

LUTHERAN 75 YEARS LIFE

1948-2023

*Florida-Georgia District LCMS
May/June, 2023*



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.

Please send address additions, corrections or deletions to: LutheranLife@aol.com.



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Lutheran LIFE

DISTRICT CAPSULES

District Calls Accepted

- 01/01/23.....Rev. Dr. Robert Roegner as Assistant Pastor to Woodlands/Montverde, FL
01/02/23.....Rev. Ted Andrada as Senior IIM to Redeemer/Stuart, FL

Transferred Out of FLGA to Other Districts

- 03/17/23.....Rev. Thomas Boeck to Mid-South
03/20/23.....Rev. Carl Rau to Texas

Transferred Into FLGA from Other Districts

- 02/01/23.....Rev. Chad Czischke from MN South
02/16/23.....Rev. Arthur Porter from Southern
03/05/23.....Rev. Ted Andara from MN South
04/07/23.....Rev. Gary Koltz from MI
04/10/23.....Rev. James Zang from Eastern

Initial Placements

- 01/29/23.....Ms. Ann Marie Collard as Principal at Good Shepherd/N. Fort Myers, FL (C)
03/03/23.....Ms. Elizabeth Sabbides as DCE at Marco Lutheran/Marco Island, FL (C)
03/25/23.....Ms. Amanda Yurk as Teacher at Faith/Eustis, FL (C)

Ordinations & Installations

- 01/29/23.....Ms. Ann Marie Collard as Principal at Good Shepherd/N. Fort Myers, FL (C)
02/19/23.....Rev. Jonathan Horsman as Sole Pastor at Redeemer/Bartow, FL (O)

- 02/19/23.....Rev. Chad Czischke as Sole Pastor of Shepherd of the Coast/Fort Lauderdale FL (O)
03/03/23.....Ms. Elizabeth Sabbides as DCE at Marco/Marco Island, FL (C)
03/05/23.....Rev. Alan Koch as Sole Pastor IIM at Risen Savior/Palm Bay, FL (O)
03/05/23.....Rev. Ted Andrada as Sr. Pastor IIM at Redeemer/Stuart, FL (O)
03/12/23.....Ms. Ellen Prohl as Director of Parish Ministries at Grace/St. Petersburg, FL (C)
03/25/23.....Mrs. Amanda Yurk as Teacher at Faith/Eustis, FL (C)

Status Changes

- 02/08/23...Mrs. Ruth Wessling from Active to Emeritus (C)
02/20/23.....Rev. Manfred Poeppel from Active to Emeritus (O)
03/02/23.....Mrs. Madison Raabe from Active to Candidate (C)
03/19/23.....Ms. Janet Tumminello from Active to Candidate (C)
04/01/23.....Ms. Sharon Vonada from Active to Candidate (C)
04/03/23.....Mr. Tyler Raabe from Active to Candidate (C)

Called to Glory

- 04/02/23...Rev. Roland Roehrs (O)

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

Luther's Theology in Today's World Explored

Christ Our Savior/St. Augustine,

FL is hosting one of the CTSFW Summer Continuing Education classes June 5-7, 2023. The class, intended for both clergy and lay people, is titled, Martin Luther's Theology in Today's World, taught by Rev. Dr. Cameron MacKenzie.

Is Lutheran theology as Luther himself developed it still relevant today? In a post-modern world that challenges the very existence of truth, can Lutherans still make use of Luther? After reading some of Luther's most significant writings and recalling their context in Luther's life and career, students will explore the Reformer's insights



Cameron MacKenzie

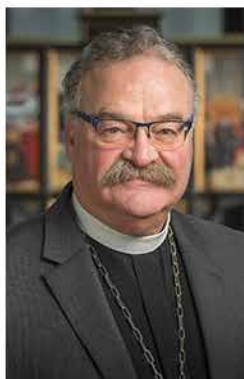
that are still important and discuss ways in which Lutherans today can demonstrate their relevance to contemporary society.

The class begins Monday, June 5th at 9:00 a.m. and concludes at 12:15 p.m. on Wednesday the 7th. While in Saint Augustine, course participants can take advantage of the opportunity to see the living history of the "Ancient City" — the oldest continuously occupied city in the United States established by the Spanish in 1565. Saint Augustine is now gearing up for its 450th birthday bash.

Additional information is available from Rev. Mark Stirdivant at (904) 829-6823 or revhollowleg@gmail.com.

Correction — In the last issue of Lutheran LIFE, Principal Loren Rehmer's name was spelled incorrectly in the 60th Anniversary story for St. Paul Lutheran, the Boca Raton, FL-based school. We regret the error.
— The Editor

Candidates for Synod President Announced



Matthew Harrison



Patrick Ferry



Richard Snow



Peter Lange



Benjamin Ball

Those named on the ballots are the Synod clergymen who received the most nominations from Synod member congregations and who have agreed to serve, if elected.

The following five candidates received the highest number of nominating votes for the office of president and consented to serve if elected:

- Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison, the incumbent Synod president — 1,193 nominations;
- Rev. Dr. Patrick T. Ferry, former president of Concordia University Wisconsin and Ann Arbor — 511 nominations;
- Rev. Richard L. Snow, president of the LCMS Nebraska District — 228 nominations;
- Rev. Peter K. Lange, Synod first vice-president — 119 nominations; and
- Rev. Benjamin T. Ball, Synod sixth vice-president — 113 nominations.

Of those receiving the highest number of nominating votes for the offices of regional vice-president (second through sixth vice-presidents, as will be ranked by the convention), the following have consented to serve if elected:

The Revs. Christopher S. Esget, Jeffrey J. Kloha, Luke Zimmerman, Victor J. Belton, and Deric Taylor.

The Florida-Georgia District is served by the East-Southeast Regional Vice President.



Except in the case of president and first vice-president, these names will constitute the ballots for elections during the Synod convention. The presidential election will take place June 17

to July 11, 2023, and results will be announced by July 15. The five presidential candidates listed above constitute the ballot for election, which must be by majority vote. Pastoral and lay voters validly registered by the congregations and parishes of the Synod before the deadline (electronic registration by March 19) or their substitutes (as validly submitted before June 9) will serve as the voters for this election. Results are to be announced at least two weeks prior to the convention.

In the case of the election of the first vice-president, the president-elect will select from the list of 20 nominees the five candidates (at least two of which must be among the top five nominees) who will comprise the ballot for the election, which will take place early in the convention. Regional vice-president elections and ranking will follow the order and process required by the Bylaws of the Synod.

Members and delegates of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod will gather under the convention theme, “We Preach Christ Crucified,” based on 1 CORINTHIANS 1:18–25. In a world of uncertainty, the church’s proclamation, her mission, her identity remains the same. We preach Christ crucified. 



Christopher Esget



Jeffrey Kloha



Luke Zimmerman



Victor Belton



District Announces \$1.5 Million Capital Campaign With Matching Funds to to Provide \$150,000 Grants

This past month during the celebratory worship of Easter, the FLGA District announced a capital campaign to celebrate 75 years. "The District began in 1948 with just 22 congregations," explained Pastor James Rockey, President. "We are extremely fortunately to have grown to 192 congregations today and our prayer is that every congregation will join us in giving a "thank offering."

According to President Rockey, less than 45 percent of people living in the United States are connected to the body of Christ — and the population of the country grows by

approximately two percent annually.

"God is loudly calling us to 'Go! Make Disciples!' and planting new congregations is essential to reaching more with God's love," Rockey continued.

The District office shared bulletin inserts, an announcement slide, and a video to announce and celebrate 75 years of mission and ministry. These inserts also announced the capital campaign. This information shows how each District congregation can participate to help reach the \$1.5 million goal.

"Our goal is to raise \$1.5 million by September of this year," Rockey said. "These

funds will enable us to provide \$150,000 in grants to start ten congregations over the next five years. For every \$2 given, \$1 will be matched. I am confident our members will rally to help us reach this goal to connect many more people to Jesus!

"In the early days of the District God shined grace on Florida-Georgia, enabling growth. If God could cause the work of the early missionaries to prosper, he can certainly motivate us today.

"The fields are riper than they have ever been as both Florida and Georgia's populations have grown. Imagine this . . . if every congregation gave a

thank offering of just \$7,500, we would exceed our goal! Imagine the lives that will be transformed and the joy over each and every new believer. Imagine the renewed excitement and revitalization in our congregations! As we celebrate 75 years, I hope to announce at the September President's Equip Conference the achievement of this capital campaign."

Details are below about the "Living As Along-Siders" themed September event and this issue of Lutheran LIFE also announces the keynote speakers.



LIVING
as Along-Siders
DISCIPLES MAKING DISCIPLE MAKERS



President's Equip Conference

September 28 – 30, 2023

Celebrating Three-Quarters of a Century of Mission & Ministry

Pastors • Educators • Congregants • Commissioned Ministers of Religion • Administrators

Hilton Orlando Buena Vista Palace • Orlando, FL

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flgadistrict.org/pec

"We're spending our kids' inheritance!" the bumper sticker reads. Unlike some generations past, not all parents today are concerned about leaving something to their children. Yet even when they do, it's often not what they'd hoped to leave due to the realities of life and unmet plans.

In sharp contrast, Peter writes of the inheritance God has for His children, It can never perish, spoil or fade. By using these words, Peter highlights the contrast and greatness of our inheritance in Christ. Who can rob us of God's full forgiveness for our sins? The Devil tries, our conscious accuses, but God points to the cross of His Son.

What can spoil the peace we have with God? Storms may rock our lives; tears may dim our view through faith. But God points to the cross of His Son — His peace is still there as sure as the nail prints in the hand that holds our hand! What can devalue the glory of heaven for us? The world may laugh, calling it "pie in the sky," "a dream, an illusion" or even a "crutch for the weak." But God points us to the cross and gives us the assurance that what is waiting for us is far superior!

Unlike some earthly parents, our heavenly Father is concerned about an inheritance for each one of us. That's why He sent His only Son, Jesus to the cross and raised Him from the grave. That's why He promises to keep us in faith through the work of the Holy Spirit. He wants us to have an inheritance that is truly out of this world.

But there is another side to this . . . each of us has that inheritance right now! Yes, you read that correctly. We may still be breathing and alive in this world, but we have this inheritance now. In the same chapter of 1 PETER, he addresses how "for a while you may have to suffer various trials . . . these have come so that your faith may be proven genuine, and result in praise, honor and glory when Jesus Christ is revealed." Now read carefully the next verse, "For you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls!"

This is truly one of my favorite Scriptures. It reminds me that no matter what I am going through. The trials, suffering, attacks, failures or anything else that this sin-tainted big world can throw at me . . . even in the midst of those things, by faith in the resurrected Lord, I am receiving the "living hope" and "salvation of my soul"!

What an inheritance!


As recipients of such an inheritance, we should ask ourselves, what are we doing with it? Are we keeping it to ourselves or are we spending it . . . or better said, are we SHARING it? You see, it can never perish, spoil or fade — it can't run out!

Yes, our gracious and loving God has given His riches to us so that we might be with Him for all eternity. Yet He also has entrusted this

inheritance to us so that we would "spend our inheritance" by sharing it with others. That is our privilege as believers and as the Body of Christ known as the Florida-Georgia District.

As we journey through this post-Easter season and the months of summer, would you please pray daily that the Lord would open your eyes and heart to seeing who He is sending you to share your inheritance with?

Will you pray that He would guide each congregation and every ministry in the Florida-Georgia District as we look toward the next 75 years and how we will share our inheritance with the growing communities around us through existing and new ministries?

Yes indeed, we have an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – and we get to share it without it ever losing its value! 

SPEND YOUR INHERITANCE !

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. 1 PETER 1: 3-4



*Living to serve
that others may
live through Christ!*

*James
Rockey*

PRESIDENT
FLORIDA-GEORGIA DISTRICT
LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

District Announces Keynote Speakers for September President's Equip Event

Plans are well under way for this year's President's Equip Conference to be held in Lake Buena Vista, Florida September 28-30, 2023.


Lay leaders, congregation members, District pastors, educators, commissioned ministers and church and school administrators will come together in a conference that offers powerful keynote speakers, opportunities for practical workshops to equip servants of every walk for ministry and discipleship.

A wide range of workshop sessions will be offered providing practical, strategic and achievable ideas that will work in congregations and schools alike.

"We invite you to be part of an energizing three-day event where you will discover all the joy and blessings of 'LIVING AS ALONG-SIDERS — Disciples Making Disciple Makers!'" explains FLGA District President, The Rev. James Rockey.

"We are extremely enthusiastic about the keynote speakers we have secured! The Revs. Greg Finke and Jonathan Fisk along with nationally known leadership coach, Leah Abel, will bring comprehensive energy to our 'Living As Along-Siders' theme.

"This will be far more than a conference," Rockey continues, "it is about us living out Christ's call to 'be His witnesses' and to 'go and make disciples.' The best way for this to happen is through His people, one on one, as we share 'the hope that is within us.'

"We have secured The Hilton Buena Vista Palace in Orlando, FL. The District website will have details and group costs. Begin to plan and recruit other leaders from your congregations and schools." 


Rev. Greg Finke

The Rev. Greg Finke is the author of *Dwelling 1:14* — a nonprofit ministry which helps like-minded Jesus-followers connect in their neighborhoods, workplaces and schools for discipling and missional living.

Greg Finke had been ordained since 1989, spending decades of his pastoral ministry mentoring churches with 1,000 or more in worship. Finke has more than 20 years experience growing and leading congregations. *Dwelling 1:14* is one of the results of that. Greg and his wife Susan are "neighborhood missionaries" in a subdivision in League City, Texas. He is best known for coming alongside a congregation and leaders to determine the congregation's level of readiness for engaging the Father's redemptive mission with Jesus.

"Most of us know or have a sense that 'things aren't working the way they used to work' in our congregations. And, most of us are experimenting and experimenting with new things. Greg brings great passion to the mission.



He's a gifted communicator and leader. He brings solid biblical teaching to the task. And, he's a proven, tested pastor and has walked where you walk. Greg understands what's going on and can help build a 'sending' culture in your congregation," states The Rev. Dr. Jock Ficken, Executive Leader, The Pastoral Leadership Institute (PLI). 



Greg & Susan Finke


Leah Abel



Leah Abel has a passion for helping leaders develop their plans into powerful, effective real life implementation. She is known for high level organizational and planning skills while working with congregations and organizations. Congregations and church leaders experience greater success in moving ideas and concepts to tangible plans and results.

She has served congregations and leaders seeking clarity for their future and a documented plan for moving toward their goals. She has also teamed with organizations to design and facilitate professional development events for teachers, youth leaders, and clergy as well as managing large events like the National Youth Gathering and the Lutheran Education Association Convocation.

Abel is a graduate of Concordia University/ Nebraska and her training includes work with the Institute of Cultural Affairs, the Project Management Institute, Emergent Leader and the Townsend Leadership Institute. She has served congregations in Florida and Colorado.

She is the former Director of Christian Education for St. Luke's/ Oviedo, FL. and now lives in Colorado where her husband, The Rev. Scott Abel, serves as pastor of Our Father/Centennial, CO. 

Rev. Jonathan Fisk


Rev. Jonathan Fisk is the Pastor at Saint Paul/Rockford, IL. He and his wife, Meridith, have five children: Chloe, Anastasia, Trinity, Fides, and Alleluia.

Fisk offers his thoughts, encouragement and Biblical wisdom, for living out your faith in this decaying age. He is a gifted blogger and author with a collection of "Mad Christian" pieces published each week in Mad Mondays newsletter. He also has the MadPx YouTube Channel, podcast presence and is the co-author of a number of books designed to help equip you to lift up your head amidst the white noise and avoid wallowing in the muck with those who have no hope.

Some of the categories he regularly covers are about marriage and family, media and technology, government



and the economy, education and home schooling as well as food, health, arts, history and living a peaceful and quiet life.

Pastor Fisk's regular Saturday show is entitled "Stop the White Noise." Fisk can be followed on Twitter @RevFisk and his YouTube channel, with more than 13,000 subscribers, is @Revfiskj. 



Jonathan Fisk



Scott & Leah Abel

VOC "Mind The Gap" Retreat Dove Deep Into Exploring Gaps Placed in Our Lives

The St. Stephen Retreat Center in Titusville, Florida was the new location for this year's Veterans of the Cross (VOC) Retreat held March 6-8, 2023.



Bob Steinke

relaxation as well as the annual Behnken Good and Faithful Servant medallion presentations.



David Benke

bridging gaps between the call of a Christian and the call of the world for his whole ministry.



Anthony Steinbronn

• Mr. Don Christian gave a thorough presentation about the LCMS Concordia universities — with emphasis on Concordia/Austin, TX.



Don Christian



Jim Essig

- Mr. Jim Essig, a member of the VOC committee opened devotions on Monday afternoon.
- Mr. Mark Brink led devotions on Tuesday morning. FLGA



Mark Brink

District President James Rockey preached at the Divine Service on Tuesday evening. and FLGA District President Emeritus, The Rev. Dr. Thomas Zehnder, closed devotions on Wednesday just before lunch.



Worship was held at Good Shepherd/Titusville, FL



Larry Schaefer



Raleigh Sims



Richard Pieplow



Jay Wendland



Mark Gaertner



Tony Hunt



Robert Scudieri



Sheryl DeWitt

Don Kaufman Honored With Behnken Medallion

Confidant. Elder. Chauffeur. Construction Manager. These are just some of the titles Pastor Jeff Shanks has assigned to Don Kaufman. Shanks is Kaufman's pastor and good friend at **St. John/Ocala, FL** and provided the Veterans of the Cross (VOC) participants with these warm introductory remarks about his parishoner and long-time friend.



Don Kaufman, from left, The Revs. Jeff Shank and Pat O'Brien at Veterans of the Cross 2023

The Lloyd Behnken Good and Faithful Servant Medallion is bestowed each year to at the Florida-Georgia District VOC Retreat. The award is presented in four categories:

- Layperson;
- Ordained Minister;
- Commissioned Minister; and
- Church at Large.

The Rev. Bob Steinke, VOC Chairperson, and Rev. Pat O'Brien co-hosted the evening on Monday, March 4th at Good Shepherd/Titusville, FL in the fellowship hall with a hilarious Christian comedian. The audience shared snacks, desserts, wine, beer, lemonade and iced teas.

"Don has served in so many ways — Shanks emphasized — it's difficult to assign just one job description to him!

"He's a confidant — someone I can bounce ideas off of and get well-thought out feedback in return. He's someone I can share something with and know it's not going any further.

"He's also an 'Elder Extraordinaire' since he is the face of our Saturday night worship. He knows the people in his elder group and they know him. He will visit the shut-ins and take communion to them."

According to Shanks, since the COVID pandemic hit, Kaufman has headed up St. John's "walk-in" communion times when those who are immunocompromised can come and receive Christ's body and blood. Shanks expanded

Shanks elaborated about Kaufman's mission heart. "Don will tell you that he's a traditional Lutheran (and he definitely is) and loves the Lutheran Church (which he definitely does), but he is just as passionate about the mission of *connecting people to Jesus!*

"As much as he loves the traditions of the church, he never lets 'tradition' or his personal preferences stand in the way of reaching out to people."

Pastor Shanks also described Kaufman's expertise as a chauffeur. When Shanks was having appendicitis in 2018 and his appendix burst before a Saturday evening service, Kaufman took him to the emergency room — because Anette, Jeff's wife, was with the students at the Middle School Retreat!


As for being a construction manager, "After teaching for more than 30 years in the public school setting, he moved to Ocala

and taught in St. John's High School. After retiring from there, he joined our maintenance team and then headed up that team for several years," Shanks continued. "It is not an exaggeration to say he kept us going and took care of our property with his wide-range of gifts and know-how. Even when he re-retired, he continues to head up "Don's Crew" a group of volunteers who jump in when needed — from remodeling rest rooms in our

Family Life Center or coordinating the set up for our massive Ocala Light Spectacular."

Don Kaufman is also ready, willing and completely able to step in and help with the liturgy or even delivering a message. "He has done that in the past and has done a wonderful job. His deep love for the Lord, God's Word and the Church shines through," Shanks said.

When we come up with a new idea and need someone to help "figure out" how to make it happen, Don is the first one to whom we turn. For example, as we returned to in-person worship, Don figured out how to safely distance each other. "And when Anette and I came up with an idea to build a giant 'labyrinth' to tell the real Christmas story during our Ocala Christmas Light Spectacular, it was Don who designed it on paper first and then headed up the team to make it happen," Shanks explained. "Thousands of people walked through that labyrinth this past Advent/Christmas season."

Kaufman recently retired from the FLGA District's board of directors after term limits had been reached. 

Brian Kneser Pastoral Recipient of Lloyd Behnken Medallion

Mr. Jim Essig, former Principal at Woodlands Lutheran School/ Montverde, FL provided the introduction of the pastoral recipient of the Lloyd Behnken Medallion, The Rev. Dr. Brian Kneser.



Brian Kneser

Kneser was born in Wisconsin and grew up there. He has a brother, Keri. Brian is married to Debbie and they share three sons — David, Daniel, and Nathan as well as five grandchildren. Brian received his A.A. degree from Concordia/ Mequon, WI, where he majored in Greek as part of his pre-seminary studies. From there he headed southeast to Concordia Senior College/Fort Wayne, IN where he earned his B.A. in Biblical languages and earned his M.Div from Concordia Theological Seminary/Fort Wayne, IN. He had stayed there after graduating from the college because the college became the replacement for the Springfield seminary.

“By staying in Fort Wayne, Brian didn’t need to move all his furniture and stuff to St. Louis,” explained Jim Essig. “Brian vicared at First/Gainesville, Florida under Pastor Bob Besalski. In 1994 Brian earned his Doctor of Ministry from Concordia/St. Louis, MO. His first call was to St. Mark’s/Hollywood, FL.

“During his ten years at St. Mark’s, Brian held three different positions — assistant pastor, associate pastor, and senior pastor. Had he stayed any longer, he would have been made “bishop,” joked Essig.

In 1991 Kneser accepted the call to serve as assistant pastor/director of Woodlands Lutheran Ministries/Montverde, FL. After three years, he was named senior pastor/director and served in that

role from 1994–1998. In 1998 Woodlands Camp and Woodlands Lutheran Church became two different ministries, and Kneser stayed with the church, where he served until his retirement in 2019.

“During his lengthy and productive ministry, Brian has served in many different capacities in the Florida-Georgia District. In 2004 when the Florida-Georgia District sponsored the Concordia House of Studies, he taught Old Testament to aspiring church workers. From 2012–2018 Brian served as District Vice-President.”

Currently enjoying his retirement with Debbie in Lakeland, FL, Kneser serves as secretary for the Winter


faces restrictions concerning service in the pastoral ministry. St. Paul/Lakeland, FL’s Director of Music, Ken Sherman, is preparing to become a pastor.

“Besides his service to the church, Brian is also active in his community,” Essig stated. “He and Debbie are leaders of their homeowners association’s ‘Come to Bethlehem Christmas presentation.’

“Brian’s connection with the Essig family dates back to when Jim’s father was Brian’s English professor at Concordia Senior College in the 1970’s. In January of 2006 when I called my dad to tell him that I’d received the call to serve as principal at Woodlands (where Brian was pastor), my dad said, “Wait a minute.” In a short time, he returned to the phone and said, ‘Yes. I see it

here. Brian was an excellent student in my class.’ Can you imagine! My dad still had his gradebooks from the 1970’s!

“Coincidentally, a few years after Brian moved from Hollywood to Montverde, I served as principal of St. Mark’s for 11 years. For several years up until the camp’s closing, Brian and I served on the Woodlands Lutheran Ministries Board together. When we played flag football against the youth group, Brian played quarterback, and I played center. When we played on the church softball team,

Brian was catcher, and I was pitcher. Brian is quite competitive in sports and in board games. Brian has never been a slacker or a computer hacker, but he has always been a Packer backer! His office was like a Green Bay trophy case with autographed footballs and helmets. He even had a Packer light switch plate. If I recall correctly, he even wore vestments with the Green Bay Packer colors! 



From left, Debbie & The Revs. Brian Kneser and Pat O’Brien and Mr. Jim Essig

Haven Circuit and assists with preaching, teaching, and serving communion at St. Paul/Lakeland, FL. He is also currently serving as mentor in the Specific Ministry Pastor Program (SMP), a distance-based, specialized program of theological education available at both seminaries. Each SMP student is supervised by an experienced LCMS pastor during and after his program of study, and each program

Robert Scudieri Church-At-Large Recipient of Lloyd Behnken Medallion

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. PSALM 1:1-3.

That was the introduction for the Rev. Dr. Robert J. Scudieri, recipient of the Lloyd Behnken Good and Faithful Servant Medallion in the "Church at Large" category. Scudiere was introduced by The Rev. Dr. Victor Belton, 1st Vice President of the FLGA District and long-time friend of Scudieri.

"I came to know Robert Scudieri as a man who, by the grace of God, can be described as a Psalm 1 man," Belton emphasized. "He grew up in Flushing, New York, the son of Alfred and Mabel Scudieri, along with brother Alfred and sister Jean encouraged by the ministry of Resurrection Lutheran Church in Flushing. He is Lutheran born and Lutheran bred. Scudieri did much of his meditation at our Alma Mater, Concordia/Bronxville, NY. That's where he met the



From left, The Revs. Pat O'Brien, Robert Scudieri and Victor Belton at Veterans of the Cross 2023

love of his life — Lynn Gollenberg — who he married in 1967."


The Scudieris have two children: Nathan and Alison. His vicarage was at Bethlehem/Monterey CA. After graduation from Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO, he served Redeemer/ Orange, NJ, and Christ Memorial/East Brunswick, NJ welcoming refugees from Viet Nam and the poor. He refreshed them, blessed them, as a tree planted by streams of living water.

"Blessed men are renaissance men who are gifts to the world," Belton continued. "This man has enthusiastically served not only New Jersey, Missouri, Michigan, Georgia, and California, in North America, but also Germany, Russia, Georgia, and Japan to name a few states, countries,

nations and people where he has had an impact of the Lord and His Church."

Dr. Scudieri is also an accomplished and published writer. He continues to author biographies of courageous, faith filled missionaries coming to America for Mission Nation Publishing. Mission Nation Publishing continues to produce videos and resources to encourage the next generation of missionaries.

Scudieri served as chairperson of the California-Nevada-Hawaii District Board for Missions, the New Jersey District Evangelism Committee, and was called to implement the Blueprint for the Nineties to invite unchurched people into relationship with the Lord Jesus and benefit immigrants coming to the United States.

"We are blessed this evening to honor our gracious Father God for the accomplishments of this blessed man," Belton stressed. "Congratulations and well done! Your God, your work, the work of your hands is prospered and recognized with thanksgiving to our Gracious Father. We join our hearts with the heart of God in proclaiming, Blessed is the man, and that man today is you, Reverend Doctor Robert J. Scudieri." 



Attendees enjoy one of the speakers



Naomi Weslock & Tom Zehnder



Nina Keller



Roger Keller


FLORIDA GEORGIA

Out and About in the District

Wild West Fun Enjoyed at Faith/Marietta




The Parent-Teacher League of **Faith/Marietta, GA**, sponsored a Wild, Wild West Family Dance in February — a cross-over event for school families and church members to share an evening of food, music, and fun.

Dressed as cowboys and cowgirls, the K-8th grade students led the Line Dancing. Sheriff Pastor and Sheriff Principal presided over the pretend jail. Families also enjoyed face painting and a photo booth. About 250 people, ages 1 - 81 enjoyed an evening of Wild West fun. 

Plant City Congregation Celebrates Bear Country

Sunday, February 13th once again welcomed a special day for the members of **Hope/Plant City, FL** as the congregation's Human Care Ministry Team hosted their annual Teddy Bear Sunday. This annual event encourages Hope members and friends to bring a new Teddy Bear to church with them on the Sunday closest to Valentines Day.

In past years, Hope has donated their bears to both the Plant City Police and Fire Departments, Florida Baptist Children's Home, members serving in Iraq and Afghanistan to share with fellow soldiers and area children and an array of others able to share the bears with those in need of that special comfort a new teddy bear gives. This year, Hope once again selected the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office as the recipients to share the bears with children as they see fit. This year approximately 120 bears were supplied. 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." 




Carol Walkenhorst donating her bears to those already in the sheriff's vehicle.


Hope/Plant City Welcomes New Members

On Sunday March 26th, the family of **Hope/Plant City, FL** joined together in their morning worship to welcome the addition of their newest brothers and sisters in Christ to the family. As the congregation has been immersed in both the Red Letter "Being Challenge" and most recently "The Great Sending" during Lent, the congregation has grown in its desire to extend the kingdom of God more and more in the community as they grow more and more in an understanding and passion for the mission of God!

Pictured following worship along with Hope's Vicar Owen Duncan and Pastor Dean Pfeffer are (from bottom left): Duncan, Nicolas DeMarco, Vicki Ferguson, Lara Kernan, and Pfeffer. Back row: Jevne & Wayne DeMarco, Ian and Chris Kernan. Not pictured are Ron and Karri Funk.

The families were welcomed to the congregation with special welcome gifts from Hope's Missions & Outreach Ministry Team. 




Holy Trinity Lutheran School in Tampa, Florida, is experiencing rapid enrollment growth. The Pre-K through 5th grade programs are full with 215 students for the 2023/24 school year. In February 2023, the church and school acquired an adjacent property that will serve as the home for middle school expansion. Next year the Holy Trinity's first 6th grade class will be in a modular classroom while renovations are made to the new property to accommodate a middle school. The Holy Trinity community has prayed over this property acquisition, and God answered. This school expansion will allow for more youth and families to meet Jesus Christ, which is the greatest blessing of all! 



From left — Pastor Daniel Prugh, Marti Fussell, Operations Manager; Carla Anderson, Bookkeeper; Dave Hoppe, Church President; Kelly Reilly, Principal; Tad Heape, Trustee; Anthony Sevelle, Campus Maintenance.



St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL's comfort dog, Jemimah, joined the FAU cheerleading squad last month celebrating Florida Atlantic University's 35 wins, undefeated home record, and participation in "the final four." 

Christ The King/Largo to Host Reed Lessing for Three-Day Seminar

Dr. Reed Lessing is a Professor of Theology and Ministry at Concordia University/ St. Paul, MN, and Director of the Center for Biblical Studies. With more than 20 years of parish ministry and 14 years as a professor at Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO, Reed is well-positioned to provide biblical resources for leaders in the LCMS and beyond. He is the author of five commentaries, has written three additional books on the Old Testament, including "Deliver Us: God's Rescue Story in Exodus" and "Overcoming Life's Sorrows: Studies in the Book of Jeremiah"

According to Pastor Joe Adams of **Christ The King/Largo, FL**, "It is his Jeremiah book that will be the catalyst for an upcoming in-depth study during a three day event in July. Continuing education credits are available."

Reed was ordained into the Office of the Holy Ministry on June 29, 1986, at Christ the Servant/West Monroe, LA, where he served as the church's pastor



until March of 1990. From March, 1990 to August, 1999 he was the pastor of Trinity/Broken Arrow, OK. Reed was on the faculty of Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO from 1999–2013 — earning the rank of full professor in 2011. He then served as Senior Pastor at St. Michael/Ft. Wayne, IN. Currently he is a professor of Theology of Ministry, Director for the Center of Biblical Studies, and Pre-Seminary Director at Concordia University in St. Paul, Minnesota.

"We're extremely enthusiastic

Seminar Schedule

Monday, July 17, 2023

1:00–5:00 p.m.

Tuesday, July 18, 2023

9:00 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

Wednesday, July 19, 2023


9:00–11:45 a.m.

Christ the King Lutheran Church
11220 Oakhurst Road
Largo, FL 33774

Information:

Pastor Joe Adams: (260) 410-6996

Email: pastorjoe@ctklc.org


about having Dr. Lessing host this seminar," Adams concluded. "Dr. Lessing brings an impressive blend of pastoral experience and scholarly expertise in the Old Testament. I expect a lot of discussion and conversations will develop during the event." 

Bethany Welcomes New Members





New members were welcomed in February to **Bethany/Leesburg, FL**. "Lent is supposed to be a season of penitence, but we

rejoiced this day to welcome 18 new members! In the past two years we've added almost 90 members and we give all glory

to God for what He's doing in our congregation and community!" exclaimed Pastor Mike Hanel. 



Abiding Savior/Gainesville, FL honored the ladies who volunteer throughout the year to prepare for weekly worship with a special appreciation breakfast on Sunday, February 26th. This occasion also offered the opportunity to especially recognize Muriel Young (at left with Pastor Graham Glover) who has led the altar team at Abiding Savior since the church was first established in 1991. "We praise the Lord for all of these humble servants who work tirelessly to prepare communion, care for paraments and banners, maintain sanctuary candles, and clean the chancel area weekly," Pastor Glover offers. "Their service is essential to the worship life of our congregation." 

Twenty-two students from the Imani Milele Children's Choir based out of Uganda, Africa performed for **Redeemer/Stuart, FL** students, parents and church members with an exhilarating Christ-centered presentation. The choir is beginning a six-month tour across the United States. 



Zion/Ft. Myers Member Participates in



Anais Mera-Sarnelli (far right) with her all-female Andromeda team at the launch pad on launch day, Tuesday, March 14, 2023

“Go For Launch’ was a pivotal experience that made me realize my passion for space and space exploration for which I am very grateful,” exclaims Anais Mera-Sarnelli a member of Zion/Ft. Myers, FL. Mera-Sarnelli is a confirmed member of Zion and was active in their youth group during her high school years.

In September, 2021, during her senior year at Dunbar High School in Ft. Myers, Mera-Sarnelli participated in a two-day event called “Higher Orbit: Go for Launch!” It was a competition in which groups designed an experiment under certain parameters which might be chosen to be tested in real life on the International Space Station.

Mera-Sarnelli was a member of an all-girl team that won their initial event and competed against other teams from across the nation.

The Andromeda experiment was one of four chosen to be flown on Space X CRS-27 mission in Space X’s Dragon capsule. That rocket launched on Tuesday, March 14, and docked with the International Space Station on Thursday, March 16.

The Andromeda experiment aims to test the growth rate of a radioactive resistant bacteria to see if it grows faster with the effects of gravity. If it does grow faster, do the structures of the bacteria remain intact? If so, the bacteria can be used for faster production of RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) vaccines. The bacteria will sit in a petri dish with a glucose nutrient broth to allow for growth. Its growth rate will be measured by light absorbance through the petri dish every 12 hours for a period of 30 days on the International Space Station.


As a result of participation in this project, Anais wrote several papers (including one on the history of the International Space Station), picked her college major and attended summer camp

Risen Savior Installs Alan Koch



Pastors Alan Koch and James Rockey

God’s Pantry is an outreach ministry of **Risen Savior/Palm Bay, FL**. In March the congregation celebrated both the installation of the Rev. Alan Koch as the vacancy pastor and the serving of the congregation’s 7 millionth meal! They hosted a “Pantry Sunday” that included worship, communion and a potluck lunch.

Each Wednesday a long line of cars snakes down Port Malabar Blvd. waiting to get to Risen Savior to be given some food. Former clients have now become volunteers to help with distribution. The average client is 59.5 years of age and the average family size is 4.2. Jimmy started volunteering at the age of 10 and used to attend chapel services. He and his mother are now members of Risen Savior. One day Risen Savior gave away a bottle of hand soap and the lady started crying. She only had \$1.04 and was .03 short of buying it from the Dollar Store. At the end of the month she would only have \$13.00 that had to go for gas or medicine. These are the people that make up the clients of “God’s Pantry.” Eight baptisms have resulted from this ministry during the past seven years. 

Participation in International Space Station Project

at NASA Space Center in Houston. She is currently a freshman at the University of Florida in Gainesville.

Coincidentally dozens of members of the District's Veterans of the Cross were sitting on the balcony at the St. Stephen Retreat Center in Titusville at the culmination of the event prepared to watch the launch — originally scheduled for 1 pm on Wednesday, March 8th. High winds and an errant boat drifting into dangerous territory prevented lift-off — which was delayed a few times before the successful March 14th launch. SpaceX delivered thousands of pounds of hardware and science experiments to the International Space Station as part of the uncrewed CRS-27 Dragon resupply mission.

Typical of these missions, this launch included scientific investigations and experiments, along with supplies needed for the Expedition 68 (and eventually Expedition 69) crew living and working aboard the outpost.

Investigations and hardware being carried to space aboard the spacecraft include a test of a student-designed camera mount, an investigation studying heart changes in microgravity, and an experiment looking at the behaviors of different surfaces that control biofilm creation, to name a few.


CRS-27 will remain at the Station for approximately a month before coming back to Earth with experiment results, samples, and other cargo, taking advantage of Dragon's sizable downmass capability. CRS-27 will utilize the same splashdown sites and recovery infrastructure used on all other Crew and Cargo Dragon flights.

Cargo Dragon 2 is currently the only spacecraft serving the ISS that can return significant amounts of cargo to Earth at this time. However, additional systems with return capability like the Sierra Space Dream Chaser and the Russian Soyuz GVK are in development. ▲



Anais Mera-Sarnelli at the Kennedy Space Center, Cape Canaveral, Florida. Below — The Dragon Space Capsule docking with the International Space Station on March 16, 2023 [photo courtesy NASA]



The Excel Club of **Grace Lutheran School/Jacksonville, FL**, is spreading the word that April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month. The Florida-Georgia District is partnering with the National Office of School Ministry to bring Ministry Safe training to all our Lutheran churches and schools at no cost to the local congregation. Sexual abuse of children is a quiet epidemic that impacts an average of 1:5 children nationally. 

Casey Schweim Placed as DCE in Boca Raton


St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL received some good news from Rebecca Duport, the placement director for the DCE program at Concordia University/Irvine, CA. She has placed Casey Schweim into a one-year internship with the congregation.



Schweim was born and raised in Puyallup, WA, a city located about 35 miles south of Seattle. The city's name comes from the Puyallup Tribe of Native Americans and means "the generous people." His home congregation is Immanuel, where Casey's mother serves as the DCE.

"Growing up in that environment I have seen and learned a lot. However, no matter the situation, God continues to show me that DCE ministry is my calling," Schweim said. "I spent my undergraduate


years at Concordia/Irvine, CA from 2019–2023 studying to become a DCE. I also minored in psychology with the hope of being a friendly ear for those who need it the most. Counseling and social psychology being my tools from this minor."

Schweim is a fitness buff and played varsity football for Puyallup High School until graduation. When he's not working he especially enjoys the gym. He's competed in some bodybuilding shows. "I love being active and finding myself out in God's creation. I like hiking, kayaking and fill up my down time being outdoors and doing things I love." 



St. Paul/Boca Raton Participates in District Music Festival in Lakeland

St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL's middle school music ensembles performed at the Florida–Georgia Music Festival held throughout the district annually in February. This year it was hosted by **St. Paul/Lakeland, FL**. The day is a valuable experience for student groups to perform for judges to receive

feedback to improve their musicianship and learn from watching peers from other Lutheran schools in their performances. St. Paul/Boca Raton had three ensembles represented: The Middle School Choir, Falcon Ringers, and Seventh Grade Handbells all directed by Rebecca Shaffer. 



Above — St. Paul's participating musicians. Below left, Falcon 7th & 8th grade ringers and at right demonstrating the singing bell technique.




Students Pack Snack Bags for Belle Glade Mission



Jodi Shegota



The Belle Glade mission is a partnership that St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL has developed with First Baptist Haitian Church in Belle Glade, FL. St. Paul's 2A class taught by Jodi Shegota worked with Vicar Anthony Sedotta to pack snack bags to support the mission. The bags are filled with food and notes written by St. Paul Students for Belle Glade's After School Program. 



Easter weekend at Grace/St. Petersburg, FL brought many baptisms and the sharing of new life. In the photo are those baptized — ranging in age from 8 to 66. God is so good!

Two District Educators Present at National Science Conference



Anne Fritz



Megan Hunt

Anne Fritz and Megan Hunt of **Faith Lutheran School/Eustis, FL** presented at the National Science Teachers Association Conference in Atlanta, GA in March. This is not a Christian conference, but they took their presentation: "Fostering Community Through Science: A Whole School Approach" to a national secular conference — enabling attendees to hear the Gospel through science. Their presentation was

respected by the National Science Teachers Association. They also presented at the local public high school to students in the "teaching academy" held there.

Fritz teaches 6th Grade Homeroom/Middle School Science and serves as physical education athletic director and coach for volleyball and basketball. She is a Concordia University/Chicago, IL undergraduate with a Masters degree in science education

from University of Central Florida. She has been teaching at Faith/Eustis since 2004.

Megan Hunt teaches 1st grade at Faith. She is also a Concordia/Chicago graduate with a Bachelor of Arts in early childhood. She earned her Masters in education from University of Central Florida in 2013 and has taught at Faith since 2008. 

Redeemer Presents Beauty and the Beast



All students from **Redeemer/Stuart, FL** performed "Beauty and the Beast" for a packed audience early in March. The K through 8 students led the entire show as cast, chorus, stage hands, sound and lighting crew. The production was directed by Redeemer's Joy Beach. ☩




Master craftsman Brad Ouellette, a member of **Redeemer/Stuart, FL** created a custom mailbox for their campus. The bell even rings when mail is delivered! ☩



FSU, UG Students Positively Charged



The campus ministries of **Florida State University** and the **University of Georgia** met together over the weekend of February 17-19 for a spiritual and fellowship retreat. The retreat's theme was "Positively Charged" and encouraged students to map out the many relationships they had on campus and throughout their lives so that they could better understand how to share the Gospel with the people that God had put around them. The entire retreat was hosted by **Christ/Perry, GA** which allowed the students to sleep in the church building and have their programming there. Programming was led by District Secretary Rev. Greg Michael, campus pastor at University of Georgia at far left in group photo, and Region 2 Vice President Rev. Jay Winters, campus pastor at FSU, at far right. 

Shepherd of the Coast/Fort Lauderdale Welcomes Chad Czischke



Pastor Chad Czischke (front row) with his two daughters, Lexi (left) and Aimsley and his wife, Jen. Back row, Pastor Bernard Julmiste, Grace Tabernacle Evangelical Lutheran/Fort Lauderdale with the three participants: Pastors Tim Hartner, Steve Carretto and Scott Gress. Below, Pastor Carretto calls the Czischke family forward for the blessing.



The Rev. Chad Czischke arrived in South Florida on February 18th and was installed the following day at **Shepherd of the Coast/Fort Lauderdale, FL**. Chad, Jen, Lexi and Aimsley Czischke barely had time to unpack the moving van!

Pastor Chad has been serving Family of Christ/Houlton, WI since 2015 while also serving in the Army National Guard as a military chaplain. He spent a nearly a year on two separate military deployments to Kuwait and Afghanistan. While on those assignments he and an assistant cared for the spiritual needs of more than 700 soldiers.

His first deployment took place in 2015 and his second in 2021. His congregation was enthusiastically behind him, seeing each deployment as part of their mission responsibilities. They viewed it as a way they can help members of the armed forces have the spiritual support while hearing about Jesus Christ.

According to Pastor Chad, filling both roles is no easy task. "It's hard to juggle work, home and military obligations, and it's especially difficult to leave my congregation and family for an extended period of time," he said. Yet, Czischke also has been able to speak of the hope he has in Christ to soldiers who are going through things that are painful or difficult. "It's the opportunity to serve people that probably would never step foot in a church."

The LCMS Minnesota South District, where Family of Christ is located, helped the congregation look at the options and ultimately find an intentional interim pastor. As the deployment drew closer, members of Family of Christ also began thinking about ways to support his family while he was away.


Pastor Chad talks about how a congregation can care for the family of a deployed chaplain. "One thing I've learned about military families is they are proud, they are independent," he said.

Shepherd of the Coast has been waiting a long time for a full-time pastor. They had a large candle placed on their altar that remained lit while they conducted a thorough search through the typical LCMS call process.

Following Pastor Chad's installation the president of the congregation came forward and extinguished that candle to the cheers and applause of the members and guests.


Shepherd of the Coast is comprised of three former LCMS congregations in Broward County: Peace/Fort Lauderdale, FL (which held the existing campus of Shepherd of the Coast), Grace/Fort Lauderdale, FL and Hope/Pompano Beach, FL. Each of those former congregations also had schools.

All three of those congregations contributed large crosses from their sanctuaries and all of them have been incorporated into the large cross that hangs above the altar. The front cross is gold, the middle cross is white and the rear cross is dark brown.

Florida-Georgia District Region 5 Vice President, The Rev. Stephen Carretto, was the presiding minister and preached. Participants also included The Rev. Tim Hartner, Emeritus, St. Paul/Weston, FL, The Rev. Scott Gress, Leadership Coach, Lutheran Counseling Services/Florida-Georgia District and various members of the congregation with Old Testament, Epistle and Holy Gospel readings. The organist was Phil Lehenbauer. 



First/Gainesville, FL Revives Chili Cookoff

A long tradition at **First/Gainesville, FL** is the annual chili cook off. Members brought their A-game chili recipes to the Fellowship Hall for a tough competition. The congregation hasn't held this event since 2019 due to the pandemic. This year it was enthusiastically revived. Along with the fellowship of eating chili together, a piñata for the kids, corn hole games, and a new contest — jalapeño eating for the brave — were added. First is happy to be worshipping and gathering for fellowship again. 



Cookoff winners, from left: Alex and Hayley Nusbickel, second place; Christa Vigil, third place; Maggie Spillane, first place.

Above — a table of ladies enjoying chili. At left — Pastor John Glover being encouraged by Congregation President Mark Hoyer and member David Jones as he makes his decision on his vote for best chili.

FSU Students Provide “Ashes-To-Go” For Lent Kickoff



University Lutheran/Tallahassee, FL, the campus ministry at Florida State University, engaged in an “Ashes to Go” outreach on FSU’s campus that was so well attended that the outreach ran out of pamphlets. The “Ashes to Go” outreach sought to engage students who would not normally attend an Ash Wednesday service. Instead, Rev. Jay Winters and several FSU students provided a pop-up experience that enabled students to go through a service of private confession and absolution, afterwards receiving the imposition of ashes. Students were invited to worship at University Lutheran that evening as well as the coming Sundays. 





St. John/Ocala Presents Christmas Labyrinth

Director of Family Life Ministry for **St. John/Ocala, FL**, Anette Shanks, found the idea of a labyrinth of Christmas lights and thought it could be modified to guide people through the Christmas story presented in the Gospels. A labyrinth is an ancient pathway set in concentric circles — meant for pause and reflection. Instead of a maze with dead-ends, it is a journey which leads to the center.

“We approached Don Kaufman, one of our members, with the idea and being a former drafting teacher he went to work designing the labyrinth and then recruited a crew to help construct it,” Shanks explains. “Typically a labyrinth is built out of stones or plants, but one



Anette Shanks



Jeff Shanks


constructed with lights posed extra challenges which they were able to figure out. They positioned 14 posts along the way to tell the story which Pastor Jeff Shanks wrote out. Each stop had a verse or two from the Scriptures along with reflection questions to bring this truth into our lives today.”

By the end of the Ocala Christmas Light Spectacular, which ran from the Friday after Thanksgiving through December 31st (not Christmas Eve or Day) approximately 11,000 vehicles came through the drive through which translated to more than 50,000 people. “Thousands

walked through the labyrinth and had the opportunity to pause and ponder the real Christmas story. In the center of the labyrinth was

the 10th ‘pause’ which was titled: ‘The Manger’ which included these verses from LUKE 2:6-7.

“While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest


room available for them.”
In the pictures, you glimpse the labyrinth from an aerial view from a drone photograph. 



Deaconess Intern Katherine Sanabria Installed in Bi-Lingual Palm Sunday Service

Palm Sunday was especially joyful at **Immanuel/Brandon, FL** this year. The congregation had the privilege and honor of inducting Katherine Guarin Sanabria in the Deaconess Ministry as an intern. Katherine is the wife of Pastor Miguel Sanabria, Associate Pastor for Hispanic Ministry. A special bi-lingual celebration included more than 50 children from the Sunday school and kindergarten through second grade. The children processed with a parade of palms and then sang to the congregation.

School Principal, Bonne Faherty, shared the children's message. After Palm Sunday homilies by Pastor Miguel in Spanish and Vacancy Senior Pastor, Dan Ritter, the Service of Induction took place. As part of that service, Katherine received her official blue cross Deaconess intern insignia which was presented to her by Deaconess Flor Sanabria, Pastor Miguel's mother.

The festive worship concluded with a congregational cookout featuring two giant bounce houses for all the children to enjoy. 



From left — Rev. Miguel Sanabria, Rev. Miguel Sanabria Jr, Deaconess Intern Katherine Guarin Sanabria, Deaconess Flor Sanabria, Rev. Dan Ritter




Jane Smith Named Early Childhood Director at Redeemer



Jane Smith, a Kindergarten Readiness teacher at **Redeemer/Stuart, FL**, is excited to step into the role of Redeemer's Early Childhood Director. She has more than 15 years experience working in Early Childhood.


"My passion is to teach, guide, and love children through Christ. I have two children who attend Redeemer and as a family we

have been so happy to be a part of such a great school. I look forward to continuing to be a part of Redeemer Lutheran Church and School," Smith said in her announcement.

Redeemer is well known in the community for exceptional educational programs, talented teams, and fostering relationships. They pride themselves on a blend of fun and learning in a safe environment that allows children to develop to their fullest potential in a Christian nurturing environment. 

Gainesville, GA Enjoys Spaghetti Supper & Carnivale

Good Shepherd/Gainesville, GA enjoyed Carnivale this year, their first since the pandemic limited large gatherings. The congregation has been hosting this event for many years — usually occurring on the last Saturday before Ash Wednesday. This year more than 90 people attended and raised \$633 for their Guatemala mission.


The evening begins with a spaghetti dinner where the church provides the noodles, salad and bread (thanks to an Action Team provided by Thrivent). This year they had 12 sauce entries for a contest. The winner was Dena Edge's Alfredo Sauce. Dinner was followed by a wide variety of desserts — lovingly made by Good Shepherd members. Leftover desserts were enjoyed again the next day at the congregation's our Bible Study. Entertainment ranged from a band playing favorite tunes to Erm's rendition of "If I Where a Rich Man" from Fiddler On The Roof. 



Plant City, FL Hosts Easter Egg-Stravaganza

On Saturday, April 8th the members of **Hope/Plant City, FL** once again hosted their Easter Egg-Stravaganza for the community. The event under the leadership of Hope's Christian Growth Ministry Team hosted a story time, a drama by Hope's youth, multiple crafts, food trucks, and every half hour an egg hunt. According to Ministry Team leader, Nora Trivunovich, "this was just another opportunity for us to reach out into our community, share the love of Jesus and connect people to Him."

Joining the fun this year was the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office who had special chocolate eggs to distribute to participants. "God truly opened doors and blessed us with many children and adults with opportunities to share the true meaning of Easter and our Easter joy," said Pastor Dean Pfeffer.

Pictured at the photo station are the three Sheriff's Deputies and Hope members, (from left) Evan Pfeffer, Jayla Lopez, Jalyn and Abby Aigner. 




Dennis Bartels Celebrated at St. Andrews/Hialeah

Pastor Dennis Bartels is retiring — and we'll believe it when we see it! One of the congregations that he has been serving — **St. Andrews/Hialeah, FL** — threw him a retirement luncheon on Wednesday, April 12th with a catered lunch by Mission BBQ.

The founders of Mission BBQ give back to the nation's heroes. They honor to honor America's military, police officers, firefighters and first responders.

Council president Bob Buhl (center below) read a proclamation saluting Pastor Bartels for the hands-on service he has diligently provided to the family of St. Andrews.

Dennis, and his wife Beth, plan to do some traveling this summer. Pastor Bartels also serves **Holy Cross/ North Miami, FL.** 



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Our Savior Youth Host Inaugural Bowling Tournament



At **Our Savior/St. Petersburg, FL** the Children & Youth Directors hosted the Inaugural Bowling Tournament as a way for the youth to raise funds for their Summer mission trips. They rented out an entire bowling alley and were able to sell out all 100 spots to members of the congregation and school families. All ages were invited to participate. They offered trophies for the highest scores, most spirited bowler, to the youngest

and oldest bowlers. This turned into a great fellowship event for the congregation as it allowed members to meet new friends and share in an evening of fun and laughter. The event was so successful members can't wait for the 2nd Annual Bowling Tournament next year, and the youth are so appreciative for the outpouring of support that ultimately helps fund their summer mission trips. 



Getting Out of the Salt Shaker

by Rev. Scott Gress

Pastor Jim had been adjusting with the changes the last few years. It has not been easy. Meanwhile, Todd, Joanne and not a few leaders in the church have been getting frustrated with the number of people who have not returned. They let people know about it too.

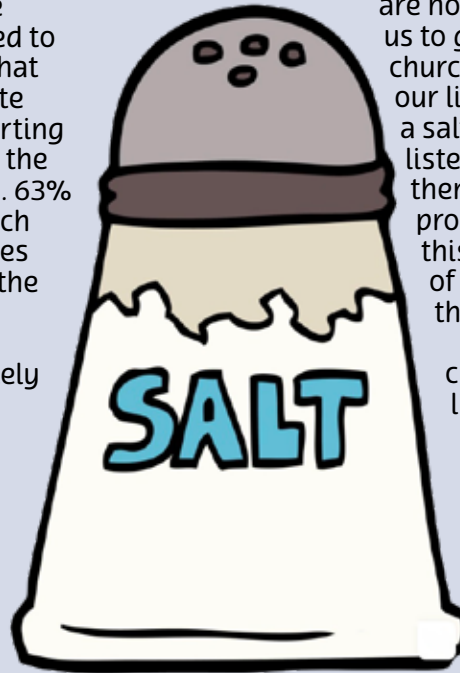
Certainly Pastor Jim agreed that a steady diet of the Word and Sacraments were essential. He missed those who seemed to have dropped out. Yet he also knew what Todd and Joanne and others didn't quite get: Well before the pandemic, the starting line for ministry had changed. Back in the 1950's, 95% self identified as Christian. 63% of Americans were members of a church body and 50% went to church. Churches and pastors were valued members of the community. There was an assumption and expectation that attendance was normal for "everyone" and unfortunately evangelism had been simplified to just being welcoming to visitors.

So Pastor Jim reminds people that things are very different now. People are not just going to show up in worship, especially visitors. People today have got other interests and assumptions of what is a good use of their time. However, Pastor Jim has also reminded them that 70% and more of the population wants to grow spiritually and they believe in God or a higher power. They also have common hurts, challenges and loneliness,

only made more acute from the pandemic.

So recently Pastor Jim preached on MATTHEW 5:13 where Jesus teaches that we are the salt of the earth. During the message, he asked, "What do you do with a salt shaker?" He was making the point that it only works when it gets it out of the salt shaker. Then he said that if people are not coming to us, then God is urging us to get out of the salt shaker of the church. Then, whoever God brings into our lives, we are to intentionally give a salty touch of "grace." Love them, listen to them, pray for them and serve them. Then, with regard to church programming, we first ask, "how can this help us get out of the salt shaker of the church and touch people with the salt of God's love and grace?"

The starting line has changed. The words of Jesus are likely more important than ever!



Rev. Scott Gress is a Professional Certified Coach and believes in Growing People for Ministry with a focus on leadership, discipleship and teamwork. Contact Scott if you are interested in working with him or your church. The Coaching Leader Podcast and YouTube channel are also

available. You can contact Scott through email scottgress@me.com or his website scottgress.com or at 561-542-4472



Lutheran Haven's Ladies Produce More than 4,000 Pairs of Earrings for Cancer Patients

Recalling the many faces of benevolence in scripture, Dorcas, or Tabitha, was an early disciple of Jesus mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles. She lived in the port city of Joppa, today absorbed by Tel Aviv. Acts describes her as being known for her "good works and acts of mercy," sewing clothes for the poor. She was constantly giving practical help to others. Her motivation was to please the Lord and serve.

The Ladies of Lutheran Haven follow her example every day. One example is Pat's group of ladies who make beautiful earrings for women going through the difficulties of cancer treatment. It's not unusual to sustain hair loss and being able to choose pretty earrings can help a woman reconnect to her femininity. This small group of ladies produced more than 4,000 pairs of earrings as gifts, and as a reminder that despite this daunting challenge, their beauty remains undiminished. More importantly, they are being remembered in prayer during a very difficult time.



Ted Andrada Installed at Redeemer/Stuart

The Rev. Ted Andrada was installed March 5, 2023 as Senior Pastor Intentional Interim at **Redeemer/Stuart, FL**. He is a native of Minnetonka, MN — a western suburb of Minneapolis.

Andrada is the 3rd straight generation in his family to serve as clergy in the LCMS. The clergy side (his mother's side) came from Germany.

Grandpa Arthur Dahms served a congregation of 4,000 members in Chicago, IL which having a passion for deaf ministry.

Throughout Andrada's childhood through college years he lived in Minnetonka, MN. Both parents were public school teachers. His father was an elder and played dart ball in the congregation while his mother taught Bible study and Jr. High Sunday School for 17 years.

"I attended Concordia College (now University) in St. Paul/ MN.

God drew me closer to Him through several professors and clergy," Pastor Andrada explains. "I began to study as a business major which changed to an education major and then pre-seminary. I did not grow up wanting to be a pastor but was drawn into it slowly over the years.

"I graduated with a B.A. in Social Science and was very close to minors in



Rev. Ted Andrada,
with District President
James Rockey

Language and Business. At seminary I continued to grow and expand interests in missions and multicultural ministry. I had begun studying Spanish in Jr. High and this interest led me to serve a vicarage in a Spanish speaking congregation in Miami, FL. I also served in an English-speaking vicarage. On Call Day I was surprised to find that I was being sent to an African American congregation in the deep south." According to Andrada, during this call his interests in pastoral leadership and administration began to grow.

"I served five congregations — each one being the equivalent to a secular job promotion. I went from being the sole pastor in a small congregation to assistant pastor in a large congregation, to senior pastor in a medium sized congregation, to senior pastor in a very large congregation to senior pastor in another very large congregation.

"I have led five ministry building projects. I have baptized, taught, confirmed, married and


buried thousands of people. I have significant experience in travelling overseas for missions in Africa, Mexico, and the Bering Strait of Alaska. I have also attended our LCMS National Youth Gatherings since 1983. Along the way I have enjoyed ministering to many people and making many friends with whom I still keep in contact to this day. I have also been blessed to meet and become friends

with amazing clergy in our synod from whom I have gleaned a great deal of wisdom and insight."

Andrada is married to Jacquie and they'll celebrate their 30th anniversary this August. They have four adult children.

Andrada has Intentional Interim Ministry Training and has served five congregations prior to Redeemer/Stuart.

"I am especially good at using a healthy process to lead a congregation in goal setting. I have a passion for Lutheran Schools and for years have enjoyed being the championship game announcer and occasional cameraman at the Lutheran Basketball Association of America's (LBAA) 'Tournament of Champions.' I also have a place in my heart for church workers. I am a proponent of church leaders 'sharpening their swords' by the attending 'Best Practices For Ministry' conference each year at which I have been a presenter.

"I look forward to working with the leaders and members of Redeemer in the days to come. It is my hope and prayer that God will use me to be a blessing, as He has so graciously blessed me throughout my life," Andrada concludes. 

Remembering Edward "Papa" Fischer

Editor's note — as the Florida-Georgia District celebrates our 75th Anniversary, Lutheran LIFE will be profiling some of the "Pioneers of the District." Special thanks and credit to President Emeritus Gerhard C. Michael, Jr., Charles Hofman and Eileen Bishop-List for research, compiling and editing of the biographies.

Pastor Edward Fischer strapped his saddlebags packed with Bibles and Concordia prayer books onto his horse and set out down the lonely road flanked by live oaks. The towering trees draped with Spanish moss formed Gothic arches in the cathedral-like Florida forests. It was 1898, when dirt roads led to isolated Lutherans homesteading on the frontiers of Florida.

A traveling pilgrim and pioneer on horseback, "Papa" Fischer was the archetype of the first Missouri Synod pastors in Florida who served as circuit riders. He was born in Red Bud, IL, and graduated from Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO in 1894. The Southern District commissioned Candidate Fischer to serve the new congregation of **Zion/Gotha, FL**, a small German-Lutheran community of grove owners transplanted from the Midwest. Fischer established a small mission in Apopka that same year.

Gotha had about 15 Lutheran families and was a four-hour ox cart ride from Orlando. It was the central post for the first Missouri Synod circuit riders who traveled by horse, mail packet, train or cart to the west and east coasts of South Florida. When the Great Freeze of 1895 caused thousands to leave Florida, Fischer was reassigned in Florida to Palatka and then to Tampa. It was here that he began a Sunday School, taught in the day school and led confirmation class where he met his future wife, Sophia DeVedig. By 1897, the 76 members of **Zion/Tampa, FL** increased the Sunday School and continued support of the Ladies Aid Society.

In 1898 Fischer returned to Gotha as a circuit rider on horseback, seeking Lutherans along the untamed frontier of Southeast Florida. This necessitated tramping through trails infested with rattlesnakes and choked with cabbage palms and palmettos. He found Lutherans living in Titusville and Lake Worth. At the Florida East Coast railway station in Delray Beach, he met Adolf Hofman, a German-Lutheran immigrant holding worship services in his home. Fischer visited the Hofman home twice a year and held worship and communion services. He left Bibles and a Concordia sermon and prayer book for them before **Trinity/Delray Beach, FL** was officially organized in 1904.

Traveling by foot, horseback and canal boat, Fischer explored the southeast coast. He saw this subtropical area as a vast mission field. He finally reached the tiny town of Miami. Fischer trekked west and served a small group of Lutherans in Larkins, (now Coral Gables). He tramped north through muck land and sugar cane fields to minister to Lutherans in Chosen, (now Belle Glade).

Near the turn of the century, Fischer visited Fort Myers to investigate starting a congregation. In 1931 he was asked to visit Gainesville to lead worship services in the living room of the Emil and Richard Wenzel families. **St. Matthews/Gainesville, FL** (now First Lutheran) was started as an outgrowth of his endeavors. Fischer also canvassed the Ocala area, baptized one child, and discussed with several families the formation of churches.

During the 1930s and 40s he went on to plant new missions in Titusville, Mims

and Cocoa Beach. By now Edward Fischer was well respected as the patriarch of LCMS missions in Florida and was well known simply as "Papa." His pioneer explorations had taken him through

almost all of Florida in his desire to spread the Gospel in a vast and growing mission field. As the reality of World War II came to Florida, Rev. Fischer served POWs in the central part of the state. At one Christmas

Eve service congregation members invited the German prisoners to attend worship. Church members stood in reverence as the prisoners tearfully sang their German Christmas carols and joined in worship.

Eventually Fischer's horse was replaced by the horsepower of automobiles to better serve the Lord in reaching people. Crumbling rock roads and thickets of palmettos gave way to concrete highways and landscaped palms. Christ's Gospel traveled farther and faster on these new roads to reach others with God's message of salvation. Yet pioneer fortitude and faith remained the trademarks of Papa Fischer as he continued his endless trek down these roads. Having fought the Florida frontier for Christ, Edward Fischer retired in 1955 as the revered pioneer patriarch of the District.



The LAST WORD

by John List, Editor



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First Our Mascot. Now Our Art Collection!

Valparaiso University, my alma mater, is in the national news again — the Chicago Tribune and even the New York Times front page! I wish this exposure were centered around athletic accomplishments . . . or academics. The recent exposure is centered around the arts — and not in a good way. Valpo's **Brauer Museum of Art** is an recognized collection of 19th, 20th, and 21st-century American and international religious art. It doesn't rival the Vatican Museums but is a notable collection located on campus in a seven gallery facility. Admission is free not just to students and faculty but to anyone.

What is attracting national attention is resistance to President José Padilla's decision to sell the three most valuable paintings in the collection to renovate Brandt and Wehrenberg dormitories. His goal is to create a freshman village more attractive to prospective first year students. I lived in Brandt in the early 70s before moving into my fraternity house. It was old then. No one disputes the fact we need to boost enrollment and I understand that today's college students expect the best technology and creature comforts available — or they'll seek educational opportunities elsewhere. Padilla is three-years new to Valpo. He has convinced the board of directors to deaccess our three most valuable pieces in the Brauer collection to finance the renovation. Deaccession is the process through which an artifact or work of art in a museum collection is either sold or given away.

One of my fraternity brothers is a member of the Brauer Collection Committee for Valpo and he confirms the committee was never even consulted. Traditionally, when a museum sells works of art, the proceeds can only go to building or improving the collection. Nothing else. In fact, those were the terms of the trust agreement that

Valparaiso accepted with Percy Sloan, who in 1953 donated to the University his personal art collection with an endowment which formed the nucleus of what is today the Brauer Museum of Art. President Padilla's action was being kept secret and people with knowledge of this action were required to keep silent. Only lately has Padilla gone public with his plan.



Georgia O'Keeffe's "Rust Red Hills"



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Just two years ago Valparaiso University announced that it had adopted the "Beacons" as its new team mascot name, replacing the "Crusaders," a term school officials claimed had been embraced by hate groups. That decision came after a decades-long debate that intensified because groups such as the Ku Klux Klan began using the words and symbols of the Crusades. Apparently being a Crusader of Christ wasn't considered strong enough rhetoric.

And now we alumni have to stand and watch as Valpo intends to sell a trio of artworks by Georgia O'Keeffe, Frederic Edwin Church, and Child Hassam estimated to be worth more than \$20 million to fund improvements to freshman dormitories.

Ouch! O'Keeffe's "Rust Red Hills" was appraised at \$15 million in 2016. Student resistance has been loud — especially those close to the arts. Petitions have been signed by students, faculty and administration. Richard Brauer, the museum's namesake and founding director, is against the plans to sell the works. If the university goes through with it, the retired art professor wants his name removed from the doors of the institution. The lead donors — the Urschel family — gave a \$3 million gift to the university on the condition that the museum's 17,000-square-foot facility be named after Brauer. The artwork is irreplaceable and has put the university on a global stage in the distinguished art world. Again, no one is disputing that freshmen deserve nice dormitories. However this type of fund raising degrades the Valpo community.

I don't have the answer for funding or increasing enrollment — which is down to about 60% of 2015's numbers when the campus boasted 4,544 students.

Padilla has emphasized that he's not closing down the museum and these are three paintings of more than 5,000 in the collection. "We recognize there are some on this campus and in the community who disagree with this action. We know it's very heartfelt. These pieces have been part of the collection for years, and we respectfully disagree because we believe this will ultimately meet our mission of providing a first-rate student and academic experience," Padilla concluded. Padilla wants to renovate Brandt and Wehrenberg over the course of 2024 and have them ready for incoming students envisioning "a freshman village."

I actually like the idea! I just wish I knew how to make it happen without destroying one of our most prized possessions. ☹️