

LUTHERAN[®] LIFE

The Newsmagazine of the Florida-Georgia District LCMS
August/September 2020



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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District Calls Accepted

Jeffrey Jensen accepted pastoral call to King of Kings/Jasper, GA
Michael Duchene accepted the senior pastor call to Peace/Naples, FL

Transferred Out of FLGA to Other Districts

6/22/20 — Ms. Claire Fuhler (C) to Missouri
6/26/20 — Mr. Nathan De Young (C) to Nebraska
7/1/20 — Mr. Matthew Chilman (C) to Pacific Northwest
7/3/20 — Rev. Benjamin Schroeder (O) to North Wisconsin
7/7/20 — Ms. Crystal Jones (C) to SELC
7/15/20 — Mr. Ronald Pawlitz (C) to Missouri
7/23/20 — Ms. Cassandra Moore (C) to Texas

Transferred Into FLGA from Other Districts

5/19/20 — Rev. Manfred Poeppel (O) from Easter
5/22/20 — Rev. Stephen Schafer (O) from Southeastern
6/3/20 — Ms. Brenda Arden (C) from Indiana
6/18/20 — Mr. Michael Glowinski (C) from Kansas
6/23/20 — Ms. Dineen Rottman (C) from Northern Illinois
7/2/20 — Rev. Alemu Sernessa (O) from Ohio
7/15/20 — Ms. Sharon Wallace (C) from Wisconsin
7/19/20 — Rev. Gary Siefert (O) from Northwest

Initial Placements of Ordained/Commissioned Ministers

6/28/20 — Rev. John Kyle Concordia/STL to Grace/St Petersburg, FL
7/12/20 — Rev. Kyle Will Concordia/STL to Epiphany/Lake Worth, FL
8/9/20 — Ms. Sarah Duffy Concordia/Seward to Grace/Winter Haven, FL
9/27/20 — Mr. Jacob Roggow Concordia/Seward to Zion/Fort Myers, FL

Installations of Ordained/Commissioned Ministers

5/21/20 — Rev. Manfred Poeppel (O) as Interim Pastor
Shepherd of the Coast/Fort Lauderdale, FL
6/19/20 — Mr. Timothy Mirly (C) as Principal
Redeemer/Stuart, FL
7/8/20 — Rev. Michael Duchene (O) as Pastor
Peace/Naples, FL

7/12/20 — Ms. Brenda Arden (C) as Principal
Abiding Savior/Gainesville, FL
8/1/20 — Rev. Jeffrey Jensen (O) as Pastor
King of Kings/Jasper, GA
8/2/20 — Ms. Beth Leech (C) as Teacher
Faith/Eustis, FL
8/2/20 — Mr. Timothy Leech (C) as Principal
Faith/Eustis, FL
8/2/20 — Ms. Dineen Rottmann (C) as Teacher
Faith/Eustis, FL
8/2/20 — Ms. Sharon Wallace (C) as Principal
St Paul/Peachtree City, GA
8/5/20 — Mr. Luke Beck (C) as Teacher
Grace Jacksonville, FL
8/9/20 — Mr. James Essig (C) as Principal
First/Clearwater, FL

FLGA District Status Changes

6/30/20 — Mr. Jon Wareham (C) from Active to Candidate
6/18/20 — Mr. Austin Dukes (C) from Active to Candidate
6/18/20 — Ms. Erica Dukes (C) from Active to Candidate

Emeritus

5/31/20 — Rev. Craig Mathews (O) from Active to Emeritus
7/31/20 — Rev. Karl Galik (O) from Active to Emeritus

Removed from the Roster

6/8/20 — Rev. Dennis Glick (O) Resigned from Roster

Called to Glory

5/25/20 — Ms. Margorie Meier (C)

Closed

5/16/20 — Lakeside Preschool/Venice, FL

CAPSULES

ONE BODY, MANY PARTS Theme for September Virtual Event

The Fall President's EQUIT Conference (PEC) will be held virtually September 24-26, 2020. Registration opens on August 15th. A \$50 registration fee — and your unique email address — gives you access to the entire event as well as to approximately 90 breakout sessions. Here's what you can expect:

- The Equip Mall will open daily, one hour before the General Session. Log on and visit our exhibitors who will have exciting products to view, along with drawings to enter and games to play.
- The General Session will begin at 10 am on Thursday 9/24, and at 9 am on Friday and Saturday. During these sessions, you will hear from President Walton, watch our main speakers and celebrate ministry anniversaries.

You'll also see fun and informative videos and words of encouragement from ministry partners across the country. Lunch is scheduled for noon each day to allot time for lunch on your own. Breakouts will be available starting at 1 pm. With so many to choose from, you'll have no trouble finding something to attend.

Be sure to check the list ahead of time so that you won't have to make any last minute decisions!
• Saturday, 9/26 Only — During the 10 am General Session, there will be a live Q&A session with President Walton and David Kinnaman at the Barna Group. This is sure to be an informative discussion.

The Barna Group is a leading research and communications company that works with churches, nonprofits and businesses ranging from film studios to financial services. He'll be sharing abundant research data that will be extremely

useful in your ministry work.

Keynote, Donna Snow, a frequent speaker for the LWML, will be leading us in the Word and sharing some impassioned stories.

Finally, laugh with The Skit Guys — who have a stellar reputation for writing and performing hilarious and poignant acts and have traveled the world performing at events, churches, and conferences.

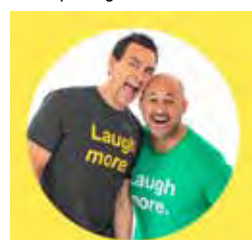
Think about planning to gather safely as a group — in your church, fellowship hall, teacher's lounge or a classroom or even your gym and participate together virtually while using a large screen. Laugh together! Be in the Word with one another! Those who aren't comfortable in a group are certainly able to participate from home.



David Kinnaman is president of the Barna Group



Speaker Donna Snow has been a frequent guest of the LWML



The Skit Guys will provide great comic relief

PRESIDENT'S CONFERENCE

Concordia Seminary President Emeritus Dale Meyer Honored with Festschrift

Although many festivities may be canceled due to COVID-19, that didn't stop faculty, staff and friends from honoring — and completely surprising — Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO President Emeritus Dr. Dale A. Meyer. In recognition of his contributions to the church and his recent retirement from service as Concordia's 10th



president, a *festschrift*, or honorary volume of essays titled *Let the Gospel Lead: Essays & Sermons in Honor of Dale A. Meyer*, was presented virtually to Meyer July 2 via Adobe Connect.

Friends and colleagues who contributed to the anthology span the years of Meyer's tenure as speaker of *The Lutheran Hour* radio program to his service at the Seminary. They also include fellow leaders in higher education, the church and ministry.

Topics covered in the volume encompass his vocational interests as classics scholar,

professor of homiletics, media personality, church leader and pastor — each reflecting his singular focus to “let the Gospel lead” in all things.

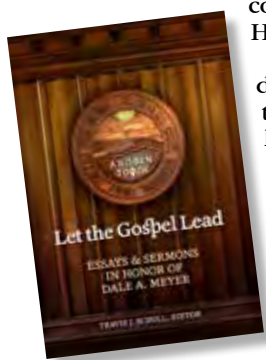
The book was edited by Dr. Travis Scholl, managing editor of Seminary Publications, and was published by the Concordia Seminary Press.

“It was an amazing thing to see this collection come together, from so many different pastors, scholars and leaders who have worked with Dr. Meyer, even a sermon from the late, great The Rev. Dr. Oswald Hoffmann,” Scholl said. “I, for one, count it an honor to have worked with Dr. Meyer in various ways over the years, to learn from his generous churchmanship, and to be blessed by his life and ministry centered in the Gospel.”

The *festschrift* is divided into three sections: **ESSAYS:** This section contains both scholarly and collegial articles written by friends and colleagues that reflect Meyer's professional life and ministry. **ANATOMIES OF A SERMON:** This section includes three of Meyer's sermons accompanied by commentary from fellow homiletics on the Seminary faculty.

SERMONS: This section contains sermons from colleagues that encompass Meyer's time at Lutheran Hour Ministries and at the Seminary.

“This was the last thing I would have expected. I don't think I deserve it,” said Meyer, after receiving the *festschrift*. “Diane and I have been talking these last weeks ... She and I separately said the same thing, that during these years, we just tried to do our duty, like in Jesus' parable. Sometimes we got it right and sometimes we botched it. But the great thing about the Seminary and this faculty is that we're so collegial. We can argue, but it's always about the Word and the Gospel. I hope all of you know about the love that Diane and I have for the Seminary and all of you.”



Collette Irwin-Knott Named Interim President During Valparaiso University's Transition

Collette Irwin-Knott, a 1981 graduate of Valparaiso University, has been named Interim President-Elect effective September as the board of directors for the university continues their nationwide search involving a transition process to replace retiring President Mark Heckler. Ms. Irwin-Knott has had numerous professional and social affiliations in financial services including chairing several committees. She spent her career in the field of public finance with HJ Umbaugh & Associates in Indianapolis, Indiana,

retiring as a partner in the firm in 2014. She worked closely with educators throughout Indiana on hundreds of school and library projects involving the issuance of municipal bonds. She has been an instrumental leader at local, state, and national levels of public finance, and has represented independent financial advisors at the federal level as regulations were developed for this industry.

After 12 years of leadership, Heckler is stepping down but will continue to lead the

University as President Emeritus, continuing active fundraising efforts and assisting in presidential transition matters.

Ms. Irwin-Knott is a member of both the University's Board and the presidential search committee. She has also been active in ministries assisting inner-city teenage youth in Indianapolis. Her interests have also included the arts and serving on the Board of the Indianapolis Public Library Foundation. Among her many professional and charitable activities, the Indianapolis

Business Journal recognized her as a “Woman in the Lead for Financial Services.”



Recognizing the Past as we Look to the Future

Adapt to Grow
Embrace change
to get ahead



Maybe you've heard it said, "We are living in crazy days." Maybe you've said it yourself! It almost seems like an understatement.

Many people thought politics would take center stage in the latter part of 2020. Political name calling has certainly been overshadowed by an even greater threat.

Many thought 2020 was a year to gain clarity. Turns out it still could be an excellent time to gain clarity, especially in regard to our faith and values. Think about how people have found new ways to spend family time, to educate children, to stay in touch with neighbors, and even to worship together. Is it ideal? Certainly not! Though it is truly amazing to see how resilient people can be and how we can learn to adapt to strange circumstances.

Jesus gave us what we call "the golden rule" in MATTHEW 7:12, "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

Our world continues to struggle to operate under the standard of God's Word. This, of course, is the result of our sinful nature. We find many ways to stretch the Word to conform with our way of thinking.

When people assert their rights over their own safety, or over the safety of others, we have lost sight of important values. Jesus taught us the value of our neighbor in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. John told us, in his first epistle, that if we say we love God, yet hate our brother, we are liars. It is really not an option.

embrace change!

Many are seeing life in 2020 with 20/20 vision. For some, they have learned that we must not take our freedoms for granted. Others are learning that the world is bigger than just "me," and what I want, when I want it. Some have chosen not to learn at all, hoping life will return to what they consider normal.

In this "new normal" it is clear that we must think differently. Interestingly, the Bible has a lot to say about how we choose to live in the world, and many of these words seem to have direct application to the days in which we live. In 1 JOHN 3:16 he wrote, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers [and sisters]." Love is the fulfillment of the law, Paul tells us in ROMANS 13. In fact, Paul writes in GALATIANS 5:14, "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Few people have not had their life somehow interrupted by the pandemic which continues to wreak havoc on our nation, much less the world. And the cry goes up, "How long?" When will this end?

Like the little child on a road trip, I find myself asking at times, "Are we there yet?" How long must we endure this time? Yet, as we look back in history, as difficult as these days are, it isn't the first time our world has endured hardship. Echoing in my mind are the words from ECCLESIASTES 1:9, "What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun."

The other day I heard Billy Joel singing the song, "We Didn't Start the Fire." It goes through a whole list of names and happenings, presumably covering events in Joel's own lifespan up to the time the song was written.

As I listened to the song it was not intended as a social commentary on our



current circumstances, but it certainly seemed to fit. We are seeing the world change right before our very eyes in dramatic ways. The truth is, the world has always been changing, one day at a time.

Tragedy and illness have always been with us. Every generation has dealt with some unusual and tragic circumstance, many through our own actions and fault. Whether it was a plague, an assassination of a leader, mass extermination, war, inflation, housing crunch, or pandemic. Nothing is new under the sun! If you wait long enough, things will change!

While there's nothing new under the sun, the things we are currently experiencing may be new to us, and require us to change and adapt if we are to grow. Here's what I've learned — change is inevitable, growth is optional. Often we resist change. We like things the way they once were. We like things to be comfortable and familiar. Change can cause us to react in ways we don't intend.

The truth is, nothing stays the same, but how we respond to the changes and challenges all around us can help define who we are becoming. I have often said we cannot change the past, but we can help determine our future by the choices we make. During this pandemic time a question to answer is how will you respond to the changes coming at you daily. It's not a question of if changes are coming, they are already here!

How can we grow, especially in our faith, in the midst of continual change? In the past six months I, along with numerous others, have experienced a plethora of changes. How about you?

As a nation we don't travel the way we once did. We don't shop the way we once did. We don't spend leisure time the way we once did. We don't interact with our friends the way we once did. And regardless of whether your church is open yet or not, we don't worship the way we once did.

No one chose any of these circumstances, but we are better able to handle them when we work together to figure it all out even when we are socially distanced. Just take a look at the articles in this issue of *Lutheran Life* and see how our awesome God is still at work among and through His people! See how some of our pastors, congregations and schools are embracing change!

Years ago I learned that if I want to move forward, but keep looking back, I eventually run into a wall. It's not wrong to long for the past, however, we cannot live there. To do so is to miss out on what God is doing among us right now. Our God never misses an opportunity to teach and bless His children.

While we may not fully understand or appreciate it, God will use all circumstances for His glory. Paul reminds us, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose." That's each of us. Even in the midst of change, we can look confidently to the future, knowing that God has a good plan for His children. He has a record of bringing order out of chaos — just see *GENESIS 1*. He has already demonstrated the depth of

His love for us in Jesus, who bore the trauma of our sin and death so we could live forever. It's a picture of the length God goes to for each of us. And day by day He's stretching us and teaching us, preparing us for an eternity that will blow our finite minds!

The winds of change, like the fall, come upon us quickly. As nature moves into a new season, so God has moved His Church into a new season. He is calling us not to membership in a church, but to discipleship as His Church.

Embrace the change all around us and use it to grow, keeping your eyes fixed on Jesus through it all. Our future is fixed on Jesus! He's the one to give us clarity in 2020 and into the future. I can't think of a better hope to build on, especially when the days seem crazy! ☺



2020
VISION
 Reaching Many in 2020
 for Jesus!



the URBAN EMBRACE



by Victor Belton
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Florida-Georgia District
Atlanta, Georgia
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***Black & Brown Americans
experience deadly stress
as a worldwide pandemic
collides with violent racism.***

***Events reinforce the role of the church
in the community to help the poor
and underserved.***

These are very challenging times for the church in the world and the United States of America. We have a global pandemic of COVID-19 that calls for sheltering in place, social and physical distancing, and quarantine for those who have been exposed. This has meant that the church, the people of God, have had to adjust in the way we worship, study, and serve one another.

This is just one facet of what makes this time so interesting. There are a few other things happening that are also challenging our life together as the people of God. Consider this comparison to the four horsemen of the apocalypse in REVELATION 6. We have the horseman that brings death and disease. Another horseman generates social unrest and protests perceived racial injustice and police brutality. The third delivers attendant social needs for food, housing, and provision because so many people are unemployed. The final one highlights the economic crisis of the fluctuating financial markets around the world and the loss of equity in housing and retirement funds.

This is not a one to one reference from the Revelation, but I hope you get the picture!

What makes this time so stressful in the urban core context of our highly populated city ministries is that all these issues will come galloping in at once with their relentless need for attention and accommodation. In more suburban and rural communities there may be one or two of them but seldom will all four be manifest and come through the door, in person, by e-mail, over phone lines or in social media all at the same time.

Each must be addressed and for the worker in the urban core setting it is exhausting and requires constant prayer, clear focus, and courage to stand as others are shrinking. Each calls for prayer and an appropriate proclamation and administration of the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is this element that makes the request of assistance from the church unique and distinctive. It is the activity in which, even amid the other needs, the people of God can find refreshment and relief.

For example, rural and suburban communities may experience the economic crisis of job loss but will probably not experience the COVID-19 crisis or the protesters shouting in the street. These communities may face some level of human suffering as homelessness and hunger increase because people have lost their jobs. This will be an attendant part of the economic crisis. But seldom in the middle and upper middle-class context of the average Lutheran congregation will all these issues demand attention at the same time.

The distinguishing mark of ministry in the urban context is that all these things are happening at once and comprise a “perfect storm” that the pastor and the body of Christ must address. This understanding has led us to interview some Lutheran pastors in the urban core in an attempt to discern how the Lord is blessing the people of the church to be creative as they deal with the convergence of these issues.

Pastors that serve in the urban core contexts of the cities of Atlanta and Miami were interviewed to help us understand how they and their members are doing in this time of pandemics within pandemic. This is a brief report on what creative things they are doing in these times. I also inquired about ministries — and how the ministers are dealing with the social needs and unrest. I also wanted to know how they are coping with the crush of issues in this time.

There were some things that were common to the experiences of most of the pastors to whom I spoke. They all indicated how much more work it is to virtually stream

or utilize ZOOM worship in an online context. The pastors have had to update their skill sets overnight to become proficient with preaching and teaching their members online. Most found it very challenging, but all have had a modicum of success in making the turn. In fact, each of the pastors was grateful for the way their members have received ministry in this new way.

Take, for example, **Holy Cross/North Miami, FL** whose pastor is the Rev. Dennis Bartels. COVID-19 has hit the ministry hard. There are eight families with members who have recovered, five currently ill, five funerals have been conducted and three staff members have been or are currently ill with the virus. Prayer is much in order.

Pastor Bartels has conducted two graveside funerals and one inside the sanctuary with six people in attendance. The virtual services take about eight hours each to put together and are uploaded to YouTube for people to watch. Of course, while all this is occurring the regular weekly sermons, Bible studies and pastoral care issues continue — and demand attention. You can see how this is an extremely challenging time for many pastors in the urban core context.



Dennis Bartels

“The good news is that the number of people viewing Holy Cross’s services is *four times* as many as would be present in church on any given Sunday,” Bartels states. “One Sunday there were more than 1,000 views of the service. People from all over the country tuned in as well as some from other nations. This is a blessing because more people are engaged with the Gospel of Jesus Christ online than would ever have been reached in the church building”

Most ministries are concerned about how to engage people when restrictions are released and worship in the church’s sanctuary can resume. Pastor Bartels shares, “Some people will never come back to worship. They will continue to engage online.” He knows of one person who has not been in the church building in 15 years but has not missed a single Sunday online. This pandemic has churches reaching out with the Gospel and in new ways with the Word of God.

I was very surprised to find that one of the ministries in our District never stopped in-person worshipping and question the extreme response of leadership to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Reverend Luis Santana of **St. Matthew/Miami, FL** expressed skepticism regarding the numbers citing all the misinformation and confusion surrounding how to best respond to the pandemic. Pastor Santana and his members believe that there are a lot of games being played with the numbers to help receive federal funding. At St. Matthew they practice social distancing “to the letter.” There is *no* sharing of the peace or fellowship after worship. Sanitizer, masks, and gloves are provided at the entrance and cups are available in the event someone brings coffee to share. There are some younger members of St. Matthew sick with COVID-19 who are receiving pastoral care. Offerings are stable as people give both by mail and in person.

The people of St. Matthew appreciate that the chaos and confusion being perpetuated on the street is not perpetrated by most of the protestors. The looting and violence seem to be more a phenomenon involving white people as perpetrators rather than black protestors. There is intentional prayer for first responders and an appreciation of them as the first line of defense against bad actors in the neighborhood.

This somewhat mirrors the experience of the Rev. Stephen Wiggins, Sr. of **Christ/East Point, GA**. Pastor Wiggins shares, “the pandemic forced us to go to the next level in terms of us now having virtual worship. Vacation Bible School, Bible Study and even regular meetings have all been online. Both worship numbers and offerings have increased and we are aware that we are serving people in at least seven states.”



Stephen Wiggins

Pastor Wiggins is using the preaching platform along with Bible studies with open discussion to deal with the challenges presented by the current social unrest pandemic. The killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, MN, Rayshard Brooks in Atlanta, GA and Ahmaud Arbery in Brunswick, GA along with the recent deaths of Rev. C. T. Vivian and Congressman John Lewis have opened the doors for conversation regarding social justice, equitable policing, and equality. These events reinforce the role of the church in the community to help the poor and underserved.

Another aspect of ministry in the urban core of Atlanta is represented by the Rev. Joseph Song and **Stepping Stone Ministry/Perry, GA** for the homeless. Pre-pandemic activity included study on Wednesday and Friday with worship on Saturday. Each of these gatherings included serving food, giving away socks, clothes, and toiletries. Now some congregations are afraid to allow Stepping Stone to use their facilities, but Pastor Song knows the ministry must go forward because lives are being saved both in time and eternity.



Joseph & Sharon Song

Since the pandemic shut-down the third week in March, Pastor Song and his wife Sharon have continued the Saturday ministry in a parking lot. This includes a brief prayer and message. Afterwards, food is shared. It is important to maintain the social distancing even when distributing masks, socks, toothbrushes and food. The city of Atlanta mandates that no more than nine people may assemble at any one time.

This has become a very trying time for the homeless because the protesting crowd has now been added to the

next page ▶



Stepping Stone has been meeting in parking lots during the pandemic

COVID-19 pandemic. “This brought an immediate and significant drop in attendance,” Song explains. “It may well be that the homeless do not want to be out in the open during the protests, so they make it their business to stay out of public view.”

It is interesting that the Center for Disease Control has said that the Atlanta Mission for the homeless is the safest place to be in metropolitan Atlanta. The homeless are not being widely impacted by the virus. God is indeed gracious because the homeless do not have insurance and many would perish on the street if the virus were to breakout among them.

Pastor Song has noticed, “Flexibility is a key to success in uncertain times.” He is beginning to use ZOOM to teach Bible study to the brothers staying in the Atlanta Mission. Some who are living on the street and under bridges can also access the teaching by phone but do not have video. Pastor Song prays for the body of Christ to remember those in need in this time and to continue to be generous in reaching out and sacrificial in giving.

Pastor Adam Ellsworth at *Grace/Atlanta, GA* (the mother LCMS church for Greater Atlanta) is also one of the leaders of All Nations Society Atlanta (ANSA). ANSA seeks to minister to the needs of immigrants in Clarkston, Georgia. Half of Clarkston’s residents are foreign born and hail from more than 50 countries across six continents and the city proudly proclaims itself as “the Ellis Island of the South.”



Adam Ellsworth

Pastor Ellsworth leads a team that does grocery deliveries to those in need in Clarkston — visiting, sharing the Gospel and praying with clients. Pastor Adam appreciates that in this pandemic time ANSA must be fluid in their ministry and be prepared to stop and go as restrictions are eased.

“ANSA seeks to provide computers for families who have more than one child but only one computer,” Ellsworth explains. “While families are sheltering in place and children are learning online it is a hardship to have only one computer in the house. We are seeking assistance with this project and



These two children have a computer contributed and delivered by Pastor Ellsworth and the ANSA Organization

appreciate donations of laptops that are no longer being used. We also greatly appreciate cash donations. I invite you to contact me at pastoradamellsworth@gmail.com.”

According to Ellsworth, urban pastors often suffer from a high rate of burnout — a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. It occurs when you feel overwhelmed, emotionally drained, and unable to meet constant demands. “This pandemic has pushed that rate even higher. It seems to take twice as long and twice the amount of energy to do anything in ministry because of all the consideration that is demanded. I never thought I would have to figure out whether or not to have church according to the restrictions imposed by the governor or mayor. Navigating all this is difficult, he concludes.”

Another interesting aspect of the COVID-19 pandemic in urban core settings is that “giving” has remained consistent — or even increased. Giving has shifted from in person to online through members bank accounts, CashApp, PayPal or other online platform. Pastors expect revenue and consecrated giving to continue when the pandemic is past. This is one of the new practices that members now follow.

Some of the pastors I spoke with have members who are elderly struggle a bit with technology. They are not able to easily set up online contributions — and prefer to make their church offerings through traditional methods. They either mail their offerings to the church or drop an envelope off at the office. The members receive communication by mail once a week. The bulletin, a sermon transcript, church announcements and other information is distributed to members who do not want to leave the house or are uncomfortable leaving the house for fear of contracting the virus. Some congregations provide an online worship folder in a .pdf format that can be downloaded in advance to make it easier to follow and participate in the liturgy and hymns.

A new experience for the saints at *Rivercliff/Dunwoody, GA* is taking the time to make a reservation for a seat at church. The Revs. Jeff Jordan and Jacob Berlinki provide worship experiences for members online, but in addition to the livestream broadcast, they allow space in the sanctuary for those who feel comfortable to worship in the sanctuary. They even leave a couple of spaces open for visitors should the Lord send a few.



Rivercliff makes preparations for for those who wish to attend corporate worship



Jacob Berlinki



Jeff Jordan



Wilton Heyliger

Pastor Jordan is praying that we, Lutheran Christians, grow in our desire for the Sacrament of Holy Communion. “The incarnational presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper makes us want to get back to coming together as the body of Christ,” Jordan says. “The Supper is both a hope for the future and a reminder of the current need for ministry with what is happening in the United States.”

The Rev. Dr. Wilton Heyliger of *Incarinate Word/Tucker, GA* has been streaming service online through Facebook for a while and now also uses ZOOM. Divine Service is a staple for Dr. Heyliger. It is the lifeblood of the church so even when streaming he continues to use the historic liturgy to edify the members of Incarnate Word. “Liturgy and the Confessions provide a place of stability during the changes and fluctuations of this current time. The word of God remains and endures forever,” he offers.

Those dealing with serious issues in these very trying times pointed to the fact that as the people of God, the Body of Christ in the earth, we cannot concentrate on the Four Pandemic Horsemen introduced earlier. Instead we maintain our focus on the Fifth Horseman who comes as King of all Kings and Lord of all Lords with power, authority, dominion, and promise. We focus on the promise of life and provision the comes from faith in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and we cling with tenacity to His promises. We do not allow the needs of people to guide our behavior as if the King has established them in authority but as the people of God we are careful to reject the fear that looms all around us and receive the mantle of leadership our Lord has given.

Pastor Santana said it this way, “This is a very confusing time for people because there are so many voices and confusing messages. Christians should be ready for whatever comes and not be so fearful. Leaders should show a certain degree of courage and be an example to the people. I know it is dangerous. Be cautious but not fearful.”

An interesting point I want to make . . . there is not much attention being given to the protests in the street regarding the injustice of racism, the killing of African-Americans and the hesitant or missing prosecution of those involved resulting in the initiative to defund and demilitarize law enforcement. A consideration for why that may be is that even in the urban core settings we are very much a middle-class church that does not participate in that way in social injustice issues.

Lutherans are not lazy.

Lutherans are not uncaring. We have our ministries to

‘the least of these’ serving the homeless, hungry, widows, orphans, and immigrants. Lutherans are not racist or prejudiced any more than others in the general population. So why are we, in general, not preaching or going out and advocating for these causes?

I have four reasons why we may not be participatory at this time.

First, we all truly sin and fall short of the glory of God. The good that we would do we do not, but the evil we would not is what we often do.

Second, Lutherans are very cerebral and must have clearly defined goals and objectives. The Black Lives Matter movement is about Black lives but is also about dismantling the system and overthrow of the criminal justice system and we are unclear if supporting the injustice will also support the other agendas. Consequently, we are very careful.

Third, Lutherans are realistic about the fact that there is evil in the Kingdom of the Left. When the righteous rule good men rejoice. We are very careful about making judgments regarding the faith and life of our political and social servants and would rather support them as encouraged by ROMANS 13.

Finally, Lutherans look for Jesus and His agenda to be clearly expressed in our activity. The socio-political landscape in the United States is so polluted with the doctrines, preferences, and traditions of the leaders that Jesus and His agenda of love and community has been lost in the background so we will not participate because we view it as a distraction from our prime directive to seek and save the lost.

So this, my friends, is a snapshot of how our congregations in the urban core and first ring, old suburbs are coping in the time of pandemic within pandemic. It is absolutely exhausting because all the issues hit us at once and pastors in urban minstry are quite often the only staff member, with at times a part-time administrative assistant. These ministers must bear the entire load of helping people respond faithfully to each of the issues in a Biblical, confessional and personally edifying manner.

When we think we have the issue of worship during the pandemic solved, in comes someone being evicted, someone who has lost their job, someone whose spouse has been unfaithful because they had too much time on their hands, someone who is grieving the loss of a loved one from the virus or by other means, or someone who needs food or other assistance. Sometimes it is someone who is simply tired and needs to rest for a moment and be reminded the Jesus lives victorious and because He lives we will live also and have the power to face today and all of our tomorrows.

Sometimes the one in need is the pastor or other worker so please do not hesitate to call your brother and sister in urban core settings with that kind of support and encouragement in the Word of God. ☮

Editor’s note: The Rev. Dr. Victor J. Belton is a graduate of Concordia/New York and received his Master of Divinity from Concordia Seminary/St. Louis. In addition to his work for the FLGA District in the area of missions, he served as pastor of Peace/Decatur, GA for 27 years, Concordia University/New York for 3 years and served 12 years on the LCMS Board of Directors. He is a sought-after speaker nationwide. He can be reached at email: vjbelton@gmail.com

Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

I think it is safe to say that we in the Florida-Georgia District Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, know what Paul is referring to in I CORINTHIANS when we hear our conference theme. But what about the world around us? We all know how small our LCMS world is . . . and many times we like to live in that world only because we are comfortable.

We are safe in our world.

We can talk with others in our world and use our “vocabulary” with our alphabet soup of acronyms (LWML, LCMS, CPH etc).

We know what all those letters represent. But guess what? There is

other. We knew that the “civility” of this year’s presidential contest was going to be non-existent and that the price tag of this election would be like none before.

We knew that the Olympics this summer were going to be a great distraction from the heat of politics and a great opportunity to cheer on our athletes who have sacrificed so much.

Many of us in the District were looking forward to attending the Passion Play in Oberammergau, Germany in September and the Presidents Equip Conference in Orlando, FL. Lots of plans. Lots of exciting things to look

to stop us but didn’t succeed.

The church fought right back at Satan as we moved our worship from our sanctuaries into virtual settings — like Youtube and Facebook. Now there was an even greater presence of the Gospel in our world other than just keeping that message in our sanctuaries.

Here at Hope/Plant City, FL, members began to worship much like they did in the early church — in their homes, surrounded by family and friends. Our members began to share our worship service links with their friends and even worship together as they would watch together. The Word of the



by Dean Pfeffer
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Embracing the Future, While Preserving the Past!

a big, beautiful world that our Lord created and calls us to enter with His Gospel message to *Connect People to Jesus!* And He uses each of us no matter what our position in His church, as the parts of the body with our various gifts given by His Holy Spirit, to go into our communities with His message of love and grace. But especially in these days, with the news that He will never leave us or forsake us.

We all know that 2020 has been a year like none before! I can’t think of anyone saying, “let’s do 2020 all over again it was so much fun!” We entered this year, knowing that there would be an election like none

forward to as we ushered in 2020. Then we heard the brakes screeching to a complete stop!

New words entered our vocabulary like “Coronavirus” (also known as COVID-19) and “social distancing.” And here is where the plot thickens. We saw what was happening in China and Europe and suddenly we found ourselves in the same situations. Work from home orders, social distancing, guidelines for handwashing etc. were all put in place right here at home.

Then businesses started shutting down. Then, Satan had his field day as churches started shutting down. Ah yes, in Satan’s twisted mind, he has won the war! “The churches cannot preach the Gospel. I won!” But just like Easter, Satan thought he won and then came the blow . . . Satan lost again! He lost again because the Gospel cannot be stopped. The leaders tried to stop Paul, but did not succeed. They tried to stop John, Peter and the others and did not succeed. Satan tried

Lord was spreading. God was taking what Satan thought would destroy the church and giving His people the strength and gifts to use it to God’s glory! We saw this happening in homes across our District and across our Synod.

No, the Gospel was not contained to brick and mortar but our message and our members were deployed during the shutdown.

At Hope, we saw the opportunities God was giving us through all that was happening and responded saying, “Here am I send me!” During the shut down, some of our members saw our online worship as that opportunity to invite friends and neighbors to join them for worship. Others would simply hit the forward button with the link to worship and invite others to join us for online worship. Hope’s Missions and Outreach team took the opportunity as their Lenten dinner was cancelled and the food purchased, to make and deliver meals to our homebound and senior members.

As a result of our efforts at the Florida Strawberry Festival and our Annual Turkey Supper, Hope donated funds to the Plant City YMCA to help support their summer camp, gave financial assistance to our Hispanic ministry to purchase groceries and needed items for their members, and provided \$4,500 in



Pastor Dean Pfeffer leading worship via YouTube

THE RURAL EMBRACE

support to the United Food Bank of Plant City for emergency food purchases. While Hope annually supports the Food Bank — this was over and above our annual assistance. Plus, Hope's Missions & Outreach Team provided lunch for the volunteers at the Food Bank, as did my wife and I for several weeks.

Then our world made an abrupt turn to the civil unrest in our nation, which has put many on edge. Most of our communities were faced with demonstrations and outrage



Plant City, FL Mayor Rick Lott

over the death of George Floyd in Minnesota. Thankfully, due to the leadership of our community and the proactive response of Mayor Rick Lott, Plant City did not face what was threatened or planned. Rumors were flying, Facebook posts were calling for action. It was said that a pallet of bricks was mysteriously delivered at the congregating point.

Downtown merchants were boarding up their business — as if a hurricane was approaching! Businesses were closing early. Even Hope postponed a re-opening training meeting due to what was being said the night of June 2nd for the safety of members that would be traveling through what was anticipated as the “riot zone.”

Mayor Lott's response to all that was being said was simple, “what do they want?” So, he sat down with the protest leaders to talk. His face to face, one on one honest discussions have opened the door for more discussion and regular peaceful, lawful protests in our community.

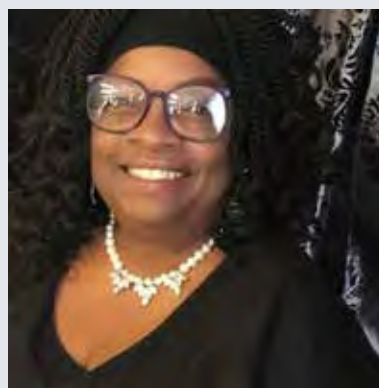
We as Pastors (committee of area senior pastors) have been working together with Mayor Lott and others in the community to



Plant City's Downtown District

bring a spirit of unity and community to Plant City. Together we pastors, of various ethnicities, shared and prayed together for peace in our community and peace in our nation. We prayed that the members would come to see racism as idolatry and seek God's forgiveness for our injustices. We are looking forward towards a possible mass event (when the COVID-19 situation allows for such gatherings) to bring our community further together.

In addition, we at Hope work



Sharon Moody


closely with the Plant City Black Heritage Foundation and its President, Sharon Moody who runs “Lots of Hugs Summer Reading Camp” on our campus. This gives us the opportunity to share the love of Jesus with the students and staff on our campus every day and

connect them to Jesus.

Hope Lutheran Church is just *one* example of so many in our Florida-Georgia District that has been blessed with leaders of mission, ministry and vision to reach into our communities with the Gospel in both word and deed. Together we see how God has made us one body in Christ, with many parts to do the ministry He has called us to do.

So where do we go from here?

The answer is simple. To our knees with our eyes lifted to God. As the Psalmist tells us, “I lift my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” (PSALMS 121)

As we continue through the pandemic and civil unrest and political robocalls and political mudslinging, let us keep our eyes lifted up to the hills. Because the only way we will get through all of this is not by might and not by strength but by the help of our Lord who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 

South Florida Congregation Embraces

Wthe midst of a global pandemic, protests and social distancing, leaders have had to figure out new systems for ministry and how to connect with people in safe ways. This, of course, is complicated by the constant change in COVID-19 counts and trying to evaluate what is perceived to be safe, the polarizing political views involved, and local leader's expectations which differ from state-to-state, county-to-county and even city-to-city throughout our FLGA District.

them to our YouTube channel. One of our goals was to include as many members as possible in our services to help create the community connection even though we were not physically together. People recorded themselves doing the readings, singing songs, and speaking responses and these videos were woven into the worship.

There were more than 80 videos included in our Easter Worship service alone. Our office staff created PDF versions of our bulletin and other printed handouts and these were linked to the video and on a new web page created for livestreaming (www.stpaulweston.com/livestream).

Another system that was created was to help streamline our online giving options. We moved to a new platform through Subsplash Giving that has the lowest transaction fees available at just over 2%. We created training videos to help people sign up for the online giving, and within a few weeks people had moved into a new system of "giving online" or mailing their contribution envelopes into the office each week.

Zoom also became a daily used ministry tool as our staff meetings,

adult bible classes, worship planning, youth fellowship and Bible studies, and even a congregation assembly



meeting were moved into this system of communication. The normal Bible study that Pastor Scott Henze would lead on Sunday morning started meeting on Thursday night, and then the recording of the study premiered on YouTube on Sunday morning. A web page was also created to host these studies for people who might want to go back and catch up on missed lessons. (www.stpaulweston.com/biblestudy).

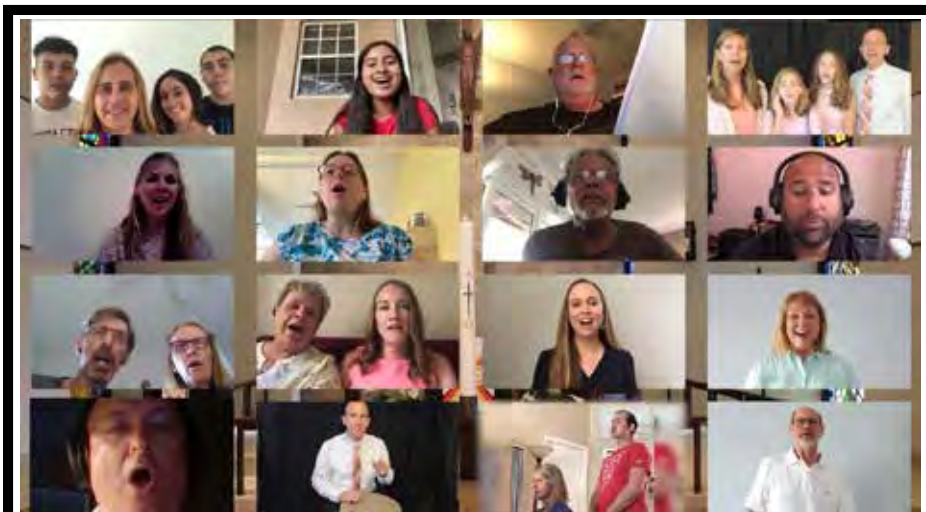
The biggest thing we knew we needed to continue to do was *connect and communicate with people*. Besides the worship services online and Bible studies and meetings through Zoom, the office staff created a system of calling, e-mailing, texting, letter writing, and follow up with members and those who were connected with our worship online. Members, who found they had more time while being at home, volunteered to call on other members to check in with them and pray with them. Staff — working from home — continued to reach out with people to let them know they were prayed and cared for.

As closure restrictions in Southeast Florida's Broward County began to loosen a bit, Pastor Scott worked with staff and leadership of the congregation to put together a plan for phasing us back to in-person corporate worship. These documents were shared with the congregation so that they would be aware of the plans and know how we were working hard to come back together — but also to do it in the safest possible way.

Phase I included short communion services for small groups that were held outside. We are currently in



At St. Paul/Weston, the first step was to continue to provide a connection to worship even though we were not able to meet in person. Thankfully, we had been live streaming our worship services since February of 2015. We quickly transitioned from leading worship live, to pre-recording services and uploading



St Paul/Weston members created a virtual zoom singalong of Halle, Halle, Hallelujah — the exuberant anthem with the traditional Caribbean melody with a strong, spirited piano accompaniment. Some familiar faces on the zoom are Pastor Billy Brath (a son of the congregation now with LCEF working nationwide) along with the Hartners, pastor emeritus at St Paul/Weston. That's the Beckers (upper right) and Jeremy on the bongos bottom row.

Technology, Expands Outreach

Phase 2 which includes the Phase 1 Communion services outside and Worship at 8:30 and 11:00 a.m. inside our sanctuary with limited numbers in socially distanced seating configurations. In coming back to worship, we knew that we needed to limit the number of people in our space. Through our Breeze Church Management System, we created sign up for worship that tracked who was attending and how many spaces were left to sign up for each worship time. We also are working to implement two new systems that will help us in our ability to socially distance well and communicate with the congregation.

The first platform is called Perfectly Distanced (<https://www.perfectlydistanced.com/>). Alex Akar (St. Paul Weston member) and business partner Johnny Ghibril reached out to us with a new platform they developed to help business adhere to socially distancing policies. They believed that they could easily adapt this platform to work for churches where people will sign up for a service and then, through the application, check in once they arrive on campus before worship at which time ushers and staff can send a text message to let them know when they can enter the building.

This system will help people from lining up outside the sanctuary and possibly crowding the entrance upon arrival at worship. When our worshipping in person population increases to our socially distanced capacity, we plan to implement this application to help maintain safety of those coming to worship.

We are also very excited to go live with our new St. Paul Weston App (available in August on Google Play, Amazon, and Apple App Store) which will help keep St. Paul members connected. The app will include an interactive prayer wall, archived (and soon live-streaming) worship services (video and audio), member directory, activity calendar, sign-up links, check-ins, Bible reading programs, group messaging and more. We will also be able to send push notifications to the groups people subscribe to and even



Clockwise, from upper left — Tim & Savannah Hawkins enjoy Pastor Scott Henze's sermon from their desktop computer. The Gersteneckers — Charles, Andrea & Sofia participate in a St. Paul/Weston Zoom session. Melinda and Jim Battani in virtual worship. Heidi and Frank Weinitz join Weston's worship from Puerto Rico.



Pastor Scott Henze conducts a small-group adult Bible class via Zoom this summer.

have an automated notification sent with a link to the bulletin when people arrive on campus for worship. This app was also created with Subsplash, so our online giving application will also be synchronized into the app.

While none of us know how and when things will return to full capacity, we know that God created us to be in community with each other and we are thankful that in the midst of all that is going on, there has been technology available for us to stay connected with each other and even reach beyond geographical limitations to connect people to Jesus — even those who are distant from the congregation.

At St. Paul/Weston we're enthusiastic about this "new normal" while keeping all our FLGA District congregations' ministries in prayer. 🙏

Editor's note: Jeremy Becker can be reached via email at jbecker@stpaulweston.org. Videos and documents about St. Paul/Weston's reopening can be reviewed at <http://stpaulweston.com/reopen/>

Recently, someone asked for my thoughts as a Black man about the current racial tensions in the news. I replied, “I look at the light at the end of the tunnel instead of the darkness.” The darkness is our nation’s history of racism, slavery, segregation and inequality. Lately, the court of public opinion, the rush to judgement, the disrespect for authority, the rioting, looting and the civic unrest fuel by media sensationalism make it difficult to see anything but the gloom.

Moreover, efforts to maintain social distance during the COVID-19 pandemic seems to put us even further out of arms reach of any brightness at the end of the tunnel. And yet, as the pastor at Our Savior Lutheran Church in Plantation, Florida, I had an opportunity last June to see light — a light that shines in the darkness.

The mother of a confirmand in my parish asked me back in May if I knew of people in the community who may be struggling due to the economic impact of the public health restrictions. There were. So, she organized the other families of the confirmation class in purchasing non-perishable grocery items and they personally but safely delivered them to the addresses I provided of people in need. The effort resulted in the light of Jesus being brought to ten families in our area as our confirmands also

read scriptures of hope and prayed with the recipients.

A month later I received a request for help from another family that heard about our outreach. I turned to a member of the church, Kim VanSant, to use some donated gift cards to purchase some groceries to deliver to them. When Kim returned to the church after making the delivery the light of Christ was on her face. She was beaming with delight over being able to bring joy to others in such hard times.

It is the care given to people in need during the pandemic that has been light for me as our world seems to have fallen into deep dark pit of unrest. It is an illumined monument to how in Christ (if not in America, if not in our historical statuary) Black lives matter. Most of the recipients of the groceries were Black. However, they matter to us not because they are Black but because they were fellow human beings in need. No one made

children of God. They helped others out of compassion for their neighbor whatever color they were. This color blindness of compassion was the message I proclaimed in a sermon on back June 7th titled, Your Life Matters. I expounded on GALATIANS 3:26 where St. Paul declares, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female for you are all one in Christ.” Every human being matters because Jesus was willing to be arrested, brutally treated, mocked for his ethnicity and deprived of



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breath on the cross for each of us so that “whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life” (JOHN 3:16).

This salvation, this freedom from slavery to sin and death. This

Seeing the Light Shine

deliveries because they knew the recipients were Black. They did not know or care. Indeed, the deliverers themselves were a diverse group of Black, Brown, Hispanic and White

is the light we receive in these dark days from Christ, whatever our race, ethnicity, sex or socioeconomic status. Nevertheless, St. John wrote in his gospel, “The light shines



Marley & Kai-Zoe Fellows helped prepare messages of encouragement for the bags being delivered.



Elliott and Lucius Morales help load groceries

in the darkness but the darkness has not understood it” (JOHN 1:5). The destructive rage and anger we see being displayed in the daily demonstrations are a sign that there are many in our nation who are missing the light at the end of the tunnel. Sadly, they only see the darkness, the history, the racism and the injustice and not the light, the gospels, the anti-racism and justification we have in Christ. The light of Christ I see is that He suffered in the darkness of bondage, the anti-Semitism and the injustice on the cross.

And yet He forgives us. We are the light of the world not only because we give groceries to our neighbor but because we forgive them as Christ has forgiven us. One of the most memorable articles I ever read in the *Concordia Seminary Quarterly Journal* was one about forgiving and forgetting. The author said we don't actually forget when we forgive. We remember what happened differently. Instead of remembering an injustice, we remember that Christ let us punish Him for what was done to us. Instead

we remember how we were just as evil before Christ forgave us. Therefore, when we see the cross that so brutally tortured and asphyxiated our Lord, we do not tear it down, deface it or erase the testament of His love. Instead we remember it differently. We see the cross as a reminder to forgive as we have been forgiven. We see it as our emancipation from slavery to sin. We see it as our salvation. We see it as the light. While it is hard to justify some monuments that remind so many of the darker moments in American history, perhaps as we forgive the wrongs of the past we can remember what the symbols and images represent differently, now that we have the light of Christ.

Today, because members of my church decided to reach across racial barriers and the six feet of social distance to show their compassion to their neighbors in need, I find new monuments of how far we have come in our nation. When Kim VanSant came back from making her grocery delivery she told me how the woman at the home asked to give her a hug.

Black woman and White woman reaching across the racial divide and hugging one another just as Christ reaches out and takes people of all color into His loving



Kim VanSant used donations and gift cards to purchase groceries and deliver them to community members in need.

in Pandemic Times

of remembering our victimization, we remember that Jesus has empowered us with the authority to pardon the wrongdoer in his Name. Instead of remember how evil others are to us,

Knowing the epidemiological risk they were both taking by doing so, the two embraced anyway. So, let this be the living statue — the light — that we remember in the darkness, a



Some of the Bible verses affixed to the delivery bags



Kai-Zoe Fellows creates special wording for the bags



Marley Fellows designs some of the messages for the delivery bags

Miami Weaves Successful Unified, Integrated Christian Curriculum

Paul wrote in 1 CORINTHIANS 13:13 — *These three things will remain forever. They are faith, hope, and love. And love is the greatest of them.*

In 1 PETER 4:8 we read *Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.*

this congregation. By the mid-90's Holy Cross was very diverse with 46 different birth countries represented. By the year 2000, North Miami was 75% Haitian and today, it is close to 90% Haitian. In fact, our school was so diverse, by the time my youngest daughter Kimberly was in the second grade, she believed she, like the rest of her classmates, was black.

In the midst of such rapid change, one verse has served as a guiding post in my ministry . . .

To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all

people so that by all possible means I might save some — 1 CORINTHIANS 9:22.

As a ministry, we have learned that in order to remain viable, we have to be willing to adjust with the demographics around us. While the fundamental truth of the Gospel message would never change, our liturgy and delivery of the Gospel would have to change so that we might reach some. One of our guiding truths is that we have cultivated a community that is rooted in the love of Jesus and seeks to model that love in our interactions with one another. To do that we have built an amazing team in which the Pastor has complete trust in the Principal and the Principal has

complete trust in the Pastor. Pastor and Principal both have trust in the People. People have trust in the Pastor and Principal. People trust one another.

At Holy Cross, both our church and school leadership follows Christ. We truly try to live out the saying — WE are the church together, it begins with Respect — showing respect for people regardless of their race, ethnicity or religion, setting aside presumptions and embracing the humility necessary to understand one another. It is important that we show respect to and treat everyone the same. WE do it through:

Loving Sacrificially.

Jesus gathered the disciples together and said this in *“The way to be first is to put yourself last and be a servant to the others”* — MARK 9:35. You demonstrate love by serving, by being a servant. This is best exemplified by an amazing school staff, most who have been with us for more than 15 years. The staff goes above and beyond to demonstrate the love of Christ to our students and their families.

Loving Mercifully.

ROMANS 3:25 informs us that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. There is not one who is without need of God's mercy. As a ministry we strive to love one another with grace and mercy, recognizing that offenses are often born out of



by Dennis Bartels
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As a country, we have become increasingly heterogenous, represented by more than 500 ethnic groups and growing. As we become a more diverse perfect union, “WE” the Church, the Body of Christ, have a unique opportunity to serve and proclaim — to love those around us. If we as the Church wish to thrive, we cannot be threatened by diversity, instead, we need to be intentional about looking at all of the ministry opportunities that God has set before us.

You may be asking yourself, what does a farm boy from Iowa know about diversity? Well, truth be told, when I first arrived at Holy Cross in 1986, I didn't know much. North Miami was 80% Caucasian as was



School Principal
Sherry Mackey



Holy Cross's Gospel Choir is comprised
of more than 20 students



Holy Cross student leaders during an
assembly celebrating Black History Month



Above — reading buddies Caleb Young (8th grade) reads with K5 student Tristan Bagwandeen

At left — Margy Riefkobl and Shannon Papillion embrace Black History Month



Holy Cross student dancers perform during an assembly celebrating Black History Month



Holy Cross student dancers perform during an on-campus assembly celebrating Haitian Flag Day



Margy Riefkobl and Arabel Charles enjoy a walk through a Homestead, FL farm during a field trip.

misunderstanding rather than malice.

In times of conflict — like what we have seen recently nationwide — we seek to teach one another with patience, kindness and mercy. Gaining an understanding of the culture. We have recognized the richness of culture and diversity and have looked for opportunities to celebrate culture.

Here at Holy Cross, we celebrate Black History Month in our school and church and also Haitian Flag Day. We don't ignore race, but we work hard to embrace it. We have a Gospel Choir and we are blessed with an amazing School Praise team and sign language team that help to share God's love to all. We look for opportunities to have difficult conversations surrounding race to happen in a positive way — not in an accusatory tone, rather as an opportunity for reconciliation. We also do a weekly food distribution that has been well received by the community. We know we still have a long way to go but we try to do it all with humility.

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

— REVELATIONS 7:9-10.

The bottom line is that this is all about having relationships with each other and it begins with a relationship with God. The

question we try to ask daily is how do we build a bridge of love, within our Christian community spanning out to the community at large? What we do know so far is that we begin by knowing the community and trying to meet their needs? By trying in all ways to connect people to Jesus, so they can have a relationship with Him.

It's all about relationships. It's all about people. It's all about loving people. It always has been!

I sincerely believe this . . . Holy Cross Lutheran Church and School in North Miami, Florida is not only a glimpse into the future of what the American church will look like, it's also a glimpse of what Heaven will look like.



Nationalities Represented in Holy Cross Lutheran School North Miami, FL

Puerto Rican	Dominican	Taiwanese	Canadian
Haitian	Guyanese	Venezuelan	Chilean
German	American	Ethiopian	African American
Jamaican	Panamanian	Chinese	Myanmar
Trinidadians	Israeli	Bahamian	Burmese
Tobagonians	Spaniard	Nicaraguan	Peruvian
Grenadian	Brazilian	Cuban	Indian

Reflections on COVID-19 and God's

During the past month, it was my privilege to give the topic for each of our five Regional Pastor's Conferences. Instead of meeting in person, we met using the now-familiar Zoom format. Here are some key points from that presentation that I want to share with you.

The Missio Dei.

Missio Dei is a fancy Latin term for "the mission of God." It's not complicated. God's mission or purpose ever since Adam and Eve sinned, is to reclaim and reconcile lost sinners to Himself.



by Peter Meier
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We who have been infected with sin's deadly virus are the objects of God's passionate, healing love. He desires to save us all.

Let God Himself tell you about His mission. Read the following scriptures: 1 TIMOTHY 2:4; JOHN 3:16; LUKE 19:10; 2 PETER 3:9. What is God telling you about His heart? What is God saying to you about yourself? How would you describe God's mission based on what God says here?

Missio Dei is not only what God desires and what God has done. God actually invites us to partner with Him in His mission. Read and listen to God: GENESIS 3:15; GENESIS 12:2-3; MATTHEW 28:18-20; JOHN 20:21; ACTS 1:8. What does God tell you about Himself? About you? About your purpose or mission? Note that the word mission, missio, actually means "to be sent." God sends Jesus... Jesus sends us!

The pandemic and the Missio Dei. Our mission partnership with God is lived out where we live, work, and play. In our daily lives, we have the opportunity to follow Jesus, to live and share His love. The pandemic has not changed this.

Many have observed, "COVID-19 has made every home a chapel!" While we have not been able to gather for worship in our churches, God has pushed us out into our homes and neighborhood. We are no less the church there! In fact, many have discovered new ways to share Jesus' love with new people during this time. Many have discovered the joy of

sharing their faith with family at the dinner table, during at-home lessons and study, and on Zoom gatherings. We have discovered digital discipleship! God has used the Pandemic to disrupt the status quo and to help us discover how to be the church in our homes and communities.

What We Know.

Even in this time of uncertainty, there are some things we know for sure. Read and listen to God, Romans 8:28. What does God tell you about Himself? About you? How have you seen God work for good during this time of pain and disruption?

We know that pastors and church leaders and members have been working hard during these months. The church is meeting on-line. Pastors have prioritized worship and pastoral care. Phone calls and emails have connected members. Social-distanced visits, drive-by celebrations, and community service projects have kept us purposefully occupied. We have discovered new creativity in serving our neighbor.

We know that the mission of God continues even during "shelter in place." This has not been the time to push the pause button. Instead, we have worked overtime to figure out how to carry out God's mission under challenging circumstances.

The New Normal.

Is there such a thing as "normal" anymore? The status quo has been disrupted. We have learned to live our lives with care and concern for others, as well we for ourselves. Church does not, and will not look the same in the coming months and beyond. What can we expect?

As we think about what's ahead, reflect on these five points:

1) Pray Intentionally. Continue to pray regularly for your pastor, church and school staff, for your family and neighbors, for health providers, community safety, government leaders, mission workers and all those other prayers that you've been bringing to God's throne. Pray for a vaccine and a cure for this coronavirus, and for other serious sicknesses that plague. One thing we've learned in these past months is that more people are praying than before. That's a good thing!

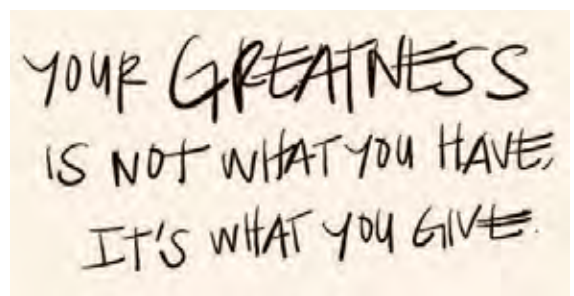
2) Worship Daily. Gathering with others in corporate worship



God has pushed us out of our sanctuaries into worship in our homes and neighborhoods

will be more appreciated than ever in the coming months. However, don't give up worshipping at home either! Continue your family worship, individual time with the Lord, on-line worship and Bible study. Pastors and leaders will look for ways to continue and improve on-line worship as an open door for those who cannot or will not gather in the building.

3) Give Generously. Times of crisis bring forward generosity from God's people. Our thoughts and attention turns to others. How have we reached out to help and bless during these past weeks? Right away we may think of finances, which is an important part of discipleship. Cash offerings in the plate will probably fade while on-line, digital giving will provide on-going



and sustainable gifts for God's mission. During these months with no on-site worship, some churches have struggled financially. God's mission continues and our generosity helps move the kingdom forward in our communities. How else have we expressed generosity, in response to God's daily mercies? How have we cared for one another, giving of our time and creativity to love others in Jesus' name? For those who are hurting and suffering loss our generous action brings healing and hope, and opens the door for Christian witness. The stories of generous love during these times are inspiring! As we daily experience God's grace, let's keep our generosity flowing!

Mission

4) **Think Creatively.** Visionary leadership looks beyond the responding to the immediate challenges of the pandemic to development and implementation of a plan for mission action in our communities. From large in-church gatherings, we quickly “pivoted” to in-home worship. From in-person small groups and classrooms, we discovered video gatherings. How will we “do church” and “be church” in the coming months? While traditions are valuable, they are not vital to the mission. What is tradition and what is required? How can we innovate for the sake of those not-yet-connected to Jesus? How can we creatively align our ministries with the Great Commission and Great Commandment?

5) **Engage Significantly.** We have learned that the church is not a building. The church is the people of God, scattered and gathered. Pastors have an important role, but do not fill every role. Who are the ones in our churches who are not engaged significantly? Many churches have figured out the digital world because high school or college students came to their rescue. Our churches will be stronger and will develop more leaders if we look to involve every generation in significant ministry.

The Lord has often used disruption and pain to advance His Kingdom beyond the limits set by man. Read the story of Moses, of Gideon, of Jonah, of the ordinary believers in the book of Acts. Persecution resulted in the advance of the Kingdom beyond where the apostles were ready to venture (Acts 8). A vision of unclean animals opened the door to Gospel proclamation to the unclean Gentiles (Acts 10-11). Closed doors in Asia brought the Gospel to Europe (Acts 16).

The Missio Dei remains. The five billion unreached peoples remain. Comfortable ways will always beckon us – and hold us – back. What new, creative and often uncomfortable ways is God moving His Church – you and me – to accomplish His mission? In what ways is He challenging and moving you to live love and to share Jesus where you live, work and play? Let 2020 be remembered as the year we reached many for JESUS! 🙏

Don't Give In To Pandemic Fatigue!

Are you experiencing pandemic fatigue? Here are some things that can help.

Pray regularly. Join a small-group prayer chain — by email, phone, text, Facebook group, zoom or by other ways. Pray daily if not more often.

Whine a little. It's okay . . . take your distress to God. Things are changing daily — from COVID counts to how we interact with family, friends and neighbors! We aren't able to experience congregational fellowship or personal interactions like we used to. Lay your complaints before God and ask Him to “renew a right spirit within me” and ask for his strength.

Bring fun back into your life. For me this had to rise to the top of the list. I needed to do more than walk my dog, ride my bike, jump in my pool. All the movie channels on TV began to get old and I soon tired of binge-watching series I hadn't experienced originally on television. I began to read more. Get creative while remaining responsible. Get your pastor to come over and grill and chill with his family. You can remain six-feet apart while enjoying a cold beer and some quality food out on the patio. If it's hot and raining, engage in a pool volleyball game or squirt gun fight. He needs this as much as you do!

Trust more biblically-centered news sources. This is a hard one in today's volatile political climate. Turn off those channels that make your blood pressure rise or pushes you toward depression. Don't let the daily COVID counts or approaching tropical storms drive you down. Many pastors, DCEs and Teachers are doing daily podcasts on Facebook, Instagram or YouTube. These are usually short, inspirational and a great way to launch your day. A quick soundbyte of important global news informs you without ruining your week.

Continue to worship. There is no reason to miss a week of worship now — more than ever before! Seriously, you don't have to confine yourself to Sunday morning. Some weeks I enjoy my online virtual worship at 4 o'clock in the afternoon in my quiet family room while it's too hot to be outdoors. Some churches have reopened corporate worship very responsibly. Take advantage of the flexibility of worshipping both at home and at your home church. I've even worshipped with friends nationwide — enjoyed a sermon delivered by a college buddy or former vicar preaching across the country. It's fun!

Check in on others. Our board of elders divvied up our congregation's directory and we regularly check in to see how our congregation family is doing and then we report to our pastor. We find out who needs help with grocery shopping or transportation. We pray with them and if we can't reach them by phone we send a quick e-mail. Our elderly members aren't the only ones who appreciate the contact . . . some of our young families offer names of people we can add to our prayer list. A simple errand can be hugely appreciated.

Remember who is Lord. Jesus is king. Whichever side of the political spectrum you are on, it's important to remember that Jesus is Lord of all and He's got the whole world in His hands. Don't forget that! My pastors continue to remind me of that. Rather than getting caught up in politics and being divisive, focus on building bridges and winning souls for Jesus. Ask questions. Spread love. Listen to the people in your life who care. 🙏



Pray for the five billion unreached people

— JL

Donations Surpass Mission Goal!

LWML Adapts During the COVID Crisis

As with many groups, the LWML FLGA District is learning new ways to go about the Lord's business during these COVID-19 days. We have been doing online board and executive committee meetings for several years, but this year we will conduct the business of our 37th Biennial Convention remotely.

Ballots will be or have been mailed to our delegates, as they will elect a new District President, Vice President Mission Grants, Vice President Spiritual Growth, Financial Secretary, and a Junior Pastoral Counselor.

The delegates will also vote on bylaw changes, and select mission grants for the 2020-2022 biennium. You might think we would have had difficulty in raising enough funds for our 2018-2020 mission grants. Churches have closed their doors, and many of our societies have not met since February. However, the US Mail is still a reliable way of sending donations, and we added the

capability for online donations to the LWML FL-GA website. Did we meet our mission goal for 2018-2020? *No...donations surpassed the goal!*



by Pat Powell
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The Lord is faithful! We thank God for the blessings we received in the past two years: the honor of being able to help in the Lord's kingdom through our mission grants, and to serve him in LWML. Our outgoing officers will be missed, but we have a promising group on the impending ballot.

While we were disappointed not to be able to participate in person at the Florida-Georgia President's Equip Conference, many of our

members will be attending remotely. I'm confident there will be a future opportunity to merge these enormous mission-driven groups into one successful event. It will still be an awesome opportunity to come together, even if we are apart. Registration opens soon for this unprecedented conference. By registering you'll have online access to hear David Kinnaman, President of Barna Group speak; to laugh with "The Skit Guys" and to journey with

Donna Snow in her sessions "Leading with God's Word."

In addition, speakers and breakout leaders from around the country will join us on this new adventure. The best news is that registration is only \$50 per person!

Yes, these are strange days. But we know God holds us in the palm of His hand. We need not be anxious about anything. Keep up on LWML FLGA District news at <https://flgalwml.com>.



Virtual Classes & Dorm Meetings May Be The New Normal.

Campuses Struggle With Less Physical Activity as Students Hibernate in Dorms

"Hybrid" is the buzz word this year on campus. Universities throughout the nation are offering remote classes and "hybrid" experiences to students who will have both in-person and online interactions with campus and one another. That's the word from The Rev. Jay Winters, pastor at University Lutheran at Florida State University.

"One of our students who is taking the position of Resident Assistant is even having dormitory floor meetings virtually — even when students will be just yards away from one another, separated by walls," he says.

"One of the challenges of campus ministry has always been to decrease the level of "disconnectedness" that students feel and invite them into community with one another and with God. That challenge is even more necessary and palpable now as many students consider not even returning to the towns of their universities — Gainesville, Estero, Tallahassee — in favor of saving

some money and taking remote classes from there. However, change and challenge are nothing new for our campus ministries," he concludes. "No matter the landscape of campus — whether it be physical or virtual — the campus ministries of the Florida-Georgia District will be reaching out to students and connecting them with the rich grace of Jesus."



St. John's Lutheran Church by the gas station is a church that has recently tried to "re-open" for in person worship services. The past few months have been a struggle. They tried Facebook live but that was a choppy video feed. They had trouble finding volunteers to record the video and even more trouble finding someone to edit the video. They really didn't even have the equipment. Well, fast forward four months and they post a video of their Sunday service to YouTube.

At first they were getting a healthy number of views per week. Sometimes even higher than in person worship was before! Yet reality is setting in. Online "views" have gradually decreased since Easter. They had hoped that opening back up would bring back the people. But that isn't happening. People are just not coming back as they had hoped.

St. Johns is now seeing only 20-25% of the people in the pews. They continued the online service but the views have dropped to maybe another 10-15%. Thankfully the financial giving is manageable for now but with these worship numbers the future is uncertain. Plus this pandemic isn't going away any time soon.

always relationship based.


The pandemic hasn't changed a thing. Sure what the church does may be limited and maybe all there is for you is a screen. Yet it still comes down to a relationship. It also helps a lot if what people are viewing inspires not only faith but also the enthusiasm to share the link and say "you've got to watch this!"

Yes this is very different and may seem awkward. But give yourself grace to experiment.

Always assume viewers don't know you or your church. This is your moment to introduce and define yourselves. "Hi, I'm Pastor Schultz. You're watching St. John's Lutheran by the gas station in Middletown Florida. We are all about loving Jesus by loving our town. So we feed, cloth and tutor our neighbors here who are in difficult times in their lives. We'd love you to be a part of making a difference with us in the name of Jesus."

Keep it very short and crisp. Your long time members won't mind hearing that over and over. In fact it may help them to know what they can say about their church in their relationships with people.

Do you expect viewers to find you and reach out to you? If you don't have and provide contact information and multiple platforms to connect then probably not. But if you are really interested in connecting and bringing them closer to Jesus you will always utilize facebook, instagram, twitter, email, phone number and website information. You will likely also invite them to sign up for free resources, participate in some activity or initiative that you are doing to make that difference! Do you have something on the calendar? Why or why not? Carve out a way for viewers to not only watch but take that next step. Make it as easy as possible. Keep saying it. Be a broken record. Multiply that information on your digital platforms. Follow up with phone calls and email replies quickly and invite them to the next step. Pass on the name to another socially winsome person who can connect with them as well.

So you see. It's not so new after all. It comes down to relationships, pandemic or not. It has always been about intentionality valuing people because that's what Jesus has done for us on the cross. 

Implementing Critical Outreach During a Pandemic



by Scott Gress
Lutheran Counseling Services
Leadership Coach
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What does this mean? How does that happen? While it's tempting to jump into solutions, the coaching leader would begin with the end in mind.

First, who are you as a church? What is your purpose? One very short phrase. What are you about? Why are you online? Why should anyone bother to tune in to another "episode" of your worship service or Bible study or other presentation? Why would anyone text or email the link to a friend (the relationship) and say, "you've got to watch this"?! It probably won't be simply a video recording of the regular worship service. Sitting in a pew is very different than sitting in an easy chair with an

ipad. But that's for another article. So first ask, who is your audience? Who do you assume you are talking to? Long time members? Those who know you personally? That's likely if you don't introduce yourself or say something about the church and ministry or forget to include contact information. Yet if you hope to meet new people, they aren't going to keep viewing if they don't know who you are, what you are, why you are and what's you are doing that makes a difference! Don't television shows often bring the viewer "up to speed" about what happened in the previous episode? Then make the mental shift, look into the camera and speak to the stranger you hope will be a friend. Talk to them *personally*. If you have a live stream and the viewer can text questions or answers live, then invite them to do so. *Interact*. Invite them to interact. Be *intentional*.



Outreach seems out of the question. But is it really? The first impression is that since people are afraid to come to church and even our members are not "tuning in" then our options are zero. We've never been here before.

Or have we?

Think for a minute. What's the one thing that outreach and engagement have always been about?

What have we always talked about?

That's right, the personal touch founded upon a personal relationship. Study after study for decades has proven that it's all about a relationship. Outreach, evangelism, participation all comes down to a personal relationship with someone they know, like and trust. Then out of that relationship comes dialogue about faith, how Jesus has made a difference, then inviting them to church or a church activity and more dialogue afterward. It is



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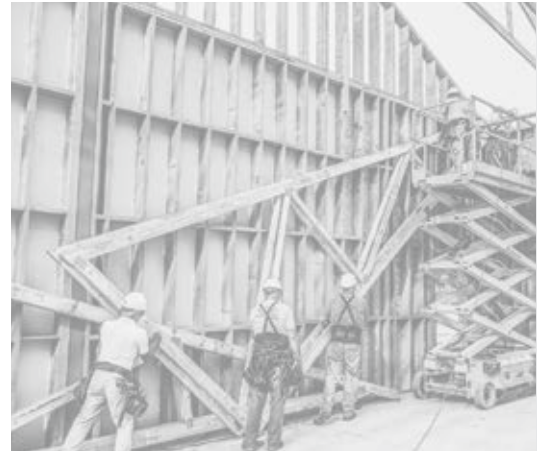
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NATIONAL SYNOD NEWS

Daniel Preus Named Interim Seminary President

In early June, the Board of Regents of **Concordia Seminary/ St. Louis, MO** named the Rev. Dr. Daniel Preus interim President. He began his new role on July 1 and will continue serving until a new president takes office.


“The seminary is blessed to have Dr. Preus agree to serve us once again,” said the Rev. Todd A. Peperkorn, chairman of the CSL Board of Regents. “Daniel is a distinguished churchman with 40 years of parish service, making him well acquainted with the needs of future pastors. He is very familiar with Concordia Seminary: He literally grew up on campus and, more recently, served for nine years on our

Board of Regents. His steady demeanor and pastoral heart will serve the seminary well as we continue our work forming pastors, missionaries, deaconesses, scholars and leaders ... during this time of transition.”

Preus has served, at various times, as the first, third, fourth and fifth vice-president of the LCMS. He also has served congregations in



Indiana, Minnesota, Illinois, Colorado and Missouri. He was director of Concordia Historical Institute from 1995 to 2001 and of Luther Academy, an organization devoted to promoting professional Lutheran theology, from 2005 to 2012.

Preus and his wife, Linda, live in St. Louis. They have three sons, two daughters and 10 grandchildren. 





The latest issue of Lutheran Church Extension Fund's **Interest Time** magazine is now available! This issue focuses on Lutheran art and architecture and is an interesting read about how art and architecture serves our churches. It is available on the website interesttime.org. 



On March 20, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) **Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR)** unanimously endorsed “Communion and Covid-19” (CC19), an opinion on certain Holy Communion practices during the coronavirus pandemic.

The Addendum was written, in part, as a response to an anonymous document circulated within the Synod titled “Communion in Homes During Times of Crisis: Scriptural and Confessional Principles” (CIH). The CIH document was evidently written and/or endorsed by pastors who are now advocating and practicing online home Communion services in their congregations and who intend to continue the practice. The article is at

<https://blogs.lcms.org/2020/ctcr-releases-addendum-to-communion-and-covid-19-opinion/> 

*The Holbrook family has been waiting to baptize their sons since the initial COVID-19 outbreak in early March. Pastor Tony Durante invited them to attend the virtual live-streaming service at **Our Savior/ Plantation, FL** on July 5th and Jason, a student in Our Savior's preschool, and his brother Jackson were baptized — masks and all! *



FLORIDA GEORGIA

Out and About in the District

send your news & photos to lutheranlife@aol.com

Thrive/Estero Returns to In-Person Worship With Clever Protocol Video



Hunter Keslar



Wyatt Baggett



The video reminds members and guests to refrain from hugs and handshakes during COVID protocol.

Thrive/Estero, FL has created an online reservation system for worshippers who are comfortable returning to in-person services. They produced a clever video, available on Thrive's YouTube channel, giving protocol instructions for participation. Two members of Pastor John Roth's creative worship team, Hunter Keslar, Thrive's worship director and campus minister, and Wyatt Baggett, their audio/visual technical arts director, wrote and produced it.

Thrive has returned to corporate worship for a several weeks now, and, according to Roth, "those who attended were refreshed by the fellowship and the gathering.

"We realize for some people this is not the right time to gather in person and we fully respect their decision. Our online worship has been well received and we are working on improvements all the time — such as adding a second video camera." Thrive is meeting on the southeast corner of South Tamiami Trail/US-41 & Estero Parkway Win Estero — in Suites 1, 2 & 3 of the Estero Ridge Plaza.

"For those who miss the gathering together and are ready, we are just asking that they make a reservation so we can adequately prepare seating and follow the protocol we've established for safety." 🌿



Above — Hunter Keslar explains the registration process required for in-person worship
At left — Pastor John Roth conducts virtual worship from his iPad

Kyle Will Ordained & Installed at Epiphany/Lake Worth, FL



From left — Jay Winters, Kyle Will, Gregory Walton, Jacob Roedsens. Participants removed their masks for the photo. At left, President Walton installs Kyle Will.

Pastor Kyle Will was both ordained and installed on July 12, 2020 at **Epiphany/Lake Worth** in a 4 o'clock festival worship that took great care in practicing COVID-19 guidelines, including propped-open sanctuary doors, hand sanitizer, worship folders on a table (rather than handled by ushers), and seating that held to the six-foot social distancing rules.

The Rev. Dr. Gregory Walton, FLGA District President performed the ordination and The Rev. Jay Winters, FLGA District Secretary preached. Winters was Kyle Will's pastor at **University/Tallahassee, FL** in undergraduate school.

Will is a Tallahassee native. He and his wife, Amy, met in middle school and began dating in high school. They both studied music at Florida State University and during their freshman year, Amy asked him to join the "German Christmas service choir" at University/Tallahassee where Winters is pastor.

"I had not been involved in church for years," Will explains, "I didn't even know what a 'Lutheran' was!" He started attending the Wednesday night college group and eventually church regularly on Sundays. He quickly became a member involved in a leadership program. It was there that he felt the call to serve in ministry.

"Amy and I graduated, got married, and moved to St. Louis for "summer Greek" at the seminary— *all during the month of May 2014!* We experienced so much during our seminary journey but our biggest adventure began when we welcomed our son, August (at left), in May, 2018.

"I look forward to shepherding Epiphany Lutheran Church and

School with joy and honor. My family and I have been richly blessed."

The Rev. Jacob Roedsens, Circuit Visitor and pastor of **Our Savior/Lake Worth, FL** served as lectionary.

The theme for worship was **EPHESIANS 3:7** — "Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of His power."

Organist Jane Illsley offered Paul Manz's "Praise to the Lord" prelude that led into the processional hymn.

Pastor Jay Winters sermon underscored and expanded on Kyle's student years at Florida State University.

"How many times do I have to tell you?" was Winters' theme and he embellished on some of Kyle's stranger habits as a college student. Winters has a history with Will — preaching for Kyle's confirmation, officiating his wedding to his wife Amy, baptizing his son August, and now preaching for his ordination and installation. Pastor Winters drew a line between the Gospel text for the ordination — **JOHN 21** where Jesus tells Peter to "follow Me" and the text for Trinity Sunday, the day that Kyle was confirmed, **MATTHEW 28** — "I will be with you always, even to the end of the age." The sermon ended with the blessing "may God grant you the assurance of knowing that no matter how many times you go to Him and say 'Lord do you love me?' He will say, 'I do.'" 🙏



Tim Mirly Joins Redeemer/Stuart, FL as Principal



Tim Mirly has big shoes to fill — following Jim Essig's retirement at **Redeemer Lutheran School/Stuart, FL**, Mirly was installed as school principal on Sunday, July 19. He was joined by his wife, Lisa, and children Micah and Grace (above). Mirley was installed by Pastor Stan Allen, Associate Pastor/SMP and Senior Pastor David Albers, Mirly served for 28 years at St. Paul/ Jackson, Missouri, a Missouri Synod congregation founded in 1893. Mirly has a reputation for excellence in education as well as school spirit — as evidenced in his cheerleading photo above. 🌀

Brenda Arden Installed as New Preschool Director at Abiding Savior/Gainesville

Brenda Arden was installed as the new Preschool Director at **Abiding Savior/Gainesville, FL** on July 12th. She and her husband, Michael, come to the District from St. James/Lafayette, IN, where she had been on staff. Pictured and masked are (from left) Pastors James Rocky, Amazing Grace/Oxford, FL; Alan Struckmeyer, Abiding Savior/Gainesville, FL; Brenda Arden, Aimee Dierks, Director Amazing Grace Early Learning Center. 🌀





Pastor Tony Durante invited the newly sworn in Plantation Police Officer, Josh Slattery and his family to attend **Our Savior/Plantation FL's** livestream service on July 26th. Durante offered prayers for Josh as he begins his work protecting the Plantation community. Officer Slattery is pictured with his wife and children with Pastor Durante following the service. Durante, a former law enforcement officer with the Delray Beach Police Department, continues to serve as a chaplain for them. 🌀



As **Hope/Plant City, FL** re-opened for worship on Sunday, June 14th, their Spanish ministry, under the leadership of Rev. Miguel Sanabria, Jr. received a special gift from one of their members. As the congregation entered for worship, each was given a special mask specially made by member Maria Victoria Arango. Members wore their masks with pride and thanks for her very special gift.

Pictured are Hope's Sr. Pastor, Rev. Dean Pfeffer, Spanish Ministry Pastor, Rev. Miguel Sanabria, Jr, and Maria Victoria Arango as she presents masks to the pastors. 🌀



St Paul/Boca Raton FL installed their new vicarage couple, Joseph & Emily Reineke on Sunday, August 2. Pastors Steve Carretto and Andrew Kubowicz brought them forward for a virtual "laying on of hands" at the conclusion of both Sunday services. The congregation was asked to virtually reach out and join in the welcome prayer. Joe is a Concordia/Chicago undergraduate and Emily a Concordia/Wisconsin graduate. She'll be a reading specialist and teach in the school. Joe was assigned by Concordia Seminary/Saint Louis, MO. 🌀

Trinity/Fort Lauderdale, FL member Roger Earl Johnson has been a member for about eight years — but has been a lifelong Lutheran. He joined the United States Airforce in March, 1962 and was trained as an Aerospace Ground Equipment mechanic. He worked on aircraft equipment. Johnson also spent time in the Michigan National Guard until retiring at age 60. He and his wife moved to Florida.



Jan Withers retired at the end of July following 34 years of service at **Our Savior/Plantation, FL**. Withers began working at OSL as a pre-kindergarten teacher in 1986. Then after 11 years in the classroom, Pastor Walter Volz convinced her to become the congregation's administrative assistant. She served in this role for another 23 years. She will continue working in the church office in a part time capacity as the visitor coordinator. She is shown on the Plantation campus with Pastor Tony Durante, Our Savior's senior pastor. 🌀

His wife passed away in 2009. In 2013 he met his second wife and they were married in June of 2014. She passed away this past June and Roger is ready for his next assignment from the Lord. As a tribute to

his military background and for the love of his two marriage partners, he erected this flag on Trinity's campus this summer.

Trinity is located in the heart of Fort Lauderdale — in an urban area that is rapidly growing and attracting young professionals. The congregation is being shepherded by Intentional Interim Pastor David Kehret. 🌀



Michael Duchene was installed at **Peace/Naples, FL** on July 8th. Circuit Visitor Richard Browning officiated. Mike transferred to the FLGA District from the Michigan District where he was the pastor at Saint Trinity Evangelical / Clarkston. Previously Duchene served as associate pastor of Shepherd of the Desert/Scottsdale, AZ and intentional interim at Grace/Merritt Island, FL. He and wife, Susan, arrived to the Fort Myers area in June. 🌀

Benefits From LCEF Services

Savior of All/Cartersville, GA Breaks Ground For New Community Fellowship Center

On Sunday July 19, 2020 a celebratory groundbreaking service was held at **Savior of All/Cartersville, GA**, for an addition to the original church and Sunday School building built in 1995. It has been a long and winding path with the FLGA District and LCEF providing support and guidance along the way. In late 2012 and early 2013 Rev. Dr. Max Biesenthal, VP of Ministry Support for LCEF, facilitated the congregation's leadership team through the first Vision Path Planning Process — a program sponsored by LCEF.

That followed with a special committee reviewing Savior of All's Mission and creating a Vision Statement that was adopted in August of 2013.

In September of 2013 the mortgage on the original church building was paid off early and the congregation continued to accrue the amount of the mortgage payment in an LCEF Steward Account for a future building.

That same month the Church Council started the process of developing a long-term Strategic Plan for the congregation, which was approved in February, 2014.

In March, 2014 the LCEF Architectural Advisory Committee had the first of a series of meetings with the leadership team for developing a



Pastor Michael Zwemke conducts a "socially distant" groundbreaking ceremony for Savior of All/Cartersville, GA

long-term Site Plan. Dan Reichard, former FLGA District Vice President for LCEF and Greg Beste, an architect in the FLGA District, facilitated this development process.

A special Facilities and Grounds Committee was formed to take information from the Site Plan and the Strategic Plan.

One area that was a high priority was the need for more space for special events, such as dinners, receptions, the annual yard sale, and meeting space.

A committee was formed to develop concepts for a new building. The location of Savior of All's current building, new code requirements

and other factors presented a real challenge. A small Capital Campaign Team was formed to raise awareness of the opportunities and to secure pledges for the new building.

The plan that was approved will provide for a Community Fellowship Center that is approximately 4,000 sq. ft. containing a large fellowship/multipurpose room, a kitchen, storage space, and restrooms. The project is targeted for completion in late spring of 2021. The Rev. Michael Zwemke conducted the ground-breaking service. Rev. Frank Martin, the first Pastor for Savior of All, came in from Michigan to be part of the celebration.



*Above from left, Mr. Timothy Leech was installed as Principal, his wife, Beth, as 6th grade and middle school English teacher and Dineen Rottman as 3rd grade teacher at **Faith/Eustis, FL** on Sunday August 2. Mr. Leech was formerly Principal of Lutheran High School of Heartland in Grand Island Nebraska. Pastor Marc Kappel installed them. 🌀*



*Michelle Barbieri (at right) is a daughter of the congregation of **St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL** and her parents were charter members. School Principal Jim Richards Left) and Pastor Steve Carretto present her with the Cross of Christ upon her retirement in appreciation of her 26 years of service to the school. The school's yearbook was dedicated to her this year. 🌀*



***Redeemer/Stuart, FL**, recognized Deacon Joe Lamoureux's 25 years in the ministry at a July worship service. Joe is pictured with wife, Marge, during the congregation's coffee hour before they cut the cake. 🌀*

Woodlands Celebrates With Outdoor Worship



Pastor Joshua Pettit, Woodlands/Montverde, FL, is having second thoughts about his COVID-unfriendly clerical collar for outdoor worship. The congregation returned to outdoor worship with lawn chairs. Far right — The Rev. Milan Weerts kept his attire a little more climate friendly.



June Food Distribution Tops 5,000 in Fort Myers

Zion/Fort Myers, FL served more than 5,000 persons when it partnered with the United States Department of Agriculture Farmers to Families food box distribution in June. The congregation joined with Senior Friendship Centers and GA Foods as it hosted eight dates on which a “fresh food combination” box was offered free, one box per household, to Lee County residents.

The boxes contained meat, fruit, vegetables and dairy products. Two hours were set aside for the distribution, but demand was so great that for three weeks straight the program distributed 280 boxes within 75 minutes.

The effort was part of the federal Coronavirus Food Assistance Program, which purchased approximately \$1.2 million of agricultural products between May 15 through June 30 from American producers impacted by the closure of restaurants, hotels and other food service businesses. That food was packaged into family-sized boxes, then transported to distribution sites.

Zion served as a June distribution site. Volunteers loaded the boxes from “truck to trunk,” so recipients could practice physical distancing by remaining in their cars. According to Chris Fenn, chairperson of Zion’s Independent Town Elders Ministry, 32 of the 42 volunteers were members of Zion.

“We had planned to host a churchwide one-day service project to benefit seniors in our community,” she said. “God answered that prayer mightily. He provided an opportunity to serve not just for one day, but for the entire month of June!”

Fenn reported that 2,240 boxes serving 1,534 households with 5,072 members were distributed. 120 households also accepted Zion devotional materials.

The effort generated coverage on a local television station.

Zion also responded to the pandemic with volunteers sewing more than 1,000 masks at the start of June. These were offered free of charge to community and Zion members as well as friends. One member reported his neighbors drove the 20-mile round trip to the church to each get a free mask.

In mid-March, Zion combined their regular four services each weekend into two online worship broadcasts and a Sunday morning drive-in service. The Oasis contemporary service is broadcast at 5 pm Saturday, with a traditional service aired at 9:30 on Sunday morning. The drive-in service has been held on the front lawn, as weather permits, starting at 11 am Sunday.



Above — Volunteers move a box of fresh food “from truck to trunk” during a “Farmers to Families” food distribution day in June. At right, DCE Tim Richter, youth and family minister loads fresh food boxes for delivery.



Jefrey Jensen Installed at King of Kings



Rev. Jeffrey Jensen was installed on August 1st at **King of Kings/Jasper/Talking Rock, GA** (above) by The Rev. Dr. Gregory Walton, President of the FLGA District.

Above right, participating clergy are Pastors Ernie Knoche, Ray Borcbelt, Jeff Jordan, Jeffrey Jensen, Greg Walton and Daniel Brammeier. 🔄



Lutheran Pastor Todd Jenks Augments National Hymn



Three new hymn verses address three turbulences currently affecting our nation: the pandemic, racial discrimination, and civil division

Todd A. Jenks,

Siegfried August Mahlmann was born in Leipzig, Germany on May 13, 1771. He studied law in the university and, after travelling throughout Europe, bought a book store in Leipzig in 1802. From 1805 to 1816, he edited the *Zeitung fur die elegante Welt*, a German magazine, and from 1810 to 1818 wrote for the *Leipziger Zeitung*, a daily regional newspaper in Leipzig and western Saxony, Germany. It was an important publication of the workers' movement and today remains the only local newspaper in Leipzig. In addition to more serious poems, Mahlmann wrote a number of folk songs still popular with German children. His collected poems have been published several times. In his early life, he served as private tutor to several young noblemen. He died at Leipzig, December 16, 1826. He is credited with the lyrics for verses 1 and 5.

The music composition is attributed to Henry Carey. The melody used is the same as that of the national anthem of the United Kingdom, *God Save the Queen*. The song served as one of the de facto national anthems of the United States before the adoption of *The Star-Spangled Banner* as the official U.S. national anthem in 1931.

Editor's note: Verses 2 through 4, Lyrics by Todd A. Jenks, and may not be used without express written consent of the author — who has granted permission to all congregations and ministries of the LCMS for use when including written credit in print. The Rev. Todd Jenks is pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Ames, Iowa, email: office@saintpaulames.org 🔄

1) God bless our native land;
Firm may she ever stand
Through storm and night.
When the wild tempests rave,
Ruler of wind and wave,
Do Thou our country save
By Thy great might.

2) Lord, heal us from disease!
To you alone we plead,
As illness lurks.
May you with mercy pure
Reach out and send a cure,
That we may rest secure
In Christ's strong work.

3) Lord, spare us from the sin
That thinks we're better than
Our fellow man.
We were all made by you,
To love each other true,
So that in all we do,
As one we stand!

4) Lord, curb the selfish pride
That leads us to divide
And tear apart.
Lead us to work as one,
To stand forever strong,
Hand in hand, arm in;
Christ in our hearts!

5) So shall our prayers arise
To God above the skies;
On Him we wait.
Thou who art ever nigh,
Guarding with watchful eye,
To Thee aloud we cry:
God save the state!





The
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Georgia Congregation Benefits From LCEF Services



by Jay Wendland
FLGA District Vice President
Lutheran Church
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Every Friday for the entire history of **Christ/Perry, GA**, the congregation has hosted a community meal. This weekly dinner, known as “Thee Lord’s Table,” provides a delicious home-cooked meal and is open to all. On average, 85 people show up each week.

“The congregation is very focused on outreach and it was that way from early on,” said Rev. John Lehenbauer, senior pastor. There wasn’t a lot around Perry 13 years ago — just farmland as far as the eye could see. Since then, Perry has blossomed — as has the congregation. The Lord blessed them with steady growth, as Christ’s worship attendance grew from an average of 64 in 2009 to 106 in 2018.

“It was a long journey to get to where we are now. In our 13-year history, we have worshipped in a funeral home, school gymnasium and store front,” Lehenbauer continued.

“In late 2009, the congregation purchased nine acres of land several miles north of Perry. Through a loan with Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF), we were able to build Phase One of our new facility which consists of a sanctuary, fellowship hall, kitchen,

life. With eight children it was a great opportunity to show them the importance of saving for their future and for their college years.”

With seven grandchildren, the Lehenbauers have found plenty of opportunities to gift them with Young Investors (Y.I.) Club accounts as Christmas presents. Lehenbauer believes there are three good reasons that it’s important to invest with LCEF.

- #1, your money is being used to fund Lutheran churches and schools that proclaim Jesus Christ.
- #2, rates are competitive and sometimes better than other institutions.
- #3, this is a wonderful opportunity for parents to encourage their children in a mindset for the next generation — to set aside and have a rainy-day fund and prepare for the future.



The John and Renee Lehenbauer Family

Sunday school rooms and offices.”

In addition, their partnership with LCEF extended to two projects completed by Laborers For Christ in 2012 and 2018; advice from the Architectural Advisory Committee in 2014; and a Consecrated Stewards campaign in 2014.

This was not Lehenbauer’s first encounter with LCEF. “My wife and I have been investors all of our married

life. With eight children it was a great opportunity to show them the importance of saving for their future and for their college years.”

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Through faithful investors like the Lehenbauers, LCEF is able to help strengthen Lutheran organizations and rostered church workers through low-cost loans and ministry support services. To learn more about LCEF, contact me for more information at (407) 258-5041 or via email: jay.wendland@lcef.org