speaking the love of God.

The Right Place, the Right Time

Beginning January 2, ten students and adults from Immanuel Lutheran/Riverside, CA, a mission partner since 2010, made their third trip to Port au Prince to present a week of VBS at different locations to several hundred youngsters on Christmas break.

The team taught about 40 children to play the recorder, helped paint a Lutheran guest house and taught carpentry to some local men. The young adults met with college-age Haitians to learn about each other's lives, cultures, hopes, dreams and faith.

During one painting session wailing was heard outside the building. A young teen boy trying to reach a mango from a third-floor roof had fallen onto the concrete. He was rushed unconscious to the hospital on the back of a motorcycle; his mother didn't have the money to rent a motorcycle for herself so she was left behind sobbing. The team sent her to the hospital and waited for news.

Gratefully, the young man only had one badly broken arm and a concussion, but the family had no money for surgery or hospitalization. The team collected an offering and raised

exactly what was needed for this young man's care. Without the team's kindness this young man would have come home without any medical care, and there is no way to know how his arm would have healed. God put His people at the right place, at the right time to change the life of one young man and his family!

Fulfilling a Heart's Desire

Later in January, a great team of folks — young and not so young —



St. Paul/Weston Pastor Tim Hartner leading a presentation during the team's mission trip.

from St. Paul/ Weston, FL, traveled to the small village of Jean-Louis, about three hours north of Port au Prince, to complete the floor of a church built in 2015. The church was the heart's desire of 122-year-old community patriarch Mr. Orilus, who deeded land to the church for the building as well as for village gardens. Though he could have sold the several hundred acres and lived well, he resided in a tiny mud hut and gave all he had so that the village he grew up in could have a church and gardens.

Besides accomplishing the hard work of concrete pouring by bucket brigade, the St. Paul team made Bible story presentations to the village children; taught hygiene and infant care; provided food for the workers; distributed shoes, vegetable seeds and garden equipment; and had a celebration meal with the village.



VBS presentations were part of the January mission trip.

Our good friend Mr. Orilus did not see the floor completed. He had told us that he would not die until the church was completed. God was faithful to His servant. Mr. Orilus went to the hospital on the day the team arrived, and entered the presence of his Savior the day after the floor was completed. His final question to his grandson was, "How was the party at church?" The grandson told him that they had danced on the new floor and the party had been wonderful. Mr. Orilus said, "I knew it would be," then closed his eyes and died.

Homebuilding in Jubilee

In March a small team of folks from Texas, Florida and California undertook a 17- day trip to complete a second eco-dome home in Jubilee, pour a foundation for a new dormitory at the girl's home in Gonaives and check the boys dorm ceiling reported to be deteriorating. They took side trips to gather information for future projects.

The trip was an unqualified success!

The second dome was completed, the foundation was laid and good information was gathered. Unfortunately the boys dormitory was in worse shape than described and must be demolished. The boys have moved into alternative rooms on the campus, and the old dormitory is being torn down. Plans are in the works for a new dormitory at an anticipated cost of about \$35,000 due to high inflation in Haiti.

Health Outreach Team Impact All Ages

One of three Community Health Outreach Teams that Mission: Haiti sends each year was in country April 9-16. Twelve participants from all over the USA came together to serve more than 1,000 adult patients and as many children in just four days.



The second dome home in Jubilee was completed during in March.

Birthing kits were given to each pregnant woman during a class led by Dr. Nancy Swisher and Lisa Douthwaite, NP. Each kit contained directions in pictures and in Creole to help Haitian women have a clean, safe home birth.



At left — Dr. Nancy Swisher once again led the Community Health Outreach Team during its April visit.

The team traveled several hours each day over very rugged mountain roads to villages who had never seen doctors before. There were four medical providers, a pharmacist, two Haitian nurses and six helpers who worked with the children's clinic and gave out hygiene items, clothing and shoes. Pastor Bill Douthwaite of Shepherd of the Coast/Palm Coast shared the Gospel and prayed with almost every patient. We had the joy of witnessing two baptisms during the week: an eight-month old girl with Down's Syndrome and a mid 80s gentleman at very high risk with malnutrition who was a believer in Jesus but had never heard about baptism.

Team Openings

- July 2-9: roof and interior construction at girls orphanage
- September 11-22: building girls dormitory dome
- October 15-22: Community Health Outreach to Port de Paix with Pastor Bernard Julemiste
- November or December: possible construction trip for boys orphanage

Mission: Haiti is grateful to be the hands and feet agency of the Florida-Georgia District and is always thankful for your prayers and resourcing. Please call or email if you have questions: 954-868-8218; email: missionhati99@aol.com; Facebook [mission: Haiti](https://www.facebook.com/mission: Haiti); address: 2269 S. University Dr. #227 Davie, FL 33324. ■

District Congregations Again Respond to Flood Bucket Challenge

Over the past few months, congregations of the Florida-Georgia District have been busy putting together LCMS Disaster Response Flood Buckets.

Last fall, several volunteers rented and drove two trucks full of flood buckets to Columbia, SC, to help with the flooding in that area. This mission of mercy left the District with no more fully prepared flood buckets to help deal with the next emergency.

To remedy this shortage, Joel and Kathy Mathews from Messiah/Tampa spearheaded the new campaign to refill the stock of flood buckets across the District. The campaign saw a change that enabled the District to use a storage facility in Georgia and one in Florida. The final tally collected, along with a few more promised in the near future, came to 470 buckets stored in Florida and 149 stored in Georgia for a grand total of 619 flood buckets stored and ready to go.

"On behalf of the District, I would like to thank all those that participated in this challenge," said John Elliott, Florida-Georgia Business Manager and District Disaster Response Coordinator.

"Your love, kindness and care for your fellow man are not misplaced. We look forward to sending these buckets of love to those in need as they are required in the near future."

He added, "If your congregation would like to participate you can still make up the flood buckets at any time if you can transport them to one of the storage facilities. If you think you might wish to do this, please contact me in the District office at jelliott@fgadistrict.org or 877-457-5556." ■



At Our Savior/Zephyrhills, the Wednesday morning Bible Study group put 20 flood buckets together.



Abiding Savior/Gainesville members assembled 30 Flood Buckets to help build up the stock of available flood buckets for the next natural disaster. The youth group assisted in this operation by packing the buckets.



Members of Hope/Plant City responded to the challenge by donating items and filling flood buckets as part of the congregation's mission and outreach ministry.

Our Redeemer/Ocala Pastor Joe Adams reported that "one of our members applied for a Thrivent Action Team project. Once she received approval from Thrivent, she used the startup funds to purchase 30 buckets (photo at right) with lids and placed a list of needed contents into the buckets. Members then took the buckets home and filled the buckets with the required items and returned them to the church."



"We had some fun with the bucket challenge," said Lori Schwan of St. Michael's/Fort Myers. "We did it as a Thrivent Action Team during our kids' Spring Break for those families whose parents needed to work and sent their students to extended care. Our goal was for 15 flood buckets, but with the help of Home Depot donating 25 buckets and Thrivent Financial's seed money, we were able to complete 31 buckets. We followed the instructions to use an assembly line and the elementary kids matched up with the preschoolers to fill and carry the buckets. It was so awesome to see them working as a team."



Tina Wadsworth represents the LWML group at Our Savior/Lake Worth in the South Palm Beach Zone. "Our church has a very active Caring Ministry," she said. "The Flood Bucket ministry fits well with our mission. When the District contacted our Pastor Steve Wipperman, our LWML group readily agreed to take on the Flood Relief Buckets program. We used fundraising to purchase everything and got the buckets donated by our local Home Depot. Then we divided up the shopping tasks between our members. In the end we filled 21 buckets!"



According to member Leslie Jean, St. Mark/Tucker responded enthusiastically to the Flood Buckets appeal. Some of the contributors are shown above. "Several of our members are acquainted with victims of flood waters who have already been assisted by Flood Buckets and the mercy witness included with them," Jean added. "This project created many opportunities for fellowship among church members

and with those in the community as we gathered the supplies and shared the story of our mission. It was so warming to see the support of our community. It also was gratifying to see the work of many hands in an act of mercy toward our fellow man always remembering that the body of Christ has many members and when 'one member suffers, we all suffer together.'"(1 Cor. 12:26a ESV)

The BACKPAGE

Jesus Loves You! Children Help Tell the Story of Pentecost



St. Paul/Boca Raton Senior Pastor Steve Carretto had some enthusiastic assistance in telling the message of the day on Pentecost Sunday: students from the ministry's school.

Carrying banners — made by St Paul School's fourth graders — that proclaimed "Jesus Loves You" in multiple languages (including Swahili), answering pertinent questions about

Pentecost's wind, fire and witnessing, and sharing songs in several languages were students from grades two and four as well as members of the pre-k three-year-old classes. St Paul's students were involved in all three worship services of the weekend — one on Saturday evening and two on Sunday morning.

The congregation enthusiastically sang along with the children to "Jesus Loves You" and gave the students zealous applause.

Carretto worked with the students in religion classes the week before Pentecost to help prepare them for the worship participation.

St. Paul serves students from the pre-k through eighth grade levels. Pastor Carretto is shown above interviewing the children in front of the congregation. ■



LCEF Sundays are happening all around the Florida-Georgia District. Shown at one of the most recent events at Risen Savior/ Palm Beach are Pastor Gary Held and LCEF District Vice President Daniel J. Reichard. Congregation members learned how Lutheran Church Extension Fund investments help move ministry forward — and Reichard and his wife Andrea heard about the Risen Savior's impacting God's Pantry ministry (see page 23 for that story). For more information about hosting an LCEF Sunday, contact Debbie Talbot at the Florida-Georgia LCEF office, 877-457-5556, ext 4.