

LUTHERAN[®] LIFE

The Newsmagazine of the
Florida-Georgia District LCMS
Christmas & Epiphany
December 2021 • January 2022



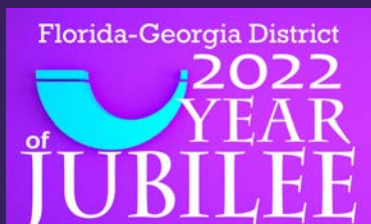
wise
men
still seek Him



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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LCMS Communications Icon Retires

David Strand, executive director of LCMS Communications, retired in October after more than 40 years of service to the LCMS. Strand began working for the Synod in 1980 as a writer for the stewardship department. But most of his years were in Communications, which he joined in 1986 — first as features editor, then managing editor of *The Lutheran Witness*; as assistant to the executive director for public relations; and finally in the top Communications post, which he assumed in 2006.

Strand first went to work for the Synod when its offices were in downtown St. Louis. He has been at the building in suburban Kirkwood since it opened in 1983.

He said that he thinks the “most striking” thing that he has seen over his 40 years, “though it has happened gradually over time, is the digitalization of all things communications.

“I remember the days of filmstrips and slide projectors, of mimeographs



and carbon paper,” Strand continued. “And now we have the internet, websites and blogs, social media, and amazing advances in publishing, photography and video. God has used technology to keep His church in front of the world.”

Once retired, Strand said he plans to spend time with his wife, Sherri; enjoy his two grandchildren, who live nearby; read — including some seriously “in-depth Bible reading;” work in the

yard; travel some; and play a little golf.

Reflecting on his career, Strand asked, “How can you say that four decades of working for the church is not a career well spent? It’s more than that; it’s a tremendous, God-given privilege. You can exemplify your faith and share the love and mercy of Christ no matter what your vocation. We have a Lutheran doctrine to that effect.

“But working for the church every day, year after year, puts you directly in the midst of the mission, and that is special.” ▲

District Calls Accepted

11/1/21 Rev. Seth DeBartolo to Christ the King/Labelle, FL

Transferred Out of FLGA to Other Districts

3/18/21 Ms. Brenda Dean to Missouri (C)

Transferred Into FLGA from Other Districts

9/7/21 Ms. Kay Eckstorm from Michigan (C)

9/16/21 Rev. Roegner from Texas (O)

10/25/21 Mr. William Leech from Missouri (C)

10/25/21 Ms. Debra Leech from Missouri (C)

10/28/21 Rev. Richard Cox from Southeast (O)

Installations of Ordained or Commissioned Ministers

11/6/21 Rev. Richard Cox, Pastor, Trinity/Ft. Pierce, FL (O)

Status Change

10/19/21 Rev. James Weist from Active to Candidate (O)

CAPSULES

Swanson Joins District's Communications Team



Meridith Swanson has accepted the role of part-time Communications Specialist for the Florida-Georgia District LCMS. She began working in November, 2021. Meridith was previously employed at Prince of Peace/Orlando, FL as their Communications Coordinator. She will continue to serve Prince of Peace as their Contemporary Worship Leader.

Meredith can be reached at communications@flgadistrict.org. ▲

Connect With FLGA District College Campus Ministries

Do you have a student attending one of these colleges? You can contact the campus ministry with an email and our campus connectors will reach out to your student.

- Live Ministries, University of Central Florida, Orlando. DCE Kalli Wied – kwliveucf@gmail.com
- Thrive Community Church and Thrive FGCU, Florida Gulf Coast University, Estero. Pastor John Roth – john@thrive-fl.org
- Christus Victor Lutheran Church and Student Center, University of Georgia, Athens. Pastor Greg Michael – pastor@cvlc@gmail.com
- University Lutheran Church and Student Center, Florida State University, Tallahassee. Pastor Jay Winters – pastor@universitylutheranchurch.org
- St. Peter Lutheran Church, University of North Georgia, Dahlonega. Rev. David Kruger – dfkruger@comcast.net
- First Lutheran Church, University of Florida, Gainesville. Rev. John Glover – office@flcgainesville.org
- Messiah Lutheran Church, University of South Florida, University of Tampa & Hillsborough Community College Tampa. Abby Moss, Family Life Minister – abbymoss@messiahtampa.com ▲



Trinity/Orlando's Comfort Dog, Peace, Raises Funds for Pets Needing to be Re-Homed

Trinity/Orlando, FL's Comfort Dog, Peace, and her handler team coordinated a "Peace Shares" campaign at the downtown Orlando congregation.

The campaign involved collecting donations for All Creatures Pet Grooming. All Creatures generously donates Peace's monthly grooming, so when Trinity's congregation learned that All Creatures were taking in dogs and cats that needed to be rehomed, the congregation asked how they could help.

"We heard we could supply dog and cat food, treats and toys," exclaimed Pastor Doug Kallesen. "Thanks to the generosity of our members, we delivered 25-30 bags/boxes of dog/cat food and treats, plus toys, blankets and towels. In addition, we are giving them a check for \$730 for additional food and supplies."

The LCC K-9 Comfort Dog Ministry is about compassion and mercy, sharing God's love in our community. In photo at right are Robert and groomer Monica with Peace at All Creatures Pet Grooming. ▲



THE YEAR Of



The New Year

is a great time for looking forward, even as we reflect on the previous year. What a year 2021 has been! Never could I have imagined the unfolding of events in this past year. From the very start of the year when we saw many dear brothers and sisters in Christ pass into the arms of Jesus, to the loss of both my father-in-law and father, it has been a year filled with death. Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." The lives of all these servants continue to bear fruit, certainly for me, but I know for others as well. Even in the face of death we celebrate the new life we have in Jesus and all the promises we find in His Word.

Lutheran Christians have always celebrated the promises in God's Word. The Word of God reveals to us the love of God, the power of His forgiveness and grace, and His care for His children in so many ways. Our faith is built on God's Word. The writer of HEBREWS tells us, "For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." God's Word has the power to convict us of sin, to transform hearts and lives as it discloses the wisdom

and joy of God to the reader.

One of my college professors used to remind us not to be so heavenly minded that we were no earthly good. His point to us was an encouragement not to simply read God's Word rather, more importantly, to apply it to our daily lives. Over the years I have found it easy, at times, to read God's Word like a text book or a history book. How effortless it was to use God's Word to prepare a sermon, Bible Study, or a devotion, but not stop to let His Word engage my personal life. As a pastor it can become easy to apply God's Word to the lives of others and neglect to apply it to myself. The older I get the more important it becomes to see how God's Word applies to my own life, now and into the future. Maybe you can see that in your life, too!

With all this in mind, I am declaring, both personally and professionally, the New Year as a Year of Jubilee! The Bible talks about a Year of Jubilee in LEVITICUS 25. There we learn it was the 50th year after seven cycles of seven years, with specific instructions about how Israel was to deal with property and slavery. However it was an ongoing process in the life of Israel. The word "jubilee" comes from a Hebrew word that means to be "jubilant" and to "exult," and is related to the Hebrew word for ram's horn or trumpet. The

Jubilee year was launched with a blast from a ram's horn on the Day of Atonement, signifying a call to joy, liberation, and the beginning of a year for doing justice and loving mercy. It was a special year in which God's people were to "proclaim liberty throughout all the land" (LEVITICUS 25:10—a verse inscribed on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia).

In the Florida-Georgia District this year will take on a slightly different character. The Jubilee Year reminds us that God wants people to be free. Jesus said in LUKE 4:18–19, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Jesus now sends us into the world to do the very same thing. A year of Jubilee can also stand as a witness and reminder of God's desire for justice on earth and calls into question any social practices that lead to permanent bondage and loss of economic opportunity. Part of the reason God established the Jubilee Year was to prevent the Israelites from oppressing one another. The Jubilee Year had a leveling effect on Israel's culture; it gave everyone a chance to start over, economically and socially. The Year of Jubilee was also



characterized by instruction in the Law (DEUTERONOMY 31:9–13), and in this way the people learned God’s demand to love and obey Him was directly related to His concern for the welfare of all the people of Israel. A District Jubilee year can serve as a time to reset our hearts and minds as we immerse ourselves in the Word of God, learn to walk in deeper devotion to Him, and gain a new perspective on life.

As we walk in newness of life in Jesus, we need to refocus the eyes of our hearts to see the mission of God which we are sent to fulfill. In a few months we will gather in Convention around the theme “A Future Fixed on Jesus!” Another reminder for us to keep our eyes on Him, the Author and Perfecter of our faith. In the meantime, there is still much work to be done on behalf of His Kingdom. This is why we are encouraging congregations to use the book *The Great Sending* as a catalyst to encourage setting aside the things which distract us from God’s Word and His call to connect people to Jesus.

Jesus said to His disciples, as they huddled in the Upper Room in fear on the night of the Resurrection, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you.” As we begin to see Scripture in light of this sending, and see how over and over God sent His chosen ones into the world, even as He sent Jesus, His Word at work in us becomes transformational. God’s heart for the world begins beating through each of us. God loved this world so much He sent us our Savior, Jesus! Jesus said, “Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has

said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” In other words, when the Holy Spirit works through the Word and Sacraments in our lives revealing Jesus, God’s grace and love can’t help but overflow in us and touch those around us. This is God moving His Word from our head to our heart, and making us not only heavenly minded, but allowing us to walk in our faith and do earthly good.

Will Sohns writes in *The Great Sending*, “We can so easily feel trapped behind the locked doors of process, institutional polity, practices, activities, routines, and traditions that we don’t realize we must have a long-term immersion to change, transition, and be transformed.” God regularly used a Jubilee to refresh, reset, and transform the children of Israel. If He did it for them, imagine what He could do in our churches, in our homes, in our lives if we would commit to being immersed in His Word.

That’s the challenge as we enter a New Year. We have a great tool in *The Great Sending*, but it’s certainly not the only tool. There are plenty of resources available to stir your heart and faith. What is necessary is our personal commitment to daily walk with Jesus in His Word asking, “What is it You desire to do in my life in the coming year Lord?” If we seek Him with all our heart He will be found by us, and come and be with us. Don’t doubt it. As I wind down my time serving as District President, what an honor it has been to serve the Florida-Georgia District. If I could leave any legacy at all it would be to have a united people, immersed in God’s Word,

serving Him in the midst of a dark world, confident of His light emanating through His promises and His people. As we gather in June for the District Convention we will have much to celebrate as we gather to be sent in His name. God’s richest blessings in 2022 as we focus on His Word and celebrate a year of Jubilee! ▲



Your friend in Jesus,

Gregory A. Walton

PRESIDENT
FLORIDA-GEORGIA DISTRICT
LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

Kingdom Seeds Miracle Grow Initiative Focuses on Greater Orlando's Rebecca's Garden of Hope

The vision of Rebecca's Garden of Hope is to serve as a resource to faith-based and secular organizations in underserved communities, in order to improve educational outcomes, provide essential life skills, and build social and civic responsibility and discipleship in youth. The goal of the program was to improve outcomes for youth ages 4-18, in the areas of:

- 1 — Nutrition and Food Choices,
- 2 — Physical Fitness,
- 3 — Social and Emotional Mental Health,
- 4 — Personal Well-being and Goal Setting.

The **Let's Get Healthy Program** was held at Our Savior/Orlando, FL.

"Youth were invited locally and nationally and both in-person and virtual sessions were held to encourage more participation," explains Sanya Parson, director of RGOH. "It was a six-week program with sessions launching in June. The final activity was held mid August. Sessions included dance classes with a professional dancer, exercise and workout sessions and Bible study and art sessions.

"Weekly nutrition topics included hydration, sugar intake, electrolytes, carbs and proteins, fiber intake, fruits and vegetables.

"Mental wellness topics discussed dealing with past hurts. Other weeks included etiquette, self esteem and body image, personal hygiene, clothing choices and hair maintenance. Youth also participated in a reading club and received journals and were encouraged to journal writing struggles, challenges, and successes, praying about each issue and including Bible verses to show how

God helped them deal with their issues."

According to Parson, teens were encouraged to sign-up on the website USDAmplate.com to learn how to make healthier meals challenges to cook one each Friday

and post pictures to invite others to try their recipes. Culminating activity held August 14, 2021 Healthy Cooking demonstration at Hebni.

Hebni Nutrition Consultants, Inc. is a community-based, not for profit agency formed in 1995 to educate high-risk, culturally diverse populations about nutrition strategies to prevent diet-related diseases. Hebni's mission is to provide culturally appropriate nutrition education

and intervention strategies to prevent diet-related diseases. Hebni's acronym H.E.B.N.I. stands for "Health Education through Behavioral and Nutritional Initiatives."

"Hebni is committed to reducing health disparities among high-risk minority populations by providing compressive nutrition related strategies to decrease, manage and delay chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease,

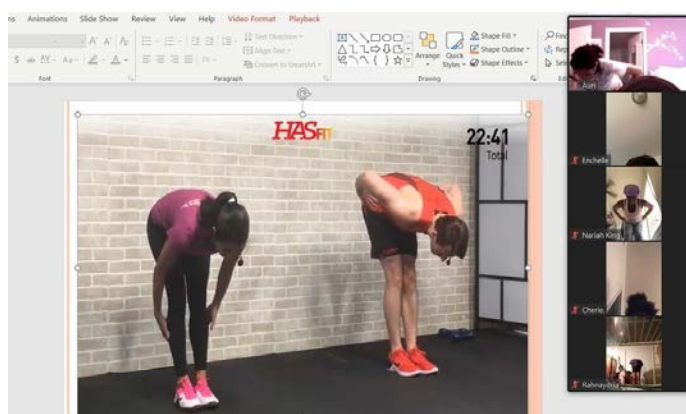


by Peter Meier
Executive Director of
Missions and Outreach
Florida-Georgia District
pmeier@flgadistrict.org



cancer, obesity, and hypertension in youth also. Youth were able to prep, cook, setup and breakdown directed by a staff dietician.

"Some of the comments from the onsite staff included the fact that our students were some of the most well-behaved students they ever had at their facility," boasts Parson. "Although we were only able to take 10 youth because of the cost, those participating loved the food, the interaction, and the opportunity to learn how to make healthier food choices. We look forward to partnering with them next year and getting even more youth involved. ▲



Registration Now Open for March Veterans of the Cross Retreat

Put March 7-9, 2022 on your calendar for the next Veterans of the Cross Retreat when the Lutheran older adults will gather under the theme of “Tell Me a Story,” inspiring attendees to tell the story of Jesus to the next generation. Speakers, worship leaders will lead the attendees to understand how their lives are intertwined with the story of Jesus.

“Storytelling is a favorite pastime of many Veterans of the Cross,” said Chris Rau, one of the event committee members. “We enjoy both sharing and hearing stories.”

Has it crossed your mind to tell someone your faith story? Today’s technology provides a wide variety of ways to share with present and future generations.

At next year’s VOC retreat, Dr. Mary Manz Simon will be sharing her vision of Faith Stories. To help her, the VOC committee is looking for a few people to record their own faith stories in advance to show at the retreat.

“We can walk you through the simple steps of preparing, recording, and transmitting it,” said The Rev. Bob Steinke, VOC Chairman.



Rev. Dr. Jeff Moore

Interested? Contact Steinke at revstein@verizon.net or Kathy Keene, District Office, kkeene@flgadistrict.org. As an attendee you will have the opportunity during the retreat to tell your faith story and have it recorded. Now is the time to jot down some notes in preparation of sharing.

“We are also extremely enthusiastic to have Rev. Dr.



Dr. Mary Manz Simon

Jeffery Moore, as our Bible Study Leader, who gets it: that the Bible is a story to share,” Rau continued. “There will be breakout sessions, mission presentations, worship, and all the wonderful fellowship of your fellow veterans.”

Registration is already open. The event takes place at the Warren Willis Retreat and Conference Center in Fruitland Park, FL. ▲

District to Host Intentional Interim Ministers in February

In every congregation there will be times when members wrestle with their church’s identity and ministry. These unique transitions occur after particularly long pastorates, when conflicts exist within the congregation, when there are instances of pastoral misbehavior, when demographics change drastically, or during other church-changing circumstances.

Such times of transition are often marked by congregational stress and anxiety hampering ministry and making a fulfilling church experience difficult.

Intentional Interim Ministry is designed to restore congregational health by offering a safe bridge between challenging times and the selection of the next resident pastor.

To be credentialed in this ministry, a pastor of the LCMS must be recommended for Intentional Interim Ministry by his District President and make application to the Credentialing Committee. Those satisfying the requirements are issued a Certificate of Completion. The credential is valid for three years. The credential is renewed only when a previously credentialed pastor makes application, is a continuing, full and current member of the Interim Ministry Conference and meets the expectations for continuing education.

While not all intentional interim ministers are credentialed, the purpose of credentialing is to establish and maintain a roster of specifically trained

and experienced LCMS pastors for transitional ministry.

There is a training conference being hosted in February at the District Office. Currently Florida-Georgia enjoys the services of seven intentional interim pastors:

- Rev. Dr. John “Mike” Ramey at Lutheran Church of the Redeemer/Columbus, GA;
- Rev. Jack Mackowiak at Abiding Savior /Gainesville, FL;
- Rev. Timmothy Heath at Bethel/Hobe Sound, FL;
- Rev. Dr. Dennis Tegtmeier at Trinity /Athens, GA;
- Rev. Fred Poeppel at Shepherd of the Coast/Fort Lauderdale, FL;
- Rev. Robert Steinke, Hope/Hudson, FL;
- Rev. Dr. Larry Griffin, Epiphany/Tallahassee, FL. ▲

District Nominations Open Dec. 14th

The Florida-Georgia District Convention is fast approaching and we have resources for your participation on our District website: flgadistrict.org. Beginning December 14th you'll find:

- *Nomination Forms – these forms outline what positions are open for election and what qualifications are required for nominees
- Biographical Form – must be submitted by each nominee
- Delegate Credential Form – Each member congregation of the District has the privilege to send one layperson and one “called and installed” pastor to represent them.
- Congregation Checklist – to insure you don’t miss a vital step in attending, representing, and being a part of shaping the future of the FLGA District.
- Templates for submission of Overtures
- A Draft Agenda
- Please read each form carefully and follow appropriate instructions.

- FLGA District President
- Secretary
- District Committee for Nominations
- Synod Convention Nominations

FLGA Board of Directors consisting of from each region:

- 1 Vice President
- 2 Lay Persons
- 3 at-large commissioned ministers

Nominations must be received to the District Secretary by March 19, 2022. Nominations forms will be available on the District website and from the District Office. In order to nominate you must first have permission of the individual, and the nominee shall complete a biographical form to validate their willingness for their name to stand. It is extremely important to include the phone number and email of nominated individuals, as this helps the Nominations Committee in verifying their willingness to serve. ▲

Lutheran Hour Ministries Hosts Spiritual Conversations in the Digital Age

Technology and rapid cultural shifts may have altered the face of evangelism, but the call to bring Christ to the nations remains.

What are spiritual conversations and why should I be having them?

Lutheran Hour Ministries will host a workshop exploring spiritual conversations. This opportunity offers insights to help us become more intentional — more eager — to engage in spiritual conversations with others. Among the practices offered, it respects focusing on someone’s “spiritual posture,” so as not to impose a conversation that is forced or ill-timed.

Based on biblical foundations and

research with Barna, this workshop will aid you in graciously adapting your conversations in helpful ways.

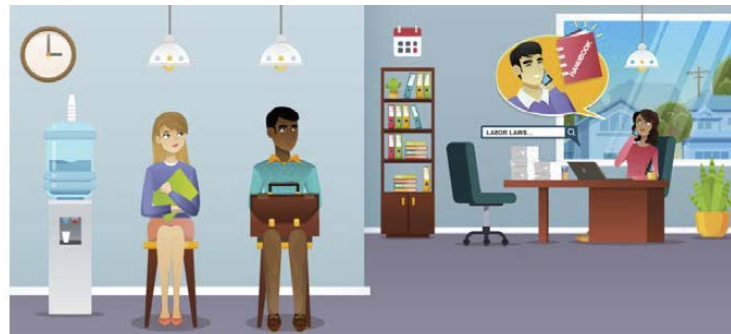
Two sessions are planned:
Thursday, February 3rd — geared toward professional church workers, and Saturday, February 5th — geared toward church laity.

Both events will be held at **Messiah/Tampa, FL** with doors opening at 9:30 am to gather materials, finding seats, and enjoying coffee, donuts, and pastries.

Messiah is located at 14920 Hutchison Road, Tampa, FL 33625.

Registration is on Lutheran Hour Ministries website: lhm.org/scdatampa/ ▲

Florida-Georgia HR Services Kick-Off



Let's face it, human resources issues can be complicated in ministry. Concordia Plans has partnered with an industry leader in Human Resource solutions to offer Human Resource Services.

The Florida Georgia District has made this valuable service **FREE** to our congregations and schools through March 2022. **DON'T MISS OUT ON THIS OPPORTUNITY!**

HR Services provides professional help and dependable HR resources, including:

- Staying well informed on current legislation (i.e. COVID related needs).
- Expert assistance walking you through HR challenges.
- Building or updating an employee handbook.
- Access to both an online platform with a plethora of resources and access to an HR call center staffed by certified HR professionals.
- Developing HR documents.

Many congregations are already benefiting from this service and there have been great testimonials.

“The driving force for the decision for St. Paul to sign up for HR Services was the need to update our employee manual and all HR forms. We do not have a dedicated staff member for HR, so over the years many of our documents and policies have become outdated. The employee manual building wizard is a great tool for helping congregations build or retool their HR documents.” Joel Dietrich – St. Paul, Peachtree City, GA.

“In the past, when HR issues arose, I had to contact our labor attorney for guidance. And, if it involved more than just a phone conversation, it became billable time. The HR Services provides a multitude of services, from answering HR questions, to establishing COVID protocols, to policy and handbook templates that may be customized. It has been a much simpler process for me overall. I really enjoy the HR Snapshot emails I receive; they more often than not, provide answers to questions I might not have had a chance to email about.” Marybeth Keenan – St. Paul, Boca Raton, FL.



Space is limited. For more information please contact izirbel@flgadistrict.org.

Tom and Betty were like a lot of couples this past year. In the midst of all the pandemic challenges they took the big step of deciding to formally retire from their jobs. It was a big shift for them. Tom worked at a service company that did warranty repair work and Betty was a shift manager at an office. They really liked their jobs and the people they worked with but it just seemed like it was time to make the change.

The trouble was that with their retirement they had more time on their hands. They didn't really want to travel but they didn't want to just kill time watching television. So they started to walk every day.

This started innocent enough but with the daily walking they started to say hello to their neighbors.



Over time they got to know not only more names but also where they worked and what they did. They heard stories and laughed a lot. People seemed to crave the social connection they weren't getting elsewhere. One thing they also learned was that unlike them, not many others were connected to any kind of faith community. When Tom and Betty were getting to know people and brought up where they went to church there was often a kind of quietness and smiles in response. Some would say where they used to go or what they did when they were kids but other

than the Olson's down the street, no one went to church, even online.

Since it was normal for Tom and Betty to see things through the lens of Christian love they would listen to people and when they



A Christmas Like No Other

heard someone express a sadness or concern they would say almost without thinking, "We'll add that to my prayers." Over time the neighbors saw Tom and Betty as that warm couple who cared about others.

As the year was drawing to a close, Tom and Betty were starting to turn their thoughts toward Christmas. Their hearts were so touched by the lives of their neighbors that they naturally began to talk about how they could bring them the love of Christ. It was Betty who said that they should hold some kind of Christmas open house at their place. She wanted to not just chat with people in five minute conversations but really wanted to welcome them into her home.

Tom thought it was a great idea but wanted to limit the numbers, even though the virus was fading. He also wondered aloud how they could welcome Christ into their Christmas party. They talked to the pastor who said he would be happy to record himself reading the Christmas story from the gospel of Luke and share a brief message. They could also include some Christmas carols from last year's service. He's put it on the church's YouTube channel.

So Tom and Betty prayed. They also began to talk to some of the neighbors they knew well and ask what they thought. Most got excited and said that would be very nice considering all that we've gone through this past year and a half. Plus they wanted to get

a piece of Betty's famous pie.

Then the invitations went out. "We have so appreciated getting to know our wonderful neighbors that we would like to welcome you to our home for a Christmas open house.

We will have a buffet table of food and of course some of Betty's pie! Then after the meal we'd love for you to join us as we play a video of our pastor reading the Christmas story and sharing a brief devotional thought.

We will also be playing some traditional Christmas carols.

They were a bit nervous but their love for their neighbors overcame their nerves. They heard back from six households that they would love to come. In fact in the days leading up to it their talks on their walk showed them how excited everyone was with having something of a "real" Christmas. The day came and it was wonderful. Tom offered a brief prayer of thanks for everyone and for Jesus coming at Christmas just before the video was played. (Everyone got a card with a copy of the YouTube address for watching again on their own). People were so



by Scott Gress
Lutheran Counseling Services
Leadership Coach
Florida-Georgia District
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gracious and appreciative. Before he left, one father quietly asked Tom about Jesus. One mother asked Betty about how she could get her kids baptized. Another older couple asked more about their church. After everyone left, Tom and Betty were overcome with emotion and how God worked it all out. It was a Christmas like no other! ▲

Rev. Scott Gress is believes in Growing People for Ministry by focussing on leadership, discipleship and teamwork. Contact Scott if you are interested in him working with you or your church. A free 30 minutes strategy session is available. The Coaching Leader Podcast is also available on iTunes and his YouTube page. You can contact Scott through email scottgress@me.com or his blog page scottgress.com or at 561-542-4472

LCC Dogs Comfort Wisconsin Parade Victims & Families

At 4:39 pm on Sunday, November 21, a vehicle driven by Darrell Brooks, Jr. fleeing police drove into the Waukesha, WI Christmas parade in progress. As of this writing, six people have been killed — four females and two males — with ages ranging from a child to 81, six children critical, and as many as 48 other victims with injuries ranging from critical, serious, and fair conditions.

According to Police Chief Dan Thompson, “there was no evidence the bloodshed was a terrorist attack or that the driver even knew any of the parade participants.”

The Milwaukee resident had left the scene of a domestic disturbance and at the time of the incident was not fleeing police.

Eighteen patients between the ages of 3 to 16 were taken to Children’s Wisconsin Hospital, including three sets of siblings. The parade route was packed with families and children of all ages who were present

for the festive occasion.

In less than 24 hours, Lutheran Church Charities K-9 Comfort Dogs were invited by Pastor Peter Schmidt from Beautiful Savior/Waukesha, WI and were present at the Waukesha Candlelight Vigil.

Tim Hetzner, LCC President/CEO has deployed with LCC K-9 Ministry teams and brought hearts/markers through our Hearts of Mercy & Compassion (HMC), Crosses for Losses Ministry to be present and help people who are shocked and trying to process this horrific event. LCC K-9 and HMC Ministry teams will serve with open hearts to listen to the hurting, bringing them hope, comfort, and prayer.

The hearts/markers will be placed at the Veterans Park memorial site for people to sign

and leave condolence messages, pray, and pay their respects to the five lives lost so far.

LCC K-9 Comfort Dogs Candace (LCC Staff), Charity (Brookfield,



WI), Mary (Janesville, WI), Rhoda (Menomonee Falls, WI), Tobias (Grayslake, IL), and Zoey (Concordia University/Wisconsin), along with their ministry teams were present at the vigil to help bring comfort and hope to all who are grieving. ▲

St. John/Ocala Launches Inaugural Christmas Light Show

The Inaugural Ocala Christmas Light Spectacular, presented by **St. John/Ocala, FL**, debuted at Florida Horse Park on November 26, 2021 at 6:00 PM and runs each evening beginning at 6:00 PM through December 31, 2021.

The Ocala Christmas Light Spectacular is almost a two-mile drive-thru filled with Christmas Magic!

“There are more than two million lights, more than 350 lighted displays (much of them animated), a children’s train ride, a reindeer training center, Santa land where children can visit their most favorite Elf, a lighted Nativity display with the Star of Bethlehem looming over the manger at 25 feet in height!” offers Pastor Jeff Shanks. “Christmas performances that include choirs, handbells, praise bands, puppet shows, inter-active activities for the children, a “selfie-spot” to grab a quick photo, and Food Trucks.

The Entrance to the drive-thru Ocala Christmas Light Spectacular



is located at 11851 SW 16th Avenue, Ocala, Florida 34476 with the drive-thru finale at Santa land located at the main entrance to Florida Horse Park at 11008 South Highway 475 Ocala, Florida 34480.

The Ocala Christmas Light Spectacular is a fundraising event, with all proceeds benefitting the missions of St. John Lutheran Church and School. ▲

Lutheran Clergy should Not Feel Obligated to Offer Virtual Online Communion During Pandemic

These past two years have taught us, as the Church, many valuable, and often painful, things. We learned to adapt to technology overnight, and many have grown to become proficient. In the wake of the pandemic many congregations faced challenges to care for members who were often isolated by restrictions or fear.

At its height, the pandemic forced pastors to explore new technology and alternate ways to serve God's people while remaining faithful to God's Word and the Lutheran Confessions. One of the most difficult and challenging issues in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod became one of how could members receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

I offer this as simply a reflective perspective. All but very few of our congregations found creative ways to provide members with the Sacrament. It varied from small family groups "scheduling" time to come to church to receive the body and blood of Jesus, to what some referred to as literal "drive through" communion. While the methods differed widely, I requested two things of our pastors through the Circuit Visitors.

First, and perhaps of the utmost importance, was to keep God's people safe. However a congregation chose to worship, whether in person or solely online, with masks or without masks, with communion or refraining from communion, we simply stressed safety as a key issue.

The second request was to practice non-judgmental grace on the congregations and pastors who may have done things differently. Putting the best construction on things, I believe that most pastors were genuinely trying to accommodate the needs of the people of their flock. This is commendable.

One of the biggest concerns, which the LCMS addressed early

in the days of the pandemic, surrounded the issue of communion — and in particular — Online Communion. The CTCR (Commission on Theology and Church Relations) urged caution and preferred congregations to abstain from the Sacrament until the pandemic passed, never envisioning the ongoing nature of this horrendous virus. Personally, not only did I encourage this, but actually practiced it myself.

After more than six months without the Sacrament I was blessed to receive it in a congregation where precautions were such they were able to celebrate it in the service. However, at the same time, others found more creative ways to provide

Communion across the Synod. Is the proclaimed Word of God in the words of distribution sufficient for consecrating the elements? Are there other "acceptable" ways, as when an elder distributes the Sacrament to a shut-in? Truly there are more questions than answers. In that vein, the Council of Presidents,



by Greg Walton
District President
Florida-Georgia District
gwalton@flgadistrict.org

at their September 2021 gathering — the first face to face since 2019 — passed a resolution requesting congregations in the LCMS *refrain from the practice of Online Communion until it can be further studied by the COP and the CTCR.*

Thankfully, for most of the congregations across the Synod the isolation from COVID is no longer a chief concern. Most ministries are currently able to meet in person and have found various ways to offer the Sacrament in a safe manner to those still unable to attend. Where creative ways were found we should rejoice in God's blessings. God alone knows what the future holds for the church and what inspired ways will be devised to serve the mission of God's people. May we be among those who act in grace, according to the Word of God, to connect people to Jesus! ▲



the blessed Sacrament to their people. I commend a pastor who hears the needs of his people, cares for their concerns, and diligently works to provide for them.

A pastor who truly cares for the welfare of his people is a good thing. At the same time, congregational members desiring the Sacrament *is also a good thing.* Early on the pandemic created pandemonium and fear, and to find creative ways to care for God's people is a good thing, too.

There are a variety of opinions regarding the practice of Online



FLORIDA GEORGIA

Out and About in the District

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Zion Publishes Second Advent Devotional Booklet

Zion/Ft. Myers, FL has released their 2021 Advent devotional, *Zion Sings!*



With all new content for this year, the 44-page booklet offers a daily devotion beginning with the first Sunday in Advent and ending with Epiphany.

Thanks to funding by an anonymous donor, one thousand copies have been distributed throughout the area surrounding Zion. A local thrift shop and nearby senior living communities were targets for a major outreach initiative led by the ten-member distribution team.

"Many booklets are being distributed in our community to bring them the story of the Christ-child's birth as an outreach," says Senior Pastor Dr. Curtis Deterding. *Zion Sings!* was available in the church narthex. A Thrivent Community Action grant funded mailing the booklet to friends from the north who had not yet arrived for season and church visitors.

Devotions were written by nineteen Zion members. "Having your own members write the content gives these devotions a personal touch," adds Deterding. Reflecting the theme of favorite Christmas hymns and carols, devotions echo Zion's historically strong emphasis on music as a way to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. Zion offers contemporary, traditional and blended worship and has a full-time director of music.

"The Christmas season is one of the easiest times of the year to share the good news of Jesus Christ," says project creator and manager Dr. Mary Manz Simon. "Offering a free Advent devotional is a low-key way to introduce the Biblical story of the birth of Jesus. "Even with the lingering threats of the pandemic, we can still thank God for the precious gift of his Son, our Savior," she concludes. ▲



"The Elderberries" a mission group at **Trinity/Athens, GA**, enjoyed a pre-Thanksgiving luncheon on November 17th. Afterwards the group made an assembly line (above and below in photos) that stuffed 70 "blessing bags" for the homeless in their area. ▲



Plantation Teacher Run NYC Marathon for Cystic Fibrosis

Kindergarten teacher, Trisha DePasquale, ran in the New York City Marathon on Sunday, November 7th and the students and staff at **Our Savior/Plantation, FL** helped her get across that finish line.

The students and staff selected Team Boomer as the recipient for their 1st quarter chapel offerings and have already raised more than \$600 at the halfway point. Team Boomer is a program of the Boomer Esiason Foundation (BEF), which contributes to helping people with cystic fibrosis live longer, healthier, and more fulfilling lives.

There were 75 runners that are a part of Team Boomer's NYC Marathon team this year. Each team member is responsible for fundraising a set amount for their team page. All of the proceeds go towards scholarships and medical treatments for CF patients, and research for the disease.

Trisha says, "It meant so much to me that Our Savior helped my family fight the disease. I really felt their prayers and heard their voices in my head cheering me on while I was running through the five boroughs of New York City!" ▲



Redeemer/Stuart, FL has seven high school students who are preparing to attend the National Youth Gathering in Houston next summer. They have already started service projects and fundraisers and are working well together and are looking forward to the big trip in July. Pictured below (left to right) are Aden, Cole, Wyatt, Eryn, Ethen, Cameron and Emily. ▲



Savannah Congregation Operating Food Bank, Clothes Closet

Trinity/ Savannah, GA operates a ministry to the homeless that began in late July of 2020. This outreach ministry is called Hearts of Compassion and encompasses not only a free clothes closet but a food pantry and meals two days a week.

"We serve the homeless community on the southside of Savannah and low-income families in our neighborhood," explains Pastor Jeffrey Webb. "Each facet of this ministry is supported completely through donations by the congregation and the neighborhood."

The Clothes Closet offers seasonal clothes at absolutely no cost. Anyone in need may come into the Clothes Closet and pick out what they need. The closet carries items for infants through adults, from pajamas to winter coats and also provides household items such as towels, sheets and blankets, and even wheelchairs and walkers.

"If an item is donated to us, we contact helping organizations to see if they need the item. We liaison with city and federal organizations on a regular basis. One of our more recent donations went to Georgia Southern University. Their Career Development Center provides appropriate clothing to their students for job interview or work environment," Webb continues. "Trinity provided seven boxes of dresses, suits, sweaters, shoes and trousers. We also regularly provide extra children's clothing to the Department of Family and Children Services and the three elementary schools in our immediate neighborhood."

Trinity's food pantry and blessing box provide much needed groceries for families and individuals. We fill bags with cereal, rice, noodles, canned chicken, vegetables and fruits and anyone in need can walk in and ask for one. The larger bags will feed a family for a few days and the smaller bags are filled with pop top cans for the homeless.

Karen Hanovich, chairperson of Trinity/Savannah's social ministry board says "we distribute five or six family bags per week and ten to

twelve single bags. We are blessed by our neighbors who place food items directly into the Blessing Box which helps our congregation keep our food pantry stocked.

"Our 'can do' Sunday — which is the second Sunday of the month — also helps keeps the shelves filled. We distribute health kits filled with personal items such as tooth brushes, combs, hand wipes, razors and soap," she offers.



A sample of Trinity's "Hot Meals for the Homeless" dinners

Trinity has a Hot Meals for the Homeless program that provides a bagged meal on Monday evenings and a hot meal on Friday evenings. Since starting this ministry in July of 2020, Trinity has cooked and distributed approximately 3,552 meals. There is a sign-up sheet and the congregation and neighbors can commit for a complete meal or a portion of a meal.

The meals are brought to TLC and put together in individual trays then distributed to the small groups of two and three homeless. All meals are donated either by the volunteer cooking or by donations to Trinity's food pantry.

"When we receive items that we are not able to use in the food pantry, we incorporate those items into one of the meals for the homeless," Webb continues.

Trinity members Jennifer and Ron Wolfe and their son Ryan Smith are the distribution team for the meals. They have their pulse on locations where homeless people are living — whether behind



Ryan Smith loading supplies into his vehicle for distribution to the homeless. Below — boxes of clothes to be distributed to the homeless sleeping in the woods, behind gas stations and shopping centers.



one of the gas stations, in the woods behind one of the larger shopping centers, or in the park at the library. They know where to find them and feed them.

"Each week — rain or shine — they pack up their vehicle and head out to meet the needs of those we serve. They bring extra clothing, blankets, socks and coats along in case they come across someone who needs them. If necessary, they will take a needed item back to them the next day. They faithfully minister to each one. ▲

Plant City Dedicates Newly Completed Sanctuary

On Sunday, October 10th, in a special afternoon service the members of **Hope/Plant City, FL** gathered for the Dedication Service of their new sanctuary. The members of Hope knowing our Lord's command to "go into all the world" also refer to their church as their "mission hub" because it is from this place that our Lord sends us into the mission fields of our various communities.

Leading the celebration was Hope's Sr. Pastor, Rev. Dean Pfeffer assisted by The Rev. Dr. Gregory Walton, President of the Florida Georgia District. The preacher for the occasion was Rev. Dr. John Nunes, former President of Concordia University/New York. Also participating was Rev. Ron Pennekamp who assists at Hope and Rev. Miguel Sanabria who leads Hope's Spanish Ministry.

According to Pfeffer, "the congregation has worked long and hard to bring this dream to a reality. We give thanks to God not just for the dedication of Hope's members today, but for those five families that began this congregation in 1957 knowing and believing that God had a plan 'to give them a hope and a future.'

Pfeffer continued, "our congregation rejoices in this tremendous blessing God has gifted us. Time and again, He has shown us immeasurably more than we could ever ask or imagine. As a congregation, what more can we say than to God be the glory?!"

A special reception followed the service hosted by Hope's Dedication Celebration Committee.

Earlier that morning, David Booher, the chairman of the congregation's Building and Construction Committee, was recognized following the morning worship. Booher had just given the monthly hooray time which follows each of the congregation's board of directors meeting with a special ministry/opportunity for which the congregation gives thanks to God.

Booher, offered to do the October hooray time that day as that afternoon would be the Dedication

Service of the congregation's new sanctuary. Following Booher's announcement, Rev. Dean Pfeffer surprised Booher with an additional hooray time as the congregation stood to give thanks to God for the leadership of David Booher.

Booher has served the congregation as Vice President, President, Past President and most recently leading the Building Committee and upon the completion of the Building Committee's assigned task, he then led the Construction Committee as the building has come to fruition. The work of the congregation's Construction Committee continues under Booher's leadership as their project is not 100 percent completed. While the sanctuary is virtually completed, the work continues on the congregation's new parking lot.

In presenting the recognition, Pfeffer thanked Booher for his many hours given to this major project. Pfeffer also thanked God for the leadership and faithfulness of Booher as he continues to look and lean on the Lord each day for his strength and guidance. The congregation joined in thunderous applause and thanks following the presentation. ▲



Above — Pastor Dean Pfeffer with David Booher. Below — on the steps of the congregation's new altar area are (from left) Pastors Miguel Sanabria; Greg Walton; Dean Pfeffer; John Nunes; and Ron Pennekamp.



*Down in a lowly manger
the humble Christ was born,
and God sent us salvation
that blessed Christmas morn.*

*Go tell it on the mountain,
over the hills and everywhere;
go tell it on the mountain
that Jesus Christ is born!*

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Plant City Congregation Arranges Pizza & Dessert Break for Community Care Center Residents



Members of **Hope/Plant City, FL** recently treated the residents and staff of the Community Care Center of Plant City with a special afternoon of treats.

Pizza donated from Plant City's Hungry Howies and desserts were provided for the Community Care Center residents. This was coordinated by Hope's Human Care Ministry Team in partnership with a community action grant from THRIVENT Financial.

According to event leader Sally Kimbrell, "this event is just a simple way for us to say thank you to the staff who have endured so much these last 20 plus months (during the pandemic) and the opportunity to show them our appreciation, while also letting the residents know they are loved by our church and our community and through all this, they are never forgotten."

Hope member, Lee Kimbrell (left) and Community Care Center's Activities Director, Jackie Pifer. ▲

Woodstock Fellowship Board Hosts Trunk or Treat

On October 2, 2021, The Fellowship Board of **Timothy Woodstock, GA** sponsored a community outdoor Trunk & Treat in the church parking lot. 27 congregational members and preschool families decorated their car trunks in a variety of themes — Bible stories, movies and Halloween. Plenty of candy was distributed to the 147 children, plus parents, who attended. The weather was ideal for people to enjoy the ice cream treats courtesy of Thrivent as an Action Team project. ▲



St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL Walks for First Care

Several members of **St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL** walked in October to raise funds for First Care Women's Clinic.

First Care empowers women facing crisis pregnancies to choose life for their unborn children while sharing the love and good news of Jesus Christ.

"For more than 30 years, abortion rights and human life have been a political hot button in our nation," explained Tim Brooks, a member of St. Paul's board of elders and the congregation's coordinator for the annual walk.

Since 1973 when abortion in the US was legalized, more than 40 million women have chosen abortion. It is estimated that 43 percent of all women will have at least one abortion by the time they are 45 years old.

"There were 34 congregations and more than 450 people participating in the First Care Walk for Life," Brooks stated. "First Care exceeded their goal of \$150,000."

"This is an annual fundraiser — with the exception of last year having been postponed due to Covid-19," Brooks concluded.

"I'm so proud of Team St. Paul — raising \$4,943 — exceeding our goal and coming in third place overall for funds raised. Our team had 65 sponsors. The 1.8 mile walk was held at Christ Fellowship Church, Palm Beach Gardens Campus."

According to Brooks, Christ Fellowship donated their facilities and support personnel as well as contributing \$5,000 to a client of First Care who was struggling financially due to losing a job because of Covid-19. ▲

First Care's Impact:

- 203 lives saved from abortion in 2021;
- 78 women confessed their faith in Jesus as their Savior in 2020;
- 38 women rededicated their lives to Christ in 2020;
- More 13,000 lives saved from abortion since 1983!

Last year, there were more than 5,000 abortions done in Palm Beach County.

St. Paul's participants in photo below, from left — Ruben and Miriam Perez, Christina, Timothy and Susan Brooks, Wayne and Susan Lindeman, Louise Claydon, Hannah Kemos, Danny and Cydney Claydon.





Join Pastor Scott Henze and **St. Paul/Weston, FL** congregation on a 10-day Bible Land Exploration tour, starting at approximately \$4,400 from Miami, FL departing on June 19, 2023. Visit places such as Mount of Olives, Mount Zion, Western Wall, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Garden Tomb, Jericho, Capernaum, Nazareth, Mount Carmel, and much more. If you'd like to be put on the information distribution list, please e-mail jane@stpaulweston.org. ▲



**Redeemer/
Stuart, FL**
youth held a
“work day”
recently. They
cut hedges and
bushes, spread
landscaping
rocks and
painted the
front campus
sign. ▲



Tampa & Boca Raton Congregations Get LERT-Ready

A modern shower/laundry trailer graciously provided by Trail Life First Officer and LCMS Member Matthew Jones of **Messiah/Tampa, FL** (father Steve Jones is copied above), is on its way to Slidell, Louisiana for use in Hurricane clean-up there.

“One member, Jim Speer, is taking it to the home of LCMS Pastor Brashier in Kimberly, Alabama, who is in turn taking it to Slidell,” explains Jay Wendland of Florida-Georgia District’s Lutheran Early Response Teams.

Working through LCMS districts and congregations as well as with international Lutheran churches and other partners, LCMS Disaster Response builds capacity of the church’s partners to respond to needs with Christian care.

The ministry reaches out to LCMS congregations and their communities with services that include on-site assessment, emergency relief and development grants, pastoral care for LCMS church workers and members, and other resources.

Key Features of the Trailer:

- 3 Private Shower Rooms
- Standard Shower Rooms
- Features (1) 32” x 32” Shower Stall, (1) Shatter Proof Mirror, (1) Shower Hook, (1) Wall Sink (1) Vent
- Washer and Dryer Hookups in Mechanical Room (Laundry Units not included)

- Direct Connection to Sewer
- 15,000 BTU Air Conditioning
- 1,000 Watt Heaters

In Shower Rooms

- 199,000 BTW Navien Hot Water On Demand Heater
- 2 x 40 lb Propane Tanks
- Commercial Flooring with Wash-down Package and floor drains
- 2 x 7,000lb Torsion Axles with Electric Runaway Brakes (Spare Tire In Mechanical Room)
- LED Interior and Exterior Lighting.

St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL has joined this national program and formulated a LERT Team. Working through Jay Wendland, these members are trained and ready to be deployed — with St. Paul’s new



trailer. “We have stocked the trailer to be immediately ready to respond to any type of disaster — hurricane, flood, fire, tornado and others,” St. Paul Pastor Steve Carretto discloses.

“Responding to a disaster is a vital part of who we are as members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Responding to a disaster allows a congregation to confess Christ to their community, region and world in ways they may have never before considered.

“While we don’t want disasters to come, St. Paul is ready to share our resources and time

with those who are affected and share the love of Jesus!”

This important ministry reaches out to LCMS congregations and their communities with services that include on-site assessment, emergency relief and development grants, pastoral care for LCMS church workers and members, and other resources. The St. Paul LERT team may be called to respond out of our immediate geographic area depending on the intensity of the disaster and requirements. ▲

Weston Staff Steps Up for Breast Cancer Awareness Month

October is all about pink. Supporting the fighters, admiring the survivors, honoring the taken and never giving up on HOPE. This is Team **St. Paul/Weston, FL** in a photo taken during October's Breast Cancer Awareness Month. ▲



Stephen Ministry Program Thrives at Messiah/Tampa, FL

Messiah/Tampa, FL commissioned its 7th Stephen Ministry Leader, Jody Schweichler, on Sunday July 25, 2021 by Pastor Mark Adrian. Jody recently completed on-line training with the St. Louis based Stephen Ministry program. Laying of hands of support was given to Jody by the Messiah Stephen Ministry. The ministry at Messiah began in 2008, has trained seven Stephen Ministry Leaders,

27 lay Stephen Ministers and has served more than 50 people in need of spiritual and emotional support.

Stephen Ministry is active in more than 13,000 congregations world wide.

It was announced that with the recent passing of founding leader, Walter Halfmann, a memorial gift has purchased packets of the resource, "Journeying through Grief," to be distributed to grieving families.

Pastor Jim Guelzow and his wife, Lynn, are active with the St. Louis Ministry, when they are doing face-to-face large group trainings.

The photo includes from left to right: Terry Picillio, Cheri Jensen, Leader Norma Halfmann, Newly commissioned Leader Jody Schweichler, Leader Sandy Hansen-Swilley, Kathy Riffel and Leadership Pastor Jim Guelzow. ▲



There is a Whole Other Church Out There!

I am thankful to be a pastor in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod by way of the colloquy process. It was decided by the colloquy committee that I serve a one-year vicarage in addition to several readings, studies, and other activities. I was pleased to serve my vicarage under Rev. William “Bill” Reister at **Our Redeemer/Jacksonville FL.**

As part of my vicarage, it was decided that I would undertake a project in addition to the other requirements. Pastor Reister and I had history from my days as a funeral director, embalmer and autopsy technician in Miami, Florida. The funeral home where I was employed was just up the street from the church Rev. Reister shepherded for eight years. Little did I know that some 27 years later I would be serving my vicarage under his immediate oversight. It just shows that God always has a plan in place.

I had begun speaking about a church without walls and making outreach more effective by taking the church outside its four walls. I had no idea what I was getting myself into. You see, I was at a church with a good eldership and a church President with vision and a pastor who was willing to get involved in my project. I believe a church with a vision is especially important.

It is hard to imagine outreach for some folks. To many, it means canvassing the neighborhood and knocking on doors. Well, that is not what I was after when I planned outreach through Internet Radio. This would require equipment, time, people, training, knowledge and putting together a team who shared the vision and could make it happen.

Little did I know but the team was there, and it consisted of the pastor, the chairman of the elders, the church President, and the chairman of the elders along with his son who was a fresh graduate from school. This project had to be written and presented to the congregation to gain support for an Internet Radio Station and the investment of time equipment and finances would be necessary. Once funding was approved and a budget was established, Our Redeemer Lutheran Radio was born with the help of Live365.com we finally

launched, but it took longer than one might think to get this off the ground, in fact, my vicarage was over by the time we launched but I wanted to stay committed to this project.

My pastor’s son built us an outstanding computer that could manage the workload required for an internet radio station and with Jeremy Fisher getting on board along with his dad Joe Fisher (our chairman of elders) we purchased the needed equipment and I even invested some of my own money into the project along with my wife Joan.

It takes many hours to develop programming and upload content for the radio station which now broadcasts into seventy countries and runs 24/7. Just when we thought we had enough to do, an entire media ministry was launched from Our Redeemer — and believe me, it was not all me. God was in this. At the present time, church services are streaming over Facebook and YouTube. We are not yet finished.

The church has purchased more equipment and even dedicated a room for media ministry that required modifications to work the way it needed to thanks to the generosity of church members who stepped up to have the studio painted and new carpet installed along with needed furniture. With new equipment we will be able to stream over more than 150 livestreaming platforms for free.

The equipment is not free, but the platforms are. Thanks to a grant from the LCMS our Internet Radio station will be able to expand and do greater things than we even imagined. God is so good. The pandemic presented challenges never encountered. How were we going to bring church to those who could not attend service? Then we discussed others such as shut-ins, those recovering at home from surgery, those in the military overseas and others who are required to work on Sunday. Well, we were on to something. The media ministry was going full-force and the radio developed and included music, a children’s hour, sermons, teaching

and will eventually broadcast the Sunday service live in real-time. We will soon be able to go live and do remote broadcasting. Who would have thought that an average Lutheran Church in North Jacksonville would be able to reach so many?



by Leon Roberts
Pastoring at
Holy Cross/ and
Our Redeemer in
Jacksonville, FL
lrobe22475@aol.com

We see people tuned in from places all over the country and we often do not even know who these folks are. The church without walls outreach is a reality and it is not because of me. It is a plan of God. As if I did not have enough to do after receiving a call to **Holy Cross/Jacksonville FL** as sole Pastor, I am now doing a 28-minute broadcast on Roku and Firestick T.V. on Tuesday mornings at 11:30 a.m. at a studio located across the expressway from Holy Cross — and across the street from a funeral home. God has a sense of humor.

With the traditional church in decline, we must find new ways to reach the lost and to reach our own people. With Advent approaching, I am excited that we will be able to have Advent services going out to another church out there beyond our walls. Holy Cross is working in partnership with Our Redeemer to help take the gospel to as many as we can, and the media ministry and radio station makes that possible. You can find the radio station by going to either ourredeemerjax.com or holycrossjax.com. If you have Roku or Firestick on your streaming service simply download the app or go on their site and search for The Inspired Network. There you will find my Tuesday 11:30 A.M. broadcast.

Incidentally, at the studio where I tape television, any church can purchase studio time for \$150.00 per hour and video production training is available for free to churches. ▲

Weston Has Successful Trunk or Treat

St. Paul/Weston, FL held their second Trunk or Treat on Saturday, October 30th from 5:30 - 7:00 PM. Members decorated their cars and shared treats and games while enjoying food and fellowship at a safe distance. ▲



Kingdom Seeds Program Funds Ocala Trunk or Treat

St. John/Ocala, FL used funds from the Kingdom Seeds program to launch their first Trunk or Treat on Saturday, October 30th.

"We had about 20 Trunks fully decorated and lots of candy along with face-painting, crafts and games at additional stations," offers Pastor Jeff Shanks. "We didn't use the \$300 to buy candy, but buy games to play at the trunks, Christian crafts and temporary tattoos and face-painting supplies. Although we anticipated a good response, we never imagined how many people would attend."

St. John had advertised the Trunk or Treat to be starting at 7pm but had people lined up before 6:30pm. "We don't have exact numbers, but we are guessing close to a thousand attended!" Shanks says. "We had a solid line of people from about 6:40 until 9pm. We had so much candy donated we were convinced we would have a lot leftover — but we were wrong. We still ran out and had to send a volunteer to get more."

One volunteer brought her daughter, who frequently comes to church with her. But she also brought her son — who helped — and her husband. Both haven't come to church previously.

Another volunteer had her elderly parents come to help decorate a trunk, pass out candy and just enjoy the beautiful night.

Another volunteer met a family from New York who had just moved into the area. "That family had a three year old son and mentioned how cool it was that a church would do this and our church member invited the family back to worship with us," Annette Shanks concludes. Annette is director of family life ministries at St. John. ▲



Weston Scores Youth Gathering Funds at Trivia Night

St. Paul/Weston, FL youth are working to raise money for the 30 youth and adults attending the LCMS Youth Gathering in Houston next summer. On Saturday, November 13th, they hosted the 10th Annual St. Paul Weston Trivia Night where 11 teams of 8 participated to play trivia for fun prizes.

Four teams were “in-person” and seven teams played virtually from all around the United States including Missouri, Illinois, and Minnesota. “While it is fun having teams play in person again this year, it was also great to connect with people local and far away through zoom teams and breakout rooms,” said Jeremy Becker, St. Paul’s Director of Christian Education. “This year, Chris Seruga’s team, the Red Hot Trivia Peppers, won 1st place after a tie break between four teams.” ▲



Red hot Trivia Peppers — the winners — are pictured left to right: Eddie Hill, Dave Bovee, Tracy Bovee, Carol Bovee, Chris Seruga, Kathy Henze, Pastor Scott Henze.



St. Paul youth were grading the trivia rounds. Pictured left to right: James Griffin, Bianca Jaramillo, Sebastian Garcia, Natalie Becker, Domenica Jaramillo, and Mikayla Becker.)

Downtown Trinity Shares Christmas With Prisoners

“Trinity Shares Christmas” is the annual Christmas outreach for **Trinity/Orlando, FL** in partnership with Prison Fellowship Ministries, providing Christmas toys and food for children who have an incarcerated parent.

“An Angel Tree goes up in the Narthex and tags are placed on the tree — and this year we’ve added an online option for picking a tag as well so that those worshipping from home can easily participate,” explains Pastor Doug Kallesen.

“Trinity collects the unwrapped gifts by November 30, attaching the tag or a note to the gift so we know for which family the gift was purchased. Each gift is valued just under \$20. Volunteers collect the gifts and deliver these Christmas blessings to local families.

“We are so grateful for your participation in blessing these wonderful children on behalf of their incarcerated parent,” Kallesen concludes. ▲



Reformation Sunday Celebration in Savannah

When it came time to celebrate the 500th anniversary of Reformation Day back in 2017, the congregation of **Trinity/Savannah, GA** did that one thing Lutheran congregations are really good at — they held a potluck! The event was held again in 2018 and 2019. But in 2020, that celebration along with many others was canceled due to COVID-19.

As 2020 closed and 2021 began, the congregation was gradually able to hold in-person worship — with COVID precautions — and resume their outreach ministries programs. When planning for Reformation Sunday, 2021 began in late summer, the organizers wanted to get more church groups involved to provide entertainment in addition to the food.

Josh and Katie Fester designed a mock “Jeopardy!” game with questions based on the Reformation and world events in 1517. “We spent about two weeks researching and writing the clues,” Katie offered. “There was a lot going on during that time!” Clues ranged from easy, such as “Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church door on the eve of this religious holiday,” and “This device allowed Luther’s 95 theses to be shared with the common people.”

Some of the more difficult clues included, “In 1521, Martin Luther was called to defend his beliefs before this Holy Roman Emperor,” which stumped all the players. Unlike the television game show, and because Lutherans believe there is salvation by grace, a lot of grace given during the game. Everyone who answered correctly received points, *even if the answer was not in the form of a question.*

In addition to a sing-a-long and a short skit by a few of their LWML ladies, the youth group and Sunday School children portrayed Luther confronting a group of villagers who believed they had to buy indulgences to have their sins forgiven.

Landon Borozinski, a high school junior, portrayed Martin Luther, telling the villagers, “You don’t have to buy indulgences to free your loved ones from Purgatory.”

“I liked playing Luther because there weren’t a lot of lines to memorize,” Borozinski emphasized. “I knew some things about Luther before I did the play, but I also learned some new things about him, too.”

Trinity normally has two morning services each Sunday — 8:30 and 11 a.m, but for Reformation Sunday, one service was held, which brought “early” and “late” people together — some who may have never met, and others who maybe had not seen each other for a long time.

According to Pastor Jeff Webb, the congregation still live streams its services via YouTube and Facebook for anyone who cannot attend in person. The social hall was set up with about 90 places and almost all of them were filled. The food tables were loaded with meat

dishes — including fried turkey, side dishes, salads, and desserts.

“I was really pleased with the participation and the turnout. We’re looking for other ideas to have fun, food and fellowship together,” Webb said. Plans are already underway to resume the congregation’s annual Thanksgiving Dinner, which was also canceled last year due to the pandemic.”

“We do so much in the community and we wanted to do something internally,” said Karen Hanovich, chairperson of Trinity’s Board of Social Ministry. “The skits, sing-a-long and ‘Jeopardy!’ were new additions this year and a great way to celebrate our congregation being together for the first time . . . in a long time.” ▲



Redeeming Life Maternity Home Emphasizes Thanks Throughout Christmas Season

As the calendar pages turn throughout the year, hearts look forward with anticipation to the last two months of the year. November brings memories of family gathered around the table, sharing the Thanksgiving Day feast. December ushers in the joy of the Christmas season and the celebration of the birth of the Christ Child. These months bring with them a hope and expectation that with the changing of the calendar page, the joy of the holiday season will overwhelm and overtake us, overshadowing us with its presence.

For the residents at **Redeeming Life Maternity Home/Sanford, FL**, the experiences and expectations of the holiday season are wide and varied, just as the cultures and backgrounds of the women themselves. Each one brings with them memories, both good and bad, of holiday seasons gone by.

“Thanksgiving was important and special and our leadership made a concentrated effort to instill into our ladies a hope and expectation that goes beyond the turkey and the pumpkin pie,” explains Sheryl DeWitt, executive director for Redeeming Life. “We deliver a message of hope and expectation that is born of the One who makes all of our lives possible.”

“Throughout November, much time is spent during devotions reflecting on and recounting the ways the Lord has blessed each of us individually and corporately. Each resident is given a chance to share specific ways the Lord has touched and blessed the lives of both her and her baby throughout the year.”

Both residents and staff met regularly to carefully plan the menu for the Thanksgiving Day meal. Because of the variety of previous Thanksgiving Day meal experiences, each resident receives the opportunity to prepare a dish of their own design to add to the menu. “The joy of sharing a piece of their Thanksgiving Day tradition with the others gives the women a true sense of ownership in the preparation of

the meal. Though it may or may not look like a traditional Thanksgiving Day spread, each person comes away with a sense of pride in knowing that they contributed their best to the meal,” she continues.

According to DeWitt Thanksgiving, Advent and into the Christmas season there is emphasis on the Redeeming Life residents and staff having so much to be thankful for.

“We thank God for each compassionate donor that gives sacrificially to this ministry to be sure that pregnant, single moms and their babies continue to have a safe place to call home. We thank God for every life we have the opportunity to touch — each single mother that chose to give life to the unplanned, unexpected child growing within her womb.

“Lastly, we thank God for keeping Redeeming Life Maternity Home and all connected with it safely in the Palm of His Hand, and for guiding us with His precious Holy Spirit down the paths that He would have us walk, she concludes.

Redeeming Life is a Christ-centered maternity home that provides a stable environment for single women with unplanned pregnancies. The structured program provides mentoring, counseling and life skills education to help the ladies become independent and provide for their children as single mothers. ▲



Sheryl DeWitt, Executive Director
Redeeming Life Maternity Homes

Did You Know . . .

- \$35 provides nutritious food for one mother for 1 week;
 - \$50 buys disposable diapers for one baby for 2 weeks;
 - \$150 supplies running water for the maternity home for 2 months;
 - \$500 pays for gas for resident transportation for 6 months;
 - \$1,000 provides safe housing for 6 residents for 1 month.
- How can you help? Information is available at 407.790.9745 or via email at info@rlom.org ▲



Ft. Wayne Seminary Hosts One-Day Conference On Ministry in Post-Pandemic World

The Changeless Word in a Changing World: Post-Pandemic Ministry was a one-day conference for pastors, DCEs, deaconesses, other ministry leaders, and lay people, exploring the ministry implications of fully serving the needs of our people, utilizing technology and offering mental health support in the midst of challenging, modern times. It was held on the campus of **Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, IN.**

President of Barna Group David Kinnaman spoke on “State of the Church, Pre- and Post-Pandemic.” He noted what he referred to as the “narcissism of the present”—that oftentimes we, as individuals, think that what we are experiencing things that no one else has experienced. We have some of the best of human inventions right in our pockets and within arms reach every day, so Google has become a “counselor, friend, [almost a replacement] ‘Holy Spirit (ever-present help in time of need).” He addressed the kind of churches, spiritual practices, and leaders we need.

CTSF President Dr. Larry R. Rast Jr. framed his presentation, “An Historical and Contemporary Response of Hope to a Changing World,” by quoting Daniel Aleshirein, “The past does not determine the future but the layers of influence never go away.” He talked about the decline of the LCMS population since 1971 and referenced an Atlantic Magazine Article, “The Evangelical Church is Breaking Apart,” talking about how we are being “catechized by our culture” and that “many Christians have embraced the worst aspects of our culture and our politics.”

“Redeeming Technology,” by the Rev. Trevor Sutton (senior pastor of Christ/Lansing, MI) explored the concept of technology — what it is and how it has been and is applied — in ancient to modern contexts. He compared and contrasted “online church” versus “church online”— how technology is largely the way we take in and view the world and how it can be applied for the good of Christ’s mission and His people.

The Rev. Dr. Richard Marrs, professor of practical theology at

Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO, presented “The State of Mental Health in the Church: ‘Post’-Pandemic.” The church has had a complicated relationship with mental health issues for decades. Fortunately, just as the pandemic brought about new challenges, it also brought about new opportunities for the care of souls in our congregations, and in the community.



In “Bright Hope: Opportunities and Growth in Face of Cultural Changes,” the Rev. Mark Kiessling, director of youth ministry for the LCMS, resonated with Dr. Rast’s description of societal anxiety, with the rapidly changing “Age of Disruption.” Generation Z has already seen a recession, the 20-year anniversary of 9/11, a state of “endless war,” violence in schools (and everywhere), the derailment of life during the height of COVID-19, and another recession following that. There has been a change in attitudes around usual markers/opportunities of “maturity”: people are getting driver’s licenses later, marrying later, fewer Gen Z kids have jobs in high school, and a general decrease in “at risk” behaviors, such as drugs and alcohol. The term “screenagers” is alive and well (although not limited to teenagers), with a pre-pandemic study noting that kids had nine hours of screen time a day (not including school work).

In “Beyond Livestream: Leveraging Technology for Deep Discipleship,” the Rev. Matt Peebles, senior pastor of Bethlehem/Ridgewood, NJ, discussed how to “create authentic connection in a world of content.”

Despite the fact that 90% of churches now offer livestreaming (versus the 10% pre-pandemic), livestreaming is not our only opportunity to leverage technology for the Gospel and the discipling of God’s people. It’s important to evaluate demographics and be intentional in platform use.

The Rev. Dr. Gregory Seltz, executive director of the LCMS Lutheran Center for Religious Liberty in Washington, D.C., addressed the need for “Christ’s Spiritual First Responders for 21st Century Mission.” While modern culture does not value the church and its workers the same way it does other first responders, such attitudes have never stopped the Church’s mission to seek and to save that which was lost. Christians are called to be spiritual first responders, to “love as I have loved you” (John 13:34), to be “ambassadors” (2 Corinthians 5:20), ready and willing to go “into the fire” (Matthew 6:12-14). The world is passionately, confidently confused about basic things in life, as well as arrogantly assured that it has all the answers it needs, and it doesn’t need God.

Seltz says “well-trained, well-prepared, spiritual first responders are needed for such a time as this — to help God’s people in the fires that are burning to destroy their hearts and minds. Most of all, it’s their courage to run into the fire, to run towards the shooter, to run into the rubble, to save and to protect others — even when everyone else is running for their lives. Thankfully, Christ has entered our fire, endured our fire, and brought us through the fire by His death and resurrection. By grace through faith in Him, we are standing on twice-burned ground in Him amidst the fires of sin and death that still rage. Because of his life and legacy, our Lord’s first responders are motivated by grace, with the wisdom of the Word and the mind of Christ for the sake of others. ▲

Greetings on behalf of the **LWML Florida-Georgia District!** We are already looking forward to 2022, where we will hold our district LWML convention in Tampa, FL at the Hilton Downtown, September 29 through October 1.

The new year also marks the 80th anniversary of the LWML.

Eighty cans of food to a food bank? Eighty cookies for your local firehouse? Eighty boxes of crayons for a preschool?

Please send me photos of your 80 to share: patpowell912@yahoo.com and send them to Lutheran Life for publishing in the district magazine: LutheranLife@aol.com.

has gone out into the highways and byways to bring in candidates, but they could use some assistance. Do YOU feel the call to serve? Positions up for election include:

- Treasurer (currently Ada Jarmosevich)
- Vice President Communications (that's me!)

(currently Silvia Grasberger)

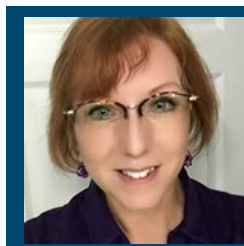
- Pastoral Counselor (currently Rev. Paul Meseke)
- Nominating Committee (3 persons).

If you are interested in learning more about any of these positions, or know someone who would be a good candidate, contact me for more information. I promise I will not arm wrestle anyone into serving. The Holy Spirit can handle that without my help.

Mission grants will be approved at the convention in September. Mission GRANTS! — that means “free money!”

We will also be accepting scholarship applications for district students who are pursuing degrees as pastors and church workers. Mission grant and scholarship information and applications are on our website, www.flgalwml.com. ▲

God's richest blessings on you this Christmas!
Your sister in Christ,
Pat Powell



by Pat Powell
VP Communications
LWML
Florida-Georgia District
patpowell912@yahoo.com



We have been challenged to show “What’s Your 80?” to reflect God’s love by blessing others with 80 ... of something!

At the convention in September, we will elect new officers. Our nominating committee

Vice President Mission Service (currently Deaconess Liz Borth)

- Recording Secretary



Available Resources:

- Gathering Registration Book
- Youth Participant Worksheet
- Adult Leader Worksheet
- Congregational Worksheet
- Special Needs Form
- LCEF Account Form
- Gathering Update Live
- End Goals Podcast
- Frequently Asked Questions



As youth groups return to school and regular youth ministry ramps up a number of National Lutheran Youth Gathering resources are available to youth leaders preparing their youth and adults to attend **In All Things** next summer.

Gathering Registration Data entry is being made available this month. Groups can begin mailing their registration materials to the Gathering Office beginning November 1. Please read each resource carefully before entering in data or sending in registration materials. ▲

Faith & Film Festival Being Presented at Concordia/St. Louis

All Christian theology and film aficionados should mark their calendars for the third annual Faith and Film Festival presented by **Concordia Seminary/ St. Louis, MO** Jan. 27-29, 2022.

The festival serves as an opportunity for participants to explore Christian themes in movies and develop eyes to see film in new ways. Participants will watch films together and engage in challenging discussions with theologians, pastors and film critics about the themes of redemption, reconciliation, mercy, grace and more.

Throughout the festival, participants will attend plenary auditorium screenings, as well as breakout sessions where they will have an option to choose up to three films at registration, each with their own discussion moderator(s). The winners of the Seminary's first-ever short film contest also will be introduced and their films screened during the festival.

"We are excited to welcome people back to campus for the third annual Faith and Film Festival after last year's online-only event. Watching movies and dissecting

them from a faith perspective together is quite rewarding," said Erika Bennett, the Seminary's director of Continuing Education. "We have another great lineup of films and moderators this January. You will not want to miss this chance to engage in rich conversation with experts and others with a passion for the intersection of faith and film. And there will be popcorn too!" ▲

LCMS Colloquy Committee Meets For a Top-Down Review

The Colloquy Committee for Commissioned Ministry (CCCM) met this fall to review the policy manual. The CCCM is responsible for directing "the Synod's activity in matters of colloquies for commissioned ministers." Among its responsibilities are oversight of the colloquy application process and course of study as well as the academic and theological standards for each category of commissioned ministry at all Concordia University System (CUS) schools. The committee reports to the Synod at each convention.

In the LCMS, a commissioned minister is a rostered member of the Synod who serves in a non-ordained position. By far the

majority of commissioned ministers in the LCMS are teachers, but there are also commissioned ministers who serve as deaconesses, directors of Christian education, directors of Christian outreach, directors of church ministries, directors of family life and directors of parish music.

Individuals who did not graduate from a course of study leading to commissioned status in the Synod may apply for a colloquy in order to ensure that they have the theological training, understanding of the Synod, and professional and spiritual attributes necessary for Synod membership. Applicants for colloquy should already have experience in the field in which they are seeking a colloquy.

Currently, the vast majority of colloquy study is completed online through Concordia University Education Network (CUEnet), a cooperative program of the CUS schools. An average of 65 commissioned colloquies are granted each year in the LCMS.

"We are excited about the potential for improvement that we see and are eager to collaborate with colloquy stakeholders in service to the Synod," said The Rev. Peter Lange, CCCM chairman. ▲

Georgia Pastor Served 50 Years in Ministry

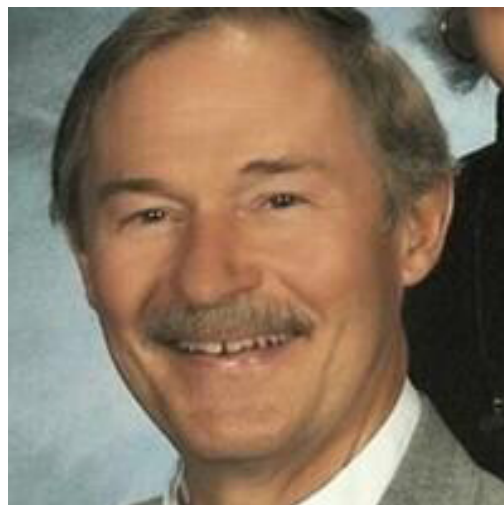
The Rev. Dr. David H. Bernthal, 81, of Juliette, GA earned his Crown of Glory on October 7, 2021.

Rev. Dr. Bernthal received acknowledgement of serving the Lord six years as a Lutheran Teacher and Minister of Education and Youth and 50 years serving the Lord in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS).

He served seven congregations full-time and several congregations as an Interim pastor.

Dr. Bernthal enjoyed hunting and fishing — anything outdoors — as well as spending time with family and friends.

A memorial service was held mid-October. ▲



PASSAGES



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Where Do Our Lutheran Pastors and Teachers Come From?

A pastor has to be a shepherd to his congregation. He must oversee his flock and rely on the power and gifting of the Holy Spirit. One of pastor's duties is to be a teacher. They have to provide discipleship and teach the people how to live like Christ. They must feed the church of God with knowledge. According to the Rev. Dr. James A. Baneck,

executive director of the LCMS Office of Pastoral Education, "**Set Apart to Serve**" was the "overwhelming" choice of the LCMS church workers and youth who took part in a recent survey designed to help with the selection of a name for a program or campaign to recruit.

"Both audiences stated that this name identified church work as something special from God and as the place where He sets them aside for service to Him and others," Baneck said. "Young people resonated with the idea that God has given them the gifts to serve in a role in the church. Adults resonated with the fact that they have a huge impact on moving youth in the direction of church work."

There is no question that enrollment has been declining — dramatically — in both ordained clergy and teachers going into the parochial education system for the LCMS. That's been happening for more than 20 years. That downward trend will result in a dramatic worker shortage in the coming years.

It's hard to imagine but 50% of the Synod's current, active pastors are 55 years or age or older. If seminary enrollment and pastor retirements continue at their current rates, the Synod could go from 6,000 to 3,000 pastors in the next 15 years.

Set Apart to Serve goes beyond recruiting bodies to fill various offices in our teacher and pastor ministries.

It goes beyond attempting to reverse the decline in church workers and instead seeks to "form pastors and church workers to hand over the saving faith to God's people, passing on the Christian faith from one generation to the next until our Savior's return."

The Synod has been laying the groundwork for **Set**

Apart to Serve since 2019, with LCMS Pastoral Education taking the lead by conducting initial research, consulting key influencers across the Synod and securing funding. An outside marketing and communications firm has been retained to assist with this initiative.

Both Concordia Seminary/ St. Louis, MO and Concordia Theological Seminary/Ft. Wayne, IN have been involved in its planning since the beginning — as have the Concordia University System, which operates our colleges and universities throughout the United States. Teacher shortages are real. I'm told the marketing and communications emphasis will have motivating subject-matter designed specifically for three age groups: baptized infants through sixth grade; seventh and eighth grade; and high school.

Luke 10:2 makes the reference "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few" and certainly that is as true today as it was when it was first spoken 2,000 years ago.

Set Apart to Serve seeks to encourage us to commend, financially support, and directly participate in this comprehensive, multi-year church

worker recruitment initiative ... for the proclamation and witness of the Gospel" today and in the years to come.

How can you help? Pray, encourage, give, support, identify gifted individuals and act on it. ▲



The **LAST**
WORD



by John List
FLGA District
Communications Director
Editor, Lutheran Life
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