

LUTHERAN[®] LIFE

2021
ANNUAL
REPORT

The Newsmagazine of the
Florida-Georgia District LCMS
June/July 2021



Resilience
Responsiveness
Results

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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CAPSULES

FLGA District Calls Accepted

Rev. John Mackowiak as
Intentional Interim Pastor at
Abiding Savior/Gainesville, FL
Rev. Gregory Sawyer as
Principal at St. Paul/Lakeland, FL
Vicar Andrew Wrasman as
Pastor Candidate at
Oak Road/Lilburn, GA
Rev. Andrew Scherneck as
Senior Pastor at
Faith/Merritt Island, FL
Vicar William Roberts as
SMP Pastor Candidate at
Faith/Sebring, FL
Rev. Larry Griffin as
Intentional Interim Pastor
at Epiphany/Tallahassee, FL
Candidate Brendon Moore as
Pastor Candidate at
Grace/Winter Haven, FL

Transferred Out of FLGA to Other Districts

3/10/21 Mr. Michael Nowicki to
SELC District (C)
4/29/21 Rev. John Turner to
Rocky Mountain District (O)
5/11/21 Mr. Nickolas Utech to
Iowa East (C)

Transferred Into FLGA from Other Districts

2/25/21 Rev. John Mackowiak from
Ohio District (O)
3/12/21 Mrs. Karen West from
Southeastern District (C)
3/15/21 Ms. Stephanie Schmidt from
Wisconsin District (C)

Installations of Ordained/ Commissioned Ministers

5/9/21 Rev. John Mackowiak Abiding
Savior/Gainesville, FL (O)
5/23/21 Rev. Leon Roberts Holy Cross/
Jacksonville, FL (O)

Initial Placements

1/15/21 Rev. Dr. Leon Roberts Colloquy
as Pastor
Holy Cross/Jacksonville, FL (O)

Status Changes in the District

3/23/21 Mr. Timothy Guelzow from
Candidate to Emeritus (C)
6/1/21 Rev. Craig Bode from
Active to Emeritus (O)
6/1/21 Rev. Nicholas Moskovites from
Active to Emeritus (O)
7/1/21 Ms. Patti Schneider from
Candidate to Emeritus (C)

Called to Glory

3/7/21 Rev. John Glamann (O)
3/10/21 Mr. Walter Halfmann (C)
3/17/21 Ms. Sara Perez-Arche (C)
3/18/21 Rev. Alan Struckmeyer (O)
3/23/21 Rev. James Wiggins, Jr. (O)

Removed from the Roster

4/1/21 Ms. Dallas Arthur | Resigned (C)

Rev. David Wesche of All Saints/Blairsville, GA Appointed to District Board of Directors



The FLGA District Board of Directors voted and appointed The Rev. David Wesche, All Saints/Blairsville, GA to fill the unexpired term of The Rev. David Brighton as Region 1 Vice President.

"After some discussion and prayer Dave has agreed to fulfill the unexpired term of our dear departed brother, David Brighton," offers District President Greg Walton. "We know he will have big shoes to fill, and I am confident that God will continue to bless our partnership as we equip, empower and engage to connect people to Jesus!"

Pastor Wesche has served in the FLGA District since 1979. ■

Rev. Henry Koepchen,

The Rev. Dr. Henry L. Koepchen, who served on the LCMS Board of Directors from 1977 to 1992, died on April 12. He was 89.

Koepchen was born on Sept. 27, 1931, in Elizabeth, N.J., to the Rev. Henry L.F. Koepchen and Edna (Krentz) Koepchen. He graduated from Concordia College New York (CCNY), Bronxville, N.Y., in 1952. He earned his Master of Divinity from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, in 1957. He received an honorary Doctor of Letters from CCNY in 1982.

Koepchen married Louise Bunzel on June 19, 1954. In 1957, Koepchen was called as a missionary for the LCMS Atlantic District to plant Messiah Evangelical

Was Involved With Feeding the Hungry in Gainesville, FL

Abiding Savior's Pastor Alan Struckmeyer Called Home in March



Reverend Alan Dean Struckmeyer was called home March 18, 2021, after a battle with glioblastoma. His loving wife was by his side and his faith gave him strength, even to the end.

Pastor Struckmeyer was born to Marvin and Verna Mae Struckmeyer on December 24, 1959, in Brenham, TX. As a boy, he loved fishing with his father and his sister Cathleen. He would go on to study ministry at Concordia University/Austin, TX, and Concordia

Lutheran Seminary/Saint Louis, MO. He faithfully served as pastor at St. John/Pryor, OK (1986-1989), Immanuel/Temple, TX (1989-2007), and concluded his ministry at Abiding Savior/Gainesville, FL (2007-2021).

During his ministry, Alan enjoyed preaching for the residents of Oak Hammock and The Village in Gainesville and delivering the weekly chapel message for the young students at Abiding Savior's preschool. He loved making a joyful noise singing in the church choir for years. He devoted much of his time to feeding the hungry through Meals of Hope and had a passion for many other charitable organizations.

He faithfully served on mission trips to places like Brazil and Guatemala, spreading the Gospel wherever he went. Alan married the love of his life, Linda Rose Knapp, on November 29, 1985, in Saint Louis, and together they raised three boys, Andrew, Aaron, and Austin. He led his family with faith and determination in the same way he led his congregation. He dedicated his life as a husband and father to teaching his family the Love of Christ and the Joy of the Gospel.

Alan is survived by his wife of 35 years, Linda; sons Andrew (Gaby) of Katy, TX; Aaron (Alex) of Orlando, FL; and Austin (Loren) of Boca Raton, FL; Parents Marvin and Verna Mae Struckmeyer of Navasota, TX; Sister Cathleen Ott of Plano, TX; and a granddaughter (Aaron & Alex) expected September 2021. He was preceded in death by his brother-in-law James Ott and nephews Matthew and Bradley Ott.

Alan's celebration of life took place on Saturday, March 20th at Abiding Savior/ Gainesville, FL and on Monday, April 5, 2021, at Trinity/ Navasota, TX. Both services were live-streamed.

In lieu of flowers, the family humbly requests any gifts or donations be made to the Jubilee Scholarship Fund of Concordia University/Austin, TX or a scholarship or charity of choice. ■

Former Synod Board Chairman

Lutheran Church in Setauket, N.Y. He would remain Messiah's pastor for the entirety of his ministry.

The Messiah congregation first met in the Setauket VFW hall. In 1966, the church broke ground on a building at 465 Pond Path, East Setauket, where it remains today. Koepchen served as Messiah's pastor until his retirement in 1996.

Koepchen served the Atlantic District as a circuit counselor, member of the Board of Directors, vice-president and acting district president (1976). He served on the Synod Board of Directors, first as a member and then as chairman, from 1977 to 1992.

The Rev. Derek Lecakes, president of the Atlantic District, wrote in a district-wide email on April 12, "Pastor Koepchen was a strong supporter of the LCMS throughout his life. ... His love of the Lord, his family and the church will always be remembered."

Koepchen was preceded in death by his wife, Louise. A funeral service took place at Messiah on April 16, with burial at Graceland Memorial Park, Kenilworth, N.J. Memorials may be made to Messiah Evangelical Lutheran Church, 465 Pond Path, East Setauket, NY 11733 or Good Shepherd Hospice, 110 Bi-County Blvd., Suite 114, Farmingdale, NY 11735. ■



PASSAGES

This issue of *Lutheran Life* is intended to give you an overview of ministries and happenings in the Florida-Georgia District. In particular you will find a transparent accounting of our finances. It is intended to clearly show God's blessings of resources and how we are trying to steward them. May God bless your reading of our annual report!

One of my favorite Scripture passages comes from JEREMIAH 29:11, where we read, *"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."*

I have often quoted this verse when working with congregations going through times of transition, or with church workers struggling to clarify God's calling. Most recently it has taken on a very personal nature as I prepare for upcoming transitions in my own life. It has also provided me an opportunity to reflect on the last 12 years.

About 13 years ago my wife "convinced" me to train and run in the Peachtree Road Race on the Fourth of July in Atlanta, Georgia. I am really not much of a runner, although I did run some in college — where I was told I'm really not much of a runner. Some friends had shared what a wonderful time they had running in it for their 25th Anniversary, so it was decided we would run. We did have other friends in the race, and that helped. We trained and prepared, walked and ran for what seems like months before. I vowed that I would probably

be a walker and didn't want to slow my wife down. Walkers are to stay to the right, and I was fully prepared to do so. As we began the run we paced pretty well together and Edith graciously walked with me the few times I slowed down. At one point I looked at her as we ran, passing all the walkers in the right lane, and said, "Who knew we would be left-lane people?" Sometimes God can do more with us than we think or imagine for ourselves.

As we came towards the end of race I could see the banner which marked the finish line. I was exhausted, but

I quoted the only Scripture verse that came to mind, *"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."* Perhaps it was said in jest, but there was also a ring of a serious undertone. Not only has this position been filled with tremendous joys, but it has also been filled, at times, with heartache. And like with the race so many years ago, it seems like the finish line has moved farther away, and at times it is exhausting. As I've quipped, who knew I would get to serve the baker's dozen!

As I reflect back over this time, we have seen some wonderful things

THE RACE IS ON!

determined to finish. It really seemed like the closer we got the further the banner seemed to be. And when we were almost there I broke into a sprint to cross the finish line to have a few seconds better time than my wife, which, considering her staying with me the whole race was kind of sneaky. When the times were posted from the electronic chip on our shoes, she and I had the exact same time. What I most remember about it was how exhausted I felt coming into the home stretch, but going the extra mile to finish well.

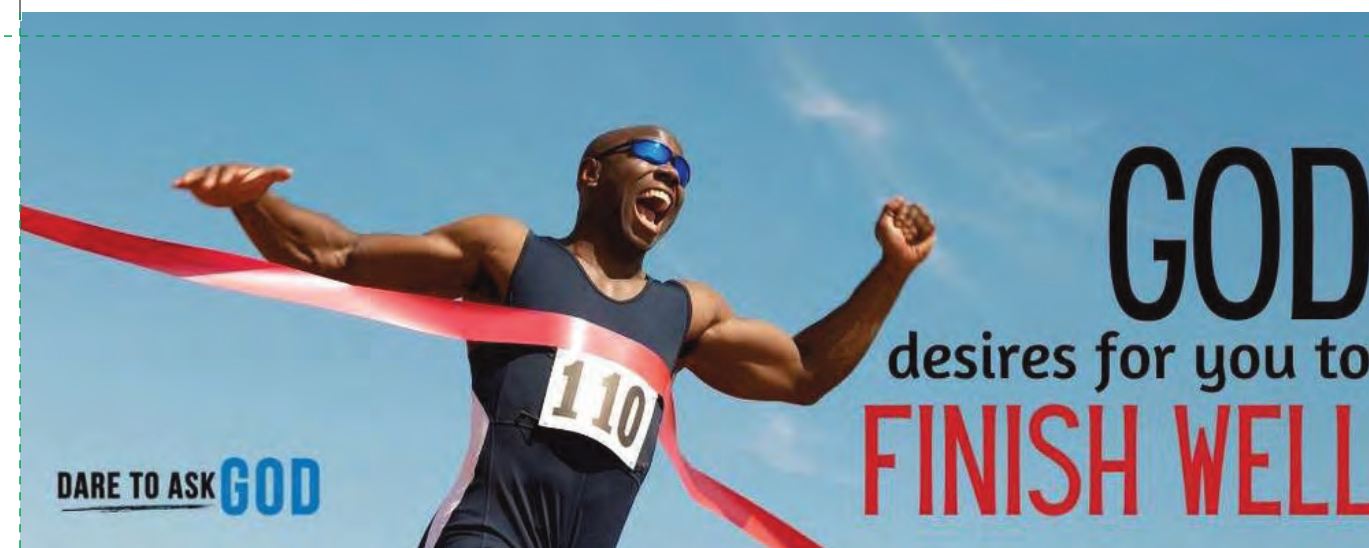
Just about twelve years ago the District Convention elected me for the first time to serve you as District President. To say I was shocked would be an understatement. It has been an honor to serve in this office and to work with the great people of the FLGA District. Some will remember when I first addressed the convention

in the FLGA District. We have been able to wipe out our debt, relocate our office, add and replace staff, see a technology revolution, and watch as we have seen ministries embrace the idea of connecting people to Jesus!

We added resources like the Lutheran Legal League, Ministry Safe, Miracle Seeds and Emergent Leaders. We have been a pilot for a number of opportunities like Grace Place Wellness, Pastoral Leadership Institute, Intentional Interim Ministries, and Lutheran Hour Ministries. We have hosted a wide variety of ministries in our office space, both locally and across the Synod, including the Puerto Rico FORO. We have been a training ground!

We have also faced challenges. We have lost some wonderful leaders who are now with Jesus. We have seen some congregations close, often plagued by financial challenges or a struggle to reach their community. We have seen worship attendance numbers diminish in some places as populations age and younger people often find new and different ways to express their faith and values. We have seen societal and cultural changes and challenges which impact our churches and schools. At times we might be overwhelmed by it all except that our confidence is always in Jesus!

So we press on, as the Apostle Paul would say in PHILIPPIANS 3, for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. That's the finish line! In ROMANS 8 he reminds us, *"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the*



LIFELINES

glory that is to be revealed to us." I am trusting the best days are yet to come. I have heard people in the church world lament the rapid changes we are experiencing all around us. Many of the things believers have grown up with and are accustomed to are no longer as relevant in today's digital environment. Certainly the pandemic enhanced some of these changes, but trends have shown the direction has been a long time coming. Our failure to embrace the transformations all around us or to accept them won't change the reality. God's Word, as always, informs us. Paul writes in 2 CORINTHIANS 4, *"We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies."* I have often said we don't know what the future holds but we do know the One who holds our future, and we are in the good and gracious hands of Jesus!

We aren't alone. I was reading a document about conditions in the Church back in the 1940s and was amazed how the church then dealt with issues not too different than what we find today. The point of the paper I was reading, which the author pointed out with great wisdom, is we need to get back to the Word of God. It is so simple, and yet too easy to come up with all kinds of "churchly" solutions without every turning to the source of our faith. Our future — your future and mine, our future as the FLGA District, is fixed on Jesus and His Word, where we find words of comfort, promise and hope.

We read in His Word, from HEBREWS 12, *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run*

with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted." These words speak to me as I look to the future. They also have something to say to our District.

We have been so blessed in the past by great District leadership. Author Alex Haley was once quoted as saying, *"If you see a turtle on top of a fence post you know he didn't get there by himself."* I stepped into some big shoes, literally, following Gerhard Michael, Ed Trinkein, Tom Zehnder and before him the sainted Lloyd Behnken — all tremendous influences on my life. I think about my dad who went home to Jesus earlier this year and the impact of his witness to me. I think about pastors and professors who have taught me over the years. These are but a few of the great cloud of witnesses that have surrounded me, and have blessed my life. Who is it God has surrounded you with as a witness to you of the love of Jesus? These folks are all around us, encouraging us in the transitions of life, pointing us back to Jesus!

This is where our focus must always be, individually and as a District — on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith. Like Peter, who began to sink in the Sea of Galilee when he took his eyes off Jesus, the broken world all around us throws so many distractions in our path. It is easy to get side tracked. For me the mission is all about connecting people to Jesus. It is so simple and yet at the same time so complex. It's easy to say, but not always as easy to do. Yet, empowered by the

Holy Spirit, we continue to run the race of faith, seeking to finish well for the sake of Jesus.

The finish line seems to move, but our Savior calls us to keep running with endurance, running together, confident that He will enable us to finish well.

The future for the FLGA District is bright — not because of new programs, not because of anticipated changes, not because of huge ministries multiplying and reaching the masses. The future is bright because we have so many dedicated people running the race, keeping their eyes on Jesus, understanding that our future is fixed on Him. I am honored to run this race with all of you, not in the lead, but right with you in the midst of it, sometimes in the right lane, sometimes in the left lane, keeping my eyes on Jesus! May the Holy Spirit inspire us all to keep connecting people to Jesus! ■



With You in the Race!
Gregory A. Walton
President
Florida-Georgia District
Lutheran Church—
Missouri Synod



Despite Pandemic District Continues to Operate With Fiscal Responsibility

Greetings! We in the District Office thank you for your continued prayers, partnership and financial support. We look forward to the opportunities this year to reach many for Jesus. We pray you are in good health and good spirits through Him who strengthens us!

Below is a summary of The FLGA District Financials for Fiscal Year Ending January 31, 2021.



by Laura Zirbel
FLGA District Director of
Finance & Administration
lzirbel@flgadistrict.org

OVERVIEW:
The District congregational giving did not meet the projected budget of \$2.1M. We continue to operate with no real debt and all funds with donor restrictions are fully funded.

Expenses continue to be monitored closely as the missions of the District are funded according to plan.

STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES:
Unrestricted support from congregations totaled \$1,968,298. This was below the budget of \$2.1 million and a decrease of \$171,118. Net Assets Released from Restriction are related to funds set aside by donors for a specific purpose. Net assets released from restriction increased by \$263,969 compared to prior year. This increase was largely due to Soldiers of the Cross COVID-19 grants disbursed throughout the year which totaled \$229,138. Net Assets

are released from restriction at the time the purpose has been satisfied. Restricted funds are not utilized to fund operating expenses and their usage can vary greatly from year to year. Convention, Conferences and Workshop revenue decreased

by \$320,946 compared to the prior year due to the District Convention and other events not occurring as planned and rescheduled for a future date due to COVID-19 related restrictions. Other income increased by \$225,650 as the District received a portion of the proceeds from a church property sale and the District PPP Loan forgiveness was recorded in the year expenses were incurred. Total expenses for FYE 2021 were \$2,933,582 versus \$2,956,451 for FYE 2020, or a decrease of \$22,869. This was due to several factors:

Congregational Services programs had an increase of \$146,529 largely due to distribution of Soldiers of the Cross COVID-19 grants as mentioned. At the same time there was a decrease in expenses in World and National Missions programs as Mission Grants were phased out this year. Additionally, Preparing Church Workers program expenses were reduced as Emergent Leaders Training was canceled due to COVID-19. With Mission and

Ministry Support there was also a decrease in expenses as the District Convention was rescheduled for next fiscal year. Also contributing to the decrease in expenses was the reduction in travel expenses across all programs in response to current world events and efforts to maintain fiscal responsibility.

As always we strive to be good stewards with the funds entrusted to us and work diligently to use them in a manner that meaningfully benefits and supports ongoing ministry. During FYE 2021, we continued to fulfill our tithe commitment to the Synod of 17% of all congregational giving for a total of \$346,423. Additionally, we allocated \$59K or 3% of congregational giving towards the District Revitalization Fund.

The change in Net Assets for the past fiscal year was an increase of \$1,052,875. This increase was due to donor restricted endowments received by the LCMS Foundation to benefit the Florida Georgia District. These endowments are restricted by the donor for educational purposes.

2021 WORK PROGRAM:
The highlights of the 2021 work program are as follows:
Congregational support continues to be budgeted at \$2,100,000.

Through unanimous support of the Board of Directors, the budgeted tithe on congregational support received at the District remains set at 20%. This is broken down into two components. Synod receives 17% of this support and the remaining 3% is budgeted to further fund District Revitalization efforts. The Missions budget moves forward this year with Mission Loan, Kingdom Seed and Miracle Grow programs exclusively. The Missions budget continues to support our (4) campus ministries and (9) other Lutheran Service Organizations (e.g., Lutheran Services Florida and Mission Haiti), as well as taking care of various maintenance expenses at District owned property in Athens, GA, Fort Myers, FL, Tallahassee, FL and Naples, FL.

We believe this work program is fiscally responsible, within our current funding forecast and it continues to enable the District to serve, assist and encourage the congregations of the District in the ministry of Jesus Christ. The Board of Directors and District Staff continue to monitor expenses and will make necessary adjustments as required.

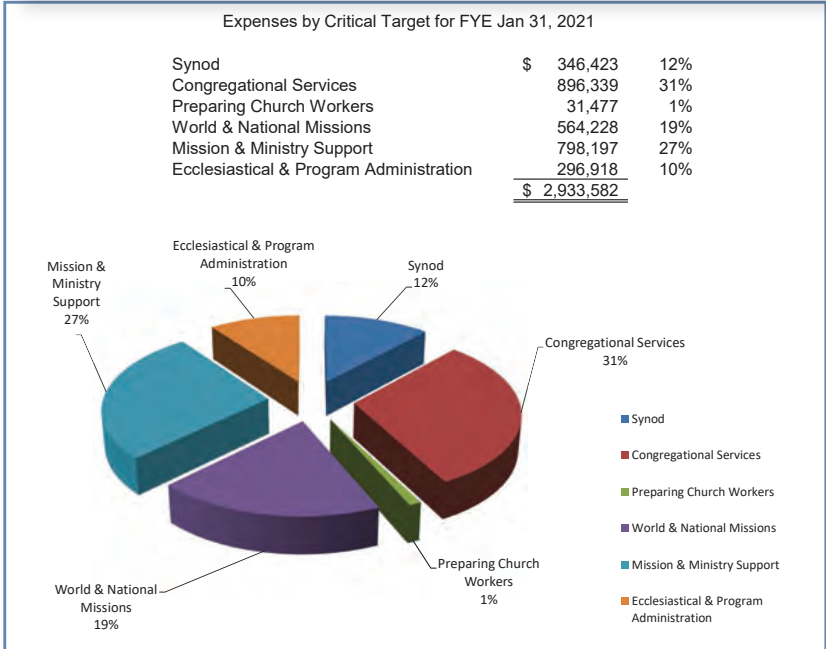
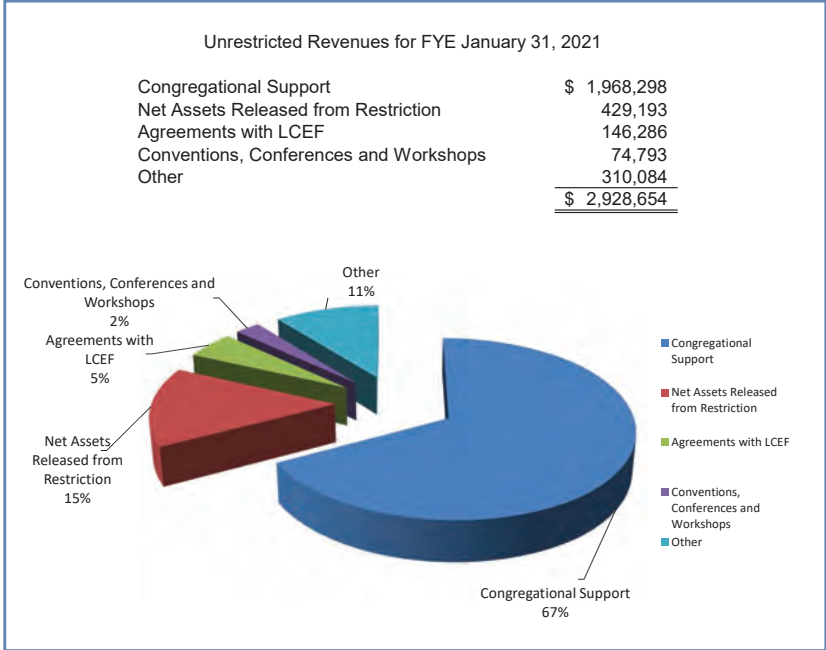
If you have any questions regarding this report, please feel free to contact me at the District office. May God continue to bless and keep you in His care!

Respectfully Submitted,

Laura E. Zirbel

Florida-Georgia District The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Statements of Financial Position Audited Results		
	January 31, 2021	January 31, 2020
Assets		
Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$ 2,678,022	\$ 2,898,856
Accounts Receivable	8,557	35,590
Prepaid Expense	61,519	89,786
From Split-Interest Agreements	121,134	129,722
Property and Equipment, net	300,567	371,093
Advance Sites	1,732,414	1,724,297
Long-Term Investments	2,031,547	2,025,358
Other Assets	2,105,859	804,382
Total	\$ 9,039,619	\$ 8,079,084
Liabilities and Net Assets		
Accounts Payable	\$ 98,885	\$ 140,779
Deferred Revenue	17,281	67,727
Other Liabilities	222,780	222,780
Total Liabilities	338,946	431,286
Net Assets		
Without Donor Restrictions	4,374,248	4,379,176
With Donor Restrictions	4,326,425	3,268,622
Total Net Assets	\$ 8,700,673	\$ 7,647,798
Total	\$ 9,039,619	\$ 8,079,084

Florida-Georgia District The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Statements of Activities Audited Results			
	For The Years Ended January 31,	2021	2020
UNRESTRICTED REVENUES			
Congregation Support		\$ 1,968,298	\$ 2,139,416
Net Assets Released from Restriction		429,193	165,224
Agreements with LCEF		146,286	152,947
Convention, Conferences and Workshops		74,793	395,739
Gifts, Property		-	-
Other		310,084	84,434
Total revenues		2,928,654	2,937,760
EXPENSES			
Synod		346,423	365,813
Congregational Services *		896,339	749,810
Preparing Church Workers		31,477	61,422
Missions		564,228	599,071
Mission and Ministry Support**		798,197	844,537
Ecclesiastical Administration		296,918	335,798
Total expenses		2,933,582	2,956,451
CHANGE IN NET ASSETS			
Without Donor Restriction		(4,928)	(18,691)
With Donor Restriction		1,057,803	373,922
Total change in net assets		1,052,875	355,231
NET ASSETS - BEGINNING OF YEAR		\$ 7,647,798	\$ 7,292,567
NET ASSETS - END OF YEAR		\$ 8,700,673	\$ 7,647,798
* Includes School Ministries, Convocation, Conferences, Disaster Relief, Human Care, Church Worker Family Care			
** Includes Conventions			



Florida-Georgia District Support

By Circuit & Congregation FYE 2020

City/State	Circuit and Congregation	Annual Financial Support	Number of Confirmed Members	\$ Support Per Member
01 — Northeast Georgia Circuit				
Athens GA	Christus Victor	12,000	60	200.00
Athens GA	Trinity	11,000	205	53.66
Buford GA	St. John		22	—
Blairsville GA	All Saints	19,862	118	168.32
Commerce GA	Christ the King	6,172	32	192.88
Dahlonega GA	St. Peter	10,897	47	231.85
Gainesville GA	Good Shepherd	5,000	194	25.77
Lilburn GA	Oak Road	31,513	213	147.95
Toccoa GA	Trinity	1,832	48	38.17
Circuit Totals/Average		\$98,276	939	\$104.66
02 — Atlanta North Circuit				
Atlanta GA	Grace	6,000	83	72.29
Atlanta GA	Rivercliff	70,390	316	222.75
Cartersville GA	Savior of All	11,000	185	59.46
Cumming GA	Living Faith	49,409	261	189.31
Jasper GA	King of Kings	6,600	94	70.21
Kennesaw GA	Living Hope	1,600	320	5.00
Marietta GA	Faith	13,200	347	38.04
Rome GA	Holy Trinity	2,475	101	24.50
Tucker GA	St. Mark	8,345	99	84.29
Woodstock GA	Timothy	15,000	357	42.02
Circuit Totals/Average		\$184,019	2,163	\$85.08
03 — Atlanta South Circuit				
Columbus GA	Bethlehem	1,000	53	18.87
Columbus GA	LC of the Redeemer	4,317	185	23.34
Decatur GA	Peace	982	70	14.03
Douglasville GA	Prince of Peace	200	68	2.94
East Point GA	Christ	—	60	—
Hampton GA	Christ Our Savior	11,92	79	150.95
Peachtree City	St. Paul	14,505	186	77.98
Stockbridge GA	Holy Cross	—	25	—
Stockbridge GA	Lord of Life	—	25	—
Tucker GA	Incarnate Word	500	40	12.50
Circuit Totals/Average		\$33,428	791	\$42.26
05 — Tallahassee Circuit				
Albany GA	Trinity	2,400	98	24.49
Crawfordville FL	Trinity	1,800	37	48.65
Lake City FL	Our Redeemer	1,200	86	13.95
Tallahassee FL	Epiphany	25,002	309	80.91
Tallahassee FL	University Lutheran	7,370	81	90.99
Tifton GA	Peace	2,705	13	208.08
Valdosta GA	Messiah	—	105	—
Circuit Totals/Average		\$40,477	729	\$55.52
06 — First Coast Circuit				
Jacksonville FL	Grace	6,350	353	17.99
Jacksonville FL	Holy Cross	250	44	5.68
Jacksonville FL	Hope	2,750	58	47.41
Jacksonville FL	Our Redeemer	1,000	97	10.31
Jacksonville FL	St. Paul	8,000	204	39.22
Jaxv'ile Beach FL	Bethlehem	20,000	434	46.08
Kingsland GA	Holy Trinity	3,330	125	26.64
Middleburg FL	St. Peter's	13,823	212	65.20
St. Augustine FL	Christ Our Savior	—	68	—
Starke FL	Good Shepherd	—	28	—
Circuit Totals/Average		\$55,503	1,623	\$34.20

City/State	Circuit and Congregation	Annual Financial Support	Number of Confirmed Members	\$ Support Per Member
07 — North Central Florida Circuit				
Chiefland FL	Good Shepherd	500	44	11.36
Dunnellon FL	Peace	2,200	72	30.56
Gainesville FL	Abiding Savior	22,924	227	100.99
Gainesville FL	First	41,747	216	193.27
Inverness FL	First	1,015	260	3.90
Lecanto FL	Faith	12,350	170	72.65
Ocala FL	Our Redeemer	17,095	342	49.99
Ocala FL	St. John	10,000	453	22.08
Oxford FL	Amazing Grace	46,470	252	184.40
Silver Springs FL	Forest	3,449	27	127.74
Summerfield FL	Trinity	41,000	813	50.43
Circuit Totals/Average		\$198,751	2,876	\$69.11
08 — Space Coast Circuit				
Cape Canaveral FL	Christ	2,500	75	33.33
Holly Hill FL	Trinity	3,000	118	25.42
Merritt Island FL	Faith	11,000	465	23.66
Palm Bay FL	Risen Savior	—	88	—
Rockledge FL	Trinity	—	131	—
South Daytona FL	Holy Cross	—	175	—
Titusville FL	Good Shepherd	13,796	256	53.89
Circuit Totals/Average		\$30,296	1,308	\$23.16
09 — Orlando East Circuit				
Casselberry FL	Ascension	26,500	283	93.64
Deltona FL	LC of Providence	—	129	—
Orlando FL	Esperanza Viva	—	10	—
Orlando FL	Hope	12,516	93	134.58
Orlando FL	Live UCF	125	30	4.17
Orlando FL	Prince of Peace	17,925	565	31.73
Orlando FL	Trinity	37,904	868	43.67
Sanford FL	LC of the Redeemer	3,000	92	32.61
St. Cloud FL	Grace	500	131	3.82
Circuit Totals/Average		\$98,470	2,201	\$44.74
10 — Orlando West Circuit				
Apopka FL	St. Paul	—	43	—
Eustis FL	Faith	35,374	439	80.58
Winter Garden FL	Zion New Life	—	112	—
Leesburg FL	Bethany	7,797	123	63.39
Montverde FL	Woodlands	20,200	444	45.50
Orlando FL	Christ the King	2,000	343	5.83
Orlando FL	Our Savior	2,050	104	19.71
Circuit Totals/Average		\$67,421	1,608	\$41.93
11 — Winter Haven Circuit				
Bartow FL	Redeemer	—	48	—
Lake Wales FL	Lake Wales	3,100	57	54.39
Lakeland FL	Christ	25,200	196	128.57
Lakeland FL	St. Paul	2,500	1003	2.49
Plant City FL	Hope	34,969	351	99.63
Winter Haven FL	Grace	49,542	1067	46.43
Zephyrhills FL	Our Savior	8,925	198	45.08
Circuit Totals/Average		\$124,236	2,920	\$42.55
12 — Heartland Circuit				
Arcadia FL	Grace	—	25	—
Avon Park FL	Christ	6,904	50	138.08
Belle Glade FL	St. Peter's	550	16	34.38
Clewiston FL	Faith	5,595	40	139.88
Lake Placid FL	Trinity	4,800	128	37.50
Okeechobee FL	Peace	6,000	295	20.34
Sebring FL	Faith	19,085	171	111.61
Wauchula FL	Peace Valley	1,200	15	80.00
Circuit Totals/Average		\$44,134	740	\$59.64

City/State	Circuit and Congregation	Annual Financial Support	Number of Confirmed Members	\$ Support Per Member
13 — Suncoast Circuit				
Brooksville FL	Christ	2,500	210	11.90
Hudson FL	Hope	1,315	147	8.95
Lutz FL	Holy Trinity	7,585	198	38.31
Masaryktown FL	Holy Trinity	18,020	170	106.00
New Port Richey, FL	Faith	5,417	189	28.66
Spring Hill FL	Forest Oaks	175	210	0.83
Trinity FL	Trinity	3,600	210	17.14
Circuit Totals/Average		\$38,611	1,334	\$28.94
14 — St. Petersburg Circuit				
Clearwater FL	Bethel	2,500	576	4.34
Clearwater FL	First	7,150	262	27.29
Dunedin F	Faith	10,250	131	78.24
Largo FL	Christ the King	—	428	—
St. Petersburg FL	Grace	18,596	590	31.52
St. Petersburg FL	Our Savior	55,807	858	65.04
Circuit Totals/Average		\$94,302	2,845	\$33.15
15 — Tampa Circuit				
Brandon FL	Immanuel	1,200	364	3.30
Riverview FL	Christ the King	—	95	—
Tampa FL	Holy Trinity	4,125	250	16.50
Tampa FL	Messiah	73,776	683	108.02
Tampa FL	Messiah Hispanic	1,962	146	13.44
Tampa FL	Zion	—	18	—
Circuit Totals/Average		\$81,062	1,556	\$52.10
16 — Sarasota Circuit				
Bradenton FL	Hope	8,000	150	53.33
Englewood FL	Redeemer	—	140	—
Parrish FL	Faith	12,870	241	53.40
Port Charlotte FL	LC of the Cross	22,250	305	72.95
Port Charlotte FL	Trinity	3,500	85	41.18
Punta Gorda FL	Faith	12,000	250	48.00
Sarasota FL	Beautiful Savior	52,857	372	142.09
Sarasota FL	Concordia	30,000	224	133.93
Sarasota FL	Good Shepherd	3,000	214	14.02
Venice FL	Lakeside	10,000	238	42.02
Circuit Totals/Average		\$154,477	2,219	\$69.62
17 — Southwest Circuit				
Bonita Springs FL	Amigos en Cristo	500	11	45.45
Bonita Springs FL	Hope	—	358	—
Cape Coral FL	Trinity	2,343	205	11.43
Esterio FL	Thrive	5,000	74	67.56
Ft. Myers FL	Bethlehem	—	76	—
Ft. Myers FL	St. Michael	43,000	808	53.22
Ft. Myers FL	Zion	15,750	344	45.78
Immokalee FL	Immokalee	1,060	11	96.36
LaBelle FL	Christ the King	—	25	—
Lehigh Acres FL	Beautiful Savior	300	32	9.38
Marco Island FL	Marco Lutheran	45,012	520	86.56
Naples FL	Grace	54,000	367	147.14
Naples FL	Peace	—	156	—
North Ft. Myers FL	LC Good Shepherd	3,010	138	21.81
Circuit Totals/Average		\$169,975	3,125	\$54.39

City/State	Circuit and Congregation	Annual Financial Support	Number of Confirmed Members	\$ Support Per Member
18 — Treasure Coast Circuit				
Ft. Pierce FL	Trinity	2,000	131	15.27
Hobe Sound FL	Bethel	—	46	—
Lake Worth FL	New Alliance	—	3	—
North Palm Bch FL	Faith	1,500	171	8.77
Port St. Lucie FL	Grace	12,000	177	67.80
Stuart FL	Redeemer	57,850	471	122.82
Vero Beach FL	LC of Redeemer	7,500	145	51.72
West Palm Bch FL	Redeemer	—	32	—
Circuit Totals/Average		\$80,850	1,176	\$68.75
19 — South Palm Beach Circuit				
Boca Raton FL	St. Paul	30,000	1618	18.54
Boynton Beach	FL Son Life	25,677	401	64.03
Delray Beach FL	Emmanuel Haitian	—	67	—
Delray Beach FL	Trinity	—	373	—
Lake Worth FL	Epiphany	4,167	123	33.88
Lake Worth FL	Our Savior	8,938	109	82.00
Lake Worth FL	Salem Haitian	—	97	—
Circuit Totals/Average		\$68,782	2,788	\$24.67
20 — Gold Coast Circuit				
Davie FL	Gloria Dei	4,445	306	14.53
Ft. Lauderdale FL	Faith	1,100	46	23.91
Ft. Lauderdale FL	LC Good Shepherd	—	40	—
Ft. Lauderdale FL	Mont Garizim	—	50	—
Ft. Lauderdale FL	Shepherd of Coast	8,000	244	32.79
Ft. Lauderdale FL	Trinity Haitian	200	1	200.00
Ft. Lauderdale FL	Trinity	500	251	1.99
Hollywood FL	Prince of Peace	600	46	13.04
Miramar FL	Miramar	1,000	33	30.30
Ft. Lauderdale FL	Le Tabernacle Grace	—	265	—
Plantation FL	Our Savior	8,000	354	22.60
Weston FL	St. Paul	52,840	643	82.18
Circuit Totals/Average		\$76,685	2,279	\$33.65
21 — Monroe-Miami-Dade Circuit				
Hialeah FL	Faith	—	163	—
Hialeah FL	St. Andrews	500	34	14.71
Kendall FL	Concordia	2,400	146	16.44
Key West FL	Grace	—	128	—
Leisure City FL	Hospital Luterana	880	256	3.44
Marathon FL	Martin Luther	—	72	—
Miami FL	Bay Shore	2,500	75	33.33
Miami FL	Our Saviour	—	49	—
Miami FL	San Pablo Luterana	500	45	11.11
Miami FL	St. Matthews	1,881	73	25.77
Miami FL	St. Paul	3,562	50	71.24
Culter Bay FL	Trinity	—	9	—
Nassau Bahamas	LC of Nassau	—	125	—
North Miami FL	Holy Cross	14,883	185	80.45
Tavernier FL	Immanuel	—	45	—
Circuit Totals/Average		\$27,106	1,455	\$18.63
Grand Totals/Average		\$1,968,298	38,172	\$51.56

Editor's Note: Congregation Support included certain Unrestricted Gifts and gifts for missions. Confirmed Members numbers have been obtained from LCMS Rosters and Statistics which are the latest numbers available.

Multi-Cultural Opportunities Abundant in the Florida-Georgia District



Christian missionaries from all over the world live in the United States and preach the gospel. Their work is the focus of Mission Nation Publishing, a five-year-old ministry in partnership with the FLGA District, and an organization driven to share their stories and the reality of their sacrifices.

We feature families from across the globe on assignments — in every corner of the country — Mission Nation Publishing highlights their experiences in books and on video.

Supporting missionaries spreads the word of God. Praying for families on mission fields and holding them close in your heart, provides strength and protection.

I have been an LCMS pastor for four decades and have served as a parish pastor, the Mission Executive for the English District and for 18 years in my last call, the head of Missions in North America for the LCMS. I'm pleased to report that many Korean, Indian, Chinese, Hispanic, African, Japanese, blind, deaf, Jewish, Pakistani and Hmong leaders and congregations have a membership in the Synod through the work of our missions programs.

What do you think when a missionary from Palestine tells you, "Jesus said, 'Go to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth,' — and to me the end

of the earth is America." That is what missionary Nader Alaraj says in a recent interview with Mission Nation Publishing.

"For more than 100 years, Lutherans have sent missionaries overseas; today the sons and daughters, grandsons, and granddaughters of those brought to faith by the witness of those missionaries are bringing the faith back to America.



Nader Alaraj delivering groceries during the COVID-19 pandemic to an Iranian gentleman.

"We see these new missionaries as gifts from a God who has watched the church in America decline," Alaraj explains, "and we have seen the growing diversity of the US population. The latest demographic studies tell us that white English-speaking people are 59% of the population."

That has significance for Lutherans who by all measures are more than 90% white English-speaking people of European origin.

"The glass is more than half empty! There is a lot of room for mission outreach," Alaraj emphasizes.

The United States is the third largest mission field in the world. As our culture becomes more and more unchurched, we will learn from those who come to our communities as refugees and immigrants. Many of them are Christians who are not afraid to experiment and innovate in new contexts.

This can be said about Missionaries John and Yolima Cobos — currently working out of Messiah/Carrollton, FL. The Rev. Mark Adrian, pastor of Messiah, says these two missionaries have used a variety of methods to reach the Hispanic community with the love of Jesus.

"Deaconess Yolima is a director for Mary Kay Cosmetics," Adrian says. "She introduces women

in ways to make themselves look better, but at the same time to better know Jesus.

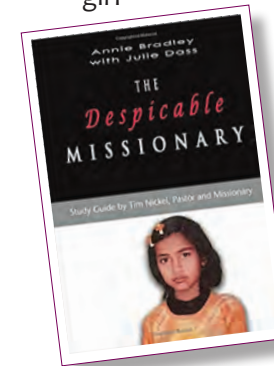


John and Yolima Cobos

"John Cobos received his education to become a pastor through the Center for Hispanic Studies at Concordia Seminary/ St. Louis, MO. This innovative strategy helps Spanish-speaking candidates for the ministry work towards ordination for men and deaconess ministry for women."

The FLGA District has been blessed by new initiatives like this that broaden our outreach to different ethnic groups.

Julie Dass grew up as a Christian girl in Pakistan.



Persecuted from her time in grade school Julie almost died in riots against Christians during the 1980s. She is currently serving as a missionary in Atlanta, GA. Mission Nation published her biography, "The Despicable Missionary," about what life was like for a Christian girl in a Muslim country. It is also a narrative about learning to forgive.

New missionaries like Julie can teach us what it is like to minister on a mission field. I like to remind people that the 2001 Synod convention declared the United States of America as a mission field.

"We are on the road most weekends for mission presentations with different FL/GA churches and are coordinating Zoom classes for seminary students and catechism students," Dass adds. "I'm enrolled

in Riga Luther Academy for a Bachelors of Theology Degree and will pursue the Deaconesses route at the end of three years via one of our Concordia seminaries. We currently are awaiting Jay's call papers from Synod-Eurasia Mission.

We will attend the LWML Convention in June and plan to leave by the end of July 2021.

"Please keep us in your prayers as we are trying to raise funds for mission. Right now nine young Christian men are attending the seminary classes via Zoom and plan to be



Jay & Julie Dass

in Wittenberg from October 30th to November 7 for an intensive course on Lutheran Liturgy. We are still conducting catechism classes for our 27 children via Zoom. There are 17 baptisms scheduled for September 2021!"

Mission Nation was recently blessed by the FLGA District LWML with a grant to help publish another mission biography. Mission Nation Publishing has recorded more than seventy video interviews with missionaries; these are described in a blog that appears on our website, www.MissionNationPublishing.org. Mission Nation — partnering with the FLGA District — has applied for a national grant from the LWML to develop more resources to help churches reach an ethnic group different from their own.

The FLGA District is blessed with a multi-cultural demographic featuring many people groups and offering many opportunities for loving and serving and

witnessing in Jesus' name. Nearly every congregation has the opportunity to partner with a congregation of another people group or to develop a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural congregation.



by Robert Scudieri
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It is especially vital that we work to include our second-generation English-speaking children of immigrants in our congregations. How many of our congregation memberships look like the ethnic makeup of their school districts?

This project will help our lay leaders and pastors grow their congregation to look a little more like the vision of John in REVELATION 7:9-10. We will help congregations listen and develop relationships with their immigrant neighbors, learning from them as well as doing ministry with them.

North America today is a cultural mosaic of God's children; we need all kinds of churches for all kinds of people. While not every context demands high levels of diversity, as North America continues to become more complex, churches that reflect diversity and mission strategies led by meaningfully diverse teams demonstrate the power of the Gospel to a non-believing world in a unique way.

Please pray for this and other mission initiatives in the FLGA District and our LCMS. If you are interested in knowing more, contact either Peter Meier, FLGA Executive Director of Missions and Outreach at pmeier@flgadistrict.org or me at bscudieri@gmail.com. ■

Editor's Note: Dr. Scudieri was the head of mission work in North America for the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. During that time he was the co-founder of the Lutheran Society for Missiology, which publishes the journal "Missio Apostolica," recently renamed "Lutheran Mission Matters." He served as chair of the Society for twenty years and remains on the board of "Mission Matters." On a sabbatical as a post doctoral Research Fellow at Yale Divinity School he wrote "Apostolic Church." He is a frequent lecturer and remains a consultant for missions on the national, district and local levels. He and his wife, Lynn, live in Naples, Florida.

Stepping Stone Mission: Care for the Least of These

In July 2009, a pastor took a group of young people for a homeless experience on the streets of our Nation's Capital, Washington, DC. When the pastor returned to Atlanta, GA his heart was touched by the homeless situation right in his hometown.



Joseph & Sharon Song

That Pastor was Rev. Joseph Song and the nonprofit organization that was initiated as a consequence of the experience is Stepping Stone Mission to serve the homeless. Pastor Song calls this ministry his "surprise calling." Pastor Song said, "I was like Martin Luther, struck by a lightning bolt, and changed significantly. I began to start a homeless ministry for those in downtown Atlanta. I was struck with the way people were living and was certain I had been called by the Holy Spirit and God to this ministry."

To witness the hand of the Lord on this ministry and the impact it makes we are certain that is true. Rev. Song was called to this work and the Lord is supporting His servant who is faithful in ministry. Stepping Stone Mission is a Recognized Service Organization (RSO) of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod that strives to assist the homeless community in Atlanta with the proclamation of the Gospel as well as providing our brothers and sisters with food, basic necessities, and assistance in moving forward toward rehabilitation, life healing, and stability.

Rev. Song is the Founder and President of this ministry. Along with his wife Sharon and a host of volunteers from a variety of ministries, the plight of the homeless in metropolitan Atlanta is made a bit less daunting.

Stepping Stone Mission strives to be a caring, loving, growing community of Christians who preach the Gospel, teach God's Word, and extend the compassion of Christ to our homeless brothers and sisters in Atlanta so that they can be identified, built up, and unified in the Body of Christ.

Stepping Stone mission uses a three-pronged approach to help organize their work. *Worship and Devotion, Sharing and Caring and Leadership Training.* The center of everything at Stepping Stone Mission is the Word of God and catechesis. Every Wednesday and Friday the men of Stepping Stone gather for a time of prayer, devotion, and study.

Pastor Song gives weekly verses to the men that they are to memorize and recite when asked. Occasionally a kind sponsor will provide gift cards and Marta card for public transportation that can be used to incentivize this learning and recitation. Another element of the Stepping Stone Mission is the way that the men reach out with the Gospel of Jesus Christ in song. The men led by Mrs.



Stepping Stone Choir

Song have formed a choir that sings a variety of music that ranges from classical hymnody to African American spirituals. Do not be surprised to hear some Korean, Spanish, or Latin mixed in with the American English as well.

The men have used their gift of song to inspire congregations on feast days such as Christmas and Easter as well as special events such as church anniversaries, ordinations, and installations. They will also give a presentation at the yearly celebration of ministry shared by Stepping Stone in which many artists from the Korean and American church community come to share. There is even the

occasional barber shop quartet.

Sharing and caring is the element of the ministry that seeks to provide relief to the brothers and sisters who live on the street. Once a week Pastor Song will visit Hurt Park in Atlanta with food for the homeless men and women. Through a partnership with Bombas socks, and working



Song with members of Trinity/Savannah, GA

with Trinity/Savannah, GA, Stepping Stone is able to distribute over 20,000 pairs of socks to the homeless.

There are also clothes that are donated and distributed to assist those in need. Stepping Stone ministry has many partners who help support the Sharing and Caring element of the ministry from both the Lutheran congregations and the Korean Presbyterian congregations in metro Atlanta.

Volunteers from these congregations supply funds for the ministry and during the retreats provide intensive leadership training for the brothers as well as three daily meals and snacks.

The brothers can spend their time, usually at Daniel Prayer Garden in Alpharetta, without concern for anything other than refreshment and study. The ministry of Stepping Stone is grateful to God to see lives changed and people impacted with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

One brother came and filled his pockets full of whatever was being offered. Pastor Song helped him see how unnecessary that was and soon the brother relaxed, learned to share again, and became a great leader. Another was a big burly man who was perpetually angry and abrasive. That helps on the street but through the consistent love and teaching ministry of Mrs. Song the man became "like

a big teddy bear." Another man, a homeless veteran, about 60 years old, had a daughter die and his wife divorce him. He became lost and hopeless. He tried to commit suicide three times. During a leadership retreat he gave a testimony about how the Holy Spirit changed his mind and his life.

This man no longer wants to take his life. He went to the VA hospital for help, regained his hope and is doing well.



Stepping Stone Mission Secretary Joy Wilkins

These are a few of the examples of lives changed and hope restored through the ministry of Pastor Song and Stepping Stone. One ministry volunteer, Mrs. Joy Wilkins, is fond

of saying, "There are long term members and others who pass through the ministry, but God uses the ministry of Stepping Stone to bless them at the proper time."

The ministry of Stepping Stone has been impacted by the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic in a few ways. This has not stopped Pastor Song and a few volunteers from continuing to work for the homeless in Atlanta. Every Saturday Pastor Song continues to volunteer downtown to feed and counsel the homeless. Before pandemic perhaps thirty would be reached but now five. Song says, "The rate of homelessness in Atlanta continues to decline. Some homeless men have moved to suburbs."



Stepping Stone has been impacted by the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic

Song anticipates an increase in the homeless population with evictions looming and people who have lost their jobs. Food insecurity is also an emerging pattern for families. Song believes we will not understand the full impact of this pandemic shutdown for years to come. They are now conducting Bible Studies using ZOOM for the homeless brothers in downtown shelters instead of in-person training on Wednesday and Friday. This continues to be an important connection point for receiving prayer requests and updates on the men in the ministry. Many Lutheran pastors in the area continue to volunteer as teachers.

Stepping Stone ministry recently purchased property to begin a New Life Village Ministry Center in Rockdale County Georgia. God was gracious to provide the resources for the purchase and funding for a loan through the ministry of the Lutheran Church Extension Fund. This 30-acre property is the fulfillment of a dream Pastor Song has to provide a residential facility for some of the homeless men. Pastor Song and the Stepping Stone board of directors are working to develop the campus. Pastor Song hopes to have three or four homeless brothers live at the New Life Village by the end of the year. Song says, "The brothers will begin developing a farm and garden area. Many of the brothers who cannot work full time jobs because of their health and age will be assisted as we expand training for leaders in agriculture and animal husbandry. We will make a greenhouse and start growing flowers and produce for sale to support the ministry."

Pastor Song and the members of the board of directors are extremely thankful for the financial support that has come to the ministry. There are a variety of ways to help — they can use gardening tools of any sort including lawn mowers, weed trimmers, and clippers. Of course, food and clothes for the brothers is always welcome. Because we have acquired the New Life Center, we have need for materials to refurbish the barn and there is a garden being planned so flower and vegetable

seeds are also very much appreciated.

We can also use expertise. Stepping Stone will need assistance with the farm and greenhouse as it develops. Property maintenance such as cutting the pasture and grooming at the fence line is also required. There is a need for help



by Victor Belton
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Florida-Georgia District
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in property development as some excavation is required to level off some land and direct water from underground to use for the plants. Funds are always welcome to purchase materials and to make the house comfortable for the brothers who will live there. Linens, towels, bedding, washcloths, toiletries, and other in-kind materials are welcome donations



Those blessed with financial resources are asked to consider making a two-year regular monthly pledge of any amount to help retire the mortgage on the property. "We hope to have the property fully paid off within a few years so that we can expand our ministry to include 'tiny houses' to help serve many more members of the homeless community," Song concludes. If you would like to assist with the ministry of Stepping Stone Mission to the homeless, please visit www.steppingstonemission.net for more information or contact one of the ministry leaders. Pastor Joseph Song can be reached by email at joseph@steppingstonemission.net, or reach ministry assistant Joy Wilkins at joyfultobehere@gmail.com, or Development Chairman, Victor Belton at vjbelton@gmail.com. ■

Care & Comfort Fund Created for Concordia/New York Displaced Workers

The Florida-Georgia District has benefited greatly over the years from the ministry provided by Concordia College/New York (formerly Bronxville). Many of the District's pastors, teachers, musicians and lay people have passed through the "East Coast Concordia" on their way to meaningful leadership and participation in ministry.

Earlier this year it was announced that Concordia/New York will be closing its doors this spring. The campus has already been sold.

As a District that has benefited abundantly from the ministry of this school the FLGA District now has the opportunity to minister to those who are need of help and care — the faculty and staff that will soon be unemployed as a result of the school's closure.

The Atlantic District, under the leadership of President Derek Lecakes, in partnership with the other East Coast

Districts of the Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, have formed the "Comfort and Care Fund."

This fund will be available to all faculty and staff and will be used, in full, to support their various needs in this time. Monies will be distributed using a grant process created by a team of alumni: Barry Keurulainen '72, Tom Marks '76, Kevin Cook '76, Richard Norris '79, Jeffrey Skopak '88, Jennifer Gross Blackwood '94, Bill Harmon '94 Chair of the committee, and Mike Hricko (father of alumnae from '14 and '17).

"Our desire is to help as many faculty and staff as we are able," reports Pastor Jeffrey Skopak, "the need is great. Consider the Residence Counselor who now has to find not only a new job but a new home. Or the office worker whose medical bills cannot wait until

all the finances of the school are figured out. Or the professor who is applying for new positions but until that time has to cover rent or a mortgage. These individuals have bills to pay and food to put on the table."

The Care & Comfort Fund will be able to offer support needed.

"Our goal is to raise \$300,000," Skopak continues. "We have been offered a matching grant for \$75,000 — and as of this writing, the fund currently has \$233,000 and have distributed \$112,000 to more than 30 recipients!"

The committee is asking people to visit the Care & Comfort Fund page on the LCMS Atlantic District's home page: <https://ad-lcms.org/>



Jeffrey Skopak



"Friends of the Fort" Gather in Fort Wayne

This past April 11 to 14 a group of pastors and church leaders gathered at **Concordia Theological Seminary/Fort Wayne, IN** to thank, celebrate, and support the seminary community. Under the leadership of The Rev. Jeffrey Skopak, Senior Pastor at **Grace/Jacksonville, FL**, the group assembled provided gifts for every staff and faculty member, a campus wide barbecue, and a special cocktail hour and dinner for the faculty.

Pastors who are a part of the "Friends of the Fort" preached in the chapel on Monday and Tuesday. This included Tim Klinkenberg from the Pacific Southwest District and ReSanti Keinbaum from the Kansas District. The group also participated in a panel discussion/convocation titled: "Christian Leadership in the Pandemic."

Supporting the event from FLGA District was Pastor Keith Lingsch, **Grace/Naples, FL**. Bart Day, CEO of Lutheran Church Extension Fund, Jim Sanft, CEO of Concordia Plan Services, Bruce Kintz, CEO of Concordia Publishing House, Derek Lecakes, President of the Atlantic District LCMS, and a wide range of pastors from across the Synod.

"Friends of the Fort" has fostered bridge building between the many facets of the LCMS and has put a spotlight Concordia Theological Seminary — one of the finest seminaries in the world," Skopak exclaims. "We are currently planning a 'Friends of the Seminary' event for **Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO** sometime later this year."

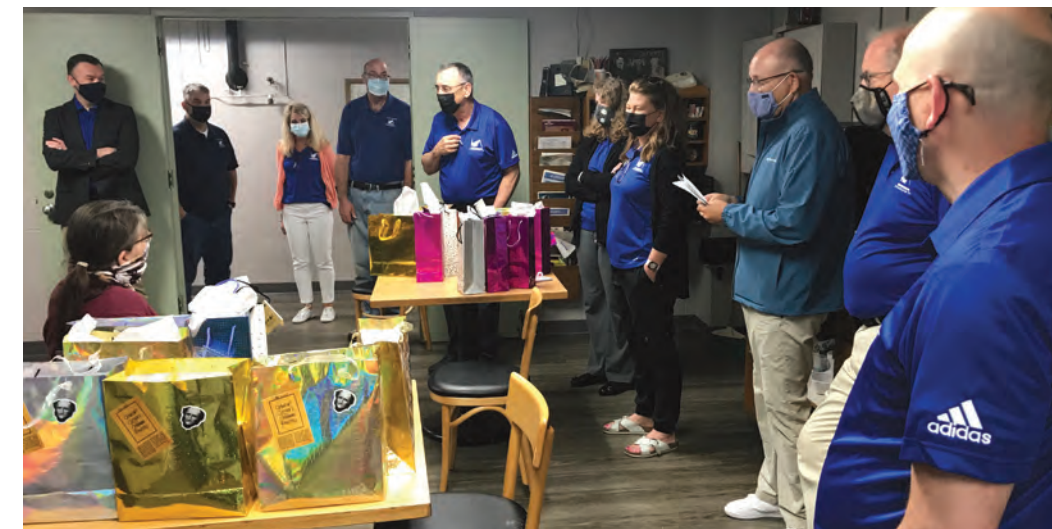


Pastor Jeffrey Skopak and Rev. Dr. Lawrence Rast, President and Professor of Historical Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary

Information on how you can support and participate these seminary events is available from Jeff Skopak at pastor_skopak@gracelutheraneagles.org.

At right — Friends of the Fort with some of the gift bags.

Below photo (from left) Rev. President Derek Lecakes (Atlantic District) Jeffrey Skopak, Chuck Mueller, Jr. (Illinois), Timothy Klinkenberg (California), and Mike Hageman (Kansas) -- Hageman previously served Trinity/Rockledge, FL in the District.



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Jay Wendland
LCEF District Vice President
Florida-Georgia District
407-258-5041
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*LCEF Residential Loan applications are accepted from: Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, Texas, Washington, Wisconsin.

For those states not listed above, RCW mortgage loans are available through the Lutheran Federal Credit Union (LutheranFCU). LutheranFCU and LCEF are not affiliated.

Lutheran Federal Credit Union: 10733 Sunset Office Drive, Suite 406, St. Louis, MO 63127-1020. Phone number: 314-394-2790. Website: lutheranfcu.org. (NMLS# 1301052).

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Update your church to become more welcoming to members and visitors alike.
- ✓ **Relieve unnecessary stress.**
Let's be honest, unless you address the issues, you're always going to be thinking about it.



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LCMS Youth Gathering Adds New, Flexible Volunteer Opportunity for 2022 Houston Event

Every three years, thousands of young adult and adult volunteers come together to make the LCMS National Youth Gathering run smoothly. Many of those give up an entire week to volunteer — a significant time commitment. The 2022 Gathering, which will be held in Houston July 9–13, 2022, is offering a new volunteer track that will allow more people to get involved, even if they don't have a full week to commit. "Team Flex," as the new

track is called, is open to anyone age 19 and up who wants to volunteer for any amount of time at the Gathering — as little as four hours for a single day, or up to eight hours a day for the whole week. Team Flex volunteers will serve a variety of roles, so the Gathering planners are inviting volunteers of all skill sets to apply.

In addition to the flexible hours, Team Flex volunteers do not have to pay a registration fee. They are also welcome to apply through April 2022. (Applications for the other volunteer positions close in 2021.) Team Flex volunteers are responsible for their own lodging, food and

travel to and from the Gathering.

"Team Flex is a great new opportunity for those who want to serve, whether they are local to the Houston area, or from elsewhere," said Leslie Sullivan, who serves on the 2022 Gathering's Team Flex Planning Team. "These volunteers will help in lots of areas, and see all the parts of the Gathering."

To learn more about volunteer opportunities at the Gathering, or to apply for a volunteer position, visit lcmsgathering.com/volunteer. ■

Photo below — one of the mass events at the 2019 NYG in Minneapolis, MN



What Just Happened? A Different Kind of Church Meeting

Christ Lutheran Church was a nice church with good people and a solid history of programs and ministry. Yet in the last years the activities seemed to be harder to put together and pull off. Volunteer leaders were sometimes tough to find. Maybe we were just getting tired.

Then Pastor Martin came. After a two year vacancy we were blessed with a pastor who was personable and caring and gave a thoughtful sermon. That was great but it was something else that seemed to surprise and bless us and the ministry the most. He always wanted to "get together" with whoever did anything at the church — both before and after we did whatever we did.

Take this past week for example. I was in charge of the Vacation Bible School. Before we started organizing a couple key volunteers and I met with the pastor. But this time was different. Sure we talked budget, curriculum and snacks. But Pastor also asked something new. "By God's grace, what do you really want to accomplish this year?" "Well, I guess I want to teach kids about Jesus" I answered. "Wonderful!" then he said, "What else?" I answered, "I guess it would be nice to see more volunteers . . . and hope more of the kids from the local neighborhood will come." "Great!" said pastor. Then he asked, "What could be done so that those desires might happen?"

We started thinking out loud and prayed about it. Betty and Jan took a while to chime in but soon came up with some good ideas! We were actually getting excited. Funny thing though, Pastor didn't seem to do

anything except ask questions and encouraged us!

VBS turned out *better than usual!* We tried to get some additional volunteers and even had a few more kids. The idea of giving the kids invitation cards to give to their friends worked! That was Jan's idea and she designed and printed the cards herself. It took on a life of its own after one of the more active kids was "put in charge of that project."

But after we were done, Pastor

celebrate and thank you and thank God for you!"

We couldn't believe our eyes or ears. They treated us like heroes. But then what happened next was so surprising and inspiring. For the next fifteen minutes the pastor led us again in thinking out loud together. "What happened? What went well? What did you learn? What could be done even better next time?" In addition to the celebration, it was a positive experience to reflect and capture how

we could do even better. "How did YOU grow closer to Jesus this week?" I never thought of that before but it was true. I thought of the song we sang: "Yes, Jesus loves (even) me!"

Christ Lutheran is a place where we take people by the hand and lead them to Jesus one at a time. Our time at the luncheon concluded with

praying for many of the children and parents. Afterward most of us had given voice to what each of us would do for the kids and families that God brought to us last week. It has changed my life. Now I smile when I see in the bulletin a notice for volunteers and leaders to gather for a meeting. I know God will be at work in their hearts and in our church. I'm thinking of inviting my neighbor to come to church with me. I had never done that before. ■



by Scott Gress
Lutheran Counseling Services
Leadership Coach
Florida-Georgia District
scottgress@me.com

wanted to "get together" again. We kind of thought it was a waste of time. Why get together? But we did. He wanted us to come to church with as many of the volunteers who helped as possible. What happened next was unexpected. Council members and the pastor were there to greet us and had prepared a catered lunch from the barbecue place down the street. Pastor prayed for the lunch and then the council president stood up and said, "We are so grateful for the time and effort that you put into VBS this year. We are so excited about how some of you are involved in being used by God for the first time. We also praise God for how the kids and their parents are learning about Jesus. You probably know one of the kids and their dad will be baptized later this month. So we wanted to bring you all together and

Rev. Scott Gress 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.

PEOPLE

Jonathan Luther Munnicha Headed to Mount Calvary/Warner Robins, GA

Jonathan is a Florida-Georgia District native. His father is the pastor of Holy Cross/Stockbridge, GA and his mother works for Delta Airlines as a translator for the international concourse (she is fluent in six languages).

"I am Lutheran through and through," he proudly explains, "my middle name is Luther and I was born on Reformation Day, 1991. Throughout my life I have always heard the call. To be completely honest, my initial response was not that of Isaiah's, 'here I am, send me' but that of Moses, 'who am I, that I should go?'"

Jonathan has always held the pastoral office in high regard and he reveals that he was unworthy, yet alone, unqualified. "But we all know that God does not call the qualified but qualifies the one He calls. I say this to mention that I have not always lived according to His will. The majority of my adolescent years were spent in juvenile detention centers and county jails. I did not graduate high school and ended up achieving my GED (Graduate Equivalency Degree) while in jail.

"I joined a gang before I was confirmed. I have more felonies than accomplishments. All of the above, in the eyes of the world, would make me 'unqualified.'"

But God had other plans for Jonathan. "Today, I feel like a palm tree in the middle of a hurricane with the Holy Spirit blowing me to the harvest field. The Holy Spirit brought me to Concordia College/ New York, I graduated in 2017. I taught high school for a year in the Bronx, at Our Saviour Lutheran School. I entered the seminary in 2018 and I'm currently leading a youth ministry that introduces the Gospel to a community that is overwhelmed with violence, gangs, and drugs on the north side of Saint Louis, MO.

I am a first generation American of a family that escaped communism from the Vietnam War. My father is an LCMS pastor who shepherds to Laotian Refugees in the metro-Atlanta area.

"When my family first arrived in America, our entire family was Buddhist. It was through the act of Christian love that my father was first converted — and eventually my entire family. The majority of my life was spent in Greater Atlanta,



Georgia and the biggest move for me was to New York City for college. I love all Atlanta sports teams, the Braves, Falcons, Hawks, and I'm especially enthusiastic about our new soccer team Atlanta United!

"My passion is ministry to the marginalized. My hobbies are reading and digesting tough topics. I am through the roof in my vicarage assignment to Mount Calvary/ Warner Robins and am enthusiastic about returning home! The big city of New York was a great experience as was the 'Gateway to the West' in Saint Louis . . . but there's no place like home! Although the city of Warner Robins and Atlanta are different, it will be refreshing. ■

Marissa Kroenke Headed to Grace/St. Petersburg, FL

I feel truly blessed to have been assigned to Grace/St. Petersburg for my deaconess internship. It's clear to me how the Lord has been preparing me for this vocation over the years, and I am excited to see how He uses me to serve His people.

Being the child of a Pastor and a Deaconess I spent my childhood growing up in towns throughout the midwest as well as on the east coast. My undergraduate work was completed at two different state schools in Connecticut. My associates degree is in Early Childhood Education and my bachelors degree in Youth and Child Programing.



During my undergraduate time I worked at Walt Disney World for two years. I have family in Lake Alfred and Bradenton, so am quite enthusiastic to be moving back to Florida.

My husband, Andrew, and I were married in February 2020 at the seminary chapel in Fort Wayne. In November 2020 we welcomed our daughter, Clarice. Together we greatly enjoy playing games, working on puzzles and spending time outdoors. It's been quite fun the last six months watching Clarice grow and finding ways to incorporate her into these family interests.

I look forward to getting to know the people at Grace Lutheran and throughout the Florida-Georgia District and serving alongside you to share Christ with our neighbors. ■

Meet the Inbound Students for a Year of Internship in the District

Jonathan Sharp Headed to Bethlehem/Jacksonville Beach, FL

Jonathan was born in Angleton, TX to Mike and Missy Sharp and graduated high school in 2008. His dad is a cost-estimator for a telecommunications company and his mom is a county tax accessor. His father is working on his Bachelor's Degree in Psychology with the intention of shifting his career to being a Christian Counselor.

Jonathan, an only-child, went to college to become a social studies teacher and graduated in 2013 with a Bachelor's of Science Degree in Education from University of Central Missouri. He began work on a Master's Degree in History, with an emphasis in Medieval Europe. During that time he was working as a substitute teacher and teacher's aide. He's very close to his cousins and their children.

"I completed my Master's in December 2017, and it was just before finishing my degree that I decided to apply to Seminary to become a pastor," Sharp explains. "I met my wife, Bridgette, during graduate school when she was finishing her Bachelor's in Social Work and was preparing to apply to the Seminary to become a deaconess.

"We were married on November 1, 2014. Because of me, she decided to delay her beginning Seminary until I was at a point where I could finish my Master's remotely. We moved to St. Louis in July 2016. She served her internship at Good Shepherd Lutheran/Haslet, TX and we returned to Concordia Seminary so that I could begin my studies.

"We are eagerly anticipating the arrival of our firstborn at the end of July, whom we will name David, after the biblical figure because of the story of David and Jonathan. We are enthusiastic to serve our vicarage in Florida — not the least because Bridgette has always loved the beach! She enjoys photography, music, women's and elderly ministry, and in her free time, she likes to color to relax. I love to read — especially history — there's just so much we can learn from the past! I also enjoy reading fantasy novels and comics. I really enjoy pop culture, so I try to stay up on popular television and movies, and I enjoy analyzing film as a form of literature and especially looking for Christian themes in popular media to help bridge the gap and have conversations with the unchurched.



"Both Bridgette and I like to play board games, card games, taking walks to experience nature, exploring local culture and cuisine, and learning about local history. I hope to be able to put my teaching skills to use over vicarage and am looking forward to being directly involved in the ministry of the Church and serving God's people." ■

Brandon Bettcher Headed to St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL



"Taylor and I are looking forward to spending this next year at St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL," Bettcher says. "We met at Concordia University/ Ann Arbor, MI where I was in the pre-seminary program and she studied health care administration. She currently works at a senior living facility. We are getting married on June 12th and soon after headed to Florida for vicarage!

Bettcher grew up in Southeast Michigan about an hour north of Detroit. He was baptized and confirmed at St. Peter/Macomb, MI and went to high school at Lutheran High North. He

was involved in youth group and helped teach confirmation when in high school. He was also a part of the ski club and Mock Trial.

Brandon's parents are Mike and Dawn Better. Mike is a lineman for an electrical company and his mom is a preschool teacher. He has a younger sister named Alyssa (20) who attended Michigan State University.

"I enjoy the outdoors, reading, and watching movies," Bettcher concludes. "Taylor played Tennis at Concordia and we both served as Student Body president. We are looking forward to trying new hobbies in Florida and embracing the opportunity God has for us! Above all we are thankful to be able to serve our Lord and His people. ■

FLORIDA GEORGIA

Out and About in the District

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Hunter Keslar Surrenders Campus Pastoral Position

This past February Hunter Keslar, **Thrive/Estero, FL's** campus pastor, shared with Mission Pastor John Roth a desire to step down to part time work within the congregation, overseeing their worship band but not the routine campus ministry beginning with the end of the current semester at Florida Gulf Coast University.

"Hunter is beginning full time work moving into management at a local coffee company," Roth explains. "I was grateful for the heads up and we immediately set out to find a person to fill our campus ministry position. We sent word out in every direction. It had appeared God was opening a door for a local pastor to be deployed to us, and he would have been a great fit," Roth continues, "so we didn't really pursue other options like an intern from a Christian University. It seemed like a local person would be best way to go."

God had a wiser plan, apparently. Through circumstances outside of their control, Thrive was recently informed this won't work because his current congregation decided they needed him full time.

Thrive continues to seek an individual for the future their vibrant campus outreach.

"Okay, Father, you've shut this door," Roth says, "and it might not be locked shut, but it's shut. You have something better in mind than what we had proposed. I'm trusting you on this. We want your will, not ours to be done, but we want to know what that is, Lord."

Pastor Roth has been reaching out to many people to see if they might be a good fit — or if they know of the right individual. He's also put a contingency plan in place should they not identify and secure a campus pastor by late summer for the fall semester. He's even designed a way to reconfigure his time. "I believe the campus ministry is one of the founding reasons why Thrive was launched," Roth concludes, "so I don't see us letting this slide this year, but rather reconfigure it, and that itself may be God's plan for us. God is very rarely early with His answers, but He is always on time and always faithful."

Have you got someone in mind? John Roth can be reached at john@thrive-fl.org. ■



Pastor John Roth

Campus pastor, Hunter Keslar isn't laying down on the job . . . he's moving into full-time management responsibilities with a local coffee company.

Winter Haven Zone LWML Holds April Rally

The Winter Haven Zone LWML Rally was held at **Christ/Lakeland, FL** on Saturday, April 10. The event opened with a Holy Communion service led by Pastor Shouse, Winter Haven Zone Counselor, and Christ's Pastor Hazzard. The theme for the day was "but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" 1 CORINTHIANS 15:57. Participants collected items for comfort kits for One More Child and then assembled them at the rally.

Stephanie Dow was the featured speaker and shared examples of sex and labor trafficking that happens in the areas of the Winter Haven Zone. One More Child seeks to meet the needs of safety, food, clothing, health care and counseling. The kits made will help new arrivals.

Fifty-eight complete kits and 39 partial kits for One More Child were assembled — plus eight large tote bags and boxes for Talbot House.

President Joyce Munz will be the delegate to the National Convention in Lexington, KY this summer. She shared a flyer about the gifts of love to be collected and also a flyer about the LWML FLGA District Retreat slated for September 24-26 in Melbourne, FL. Election of officers was held with the following: Vice-President of Spiritual Growth: Jan Struck; Vice-President of Mission Service: vacant; Secretary: Norma Miller. The Mary-Martha Guild served a light breakfast and boxed lunches from Publix for lunch. The fall rally-date — still to be determined — will be at **Grace/Winter Haven, FL**. ■



Assembling the One More Child Kits

Students Celebrate National Day of Prayer

Some of the members of **St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL's** Second Grade Class pose below the "prayer chains" that were made by the majority of the student body and then prayed over during National Day of Prayer. ■



Bethany/Leesburg Welcomes Pastor Michael Hanel

This past March, Michael Hanel was installed at **Bethany/Leesburg, FL**. In photo (left to right) are pastors Stephen Schroeder, Don Moore, Marc Kappel, Gary Genzen, Don Roberts, Pastor Mike Hanel, Andy Ritchie, Joshua Pettit and Milan Wurtz



Marco Lutheran Hosts Community Hygiene Fair For Needy

Marco Lutheran/Marco Island, FL was looking for opportunities to help the community and found out that those in need often have trouble finding hygiene products. “We learned that there is a great need for hygiene products in this time of great economic need in this area,” Pastor Thomas R. Boeck said. “The food pantries are doing a good job, but they told us themselves that hygiene products are something constantly in need. It’s something that doesn’t frequently get donated — something everybody needs — and these items are expensive. People will give up these items in order to buy food or pay rent.”

One Saturday last February, Marco Lutheran turned their parking lot into a sort of Flea market for hygiene products for those in need. The congregation collaborated with Our Daily Bread Food Pantry on Marco Island to make the giveaway happen.

The food pantry identified 100 families who were in need of the products. “The idea is people come here, they have their dignity, they can shop,” Boeck said. “They can get whatever they want. They just point to what they want, and we give it to them. As much as they can get in their shopping bag, they can take home with them.”

Pastor Boeck said the community of Marco Island is very generous. “There’s a lot more love in this community than you might imagine,” he said. “You have this sort of stereotype on Marco Island that it’s a wealthy community. And as such, you think that people are snooty and don’t care about the poor. Frankly, I’ve found just the opposite to be true. People feel like God has blessed them with material wealth and it affords them the opportunity to share with people who don’t have it. We always talk about how God has given us gifts, and everyone has gifts. For some reason people here on Marco Island — and at Marco

Lutheran — have been given the gift of generosity. This is their opportunity to use that gift.

And they give generously!

“We also had a ministry table.

One of my fellow pastors, Mark Eisold, from Pelican Lutheran, is in charge of our Hispanic church in Golden Gate. He distributed Spanish materials. We have a member of our church, Frank Romano, who is representing the Gideons. We also have some Creole New Testaments available for our Haitian friends.”

“Quite frankly, Jesus told us to love our neighbors. It’s all about sharing the love of God with people. If you ever look at the



Pastor Thomas R. Boeck



More than 30 volunteers participated in Marco Lutheran’s hygiene fair

cross, it’s got the upright and it’s got the cross member. The upright represents our relationship with God. We have to tend to our relationship with God every day. But that cross member is where Jesus tells us that we have to love our neighbor.

“That cross member reminds us that we are on this level with all of the people who are in the world.” “We have a community here that is in need in a time of great need. We need to step up. This is our opportunity.” ■

**Have you got a story to tell?
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Officer Tony Durante Leads Chapel in Uniform

In response to the recent social unrest and ‘defund the police’ movement, a chapel service message about respecting police and authorities was given in April by Pastor Tony Durante to the students at **Our Savior/Plantation, FL**.

Pastor Tony was dressed in his Police Chaplain uniform as he spoke to the student body. In his message to students about police, he referenced Bible verse ROMANS 13: 1-5 where Apostle Paul describes the one in authority is “God’s servant to do you good.”

Prior to becoming ordained, Durante served the Delray Beach, FL Police Department, his hometown.

In 2013, Pastor Durante was asked by the Delray Beach Police Department if he would serve as a volunteer police chaplain — a position he holds to this day.

Although raised in a historic black neighborhood in Delray Beach, Florida, the maternal side of Pastor Tony’s family originates from Greene County, Alabama where some family members were engaged in the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. Non-violence towards law enforcement and not resisting arrest were tenets of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement.

Pastor Tony Durante is a native of Delray Beach, Florida. After he

graduated from Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, FL with a Bachelor’s Degree in Anthropology, he was selected and accepted to serve as a Lutheran Christian missionary and teacher of English at a Lutheran church and school in Hokkaido, Japan. Pastor Durante speaks Japanese fluently and had begun speaking the language and studying the culture since the time he was in high school. During his high school and college years, he worked in the exhibition curating division at the Morikami Japanese Museum and Gardens — also located in Delray Beach, Florida.

After serving six years on the Delray Beach police force, he was spiritually guided to join the ministry staff at **Trinity/Delray Beach, FL**.

Pastor Tony Durante was part of the DELTO seminary model that engaged in offsite residential education — a well-constructed and closely evaluated distance education model leading to his theology degree from Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO

In 2018 Pastor Durante accepted the call to Our Savior Lutheran Church & School in Plantation, FL where he serves today. ■



The youth of **Redeemer/Stuart, FL** held a joint middle- and high-school student event in April. They enjoyed games, devotions and ice cream sundaes and then created their own unique shell jars as gifts for their moms for Mother’s Day. ■

Our Redeemer/Ocala, FL Hosts "Shower" for Maternity Home



The LWML women of **Our Redeemer/Ocala, FL** recently solicited their congregation members to contribute items for Redeeming Life Maternity Home in Sanford FL. According to leadership at Redeeming Life "were overwhelmed with paper goods, cleaning products,

and personal care gifts. What a beautiful outpouring of love and support for our ministry."

Two of the LWML members drove to Sanford and toured both the maternity home and the transition home. Each shared their amazement at seeing the ministry "live." ■



Redeeming Life Offering Tour During Open House

There is an opportunity to tour Redeeming Life's maternity home in Sanford, Florida a few times this summer. They are hosting to allow the community to learn more about what a maternity home is and what the program does to help single pregnant women in crisis.

Redeeming Life invites all individuals to come on-site for a small group tour through the facilities. Upcoming dates are Wednesday, June 16, 2021 from 9-11 am and Thursday, July 22, 2021 from 6-8 pm.

The July 22 event will also include a guest harpist Rev. Bill Reister from Celestial Strings and Ceremonies to delight tour guests with a variety of music. Small group tours at all three events begin every 10 minutes.



Covid-19 safety protocols will be in place for all guests. Guests are asked to wear masks for the safety of the pregnant residents. Light refreshments will be served.

For more information or to RSVP, please email info@rlom.org. Parking and welcome begins at Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, 2525 S. Oak Avenue, Sanford, Florida. ■

Hope/Plant City, FL Continues Support of Community's "Children's Nutrition Program"



Following **Hope/Plant City, FL** April Board of Directors meeting, Sr. Pastor and United Food Bank Board of Directors Chairman, Rev. Dean Pfeffer, presented Food Bank Director Mary Heysek with a check for \$1,000.00 for their Children's Nutrition Program.

These proceeds represent a portion of proceeds from Hope's participation at the annual Florida Strawberry Festival in Plant City. Hope regularly gives proceeds received to community based organizations to assist in their outreach and help to meet the needs of the community that we can better accomplish working together.

The Food Bank provides food during the periods where school is not in session to families in need. Each child (family) will receive food to replace those meals that are normally provided when school is in session — namely, breakfast and lunch. These bags contain non-perishable, kid-friendly foods (cereals, canned fruits, peanutbutter, jelly etc). In addition, Hope also is a drop off facility for food bank donations. ■

First/Clearwater Dedicates Rodgers Organ in April

It was time...

The old American Organ Builders electronic organ at **First/Clearwater, FL** had served the congregation well for close to 40 years. As time passed, however, it began to fail.

According to Pastor Pat O'Brien, "there were problems with the electrical systems in the organ which actually lead to smoke filling the balcony one Sunday. In fact, all of the electrical cables were frayed and brittle. We were closer to a fire than we knew."

The decision was made to purchase a new organ for the congregation. Different new and used models were reviewed. Central Music, founded in 1958, is a piano and organ dealer located in Clearwater and represents Rodgers Instruments (among others), and just happened to have an eight-year-old pre-owned Model 588 in their showroom at a very reasonable price. The decision was made to purchase this used instrument.

"A fund-drive was put in place and a matching donation of \$5,000 was presented to the congregation one Sunday," O'Brien explains. "By the time worship was over, that goal had been met. Another matching



First/Clearwater's Minister of Music, Ann Hinz, plays the new Rodgers 588 at April's dedication service

donation of \$10,000 was offered and in a week's time the entire purchase price of the organ was raised."

The old organ was removed in pieces and the new organ was installed this past April. It was fascinating to watch the instrument being carried up the stairs to the balcony by two strong men. Old analog speakers were removed. New digital speakers were connected. The new instrument was dedicated on April 18 during the Sunday morning worship. ■



Plantation Congregation Helps Family in Need

In April, members of an **Our Savior/Plantation, FL's** outreach team delivered a holiday care package to a local family in need. The church's outreach board organized a drive among a small group of church and school families during Holy Week to collect items to share with a household of

eight in Plantation. Among the items donated were a Today's Light Bible, baby care items, hygiene products, clothing, a gift card, holiday chocolates and a pre-cooked meal from Publix.

Good Friday, Our Savior Member Kim VanSant, School Parent Kara Wallace and student Brady Wallace delivered the care package of the donated goods to a very appreciative family. ■



Redeeme/Stuart, FL's quilters made another 20+ quilts for the Guardian ad Litem of St. Lucie, Martin, Indian River, and Okeechobee counties. They meet Tuesday mornings from 9 until noon.

Today's College Students Enthusiastically Seek Campus

Connections When Settling Into New Environments



this complex time helping them see the certainty we have as God's people in the midst of them. They want to help them grow in their faith so that sense of identity would strengthen. They seek to help them grow as they live out that faith in service to God and one another. Campus Ministry has been an important dimension of our District Mission work for more than 50 years. Consider opportunities you may have in your own community to reach out and walk with students during this important time of life. Please let the FLGA District Office know if we can be of any help in making those connections! If your graduate is headed to one of these universities, encourage your student(s) to

check out these campus ministries, and please connect with the campus minister who will gladly follow up with 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.

Here are some stories accenting the importance and joy of campus ministry. These may give you a sense of why it is so vital to connect students to Jesus, and how that is being done. As you read, pray for these ministries!



"I came to college with many questions about my faith. Stumbling upon this church and hearing all that Christ has done for me and that ultimately I can place my confidence in him was such a refreshing message and one I really needed to hear. I have so many wonderful memories, from Spring Break to fellowship dinners. I've made friends. I've enjoyed opportunities to lead and serve. Thank you for helping me grow in my faith. Thank you for making me feel so welcome."

As we hear these words from a student, we recognize a significant dynamic that is at play during the college years: students are at a transformative time in their lives. They are dealing with a new environment and new opportunities. Many are experiencing a 'freedom' they had not known prior. Others are dealing with the challenge of figuring out questions that arise during this major shift in their life: Who am I and what do I want to do? How do I engage this world around me and the complexities of it? What does it mean to be a Christian away from my family expectations? How do I meet people now that I am separated from all those people that I used to do things with? How do I

exercise my faith and reflect the life that I have been given in a greater way than when I was a youth?

For many of us, it has been a while since we faced those same questions; for upcoming college students and for those already in college these questions are very fresh. Consider the implications and these encouragements:

- 1 ♦ Listen to these young adults. Gain a sense of where they are in life and how they might use encouragement.
- 2 ♦ Encourage them in Christ. Remind them that their identity and confidence is not rooted in a course of study or career path but in their connection to the death and resurrection of Christ. They have been baptized into Christ and they are okay as His child.
- 3 ♦ Help them connect with a campus ministry. Give them a point of contact and offer to pass their information on to a campus ministry or congregation. Students often are not aware of the opportunities that are present or they would prefer an initial connection before they brave engaging a new organization.

Our campus ministry partners want to walk with them through

From Jay Winters, Florida State University/Tallahassee, FL -- University Lutheran Church and Student Center

In the beginning of February, it was brought to our attention that there was a Christian group operating on campus that was displaying cult-like activities. This group unfortunately was largely preying upon students already in Christian ministries and telling them that other Christian ministries "were not true followers of Jesus." Reports from other campuses show that this group usually ramps up then to more demands including demands for money, arranged dates, and other manipulations.

We were able to inform our students of this group early on, especially telling our student leaders about its presence and activities. As a result, when two of our students were recruited by this group, they knew that there were potential issues.

One of our students went to the group's meeting, but with open eyes that saw enough confirmation of what we had said and was actually able to talk to another student living in the same apartment complex and warning them about the group's reputation. While this is not a "positive" story, per se, it does bring to light some of why it is important to have strong campus ministry presences at our universities and colleges.

During our weekly college student gathering, we encourage people to talk about their challenges and celebrations for the week. One week we had a newly connected student tell this story: "I came here from out of state and didn't know anyone. It seemed like so many of the people in my classes already knew other people from their high schools or wherever, but I didn't know anybody. So a lot of nights I went home and just didn't do anything. It wasn't until I came here that I felt like people actually wanted to see me show up to something. Thank you."

That kind of heartfelt testimony is really tough for a student to come up with, and we are happy that he was able to find a place among us

here to feel that welcome and invite not only from us, but from Christ.

From John Roth, Florida Gulf Coast University/Estero, FL -- Thrive Church

Alyson is a new student/young adult who began attending Thrive three weeks ago. She shared by text: Hi Pastor John, this is Alyson I met you at church today. I wanted to clarify that I love the theology and the worship and the peace I feel at THRIVE. It is a relief to be able to rest for a second in a church instead of constantly trying to discern if the message is true. (But I do not love the circumstances we are in with the virus, having to be separated and masked up).

I met Kyrie last time, and also have wake-boarded when Hunter was at the cable park but it's been awhile. I am pretty busy, I presume you are as well! I would like to get together at some point to share stories. I'm happy to have it suggested in the welcome letter because otherwise I would not be bold enough to ask. I have been in a pretty dark place recently but I feel led to reach out and start new and start healing. Jesus is my only hope, my only constant, and my only security. Thank you so much for listening.

I've asked to meet with her any time, of course, and she keeps coming back to Thrive, but we have not found a time to get together for coffee or lunch yet. Hopefully soon.

From Kalli Wied, University of Central Florida/Orlando, FL -- LIVE Ministries

We were able to partner with St. Luke's "Faith on Tap" ministry for an awesome bonfire and bible study! We were able to make connections while having a great evening!

As a community building event, we attend a trivia night every other

week at World of Beer! LIVE provides the students with appetizers and we compete against everyone else there! We not only had a new face join our group and start connecting with us, we also snagged first place in Trivia! Ministry is all about relationships and building these relationships sometimes takes doing things outside of the box! Trivia has been an amazing tool in this area for us!

From Greg Michael, University of Georgia/Athens, GA -- Christus Victor Lutheran Church and Student Center

This month, we were able to gather some students together for a quick service project in the midst of the busyness of the end of the semester. The students gathered together to assemble hygiene kits for a local Christian homeless ministry. The project was student coordinated and executed. The project provided a good time, an opportunity to serve those in need, and another chance for the students to recognize their capacity to spearhead the efforts. We give thanks for God's continued use of our gifts and abilities as we live out our Christian vocations. What a joy to see the students grow as they live out their lives as His people! ■



Three Seminary Candidates Enter FLGA District Ministry Careers

The Florida-Georgia District welcomes two Seminary candidates this summer. They are Brendon Moore, who will serve Grace/Winter Haven, FL and Andrew Wrasman, who has served this past year as a convertible vicar at Oak Road/Lilburn, GA and becomes their new pastor. Wrasman participated in the Residential Alternate Route (RAR) parallel to the M.Div. Program. Students in this program study alongside those in the M.Div. Program, including the study of the New Testament on the basis of its original language, Greek. The key differences from the M.Div. Program are a reduced number of courses and Old Testament studies are carried out on the basis of the English language.

Like the M.Div. Program, these alternate routes seek to further the spiritual, academic and personal development of men to equip them for the Holy Ministry of Word and Sacraments in the LCMS. Unlike the M.Div. Program, these alternate routes do not lead to either an academic or a professional degree. Instead, the student who successfully finishes one of these programs receives a certificate indicating that a prescribed course of studies has been completed and a theological diploma that



Brendon Moore

Andrew Wrasman

Eduardo Martinez

At right — Andrew and Jessica Wrasman with Rocky and Arabella. Pastor Wrasman served Oak Road Lutheran as a convertible vicar and becomes their pastor in June.



certifies eligibility for ordination.

Pastor Wrasman looks forward to settling permanently at Oak Road. “Jessica enjoys gardening, home decorating projects, and party planning while I enjoy writing and making videos for my YouTube channel. Together, we enjoy trying new foods and

exploring new places of interest, both culturally, historically, and in outdoor beauty and activities.”

Eduardo Martinez, has also been certified for placement from the Center for Hispanic Studies assigned to Hope Lutheran Church (Esperanza Viva Mission) in Orlando, FL. ■

Registration Opens Soon for Annual Veterans of the Cross Retreat

Storytelling is a favorite pastime of many faithful members of Veterans of the Cross. 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, Mary Manz Simon will be sharing her vision of Faith Stories™ under the theme, “Tell me a Story” March 7 – 9, 2022. 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.

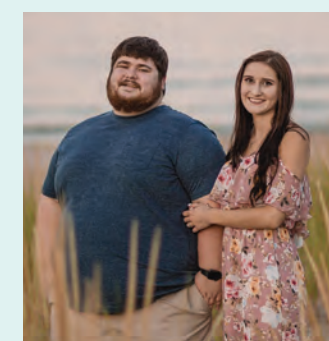
“We can walk you through the simple steps of preparing, recording, and transmitting it, explains Pastor Bob Steinke, chairman of the VOC Retreat. “Interested? you can contact me or Kathy Keene in our District Office. Kathy’s email is kkeene@flgadistrict.org and mine is revstein@verizon.net. As an attendee you will have the opportunity during the retreat to tell your faith story and have it recorded.”

Both Bob and Kathy are encouraging participants to start thinking about this now . . . jotting down some notes in preparation of sharing.

“We are very delighted to announce that Rev. Dr. Jeffery Moore will be our Bible Study Leader. There will be breakout sessions, mission presentations, worship, and all the wonderful fellowship of fellow veterans.

Retreat Reservations will open soon, so save the date – March 7-9, 2022. As in previous years, the event will take place at the Warren Willis Retreat and Conference Center in Fruitland Park, FL. ■

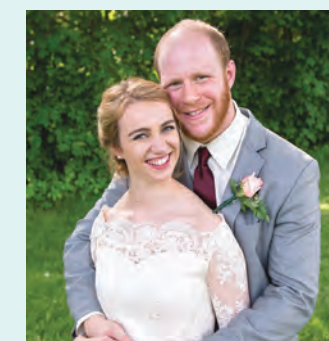
Dear Father God,
We thank you Father for the Vicar servants of this past year. We humbly ask you to guide them safely as they travel and return to their studies for their final year of Seminary. We thank you, Father, for the pastors, congregations, and your people who have worked alongside them as they studied here in the FLGA District. May your wisdom be imparted to them your Spirit guide them and your love encompass them as they serve, assist and encourage connecting people to Jesus.



Returning to
Concordia
Seminary
St. Louis, MO
Tim & Amber Barber
Vicared at Mt. Calvary
Warner Robins, GA



Returning to
Concordia
Seminary
St. Louis, MO
Andrew & Holly Simpson
Vicared at Bethlehem
Jacksonville Beach, FL

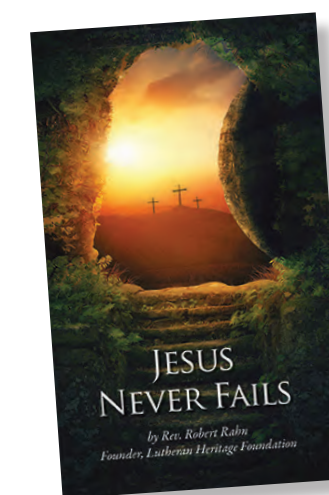


Returning to
Concordia
Seminary
St. Louis, MO
Michael & Sarah Duffy
Vicared at Grace
Winter Haven, FL



Returning to
Concordia
Seminary
St. Louis, MO
Joe & Emily Reineke
Vicared at St. Paul
Boca Raton, FL

Lutheran Heritage Foundation Offers New Resource for Sharing the Gospel: “Jesus Never Fails”



A new free resource for sharing the Gospel: “Jesus Never Fails” has been made available for community outreach from the Lutheran Heritage Foundation, a recognized service organization of the LCMS.

During these turbulent times, a central message that everyone needs to hear is “Jesus Never Fails!” And now, the Lutheran Heritage Foundation (has this short devotional booklet available at no cost to you in a variety of languages, for outreach to immigrants in your community or for short-term mission trips. The English edition is great for shut-ins and hospital visits. More information is available on Lutheran Heritage website: lhfmmissions.org. The booklet is also available in languages like Haitian Creole, Spanish, French, Swahili, Russian and Vietnamese. Email your order for print copies to info@LHFmissions.org. ■



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Synod's Youth Ministry Department Offering Great Resources During COVID-19 Pandemic

A great Bible study series dealing with the struggles often associated with mental health has been made available to pastors, young group counselors, family life leaders and directors of Christian education through Synod's National Mission — Youth Ministry Department. Check it out at www.youthsource.com. They provides Jesus-centered resources to those at work with youth in the congregation and beyond.

This new series — comprised of five studies focusing on youth — deal with how God is able to work in and through us, even in times where we struggle with our mental health. This is particularly important after a year which was stressful for almost everyone. The darkness of this world and in our minds is no match for our REAL, PRESENT God! Jesus is the ONE and ONLY source of eternal light.

The sessions include:

Lesson 1 – Walking in Darkness

This session compares the darkness that can fill our minds with the light that God provides for us in Jesus.

Lesson 2 – Walking in the Light of His Love

This session looks at what Jesus did for us on the cross because of His love, not because we deserved it.

Lesson 3 – Walking in the Light of His Promises

This session examines God's promises to us that we can count on despite the circumstances.

Lesson 4 – Walking in the Light of His Spirit This session looks at how the Holy Spirit can help us to focus our thoughts on Christ despite the dark thoughts of fear, anxiety and depression.

Lesson 5 – Walking in His Light...Together

This session encourages us to learn to help care and support others through difficult times.

Being a teenager is difficult enough and this pandemic has made it even harder. School closures and cancelled events have many of them missing out on some of the biggest moments of their lives — not just major things like sporting events, drama activities and chorus concerts, homecoming and proms, but everyday moments like chatting with friends and participating in class.

For teenagers facing life changes due to

the outbreak who are feeling anxious, isolated and disappointed, know this: you are not alone.

We want to feel the strength of our Savior who is the only one who delivers the light, hope, and power for a life full of abundance. Our young people especially begin to question whether or not His love is strong enough even start to question, is His love strong enough to bring enough comfort, warmth, and light to brighten the dark recesses of our mind? Is God powerful enough to help me?

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's (LCMS) Youth Ministry faithfully leads, serves, resources and networks youth and adults — working through LCMS districts and congregations — with Christ and His gifts at the heart and center of everything.

To investigate more about this youth-oriented

source for information and Bible study series visit website: www.youthsource.com. ■



The LAST WORD



by John List
FLGA District
Communications Director
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