

LUTHERAN[®] LIFE

The Newsmagazine of the
Florida-Georgia District LCMS
December 2020/January 2021



LUTHERAN LIFE

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



Lutheran Life Publishing:
971 SW Pepperidge Terrace
Boca Raton, Florida 33486

flgadistrict.org/lutheran-life/

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Annual Veterans of the Cross Retreat Delayed Until 2022

The annual Veterans of the Cross retreat scheduled for March, 2021 has been rescheduled for March, 2022. "Amid the growing concerns surrounding the COVID-19 virus, the committee felt a postponement is the wisest decision," explained Chris Rau, a member of the retreat committee. "But we are asking people to place March 7-9, 2022 on their calendars NOW for the next important event."

The theme of the 2022 retreat will be "Tell Me a Story," inspiring attendees to tell the story of Jesus to the next generation. "Keynote speakers and worship leaders will lead the attendees to understand how their lives are intertwined with the story of Jesus," said Pastor Robert Steinke, another member of the committee. "Opportunities will be made available for attendees to tell their own stories."

This retreat was established in 1979 by the late Florida-Georgia District President, The Rev. Dr. L. Lloyd Behnken to stimulate retired church workers with relevant ministry and fellowship.

"Originally called the Behnken Retreat, the gathering was renamed Veterans of the Cross and expanded to include workers and friends throughout the Synod, and retired lay church workers and their spouses," Steinke offered. "There will be mission presentations, fellowship opportunities,

and time with old and new friends. Participants will also be able to choose from a number of break-out sessions that will appeal to a variety of interests."

A highlight of the retreat is the presentation of the Behnken Medallions to veteran servants in four categories: Pastor, Teacher, Lay Person, and Church at Large.

"The VOC Retreat is really a wonderful way to re-connect with friends, be spiritually refreshed, and enjoy the beautiful surroundings on Lake Griffin," Rau concluded.

People interested in being added to our mailing list, or those who would like to add friends to the mailing list, are invited to contact Kathy Keene in the District Office: email kkeene@flgadistrict.org, or call the FLGA District office 407-857-5556 ext. 8. ▲



Lake Griffin is the site of the annual VOC retreat

Transferred Out of FLGA to Other Districts

10/05/20 — Rev. James Balke to Southeastern

Transferred Into FLGA from Other Districts

9/03/20 — Rev. Josepha Lecke, Jr. from Southern Illinois

Initial Placements of Ordained/Commissioned Ministers

9/27/20 — Mr. Jacob Roggow from Concordia/Nebraska

Installations of Ordained/Commissioned Ministers

10/03/20 — Rev. Nathan LeGreco Grace/Key West, FL
10/11/20 — Rev. Dennis Tegtmeier Trinity/Athens, GA
11/07/20 — Rev. Daniel Prugh Holy Trinity/Tampa, FL

Status Changes in the District

12/21/18 — Rev. John Rallison from Active to Candidate (late report)

Emeritus

10/25/20 — Rev. Albert Oren from Active to Emeritus
10/04/20 — Rev. John Hirst from Active to Emeritus
9/29/20 — Dcs. Irma Rojas from Active to Emeritus
11/08/20 — Rev. John Glamann from Active to Emeritus
03/31/16 — Rev. Timoty Parsch from Active to Emeritus (late report)

Called to Glory

10/13/20 — Rev. Harlan Schoenrock
11/03/20 — Rev. David Schmiel
11/09/20 — Mr. Arthur Swett
11/14/20 — Mrs. Monica Trautsch

CAPSULES

Retired District Educator, Church Musician



Mr. Arthur Swett, 71, of Gainesville, FL, went to be with the Lord on November 9, 2020, at Haven Hospice Care Center. Art was born in Huntington Station, New York on November 23, 1948 to Arthur and Anna Swett.

Art served as Assistant Minister of Music/Teacher at Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Ft. Wayne, IN for 10 years, Minister of Music/Teacher at **Faith/Eustis, FL** for 16 years, and as Minister of Music at **First/Gainesville, FL** for 18 years. After retiring in 2014, Art served as a substitute organist in various churches. He was an active member of the American Guild of Organists.

In his free time, Art enjoyed building and flying radio-controlled model airplanes, woodworking, fishing, and vacationing with family and friends.

Art is survived by his wife of 48 years, Marlene, two children, Jonathan (Jessie) and Jessica (Danny), and three grandchildren and his brother, Gary.

A memorial service was held at Abiding Savior/ Gainesville, FL. ▲



Former District Educator

Mrs. Monica Trautsch was called home on Saturday, November 14th, 2020, at the age of 90 (she would have turned 91 on January 1, 2021). She taught in Christian preschools and kindergartens her entire life, starting both **First/Clearwater, FL**

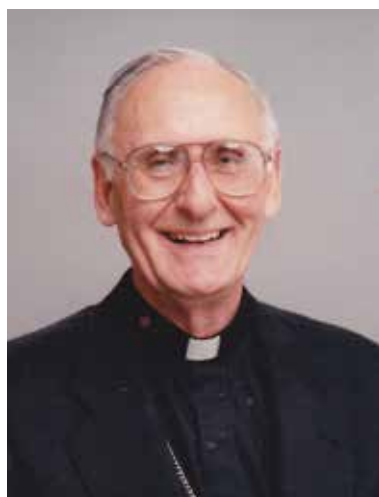
and **Redeemer /Stuart, FL** with her husband, Harold Trautsch, where he served as principal in the mid-1970s. She has been a member of **Faith/North Palm Beach, FL** since Harold's death in 2002. A memorial service will be held at a future time. ▲

Former English District President and Fourth VP of Synod

The Rev. Dr. Roger Dean Pittelko, who served as president of the LCMS English District from 1986 to 1997, died on Nov. 11, 2020. He was 88.

Pittelko was born on Aug. 18, 1932, in El Reno, OK, to the Rev. E.H. and Lydia (Niemann) Pittelko. He married Beverly (Moellendorf) on July 6, 1957, and they were blessed with two children, Dean (1959) and Susan (1962).

Pittelko earned his B.A. (1954), M.Div. (1957) and S.T.M. (1958) from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO. He earned a Doctor of Ministry from Faith Evangelical Lutheran Seminary, Tacoma, WA, in 1983, and was awarded an honorary Doctor of Divinity by Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, IN in 1991.



Pittelko served as pastor of St. John/New Orleans, LA (1958–1959), Concordia/Berwyn, IL (1959–1963), and Holy Spirit/Elk Grove Village, IL (1963–1986).

From 1986 to 1997, Pittelko served as president of the LCMS English District. In addition, he was a professor and supervisor of the D.Min. program at CTSFW, fourth vice-president of the LCMS (1998–2001) and chairman of the LCMS Commission on Worship (1983–1990 and 1992–1998). He also served as chairman of the Agenda committee during the production of Lutheran Service Book.

Pittelko sat on a variety of district and Synod committees and boards, authored numerous articles, and was a frequent presenter on topics related to liturgy and worship.

The Rev. Dr. Thomas Zehnder, former FLGA District President and a member of the Council of Presidents (COP) with Pittelko said "Roger was a

good friend. His friendly spirit was matched by his commitment to all things Lutheran. His love for the historic Lutheran Liturgy was solid and faithful. I remember also enjoying Chinese food together!"

The Rev. Dr. Gerhard Michael, former FLGA District President, who also served on Synod's COP with Pittelko, described him as "standing tall in his appreciation of the church's worship life, seeing it as wisdom and strength for its inner life and as encouragement for its witness and service in the world."

"Roger Pittelko was a wonderful servant of Jesus and a churchman through and through. He touched many lives throughout his ministry, and was a true leader in the LCMS," concluded The Rev. Dr. Greg Walton, current FLGA District President

Pittelko is survived by his wife, Beverly; his son, the Rev. Dr. Dean (Kay) Pittelko; daughter Susan (Howard) Gorecki; and grandchildren Hillary Pittelko and Jon, Jessica and Sarah Gorecki. Due to COVID restrictions, no public service is planned at this time. ▲

The Incarnation for

It's that time of year again. Since late September many merchandisers have displayed all sorts of Christmas decorations, advertised special "advanced" sales, and have sought to kick-start the season even earlier in response to lagging sales.

One year ago not many had heard of COVID, and now, it seems we can't get away from it. However we can be pretty certain that all our "normal" holiday activities will be different in 2020.

We often hear 2020 used in regard to seeing clearly. God has certainly used the year 2020 to help us reflect and see the future with greater clarity. Much of what we considered familiar, even routine, no longer can be taken for granted. Family gatherings, office parties, even Advent and Christmas Worship will be very different this year. Like a snowy white Christmas Eve when the snow is so heavy that services have to be canceled, this year will be different.

In the past many of us have often filled the season with all kinds of activities, extra celebrations, obligations, and general busy-ness that we may have lost focus of the true message of this season. In fact, I recently heard someone say this Christmas will be virtually different from any previous Christmas they had experienced. With the continuing rise of COVID and the uncertainty of when a vaccine will be available, there is great wisdom in approaching the whole holiday season in a thoughtful way. History and tradition tell us that early celebrations of the INCARNATION OF CHRIST were often done in smaller groups and the believers were not always able to meet publicly for

fear of death. This did not prevent a robust celebration of God's precious gift of salvation to all people.

We don't talk a lot about the INCARNATION OF JESUS, especially at Christmas. Our focus tends to be on the infant in the manger. Everybody loves babies. What really happened is God took on human flesh. Oh, sure, we all know the story, but often we fail to connect with the truth that we are called to live an incarnational life. Jesus now lives through us in the world. In part, this is what we celebrate each year, and maybe especially this Christmas.



Living an incarnational life empowers us to be relevant for Jesus. When our amazing God became a man, He did it so that He might touch each of us with His love and grace.

Listen to these words from the opening chapter of the Gospel of John. *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it... The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory,*

the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" —JOHN 1:1-3,14.

Through His death and resurrection Jesus completed the plan God had set out long before, told by the Prophets and seen by the disciples as they walked with Jesus. Now He invites us to an incarnational life in Him. This is an opportunity to let the love of Jesus flow through our lives, not just at Christmas time, but all the time.

Yet, Christmas is an especially wonderful opportunity to let the Jesus in you flow through you in concrete ways. The Christmas season is ripe with images and objects that point us to Jesus. Researchers have told us even people who are not religious somehow adapt to spirituality and are more open to faith thoughts during the Christmas season. What an exciting chance to show the world the love of Jesus! Maybe you heard the story about the two middle-

age women who were out on a Christmas shopping spree. They had purchased many gifts and they had dozens of packages stuffed into the trunk of the car. As they were driving home they passed by a local church where someone was assembling the illuminated crèche on the front lawn and putting up the other decorations. The church sign invited the community to the annual Christmas Eve Service. One of the women said to the other, "Why does the church try to take over everything! Look at that church, trying to horn in on Christmas."

I guess you can tell it is an old story. Yet, this really is the world in which we live my friends. Is it any wonder that people feel

You and Me!



so disconnected to Jesus, and especially at Christmas? When we strip Christmas of Christ, we can never fully appreciate the gift God has given us in Jesus. You and I have the privilege of not only telling the story, but also living in an incarnational way, showing the love of Jesus to our family, friends, neighbors and co-workers.

Someone has said the best gift you can give at Christmas is Jesus, and the best you can receive at Christmas is Jesus! *He is the reason for the season!*

This will be a different Christmas in many ways as fears of COVID still grip our nation. Perhaps it will provide time to really slow down and focus on the true meaning and blessings of this season. Taking time, making time, is an important factor if we want people to see Jesus living in us. A pastor shared the following story with me — again, illustrating how easy it is to miss the point of Christmas. It is a story about a mother who was running furiously from store to store on Christmas Eve trying to get those last-minute gifts. Suddenly she realized she'd lost track of her little three-year-old son. In a panic, she retraced her steps and found him standing with his little nose pressed flatly against a frosty window. He was gazing at a manger scene. When he heard his mother call his name, he turned and shouted in innocent glee: "Look Mommy! It's JESUS! Baby Jesus is in the hay!" The harried mom grabbed his arm and jerked him away, snapping, "We don't have time for all that! Can't you see that Mommy's trying to get ready for Christmas!?"

What a great reminder and warning for each of us this day — *don't leave Christ out of Christmas.* We dare not forget who is responsible for the whole Christmas thing. It is all about how God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son so that whoever believes in Him might have eternal life (JOHN 3:16).

In HEBREWS 12:1-2, we read, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

Recently I shared with a congregation from HEBREWS 12 that we are not only surrounded by a cloud of witnesses — those who showed the incarnate Jesus to us, but we are also part of the cloud of witnesses for others. Often we may not even be aware of it. The question is, are we a good witness or not? How we live out our faith in Jesus matters, and the world is constantly watching, and maybe even more so at Christmas time.

Some of you remember when a big part of the season was participating in midweek Advent services, which, admittedly, for many is a challenge in our day. My memories are of a decorated church building which spoke the truth of the season with Chrismon ornaments on the Christmas trees and a spirit of festivity. On Christmas Eve the service there was holy awe which seemed to fill the sanctuary, and often we would see people we hadn't seen in a long time. As I close my eyes there are sounds, sights and pleasant smells which remind me of the worship service. In my mind's eye I can see the lights being dimmed and candles being lit as we sang "Silent Night," always with a final verse in German. Then the lights would come up and we would sing "Joy to the World" as people shared the joy and love we often experience at Christmas. I can still see faces of saints who long ago went home and now celebrate Christmas at the throne of Jesus.

~ Many of us have been influenced by those in our past who displayed the INCARNATION OF JESUS. They not only spoke about Jesus, but in intentional and unintentional ways showed us Jesus. For me it was my parents and grandparents, my pastor and his family, and so many others, people who inspired me to be a leader. In fact, I am still surrounded by a wonderful cloud of witnesses in my wife, my staff, and many friendships. Who was it or is it for you? More importantly, who can you intentionally surround to encourage their faith in Jesus?

The opportunities are all around us. We are privileged to celebrate the Incarnation of Jesus, who invites us to a relationship in which He now lives through us! The mystery of the Incarnation isn't so mysterious when you think about it. Which is better, to be told of a wonderful gift, or to actually hold the wonderful gift? Let's not just tell people the story this year! Let's show people by how we live so this Christmas they will know Jesus loves them and they will see the future is fixed on Jesus! ▲

Blessings during this wonderful season!
GREG



It's a Great Day for Missions!

For many years, Mr. Dean Aurich has coached football at Mayer Lutheran High School (Mayer, Minnesota) where our three children attended. Our two sons learned a lot from Coach Aurich — as did I. For example, I learned the three most important letters in the English alphabet: N-G-U: Never Give Up. Those three letters were important for football player's attitudes for sure, but they are also important for mission attitude. God did not give up on sinners! As Jesus has not given up on me and all for whom He died,

I don't intend to give up on reaching them with the Good News of Jesus' miraculous birth, His perfect life, suffering and death and glorious resurrection! We will never give when it comes to evangelism and outreach until Jesus comes again.



by Peter Meier
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The second thing I will never forget about Coach Aurich was his often repeated saying, "It's a great day for football!" Throughout the summer practice days, the fall football season, and probably every other day of the year, those words — full of energy and enthusiasm — were spoken with his winning smile to whoever was nearby, "It's a great day for football!" It's a great day to play the game, to learn the lessons of the game, to take the lessons and training onto the field and into life! The life lessons learned from football under Coach Aurich have stayed with many young athletes long after the season ended.

I've made a slight revision to his words: *It's a great day for missions!* This is a great season for sharing "the old, old story of Jesus and His love." Christmas and Epiphany are all about God becoming flesh to reconcile and reclaim every sinner to Himself. This is the mission of God. It's His will. It's what He wants most of all. It's what we mean when we pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Everyday is a

great day to share the Gospel message!

Here in the Florida-Georgia District, It's a great day for missions! The list of mission opportunities on my office whiteboard keeps growing. That's a reminder to me that it's a great day for missions — and that many of our congregations, pastors and leaders are seeing that too.

It's a great day for missions! When I came to the District nearly a year ago, I was hoping to find five congregations who would commit to starting a new ministry — a new community outreach, a new faith community, a new entrepreneurial venture designed to connect people with Jesus. I have been blown away by a growing list of nearly 30 potential new ministries and sites.

In the midst of the pandemic, we are seeing new opportunities! It's a great day for missions! I am seeing congregations adapt to the circumstances — not giving in to them, but adapting in order to reach new people. I am talking with congregation members and pastors who ask for advice about outreach to their community. COVID has pushed us out of the church building and into our neighborhoods. We will NGU!

What simple steps can you take to get out of the building and onto the mission playing field, or more accurately, into the Harvest Field?

1. **Pray.** Ask the Lord of the Harvest to open your eyes, your heart, and those of your friends, family and fellow members, to the opportunities! Ask Him for the creativity and resources needed to take advantage of those opportunities. Pray as you read your daily devotions, considering how the Word expresses God's will to redeem, forgive, and save. Pray that God will make it clear how you can partner with Him in that awesome work.

2. **Plan.** What are the issues, problems, or burden that you/your congregation could address in the name of Jesus? What are the resources and gifts God has given? Think not only of finances, but of people and their giftedness. What kind of help will you need? Who are the ones who could help? What resources are already available in your community and your church? How can you connect with them? Take a

look at the mission pages on our District website. They are designed to help you "Do Something" and will help with your planning. If you have registered for the President's Equip Conference, be sure to watch my five breakouts which are focused on intentional outreach and will help in your planning! Those are available through the end of December, so act now!



3. **Act.** Think of a few people with whom you can share your thoughts. Discuss the issues or "burden" God has placed on your heart. Do they see it too? Would they like to help? Download demographic information from MissionInsite. Reach out to your pastor. Reach out to me at the District Office. I'm here to come alongside of your mission and outreach planning and action.

We just completed "Church Planting Essentials," a basic training course for those who want to start a new ministry, a new micro-church, or a new congregation. The interest and enthusiasm was evident in the 20 participants! Each team or individual walked away with a basic mission plan. I expect to see the Holy Spirit working to develop their plans into action in the coming months. I'll offer the course again early in the new year — watch for it and join us. It's a great day for missions!

Watch for news about our new "Miracle Grow" initiative designed to stimulate new outreach in our communities. "Miracle Grow" is designed to catalyze outreach activity and to share the stories, creativity, and ideas with the District. We will celebrate what God is doing! It's a great day for missions!

Are you ready to leave 2020 behind? Let's get a running start into a new season, a new year, a great year for missions! If you are ready to partner with God in His mission, give me a call! Let's start the conversation about how It's a great day for missions in your community! ▲

A Pastor's Personal Story of COVID-19

I have often said that the next breath I take is just a gift of God's grace. I did not know how true that statement was going to be. My "adventure" started out innocently enough, since the Ides of March (March 15) Saint Michael Lutheran Church & School, Fort Myers, Florida had moved, along with the rest of the country, into lock-down mode in the face of the pandemic: on-line worship, Google classroom for our school, Zoom for support groups, youth ministry, and Bible Classes, safety protocols and disinfecting schedules — it all became routine.

Without realizing that Lee County was at the beginning of its largest spike of new COVID-19 cases, our son and daughter-in-law and newest grandchild

My first hospital stay lasted ten days, it was early on in treatment protocols so they tried everything — zinc, vitamin C, oxygen assistance, plasma and then sent me home on oxygen, where I only lasted four days before my breathing became so labored the ambulance picked me up for the second time and the next phase of my adventure began at a second hospital in town.

A team of doctors and nurses gathered around me to decide what to do, most felt that because my oxygen level was so low and my lungs so affected that I should go on a ventilator in the ICU. The Pulmonologist asked

facility. The thoughts, cards, texts, prayers, concern and care from so many people encouraged and blessed my wife Joni, me, and our family. As



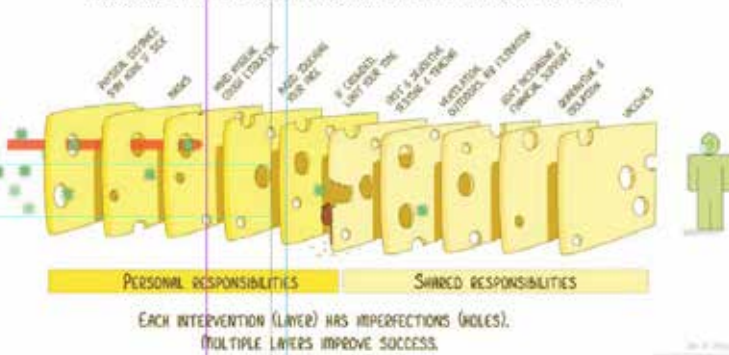
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the Apostle Paul wrote, "As you help us by your prayers ... many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many." (2 CORINTHIANS 1:11)

I am blessed and fortunate to be alive, my lungs are working at about a 50% capacity, how much I will recover, only God knows. The protocols that were put in place at Saint Michael have kept students, staff, families

THE SWISS CHEESE RESPIRATORY VIRUS PANDEMIC DEFENCE

RECOGNISING THAT NO SINGLE INTERVENTION IS PERFECT AT PREVENTING SPREAD



came for a visit. A phone call from a co-worker let him know that she had been exposed and was going in to be tested — that news changed all of our lives. They left that same day ... my son, daughter-in-law, grandson, wife and I were all about to become a part of the peak of positive COVID cases. We would learn later that my A-blood type put me at greater risk. An emergency room visit on June 29

confirmed that I tested positive. I battled 101-104 temperatures for

nine days at home, but the fever finally broke only to have the virus begin to attack my lungs. It is a distressing feeling when you cannot breathe. As a chaplain for the Fort Myers Fire Department, the EMTs who picked me up, knew me as Pastor Jon, which was what ended up on my hospital ID and would provide a number of opportunities to share about Jesus during my 59 days in three different medical facilities.

"How can I, your servant, talk with You, my Lord? My strength is gone and I can hardly breathe." — DANIEL 10:17

available, I would prefer that, since you either make it in the ICU or you don't (and sadly too many were not).

Due to the pandemic everyone gathered around me was masked, had protective clothing on, gloves — and in that moment, not knowing if I would even survive, God provided me the first of His angels, a nurse named Elijah who knelt down and placed a gloved hand

on me to let me know I was not alone, never alone — you

see, the God of Angel Armies is always by our side!

"He goes before us, He stands behind! And nothing against us will stand, He's got the whole world in His hands. He is faithful!" When I was well enough, I played that Chris Tomlin song every day.

I spent 36 days in the hospital as they worked to help my lungs recover and then 12 days at a skilled nursing



and members as safe as possible. It is difficult and inconvenient, but we do it for "the least of these" — those who might be more at risk than ourselves. Years ago, Rick Warren wrote "The Purpose Driven Life" and it begins with the words, "It's not about you!" So, we inconvenience ourselves ... Why wouldn't we? We will seek to live "with the mind of Jesus" and treat other people "as though they were more important than ourselves." (PHILIPPIANS 2:3-4).

Be well, stay safe and healthy, and may God bless and keep you all! He is close beside you and He is faithful! ▲

Speaking Up in the Church

It's a conversation I'll never forget. While talking with a local pastor one day about the mental health focus of The Lutheran Foundation, he shared something he did one Sunday morning in church.



by Dennis Goff
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As people gathered for worship, everyone received a sheet of paper with a list of ten questions related to mental health issues. Questions such as, "Have you ever been depressed?" "Have you ever been prescribed medication for a mental illness?" "Have you ever had thoughts of suicide?" Each person was to put a check mark next to any question that applied to them.

When everyone finished answering the questions, the ushers collected the sheets of paper. They shuffled up the papers and walked to a different part of the sanctuary and started to pass out those same sheets of paper. Each person was now holding someone else's paper (no names were on them). The pastor then started to read the questions, one by one, and asked people to stand up if the question he read had a check mark next to it on the sheet they were holding.

When people in the congregation saw the number of people stand up in response to each question there was an audible gasp from the congregation. "Everyone thinks they are the only one dealing with mental health issues," the pastor said. "Too often the stigma is so great in the church they are afraid to talk about their own mental health. But the issues are real for many."

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) reports one in five adults will experience a mental illness in any given year. However, I believe that also means one in five in each one of our congregations. People may not realize that mental illness is more common than cancer, heart disease and diabetes combined.

The Lutheran Foundation (TLF) in Fort Wayne was formed in 1995 from the sale of the Lutheran Hospital that opened on Thanksgiving Day in 1904. When the hospital sold for \$137 million the sale established the Foundation. Today, TLF serves a ten-county area of northeast Indiana. About six years ago the Board of Directors decided to identify a strategic focus for their grant making. In doing so, they looked for gaps in services in the region and identified that less than 1% of grants from other foundations or other charitable organizations supported mental and behavioral health and wellness. This led to a renewed focus in our grant making that promotes gospel proclamation, and mental wellness that reduces the stigma of mental illness.

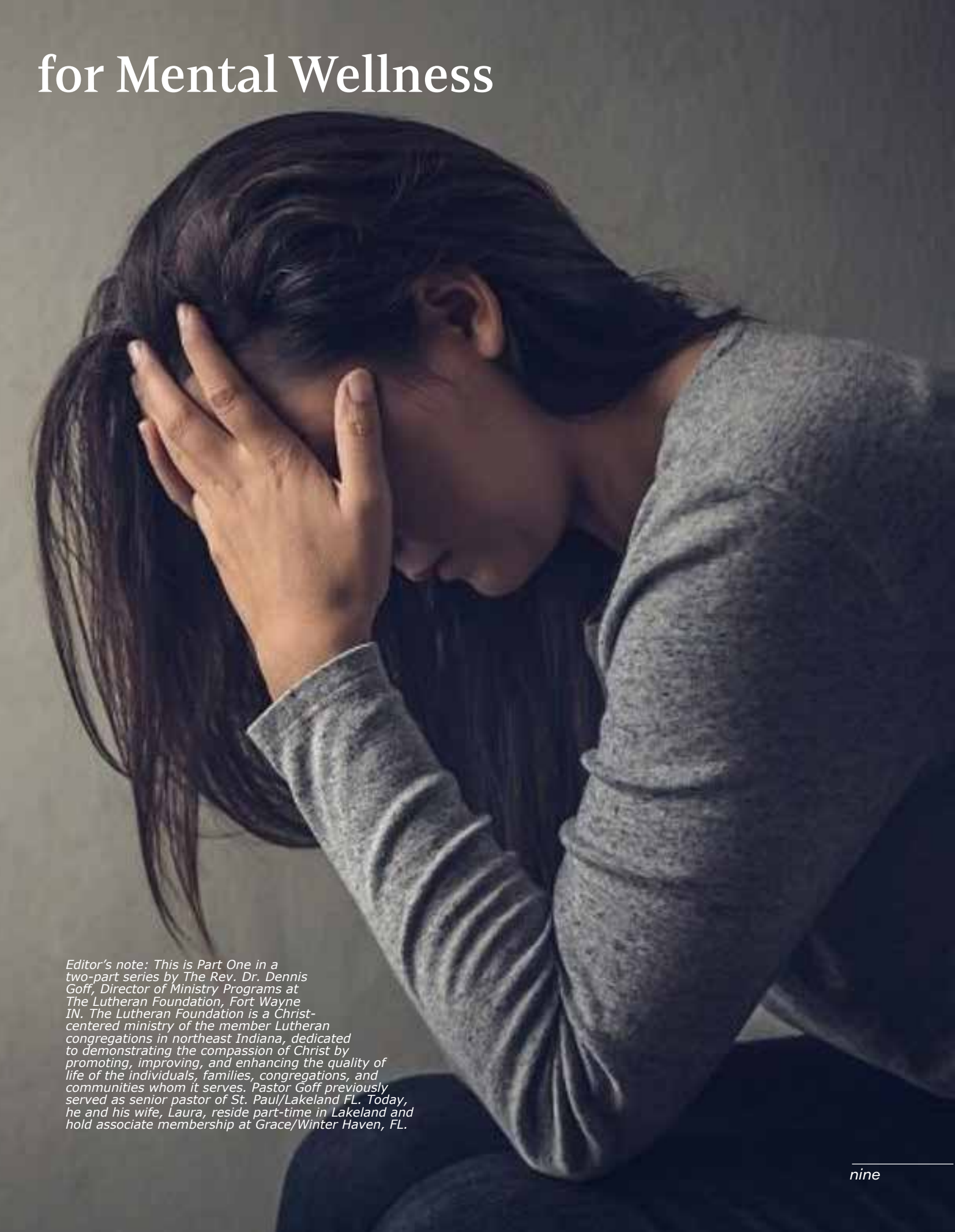
Representing the mental health focus of The Lutheran Foundation, I have had the opportunity to preach in various congregations in and around the Fort Wayne area over the past few years. On a few occasions my message referenced the statistic above from NAMI. What surprised me was the number of people who walked out of church, shook my hand, looked me in the eye and said, "Pastor Goff, I'm 1 in 5. Thank you for speaking up about mental illness because no one else in the church seems to talk about this."

One Sunday morning I referenced mental illness in my sermon and said how important it is for us to talk to our doctors

about our mental health needs and it may be necessary to see a counselor or therapist, and if prescribed by a doctor, take medication. For people of faith, seeking medical and/or clinical care is critical as we also seek God's help through our prayers and petitions.

After church that morning, I was surprised by the number of people who said they appreciated the specific references I made to the integration of seeking appropriate medical care, as well as seeking God's help. But what surprised me the most happened a few weeks later when a woman came out of church saying she was in church a few weeks earlier when I mentioned mental health in my sermon. She said she has been suffering from severe panic attacks for several years because of a traumatic situation she experienced years earlier. She went on to say that she's been reluctant to seek medical or clinical care because she thought as a Christian the reason she wasn't getting any better is because she wasn't praying hard enough. She thought she should have more faith. However, she went on to say that when she heard me say what I did a few weeks earlier, she called a counselor that very week, and had already had several appointments. She wanted me to know that after her first few counseling sessions she is feeling better than she has in years. "Thank you," she said, "for talking about mental health in church. What you said gave me permission to seek help." That experience emphasized for me the importance of the church speaking up on issues related to mental health. The second part in this series (in the next edition of Lutheran Life) will encourage us to see mental health as the 21st century mission field for the church. ▲

for Mental Wellness



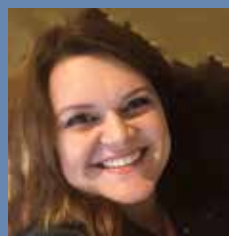
Editor's note: This is Part One in a two-part series by The Rev. Dr. Dennis Goff, Director of Ministry Programs at The Lutheran Foundation, Fort Wayne IN. The Lutheran Foundation is a Christ-centered ministry of the member Lutheran congregations in northeast Indiana, dedicated to demonstrating the compassion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

Christmas UNPLUGGED



In a world of Facebook notifications, constant Instagram newsfeeds, exciting texts and emails, could you unplug for the holidays? Does the thought of that even make you a little uncomfortable?

We know. At Family Strong Project, our mission is to build strong families, founded in faith and growing in love. We do this by disconnecting from



by Amanda Zehnder
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Family Strong
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screens to reconnect with those closest to us. We teach families how to “spend time with things that love you back” and to be a “present parent” and “walk the talk.” Therefore, I want to challenge you this Christmas to focus on spending time with the things that love you back.

We know some of you may have a Zoom gathering planned for Christmas dinner or a Christmas Eve service via the internet. That is not what we are referring to when we say unplug! We don’t want you to isolate yourself from those very important and necessary connections. Over this holiday season we want you to have what we call “digital awareness” and we want you to be aware of how you are spending your time and with whom you are spending it.

Spending time with things that love you back includes and starts with spending time



At left — Joel & Amanda Zehnder and family

with God. Start your day in the Word instead of scrolling social media or catching up on the news. Psalm 62:1 says, “Truly my soul finds rest in God; my salvation comes from Him.” Spending time in His word and learning His truths will not only restore your soul, but it will enable you to show up better

and stronger for the ones you love.

We also want you to have this digital awareness when it comes to being a “present parent.” Remember when your kids were babies and you crawled around the floor so you could see things from their perspective and to make sure there wasn’t anything dangerous around? Don’t worry, I’m not going to ask you to crawl, but I am going to ask you to think about your children’s perspective when it comes to your relationship with your device. Is it in your hand every time they approach you with a question?

Do you set it down to show them you are fully present and listening? Do we realize the impact we are making as the first generation to raise children in such a technology saturated world.

We have to “walk the talk” and lead by example so our children can have healthy habits when it comes to their use of screen-time and how much power they give it in their life. We have to teach them that it cannot become an idol before God. We have to check our motives for time spent on social media or work versus truly plugging into our lives and family.

We need to leave room in the day to serve others or have a difficult conversation. We have to guard our hearts and minds, and simply let God work in our life. What is the legacy you want to leave for your loved ones?

Do you want them to remember fond memories of incredible conversations you had, or the reflection of the screen in your glasses every time they talked to you? We are the parents and families whose actions decide what the future of screens and screen-time will look like. We are the parents and families who decide what our grandchildren will value.

We know this year has felt like it is nothing but screens and screen-time. As a mother of three who is parenting in a pandemic alongside you, I want to challenge you to reflect on your own use of screen-time. I also want to encourage you to give yourself grace on this topic for everyone involved. And if you need support, join us at www.familystrongproject.com.



com. Under the resources tab, you will find “25 Screen-free Family Night Ideas” the entire family will love.

We think Christmastime is the perfect time to reset, refocus, and remind ourselves to “spend time with things that love you back.” So have an Unplugged Christmas with us! Our best advice to decrease screen-time is to turn off notifications from social media and email, and only check those outlets during intentional times you’ve set aside at the beginning and/or end of the day. If you find yourself struggling to cut back on how much time is spent on checking-in and following up on messages, set a timer to give yourself a limit. And if you have to get some work done over the holiday, light a candle while you work and while the candle is lit, do not stray to other things, i.e., social media or news.

Just get done what you need to get done and then get back to being present with loved ones and taking some time to relax and enjoy!

So put the device in another room and gather up the kids in the kitchen to bake some cookies, have a nerf war, sit down for a tea party, or find a way you can serve others as a family. You will never regret these moments and memories you are making being fully present. ▲

Editor’s note: Mandy Zehnder, is a third-generation member of St. Michael/Fort Myers, FL, second-generation graduate of St Michael Lutheran School. She is the wife of Joel Zehnder, and daughter-in-law of Joni and Pastor Jon Zehnder. Mandy has a heart for marriage, family, and raising children in a home that lives out her faith and truly connects with one another. Join her and Joel as they teach you simple yet powerful ways to be fully present in the midst of #wonderfulchaos at familystrongproject.com and download their guide ‘25 Screen-free family night out ideas’ at familystrongproject.com/pages/family-night-out.



Let's Ring Those Christmas Bells!

Since mid-March, our nation has learned the hard way what it means to social distance. We have always had these words, "social and distance" in our vocabulary, but never like they have been in 2020. These words, put together as they are now, have changed the face of our churches, schools, sports and families like we have never experienced.

Unfortunately, we are all too familiar with the effects of social distancing not only on our loved ones but on ourselves as well. As we have now gone forward both feet into this beautiful Advent/Christmas season, many are seeing just how hard social distancing has become. As the COVID-19 numbers nationwide are on the increase, we are hearing of more and more states stressing the importance of social distancing and even setting unprecedented limits on our Christmas celebrations. All in an effort to stem the tide of this pandemic and flatten the curve.

Churches that a year ago were filled for beautiful Christmas Eve worship now will find themselves creatively working to keep everyone socially distanced while not giving up the majesty and mystery of the night when God became man. It's not a question of *if we can do it*. It's a matter of *how we can do it* — having to do it for the health and safety of everyone who walks through our doors.

But you know, even in the midst of these increasing numbers and percentages in our communities, state and nation we have good news to share this Christmas. Good news that, in the midst of social distancing, can and does break the distance barrier for us. The good news is simply that because of God becoming man in the person of Jesus, He is with us always! Even and especially in these uncertain times!

Think back to the prophet Isaiah who prophesied that a virgin will conceive and bear a son and will call his name Immanuel (ISAIAH 7:14), which means *God is with us*. Indeed, our God is with us, "for when the time had fully come God sent forth His Son to be born of a woman born under the law to redeem those under the law (GALATIANS 4)." We know fully that, In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word became flesh and dwelt among us (JOHN 1).

may our hearts burn within us as we hear that precious Christmas Gospel proclaimed again this year. Let us not focus on the way things have changed from 2019 to 2020 or how different our celebrations are this year. Instead, let us focus on that which has not will not



by Dean Pfeffer
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change, our God's love for us His people that led Him not to spare His own Son but give Him up for us all.

This Christmas — despite the masks, despite the sanitizers, despite the social distancing we have every reason to celebrate that our Immanuel is with us. We can celebrate that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ does not socially distance Himself from us and continues to be just as close to

you and me today as He was before COVID-19 became a part of our lives.

Christmas is all about Jesus, let me remind you of the glorious truth again, **CHRISTMAS IS ALL ABOUT JESUS!** Because Christmas is all about Jesus, we can celebrate and ring those Christmas bells and say, "stay near me Lord Jesus I ask thee to stay, close by me forever and love me I pray... (LSB 364). Praise God we have Jesus — our Immanuel's own promise to each of us, I am with you always to the end of the age!

So, when you think about it, there is nothing more to be said then to quote St. Paul, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift (2 COR. 9:15)." ▲

And my point?

This Christmas we again will celebrate either in person or online that Divine mystery of God taking our flesh and making his dwelling among us. We can rejoice that not even the virus of our sin can keep Jesus away from us. We can celebrate that Jesus breaks the barriers of social distancing to be with us His people. He comes to us each and every time we gather around His Word and Sacrament. He is with us throughout this pandemic to remind us again and again of His never failing love and grace for each and every one of us. He comes beside us as He did those disciples on the road to Emmaus.

As He walks beside us this Christmas, like those early disciples,

FLGA District Middle School Youth Held in

Pandemic Year 2020 didn't stop the Florida-Georgia District Middle School Youth from gathering in early November — although they did it “virtually” with fantastic breakout sessions offered via videos and a mega mass event with plenty of watch parties scattered throughout the United States.

ways to Experience a Youth Gathering” for adult leaders of youth — by Dr. Jacob Youmans and Dr. Grant Carey.

- Speakers Jacob, Maile and Leilani Youmans. Jacob is Director of the DCE program at Concordia University/Austin, TX;
 - Bread of Stone, the Billboard Christian pop chart popular band;
- Typically the District Youth Gatherings are a weekend-long event. Due to COVID-19, the retreat was turned into a single-night Mega Mass Event. The three-hour-long evening was live-streamed and experienced by more than 600 youth from more than 50 congregations around the District

world of pandemics, racial unrest, political upheavils, we are held in the loving grip of our Savior and nothing can separate us from His love!

Bread of Stone recorded all the worship music for the event and did a live question and answer session with participants after the gathering! Live



The crosses were a craft that was completed during the gathering.

Jack Proctor, Director of Youth Ministries at St. Michael/Fort Myers, FL, was the MSYG 2020 Chairperson.

Due to a range of talented volunteers from around the country, and the skill of BNY Productions, the event was able to feature:

- A Pre-Gathering Breakout “Top 10

— and even around the country! It was enjoyed in several “watch party” formats at churches as well as in private homes — for those not able to gather in person.

Dr. Jacob Youmans and his daughters Maile and Leilani were the keynote speakers, sharing a moving message that even in an upside down 2020



Left — Bread of Stone, the contemporary Christian music and pop rock band from Sioux City, Iowa that has consistently been a favorite at FLGA District Youth Gatherings; Above — Jack Proctor and his wife Jazzy, 2020 MSYG Chairperson.

Christ's Loving Grip at Socially-Distant Event

chat enabled participating groups to remain "connected" together, and videos from youth and youth leaders throughout the District were submitted.

FLGA Youth may never have to gather like this again but they were extremely thankful to God for making this single-evening retreat possible — emphasizing the message that "we are not alone! That we are a part of the Body of Christ — always held in His loving grip." ▲





Florida-Georgia District



by Pat Powell
VP Communications
LWML
Florida-Georgia District
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LWML FLGA
District President
Gayle Caruso
Gloria Dei /Davie, FL

LWML Elects New Officers

Greetings on behalf of the LWML Florida-Georgia District! We were unable to hold our 37th biennial convention in person this year, but we were still able to go about the Lord's business. We adopted a Mission Grant goal of \$126,094 for the coming biennium, and voted on the specific grants which will be funded. We also elected new officers, who will serve a term of four years.

- President – Gayle Caruso of Ft. Lauderdale, FL, member of Gloria Dei in Davie, FL
- Vice President Mission Grants – Karen McCarthy of Stuart, FL, member of Redeemer in Stuart
- Vice President Spiritual Growth – Carol Jones of Pembroke Pines, FL, member of Gloria Dei in Davie.
- Financial Secretary – Christine Jennison of Sanford, FL, member of Holy Cross, Lake Mary
- Pastoral Counselor – Rev. Tim Brown of Clermont, FL, who is the pastor of Christ the King in Orlando.

The nominating committee for the 2022 District Convention was also elected: Joanne Hahn of St. Cloud, FL, chairman; along with Cherie Nocks of Oviedo, FL and Cyndy Pieplow of Valdosta, GA.

Did you know that the LWML has FREE money? Of the \$126,094 mission grants, \$30,000 is devoted to scholarships to district students who are pursuing degrees as pastors and church workers. If you, or someone you know, needs a scholarship for the 2021-2022 school year, check out the guidelines on our website, www.flgalwml.com. ▲



LWML FLGA
District VP Spiritual Growth
Carol Jones
Gloria Dei/Davie FL



LWML FLGA
District Financial Secretary
Christine Jennison
Holy Cross/Lake Mary, FL



LWML FLGA
District VP Mission Grants
Karen McCarthy
Redeemer/Stuart, FL



LWML FLGA
District Pastoral Counselor
Rev. Tim Brown pastor of
Christ the King/Orlando, FL

Former UF Campus Associate Pastor at First/Gainesville, Welcomed Back to District

The Rev. Daniel Prugh was installed at Holy Trinity/Tampa the first weekend in November. He and wife Jen and family are relocating from Midlothian, VA. Previously Prugh served as associate pastor and campus minister (University of Florida) at First Lutheran in Gainesville, FL.

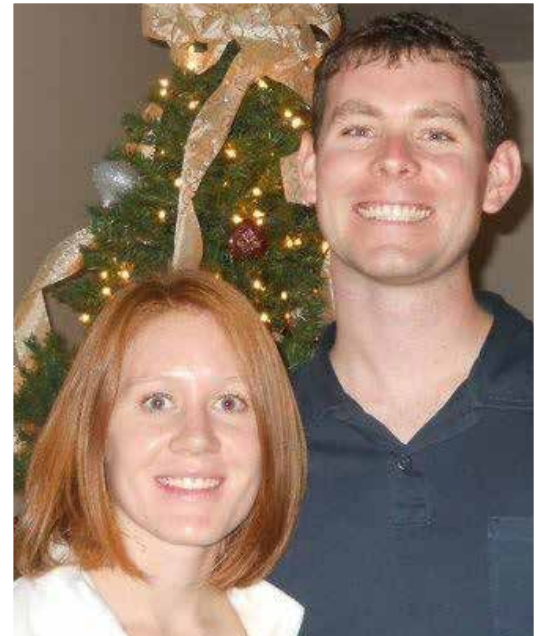
Married for 13 years, Dan and Jen met in Cambridge, England in 2006 while they were studying abroad.

Jen graduated from the University of Florida Doctor of Physical Therapy program in 2011 and has worked in outpatient orthopedic locations since that time. They have two children — Aaron 7 and Anna 5. Both of them will attend Holy Trinity Lutheran school. Dan enjoys reading and playing soccer and ice hockey. Originally from Chester, VA, he graduated

from Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO with a M.Div (Master of Divinity) in 2008, and he has completed all of his coursework for his D.Min (Doctor of Ministry) in Missional Leadership.

He spent his first five years of pastoral ministry serving First/Gainesville, FL. Both Dan and Jen served with the Pastoral Leadership Institute (PLI), a registered service organization of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod.

PLI is a learning community is a vibrant community of pastors, spouses and ministry leaders who learn together and create deeper connections of accountability, trust and encouragement. Through ongoing coaching and investing, each participant learns how to have wider influence for the sake of the Gospel in their own unique context. ▲



The Rev. Daniel Prugh was installed at Holy Trinity/Tampa on November 7, 2020. Pictured, from left, are Pastors Bill Whitehead, James Guelzow, Kevin Yoakum, Kurt Steinbruck, Daniel Prugh, Greg Walton, Mark Adrian, Gilbert Kuehn, John Roth and John Cobos

*O Jesus so sweet, O Jesus so mild!
For sinners You became a child.
You came from heaven down to earth
in human flesh through human birth.
O Jesus so sweet, O Jesus so mild!*

LSB 546 st.1

O Jesus So Sweet, O Jesus So Mild



Lutheran Church Extension Fund

> where investments build ministry

MERRY CHRISTMAS

AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR

As we end this challenging year and look forward to the year ahead, may you find comfort, hope and joy in the reason for the season—the birth of Jesus!

CONNECT TODAY.
VISIT LCEF.ORG OR CALL 800-843-5233.



Jay Wendland
District Vice President
Florida-Georgia District
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Joan usually went to the Lutheran church once a month. No, not on a Sunday but the second Tuesday at 6pm. That was when she went to the meeting of the Neighborhood Association that was held at the church's social hall. She was not a church member. The church provided

about the dollars that are lost in electricity and paper goods to this outside group. They grumble on occasion at how that room is always seems to be tied up for these community association meetings. They think they



should get some rental income and they wanted to store the Christmas decorations in that room. Then they sometimes complain because they aren't seeing any of these people in church and

people, love people, care for people and be Christ for them. That's why the pastor and a few members are consistently there the second Tuesday of the month. The miracle is that non-members are coming onto church property! It is a priceless opportunity to meet them, learn about their joys and challenges, pray for them and check in with them personally or a following month on how God is answering prayers. It is helping people to grow closer to Jesus.

Since Joan has been coming for the meetings, the consistent gentle love of the pastor and a few members has

resulted in prayer for her son. It has opened a door for Joan to work with the church members on a food drive for the local food pantry. She has seen more Christians active in selfless love through that project. She has met more people and is beginning to ask about this Jesus they talk about so highly. She is even joining a couple people to talk about the Bible in a discussion group that she will host at her home.

She may even come to Christmas Eve worship!

Yes, this is ministry. Joan is growing closer to Jesus because the church is not just hosting a meeting, they are loving people.

Contact me if you are interested in me working with you or your church. A free 30-minute sample session is available to explore what might work best. ▲

The Rev. Scott Gress is called by Lutheran Counseling Services as an independent contractor in the areas of leadership training, consulting and coaching. The Coaching Leader Podcast is also available on iTunes and his YouTube page. A Christian Leadership Training course is available at scottgress.teachable.com. You can contact Scott through email scottgress@me.com or his blog page scottgress.com or at 561-542-4472.



by Scott Gress
Lutheran Counseling Services
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the room and allowed the local neighborhood association to use it. The church didn't charge anything and they were gracious hosts. They made coffee for the people who came, all of whom were from the neighborhood. Sometimes someone would bring home made cookies and other goodies. The church provided use of their restrooms, paper cups and napkins too.

Most of the people at the meeting and living around the church are people who look different from the folks who attend the church. But no one really notices. The members who greet them and often with the pastor are always there smiling. They greet the people and ask how they were doing. Over time they have learned names and family histories and stories of their immediate neighbors who attend the association meeting. They have huddled with them before or after the meeting to talk and have a brief prayer.

The church hosts always seem to remember to ask, "Hey Briana, how is your child doing who we prayed for last month?" Not everyone wants to talk to the pastor but he smiles anyway. Often the pastor will even say a few words before the meeting and hang around afterward if anyone wants to talk. He and the others are always there to clean up afterward and are interested in what is going on in the community and where people are hurting. They really seem to care.

Some other members quibble

there have even been whispers that they wouldn't fit in because "they aren't like us" and "This isn't ministry."

Does this scene sound familiar? Maybe you have heard of a church that seems to be getting weaker or is shrinking. They put

Is This Ministry?

up a new sign but the neighbors haven't darkened the door.

Maybe you have heard of a church that does similar things to help the community like hosting a meeting or doing a "trunk or treat" for the neighbor kids. But maybe you have your doubts that it will bring more life to your church.

It's true, some churches want to do something "missional" and so they go on a mission trip to the Caribbean. Some do similar kindnesses for the neighbors. But they don't know a single name or story about the people. Is this ministry? Is this missional?

The coaching leader would ask, "What are you really trying to do with this type of effort?"

Some assume that the meeting, the Trunk or Treat or the Holiday give-aways will magically turn into new members. But that's not likely.

It isn't about the work being done. The coaching leader would ask you to think more deeply. So what are they really trying to do?

It's this: the work being done is a means by which you can meet

Laborers For Christ To Cease Operations in June, 2021

Laborers For Christ (LFC), a ministry of Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF), will discontinue operations on June 30, 2021 — the conclusion of LCEF's fiscal year. The decision comes after an extensive, 18-month review of the LFC program. A

LCMS Mission Board in 1985 and later by the LCMS Foundation. In 2003, LFC activities were transferred to LCEF.

Over its 40-year history, LFC has completed more than 800 construction and renovation projects in service to

to expand the footprint of the church.

"As the work now comes to an end, we thank God for all that has been accomplished. LCEF will consider new opportunities to serve the church in the future. As opportunities change, so must

INTERNATIONAL LUTHERAN NEWS

Sept. 16 LCEF press release stated, "This review revealed a number of critical issues impacting LFC operations, including a steady decline in available opportunities, increasing logistical and regulatory challenges and a marked shift in the needs of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) ministries we serve."

The press release said that current

LCMS congregations, schools and other ministries. During this time, hundreds of men and women answered the call to serve. The LCEF announcement highlighted these volunteers' dedication and faithfulness, which have "been a blessing to so many ... [and] left an indelible mark upon the mission and ministry of the LCMS."

LCEF and the services we provide. We will honor the past and build the future, always growing ministry opportunities."

"This money-saving benefit was secondary to the uplifting presence LFC brought to so many ministries here in the FLGA District," stated the Rev. Dr. Greg Walton, president of the FLGA District. "Laborers enjoyed attending worship



and pending LFC projects that have been contracted will be completed, with work possibly continuing after June 30, 2021.

Begun in 1980 as a ministry of the LCMS Rocky Mountain District, LFC operations were taken up by the

"The church has been blessed through the faithful work of Laborers For Christ for decades," said the Rev. Bart Day, LCEF president and CEO. "We remember and celebrate the men and women who used their gifts and abilities

services, Bible studies and becoming part of a congregation's ministry. They helped ministries multiply the volunteer base, not only for the construction project but for overall ministry." ▲

FLORIDA GEORGIA

Out and About in the District

Send Your News & Photos to lutheranlife@aol.com

Oxford Congregation Develops Mission & Ministry Plan

There is no doubt we find ourselves in a day of great challenges in our culture and in the Church. Sadly, this has hindered many of the mission and ministry activities that our churches have normally done.

Yet the world we find ourselves in is also one of incredible opportunity! Many are hurting, afraid and overwhelmed...but we have the hope that they need. It was with that in mind that Pastor James Rockey challenged the leadership of **Amazing Grace/Oxford, FL**. "We may not be saying it, but in truth we've begun to wait for 'normal' to return." The ministries and boards of the congregation was led through a process of developing a "Mission & Ministry Plan" through December

2021. "This is no time for us to sit back and wait. There is an urgency to be Jesus in the flesh to those around us who need to know the hope that is ours through Christ. Let's find ways we can help people to experience Christ's love and share it!"

Plans for each area of ministry and a calendar of events has been developed and 26 leaders gathered together for a watch party of the District's recent Equip Conference.

Each of the ministries has continued to utilize the many breakout sessions that have been available through the end of the year. ▲



Leadership of Amazing Grace/Oxford, FL participate virtually in the District's President's Equip Concert

Hope/Plant City Continues Annual Food Bank Support

On Sunday, November 15th, the members of **Hope, Plant City, FL** welcomed Mary Heysek, Director of the United Food Bank of Plant City (UFB) to their worship for a very special presentation. Annually, the food bank has distributed 1,000 turkeys to families for Thanksgiving. This year due to the pandemic, that need has drastically increased to a need for 2,000 turkeys to meet the need. To assist meet the overwhelming need, a member of Hope received a THRIVENT Action Grant, then in addition to the grant, the congregation tithed an additional \$1,500 and members gave individual contributions for turkeys. In total the food bank received over \$2,000 to

help meet the need this year.

Hope has supported the food bank over the years and this year has assisted in providing lunches to volunteers working tirelessly to meet the need. Once the pandemic began, the food bank which was serving approximately 5,000 clients per month jumped to over 11,00 per month since March. They have met this need in the community with a paid staff of 4. Hope's Sr. Pastor, Rev. Dean Pfeffer, serves as Chair of the food banks Board of Directors.

Pictured at right following worship are (from left) Rev. Shea Pennington, Associate Pastor, Mary Heysek and Pastor Pfeffer. ▲



Zion/Ft. Myers Publishes First Advent Devotional “Zion Sings!”



A 44-page booklet offering daily content beginning with the first Sunday in Advent and ending with Epiphany has been published by **Zion/Ft. Myers, FL**. Zion Sings! was made available in the church narthex and was also mailed to friends of the congregation who were not yet attending in-person worship.

“What a brilliant idea! A daily Advent and Christmas book written by members of our congregation,” says senior pastor Dr. Curtis Deterding. “It’s hard to resist reading all the devotions before the days they are assigned.”

“The pastors at Zion liked the idea of the Zion Sings! devotional so much, that an Advent midweek worship series was written to reflect and meditate on the lyrics of

several favorite Advent/Christmas songs that connect us to God’s story of Jesus coming as our Savior,” Deterding adds.

Devotions were written by twenty-two Zion members. With content based on favorite Christmas hymns and carols, devotions echo Zion’s historically strong emphasis on music as a way to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. In January, the congregation launched a Saturday evening contemporary service.

“In this turbulent year, when we have been pulled apart by the pandemic, politics and social unrest, we come together to kneel at the manger,” says project creator and manager Dr. Mary Manz Simon. “The 2020 holiday season will be

different than any other, except for one aspect,” she concludes. “Even this year, we will come together to thank God for the precious gift of his Son, our Savior.” ▲

Jacob Roggow Joins Zion As Director of Parish Music



Zion/Fort Myers, FL has added Jacob T. Roggow to a new position on its professional staff as full-time director of parish music.

The spring graduate of Concordia University/Nebraska was commissioned and installed in September — the first time “in person” worship was held in the Zion sanctuary since March 14.

Roggow began service at Zion in June, while the congregation was live-streaming its Sunday blended and Saturday contemporary services, plus offering a Sunday traditional drive-in service.

Jacob Roggow comes to Zion with a double degree. He holds a Bachelor of Music in church music and a Bachelor of Music Education for kindergarten through grade 12.

Jacob is one of three rostered Directors of Parish Music (DPM) in the Florida-Georgia District and 105 DPMs in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

He will play organ or piano for worship, plan worship with the pastoral staff, direct adult vocal and handbell choirs and develop a music education curriculum for Zion’s Early Childhood Center.

Jacob’s training included a summer music internship at Concordia Publishing House as well as student teaching at a Seward, NE elementary school and Lutheran High School West, Cleveland, Ohio.

He was commissioned and installed by Rev. Dr. Curtis Deterding, senior pastor at Zion. Assisting in the commissioning was Jacob’s father, Rev. Tim Roggow.

Jacob hails from Bethalto, IL (a suburb of St. Louis) where his father, a pastor and commissioned Director of Christian Education, and mother Annalisa lived while attending Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO.

“Zion feels very blessed to have a synodically-trained musician coming to us right out of college,” Deterding concludes. ▲



Above left — New Director of Parish Music Jacob Roggow receives a blessing from his father The Rev. Tim Roggow while The Rev. Dr. Curtis Deterding looks on.



*100 mph winds and storm surge
flood Lutheran camp*

Perry, Georgia Congregation Joins Kentucky Parish for Camp Dixie Hurricane Clean-up

Christ/Perry, GA joined **Divine Savior/Shepherdsville, KY** for a major clean-up event after Hurricane Sally did some damage to Camp Dixie near Gulf Shores, AL. The two congregations brought together 33 adults, teens and children who participated in the five-day project. Sixteen were from Christ/Perry and 17 were from Divine Savior in Shepherdsville. Many hundreds of hours of service were performed.

Camp Dixie is an LCMS camp ministry in Elberta, AL under the leadership of Michael R. Stapleton, DCE. Prior to running Camp Dixie, he served in parish ministry as a Director of Christian Education for 30 years. Stapleton then served two years as director of a Lutheran camp in Wisconsin.

“Hurricane Sally clobbered us with winds of more than 100 mph,” Stapleton explained. “The storm surge brought water levels to the flood point throughout the camp grounds.” According to Stapleton the storm caused tens of thousands of dollars of

damage, that are uninsured due to it being caused by a hurricane. “Thankfully, we had no physical harm to ourselves other than living without electricity for several weeks afterwards.”

Tasks performed by the clean-up crew included cutting up downed trees, clearing debris, installing tarps on roofs, replacing support pillars that had washed away, repairing chapel benches, painting, and cleaning. “Our congregation has been making annual trips to Camp Dixie for eight years,” said Pastor John Lehenbauer from Christ Lutheran. “But this is by far the most projects we have ever completed in a visit. We are thankful to the many volunteers who gave of their time and talents. We will also continue to pray for Mike Stapleton and his wife, Barbara, as Camp Dixie slowly returns to normal over the next several months. We give thanks to the Lord for the opportunity to play a small part in the recovery.”

Seven teens from Christ Lutheran spent their Fall break assisting with

the clean-up efforts. One 10th grader, Thomas Gillies, made his fourth visit to Camp Dixie — his first involving clean-up from a hurricane.

Each day began and ended with a devotion from God’s Word as well as prayer. Congregations or organizations interested in volunteering for recovery are encouraged to contact Mike Stapleton at director@campdixieministries.org or (251) 987-1201. ▲



Weston Surprises Laurie Hartner With Campus Playground Dedication



Laurie Hartner was recognized with a surprise dedication to the **St. Paul/Weston, FL** campus playground in October. In photo above — from left — are family members, Pastor Tim Hartner, daughters Cydney (with her dog Jaxson) and Deborah Carvajal, with husband Diego Carvajal. The family was able to work out their schedules to attend one of St. Paul's outdoor communion services on a Tuesday morning. Laurie

said she was excited that the family could all come together to celebrate the Lord's Supper. What she didn't know is that Pastor Scott Henze had worked the surprise dedication with Pastor Tim Hartner so the entire family could be present for the dedication right after the communion liturgy. The preschool students and teachers came out to celebrate — from a distance across the playground. After the dedication, Laurie and her family walked around and enjoyed the playground and its new features. Half of the structures were newly added including several features that allow kids to make noise. A newly poured rubber surface replaced the older sand surface.

Laurie Hartner was St. Paul/Weston's first pre-school director and served in that position for 25 years. She retired two years ago. ▲



Nathan LeGreco Installed at Grace/Key West



The Rev. Nathan "Buck" LeGreco was installed at **Grace/Key West, FL** in October. Pictured from left to right are pastors Tony Mandile, Dean Pfeffer, Joseph Eckman, Buck LeGreco, Don Stier and District President Greg Walton.

Buck LeGreco vicared at Hope/Plant City in 2014. ▲

Talking Rock, GA Congregation Expands Outreach While Remaining Cautious During COVID-19 Pandemic

Like every congregation, King of Kings/Talking Rock, Ga has been forced to adapt to the 'new normal' during 2020. In their case, however, their engagements with the community have not come to a screeching halt. "By the grace of God, we have been able to remain active," asserts The Rev. Jeffrey Jensen, pastor.

"In recent months, for instance, we hosted an outdoor concert. We enjoyed an evening of Gospel music presented by DaySpring. We threw a virtual baby shower for our local pregnancy center, collecting much-needed items. We participated in a trunk-or-treat event in one of our neighboring communities. We brought games for the children and encouraged them to knock down

the walls of Jericho, we were able to distribute Bible coloring books and information about our congregation."

Pastor Jensen was formally installed at King of Kings in August of this year. He is in his 25th year of ministry and has served various congregations in New England.

"Pastor Jensen and his wife are both passionate about seeking both Christians and non-Christians with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, so that Christians can live out their faith lives more fully, and non-Christians may come to know the love of Christ in His Gospel," said Gary Engel, a member of both King of Kings and the Board of Directors of the FLGA District.

As in years past, the congregation is taking part in Operation Christmas Child — with a new record. They packed more than 200 boxes for children around the world. ▲



Above — a virtual baby shower enabled King of Kings members to provide needed items for the local pregnancy center.



The Rev. Jeffrey Jensen with his wife, Paige, and their two sons, Noah and Micah were welcomed to FLGA District in August, 2020



Below left to right — community children attempt to knock down the Walls of Jericho and a few of the more than 200 boxes collected during "Operation Christmas Child" for children around the world.



Comfort Dog “Peace” Sends District Greetings

“Peace,” the Lutheran Church Charities (LCC) K-9 Comfort Dog at **Trinity/Orlando, FL**, sends safe greetings to the FLGA District. The LCC K-9 Comfort Dog Ministry is a national human-care ministry embracing the unique, calming nature and skills of purebred Golden Retrievers. They are a bridge for compassionate ministry, opening doors for conversation about faith and creating opportunities to share the Mercy, Compassion, Presence and Proclamation of Jesus Christ. ▲

Faith/North Palm Beach, FL Recognizes Kathy Knudtson, Retiring After 38 Years of Service

Kathy Knudtson, **Faith/North Palm Beach, FL's** School Director, has retired after 38 years of faithful service. Kathy began her career in 1982 when all Faith had was a simple two-room school house. That same year she was the driving force behind opening the congregation's after-school program. She saw the need in the community for this when she noticed that more mothers were beginning to join the workforce.

In 1983 Faith Lutheran Summer Camp began. In 1985 the little school house was replaced with a seven-room classroom wing. In 1999 with the purchase of the north campus, Faith expanded their ministries to cover infant and toddler care. In 2012 the school celebrated 50 years of service. Faith recognized Kathy for her years of service and wished her a very blessed retirement with her husband, daughters and grandchildren. ▲



Faith/Marietta Supports Local Food Bank With Thanksgiving and Christmas Baskets

Last year, Faith/Marietta, GA congregation filled 86 Thanksgiving baskets that were distributed to the community. And this year, they filled 148, according to Office Manager, Janice Schaag.

“The school had 591 food items donated to make 50 plus bags and the church had almost 100 bags donated,” Schaag said. “We were able to buy turkeys for every bag filled.”

Especially this year — because of the pandemic — the community surrounding Faith has lack of employment or severe underemployment. “There were 300 families needing assistance at the Brumby Food Bank and we were so grateful to be able to help meet that need.” Faith is now starting a food drive for the Christmas Season.

“We have a ‘24 Day Reverse Advent’ list that has both gone out to the school children’s families as well as members of the congregation,” explained Colleen Umphrey, Social Ministry Chairperson for Faith. “With these donations we will be able to put together food kits for Christmas.”

In addition to the food items, cash and gift cards are also used to help meet community needs. ▲



Pictured, left-to-right, are participants Gary Noerenberg, Mike Wolber, Mitzi Lewis, Colleen Umphrey, Sybil Eidson, and Emily Umphrey. Samples of some of the more than 50 food baskets prepared.

REVERSE
ADVENT CALENDAR
EACH DAY ADD AN ITEM TO A BOX
ON CHRISTMAS EVE DONATE THE
CONTENTS TO A FOOD BANK.

- December 1 - box of cereal
- December 2 - peanut butter
- December 3 - stuffing mix
- December 4 - boxed potatoes
- December 5 - macaroni and cheese
- December 6 - canned fruit
- December 7 - canned tomatoes
- December 8 - canned meat
- December 9 - dessert mix
- December 10 - jar of applesauce
- December 11 - canned sweet potatoes
- December 12 - cranberry sauce
- December 13 - canned beans
- December 14 - box of crackers
- December 15 - package of white rice
- December 16 - package of oatmeal
- December 17 - package of pasta
- December 18 - spaghetti sauce
- December 19 - chicken noodle soup
- December 20 - tomato soup
- December 21 - can corn
- December 22 - can mixed vegetables
- December 23 - can carrots
- December 24 - can green beans

Return the box to Faith on Christmas Eve to be donated to the local food pantry



Redeemer/Stuart Youth Remain Active While Social Distancing During Pandemic

Redeemer /Stuart, FL confirmed four students in November — a dedicated group of young people who went the extra mile during the pandemic. The COVID-19 situation added six extra months to their confirmation classes.

The four confirmands, from left, are Carter Gramenz, Hadden Kenney, Meghan Cochran, Cathryn Gramenz.

The congregation will be hosting a drive-thru live nativity Saturday, December 12 and Sunday December 13 from 6-9 pm. They'll be handing out crafts and cookies while guests safely wait in line in their automobiles. This is an annual event for Redeemer/Stuart and replaces their walk-through live nativity.

Redeemer School's Kindergarten, 4th, and, 5th grade were honored to partner with Elev8hope by filling Thanksgiving baskets that will be distributed to families in the greater Stuart, Florida community. Elev8Hope is a "boots on the ground" organization whose flexibility and determination has allowed them to work with many organizations and tackle many issues. ▲



Former Executive Assistant to Synod President Al Barry CPH Publisher, Executive Editor, Paul McCain Dies at 58

The Rev. Paul Timothy McCain, publisher and executive editor at Concordia Publishing House (CPH), died in Ballwin, Mo., on Nov. 25. He was 58.

McCain was born on Feb. 12, 1962, in Pensacola, Fla., to the Rev. Paul B. and Jean (Geipel) McCain and received the Sacrament of Holy Baptism on Feb. 25, 1962. He married Lynn Grunow in 1983. He graduated from Concordia University, River Forest, Ill., with a Bachelor of Arts (1984) in Biblical Languages and from Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (CTSFW), with a Master of Divinity (1988) in Systematic Theology.



McCain served as assistant to Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) President Rev. Dr. A.L. Barry from 1992 until Barry's death in March 2001, and as assistant to Interim Synod President Rev. Robert Kuhn until the Rev. Dr. Gerald Kieschnick's installation as president in September 2001. Prior to becoming Barry's assistant, McCain served as communications director for Iowa District East; pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church (Artesian) in Waverly, Iowa; and guest instructor at CTSFW.

After his years assisting two Synod presidents, McCain served briefly as interim director of Concordia Historical Institute in St. Louis. In January 2002, following the retirement of the Rev. Dr. Stephen J. Carter as CPH president and CEO, McCain began serving as interim CPH president and CEO, a position he held until the installation of Dr. Bruce Kintz on Oct. 31, 2006. In a statement released after McCain's death, Kintz said the CPH family was "deeply saddened by the news of Rev. Paul T. McCain's passing. He was a close friend and co-worker and will be sorely missed."

During his time at CPH, McCain was general editor of *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, A Reader's Edition* and also played pivotal roles in the publication of *Lutheran Service Book*, *The Lutheran Study Bible* and *Treasury of Daily Prayer*.

McCain was a frequent guest on KFUO and other programs and podcasts and the author of numerous articles. As word of his death spread across the Synod on Thanksgiving Day, the Rev. Todd Wilken, host of the radio program "Issues, Etc.," credited McCain for putting the Book of Concord

"back into the hands of the laity. For that, and for all the other gifts God gave through Paul, every confessional Lutheran should give thanks today."

The Rev. Robert Bugbee, former president of Lutheran Church—Canada, said, "My beloved friend, Paul McCain, was a source of support, not only to Missouri Synod people, but also to us within the Synod's wider family. I will always treasure the brotherly encouragement he provided in my early days as the leader of a partner church. I trust God to use the many publications Paul made possible like seeds going into the ground ... to bring forth a harvest to life everlasting! The sharp pain we feel at losing him is just the measure of how much he came to mean during the years the Lord shared him with us."

In a statement shared widely on social media, LCMS President Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison wrote, "Our Lord Jesus has called to Himself our brother and fellow servant in Christ ... to await the blessed resurrection unto life everlasting."

McCain was preceded in death by his father, the Rev. Paul B. McCain. He is survived by his mother, Jean; his wife, Lynn; children Paul Jerome (Kirsten) McCain, John Augustine McCain and Mary Ann McCain; granddaughter Anna Jean McCain; brother Phillip (Brenda) McCain; nephew Phillip (Sophia) McCain; and niece Jennifer (Brett) Pierce.

A live-streamed funeral service was on Tuesday, Dec. 1, at the Chapel of St. Timothy and St. Titus on the campus of Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO with a private burial following the service. ▲

National Youth Gathering Slated for July 2022

Held every three years since 1980, the LCMS Youth Gathering provides thousands of youth and adults the opportunity to come together as a community of God's people to be encouraged in their walk with Jesus Christ and learn about the Christian faith and their Lutheran identity.

The Gathering is more than the five days of the event. The preparation process for the Gathering brings together young people and supportive



adults to encourage each other in their baptismal identity. The Gathering provides young people a vision for the vastness of Christ's Church and equips them for vocational service as they continue their walk with Jesus.

This event is organized by LCMS Youth Ministry in Saint Louis, MO. For additional ways to connect to LCMS Youth Ministry, please visit www.lcms.org/youth. ▲

One-day seminar will explore Galatians

Seminary's Lay Bible Institute Slated for February

Paul's message to the Galatians is the focus of Concordia Seminary's February 6, 2021 Lay Bible Institute, "Galatians: Hearing Paul's Gospel Afresh," led by Dr. Mark Seifrid, professor of Exegetical Theology.

Dr. Seifrid will help participants explore the relationship between "justification by faith" and Christian ethics — revealing how Paul's message to the first century Galatians applies to Christians today.

"Paul's message to the Galatians is that their lives — Gentile lives — matter. As Christians, we should find our identity in Jesus Christ and His saving work for us," Seifrid said. "The answer to the question, 'Who am I?' is found in Jesus. In finding ourselves in Jesus, we find one another, too. True Christian

fellowship does not lie in what we do, but in Jesus Christ, Who has taken down all barriers and made us one."

Open to lay people, students, pastors and others interested in the proclamation of the Gospel, the one-day workshop will be held from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Feb. 6 in Werner Hall on campus, 801 Seminary Place, St. Louis, MO 63105. The registration deadline is Jan. 24, 2021. Cost is \$20 per person.

The Lay Bible Institute, offered three times a year by Concordia Seminary faculty members, is an ongoing study of the Bible and how it relates to today's life and events.

For more information or to register, visit csl.edu/lbi or contact Continuing Education at 314-505-7286 or ce@csl.edu. ▲



Concordia/Nebraska Announces Dr. Bernard Bull as President-Elect

Concordia University/Nebraska's Board of Regents has named Dr. Bernard D. Bull to serve as the University's 11th president. Bull, currently serving as president of Goddard College in Plainfield, VT, succeeds Rev. Dr. Brian Friedrich, who served as Concordia's president 2004-19.

"Dr. Bull had the unanimous support of the Board of Regents," said Stuart Bartruff, Board of Regents chair. "He expressed a strong desire to return to serving in a Christ-centered Lutheran institution of higher learning. He has a strong commitment to Lutheran theology, and he looks forward to faithfully fulfilling the Concordia University Promises of a Lutheran Education. Dr. Bull is known nationally for his innovative insights regarding Christian education at all levels. Concordia University will be well-served given Dr. Bull's leadership attributes and experience. The Lord has blessed us by raising-up Dr. Bull, a faithful servant."

Prior to serving Goddard College, Bull was the Chief Innovation Officer, Vice Provost of Curriculum and Innovation, and Professor of Education at Concordia University/Wisconsin(CUW). There he led a University-wide effort to refine and expand low-residency and online learning opportunities for adult and post-traditional learners. Before that, he served in Lutheran middle and high

schools in Illinois and Wisconsin.

Bull will fulfill his contractual obligations with Goddard College for the 2020-21 academic year, and then begin his Concordia tenure in August 2021. During this timeframe, Concordia will continue to be served by Interim President Rev. Russ Sommerfeld — who has served in the role of president since Jan. 1, 2020.

"I'm humbled to heed God's call to serve as the next president of Concordia/Nebraska," said Bull. "I've long admired Concordia's legacy of cultivating a rich, academically challenging, vibrant and Christ-centered higher education community and its inspiring track-record of equipping men and women for lives of learning, service and leadership in the church and world."

Under Bull's leadership, which started in November 2018, Goddard College renewed its accreditation status from the New England Commission of Higher Education, after it was placed on a two-year probationary period. Bull is actively involved in the higher education landscape regarding educational innovation, futures in education, nurturing learner agency and ownership and the intersection of education and digital culture. He is a regularly featured presenter at national education conferences and has authored and edited several books and publications, many of which are used by Concordia instructors.

Bull earned a bachelor's in education, theology and history from CUW in 1994, before earning a master's in curriculum and instruction from Concordia University/Chicago in 1997, a Master of Liberal Studies from the University of Wisconsin/Milwaukee in 2005 and a Doctor of Education in instructional technology from Northern Illinois University in 2007.

Bernard and his wife, Joyanna, have two children, Bethany and Nathaniel. In her past career, Dr. Joyanna Bull served as an adjunct instructor at CUW as well as a K-12 teacher in Lutheran and public schools. ▲





Thanksgiving meals were delivered to 21 families in the community surrounding **Our Savior/Plantation, FL**. Volunteers from both church and school families -- about 20 teams in total — came together in an effort to pack and deliver baskets. Altogether \$3,100 worth of food donations were given out. Each meal basket contained a turkey along with the means to prepare it and the accompanying side dishes as well as a Publix gift card and a devotional book. They also shared the Scripture (Psalm 34:4-10) with each family and prayed over them that God may provide for their individual needs. Tony Durante is pastor at Our Savior/Plantation. ▲

Kalli Wied to Spearhead Live/UCF Ministry



Kalli Wied was installed as Outreach Minister for **LIVE/University of Central Florida** Outreach Minister on November 22 at Hope/Orlando, FL. LIVE UCF is the campus ministry at University of Central Florida, one of the largest and fastest-growing universities in the country. The ministry was started in 2015.

Kalli was born and raised in Texas. She received her Director of Christian Education (DCE) Certification from Concordia University/Austin, Texas in 2017 and also studied at Concordia University/Irvine, CA. She was placed at St. Luke's/Oviedo as a DCE Intern and received a call as DCE to St. Luke's in June 2018. She worked with high school youth and young adults and assisted with middle school youth, confirmation and school religious instruction. She volunteered at LIVE UCF for more than a year leading Bible study and working with small groups prior to accepting this new call. Rev. Dr. Peter Meier installed Kalli during morning worship. ▲

Thrive Seeks to Find a "Meaning in the Mess"

Thrive/Estero, FL had a successful "Thanksgiving Thrive By," and plan to do it again for Christmas. They collected food goods for the Interfaith Food Bank in San Carlos Park near their campus. Interfaith has seen a huge increase in families over the past few months due to COVID-19. Since June 200 new families have registered for their services.



During Advent the congregation is "finding meaning in the mess" of 2020. The sermon topics include finding meaning in some of the worst in human nature and nature itself. "As we approach the Christmas season we might think there is a disconnect between the beauty of the holidays and the year 2020, but in fact the opposite is true! Jesus came for this ugly world and the original Christmas had its ugly side from shepherds to mangers to Herod," explained Pastor John Roth. "This year we will celebrate An Ugly Christmas in a series of messages that highly the beauty of God's love in the middle of our messy world." ▲



Beautiful Savior/Sarasota, FL held a baby shower for the Community Pregnancy Clinic [communitypregnancyclinic.com/]. In addition to the infant items, they were also able to provide approximately \$300 in cash for the clinic to use as needed. The Evangelism Board members pictured — Barb Christensen, Donna Taylor and Doris Schnepel delivered the items. The congregation's Service Guild also provided a stroller/car seat combination and many members of the congregation also provided homemade blankets and sweaters. ▲

The third-grade students at **Our Savior/St. Petersburg, FL** created Thanksgiving dioramas —three-dimensional miniature models of things for which they grateful. ▲



The Students at **St. John/Ocala, FL** created Thanksgiving Trees to count their blessings. Each of the leaves on the trees were labeled for a variety of blessings. This student included her mailman — because he brings her letters from her pen pal and her dogs like to chase him. Below — a friendly group of turkeys was spotted hanging out near Mrs. Boothe's preschool window as students got ready for Thanksgiving. ▲





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A Resilient Dragon’s Message For Christmas 2020

It’s going to be a crazy Christmas this year coming off what seems like a decade of negative news and crisis communication about the COVID-19 pandemic and election banter that still berates us as we pass through Thanksgiving into Advent.

On Christmas Eve, 1968, the crew of Apollo 8 spacecraft were orbiting 250,000 miles above the earth. In honor of the auspicious occasion of celebrating the birth of Christ they decided to read from the book of Genesis. Looking down on our tiny planet they read, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” This powerful truth was broadcast live over all the earth. God is the creator of all life — even back then. NASA ended up being sued by atheists for allowing such a thing. The funny thing is that these non-believers would have probably had a stroke had they known a few months later, in 1969, Buzz Aldrin took The Lord’s Supper with him to the moon and partook of Holy Communion in the lunar modular while he read Scripture, “I am the vine you are the branches, whoever abides in me will bring forth much fruit.”

Jump ahead to our current pandemic/election year of chaos that is about to come to an end . . . on Sunday, November 15th an international crew of astronauts lifted off at from Kennedy Space Center in Florida — right here in our FLGA District. A privately-owned spacecraft propelled three American astronauts: Michael Hopkins, Victor Glover, and Shannon Walker, along with Japan Aerospace member, Soichi Noguchi, into orbit to begin a six-month science mission aboard the international space station. This was a “first!”

The crew — named “Dragon” — appropriately dubbed their spacecraft “Resilience,” and according to Commander Mike Hopkins, it was because 2020 has been such a challenging year: a global pandemic, massive economic

hardships, nationwide civil unrest, and quite difficult forced isolation.

This Christmas season we are able to broadcast loud and clear the Christmas message of Hope, “Today in the city of David a Savior has been born for us, who is Christ the Lord.”

The great gift of Christmas. As President Walton affirms in this month’s LifeLines, God himself became one like us in all things but sin. What is it that we are celebrating? A gift so profound can never be fully explained.

Ultimately it is an authentic and unadulterated gift — not just a

present that is here today and gone tomorrow. It is a grace and that gift that keeps on giving. God has become man in order for us to become like God.

Our all-powerful creator wants you and me to be like him. Impossible? Let’s not forget the message of the Angel;

“All things are possible with God.”

The child of Bethlehem is the means to this end. Christ, our Redeemer has saved us from everlasting death so that we have the opportunity to live with Him forever. I know it seems impossible, yet here we are, once again — in a year of incredible unrest — proclaiming the Gospel message, God has become Man! The Good News never changes! While our astronauts get a unique vision from Dragon of His spectacular Creation, we can share along with them God’s Word, Jesus Christ, who “became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth,” [—JOHN 1:14].

My Christmas prayer for you is that the peace, joy and love the infant babe of Bethlehem brings will enable you to continually grow in His image. That he will strengthen you in your resolve to live as His son or daughter. That He will instill in you a wisdom to make good decisions and that you will have the courage to act upon your convictions.

Let the nonbelievers have their lawsuits . . . we have Jesus Christ and with Him *everything* is possible. ▲



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