

LUTHERAN[®] LIFE

The Newsmagazine of the
Florida-Georgia District LCMS
February/March 2021

Together
in the SON
in 2021



LUTHERAN LIFE

Lutheran Life is the official newsmagazine of the Florida-Georgia District of the Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod. 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 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.



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FLGA District Calls Accepted

Rev. Dr. John Ramey, Intentional
Interim Pastor | Lutheran Church
of the Redeemer/Columbus, GA
Rev. Michael Hanel, Pastor |
Bethany/Leesburg, FL
Rev. Joshua Pettit, Senior Pastor |
Woodlands/Montverde, FL
Rev. Christopher Hazzard, Pastor |
Christ/Lakeland, FL
Rev. Dr. Leon Roberts, Pastor | Holy
Cross/Jacksonville, FL

Transferred Out of FLGA to Other Districts

12/01/20 Rev. Eric Estes to IN
12/01/20 Mrs. Dana Tews to ENG
12/07/20 Rev. Dana Loney to WI
12/21/20 Rev. Shea Pennington to SW

Transferred Into FLGA from Other Districts

11/16/20 Rev. Jasson Kalugendo
from Mis-South District
11/22/20 Ms. Kalli Wied
from SELC District
12/01/20 Rev. Wayne Riddering from
California/Nevada/Hawaii
12/04/20 Rev. Jin Jeong
from Southeastern District
12/21/20 Rev. Christopher Hazzard
from Nebraska District

Initial Placements of Ordained/ Commissioned Ministers

12/16/20 Mrs. Linda Root, Teacher
Concordia/Austin, TX
Our Savior/Plantation, FL
01/22/21 Rev. Colton LaMay, Pastor
Concordia Sem/STL, MO
St. Michael/Ft. Myers, FL

Installations of Ordained/Commissioned Ministers

11/22/20 Rev. Karl Glander, Pastor
Bethlehem/Ft. Myers, FL
11/22/20 Rev. Kalli Wied, DCE
Hope/Orlando, FL
01/09/21 Rev. Christopher Hazzard, Pastor
Christ/Lakeland, FL
01/24/21 Mrs. Darla Beckwith, Teacher
LSEM/Ann Arbor, MI

Status Changes in the District

10/07/19 Ms. Staci Welburn
from Active to Candidate
12/07/20 Rev. Dana Loney
from Active to Emeritus
12/31/20 Ms. Lois Ford
from Active to Emeritus
01/01/21 Rev. David Heller
from Active to Emeritus
01/04/21 Rev. Thomas Artelt
from Candidate to Emeritus
01/20/21 Mr. Martin Zabel
from Active to Emeritus
01/22/21 Rev. Joseph Cockey
from Candidate to Emeritus
01/31/21 Rev. Thomas (Kent) Fuqua
from Active to Emeritus

Called to Glory

05/25/20 Mr. Arthur Niermeier
08/18/20 Mr. Ralph Grewe
11/17/20 Ms. Monica Trautsh
01/10/21 Rev. David Brighton
01/17/21 Rev. Bruce Lieske
01/18/21 Rev. Frederick Koehler



St. Michael/Fort Myers, FL

celebrated both the ordination
and installation of Pastor Colton
LaMay on January 25. Colton has
served in the area of music ministry
in the FLGA District previously at
Grace/Saint Petersburg, FL. Six
years ago he came to St. Michael
as Director of Music Ministry.

Concordia Seminary's Specific
Ministry Pastor (SMP) Program is a
four-year state of the art distance
education program that prepares
men for specific pastoral ministries
in The Lutheran Church—Missouri
Synod (LCMS). While taking classes
through Concordia Seminary, Colton
worked with Rev. Jon Zehnder as
his supervising pastor — most
recently when Zehnder got COVID
at the end of June. God enabled
a beautiful partnership as Colton
facilitated worship as he has been
recouping these last six months. ■

**Third institution in the LCMS system to close in the last eight years.
COVID-19 pandemic cut Concordia's enrollment nearly in half.**

Concordia College New York to Close This Summer

The Concordia University system must brace for yet another closure. Concordia University New York (CUNY), the Lutheran liberal arts college in Bronxville, N.Y., will close this summer, it announced in late January.

Iona College — a private Roman Catholic institution in nearby New Rochelle, N.Y. — will purchase the Concordia campus. The two colleges are also developing a teach-out plan for Concordia students to complete their degrees at Iona. Iona will purchase CUNY's 33-acre campus, which sits only three miles away. The two colleges are still working out a binding agreement, and neither would disclose the sale price.

"This loss is felt very deeply and personally," stated FLGA District President Rev. Doctor Greg Walton. CUNY is his alma mater and Walton holds his undergraduate degree from there. "It is a part of my life that I will always cherish, and shall sorely miss."

Considering the recent closings of sister Concordias in Selma, AL and Portland, OR, this news is particularly painful and sobering to the LCMS. "We are living in challenging times, and while we mourn our losses, our hope remains squarely in Jesus.

"The financial condition of the college impacted by declining enrollment and the global pandemic have converged to create an difficult and wearisome situation. This institution has touched many

lives through the years, and gave the larger church such men as Walter A. Maier and O.P. Kretzmann. It has also provided a great foundation for the sports world, with men like Dell



Rev. Dr. John Nunes
President, CUNY

Alston, Mike Aviles, John Doherty and Willie Fraser. Author Kenneth C. Davis, Actor Jason Cerbone, and Commentator Tony Florentino with the Miami Heat, each were part of the CUNY family, as were countless young men and women who sang and toured with men like Doc Schultz and Gerry Coleman. So many

pastors, teachers were formed here, not to mention those who have served churches in the priesthood of all believers."

The decision to close Concordia was pre-emptive, said John Nunes, President of CUNY.



"The two paths that financially challenged institutions go down is either the precipitous close — 'oops, we ran out of money, and now we have to close' — or, the long,

lingering, threadbare existence," Nunes said. "In January, our board decided that they didn't want to go down either of those two paths."

Concordia's closure leaves just seven institutions in the Concordia University system. It began to shrink eight years ago, when Concordia/Ann Arbor, MI was annexed by Concordia/Mequon, WI in 2013. Five years later, Concordia/Selma, AL, a historically African-American college, closed due to falling enrollments and mounting debt. Concordia/Portland, OR, announced in February that it would close, citing a challenging and changing higher education landscape.

CUNY, like the two institutions that closed before it, has faced increased financial pressure as tuition discount rates and operating expenses continue to rise. It has limped along for decades; in 1987, its accreditor, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, said the institution's finances were "precarious," Nunes said. The

college's original buildings — designed by Edward Lippincott Tilton, who helped design Ellis Island — are old and in need of maintenance.

The arrangements between Iona and Concordia must be approved by the New York State Department of Education and Middle States, the accreditor.

"The heartbreak is, there's nothing wrong with the mission of the institution. It's about getting a business model that works, which is

becoming increasingly difficult in this environment," Nunes concluded. "It's not for lack of trying." ■

Reflect Jesus in the SON in 2021



DO you remember the line from the movie, "Jaws?" Forty-five years ago it gripped the nation, and the spooky theme music was so familiar to a generation, as was the tag line. "Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the water..."

Not to give away the story, but in the movie, it just didn't seem

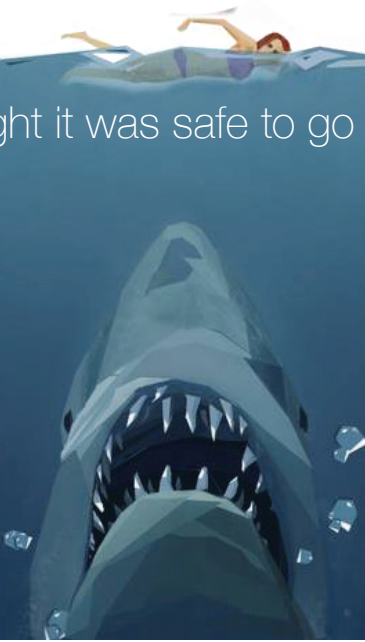
like you could get rid of the shark! So today, in our nation, it isn't a shark traumatizing our nation, but a virus. Over the last year we have learned to pivot in so many ways. Many are shopping differently, celebrating holidays differently, visiting family members differently, or in some cases not visiting at all.

We are also worshipping differently. The impact has been

wide-spread, even in places where few changes have been necessary. There is a greater awareness and an increased sensitivity, especially when the virus has hit close to home.

Last year, when Pastor Jon Zehnder was hospitalized with COVID-19 it was a very sobering moment influencing some decisions on my desk. What a thrill to know how well Pastor Zehnder is doing

Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the water...



as he continues his battle, wearing oxygen, but slowly beginning to serve his parish. Praise the Lord! Even after all he has been through; even with his weariness, he continues to boldly reflect Jesus the Son in 2021.

The virus hit even closer to home this year. My older son and his family test positive, preventing us from seeing them in person at Christmas. Fortunately, they were struck with very mild symptoms. At a time when we prayed this virus would diminish, we saw a surge. Over and over, as the weeks of the New Year unfolded, I learned of additional pastors and congregations wrestling with the virus that just won't go away. Thankfully, again, most have not been severe, but several pastors in our District have been hospitalized. The blessing came in the response of these congregations, supporting not only their pastor, but also the pastor's family.

On the day of Epiphany I learned the First Vice President of the District, Pastor David Brighton, had been hospitalized and tested positive for COVID-19. David was a strong, athletic, fit, and healthy servant of God. He was one who reflected the Son. His witness for Jesus was uncompromised, and his love for the people of his ministry in Warner Robins, GA where he served just shy of 22 years, never wavered. He once told me how certain he was of his call there, and had planned to retire from there. Unfortunately, he never had the opportunity. On January 10th God called him to his eternal home where he now stands in the radiance of Jesus the Son.

How I pray, with so many of you, God would eradicate this virus from our land — indeed from the world. Yet, the truth of His Word continues to ring forth: "God so loved the world that He gave His One and only Son, that whoever would believe in Him would not perish, but have eternal life." We know this verse well. Most of us learned it in Sunday School or Vacation Bible School, or early on in our walk with Jesus.

Equally important, but often overlooked, is the very next verse — JOHN 3:17, where Jesus says, "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through

Him." This was true for Nicodemus, and is still true for each of us today. In fact, it is true for the whole world — even those who do not yet believe! But truth undelivered is like no truth at all! This is why each of us are called on to reflect Jesus the Son in 2021.

All around us are opportunities to share His love and grace, no matter what our circumstances may be. It isn't simply a matter of what we say, but also what we do with what we say.

Feel like a failure? I often do! Sometimes I think I can beat Paul for the title of Chief of Sinners! Yet, the truth of God's forgiveness in Jesus isn't simply something we are privileged to proclaim to others. I also receive it to myself, reminding myself of what Paul no doubt had to remind himself: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Paul goes on in ROMANS 8 to encourage us with these familiar words: "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And He who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose." It is great to know, as those washed clean in the waters of baptism, it is the Spirit who enables us to reflect Jesus the Son in 2021!

We can't do it on our own. So we daily pray for the indwelling of God's Spirit in us, even as Jesus promised in JOHN 16 how the Spirit would reveal God's truth and reflect the glory of Jesus.

The virus has no power over us as we look beyond our present circumstances to what lies ahead. We are simply sojourners here. Paul reminds us that our real home is with Jesus in eternity. My good friend and brother, David Brighton, proclaimed this truth, both publicly and privately. It is our joy and privilege to do so as well. For me, I am motivated by the legacy of David, but I am empowered by the Spirit of Jesus!

We have no fears as we walk in the light of Jesus. We are children of the Light who calls us to reflect His

light to the world. Jesus tells us, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." I believe this is, at least in part, what God has been teaching His Church in the past year! May we who believe have ears to hear!

While we may fear things like sharks or viruses, we are safe in Jesus through the waters of baptism and have no fear because if God is for us (and He is because of Jesus) who can be against us! No matter what we face, we don't face it alone. We have a Savior who promises to be by our side — always. God has claimed us, He's called us, and now He sends us out to equip, empower and engage to connect people to Jesus. As we look to the days ahead, no matter how long this virus sticks around, may we boldly reflect Jesus the Son in 2021! ■

*With you
in the struggle!*
GREG



District Vice President Dave Brighton Called Home

Reverend David Carl Brighton, Region 1 Vice President and pastor of **Mount Calvary/ Warner Robins, GA**, was unexpectedly called home January 10, 2021 after a short battle with the COVID-19 virus. He was 65.

Brighton was born October 28, 1955 in Philadelphia, PA to Dr. Carl and Ruth Brighton. He was the oldest of four children, including his sister Susan, and brothers Andrew and Joel. Learning from his parents' example, David garnered a zest for knowledge, discipline, sports, work ethic and most importantly love — not only for those around him but for his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

As David matured, he enjoyed many hobbies including reading, music, collecting stamps, and any and all sports. He was a life-long fan of the Philadelphia Eagles, Philadelphia Flyers, and the St. Louis Cardinals, among others. He really enjoyed the spirit of competition and hard work associated with athletics.

David majored in Pre-Med his freshman year at Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, IN, before ultimately switching to History with a minor in Greek. Upon graduation, he felt the calling to serve the Lord in the Ministry and enrolled at Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO, where he would receive his Master of Divinity.

During his third year — his vicarage — he was sent to Raleigh, NC and met Marcia Swaim. Upon graduating and becoming ordained, Marcia and David were married on June 19th, 1982. They had five children.

Upon graduating from Seminary, David was first called to become the Associate Pastor at St. Mark/Omaha, NE from 1982-1984. He became

Senior Pastor from 1984-1990.

David was called to St. Paul/ Parkersburg, WV, where he would serve as the Senior Pastor from 1990-1999. His final call was to become the Senior Pastor at Mt. Calvary/Warner Robins, GA, where he would serve as the Senior Pastor from 1999 until the time of his passing.

In 2009, David was elected as the Region 1 Vice President of the LCMS Florida-Georgia District and has served in that capacity until his death. During his tenure at Mount Calvary, David had the honor and privilege of mentoring and teaching 20 different vicars — who all held a special place in David's heart. He was a leader of men, and he enjoyed nothing more than seeing other young men grow closer to Christ and stronger in the word, as they walked in humble servitude through the ministry on their journey to becoming leaders of men in their own right.

"Our dad approached each and every day with contagious vigor, uncompromising purpose and palpable love all of which were encapsulated with a joyful smile and a resounding message of hope," Jonathan and Benjamin remarked in their message at David's celebration of life service. "We have such fond memories of dad in the pulpit! He really enjoyed preaching and teaching and never sought things of this world. For him, life was simple. He spent time each and every day with the Lord in thought, word and prayer," Jonathan stated.

"David served 12 years on our District's board — several as board

chairman — and I'm grateful for those years that we celebrated together," proclaimed President Rev. Dr. Greg Walton. "While we don't understand God's plan to call home this anchor in our District

family, we can still celebrate David's victory over death." "The Psalmody — Psalm 27 — is read responsively today because it was David's confirmation verses," Rev. Andrew Howe explained. "The only legacy he prayed for was for his children, his church, and people of all nations to know the love, grace, hope, joy, peace and eternal life which is theirs, through faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Pastor Howe told the congregation about his last visits with David at the hospital and how he was still witnessing to someone in one of the waiting rooms. "I've lost a friend and a mentor who has taught me how to be a husband

and father and I will miss him immensely," Howe concluded.

David Brighton is survived by his wife Marcia, his mother Ruth, his sister Susan, his two brothers Andrew and Joel, his five children Michelle, Emily, Jonathan, Benjamin and Elizabeth and three grandchildren Olivia, Ezekiel and Selah — with another on the way due in March.

A celebration of life service was held January 20th at Mt. Calvary. For safety reasons the service was live-streamed. President Rev. Dr. Gregory Walton brought the family and congregation greetings from the Florida-Georgia District and Associate Pastor Andrew Howe delivered the homily. ■



Mount Calvary Associate Pastor Andrew Howe (left) delivered the homily for David Brighton

District Jewish & Muslim Evangelist, Bruce Lieske, Dies

Reverend Bruce Jerome Lieske, Emeritus, entered his heavenly rest on January 17, 2021. He is survived by his wife, Barbara, his three children and eight grandchildren.

Bruce was born on March 20th, 1935, in LaCrosse, Wisconsin. In his childhood and youth Bruce was a voracious reader, an activity which influenced him in the disciplines of science and technology and led to his becoming a polar meteorologist. After graduating from Pennsylvania State University in 1956, he spent a year in Antarctica as a member of a government team.

Bruce was ordained in 1969 after graduating from Concordia Theological Seminary/Springfield, IL. Before becoming a pastor, he was a meteorologist who spent time in both Antarctica and Point Barrow, Alaska.

During the next few years Bruce continued his profession while serving in the Air Force as an aviation weather forecaster. In 1959 he married his wife, Ann, and the two of them together with their first two children spent two years living in half a Quonset hut in Point Barrow, Alaska. In 1964, while Bruce and Ann and the family (now three children strong, Stephen, Becky, Daniel) were worshipping in a small Lutheran Church he felt a strong "call." Afterwards he wrote, "Scientific research was important. I loved polar meteorology and writing the reports, but the possibility that people might know the goodness and love of God in Jesus, the Messiah, was far more important."

Bruce, Ann and the children loaded up their VW Microbus and

drove over the mountains and through the prairies to Concordia Seminary/Springfield, IL. After graduating in 1969, Bruce served a

whom he had not seen for 40 years. After high school Barbara attended the University of Maryland, served on the

faculty, and then moved to Austria, where she headed the Art Department for many years. After Ann's passing, Bruce persuaded Barbara to leave Austria and return to the USA. They were married at a small Lutheran Church in southern California in 2011, and remained ministry partners until Lieske's death.

Rev. Lieske was the director of Lutherans in Jewish Evangelism until his retirement



Barbara and Bruce Lieske were regulars at the District's Veterans of the Cross Retreat

deferred vicarage in Apopka, FL.

In the ensuing years the Spirit led Bruce and Ann to pastor three congregations — six years at St. Lukes/Philadelphia, PA, where the congregation was located in a community populated with many Jewish people; eight years at Our Savior/N. Fond du Lac, WI, where Bruce was founding pastor; and 10 years at Our Redeemer/North, NJ; where he again was the founding pastor.

In 1993 the Florida-Georgia District called Bruce to head up Lutherans in Jewish Evangelism ministry — proclaiming Jesus as Messiah to persons of Jewish heritage. During all these years, his partner in marriage, Ann, stood by his side, serving the Lord with him, even in the latter years when she was fighting a battle with cancer. She died in September, 2009 after 50 years of marriage to Bruce.

Prior to Ann's passing, Bruce attended a high school reunion and reacquainted with Barbara,

in 2002. In March 2019 he was honored as one of the recipients of the Lloyd Behnken Good and Faithful Servant Medallion at the annual Veterans of the Cross Retreat.

"Bruce Lieske, has the gift of evangelism. I don't know of another LCMS pastor who went to Daytona Beach during spring break, walked up and down handing out tracts and engaging the students in Gospel-centered conversation," reported Rev. David Ludwig, pastor emeritus Prince of Peace/Orlando, FL Lieske's long-time pastor. "In the evening he and his teams would work the night clubs. He did this for three years. For 10 years Bruce and his faithful team at Prince of Peace spent Monday evenings going out into the neighborhoods making 'cold calls.'"

Bruce also headed up the District Task Force for Muslim Evangelism. He and Barbara mentored a young Palestinian Christian couple conducted Cross and Crescent workshops around the District. ■

Chaplain/Lieutenant Colonel Pastor Dies in Georgia *His Campus Work Resulted in Students Selecting to Go Into Ministry*

The Reverend James "Jim" Allen Knuth, died peacefully in his sleep Friday morning, January 22, 2021 at his home in Woodstock, Georgia, at the age of 79. A loving and loyal husband, father, grandfather, son, brother, uncle, neighbor and friend, he served as Pastor for many congregations as well as Chaplain in the Air National Guard.

Jim was born to Fernest and Martha (Gallert) Knuth on June 7, 1941 in St. Joseph, Michigan, who preceded him in death. He was the third oldest among eleven children. At age 14, Jim left home to attend preparatory school at Concordia High School in Milwaukee, WI, continuing to Concordia University. His university athletic accomplishments were often featured in the local newspaper, and he was awarded

varsity athlete of the year as a freshman. Jim finished his B.A. at Concordia Senior College, followed by Concordia Seminary/ St. Louis, MO in 1963,

graduating with a Master of Divinity in 1967.

Jim's first role as a Pastor was in 1967 at Trinity and Grace Lutheran Churches in Bear Creek, Wisconsin. In 1970, he developed a mission congregation in Two Rivers, WI. He rose to Senior Pastor at Calvary/Madison, WI in the heart of the University of Wisconsin campus from 1974-1987, a multiple staff ministry to UW students. His vigor for creating an atmosphere of celebratory and interactive worship helped him to build up the struggling congregation to more than 500 members. He had a lasting impact on many of the college students he interacted with; several of whom switched majors to become Pastors themselves because of his dynamic and inspiring influence.

From 1979 through 2001, Jim served as Base Chaplain for the 115th Fighter Wing in Madison and later the 203rd Fighter Wing at the Norfolk, Virginia Air National Guard. He served 29 years in the reserve support, providing active duty and short term duties in Portugal, Greenland, Germany, Egypt, and Cuba. He often said "I don't bless bombs or baptize bullets." Jim received the commendation medal for meritorious service, the St. Martin

of Tours medal. He retired as Chaplain/Lt. Colonel.

Jim served approximately three years as Chaplain at a Wisconsin



maximum security prison beginning in 1988, providing counseling and support for prisoners. In 1991, he was called to be the Senior Pastor at Grace/Durham, NC, where he made many lasting friendships and connections. He served at Grace until he "retired" in 2008.

Jim and Connie moved to the Atlanta area in 2018, where two of their daughters live.

Jim is survived by Constance "Connie" (Rueter) his four children: Christa Callen (Andy), James "Jim" Knuth, (Becca), Cathy Yonaitis, (Matt), and Corrie Knuth Howard; and nine grandchildren. ■

The Rev. Fred Koehler Passed Away in January

Rev. Frederick Koehler passed away in January. Pastor Koehler, ordained in 1957, served many of his years in Canada, retiring to the Florida-Georgia District in 1999.

Pastor Koehler, and his wife Gloria, faithfully attended the Veterans of the Cross retreat and found the camaraderie and

fellowship of mission particularly helpful as they made the transition to retirement. However, like many of the LCMS veterans, retirement for Pastor Koehler meant serving the neighboring congregations through vacancies and pastoral care.

"Our thoughts and prayers go out to his friends and family,

and especially for Gloria and their children. May God comfort, guide, and bless them with His peace and especially with His love," said District President Rev. Dr. Greg Walton.

A funeral service was held for Pastor Koehler on Tuesday, January 26th at his home congregation, **Faith/ Punta Gorda, Florida.** ■

Don't Wrap the Cross in the American Flag or Hold the Cross Hostage to a Political Party

I've debated whether to make any statements about the riot at the US Capitol building on January 6th. In some ways I think it is obvious Christians are not to encourage or participate in violence, so why would I need to state the obvious? Certainly Christians are to remove all racist attitudes and behaviors from their lives and promote the full dignity and equality of all people. And all violence over the previous year in the midst of protests is to be rejected. Yet, these norms seem no longer normal.

Also, in viewing the dramatic events of January 6th, I noticed a number of Christian signs alongside of confederate flags, nooses, Q-anon swag, and Trump support. The comingling of Christianity and Politics has always bothered me — not because Christians are to be apolitical, but because Christianity is often co-opted by politics. Politics is often an abusive spouse in the relationship, demanding so much and giving so little.

There was nothing Christian about what happened on January 6th.

God is not easily placed on one side in our cultural divide. God is on God's side and the question we need to ask ourselves is this: "Are we on God's side or using him to validate our viewpoints, justify our positions?" Have we turned Christianity into ideology, which becomes another form of idolatry.

Thankfully, I'm not writing anything others haven't already stated or observed. "Christianity Today" has had a couple of thoughtful articles concerning the use of Christianity in this polarized situation.

Don't wrap the cross in the American flag or hold the cross hostage to a political party, a culture or any human philosophy.

The cross stands alone!

Jesus' kingdom, His reign is unlike any this world has ever seen. It's not one of coercion or "rights" but one of sacrifice and love. Jesus said it himself to Pilate:

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." — JOHN 18:36

It's not **of** this world, but it is **in** this world. And Christians are to live

in this world, in this political realm, but not be of this political realm. God's kingdom is growing across all cultures and in all nations because his Spirit through his Gospel is reigning and serving and forgiving and loving and we are sharing likewise.

I believe that's why Jesus commanded Peter to put down his sword. (JOHN 18:11) We are to put down the way of violence and take up the cross of service, the cross of sacrifice, to deny ourselves and serve God and others.

Think of it this way:

Can you imagine Paul stirring up a mob to protest Roman pagan practices and call for a godly government? He just didn't. He asked we pray for those pagan rulers.

I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people — for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. — 1 TIMOTHY 2:1-4

The Christian movement radically changed Roman society through the Gospel of Jesus Christ and how the culture saw the Christians and exclaimed: "My, how they love one another."

Is love what we saw on the capitol steps? I think not.

I always take my faith into the voting booth, but my faith also comes with the humility that my understanding of who are the best candidates and how to vote on the issues is not infallible. I try to vote for the more virtuous candidate who has an understanding of public service rather than self-aggrandizement, but it's hard sometimes to figure that out. I try to vote for those who align more with Christian values — but no political party does that fully. Often I find myself outside of the mainstream and with no "party" to call my own.

I'm okay with that.

Please do take your faith into the voting booth as well! Yet, be aware that no leader or public servant will save or resolve our lives in the way that Jesus has done. We can vote and "lose" and still have certainty in our faith in Jesus.

Many US leaders and global leaders

have reigned, and God continues to be faithful with a promise of the Gospel despite who is leading society. To say that without "our" party or candidate (whomever that may be) in office, God is unable to work His eternal purpose for His kingdom, is



by John Roth
Missional Pastor
Thrive Community Church
Estero, FL
john@thrive-fl.org

to say that man is powerful enough to stop God. I believe not.

Now more than ever the Christian church needs to be the church and not a political or ideological party. We need to serve and share the Gospel. And we need to pray for our leaders, regardless of who's in office and we need to be about what we are best at: living like Jesus and sharing the Good News of His kingdom.

And why can we? Because Jesus has the victory already. He conquered all powers and threats to our future. We are in his kingdom now and will be forever when he appears in glory. His kingdom is the everlasting kingdom. And his Kingdom of grace means even when I have abused the symbol of the cross and used it for my purposes, I am forgiven.

In the confidence that God gives in the Gospel, that our future is secure, our present is under His grace, our righteousness is not of ourselves but Christ, I need not get wrapped up in making anyone other than Christ or anything the ultimate meaning or purpose in my life. In fact, my best witness is when others see my allegiance foremost and evidently is to Jesus Christ. ■

The Rev. Dr. John Roth is the husband of Lisa Roth and the father of two children, Justin and Emma. John has been a follower of Jesus since childhood and a pastor since 1987. He has led various ministries in the states of Alabama, California and Florida as well as campus ministries at LSU and UF. He received his doctorate in ministry from Asbury Theological Seminary of Lexington, KY in 2012. John and Lisa love cooking, fine wines, enjoy reading, exercising and being a family. He is the former secretary for the FLGA District LCMS.

Rebecca's Garden of Hope Offers New Life for

Why Rebecca's Garden of Hope tutoring and mentoring program? According to Sonya Parson, the Founder and Executive Director, Rebecca's Garden of Hope, says this, "because children are at risk, because they are very often left alone to raise themselves, do their homework, and provide for their own needs after school."

Rebecca's Garden of Hope because "Jesus commands us to make disciples of all nations and that includes children." Rebecca's Garden of Hope because the bible encourages us to "train up a child in the way he should go." PROVERBS 22:6. This is the work of Rebecca's Garden of Hope.

Sonya Parson, together with her support team that includes Pastor Rev. Larry Schaefer and wife Carol; Vicar Patrick Luke; and her sister Kay and Kay's husband Curtis Barnes, work together to introduce children and young adults to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to enhance their lives by spending time with the young people and helping them with tutoring, mentoring, and sometimes serving their needs for food and other necessities.

Rebecca's Garden of Hope currently has ten active partners around the country including their primary site at **Our Savior/Orlando, FL**. There were many more partners and participants prior to the restrictions involved with battling the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of the need to physically distance

the programs of RGOH, they are now online through ZOOM. This makes the program continue to be a viable option for people in congregations who desire to help young people in their church and community to thrive.

When asked why RGOH is important Sonya says, "The Holy Spirit motivates us to have passion for children. Children do not have a choice. They did not ask to be here. They sometimes live in and through circumstances that are horrific."

Being home alone after school without an adult to impart an appreciation for becoming a disciple of Jesus, developing a passion for learning, and having moral values imparted is another serious pandemic that will handicap the coming generation unless we deal with it. That's why Rebecca's Garden of Hope!

Sonya inherited her passion to serve young people and humanity with the Gospel of Jesus from her family. She is the daughter of Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Pastor, The Rev. William Parson who served at St. Mark/Winston-Salem, NC. Her father would remind her often that she is not responsible to save people but to introduce them to Jesus Christ who loves them and to proclaim the Gospel of salvation.

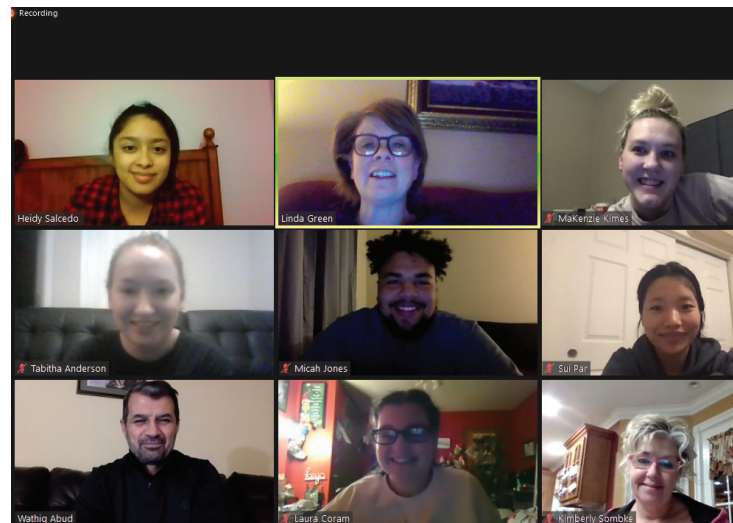
Kathleen Rebecca Crump Parson, Rebecca, was Sonya's mom who was a schoolteacher who also had a passion for serving children that was passed on to her own children. Mrs. Parson

was tireless in service to children with no expectation of receiving any substance in return. Sonya said, "Giving, agape love, and service are the cornerstones of faith." The children save by hope are Rebecca's garden.

Sonya knows that her call is to serve children. She is strongly motivated by the desire to serve in the way that God has equipped her. The idea that children are as flowers in a garden is derived from Sonya envisioning children faces as brightly colored flowers in the planting of the Lord. Each child has their own specific color and fragrance. God can plant flowers anywhere and with nurture can cause the flowers to flourish and grow. RGOH provides soil the Lord can use to promote growth, beauty, nurture, and value for the purpose of serving others.

You would be mistaken to think that RGOH is only for disadvantaged children and young people. The term Sonya uses is 'at risk' which means they are underserved because parents are working, relationships are lacking, and spiritual education and nurture is practically non-existent. This can be true of children in every strata of our society and RGOH can work in any and every congregational setting.

RGOH provides a safe haven in which children are helped to understand the importance of Jesus Christ in their life and teaches them to pray for themselves, stabilizes and encourages the children not to lose



Your Church and Children in the Community

hope, and to continue seeking Christ and their bright flowery faced future.

Sonya said some of the children that are served seem to suffer from PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder], and come from dysfunctional households that are not nurturing environments. This sense of isolation has been heightened by COVID-19 restrictions and now we are forced into situations where we are churches without walls. We can serve children in a variety of different settings using the ZOOM application.

We can move away from the barriers we have established and into the Missio Dei (the mission or sending of God). Children of those imprisoned, suffering dementia, in need of food, clothes and encouragement are served. Children are hungering and thirsting for interaction and RGOH provides them with the knowledge that they are children of the Most High God who loves them, has saved them and wants to serve, empower and equip them to serve others.

Sonya is encouraging congregation members to not allow doubts, distractions, and previous experiences to hinder what the Spirit of God is calling them to do with young people now. There are ZOOM trainings available from a professional who works with RGOH for those who need help with the technology.

Some of the excuses used that hinder the start of a RGOH program

include fear of children, the racial divide, and even apathy. We are urged by the Lord to press through those fears and doubts to listen to the stories children tell and to assist when we can because of our relationship with Jesus Christ.

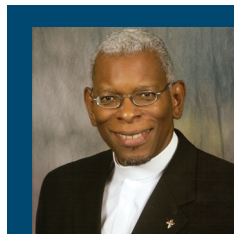
Retired people may have a very special role in providing service to the coming generation. They have the time, the experience the love and energy to give to a young person in need. The challenge is to overcome fear and doubt and to consider the unique nature of this ministry that has as its core focus teaching young people to serve the Lord and the church. To develop leaders on every level in our congregations.

Sonya tells the story of how children were given bibles. The children now read the bibles and send notes of encouragement to one another using bible verses. Children are also involved in the worshipping life of the church and read the scriptures and are enthusiastic about attending worship on Sunday morning, study on weekday afternoons, and special events on the weekend. The children are always on when the program is live and seldom miss an opportunity for encouragement.

Sonya and her team would love to help **YOU** start a Rebecca's Garden

of hope in your congregations.

You can contact her by the website rebeccasgardenofhope.org. If you would



by Victor Belton
Mission Facilitator
Florida-Georgia District
Atlanta, Georgia
vjbelton@gmail.com

like to help support RGOH you can give at the website, Roundup, Amazon Smile, Facebook, and Instagram. In kind gifts are also welcome because RGOH children can always use clothing, shoes, toiletries, school supplies, sanitizer, food, and snacks for the program.

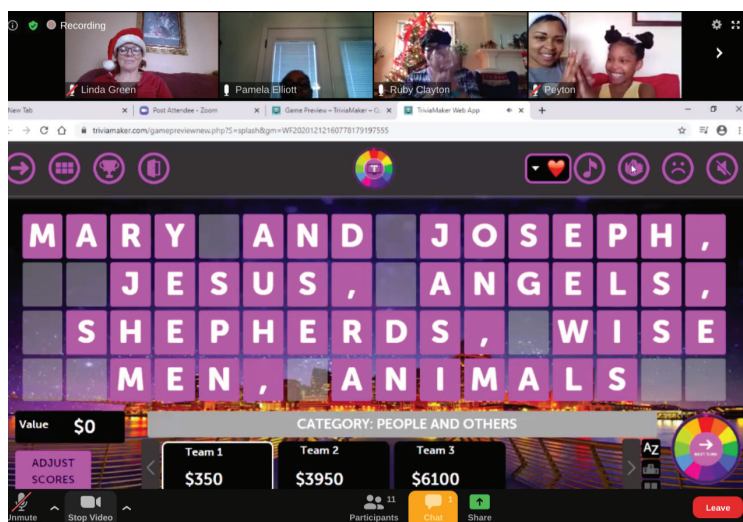
Imagine the blessing of having a smiling flowery face in Paradise who is in glory with Jesus because of the sacrifice you made to befriend a child and introduce them to the Savior who loves them and has fearfully and wonderfully created them to be saved alive and come to the knowledge of the truth through your efforts. ■

Pictured below are ZOOM screen shots for some of the tutorial training sessions that have been successful. The far right screen shot is from their Christmas celebration ZOOM session.

rebeccasgardenofhope.org

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- ✓ 2 Download the "Round Up" app, click on Rebecca's Garden of Hope as the charity of choice
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- ✓ 4 Mail a check payable to:
Rebecca's Garden of Hope
2212 S. Chickasaw Trail Ste #114
Orlando, FL 32825
- ✓ 5 Support our ministry is through prayer.



Two District Seminary Students Report On Their Florida C

If there is one thing that is certain about vicarage, it is that it is a year of growth. It's always a year of growth for the unassuming vicar who is placed in the midst of the whirlwind of ministry.

"While I don't have a previous vicarage year for myself to compare it to, this year seems unique because I can tangibly see growth simultaneously happening in the congregation as well as we all try to figure out how to **BE** the church in the midst of a pandemic," offers Vicar Joseph Reineke, this year's vicar at **St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL**

"The growth for this congregation happened from my very first elder meeting that I attended. At that meeting the leaders of the congregation decided to re-initiate in-person worship. With that decision came a plethora of COVID-19 safety precautions — most importantly being protective masks being worn by all members of the congregation."

Reineke explains that temperature checks with digital thermometers were executed at all the entry points to worship. St. Paul was using the down-time with only virtual worship as an opportunity to renovate the main sanctuary so the in-person worship was launched in the congregation's family life center.

"Chairs were grouped according to family size and the groups were spaced out about six feet apart," he continues. "We also began to use packaged communion prepared by a vendor with the wafer attached to the wine in an individual, disposable cup. Rather than having traditional worship folders we also exclusively used large projection screens that made it easy for the in-person congregation to follow along — much like the members watching virtually from our YouTube Channel."

The safety precautions have been successful for St. Paul and in-person worship continues to grow. Most recently the congregation added back a Saturday night service to their weekend worship schedule. Just before Christmas St. Paul moved worship back into the renovated sanctuary.

"Our school reopened as well

with very strict safety precautions. Imagine the challenge of keeping more than 300 students, teachers, administrators and others socially distant while performing daily temperature checks while ensuring an active educational environment. Despite the challenges, we are succeeding! We have not experience any COVID virus on campus.

"Our teachers have worked tremendously hard as they learned to re-teach in this world. And the most amazing part is that throughout all of this Jesus is still at work in our community. We've had several baptisms that came from our school families this year. — underscoring that God's work is emphatically being done at a time where it seems that all movement has stopped!"

According to Reineke other ministries at St. Paul have safely been able to open as well. Bible study continues both on campus and in small groups in homes. The REVIVE recovery community is learning and growing together.

"During all this I have grown as a vicar as well, he emphasizes. "I have learned many of the things a vicar typically experiences in a year's time. I'm improving my preaching and teaching skills, working with my supervising pastors and church and school staff, and how to share the Gospel in a variety of different ways.

"In the midst of that, there is a reality that I have not been able to experience many things that a vicar typically would during my time in Boca Raton. I have not been able to visit hospitals, or nursing homes. I have had few opportunities to visit people in their homes. I have had few opportunities to simply sit and get to know people because of the restrictions in place.

"In many ways, I simply haven't had the traditional experience of being with people as they experience the joys and struggles of life. I have had a few opportunities — don't get

me wrong — but they are definitely less than I would have had in what I expect is a typical vicarage year.

And because of the COVID situation I have learned a lot of things that I never would have even dreamed about before — things I suspect few vicars experience such as conducting worship completely



online. I have learned how to teach and have conversations with people while wearing a mask! I've learned how to operate a soundboard to balance both the audio in the house with online at-home worship. I've learned how to use YouTube to stream a service, and how to bring some semblance of community to people who are homebound. I've learned how to keep up a social media presence for a church by using Facebook and other platforms."

"Above all, I've learned how important it is for the church to be in community with one another. I've seen what the absence of community looks like, and seen its effects on the lives of people. I've seen how important it is for us as brothers and sisters in Christ to be with each other, so that we can help point each other towards Jesus and live life together as we journey through this walk of faith.

"The congregation of St. Paul has grown this year. I have grown this year. And throughout it all, God is still at work, moving His people, causing us to grow, and bringing his grace and forgiveness to bear upon people's lives in the midst of this crazy pandemic. And all we can say to that is "thanks be to God!" Reineke concludes. ■

a Georgia Unique Vicarage Year During COVID Pandemic

“Vicarage has been interesting, exciting, formative, and constantly changing,” reports the 20th congregation vicar for **Mount Calvary/Warner Robins, GA**, Timothy Barber, “and quite honestly a lot of vicarage has remained intact despite COVID-19.

A personal highlight of his vicarage is preaching a couple times each month, leading in-person Bible classes with the youth and adults, and attending in-person meetings. “I have been blessed to be able to visit our people who are not able to come back to in-person worship yet,” he emphasizes. “and I have had a great experience highlighted by the mentorship I have received from our entire Mount Calvary staff. They have really worked together to help me grow and to experience the ups and downs of parish ministry.

“I have been truly blessed with my experience. Recently my wife and I just got off quarantine. On January 10th, our congregation lost our beloved senior pastor, Pastor David Brighton, to the COVID virus. This was heartbreaking.

Mount Calvary — like most FLGA District congregations — is still asking for masks to be worn and for precautions to be taken. “One of the clearest ways COVID has impacted our ministry and the vicarage experience was in our Helping Hands Christmas Dinner — an annual

event the vicar runs. The vicar is in charge of coordinating, planning, and executing this meal every Christmas Day. While preparing for the dinner it became very

obvious that this year has really impacted lots of families. This can be summarized in the reality that in 2019 we served about 275-300 meals and in 2020 we served 424 meals. We delivered 135 meals to homes, 75 meals were taken to the homeless population in and

around Macon and more than 200 meals were picked up or eaten on location. The whole dinner also looked different,” Barber explains. “All meals were pre-packaged, as



few people as possible touched each meal, tables could only seat 4 people and we encouraged social distancing, and, of course, masks were worn by everyone. Each family got a Christmas card and letter talking about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The letter pointed to the reality that Jesus Christ is still in control even amidst the brokenness and pain of the world, even in a year like 2020.”

Barber goes on to say that another way COVID impacted his vicarage experience is in the way the congregation handles fellowship. The Sunday before Thanksgiving Mount Calvary hosted had an outdoor night of Prayer,

Praise & Worship led by one of the young leaders. “This event was a huge success and allowed for our congregation to gather safely outside,” he says. “Then in December, we had an outdoor night of Carols & Cookies where we came together outside, sang carols, drank

hot cider and cocoa and ate cookies. This event was especially exciting as we had several visitors simply see us and stop to join in our singing.”

COVID has forced Mount Calvary

to be creative in their fellowship and community outreach.

“I ask our fellow Florida-Georgia Lutherans to keep Mount Calvary in their prayers as we move forward as a congregation following Pastor Brighton’s death. Please pray that God provide us wisdom and strength along with comfort. And join us in a prayer of thanksgiving for His servant, Pastor David Brighton.

God used Pastor

Brighton to proclaim the Gospel to countless believers. God used Pastor Brighton to form 20 vicars and lead 3 flocks.

“Death stole a great saint, a great husband, a great father and grandfather, a great pastor, and a great mentor, and while it feels as if the enemy is victorious, that death has succeeded, we as Christians know the reality, the truth, that Pastor Brighton proclaimed week after week with a smile on his face. The truth that Jesus is victorious, the tomb is empty! Jesus has already defeated sin, death, and Satan himself. It may appear as if this world is dominated by death and sin but Jesus remains victorious. Even in this time, God is still working and redeeming. God used Pastor Brighton for 65 years on this earth.

“Even in this painful time Jesus is victorious and the tomb is empty. We look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. I count myself as extremely blessed to spend these last six months with Pastor Brighton and for all the lessons he taught me in this short time, Barber concludes. ■

“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.’”

— JOHN 11:25-26

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder...

When We Pray for Our Leaders We Honor Our Father

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and . . . do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Whatever you may think about the Executive Branch leader of the federal government, there are two things that must be kept in mind. First, all government on earth is under God's authority, whether or not those occupying seats of governmental authority among us know it or not.

St. Paul wrote, "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God (ROM. 13:1).

Second, we have an obligation to pray for those who exercise authority in our country, on whatever level, precisely so that they may do God's will in their dutiful administration — again, whether or not they even believe in God. Our prayer is that God's will and purposes among us be realized, even if those holding positions over us in the civil arena are apostates. Again, St. Paul wrote, "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made

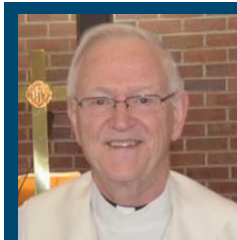
for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior (1TIM. 2:1-3).

Note: it is pleasing to God and good for us to pray for our leaders, whatever our personal objection to their moral or political tendencies.

The rulers and authorities of St. Paul and St. Timothy's day were amoral pagans, and occult religionists. Yet, Paul and the Christians of his day would have prayed that the pagan rulers made decisions in keeping with our LORD God's purposes. Was it such prayers of Paul, Silas and Timothy that caused Gallio, Roman proconsul of Achaia (Greece) to dismiss charges brought against them in Corinth? (Acts 18). And again in ACTS 19, when Gaius and Aristarchus, traveling companions of St. Paul, were dragged into the public theatre by a mob led by the guild of silversmiths in Ephesus, they were saved by the pagan "city clerk" who appealed on their behalf to take the case to the

Roman proconsul in the court of disputes.

In all things pertaining to our Christian life in this current politically charged civil society, Jesus has instructed us to "seek first the kingdom of God." If you have in



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fact exercised your civic franchise, and campaigned and voted for leadership that protects the God-centered principles on which our Republic was founded, then, even if you feel defeated, do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself (MATT. 6:34). Rather, pray for our in-coming executives and legislators, that God may work His divine will through them just as He has always done since the days of Noah.

Soli Deo Gloria:

"To God alone be the glory!" ■

Yes, God Can Work Through You in 2021

Carl sat down at the beginning of the elder's meeting a little discouraged. He and most of his friends at church had received the vaccine by now, local business was starting to pick up and it seemed like there was a light at the end of the pandemic tunnel. But church was another story.

They had been worshipping in person for more than nine months. They had relatively few incidents of people who were upset one way or another about masks or sitting further apart or not shaking hands. Attendance was way down. In-person numbers were about a third of what they were before the pandemic. Online numbers were mostly now in the single or low double digits. Other activities like their Sunday school, Bible class, fellowship and other outings were almost non-existent.

Carl hadn't thought it all through but it was beginning to weigh on him. To Carl, the church seemed to be just so much less of what it was. It was deflating.

But the pastor walked into the

room with a whistle on his lips. He seemed different — but in a good way. The chairman of the elder board also seemed to be more upbeat. It brought a spark of hopefulness to Carl but he was suspicious and felt the steep decline seemed inevitable.

The meeting began with a devotion as normal. It was an interesting choice. The pastor read LAMENTATIONS 3:22-23 "Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." The pastor spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem, yet how God's mercy prevails and how that gives hope. Then he prayed for their community that has been ravaged by all that had gone on. Most people were feeling a sense of loss and pain, sometimes too weary to face tomorrow, especially if they didn't have the hope from God's promised mercy. Then the pastor asked that God would forgive their church for their short sightedness and that their church would be a safe harbor of hope for people.

Carl opened his eyes and it was as if there was a different kind of air in the room. The heavy weight of discouragement was replaced by an oxygen of mission and purpose. It seemed to spark possibilities and ideas and action on the part of these Godly elders. They knew God's mercy personally and their eyes were opened at how they could be the messengers of that mercy in word and deed for the people living right under their noses. All at once their perspective shifted from depression about their church to an urgency to bless others. God could work through them!

They forgot the prepared agenda and immediately began to jump into an energized brainstorming dialogue. They talked about how they could provide tutoring for children with Mary and John, retired educators, leading other members to do exactly that for kids. They talked about how their little food pantry could partner with the neighborhood association that meets on their property to find people who were unemployed, underemployed or otherwise food

Kent Fuqua Retires After 45 Years in Active Ministry

The Rev. Dr. Thomas “Kent” Fuqua originates from Wichita, Kansas. He graduated from St. John’s College in 1969; attended Concordia Senior College, Ft. Wayne/IN and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in 1971. He then entered Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO.

He received his Master of Divinity from Concordia Seminary-in-Exile, was ordained into the Holy Ministry, November 1975. He was assigned to Christ the King/Dighton, KS. His next assignment was at **Lake Wales/Lake Wales, FL** in 1977. While at Lake Wales, he was instrumental in starting a preschool and elementary school. He also served as the Winter Haven Circuit Counselor.

In 1991 Fuqua was called to serve at **Lord of Life/Stockbridge, GA**. He has served two terms as Second Vice President of the Florida-Georgia District as well as serving on the Board of Directors for Lutheran Ministries of Georgia.

In 2004 he accepted a call to **Hope/Hudson, FL**. Last year, in 2020, Hope celebrated their 45th anniversary and Pastor Fuqua celebrated his 45 years of ministry.

Fuqua has many interests outside of the church. He is an avid guitar player

and serves as the lead guitarist for the congregation’s *Anchors of Hope Praise Band* that performs at the Saturday night services, church functions including holiday barbecues and their annual Oktoberfest. He is an expert wood-worker. Each year during Lent he makes wooden crosses which are distributed to his members with the encouragement to take one and give one to someone else.

Annually he provides the invocation for the community’s Relay for Life event in Hudson. His other interests include aviation and fishing.

The congregation has recognized Pastor Fuqua for a lifelong, dedicated and tireless career as God’s minister to others and for being their beloved shepherd.

Kent and his wife of 49 years, Arlene, have two daughters, grandchildren and soon will become great-grandparents this coming summer. ■



challenged. They talked about how each activity and event should be covered in prayer before, during and afterward and that they should be careful to share a Bible passage of God’s love at every turn. They said they needed to focus not on the activity itself to “promote the church” but rather to focus on people. They wanted to be sure to remember names and stories and follow up to love on them and give them hope in Jesus.

The pastor reminded them that it was not about attracting people and building up the worship numbers but to simply be salt and light to these people as we live and share Jesus. God would take care of the rest. He reminded them of the passage in MATTHEW 4 that they read during Christmas, “the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned...” He said we need to repent of just being here for ourselves to now being Jesus with skin on for the people who live right across the street, to help them see that “great light.” Authentic, compassionate,

nonjudgmental, we are the hands and feet of Jesus, to whomever God puts right in front of us! They may be different looking, a different economic background, a different first language, but Jesus died for them, so our purpose is clear. God has put us here for them! Our joy will come as we do for others.

What the elders later learned was that the pastor had met with his coach earlier in the week. Through the coach’s questions, the pastor came to the awareness that he was focussing on the wrong thing. Instead of trying to fix the decline in the church, the pastor and the leaders needed to focus on what they could do with what God had given them: gifted, caring people with a message of hope in Jesus. When the pastor had this insight triggered by the question all kinds of ideas also came to mind. The pastor then shared his enthusiasm with the head elder before the meeting.



by Scott Gress
Lutheran Counseling Services
Leadership Coach
Florida-Georgia District
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Each member left the meeting with a clear goal to put the plans into action and to share the enthusiasm with others. Each one had a phone call to make to widen the circle of servants and enlist their prayers and hands and feet. It was new for them but it was not too late. Jesus had given them clarity about what was really important, and to a person, they were excited that they were going to make a difference and focus on people going forward. This was far from normal for their church, but they were convinced it was normal for any church of Jesus, especially in 2021. God would work through them, and in amazing ways! him working with you or your church. ■



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Is Mental Health is the 21st Century Mission Field?

Dr. Matthew Stanford, CEO of the Hope and Healing Center and Institute in Houston, TX speaks often of how people living with mental health issues will contact a pastor first before speaking to a doctor or a counselor



by Dennis Goff
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about their mental health. With that in mind, Stanford believes the church is the gateway to mental health care. In fact, Stanford believes mental health is the 21st century mission field for the church. I've come to believe the same.

However, not everyone has experienced the church to be a welcoming place for someone living with a mental health issue, or for those who have a family member living with mental illness. Amy Simpson, author of *Troubled Minds: Mental Illness and the Church's Mission*, grew up in the church. While her father was a pastor, her mother experienced serious psychotic episodes which were later diagnosed as schizophrenia. While her family was always active in church, when it came to the family's mental health issues, they often felt they had to deal with this in silence.

Amy remembers feeling like the church, directly or indirectly, conveyed the message that while her family was welcomed at church, Mrs. Simpson's struggles with mental illness needed to stay home.

A few years ago, a woman in our community contacted me one day after learning about The Lutheran Foundation's focus on promoting mental wellness and reducing the stigma of mental illness. She shared her family's story of how her son died by suicide five years earlier. She told me how much she wished she would have reached out to her church family at the time and acknowledged they needed help and support. Instead, she felt too much shame. Now, she says she's ready to help others in the church talk about some of

the challenges that go along with a family member living with a mental illness.

Several years ago, LifeWay Research did an extensive study on mental health related issues and the church. One of the questions they asked had to do with whether people wanted their church to talk about this. For those with a family member living with a mental illness, 65 percent said they wanted the church to talk about the topic. And, for people themselves who live with a mental illness, 59 percent said they want their church to openly talk about mental illness, so

the issue isn't considered so taboo.

When I started working with churches in Northeast Indiana on how mental wellness can be a part of a congregation's ministry, there were three areas I focused on:

- **Awareness.**

It starts with just being aware that one in five adults in America are living with a mental health issue. This means one in five in every

congregation which makes this topic very real for every church.

- **Education.** There is much we can all learn. Organizations like NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) and Mental Health America offer numerous presentations appropriate for a church setting. In the Florida-Georgia District we have been fortunate to also have as a resource Lutheran Counseling Services of Central Florida not only for clinical care, but also for educational and training opportunities.

- **Action.** Every pastor can include in weekend worship, prayer for people living with depression, anxiety, or other mental health issues (names don't have to be included). Also, there are numerous resources appropriate for a Sunday morning or mid-week Bible study. There are various Biblical texts that lend themselves to a reference of our mental health, as well as our physical and spiritual health.

For a Christian, mental illness doesn't mean a lack of faith. David, who

authored over 70 of the Psalms, openly shared his own "laments." He boldly asked the Lord in PSALM 13, "How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart?" And yet, in that same Psalm David was clear to express his faith saying, "But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in my salvation." One Sunday morning I taught a Bible class at a local church in Fort Wayne on the Psalms of Lament including PSALM 13. One man walked out of class and said, "Every day I pray the words of Psalm 13. Every day. Those words summarize my life." For this man of faith, the daily struggle with mental illness was very real for him.

In JOHN 14:6, Jesus is referred to as "the way, the truth, and the life." Recently I heard an old African American expression that says that

How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? Look on me and answer, LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death, and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall. But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the LORD's praise, for he has been good to me.

Jesus is the "way out of no way." So often when someone is living with a mental health issue, especially when they are not receiving treatment, it may feel like there is no way out. But this may be just such a time for the church to encourage, to educate, to equip one another to receive the appropriate clinical care and walk alongside one another during this time sharing the hope we have in Jesus who is the "way out of no way." What an opportunity the church has for ministry today! ■

This is Part Two in the series by The Rev. Dr. Dennis Goff, Director of Ministry Programs at The Lutheran Foundation, Fort Wayne IN. The Lutheran Foundation is a Christ-centered ministry of the member Lutheran congregations in northeast Indiana, dedicated to demonstrating the compassion of Christ by promoting, improving, and enhancing the quality of life of the individuals, families, congregations, and communities whom it serves. Pastor Goff previously served as senior pastor of St. Paul/Lakeland FL. Today, he and his wife, Laura, reside part-time in Lakeland and hold associate membership at Grace/Winter Haven, FL.

FLORIDA GEORGIA

Out and About in the District

Send Your News & Photos to lutheranlife@aol.com

Christopher Hazzard Installed at Christ/Lakeland

Christ/Lakeland, FL celebrated the installation of their new shepherd, Pastor Christopher Hazzard on January 9th, 2021. Pastor Hazzard, his wife, Andrea were married in July of 1995 and have 4 children Caleb, Levi, Maria and Josiah. They relocated from St. Paul /Minden, Nebraska where he was pastor since 2015.

Pastor Hazzard grew up in the town of Wyoming, Delaware. He earned a B.A. in International Studies from Concordia College/Bronxville, NY, in 1993, and a Master of Divinity from Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, Missouri, in 2001. He also completed course-work toward a M.S. in Pastoral Counseling from Iona College in New Rochelle, NY.

Previously Hazzard served Grace/Norfolk, Nebraska, as associate pastor, from 2001-2007. From late 2007 until November, 2015, Pastor Hazzard served at St. John's/Westfield, MA. He enjoys spending time with his family, walking, reading, music, railroad history, and cooking. ■



Clergy pictured at the January 9th installation are, back row L-R: Jonathan Horsman, Ron Penekamp, Robert Steinke, Brian Kneser, Miguel Sanabria. Front Row L-R: Jerry Munz, Dean Pfeffer, Christopher Hazzard, Gregory Walton, Charles Reich.

Jeremy Becker Recognized for 20 Years Service in Weston

The **St. Paul/Weston, FL** congregation worked with the family of Jeremy Becker to surprise him on his 20th Anniversary in ministry in mid December. He actually hit the 20-year mark in 2019 during the congregation's pastoral transition from Tim Hartner to Scott Henze —



but Pastor Scott and the team at St. Paul didn't want the special anniversary to go unnoticed.

Becker's ministry includes working with youth and families to leading music in worship (with his daughters and brother).

"It was a complete surprise that morning — with many video greetings and cards and gifts," Becker said. "I am so appreciative of the love and support St. Paul has poured out to me and my family — we are truly blessed." ■

The Becker family (left) along with wife Kristin joins Jeremy for the celebration and some anniversary cake.





Winter Haven Quilts Continue to Benefit LWR

Every year the Sanctuary of **Grace/Winter Haven, FL** is adorned with quilts lovingly-crafted by the congregation's quilters. These quilts are sent to Lutheran World Relief where they are then shipped around the world to those in need. This year, due to COVID-19, the display of quilts is a little different, but no less beautiful.

The congregation's three services have continued with communion offered every-other Sunday. Even with numbers of COVID-19 cases increasing in our state and region, the leadership of Grace ensures that participation in the various ministries are doing their best to keep the spaces and one another sanitary and safe. ■

Woodstock, GA Congregation Awarded "History &

There was no rain on their parade! The city of Woodstock in Cherokee County, Georgia vowed not be defeated by COVID-19. 2020 had been a difficult year for all with so many plans dashed, and events cancelled. It seemed the Christmas Parade was going to be a casualty too; until an idea was hatched.

How about a Reverse Parade!

Community businesses and individuals were asked if they would like to participate in the Reverse Parade where the floats would remain stationary and the community would drive past in their cars admiring the various displays from the safety of their family vehicles.

Timothy/Woodstock, GA

enthusiastically signed up to be part of the Reverse Parade which was held Saturday, December 5th with a live Nativity Scene depicting the birth of Jesus. A custom made three-foot star decorated with lights positioned above the scene added a warm glow and seemed to draw the line of cars to come see, just as the star of Bethlehem drew the Wisemen more than two thousand years ago.

"It was the culmination of talents from so many members of our congregation," said Joan Mueller who helped organize the Church project.

"If ever there was a time to spread the message of Peace and Good Will toward men, it is now and what better way than through celebrating the birth of Jesus at Christmas."

Timothy's congregation constructed a cardboard stable with a light shining on baby Jesus. Members dressed in period costumes of Mary and Joseph, three Wisemen, and shepherds (who had their hands full managing two live goats). "They were content munching on the hay bales we provided for their comfort," said Joan.

More than 1,000 cars drove past the float and the greetings from children and adults alike brought smiles and warmed the hearts of the float participants who braved the cold in order to share their message of the Christmas story to the public.

"So many people exclaimed, 'oh, there's baby Jesus. Look, there's goats!'" said Joan. "We had as much fun during the Parade as those driving by." On Monday January 11, the City of Woodstock presented Timothy/Woodstock, GA with the 2020 History & Heritage Award for their float entry. ■



Joan Mueller receives trophy at the City of Woodstock Council Meeting from Mr. Michael Huffstetler CPRE, Parks & Recreation Director



Jeannie Bernerth, Jon Holbrook, Joan Mueller with the History and Heritage Trophy of 2020.

Lois Ford Retires After 45 Years Teaching in LCMS

Lois Ford taught 45 years in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod school system. She served **Faith/ Eustis, FL** for the past 24

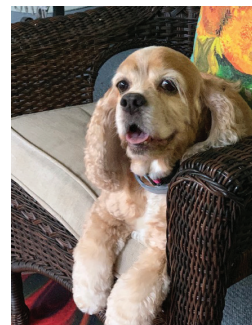
years. Prior to that Ford taught 21 years at **St. John/Ocala, FL.**

Lois graduated Concordia/Bronxville, NY in 1975. She held the position of Zone President for two different zones of the LWML. She also held various positions including Vice President of Spiritual Growth and LWML District President. In addition to her LWML work she is Faith's church council secretary.

Ms. Ford has served on the FLGA District Board of Directors since 2009. She chairs the scholarship committee and is passionate about recruitment of more professional church workers.

Faith's congregation and school presented her with a plaque thanking her for her dedication and service to the Lord, her fellow faculty and administration and her students and alumni.

In retirement Lois plans to continue her passion for painting. She shares her home with her dog named Bella. ■



At left, Principal Tim Leech , Lois Ford and Pastor Marc Kappel

Heritage" Trophy for Reverse Christmas Parade

Timothy/Woodstock, GA members (from left): Marlene Snyder, Maureen Dicks, Kayla Howe (angel), Jeannie Bernerth, Kim Howe, Brian Howe, Joan Mueller, Gerald Mueller, Don Snyder, Cameron Howe, (and the two goats).



Seventh-Grader Brooke Harter Takes Home Top Prize in Plantation, Florida Essay Contest

Miss Brooke Harter, a 7th Grader at **Our Savior/Plantation, FL**, won the City of Plantation's annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s. essay writing contest.

Brooke's winning essay about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. reported that everyone has the power for greatness — not for fame but greatness — because greatness is determined by service.

"It means to me that when you help others you have the feeling of greatness. You don't have fame, which just means that people know you, but that you are happy in your heart," she wrote. "For example, greatness is like how you feel when you do something like mowing the lawn for a neighbor if they are in the hospital, or giving someone a hug if they are feeling sad. When Dr. King says *everyone has the power for greatness*, he means that everyone can help someone in some way.

"A person doesn't have to be famous to make a change. Small actions can easily change the way someone feels or impact the direction of their life in a positive way. I think these words meant to Dr. King that when he saw a problem he wanted to fix it. Even though his actions made him "famous," his intent was to change the conditions of the society. He saw a problem, developed a dream, and took action," she continued.

"Through his series of non-violent protests and speeches he began to change a lot of minds in the U.S. and most parts of the world about racism. We can all help others in our own way, and we don't need lots of money to help others. When we help others, it helps our personality grow. It also helps us to be closer to our community. And it also gives us a feeling of teamwork and greatness. If we walk in his footsteps, continuing to learn the lessons Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. put before us, maybe we can be the change that the world needs now." ■



About the Plantation, FL Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. 2020 Essay Contest

The annual contest is open to middle or high school students enrolled in a City of Plantation school or a resident of the City of Plantation.

Only one essay per student is allowed.

Essays must be original, typed, double spaced, 250-500 words and submitted as a Microsoft Word document or PDF.

The essay must be accompanied by a cover sheet containing the student's name, address, telephone number, email address, name of school and grade.

The essays are judged on content, voice, creativity, grammatical structure and overall conformity to the theme.

Weston Congregation Holds Inaugural Live Nativity

St. Paul/Weston, FL held their first-ever drive-through live nativity the first weekend in December. They heavily promoted it throughout the community and invited neighbors to experience the joy of the Christmas story. Narrated stations around the St. Paul parking lot included live animals — including two camels as well as a large cast of costumed actors. ■





Zion/Fort Myers, FL Handbell Choir and Adult Choir musicians led an estimated 75 participants in "Zion Sings!," an outdoor Christmas carol and hymn sing on Sunday afternoon, December 13.

Attendees had an opportunity to request selections in advance from Zion Sings!, a booklet of daily devotions based on Advent and Christmas songs. The meditations were written by 21 Zion members.



Director of Parish Music Jacob Roggow led the two choirs and hymn singers in a musical journey from the start of Advent through Epiphany Day, Jan. 6, 2021. Margaret Hinchey wrote a narrative commenting on each carol.

Zion members and friends had been humming quietly, singing softly or meditating silently on hymns in worship since reopening for "in person" worship on October 11. Members enjoyed being able to sing together (while masked) at this afternoon event. ■



The Praying Hands and Hearts Knitting and Crocheting Ministry at **Redeemer/Stuart, FL**. They not been meeting due to so many of their members being in that high risk group. It has been a full year since they last met as a group — but that doesn't mean that things aren't happening. In January, 12 prayer shawls were delivered to Grand Oaks in Jensen Beach, FL and a baker's dozen hats were delivered to LAHIA (Love and Hope In Action). The Redeemer ladies keep knitting/crocheting prayer shawls, baby items and hats from their homes. ■

Lutheran Social Services Served More Than 41,000 in 2020

After a year like this one, the entire country — if not the world, is looking for a source of renewed optimism. At Lutheran Social Service of Northeast Florida, they have found hope when reflecting on the thousands of people they were able to serve in 2020.

- ❖ Hunger relief for 39,364 food-insecure individuals
- ❖ Care and support for 1,162 HIV-positive individuals
- ❖ Resettlement, employment, case management, tutoring and mentoring for 224 refugees
- ❖ Career and financial coaching for 79 individuals who are finding and maintaining financial wellness
- ❖ Money management for 531 individuals at high risk for homelessness

Lutheran Social Service of Northeast Florida served more than 41,000 of their neighbors in 2020. As 2021 began, the organization is reinvigorated and ready to continue meeting the intense need in Northeast Florida. Through the work of LSS, it means a brighter day for a family facing hunger, a young adult searching for career and financial guidance, a refugee fleeing persecution, and an HIV-positive individual needing medical support. ■



Jeremy Becker, director of youth and family ministry at **St Paul/ Weston, FL** shows up to Crazy Hair Day during National Lutheran Schools Week, January 25-29, 2021.

At right — St Paul celebrated the teaching staff by profiling each one of them at some point during the week-long celebration.



National Lutheran Schools Week January 25-29 2021

**Sent
to
Serve**

NATIONAL LUTHERAN SCHOOLS WEEK

The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.



An **Our Savior/Plantation, FL** student with Pastor Tony Durante. Students wrote letters or cards of appreciation to Pastor Tony or their own pastors, teachers, youth leaders during National Lutheran Schools Week.

An **Our Savior/Plantation, FL** student with her pet dog. As part of National Lutheran Schools Week, the students held a virtual pet parade with photos of students with the family pet. They also collected supplies in Kindergarten through 2nd grade to be donated to the Broward County Humane Society.



Our Savior/Plantation, FL students dressed up as “essential workers” for career day during National Lutheran Schools Week. All of the students were asked to support a community project. Third through 8th Grade brought in supplies for “Thank You Bags” for the Healthcare Workers at Westside Regional Medical Center in Plantation, Florida.



Plant City Congregation Supports United Food Bank

At the beginning of the Season of Advent (November 29th), the members and friends of **Hope/Plant City, FL** were given empty grocery sacks with lists of non-perishable food items needed by the United Food Bank of Plant City. This event, again this year, was sponsored by the Plant City congregation's Missions & Outreach Ministry Team.

Each sack distributed by the Ministry Team, not only contained the grocery list of needed items, but also Advent devotionals for Hope members to use throughout the season. The bags were to be returned to the church by Christmas filled with the groceries for distribution.

According to Hope's Sr. Pastor, The Rev. Dean Pfeffer, "Hope's members look forward to opportunities to serve our community in this way. We know there are many people in our community, especially during this pandemic, living with food insecurities and anything we at Hope can do to fill an empty bowl is truly the living out of our faith in a very simple and practical way."

Pfeffer, who also serves as board chair for the United Food Bank, has seen the shelves at the food bank stocked beyond belief one minute and by the end of the day are in total need of replenishing due to the increasing demand for food at the present time. As a community food bank, the United Food Bank in 2019 and 2020 distributed over one million pounds of food to those in need.

Mary Heysek, Food Bank Director reported that Hope's Advent Bags collected approximately 925 pounds of food. She also indicated that these gifts will go far as they provide support to many in our community as so many are struggling at the present time.

Pictured with Pfeffer are Ministry Team members Cathie Warner (left) and Willa McMinn. ■



Grace/St. Petersburg Gets Surprise Presidential Visit



Grace/ Petersburg, FL welcomed a surprise guest when LCMS President Rev. Dr. Matthew Harrison and his family joined them at their 11 am Divine Service on Sunday, January 3rd. Harrison greeted the congregation and posed for some pictures with the ladies of our LWML who were gathering mite boxes that day." ■



Left photo — Pastors Matthew Harrison and Kevin R. Loughran

Above — (From left) Patti Lewis; Peggy Thomason; Donna Tobin (in back row); Mary Anderson; President Harrison; Silvia Grasberger; Jan Greenway

Hudson LWML Adopts Youth at Runaways Alternative Project House

Hope/Hudson, FL has been worshipping virtually during the Christmas holiday due to COVID-19, but Hope's LWML was still working to help others in need. Their enduring love of children has them "adopting kids" of R.A.P. (Runaways Alternative Project) House. They were still very successful in getting the backpacks full of goodies to the children at Christmas. Then in January they used leftover money to donate to the organization for the many needs in the house. Special thanks go to (at right) Bob and Catherine Kravcenko for their generous donation of the backpacks, everyone that donated items for the backpacks and for those who helped pack and deliver the backpacks to the R.A.P. House. ■



St. Paul/Boca Raton Shows Falcon Pride During National Lutheran Schools Week



A student dressed as a fire fighter on Career Day



Pastor Carretto shares a theme shirt with one of St. Paul's students



A law enforcement officer poses with two students on Career Day



Students participate in a Boosterthon Fun Run during National Lutheran Schools Week

Sent to Serve

NATIONAL LUTHERAN SCHOOLS WEEK

The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (MATT. 20:28).

January 25-29 2021



Garrett Franskousky, a St. Paul graduate, shares an alumni video with students. Garrett is Assistant Director of Compliance at Marshall University. He is also a graduate of The Florida State University and University of Miami's Law School.



Principal Jim Richards gets ready for the flood dressed as Noah while one of the 3rd-graders dressed as a sheep shares his umbrella before boarding the ark.



Mrs. Majhess' Sixth-Grade Class Participates in Campus Clean Up During National Lutheran Schools Week



Mrs. Franskousky's Pre-K Class celebrates Career Day with Hayley as a teacher, Finn as a mail carrier, Olivia as a hair stylist and Kylan as a Veterinarian.



Mrs. Merritt's Class celebrates Team Sports Day (including a virtual student participating on screen)



Bible Character Day



Bible Character Day



Angels on Bible Character Day

José D. Padilla To Lead Valparaiso University in Times of Unrivaled Challenges and Opportunities

The Board of Directors of Valparaiso University ("Valpo") announced in late 2020 that it has named José D. Padilla as its next President. A dynamic innovator, thinker and natural leader, Padilla brings many skills, experiences and accomplishments in higher education which are ideally suited to the University's needs today and in the future.

Padilla joins Valpo as the culmination of a long and successful career in higher education. Most recently, he served as Vice President, University Counsel and Secretary to the Board of Regents of the University of Colorado System. Prior to that, he served 15 years successfully in a number of senior leadership roles at DePaul University in Chicago, the most recent role as Vice President, General Counsel and Secretary.

Padilla is widely respected nationally in the higher education space as having superior business acumen and as a man of faith. His broad experience ranges from undergraduate student, to graduate student, alumnus, donor, lecturer, administrator, member of the president's cabinet, and board member. His leadership experiences provide the background to address the University's current needs and, moving forward, the strong desire

to increase enrollment and attract a more diverse student body.

"We are delighted to have found such an exceptional leader for our University," said Frederick G. Kraegel '70, Chair of the Board of Directors. "José's deep and varied background in all aspects of higher education make him ideally suited to lead Valpo."

"The COVID-19 pandemic made our search process especially challenging," said John Draheim '64, chair of the Board's Search Committee. "The Committee was determined to be both deliberate and thorough to be sure we identified the top candidate. We believe we have made an excellent choice with José."

"I am really looking forward to working with José," said Robert D. Hansen, Jr. '82, Chair-Elect of the Board of Directors. "I am confident he will provide the insightful leadership Valpo needs to navigate these unprecedented times in higher education."

"I am humbled and grateful to be asked to lead Valparaiso University," said Padilla. "Its storied past, exceptional programs, devoted faculty, motivated students, committed alumni and strong Lutheran Christian ethos all attracted me to this incredible opportunity," Padilla said.

Padilla was selected as Valparaiso's



next President after an exhaustive search over the course of more than a year and which included more than 100 candidates. The Search Committee sought candidates with a specific set of attributes and demonstrated career skills to lead the University as it faces the challenges and opportunities ahead.

For more than 150 years, Valpo has been delivering a distinctive model of learning rooted in the Lutheran tradition and grounded in the liberal arts and sciences with degree programs also offered in professional colleges along with Division I athletics and a robust student life. ■

Synod Addresses Questions & Concerns About COVID-19 Vaccines

On Jan. 21, LCMS President Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison sent an e-mail to all workers on the Synod roster addressing questions and concerns about the COVID-19 vaccines that have, in recent weeks, begun to be distributed and dispensed.

Harrison wrote, "These questions have come not in the interests of politicizing the matter, but out of sincere Christian moral convictions. Having consulted with our district presidents and other agencies of the Synod, I requested that the staff of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations [CTCR], in collaboration with the Office of National Mission's [ONM] Life Ministry, draft 'The LCMS and COVID-19

Vaccines: Facts and Considerations.' "

Both Harrison's letter and the vaccine document are now available at lcms.org/president for churchwide reading and download. They address such topics as:

- Whether the currently available vaccines contain aborted human fetal tissue.
- Whether the currently available vaccines were tested using human fetal cell lines.
- Whether there is an official LCMS position on the use of COVID-19 vaccines.

In addition to providing factual information about the vaccines, Harrison's letter offers pastoral counsel on deciding whether to

receive the vaccine and talking to those with whom one disagrees:

"In this contentious issue, we must respect the consciences of fellow believers who share our same commitment to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, as well as our life together as a Synod. As St. Paul urges us regarding matters of conscience, 'let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor' (1 Cor. 10:24), and 'let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother' (Rom. 14:13).

"At a time of cultural upheaval, I would encourage you not to allow disagreement even over



Sixteenth President Begins Third Term

Lawrence Rast Reappointed President of CTSFW

The Board of Regents of Concordia Theological Seminary (CTSFW)/ Fort Wayne, IN, announced the unanimous reappointment of the Rev. Dr. Lawrence R. Rast Jr. as President. “The Board of Regents is very pleased that we can reappoint Dr. Rast for a third term as president of Concordia Theological Seminary,” commented Dr. Leo S. Mackay, Jr., Vice Chairman, CTSFW Board of Regents. “He is uniquely qualified to lead the Seminary through the significant challenges facing all institutions of higher education and seminaries in particular.

“His commitment to the Lutheran Confessions and expertise as a theological historian will serve our church body well as he helps to guide the plans for the future of seminary formation in the years ahead. Dr. Rast is highly regarded by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) and by Christendom the world over. We are thankful for the continued leadership of Dr. Rast as president of CTSFW.”

Rast has served as president of CTSFW since May 2011. “I have been

incredibly blessed this past decade to work alongside the faithful and gifted people of the CTSFW community. We have a world-class faculty, an incredibly skilled staff, and a Board of Regents that bring experience, expertise, and commitment to the mission of the Seminary.

“My greatest joy remains my interaction with the students who will serve as pastors, deaconesses, and lay leaders in the LCMS and in our partner churches throughout the world,” Rast shared. “Ultimately, I am most thankful to our gracious Lord Christ, who is the Gift above all gifts. It is by His grace that this remarkable community was formed, continues to prosper in this, its 175th Anniversary, and will thrive into the future.”

The CTSFW community rejoices at this news and joins with Rast in requesting the continued encouragement of our friends as we move forward in service, “There are and will be challenges, so I ask for your continued prayerful support of this Seminary. By God’s grace,



together with the larger Synod and our international colleagues, we will, with excellence, fulfill our mission to form servants in Jesus Christ who teach the faithful, reach the lost, and care for all.” ■

Seminary Sets “Contemplate Visitation” for March 12th

College-age and older men and women are invited to CONTEMPLATE, an online visitation event that gives prospective students an opportunity to learn about life at Concordia Seminary/ St. Louis, MO and the preparation that leads to service as either a pastor or deaconess. This free event will be held online March 12.

During CONTEMPLATE, participants will engage in sessions that focus on the spiritual and personal aspects of the decision-making process, as well as learn about the academic program, field education, vicarage or internship year, financial aid and housing. They also will walk through the admissions process, learn a little about the St. Louis, MO area and meet with the admissions team.

“CONTEMPLATE will give prospective students the opportunity to virtually ‘travel’ to St. Louis to experience Seminary life,” said Rev. Micah Glenn, director of Recruitment. “It’s our hope that this one-day online event will help participants further discern whether Concordia Seminary — and a call into ministry — is part of their future.”

The deadline to register is March 5. Interested participants can learn more and sign up at csl.edu/contemplate.

A link to join the event will be provided to registrants before the event.

CONTEMPLATE is one of many visitation events for prospective students that provide a preview of the Seminary’s ministerial formation experience. Individual visits also can be scheduled. To learn more, contact Recruitment and Admissions at (800) 822-9545 or admit@csl.edu, or visit csl.edu/visit.

Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO provides Gospel-centered graduate-level theological education for pastors, missionaries, deaconesses, scholars and other leaders in the name of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). To learn more, visit csl.edu. ■



COVID-19 Vaccine

undoubtedly important matters such as this to take precedence over the faith that unites us in Christ. In all things, we should heed the call to ‘maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’ (Eph. 4:6).” ■





The LAST WORD

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Will Valparaiso University Retire Their Crusader Mascot?

My good friend, David Brighton, was a Valparaiso University graduate. We were about five years apart — and he liked to remind me I was older — but we shared plenty of the same memories about campus life. We both frequented Good Times and The Stone Balloon — two off-campus bars that were popular with fraternities, sororities, students and faculty.

Dave was an athlete. You know the type . . . good at just about every sport ever invented while I was the guy singing in the choir. Right up until the day he died he was lean and athletic, a runner and bicyclist so it was shocking to learn that the crazy COVID virus took him in a matter of a few days.

David married Marcia, the beauty queen he met during his vicarage years. Marcia has the face and figure of a Vogue cover model with a cool air about her that guys could find a little intimidating. Not Dave! Marcia exudes fashion — but more importantly she has style . . . and style is forever while fashion can be trendy and “out” in moments. Marcia is totally inviting and comforting, reassuring and relaxing. No wonder she made the perfect life partner for a guy going into the ministry. And she could keep up with him athletically, too! During down time at District Board meetings, convocations or conferences it wasn’t unusual to see them on bicycles or taking a brisk walk or run.

My favorite thing about Dave Brighton was that he remained a Crusader (Valpo’s official mascot) long after graduation. The medieval crusades were often violent. And after January 6th rioters storming the Capitol were seen wearing the Crusader cross and calling themselves ‘Crusaders,’ the acting Valpo president created a task force to find a mascot “more suitable” for a Lutheran school.

A staple of a modern Crusader is the image of a Templar knight preparing to make a righteous war on non-Christian unbelievers. Yet some historians from Syria documented as far back as 1188 that the Templars in warm, friendly terms allowed the Muslims to use their chapels to pray toward Mecca! Hmmmm.

None of this nuanced history tends to appear in the manifestos of terrorists or would-be car bombers. The medieval crusades were a largely dreadful misdirection of religious enthusiasm towards painful and bloody ends. They were neither a glorious clash of civilizations, nor a model for the world as it is today. The term “Social Crusader” often

refers to a person who makes social justice and equality their primary priority. You know, a person who works hard or campaigns forcefully for a cause.

That said, you can imagine my surprise when my friend Carolyn Schlie Femovich, a member of Valparaiso University’s board of directors,

sent me a survey asking my participation. Valpo’s board, you see, is surveying students, faculty, administration and alumni. It seems the committee wants our opinion regarding the retirement of our Crusader mascot.

“The Crusader, in name and image, represents war, violence, racism, xenophobia, and forced assimilation during one of the darkest periods of Christian history,” they claim. A Facebook page shows about 2,100 members in agreement although it’s difficult to know if that includes alumni.

I wonder what Dave would think given he was a Crusader. His emblem, however, was a frog. Dave wore frog ties. His two sons both wore Dave’s frog ties to his memorial service (I noticed! I’m sure others close to Dave did as well.) Why a frog you ask? FROG is the acronym for “Fully Rely On God!” It was Dave’s constant reminders to us. He wrote his own memorial service, chose

the hymns and readings and had Pastor Andrew Howe remind us that we need to be constant Crusaders (frogs?) for Christ — every day letting the light of Christ shine in our lives.

Maybe Valparaiso University’s next mascot should be a FROG? ■

