

LUTHERAN LIFE

Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod
Florida-Georgia District
April/May, 2024



LUTHERAN LIFE

Lutheran LIFE is the official newsmagazine of the Florida-Georgia (FLGA) District of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The Mission of the FLGA District is to serve, assist, and encourage congregations in the ministry of Jesus Christ. People of the FLGA 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 readers to express their views and ideas on a wide range of topics. Lutheran LIFE is published bi-monthly. News items and photos are encouraged. Please send scanned photos as a .jpg, .png or .pdf attachment rather than embedded in emails.



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DISTRICT CAPSULES

Transferred Into FLGA from Other Districts

12/19/23.....Mr. James Sohl
from South Wisconsin (C)
01/01/24.....Mrs. Katy Bass from Texas (C)
02/01/24.....Ms. Christine Ressler
from New Jersey (C)
02/01/24.....Rev. Philip Ressler
from New Jersey (O)

Transferred Out of FLGA to Other Districts

12/01/23Rev. John Flamme
to Rocky Mountain (O)
01/01/24.....Mrs. Sarah Duffy
to N. Illinois (C)
01/01/24.....Ms. Gwyn Powers
to Southeastern (C)

Ordinations & Installations

01/07/24Rev. Keith Enko (O) as Vacancy
Pastor for Trinity/Delray Beach, FL
02/10/24.....Rev. Philip Ressler (O) as Senior
Pastor for Immanuel/Brandon, FL
02/18/24.....Rev. Larry Griffin (O) as Sole Pastor
for Good Shepherd/Chiefland, FL
02/21/24.....Rev. Robert Steinke (O) as IIM for
Our Savior/Zepherhills, FL
02/25/24.....Rev. Andrew Apple (O) as Sole
Pastor for First/Clearwater, FL

Called to Glory

01/29/24.....Mr. Kenneth Jacques (C)
02/05/24.....Mr. Mark Miesler (C)

Status Change

01/01/24.....Mr. Jeffrey Knutson (C)
to Emeritus
01/01/24.....Mrs. Francesca Knutson (C)
to Emeritus
01/01/24.....Rev. Alan Koch (O) to Emeritus
01/12/24.....Rev. Andrew Kubowicz (O)
to Candidate
01/16/24.....Rev. Gregory Stringer (O)
to Emeritus
02/26/24.....Rev. Pat O'Brien (O)
to Emeritus

Note: (O) = Ordained; (C) = Commissioned
(IIM) = Intentional Interim Minister



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Things Pastors CAN and CANNOT do:

Pastors CAN:

- Preach the Gospel to encourage the work of the Holy Spirit in people's lives.
- Lead with love and encouragement no matter how many people follow.
- Thank those who give time, money, energy, and other resources.
- Understand that God is still working in them.
- Take care of their own health (body, mind, heart, and spirit) while caring for others.
- Set a good example of faithful living even if very few are paying attention.

Pastors CANNOT:

- Make anyone follow Jesus or grow in faith. That is the work of the Holy Spirit.
- Make people come to worship, serve, or give financially. People set their own priorities.
- Choose how someone is going to treat another person. Each person is responsible for their own behaviors.
- Magically revive the life of the church on their own. This is only possible when the whole church works together to do it.
- Decide how and when God is going to act in this world and in the life of the church. That is up to God.
- Defeat the powers of sin, death, and evil that are still at work in the world. Jesus already did that. 🙏

Cover Photo – A guest arrives on the red carpet among the paparazzi at The Tim Tebow Foundation and **St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL's** annual Night to Shine event. Story page 23.



Ezra praised the Lord, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, "Amen! Amen!" Then they bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

(Recorded upon the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem in NEHEMIAH 8:6).

Do you remember how during the pandemic in cities like New York and Chicago, outside each night you could hear the clapping and cheers of citizens encouraging healthcare workers and first responders for their great and

country where selfish individual rights have replaced love for one's neighbors. Situations that once were handled by honest discussion now result in division, walls, and an unwillingness to even just listen to one another. There's more hate, intolerance, gun violence, depression, and uncertainty about the future than most of us have ever seen. On top of all that, we continue to see the church decline with many walking away from the faith. The true message of grace, life and salvation through Christ alone is being replaced with what itchy ears want to hear.

HOW GREAT...IS OUR GOD!

sacrificial work? In cities and towns across the land we heard about stories where communities came together and helped one another.

The epidemic that began in 2020 was not the first-time suffering, crisis and trial resulted in people coming together for good. The recorded events in the Book of Nehemiah record such a time. After decades of exile, the people of Judah return to find Jerusalem and its walls reduced to rubble. They could have given up and accepted that Jerusalem would never be restored, but with our great God, all things are possible.

Maybe you're looking at our world or your life with such doubt and hopelessness right now. The war continues to rage between Ukraine and Russia and the effects of the war have impacted not only Ukraine and the surrounding countries, but even the global economy and food supplies. Then the war between Israel and Palestine seems to have no end in sight; and other countries are being drawn in. There's instability, suffering, sickness and death and the reverberations are beyond the region. Add to that our own

So, in the midst of all this, I wonder how many of you would join me in going outside and clapping and cheering saying, "How great is our God!" Why do I say that with some doubt? Because as I previously noted, in the midst of the realities of our lives, this can cause us to wonder — "Is there really a god and *why* is he causing this or letting this happen?"

But my dear friends, our God has not changed! He has always been the God of love and hope! From the beginning, He made us to love us and be in relationship with Him. Even in our failure and sin, He still loved us so much that He "Sent His One and only Son that whosoever believes in Him shall be saved!" Sadly, we continue to see the impact of sin and Satan in the world, and in our lives. It shows up in countless ways. So, when we suffer or face trials, we begin to wonder where the Lord is, if He cares or even really has the power to deal with our circumstances.

BUT *God does not change*, "His love endures forever!" (PSALM 136). Yes! He is that God who "will be with you; He will never leave you

LIFELINES

nor forsake you. Do not be afraid!" (DEUTERONOMY. 31:8). How Great is our God! He not only abides with us in times like this, but He has met our greatest need eternally and that my friends is the reason for us to cheer and say, "**How Great is our God!**"

I love King David's words about the Lord being the source of true hope. "I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore, my heart is glad, and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest in hope" (PSALM 16: 26). One of the songs many of our congregations' sing is *How Great is Our God*. You might want to listen to and reflect on that amazing truth.

Finally, consider these powerful words of the Apostle Peter.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time (1 PETER 1:3-6).

No matter what may be going on in our world, nation, or lives, we can rejoice for we have a "living hope" through Jesus Christ. Yes, indeed "How Great is Our God!"

May the Lord bless you as you cling to Him and share this great truth and hope with others!

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.
— ROMANS 12:12



James Rockey

PRESIDENT
FLORIDA-GEORGIA DISTRICT
LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

Rivercliff/Sandy Springs, GA Opens Only Lutheran Braille Workers Center in the State

What do you get when you mix one printer, four manual binding machines, one heat binding machine, one Braille press, more than 6,000 pounds of paper and two dedicated leaders? Then add a sprinkling of plastic comb bindings and fold in 60 volunteers?

The answer — the LoveWorks Production Center #324 located in the Rivercliff Community Center on the Rivercliff Lutheran Church (RLC) campus in Sandy Springs, Georgia.

In 2019 Rivercliff's Pastor Jeff Jordan attended a pastor's conference where Daniel Jenkins, now President of Lutheran Braille Workers (LBW), spoke about the need for more production centers (called LoveWorks) to produce Christian materials free of charge for the visually impaired.

"As I heard about what LBW was doing, there just seemed to be a natural connection to the kind of thing we are looking for at Rivercliff, Jordan explains. "What I heard in the presentation that moved me the most was this intentional sharing of the Gospel of Jesus Christ with people."

Excited about the ministry, Jordan spoke to the congregation about starting a production center and invited Daniel Jenkins to visit and speak to Rivercliff's members. While in town, Jenkins spoke with other churches in the area and with members of the Lutheran Outreach Partnership, a pan-Lutheran group in the area. Many members of Rivercliff indicated that they would like

to volunteer in the LoveWorks ministry so the congregation decided to open a production center.



Stephanie Grieger and Beth Norton volunteered to be the production center leaders and began working with the staff at LBW to set up the center. After receiving a \$20,000 grant from the Rivercliff Mission Fund to purchase equipment and supplies, Grieger and Norton organized the center and learned how to produce the Bibles. With help of LBW's staff they held a training day in mid-October of 2021.

"We're starting small and focused but we plan to grow it," Grieger continues.

Pastor Jordan remarked after checking in on the training workshop that it was "beautiful chaos."

"To see people so enthusiastic about punching holes in paper and hitting buttons to print . . . the joy was incredible. You can see the love in action — love works!" adds Norton.

Rivercliff's production center, the only one in Georgia, produces three types of products — Bibles for Prison Ministry, Large Print Bibles for the visually impaired and several books

of the Bible in Braille. To produce a large print Bible, for example, they print 26 volumes (some are single books of the Bible and some are smaller books combined) on high contrast paper, punch holes in the 5,882 pages, bind each volume with a plastic comb binding, check each volume for quality, and pack them into three boxes for shipment. Volunteer Alan Grieger, loads the boxes into his car and takes them to the post office. "Our materials are mailed all over the

world free of charge because they are materials for the visually impaired," he says.

To create a book of the Bible in Braille, a special Braille paper is purchased from LBW. The first step is to number each page of the book. Each page is then placed by hand between two metal plates with the Braille translation, the plate is put through a press which creates the raised dots, the page is removed from the plate and then bound on a manual binding machine.

"Checking for errors is more difficult on a Braille book because we don't read Braille" says team leader Helen Bourne, "so we carefully check the page numbers to verify that each page is in order."

Wayne Smith, a team leader and volunteer says about the ministry, "This is such a concrete way to share the Gospel — at the end of the day you can hold up a finished Bible and think I did this and it is going to someone who I know really wants to hear the word."

Trilby Leech, another

volunteer on two teams explains, "we produce a book with our own hands, review it for quality, initial it on the back page and then ship it directly to the recipient."

According to LBW, there are about 300 million blind people in the world and 95% of those are unchurched.

Steve Frerking, volunteer, team leader and occasional punch machine repairman for the center remarks that "many people have never read the word of God — how could you not want to be a part of this ministry?"

Rivercliff's congregation has been joined in the ministry by two other area churches and hopes to have other Christian churches and community groups joining in the future.

Hazel and Tony Henson of Cross of Life/ Roswell, GA put together a team and has been volunteering with us for more than a year. In January of this year, a group of interested volunteers from Holy Trinity/Marietta, GA spent a morning with them learning about the center and trying all three processes.

"We were so impressed with the instruction and organization of the facility . . . we can't wait to get started!" says David Fricke from Holy Trinity.

If you live in the Atlanta area and are interested in volunteering at LoveWorks you can email them at LoveWorks@rivercliff.org for more information.

"I can only think that God's got dreams that I've never imagined, and we'll see where God takes those dreams from this point," Jordon concludes.

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JAY WENDLAND

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RESIDENTIAL LOAN PROGRAM

FOR LCMS ROSTERED CHURCH WORKERS



Rev. Robert and Carol Tasler in front of their home in Castle Rock, CO, purchased with a loan through LCEF.

Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) is blessed to offer the Residential Loan Program to Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) rostered church workers. This program is designed to provide financial assistance to LCMS ordained and commissioned ministers, allowing them to effectively focus on their calling—witnessing and teaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ to others. Loans are available for the purchase or refinance of a primary, single-family residence only. LCEF is a financial partner that shares your Lutheran values—without forfeiting competitive interest rates.

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Visit lcef.org/residential-loans to learn more!

Lutheran Church Extension Fund—Missouri Synod, 10733 Sunset Office Drive, Suite 300, St. Louis, MO 63127-1020. 800-843-5233. lcef.org. NMLS #3444. Illinois Residential Mortgage Licensee (MB.0006057). Loans made or arranged pursuant to a California Law License (6037619). For more information on LCEF's lending license go to lcef.org/state-disclosures/. LCEF Residential Loan applications are accepted from: Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, Texas, Washington, Wisconsin. Specific state regulations are applicable in Arizona and Wisconsin. Call 800-853-5233 for details. All cash-out refinances and straight refinances in excess of 80% loan-to-value are not available in Texas. For those states not listed above, RCW mortgage loans are available through the Lutheran Federal Credit Union (LutheranFCU).

LutheranFCU is not affiliated with LCEF. Lutheran Federal Credit Union: 10733 Sunset Office Drive, Suite 406, St. Louis, MO 63127-1020. Phone number: 314-394-2790. Website: lutheranfcu.org. (NMLS# 1301052).


First/Gainesville Shares Passion for Nicaragua

Four members of **First/Gainesville, FL**, recently returned from a mission trip to Nicaragua. This mission began back in 2003 when several college students traveled to bring the people a Vacation Bible School program. The following year several adults joined them and provided an eyeglass clinic. Over the years several pastors, vicars and the director of the preschool have been among the mission teams.

In 2005 the group went to Santa Patricia, a refugee village, to see if more of an impact could be made by visiting the same place each time. Partnering with the Canadian Lutheran Church (CLC), a new mission focus was born: B.A.S.I.C. Nicaragua (Brothers and Sisters in Christ.) The CLC started the original mission and welcomed the folks from First. They also trained the first pastors to minister to the village.

Over time B.A.S.I.C. has sponsored children to be able to attend school, held eye glass clinics, provided medications, bought food packs, furniture, construction tools and clothing. On the most recent trip, they took bikes so one woman could take her wares to market and another as a bike taxi for one of the men to haul people and items. Some members work with the children learning English; reading, singing and conversing with them. Perhaps the biggest impact has been the building of sturdy housing. More than 100 small homes have been built over the years to replace the rickety structures thrown together as refugees seek some sort of shelter. Along with local masons, many volunteers have shared their own skills to help young Nicaraguan men learn how to build the homes, working alongside them for the week they are there. The first homes were built with the most rudimentary tools, prompting the teams to add tools to their donations.

COVID and an unsettled political situation curtailed the

trips for several years but they are back in full swing with plans to have at least two trips every year. Members who have attended attest to the feelings of great joy in participating in these trips. The next one is planned for July. 

Below – bicycles purchased for residents; at right, house building team; below right, teaching the English words for various parts of the body.



Original missionaries, the late Dick Hughes and his wife Barbara, with one of their school-sponsored children, Luis Garcia Diaz




Ed and Sheryl Shiver, long time missionaries Roger and Karen Natzke and a former member of First/Gainesville, FL, Suzi Eberle



The Ministry Wives Wellness Team is moving along with plans for the 2024 Ministry Wives Retreat to be held at Canterbury Retreat and Conference Center on April 5-7. Retreat Leader, Deb Burma, will guide the women through Psalm 46, unpacking the promises found in God's Word. "Be Still and Know – A Study of Rest and Refuge" will focus on Stormy Situations, The Storm of Sin, and Storms of Scurry.

"The goal of the retreat is to provide an opportunity for ministry wives to connect, support, encourage, and build relationships with one another," said Kathy Meier, Chair of the Ministry Wives Wellness Team. "This weekend retreat will include relationship-building activities, private reflection time, rest and of course, some fun!"

Members of the Ministry Wives Wellness Team are Kathy Meier (chair), Barb Pennekamp, Martha Rockey, Anette Shanks, Elaine Stier, and Sally Wesche. To check on registration availability and/or scholarship funds, please contact Kathy Keene at the FLGA District Office or go to the FLGA District Website: <https://flgadistrict.org/ministrywivesretreat>. 



Disciples Making Disciple Makers


During last year's 75th Anniversary, the FLGA District's theme was *Living as Along-Siders!* This was chosen because it conveys the way the Lord has called each of us to live as "Disciples who Make Disciple Makers." Remember, that was His command: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them..." Therefore, we are to live as followers of Christ who "come alongside" of others and walk with them through life!

"What a great year of celebration it was culminating at our Fall President's Equip Conference with more than 1,000 attendees. Yet, our focus on Living as Along-Siders remains! We pray that each congregation, school and individual connected to the FLGA District will continue to discover and live out this calling daily," emphasizes FLGA District President, James Rockey.

"We are also still in the process of raising \$1.5 million to plant 10 new congregations. We have received more than \$230,000 to date and thank the Lord for all those who have responded. We remind you that with the growth of our two states, the vast majority of our neighbors having no connection to the Lord! Now is the time."

Rockey has underscored the importance of establishing new ministries to serve as bridges to reach these new neighbors. "It is time for us to start new congregations that will be chartered but will be of various approaches to being Christ's presence and witnesses," he says. "They may be store front, they may be multi-national in an existing church, and they may look different than our existing congregations. But the mission is the same – to Connect People to Jesus!"

The District is asking individuals and congregations to join in making a sacrificial gift. The District has established resources that can be used to share this vision and prepare people to bring their gifts on a set day.

"Working together I am confident we can make an eternal difference in our future ministry goals," Rockey concluded. "Please contact me to learn more about how you can help." 



Visitation and Relationships Are Vital in Christian Ministry

by Rev. Scott Gress, Professional Certified Coach

Pastor John recently retired and he and his wife moved closer to his daughter and family. They joined a small church nearby that was without a pastor. When talking with members John would often hear them express what would resolve their challenges.

They would often begin by saying, “when we get a pastor...” Certainly Pastor John knew how important it was to have a shepherd, yet what he heard just didn’t sit right with him. He knew the body of Christ could do a lot even without a full time pastor. He told them he would be willing to do a little preaching – even though he just retired.

Recently John was talking with Daniel after church. Daniel was an elder and always seemed to do a lot. Pastor John: Hi Daniel, how are you?
Daniel: I’m doing pretty well.

hospital and evangelism calls, I’m sure it gets to be a lot for you and Tom.

Daniel: Yeah. But we’re doing the best we can. You know, we’ve asked plenty of people to take some visits but they keep saying no. It’s frustrating. Pastor John: What do you think is getting in the way?
Daniel: I really don’t know. I try to give them some names and they just turn me down.

Pastor John: Oh I’m sorry. So it sounds like people are just reluctant to be assigned visits?

Daniel: Right. I’ve asked, I’ve begged, I’ve said it was easy and people just say no.

Pastor John: Well, if assigning

Take them with you! Then they would see what you do and you



Community Connections & Ministry Moments

could talk about what you did on the way back. It sounds perfect.


Daniel: Oh, wow. Do you really think people need help learning how to make visits?

Pastor John: I know when I was on vicarage (internship) the pastor took me with him. Watching him was a huge help. Just think, if you do that you would have the privilege of modeling and discipling them. I’m sure it would be a blessing for both of you.

Daniel: I never thought about it that way. It makes sense.

Pastor John: This also means you don’t have to ask just the active people. You can ask almost anyone to go with you. So who are you going to invite to go with you this week?

Daniel: I’ve got lots of great candidates now that you say that. I’ll ask them personally and suggest we get coffee to talk more afterward.

Pastor John: Perfect. A personal invitation to spend time with you and do something for Jesus. I look forward to hearing how it went! 



But I wish that we had more people willing to help out making visits. We have more than Tom (another elder) and I do. (Daniel was hoping John could help).
Pastor John: Between shut-ins,

them visits isn’t working, what other approach could you take?

Daniel: Hmm. I don’t know. At this point I’d practically have to take them with me!

Pastor John: What a great idea!

Rev. Scott Gress is a Professional Certified Coach and believes in Growing People for Ministry by focussing on leadership, discipleship and teamwork. Learn more at scottgress.com, The Coaching Leader Podcast and his YouTube page. Contact Scott if you or your church are interested in working with him at scottgress@me.com, 561-542-4472.

National Parks Ministry Opportunity Offered in Summer Months

A Christian Ministry in the National Parks (ACMNP) is a grassroots, student-led ministry that began in Yellowstone National Park in 1951 with the dream of providing Christian community for the people working in, living in, and visiting the first national park in the world. Since then – for more than 70 years – ACMNP has given a Christian interpretation to the awe and grandeur of God’s creation in the nation’s national parks. ACMNP has always been a ministry *in* rather than *to* the national parks, serving employees, residents, and visitors through interdenominational worship services on Sundays.


Today, ACMNP lives its mission by sending roughly 150 to 200 ministry team members into 75 locations in 45 national parks from Alaska to the Virgin Islands. More than 30,000 people worship together in ACMNP services every year, experiencing the glory of God by seeing it first-hand – nothing compares to the inspiration that comes from worshipping God the Creator in the beautiful outdoors!

This is an opportunity for short-term missions for people of




all ages – especially for college students – during the summer break. Students will be trained at Rocky Mountain National Park for their ministry and placed in teams of two to 20, depending on the size of the National Park. They will work with a vendor within the park and

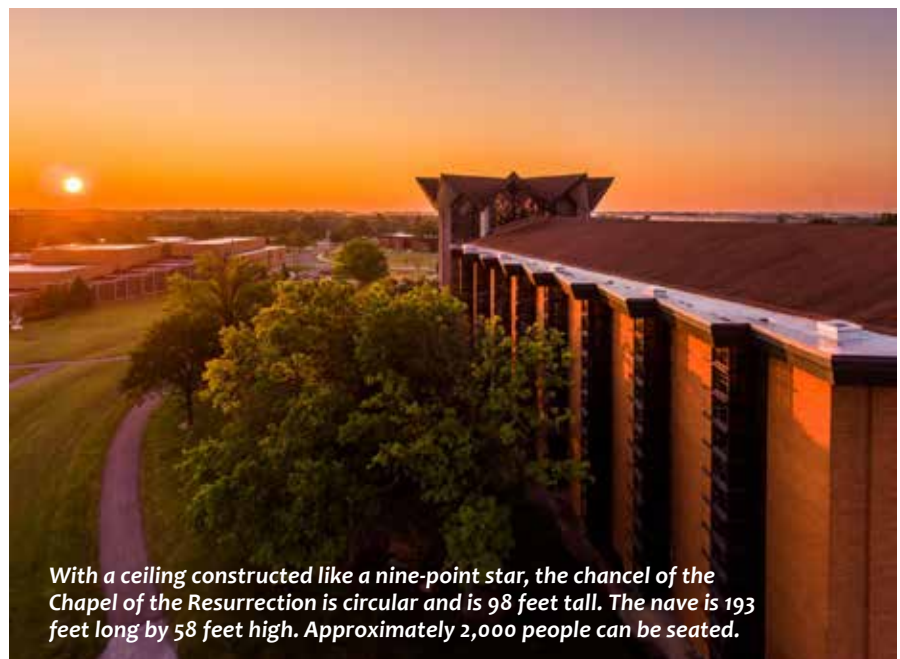
make a salary and tips while getting housing and some meals. Then as teams they will hold outreach events, ministry and worship.

Additional information is available on the website acmnp.com/ 

Valparaiso’s Chapel Listed Among Most Beautiful Chapels and Cathedrals on College Campuses in the World

The Chapel of the Resurrection at Valparaiso University is in the news! The Lutheran-based historic chapel has been officially listed on College Cliffs’ lineup of “The 20 Most Beautiful Chapels and Cathedrals on College Campuses,” honoring the structure as a place of worship and a national landmark. This accolade sits amongst a few other high praises: Valpo’s Chapel is the largest collegiate chapel in the nation and the second largest in the world – second to Lancing College in Sussex, United Kingdom.

Since its construction in 1959, the Chapel of the Resurrection has served as a safe space for all Valparaiso students, faculty, administration and the community – providing support, spiritual growth, and a place of togetherness that completes Valpo’s campus. 



With a ceiling constructed like a nine-point star, the chancel of the Chapel of the Resurrection is circular and is 98 feet tall. The nave is 193 feet long by 58 feet high. Approximately 2,000 people can be seated.

“Plant The Church” Mission Initiative Kicks Off

Word association game: I say “church planting” – you say . . .

Many responses have something to do with land and buildings and money and pastors and sending people. In reality, “Planting the Church” is simply recognizing that nowhere in Scripture does Jesus tell us to *plant churches*. Rather, he calls us to *make disciples* which in reality is planting the church.



Plant the Church is an initiative which is designed to include every

congregation of the FLGA District in the work of planting the church. For some it may mean traditional church planting. For others, it means an intentional emphasis on making new disciples, since the Church is people, disciples making more disciples. Disciples are people who follow Jesus, learn

from Jesus, want to become like

Jesus and who come alongside others to make more disciples. Congregations typically make disciples through relationship-building activities, fellowship, Bible study, service events, and neighborhood mission.

Other types of planting the church include starting a new outreach ministry or gospel ministry in order to build relationships and connect people to Jesus. A new Micro-Church or Multi-Site which is an extension of an existing church’s


Word and Sacrament ministry at a separate site is another type.

A church which is nearing the end of its lifecycle can be a mission planting church too. It can plan intentionally to leave



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a legacy that carries its mission beyond its lifetime. This legacy is used to plant the church of the future. Their dream of reaching new people does not need to end when the doors close.

I recently shared this with several Circuit convocations and congregations. I would like to share the Plant the Church vision with every circuit and congregation. Contact me at pmeier@flgadistrict.org to learn more. 

Concordia/Nebraska Launches Two New Family Life Focused Graduate Degree Programs

Concordia University, Nebraska announced the launch of two new university graduate degrees: a Master of Arts in Marriage and Family Therapy and a Master of Science in Family Life Education. Available in fall 2024, both programs emphasize a Scripture-based perspective and Christian worldview not often found in the curriculum of typical counseling programs.


“These programs will equip participants to guide and support church and community families by developing knowledge of faith-focused therapy perspective that reflect Christ’s light and champion a Christian worldview that revitalizes and protects marriages and families,” explained Dr. Thaddeus Warren, director of

the Concordia Nebraska Director of Christian Education program.

The Master of Marriage and Family Therapy is ideal for college graduates and undergraduates who have earned or are working toward a degree in psychology or social services and want to become licensed therapists. The program will prepare participants for therapy licensure and help them pursue a career that transforms marriages, families and communities by emphasizing Scripture-based views of modern psychology. The program is 62 to 64 credit hours and completion time is 24 months.

The Master of Family Life Education is ideal for existing full-time or part-time church workers, pastors, DCEs and others who desire to expand their ministry as

family life educators. The program will help participants enhance their church work roles and will help participants guide congregations through faith-focused counseling approaches designed especially for the church environment. The program is 36 to 39 credit hours and completion time is 18 months.

CUN offers a variety of comprehensive, online graduate programs. Featuring eight-week courses and numerous start dates throughout the year, these faith-based programs allow most participants to earn a master’s degree in 18 to 24 months. To learn more about this program and other Concordia Nebraska graduate programs, visit www.cune.edu/academics/graduate. 

FLORIDA GEORGIA

Out and About in the District



St. Paul Weston Youth Rock The Universe!


Rock the Universe is the annual Christian rock festival that takes place at Universal Studios Florida. It started in 1998. This year it took place the first weekend in February because it was competing with Halloween Horror Nights.

The event is held after-hours and is billed as Florida's biggest Christian music festival – where participants rock, ride, and rejoice! Some of the biggest names in the Christian rock scene participate on three stages scattered around the park. The main stage is located at the Universal Music Plaza Stage in the

Production Central area. The Hollywood Stage is located at the lake near the Hollywood area. The Coca-Cola fan-zone stage is located in the New York area. And the Praise and Worship Stage is located in the Animal Actors on Location theater.

St. Paul/Weston, FL participates each year led by Jeremy Becker, Director of Youth and Family Ministry. About 20 members enjoyed musical groups like headliners Casting Crowns, Blessing Offor, Brandon Lake, LECRAE, Phil Wickham and We The Kingdom.

The Walt Disney organization cancelled their annual Night of Joy in 2018 after more than 35 years offering contemporary Christian music to participating youth.

Rock the Universe frequently sells out their concert two-day event – which enables participants to attend multiple open-air concerts and also ride the many Universal Studios. Historically, there's the candle lighting ceremony, and Sunday morning sees a non-denominational worship service. 

Weston Congregation Participates in Annual Blessing of the Animals



Pastor Scott Henze leads blessing

The Bible affirms that God designed animals to play a pivotal role in His creation and in our lives. Genesis 1 reveals that after God lovingly created all of the creatures of the earth, He blessed them and declared that they were good.

Earlier this year **St. Paul/ Weston, FL** participated in a "Blessing of the Animals" Sunday with Pastor Scott Henze leading prayers.

Historical evidence shows that man has domesticated dogs for 10,000 years - Egyptians began domesticating wildcats as early as 3500 B.C., and ancient Romans kept dogs, birds, cats and horses as both working animals and pets. 2 Samuel - a biblical book written between



630-540 B.C. - records the story of a man and his pet lamb:

But the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. - 2 Samuel 12:3.

Studies conducted by several US universities have found that caring for pets have made children more cooperative and sharing, bolstered their self-esteem, and buffered them from loneliness. 🌀

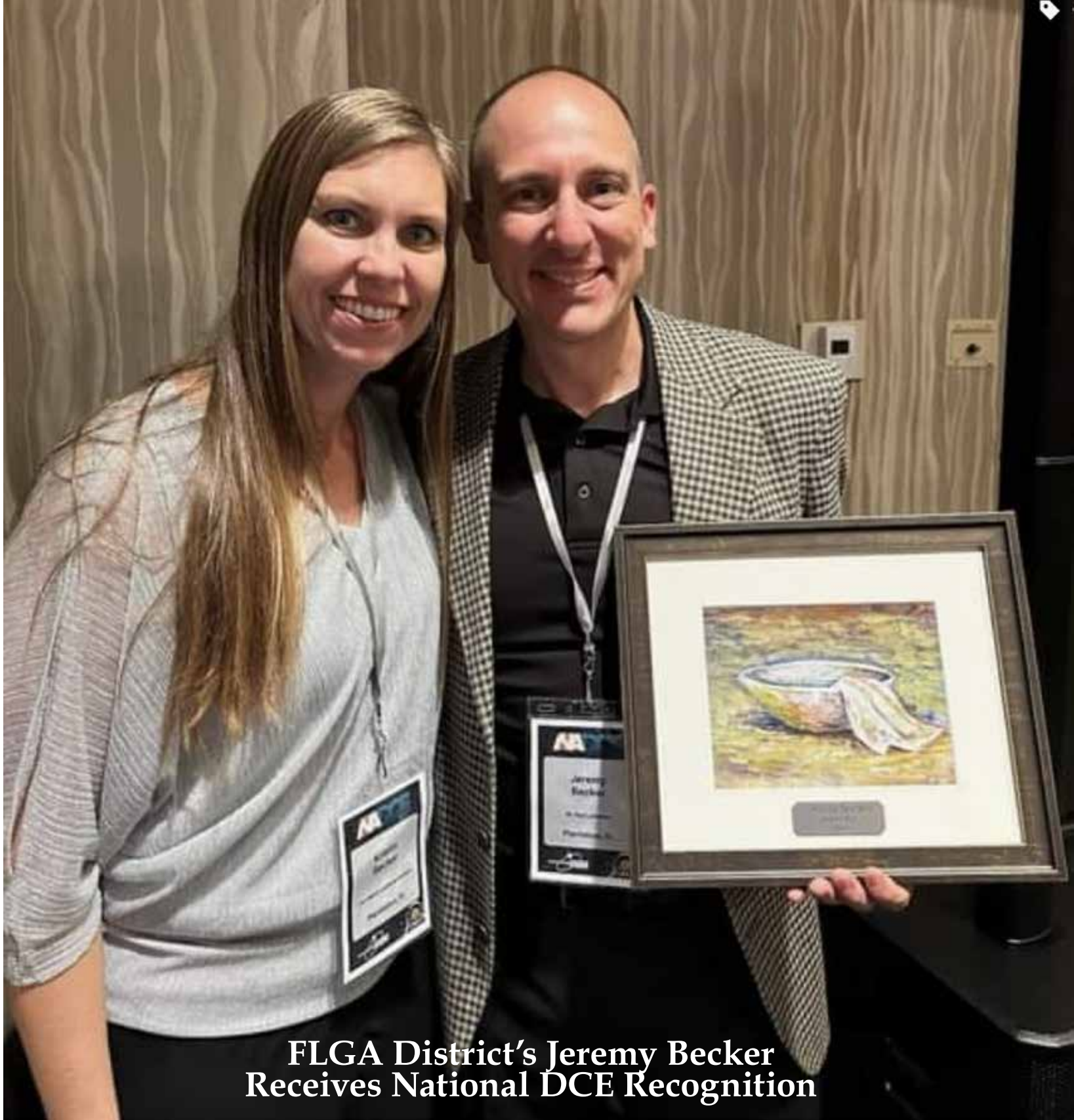


St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL's team participated in the First Care Women's Clinic Walk for Life. From left are Ruben and Miriam Perez, Zackary and Christiana Brooks, Timothy and Susan Brooks and Wayne and Susan Linderman. The event was held at Christ Fellowship Church in Palm Beach Gardens. More than 500 were in attendance with 471 walkers and 20 churches registered teams. The event exceeded their goal of \$150,000! According to Tim Brooks the St. Paul team exceeded their goal of raising \$2,000 through the support of church members.

First Care Women's Clinic steers clear of the political environment and takes care of their clients in need and a very vulnerable time in a women's life, providing counseling, medical tests, ultrasound and help the women financially who changed their mind and decided not to have an abortion. In calendar year 2023 First Care worked with 691 women and saved 190 babies. During the counseling many of the ladies recommit their lives to Christ or are introduced to Christ in a meaningful way. 🌀



Hope/Plant City, FL hosted their annual Teddy Bear Sunday in February. This annual event encourages members and friends to bring a new teddy bear to church with them on the Sunday closest to Valentines Day. Hope has donated their bears to the Plant City Police and Fire Departments, Florida Baptist Children's Home, Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office. Bears are also shared with Hope members serving in Iraq and Afghanistan to share with fellow soldiers. Area children and an array of others also received bears to share with those in need of that special comfort a new teddy bear gives.. Each donated bear is tagged with a special message from Hope and the words of John 3:16 to remind the recipient of God's never failing love for them." 🌀




FLGA District's Jeremy Becker Receives National DCE Recognition

Jeremy Becker, Director of Youth and Family Ministry at **St. Paul/Weston, FL**, received the Master DCE award at the National Association of Directors of Christian Education Conference held in Houston in February. "I'm so thankful I was able to be with him to celebrate this great honor," said Kristen Becker, Jeremy's wife. "Congratulations to my creative, servant-hearted, fun-loving husband!"


The mission of NADCE is to support and promote Christian Education by providing advocacy, professional connections, and resources for Directors of Christian Education. They are a Registered Service Organization (RSO) of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod.

Every two years, NADCE presents the Master DCE Award and Outstanding New DCE Award at their biennial conference to deserving individuals nominated and selected by their peers and partners in ministry through NADCE. 




The Stepping Stone Choir Team visited **All Saints/Blairsville, GA** in February. The Stepping Stones ministry focuses on sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with homeless brothers and sisters. Stepping Stone is a Recognized Service Organization of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod that began in 2009 in the Atlanta, GA area. 




Thanks be to God for how He always provides for His people! Just as Stepping Stone Ministry was running out of socks, their year began with the receipt of a truckload numbering 45,000 pairs of Bombas socks from **Trinity/Savannah, GA**. This is the third time Trinity entrusted this ministry to ensure these high quality, bacteria-fighting socks donated by Bombas got into the hands and onto the feet of homeless brothers and sisters in need. The ministry also received 1,500 pairs of socks from Missionary Kim Cheol-sik, who runs a prison ministry. 



Trevor Hudlin was installed in January, 2024 as **Mt. Calvary/Warner Robins, GA** DCE Intern. He is enrolled at Concordia University/Irvine, GA. He is also a son of the congregation having been members for most of his life. He'll serve as the DCE intern for one year. Pictured above are Mt. Calvary's Pastors Andrew Howe, left, and Pete LeBorious with Hudlin (center). Concordia's DCE program equips leaders for ministry who are passionate about the Gospel, God's people, and their calling. Through four years of coursework and one year of internship, students are prepared to serve effectively in a congregational setting. 



Our Savior/Lake Worth Beach, FL and **Epiphany/Lake Worth, FL** combined their angel tree donations for Lutheran Services Florida Head Start in South Bay. This is an annual tradition for the two congregations. For more than 30 years, The Head Start program has provided the highest quality early childhood education to children who otherwise might have been left behind. When children receive the quality early childhood education they deserve, not only do children fare better, but communities do, too. Shown above are Francetine Inman-Dennard of LSF Head Start with Pastors Kyle Will from Epiphany and Jacob Roedsens from Our Savior. 



Our Savior/St. Petersburg, FL had their annual Angel Tree Project set up in the narthex, allowing each congregant the opportunity to pick a child or young adult to adopt for gifts by choosing an angel tag. The past five years they have teamed up with Sabal Palms Health & Rehabilitation in Largo, FL, to 'grant wishes' to their residents. This year more than 80 presents were distributed to the residents. The Middle School students handed out presents, sang Christmas carols and interacted with the residents.



St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL boys placed third and girls placed fourth in the state tournament in February. Boys were coached by Steve Carretto and Dan MacLachlan. Girls coached by Jeff Walcheski and Fernando Ynez.



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Pastor John Roth, **Thrive/Estero, FL** (left) gave the invocation for President Aysegul Timur's installation at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) in January at Alico Arena. Timur, an economist by training, is a Naples resident with more than 24 years of experience in higher education. Roth is pictured with Founding President Roy McTarnaghan, who started FGCU. McTarnaghan's wife, Beverly, was a member of Hope/Bonita Springs prior to her passing a few years ago. Mr. & Mrs. McTarnaghan were part of the interviewing team for John Roth. 🌊



On Sunday December 3, 2023, **Messiah/Tampa, FL** commissioned two new Stephen Ministers. Rev. Mark Adrian commissioned Jenny Tait and Victoria Glisson to join Messiah's active ministry that began in 2008. The new members were joined by four Stephen Leaders and four active Stephen Ministers. From left, Lynn Turke, Cheri Jensen, Leader Jody Schweichler, new Stephen Minister Jenny Tait, new Stephen Minister Victoria Glisson, Leader Norma Halfmann, and leader Lynn Guelzow. 🌊



St. Paul/Lakeland, FL held a spirited pep rally on Day 5 of National Lutheran Schools Week. Students wore their blue and green school colors and cheered as loud as they could while celebrating how blessed they are to be a part of such a wonderful school! Day 5 was also a field day with plenty of races, sports, games and fun. 🌊



Christ Our Savior Celebrates 75 Years of Mission in Florida/Georgia



Members of **Christ Our Savior/Griffin, GA** spent last summer gathering clothes, tools, golf and recreational equipment, furniture, jewelry, and all sorts of knick-knacks and other treasures for a community yard sale. The sale was held in September and raised more than \$3,000. A hot dog lunch and other refreshments were available for purchase to enjoy while shopping. All proceeds went toward the President Rocky's goal to provide grants for 10 new ministries in Florida and Georgia. 🌊


The women of LWML at **Our Redeemer/Augusta, GA** celebrated the work of the congregation's quilters — who spread the love of Christ around the globe through their gifts to fire houses, women's shelters, and Lutheran World Relief. The quilters designed, cut, constructed, tied and bound their creations — all while enjoying fellowship.. 🌊



Our Redeemer/Augusta, GA had a successful Chili Cook-off in January as a fundraiser for their youth. Eleven contestants and four winners in Spiciest, Meatiest, Most Unique, and Overall Best chili. Congratulations to all the winners. Also congratulations to the youth, and DCM Becka Prestwich, for a successful dessert auction fundraiser! 🌊

Epiphany/Tallahassee Builds Beds for Children




On January 14th, **Epiphany/Tallahassee, FL** partnered with Sleep in Heavenly Peace to build 30 beds for children without a bed and one for an adult. Child bedlessness is a national problem, and as a national nonprofit with chapters spread across the country, Sleep in Heavenly Peace has provided the solution. They are a volunteer organization that builds beds for kids who are sleeping on the floor and there are multiple ways to get involved. More than 70 volunteers of Epiphany showed along with several from **University/Tallahassee, FL**. "It was a great day of serving, building relationships, and enjoying God's Creation!" says Pastor Tim Barber. "That night 24 people no longer slept on the floor." 




Our Savior/St. Petersburg, FL supports the Live Love Immokalee Mission. Their mission team headed to Immokalee, Florida, to assist Pastor Karl Glander with the distribution of all the donations from Our Savior!



Although they no longer have a permanent building, they have been given space rent-free to worship and distribute donations at another local church! Our Savior's team donated a truckload of food and clothing. This is just one of the global missions that they support. 



Our Savior/Lake Worth Beach, FL held their first event with Campus Life — a faith group that Pastor Jacob Roedsens launched at Lake Worth High School. The high school campus is located across the street from Our Savior's campus. 



Pastor Bob Steinke (left) was installed on February 21, 2024 as intentional interim pastor at **Our Savior/Zephyrhills, FL**. He is pictured with FLGA District President James Rockey. 🌿



Our Savior/Plantation, FL participated in Bless Broward. The Hope Women’s Center in Oakland Park was one location to benefit and the other was the Encompass Rehabilitation Center in Sunrise. Pictured are (in front) Robert Faust Jr. with Robert Faust III. Back row from left, Okyra Tanco, Brad Heine, Crystal Gossard, Rosemary Johnson, Jan Withers, Robert Rajabally. 🌿

First/Clearwater Welcomes Andrew Apple, Celebrates Pat O’Brien’s “Re-Retirement”

On Sunday, February 25, 2024, The Reverend Andrew Apple was installed as the sole pastor of **First/Clearwater, FL**. Seven years ago, Pastor Apple began his preparation and study as a specific ministry pastor (SMP). He has faithfully been serving under the senior pastor, and then under the supervision and guidance of, Pastor Pat O’Brien.

This month Pastor Apple completed his General Pastor Certificate (GPC) studies, and was certified to be called as sole pastor.

That same day the congregation celebrated the “re-retirement” of Pastor, Pat O’Brien — who served First Lutheran for so many years! Clery (from left) — Ed Krause, Pat O’Brien, Andrew Apple, James Rockey and Glen Borhart. Pastor Borhart worships at First/Clearwater during winter months when in town. 🌿



Messiah Continues the Feed Your Neighbor Program

“Feed Your Neighbor” is a ministry **Messiah/Tampa, FL** began in 2017 to provide food for children and families over the weekend throughout the school year. These supplemental bags contain breakfast and lunch items, snacks and beverages. Approximately 16-30 bags in large bins are delivered each Wednesday during the school year to the school. The Gilletts are two of Messiah’s 24 volunteers who deliver, purchase food items and prepare the bags and bins. At Thanksgiving and Christmas, “Feed Your Neighbor” also supplies gift cards for school families. 🌀



From left, Don & Ann Gillett, members of Messiah/Tampa and Tammy Renner with Alexandra Craveiro, Administrators at Citrus Park Elementary School in Tampa.



Hope/Orlando, FL hosted a Baby Shower and Brunch for Redeeming Life Outreach Ministry (RLOM) on Saturday, February 10, as a culmination of Hope’s Baby Bottle Campaign. Members brought in baby bottles filled with coins, cash, and checks, or brought gifts purchased through the RLOM Amazon Needs List to benefit the maternity hHome in Sanford, FL.

After a delicious brunch prepared by the women’s group at Hope, Sheryl DeWitt, Executive Director, shared the mission and ministry of Redeeming Life. All ages attended this event, from 6 weeks old to those in their golden years! Sheryl shared inspiring testimonies from former residents, and how their life was changed through this vital ministry. She went on to share that the mission of Redeeming Life is to reach out with the love of Christ to support single expectant and postpartum mothers by providing a safe and stable home. The women have opportunities for growth in their relationship with their Savior, as well as career, parenting, and life skills education. If you would like to host a Baby Bottle Campaign at your church or learn more about Redeeming Life Ministry, please visit their website: <https://www.rlom.org/> 🌀

The Rev. Phil Ressler Installed at Immanuel/Brandon



Rev. Phil Ressler was installed as the Lead Pastor of **Immanuel Brandon, FL**, on February 11, 2024. Participating clergy are the Revs. (front row from left) President James Rockey, Mike Mast, Phil Ressler, Miguel Sanabria, Jr., Gilbert Kuehn, Miguel Sanabria Sr., Dan Ritter; (back row) Steve Massey, Dan Prugh, David Haara, Kevin Yoakum, David Brockhoff, Kent Fuqua, Kurt Steinbrueck. 🌀

Amazing Grace Annually Recognizes Top Readers at Wildwood Elementary



Sixteen volunteers celebrated the top 42 readers at Wildwood Elementary School – the local educational facility near **Amazing Grace/Oxford, FL** during an Accelerated Reader awards ceremony. They do this each year – complete with a pizza party and book giveaways. 🌀



The Jane Anderson Teacher of the Year award is given annually to one of **St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL** teachers who displays the same commitment to education as former teacher Jane Anderson did for many years at the Boca Raton school. Jane taught into her 90's and always displayed a passion for her students. A memorial was established by the Anderson family in her honor to recognize outstanding teachers and to encourage all teachers to strive for excellence.

"I am very excited to announce that Mrs. Jennifer Majhess has been selected as the Jane Anderson Teacher of the Year for the 2023 - 2024 school year," stated Principal James Richards. "Mrs. Majhess was selected as she is an extraordinary educator who makes a difference in the lives of her students and families." 🌀

St. Paul/Lakeland Celebrates Grandparents



In mid-February, the **St. Paul/Lakeland, FL** campus was overrun with grandparents! The 520 students of St. Paul hosted their grandparents on campus for a few hours. There were tours of the campus as well as their classrooms. "Grandparents saw the students' crafts and, in some cases, got to do crafts with them," explained Pastor Andy Ritchie. "The day began with a chapel service where DCE Nick Moss and I welcomed the grandparents to our campus, while principal Greg Sawyer developed a fun-filled, Christ-centered message about handling the storms of life and looking to Jesus." There were games and other fun things to do for the grandparents and snacks were served.



As lunch drew near, grandparents either took their grandchildren home or out to lunch. This yearly event brings multi-generations together, helps build trust, and honors the grandparent's role in their adult children's and their grandchildren's lives. During chapel, both our students and grandparents had the opportunity



to speak about what they were thankful for. Those expressions included thankfulness for Christ-centered education, a school that says the pledge of allegiance, for teachers who love their students, and for the gift of families. 🙏



Ninth Annual Night to Shine a Success at St. Paul/Boca Raton

Night to Shine is a complimentary event for people with special needs hosted by local churches around the world. **St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL** has hosted this event nine times – with short break during COVID. That year the congregation made the event a “drive through” the campus where guests still experienced a throng of paparazzi and received a pre-packaged prom dinner and the end.

“This is Tim Tebow Foundation’s worldwide movement that has reached approximately 56 different countries and celebrated by thousands of people,” explained St. Paul Pastor Steve Carretto. “The event is open to anyone living with disabilities, ages 14 and older.”

Although each event is a little bit different, at St. Paul, guests enter on a red carpet after going through registration – where they receive corsages and boutonnieres, hair and makeup application and even shoe shines.

“Our congregation is assisted with plenty of participation throughout the community. We have hundreds of volunteers that enable us to provide a catered dinner, limousine rides, karaoke and even a ‘respite room’ for parents and caregivers of the guests. We have large monitors to enable them to watch all the action that takes place in our family life center.

“We have plenty of spirited dancing – with a professional DJ that leads to a crowning ceremony near the end

of the evening – where every honored guest receives a crown or tiara,” he continued. “We emphasize

that this is a true celebration of God’s love for them – our Kings and Queens!”

St. Paul opens registration early in December each year and it quickly fills up – with as many as 50 people on the “wait list.”



After serendipitously finding his date at the karaoke station, a guest planted a kiss and later proposed on the dance floor. A buddy greeted her guest with a birthday sign. Pastor Carretto introduces the Tebows.



The Night to Shine “shoe shine team” gets ready for the guest arrival. Tim and Demi-Leigh Tebow greet guests on a pre-recorded video to handle the crowning ceremony.



Above, from left – there is a photo booth where buddies and guests can wear silly hats, sunglasses and hold signs for photos. The Boca Raton Christian School Cheerleaders shake pom-poms and cheer the guests as they welcome them to registration. St. Paul’s Vicar Jacob & Shelby Scheler prepare to take a ride in one of the limousines.

Boca Raton Mission Team Heads to Guatemala



A team of about 18 headed to Guatemala for spring break to participate in Casas Por Cristo — an organization that builds homes in San Raymundo. Casa Por Cristo (Homes For Christ) build homes for families that need to be reminded that Jesus loves them. They also build relationships between volunteers, families, and pastors that would otherwise never have met.

St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL has participated in these programs in the past. “Through this building process, God allows us to interact with our teams, local families, vendors, and fellow missionaries,” explained St. Paul Vicar Jacob Scheler, one of the participants. “We do not want to take any of these interactions for granted. We believe that these are unique opportunities presented to us by God to serve each other.”



Stuart Students Find Nemo

At left and below — **Redeemer/Stuart, FL** students in grades K-8 from their school performed “Finding Nemo Jr.” for a packed audience. Every student had a role in the show.

New Music Director Welcomed to Gainesville

First/Gainesville, FL recently welcomed Stephanie Smith as their new music director. Stephanie was born in Missouri but has lived all over Florida since age three. Her father was a Baptist preacher and she started playing in church at age 11. She attended Florida State University, majoring in piano and playing

saxophone in the band. She married a native Gainesville resident, Don Smith, and raised their children before going back to school — at 48! She majored in organ and sacred music at University of Florida. In the photo above, Pastor Jonathan Rockey introduces Stephanie during worship.



Trinity/Rockledge Students Believe to Achieve

by Rev. Dr. Russell Frahm

As a Pastor I served churches that had schools for over thirty-five years. I know what Lutheran education can do to change lives, not only the lives of the students, but their families as well. I also know about the struggles and challenges of running a school. After I retired from full-time ministry in February of 2020, I learned that **Trinity/Rockledge, FL** could not afford a full-time Pastor. There were some who thought the church should close its doors. I did not think the Lord wanted that to


happen. At the end of September, 2023, I began Word and Sacrament ministry at Trinity serving both the congregation and school. The experience has been amazing!

I am amazed at the dedication of the members of the congregation toward the ministry of the school. I am amazed at the dedication of the school's Principal, Mrs. Becky Houston. I am amazed at the commitment of the teachers and assistants in the school. I am amazed at the dedication of the students.

Trinity currently has 120 students from preschool to sixth grade. The School has two chapel services on Wednesday morning. One chapel service for grades 1-6, another for preschool and kindergarten. The students show such respect for each other, for their teachers, for the church and for the Lord. They participate fully in the chapel service, singing the hymns, reading the scriptures, proclaiming the Apostles Creed, praying the Lord's Prayer.

Is everything going great? Spiritually, yes! Financially, there are some needs to be addressed.

Lutheran education is unique. Trinity Lutheran School is changing lives. with them to change lives.

At a recent School Board meeting we were talking about a motto for the school. I suggested, "Believe To Achieve." We want the students to believe in their God given abilities and to achieve great things. We want the students to believe that God has a plan for their lives and to believe they have a future filled with opportunities. We want the students to believe that God loves them so much that He sent His one and only Son to be their savior. You don't believe to achieve salvation, you believe to receive salvation! Trinity Lutheran School is changing lives today and for eternity. 



Above and below — students of Trinity displaying their honor roll certificates; students leading chapel worship and craft participation during a special Grandparents Day visitation.



VETERANS OF THE CROSS

The annual Veterans of the Cross Gathering was held Monday, March 4th through Wednesday, March 6, 2024 at the St. Stephen Christian Retreat Center in Titusville, FL.

The retreat was established in 1979 by the late Florida-Georgia District President Dr. L. Lloyd Behnken to stimulate retired professional church workers with relevant ministry and senior presentations in addition to helping people connect with friends from years past. In recent years the gathering includes laypersons who have been involved in the work of the

church. This year's theme was "Pace for the Race," — with emphasis throughout the event challenging the participants with "What does God want me to do with my remaining time in this world?"

The writer of the book of Hebrews explains that, for followers of Jesus, life is primarily a matter of running "with endurance the race that is set before us" (HEBREWS 12:1). "No matter who we are, what our age or how far we've traveled on our pilgrimage, the Lord still has a job for us to do," Ruth Wiedenmann shared. Wiedenmann was this


year's chairperson of the annual event. "There is an urgent need to persevere to serve the Lord. Let us find the pace that will see us over the finish line."

Keynote speakers were Ron & Barb Pennekamp — the emphasis was on having "Joy for the Journey" and the importance of a smile. Bible study leader was Craig Mathews and Vic Belton served as proclaimer at the communion worship.

Each year the gathering selects recipients of the Lloyd Behnken Retreat Medallion in four distinct categories:

- Clergy
- Commissioned
- Layperson
- Church at Large

This year those awards went to The Rev. Robert C. Steinke, ordained minister; Mr. Jesse Crosmer, commissioned minister; Ms. Jean Roehrs, layperson; and Ms. Betty Hoyer, church-at-large.

Behnken Medallions are presented to honor those who have served our Lord faithfully and often continue to serve even during their retirement. 

Robert C. Steinke Behnken Medallion Recipient | Ordained

Bob Steinke was born to Charles and Ruth Steinke in Philadelphia in 1945. Both parental families were heavily involved with his birth congregation, Nazareth Lutheran.

Bob says that he wanted to be a preacher very early on. His relatives report that he was preaching to his cousins when they were sitting on the living room stairs when he was just five.

Back in those old days, if one wanted to be preacher in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, one attended Concordia Collegiate Institute in Bronxville, NY. Bob learned Greek, German and religion and went on to Concordia Senior College where he was introduced to Hebrew, philosophy, and dramatic arts. He graduated in 1965, the first year that graduates from the Senior College enroll in the Seminary at Springfield.

Pastor Steinke's first call was to a congregation in upstate NY, Massena, for about ten years where his children were born. Freda, his wife of three years, had to give birth in Canada because there was no ob-gyn doctor in the town. From Massena, he journeyed to Brentwood, a little city suburb of Pittsburgh. The church was well situated for a ministry to the local school system, and he was instrumental in starting a before and after childcare program, at a time when the state's involvement was to license, not run, the service.




Freda & Bob Steinke

He was recognized by the Pennsylvania House of Representatives for his involvement in many civic activities affecting the school board, local race relations, and even politics. As the Steinke family grew, they moved first to California and eventually to Florida to work with Roy Lidbom at Faith/

New Port Richey, FL. He began teaching confirmation classes and working with the Youth Group. He also launched the Saturday evening services at Faith and helped the contemporary format get off the ground.

Throughout his ministry, Bob has served in the larger church. In the Eastern District he was on the Board of Mission Services. He has served as a Circuit Visitor in every circuit in which he held membership. In Florida he was elected to be the chairman of the Circuit Visitors conference and was responsible for putting together a number of Pastoral Conferences.

Following his retirement, his focus shifted to Senior Ministry and he served as the Chair of the Florida Region of the national Adult Lutherans Organized for Action (ALOA) group. Bob is trained to be an Intentional Interim Minister (IIM) and has assisted four congregations through the transition to a new pastoral ministry. Just recently Pastor Steinke was installed as IIM at Our Savior/Zephyrhills, FL.

Bob has been a member of the Veterans of the Cross Planning Team for a number of years and prior to this year chaired the last three retreats. 

2024 • PACE FOR THE RACE



Becky & Jesse Crosmer with Presenter, Jim Essig

Jesse Crosmer Behnken Medallion Recipient Commissioned Minister

Jesse began his ministry service early in life – in grade school serving as an acolyte and usher at St. Luke’s/Ann Arbor, MI. In high school he became the church custodian and spent all day Saturday listening to Wolverine games while cleaning. After graduating high school he spent summers serving as a camp counselor at Camp Concordia in Gowen, north of Grand Rapids, MI, and enjoyed working with the youth.

He attended Concordia/St. Paul, MN, and transferred to Concordia/Chicago, IL (River Forest) where he met Becky Monsees. After graduating in 1980, they married and headed to Our Savior/Houston, TX, where Becky taught fourth grade at a neighboring school, and Jesse taught seventh grade, served as Sunday School superintendent, coached basketball and baseball. Of the nine teachers on staff there, four became principals! Jesse’s principal, Ed Richter, was a true servant leader.

Jesse’s first leadership role came when they moved to the Florida-Georgia District and Peace/Ft. Lauderdale, FL where he taught seventh grade and served as athletic director. He served with principal, Don Eicholtz. He also completed his Master’s degree at Florida Atlantic University. During their early years in Florida, Becky worked part-time as the music teacher at Faith/Fort Lauderdale, FL and took care of son, Joshua, and daughter, Megan. Becky moved into full-time teaching and Jesse served on the Mission Advisory Council (MAC) with Bob Besalski from First/Gainesville, FL.

Following the completion of his Master’s Degree, the Jesse accepted the call to Holy Trinity/Tampa, FL -- just 35 students which grew to more than 100 during his time there. He served with Ronald Weidler. In addition to teaching grades four and five, he also served as the school administrator. The church secretary collected the tuition and ran off the school newsletter.

Jesse’s FLGA District activities expanded beyond the Mission Advisory Council into Lutheran School Accreditation visiting team member, Educators Conference planning committee member and the Lutheran Administrator’s Association executive committee.

In 1993 Our Savior/St. Petersburg, FL called Jesse to serve as principal, working with Erich Heintzen and Paul

Burtzlaff. Jesse says it was a very successful partnership with church and school working closely together. When Pastor Heintzen retired – and before Pastor Burtzlaff arrived – Jesse picked up the assignment of parish administrator. In addition to doing visits for accreditation (NLSA and Wisconsin Evangelical Synod), he continued to serve on the Educators Conference committee (serving as president in 2000), Administrators Committee, and the FLGA District Board of Directors. He also served on the Pinellas Association of Christian Schools educators planning committee.

In his retirement years, he leads a weekly men’s Bible study. The Crosmers enjoy traveling and quality time with family. Their son, Joshua and his wife, Lori, live in Atlanta with their 2 daughters Karis (2012) and Jenna (2015) and Megan and her husband, Alex, live in Bettendorf, Iowa, with their twin sons, Clark and Grayson, who were born in 2020, Becky’s mom and sisters in Springfield, MO, and Jesse’s mother lives in Clearwater. 🌊



Jean Roehrs with Presenter, Jim Essig

Jean Roehrs Behnken Medallion Recipient Layperson

Jean Roehrs attended grade-through-high-school at St. John/Indianapolis, IN. She attended/and graduated/from Indiana University School of Nursing – affording her the opportunity to comfort and support others as well as strive to improve lives.


Another opportunity to serve the Lord came in 1957 when He led her to marry The Rev. Roland Roehrs. Jean sang in the choir and joined in the activities of the various women’s groups. As the pastor’s wife, she didn’t think she should take a leadership role – but while serving in Wisconsin, her little LWML was in need of a leader, so she reluctantly stepped forward. As Unit President she warmly welcomed the LWML at the Zone rally but had to leave at noon because she was enrolled in a nursing refresher course at the local hospital.

That afternoon when elections were held she was elected Zone President. As a Zone President, Jean was a member of the LWML District Board of Directors – holding several different committee chairmanships and elected offices.

In 1990 her husband, Roland, retired and they

VETERANS OF THE CROSS

moved to Florida where she led Bible studies at Lakeside/Venice, FL. She served as Unit President of the LWML, then the Zone President, District Secretary, and was honored to serve as LWML District President from 2000-2004 – serving on the LWML National Board of Directors.

Roland and Jean are now living in Allentown, FL – an unincorporated town in Santa Rosa County in Florida’s panhandle. 




Betty Hoyer with Presenter, Jim Essig

Betty Hoyer Behnken Medallion Recipient Church at Large

Betty Hoyer’s ministry journey began at Immanuel/St. Charles, MO where her grandparents and parents were actively involved in the congregation. Attending school there, a favorite teacher was instrumental in planting the seeds for her desire to become a Lutheran school teacher. Encouragement from her pastor and youth group leader, she attended St. Paul’s College in Concordia, MO, and then Concordia/St. Paul, MN.

Betty earned her BA in Elementary Education from Concordia/St. Paul, and then a Master of Liberal Studies degree from Rollins College in Winter Park, FL. In 1976, Betty married Paul Hoyer and became his partner in ministry. Together they served a church in Linkville, MI, for three years until Paul was called to a mission start in Lake Mary, FL. There she helped with Sunday School, VBS, and numerous community outreach initiatives. She started a preschool story time, which eventually grew into Holy Cross Lutheran Academy, a K-12 school in Sanford, FL.

Betty has taught in early childhood and elementary classrooms, served as an adjunct professor for pre-service teachers at the University of Central Florida, and been the Director of Education Services for the Orlando Science Center. She was the Education Executive for the SELC District from 2014-2023 and also served on both the FLGA District and National Accreditation Commissions for National Lutheran School Accreditation. Betty and Paul were blessed with four children, two girls and two boys. All live in the Central Florida area, and both boys, Ben and Jacob, currently serve as pastors in Orlando and Deland respectively. 

Out and About Around the Veterans of the Cross Gathering

At right – The Rev. Dr. Victor Belton, First Vice President of the District prays over President James Rockey as the Veterans of the Cross Gathering is called to order.



Below, Pastor Craig Mathews leads Bible study after taking the group through a rigorous calisthenics workout.



Above right – the FLGA District Comfort Dogs were on site throughout the event: Lizzie, from Trinity/Savannah, GA; Moriah, from St. Luke’s/Oviedo, FL; Peace, from Trinity/Orlando, FL and Jemimah, from St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL.



At right – The Rev. Dr. Roy Peterson brought greetings from Concordia University Wisconsin & Ann Arbor.



St. Luke’s 4th Grade Choir serenaded the group during closing devotions. FLGA District President Emeritus, Tom Zehnder, caught up with friend, Marge Friedman.



2024 • PACE FOR THE RACE



Creation, Not Commodity: The Church's Liturgy In A Consumer Culture

Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, IN is hosting an on-campus liturgical conference April 9-11, 2024. This conference is geared towards parish professionals and serves as a vital source of renewal for the church's liturgy and life through engagement with scholarship and attentiveness to practical applications in parish settings.

This year's theme is Creation, Not Commodity: The Church's Liturgy In A Consumer Culture.

"Consumer or market culture's role in our lives is so ubiquitous that we frequently fail to recognize its presence and influence over

us," explains Rev. James Wetzstein, Executive Director for Valparaiso's Institute of Liturgical Studies. Wetzstein is also a campus pastor. "Even committed church folk will talk about "church shopping" when they move to a new location. We live in a consumer culture in which our collective and personal economic well-being depends on our shared habits of material consumption. Those in ministry know that the market economy driving this consumption – with its emphasis on personal choice – impacts how the local congregation positions itself within its ministry

context or fails to do so."

Now in its 75th year, the Institute of Liturgical Studies will turn its attention to this phenomenon. "We will seek to understand better the ways in which consumer culture impacts liturgical life. How might that impact be countered through careful curating of the church's liturgical theology? We will also be seeking practical guidance for what we, as church practitioners, might learn positively from those who work to drive consumer desires in the marketplace," Wetzstein concludes.

More information is available at valpo.edu/ils. 

25 Years of Mission: Haiti Empowering Communities, Inspiring Change

In the heart of bustling Port-au-Prince, Haiti's capital city, Mission: Haiti stands as a beacon of hope, marking a significant milestone in its journey of service and solidarity.



Celebrating its 25th anniversary, this non-profit

organization continues to catalyze transformative change, uplifting communities, and inspiring resilience across Haiti. Founded on principles of compassion and collaboration, Mission: Haiti has remained steadfast in its commitment to walking alongside the Haitian people, investing in their futures, and celebrating their unwavering spirit. Over the past quarter-century, the organization has evolved and expanded its efforts, addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by communities throughout the nation.

Central to Mission: Haiti's mission is its dedication to providing both immediate relief and long-term sustainable development. Through a diverse array of programs and initiatives, the organization addresses pressing needs such as food insecurity, inadequate healthcare, and limited access to education

and economic opportunities.

The heart of Mission: Haiti's work is sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ through current projects such as food distributions, support of students and schools through the GROWW program, and medical clinics.

Moreover, Mission: Haiti goes beyond material aid to offer spiritual nourishment and emotional support to those in need. During the food distribution events, volunteers take time to reflect on passages such as Psalms 103:12, reminding both themselves and recipients of the boundless nature of God's love and grace. These moments of collective reflection serve as sources of strength and solace, grounding individuals in hope amidst adversity.

As Mission Haiti commemorates its 25th anniversary, the organization reflects on the journey thus far and renews its commitment to serving Haiti's communities with passion and purpose. Despite the passage of time, the legacy of the 2010 earthquake remains etched in the nation's collective memory. As Haiti marks the 14th anniversary of this


devastating event, Mission: Haiti holds special prayers to honor the lives lost and the ongoing struggles of those still affected by its aftermath.

Yet, even in the face of such challenges, Mission: Haiti remains resolute in its mission. Through ongoing education initiatives, healthcare programs, economic development projects, and more,

the organization empowers communities to chart a path toward a brighter future.

As the sun sets over Port-au-Prince, casting a warm glow over the city's bustling streets, Mission: Haiti stands as a testament to hope, resilience, and the enduring power of collective action. In celebrating 25 years of service, Mission: Haiti looks ahead with optimism, knowing that the journey toward positive change is ongoing and that

together, we can build a brighter future for Haiti and its people.

If you are interested in partnering with Mission: Haiti, please visit their website www.missionhaiti99.org/ for more information and to donate. 




Redeeming Life's Northern Illinois Location Is Open and Soon Operating

Since early 2020, Redeeming Life Outreach Ministries has been actively planning to expand their successful maternity home program by opening a second location in Northern Illinois. After almost two years of prayer, planning and searching, they are open and will soon be operating in East Dundee, IL.

"This new home is critical to protecting the lives of unborn children in Chicagoland," exclaims Sheryl DeWitt, executive director for Redeeming Life Ministries. RLOM began accepting applications in February, 2024.

Housing and programming is available for pregnant women whether they choose to parent or share their baby through the gift of adoption. Residents live in a family-style community and gain skills in infant care, job readiness, financial literacy, and more. All programming is focused on helping residents to live full and independent lives and the home welcomes up to four women at a time and features a live-in residential manager.

Daily family-style meals and weekly worship, work together to foster a strong community and residents will find help securing pre- and post-natal healthcare as well as behavioral health support.

There are many ways individuals, churches, businesses and civic organizations may get involved to help support this new venture. Information is available at their website: www.rlom.org/expansion. 


Please pray for the people of Haiti and the safety of our Christian brothers and sisters there. Please also pray that the lost in Haiti will be brought to a knowledge of the truth and that because of the hope of Christ, Haiti will begin to see brighter days ahead.

Former FLGA District Vicar Gives NASCAR Invocation




The Shriners Children's 500 is a NASCAR Cup Series stock car race held annually at Phoenix Raceway in Avondale, AZ since 2005. It is one of two Cup Series races at the track, the other being the NASCAR Cup Series Championship Race.

The Rev. John Karolus, Associate Pastor at Shepherd of the Desert Lutheran Church and Preschool in Scottsdale, AZ, gave the invocation just before the national anthem. Karolus is a 2020 graduate of Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO and did his vicarage year in FLGA at **St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL** under the supervision of The Rev. Steve Carretto. John started with Shepherd in January 2021.

"For a 'car buff' like me, it was aretty awesome and humbling opportunity," Karolus said, "and seeing the race up close was something else. Pretty awesome and humbling opportunity. We were right up next to the stage for driver introductions and had a great view as the driver's walked out and got into their cars for the race." 

Nominate Young Musicians for Lutheran Summer Music Academy

Lutheran Summer Music Academy & Festival (LSM) is a residential academy for high school musicians. Students study with nationally recognized faculty, and are immersed in musical experiences through large ensembles (Choir, Band and Symphony Orchestra), chamber music, private lessons, elective classes, ongoing recitals and concerts. Students also experience a welcoming and joyful community that worships together daily, offering musical gifts through Lutheran liturgy and hymnody. LSM 2024 takes place at Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, IN, from June 30-July 28 and is open to students who have completed grades 8-12. Information: LSMacademy.org/nominate. 



Above left – St. Paul/Lakeland, FL choir.
Above – St. Paul/Lakeland, FL band.

The FLGA District Music Festival, held on February 23, 2024, in Lakeland, FL was a resounding success! The event brought together talented Lutheran school students from throughout the District, showcasing their remarkable musical abilities. The day featured a broad range of performances, including praise bands, vocal choirs, concert and symphonic bands, steel drum bands, and handbell choirs.

The festival featured the participation of dedicated musicians from **St. Paul/Lakeland, FL, St. Luke's/-Oviedo, FL, Our Savior/St. Petersburg, FL,**



*Denise Bates, Music Teacher
St. Paul/Lakeland, FL*

District School Music Festival

Grace/St. Petersburg, LE, Grace/Winter Haven, FL, St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL, Trinity/Rockledge, FL, and Holy Cross/Sanford, FL. It was truly a celebration of God's gift of music.

None of this would have been possible without the tremendous dedication of volunteers and support of the church and school staff at **St. Paul/Lakeland, FL.** Denise Bates, whose tireless efforts and hard work played a vital role in the smooth execution of the festival.

Next year's festival will take place at **St. Luke's/Oviedo, FL.** 



Below left – Grace/St. Petersburg, FL band.
Below – Our Savior/St. Petersburg, FL choir.





Resounding Success!

Clockwise from top left – Our Savior/
St. Petersburg, FL steel drum band.
Grace/Winter Haven, FL, choir. St. Paul/
Lakeland, FL praise band; Holy Cross/
Sanford, FL band; Trinity/Rockledge, FL
bell choir; St. Luke's/Oviedo, FL band.




Clockwise from
above – St. Paul/
Boca Raton, FL
bell choir.
Grace/St.
Petersburg, FL choir.
St. Paul/Boca
Raton, FL choir.



NLSW Connects Districts Schools

National Lutheran Schools Week provides more than 1,800 preschools, elementary schools and high schools with the public opportunity to proclaim and celebrate God's work among us in schools of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

According to Jennifer Tanner, FLGA Executive Director of Schools and Youth Ministry, "We thank God for the opportunity to provide excellent academic preparation for the children we serve. We are most grateful for the opportunity to share Jesus' amazing love with children and their families. This event is celebrated nationwide and it really gives us a fantastic opportunity to proclaim these great blessings within the communities we serve."

Lutheran schools — pre-K through high school — are incubators for faithful witness of God's love for us through Christ by teachers and students alike. 



Above below and at right — Our Savior/St. Petersburg, FL



Redeemer/Stuart, FL assembles in the Sanctuary



Faith/Eustis, FL launched NLSW with a mis-match day where none of their clothes were to match.



St. Paul/Lakeland, FL students dressed appropriately to celebrate the 100th day of school.




Above and below – St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL students dressed as their favorite super hero during NLSW.



At Timothy/Woodstock, GA, preschoolers wore red symbolizing Hearts for Jesus and showing just how much loves grows at Timothy. The teaching staff for the 2 year old class, designed their own t-shirts stating “I teach tiny humans all about Jesus!”



St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL eighth-grade students dressed up as presidents.

Jeff and David Robinson and Lois Schaefer (Outreach Chair) of **Amazing Grace/Oxford, FL**, loaded more than 50 Phil’s Friends hope-filled packages to deliver to Becky Hartmann & Sandy Howell (Health and Human Care Chair) of **Hope/Plant City, FL**. In our partnership arrangement, they then deliver the packages to the Lakeland Regional Health Hollis Cancer Treatment Center. Each package includes encouragement, greeting cards decorated by the four-year-olds of Amazing Grace Early Learning Center. The boxes were decorated by the students of **St. John/Ocala, FL**. Many of the blankets were made by students of Rebecca Schaffer at **Saint Paul/Boca Raton, FL** during Lutheran schools week. 



FLGA District Celebrates Three


IRIS Lending Library For The Blind

The purpose and mission of IRIS LENDING LIBRARY FOR THE BLIND, INC. (IRIS LLB) is to acquire and/or produce Christian books in specialized formats of Braille, Large Print, and Audio to provide legally Visually-Impaired and Blind individuals with Christian books in formats they are able to read. It is the hope that as patrons read books that they will see Christ Jesus and view their life and the world in which they live through His eyes.

IRIS LLB has a rich resource of a wide variety of Christian books provided free of charge on a lending basis to visually-impaired and blind individuals throughout the United States and Canada. From popular books to timeless classics to current treasures written by respected, Christian authors are included. Genres include Bible Studies, Devotions, Christian Life, Christian Faith,

Biographies, Autobiographies, Christian Fiction, Music, Poems, and more for all ages from primary to adult.

Volunteers at the library work with patrons to establish a "want list" – a list of books you an individual would want to read. The volunteers mail out books in a sequence as they are returned to the lending library.

Information is available at INFO@IRISLLB.ORG
Telephone: (888) 215-2455. 



Florida-Georgia Lutheran Early Response

The Florida-Georgia Lutheran Early Response (FGLER) received RSO status. As its name says, FGLER works with LCMS Disaster Response, the FLGA District, and its congregations, pastors, and members in preparing for, responding to, and managing disasters. Following Jesus' command to help our neighbor (LUKE 10:25-37), FGLER enables our churches and members to be directly involved in helping following disasters.

Joel Mathews, FGLER's Chairperson, says that "our desire is to provide expertise, equipment, and leadership so that volunteers can assist with disaster response."

According to FLGA District Disaster Response Coordinator, Jay Wendland, "In March trainers provided instruction for volunteers in basic disaster response, chainsaw safety, Bobcat skid steer operation, and first aid."

FLGA District congregations may host Disaster Response training for individuals in their area to join a Lutheran Early Response Team.

LERT has a network of volunteers trained to respond in times of disaster. Individuals or congregations who would like to receive disaster response training should contact Jay Wendland at jwendland@flgadistrict.org, or contact FGLER at info@FGLER.org. 



Jay Wendland



Joel & Kathy Mathews of Florida-Georgia Lutheran Early Response

New RSOs

Lutheran Legal League

Lutheran Legal League (L3) has been recognized by the LCMS as an RSO. L3 members are made up of attorneys who are actively worshipping, and who are recommended by their Pastor for admission into L3. The organization does not charge a member a fee to join – nor does it dictate the fee to be charged for services rendered. Instead, L3 members have expressed their willingness to serve our LCMS churches, schools, ministries, workers, and congregation members. Like every attorney-client relationship, the decision to




William "Rusty" Huseman

engage an L3 member is between the person needing assistance and the member. Likewise, if a fee is charged is also a decision that is made between the L3 member and the caller. Many members do not charge a fee – but that depends greatly on the scope of work.

In cases where the attorney is offering pro bono or discounted services, the L3 member provides the "client"

with a statement which represents the member's normal hourly billing. The client would then have an opportunity to contribute to L3 in any amount the client determines is appropriate. Those monies are then used to subsidize those L3 members who are dealing with more complex legal issues that may require subsidy to limit the financial exposure of the legal work. We refer to this as "AGG" (Advancing God's Grace).

God has enabled L3 to be of service to you and the members of L3 stand ready to be a legal resource should the need arise. Information is available www.lutheranlegalleague.org for more details and resources and from Rusty Huseman at RustyH@lutheranlegalleague.org. 

About RSOs

Recognized Service Organizations (RSOs) are 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organizations that are independent of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), but they operate ministry programs that foster the mission and ministry of the church.

RSO organizations reach out in mercy and love to meet the needs of those who are suffering, poor, sick or lonely. They address human, social, economic, educational and spiritual needs.

Jennifer Tanner Addresses Girls' Gifts

Jennifer Tanner, FLGA Executive Director for School and Youth Ministries, participated in a seminar in Wilton Manors, FL on March 16th.



Entitled "Girls Are A Gift To The World," the symposium focused on leveraging female gifts and talents in academia, business and ministry. In addition to Tanner, the panel included the North Miami Chief of Police, a social media influencer and life coach, an attorney and the Director of Nursing for a major healthcare provider. 

Habitat for Children Ministries Seeks Funds During Crisis in Haiti

Habitat for Children Ministries is an organization that works for indigent and helpless children and families in need. Their mission is to help build the minds of young people and to assist families to become stable in their communities.

With the expense of uniforms, registration fees, and tuition, ninety-five percent of Haiti's children and families struggle to afford the opportunity to go to school every year and many Haitian children are dying because they cannot get adequate medical attention or nutrition.



"Especially now, while so much gang violence has hindered our ability to get supplies to Haiti, we are seeking funds – we are committed to delivering valuable services to the Caribbean nation," says Meschac St. Amor, president of the organization. "We have made a commitment to help provide an affordable education which includes recreational activities, so the crime rate and juvenile delinquency levels can be tremendously reduced. After the January 12, 2010 earthquake, the demand for resources has greatly increased. Through the help of the Holy Spirit, we can build strong children, strong families, and even stronger communities. Our desire is to be the teacher of teachers and to empower a new generation of children, so that they can achieve lifelong success."

A special YouTube interview can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rXX8rr6ve6s>



St. Paul/Jacksonville, FL Founded

In 1955, the Lutheran Synodical Conference resolved to open up new missions in Florida, specifically targeting Americans of African descent. The Rev. William Jones arrived in Jacksonville, explored the Magnolia Garden/Floradale communities and received authorization to purchase property at 2730 Edgewood Avenue West on May 14th at a cost of \$7,250.00.

Construction of a worship facility priced at \$30,000.00 began January 10, 1956 and was completed three months later. While the church was under construction, Pastor Jones visited with families in hundreds of homes in the Magnolia Garden and Floradale communities, informing them about the developing Lutheran congregation in their neighborhood. On Sunday, April 22, a Dedication Worship Service and Concert was held. In addition to an entourage of 50 Lutherans from Mobile, Alabama and Pensacola, Florida (Clergy Chair of the Missionary Board, the College Radio Chorus/Academy), representatives numbering 50 from local Lutheran churches, some 200 men, women and children from the surrounding community attended the dedication.

Rev. Jones wrote in 1957 the following: "When services were first held at Saint Paul there was to our knowledge not a single Negro Lutheran in the city of Jacksonville. As the services continued Sunday after Sunday, more and more people showed interest in becoming members of the Lutheran Church. At the beginning of June we had 10 adults taking instructions. On August 5, before leaving for the hospital in Tallahassee, Mrs. Gwendolyn Friall and her son Tommie were baptized at their home. Now we had a beginning: one communicant member and one baptized child! Shortly after this on September 23, seven more were confirmed, bringing our communicant membership to a total of eight people. That same date was the first

celebration of the Lord's Supper."

St. Paul/Jacksonville, FL has been blessed through the spiritual leadership of seven pastors. On September 1, 1957, Missionary Jones installed the Rev. James Bowman as the first permanent pastor. At that time, there were 62 communicants and 125 baptized members.

In 1959, the Rev. Floyd T. McAdoo, the first African-American pastor began a four-year pastorate which saw the membership extend beyond the Magnolia Garden/Floradale area. The Rev. Gerald Quiram followed Pastor McAdoo in 1963, serving as vacancy pastor for a year. Under his leadership the congregation stepped out in faith and began to develop plans for its first renovation project. The renovation work was completed under the leadership of the Rev. Paul Labrenz, a young minister who came to St. Paul from California in 1964. While leading the membership to grow in God's Word, he also challenged the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS) Florida-Georgia District over their policies of segregation.

During the years 1964 - 1967, the congregation became increasingly concerned for the poor and got involved in the civil rights movement. The Rev. Michael Wendt, who served as vacancy pastor after Rev. Labrenz's return to the West coast, encouraged the congregation to become involved in the development of Lutheran Inner City Center (LICC), which was later renamed Hollybrook Homes.

The pastoral vacancy period ended when the Rev. Dale G. Gatz, was called to be the next pastor of St. Paul. Pastor Gatz continued the congregation involvement in the LICC ministry. Partnering with the LCMS and the Florida- Georgia District, 182 subsidized housing units were eventually constructed. Under his pastorate, St. Paul's membership voted to take responsibility for its own financial

mission and ministry affairs.

In November of 1972, after 16 years of LCMS and the Florida-Georgia District subsidy, members of the congregation signed a financial "Declaration of Independence." Since that time, the congregation has been blessed by continuous stewardship growth and giving. Also, during that time, on the occasion of the church's 24th anniversary, the current Sunday School wing was named the "William A. Jones Education Wing" in memory of the organizing missionary pastor.

Pastor Gatz went on to serve the congregation for 13 years, developing the "Song and Service Supplement" and the "Our Life Newsletter." Gatz left our church family to become the CEO of Lutheran Social Services of Northeast Florida and later as President of Wartburg Nursing Home in Mount Vernon, NY.

Upon Pastor Gatz's departure, the Rev. Arnold Hilpert, served for two years as vacancy pastor until the Rev. Duane Geary accepted the Call. Pastor Geary introduced the congregation to many different aspects of liturgical worship and meditation. It was during his pastorate that the congregation purchased the Lutheran Book of Worship, with Mr. Edgar Graham providing musical leadership to aid the congregation's familiarity with the new liturgies. Pastor Geary later accepted a call to a congregation in Tennessee and in his absence, the

Rev. Mark Yates served as vacancy pastor.

Despite a long vacancy period, the congregation continued to grow spiritually. This period of growth was continued under the spiritual leadership of the Rev. Frank T. Marshall, Sr., who accepted the Call to St. Paul in August of 1986. Pastor Marshall came to St. Paul at a critical time — the congregation



The Rev. Frank Marshall

was beginning to seriously focus on expanding its worship

by Missionary William Jones

facilities to better accommodate its growth in membership and Christian mission and ministry.

On April 14, 1991, the groundbreaking service for a beautiful new worship edifice was held. Pastor Marshall missed the dedication due to his United States Army Reserve deployment to the Middle East (Desert Storm) where he served as Chaplain, later retiring with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Pastor Marshall returned from Reserve Chaplain duty to work closely with Mrs. Myrtice Canady, Mr. Rodell Shuford, Mr. Curtis Davis, Mr. Frank Hughes and the Board of Directors and many others to ensure that the building expansion stayed on target and on budget.

On Sunday, November 17, 1991, the dedication service for the third and most significant structural change was celebrated as St. Paul entered their new worship sanctuary and administrative offices. With God's blessing, in 2003, Pastor Marshall led a special worship service to celebrate the burning of the \$400,000.00+ mortgage required to build the new facility.

Aside from establishing a new physical plant for worship, Pastor Marshall and the congregation were blessed to:

- Purchase the hymnal "This Far By Faith."
- Install stained glass windows through memorial gift-giving.
- Organize and house the LCMS Youth Servant Events for eleven years.
- Establish an ecumenical relationship with Woodlawn Presbyterian and Ebenezer UMC for Annual New Year's Watch Night.
- Sustain an annual church budget that exceeded \$200,000.
- Participate in LCMS, District and Black Ministry events.
- Revise the Church's Constitution and Bylaws.
- Retire the church's mortgage.
- Purchase a church van and bus for church and community outreach.

After serving the longest tenure of any pastor of St. Paul,

Pastor Marshall formally retired after 24 years of faithful service August, 2010. In 2022 Pastor Marshall received the prestigious Lloyd Behnken Medallion – presented to both professional church workers and laypersons demonstrating true servanthood toward mission and ministry.

The Rev. James Wiggins, Jr., was installed as St. Paul's seventh undershepherd of Jesus on Sunday, January 30, 2011. The following year after a very successful congregational retreat at Epworth By the Sea, St. Simons Island, Georgia, a new church vision and motto was cast and adopted. Church Vision

Other noteworthy accomplishments under Pastor Wiggins' leadership have included:

- The transition from church council to policy based governance.
- The revision and ratification of the Church's Constitution and Bylaws.
- The establishment of a Deaconess Ministry.
- The incorporation of a Technology Ministry that introduced audio and video viewing during worship.
- The creation of a Volunteer Office Staff Ministry.
- The implementation of the Children Community Choir and Praise Teams.
- Congregation's active involvement and support in ICARE (Interfaith Coalition for Action, Reconciliation and Empowerment) to promote justice and right social wrongs in Duval County.
- The establishment of the Friall-Godwin Parish Health Ministry.
- The Annual Community Day and Health Fair.
- The establishment of three Mission and Ministry Task Force Committees (Neighborhood Development and Wealth Initiative, Children and Youth Mission and Ministry Outreach and Technology Integration into Mission and Ministry Outreach). This was established to reflect Saint Paul's desire to be a community church and not just



Yvonne & Dale Gatz

Dr. Gatz served as President and Chief Executive Officer of Wartburg Nursing Home from 1991-2004. That period of Wartburg history saw the rapid expansion of facilities on Wartburg's historic campus. Prior to joining Wartburg, Dr. Gatz was the founding Executive Director of Lutheran Social Services of Northeast Florida (1979-1990), and Pastor of St. Paul Church in Jacksonville, Florida (1968-1979). Raised near Chicago, IL, Dr. Gatz received a B.A. from Valparaiso University, Indiana, in 1964; a Master of Divinity from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, in 1968; and a Doctor of Ministry from McCormick Seminary, Chicago, in 1983.

a church in the community.

- The establishment of a partnership with our neighborhood school – Carter G. Woodson Elementary.
- The creation of Worship Assistants to serve alongside pastor at Sunday service.

As "pastor and people" the congregation continues it forward march under the providence, presence and power of God through His Word and Sacrament to impact souls for Jesus.



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What Does This Mean?

Have You Got a Little Lutheran in Your Life?

As you can probably already tell, this issue of Lutheran LIFE looks a little different than previous issues. We've tweaked the layout a bit to focus on clarity, readability and making the print copy more "reader-friendly."

We have a new font with a larger point size – to make it easier to read. We also realize that print magazines are designed to provide a unique connection to our readers – to make the most of the experience.

That said, we value your input! Let us know what you're thinking! You can do this via email to LutheranLife@aol.com and by participating in a quick survey on the FLGA District website.

As any good Lutheran would inquire, "what does this mean?"

We have a short survey you can complete by using your mobile device to scan the QR code at the top of this page. It will take you right to the survey. We want to have your input about content! What parts of the magazine do you enjoy most?

Lutheran LIFE's news and event content drive our publication to excellence which keeps the FLGA District informed and inspired about God's work. We want to keep reaching the readers who are interested in the work of the FLGA District. This includes our pastors, teachers, administrators, students, congregants and friends.

The District publication's goal is for Lutheran LIFE to continue to Equip, Empower, Engage – Connecting People to Jesus.

Printing and mailing costs have risen – quite dramatically since the pandemic. As a result, to help fund this communications vehicle, we are also opening up


From the FLGA District website you can also make changes to your address – or delete your subscription.

Are you getting the FLGA District weekly newsletter each Friday? From our website you can subscribe to it. The weekly newsletter is timely and will keep you up to date with all of the activities going in within all departments of the District. It also enables you to submit a prayer request, investigate prayer resources and prayer guides. You can stay on top of current events and topical opportunities offered by Lutheran Church Extension Fund and Lutheran Federal Credit Union.

There are opportunities to purchase or obtain free items . . . things like hymnals or Bible studies – or even pianos and organs. The newsletter also informs us of congregations

seeking items such as paraments, tapestry hangings, banners used to adorn worship space, communion ware and more.

This is YOUR magazine and your input is appreciated. Along with our weekly newsletter, Lutheran LIFE comes alongside you and the myriad ministries of the FLGA District as well as our synod, colleges and universities.

Keep sending your good news and photos to us at LutheranLife@aol.com. 

The LAST WORD



John List
 FLGA District
 Communications Director
 Editor, Lutheran Life
lutheranlife@aol.com

the magazine for prospective sponsors and advertisers! Very attractive rates will enable you to reach nearly 25,000 readers through an advertisement in Lutheran LIFE. Could you – or perhaps someone you know – benefit from advertising in this magazine? If you'd like more information about sponsorships or advertising opportunities, please contact Laura Zirbel, the FLGA District Executive Director for Finance & Administration. Laura can be contacted at lzirbel@flgadistrict.org.