

LUTHERAN LIFE

Florida-Georgia District LCMS
November/December, 2023



**St. John/Ocala Prepares for
Annual Christmas Light Spectacular
November 24 to December 30**

Story Page 23

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

08/14/23..... Rev. David Bass | Ohio (O)
08/31/23..... Rev. Richard Mokry | Eastern (O)
09/01/23..... Rev. Eric Luhman | Missouri (O)
10/01/23..... Rev. Patrick Galligar | N. Illinois (O)

Transferred Out of FLGA to Other Districts

07/24/23 Ms. Sandra Sibley | to Oklahoma (C)
08/01/23..... Dcs. Andra Gates | to S. Dakota (C)

Ordinations & Installations

08/13/23..... Ms. Michelle Pitts, DCE to Our Savior/Plantation, FL (O)
09/10/23..... Rev. Justin Pahl, Sole Pastor to Holy Trinity/Lutz, FL (O)
09/10/23..... Rev. David Bass/Senior Pastor to St. Michael/Fort Myers, FL (O)
10/08/23..... Rev. Patrick Galligar, Sole Pastor to Faith/Lecanto, FL (O)

Called to Glory

09/02/23.... Rev. Martin Renner (O)
09/03/23.... Rev. Robert Elsner (O)
09/27/23.... Rev. Manfred Poepfel/ (O)
10/16/23..... Mr. Donald Ross (C)
10/16/23..... Ms. Sara Footlander (C)

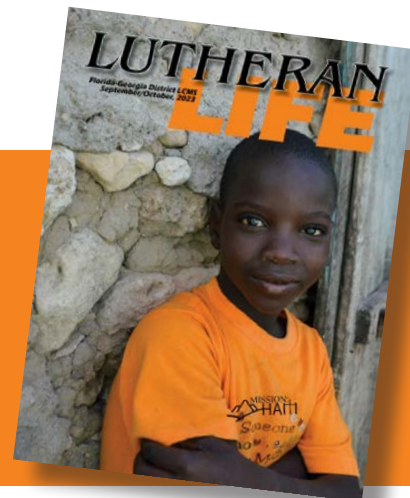
Status Change

07/01/23 Rev. Roger Schoolcraft from Active to Emeritus (O)

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


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John Roth Selected for Florida Gulf Coast University Leadership Institute

Florida Gulf Coast University Athletics will select from applicants a few to experience the E.A.G.L.E. Leadership Institute for a given year. This year, Pastor John Roth, **Thrive/Estero, FL**, has been asked to lead two sessions in September and October on Leadership and Character. It is another opportunity to meet with various students and parts of FGCU to connect them to more than the wisdom of leadership principles, but the underlying reality God has for us as those created in God's image.

Congregation leaders of Thrive are working alongside Pastor Roth and others at FGCU to hold an open forum concerning some campus preachers, who, sadly, give Christianity a bad name. They have verbally attacked some students and provoked them. (The word they preach has no Gospel in it, but judgment and condemnation alone and gives a distorted view of God.) Thrive and Roth hopes to train a group of students to encourage others not to interact with these preachers so they have less incentive to come on campus, and to let FGCU students know the Christian student groups are much different. 



— Be strong through the grace that God gives you in Christ Jesus. You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others. (NLT, 2 Timothy 2: 1-2).

We sometimes hear about traditional trades and crafts being in danger of dying out or being lost. If such skills and crafts are to endure, they need those who now practice them to pass-on the knowledge and techniques to others. Otherwise, the skills and crafts die out with the craftsman.

To some extent, the same goes for matters of faith. If our faith is to accomplish that for which it is intended and not just survive but thrive, we need to ensure future generations will know what the Christian faith is about and how to receive God's gifts of grace and live it out. Our faith may be intensely personal,

but it's not meant to be just private. We can't keep it to ourselves as a precious possession. On the contrary, it needs to be passed on!

Today, as I write this article, I received news that the Senior Pastor I served with as Associate Pastor in my first congregation, died yesterday. Pastor Dan Otto was a man who helped to shape and mold me during the early years of my ministry into the pastor I became. He had 37 years of ministry experience when I arrived in 1998. Yet his deep faith and passion for seeing Christ's Church grow was as fresh and strong as the day he left the seminary in 1961.

Dan loved discipling people both formally and in the daily walk of life. He knew how to be a friend, how to listen, how to help people understand things of

faith and God Himself. He loved to pass-on, to teach the truths of God to others! Dan believed that being a Christian was not just about religion. Instead, it was to be intertwined with our whole life and being. Dan sought to live as an Along-Sider. I believe the words of our reading from Peter were likely a driving force in how he sought to pass-on to others the gift of God's grace in Christ. "Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be



GIVING THANKS... BY PASSING IT ON

Living as an Along-Sider

able to pass them on to others."

As we journey through this season of "thanksgiving," I am overflowing with thanks for the many Along-Siders in my life. People like vicars who influenced me as a youth like Mike Mast, Brian Kneser, or my brother and fellow pastor, Jonathan, my neighbor Mrs. Pabisch, Sunday school teachers like Judy Helling, youth leaders, college professors like Dr. Frahm and Dr. Stalhke, my accountability partners and more. The truth is, as I think about it, I've regularly had people who have been Along-Siders in passing on the truths of our faith, so that I would be able to pass them on to others.

You might be a little surprised that I am writing about **Living as Along-Siders: Disciples Making Disciple Makers**, knowing that

our Conference under that theme has past. Yet this is no mistake. The theme and focus of our President's Equip Conference was not meant to be "one and done!" Instead, our prayer is that each of us will continue to grow in coming along-side of others and walking with them in life that they too may experience the "joy of the Lord's salvation."

Our belief is that Living as Along-Siders is one of the most powerful ways for us to honor our Lord's command to "go and make disciples," to "be His witnesses" and to "love our neighbors as ourselves."

During the coming weeks, as you reflect upon your life and all your blessings, I pray you will take time to remember and give thanks...to give thanks for those who came Along-Side of you and helped you to understand and believe the incredible truths of our faith! Then

as you consider those individuals, I encourage you to respond with the psalmist when he says: I will give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds. (PSALM 9: 1). Yes, let us give thanks by passing it on to others that they too may begin **Living as Along-Siders: Disciples Making Disciple Makers!**



*Living as an
Along-Sider*
*James
Rockey*

Veterans of the Cross Retreat Announces

Plans are moving along for the annual Veterans of the Cross retreat, the event geared toward retired church workers and their spouses. Held at the St. Stephen Retreat Center in Titusville, Florida, it will commence on Monday, March 4th and conclude on Wednesday, March 6, 2024.

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.

"This year's theme is 'Pace for the Race,'" said event chairperson Ruth Wiedenmann. "As people enter retirement, a major question one might ask is 'What does God want me to do with

my remaining time in this world? This is critically important!"

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). For Paul, the goal of that race was to finish strong (2 TIMOTHY 4:7).

In order to reach that goal, Paul set everything else aside, keeping his eyes fixed firmly on the prize. (PHILIPPIANS 3:14).

"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," Wiedenmann continued. "There is an urgent need to persevere to serve the Lord. Let us find the pace that will see us over the finish line. Come to the 2024 Veterans of the Cross Retreat and rediscover God's purpose for your

life and advancing the cause of His Kingdom."

Keynote speakers are Ron & Barb Pennekamp; Bible study leader is Craig Mathews and Vic Belton will serve as proclaimer at the divine worship.



Ruth Wiedenmann
VOC Retreat Chairperson

VETERANS *of the* CROSS

Retreat registration will open in December and will be available online through the FLGA District website (flgadistrict.org) Newly retired workers are encouraged to contact the FLGA District office at 407-857-5556 x8 with any questions.

Mark your calendars now to ensure participation. ☩




"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

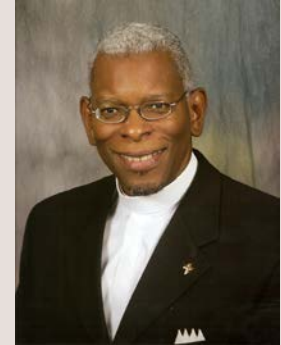
March 4- 6 2024 • St Stephen Retreat Center • Titusville, Florida
Registration opens in December

Speakers, Dates, Place and Theme



Divine Service Proclaimer Vic Belton

The Rev. Dr. Victor J. Belton serves as 1st Vice President of the Florida-Georgia District and the Manager of REV7:9 He has been a Mission Facilitator for the Florida-Georgia District, served his alma mater, Concordia/New York, as campus pastor and Founding Director of the Center for Contextual Leadership. Belton served 27 years as pastor of **Peace/Decatur, GA**. He served 12 years on the LCMS Board of Directors and as a proclaimer for three LWML conventions. Belton has also worked extensively in youth ministry and LCMS Youth Gatherings. Belton wrote daily devotions for Portals of Prayer in conjunction with Concordia Publishing House and has commentary to be included in The Great Sending II. He is married to Wenona and has one foster son Michael. He enjoys time on the beach, bike riding and spending time with family and friends. 




Keynote Speakers Ron & Barb Pennekamp

The Rev. Ron and Barb Pennekamp have been married for 51 years and have been blessed with 7 children and 19 grandchildren. They have served congregations in Indiana, Kentucky, Illinois and Florida — Ron as a Lutheran pastor and Barb as a Lutheran school teacher. While they are now officially retired, They remain active in ministry — accurately refired and repositioned to advance the Kingdom of God.

The Pennekamps have served as short term missionaries in Russia, China, Panama, Guatemala, and Mexico. Their passion is to seek and save the lost and disciple others who will do the same.

"After praying for three years, asking God 'What do you want us to do together now to advance your Kingdom?' His answer is 'Reach your neighborhood, encourage the pastors and their wives and families in your circuit, and help a dying congregation, by becoming "Alongsiders" who encourage, help and serve.'" Pastor Pennekamp offers.


They continue to learn how to disciple others, and their newest discovery is "Information without relationship leads to knowledge, but information with relationship leads to transformation." The key to healthy relationships is shared joy which is the fertile soil for the knowledge of Christ to develop in.

"To continue strong in life's journey we need to fuel our brains with joy. Joy is the second fruit of the Spirit after love. What is Joy's source? What is Joy's outcome? We will discover "Joy for the journey," in our Veterans of the Cross gathering," he concluded. 

Bible Study Leader Craig Mathews

The Rev. Craig Mathews is a graduate of Concordia/St. Paul, MN as a Director of Christian Education. He served as a DCE for 20+ years at St. John's/Port Washington, WI, Peace/Neenah, WI and Beautiful Savior/Omaha NE. After attending Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO in the Alternate Route Program, he served for more than 20 years as a Pastor at Faith/Chippewa Falls, WI and ultimately at Hope/Bradenton, FL.

"While serving in Chippewa Falls, I became more serious about maintaining and improving my physical fitness," Mathews offers. "I competed in several Sprint Triathlons. After moving to Florida, my focus turned to competing in the annual Fight for Air Climb in Tampa, which was a race up 46 flights of stairs at a bank in downtown Tampa. Wanting to help others in the fitness journey, I became certified with the American Council on Exercise in 2016 and began working part-time at the Bradenton YMCA as a Fitness Coach and Personal Trainer."

Mathews retired from full-time pastoral ministry in May of 2020, but his work for the Lord still continues as he has served as a vacancy pastor and in April of 2023 have completed training as an Intentional Interim Pastor. Pastor Mathews is presently serving **Redeemer/Englewood, FL** in that capacity. 



District Celebrates 75th Anniversary During Triennial Presidents Equip Conference

The largest Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod “District Gathering” — not just nationwide but worldwide — was hosted by the Florida-Georgia District September 28-30 at the Hilton Buena Vista Palace in Disney Springs. Lay leaders, congregation members, District pastors, educators, commissioned ministers and church and school administrators came together in a conference that presented powerful keynote speakers, opportunities for practical workshops to equip servants of every walk for ministry and discipleship.

The 2023 President’s Equip Conference was themed ‘LIVING AS ALONG-SIDERS — Disciples Making Disciple Makers!’

“More than 50 workshop opportunities were available,” offered The Rev. Tom Eggebrecht, chairman of the event planning

committee. “These workshops offered practical information, personal growth, and new insights to use in home congregations, schools, ministries, and the community.”


Keynote speakers included:

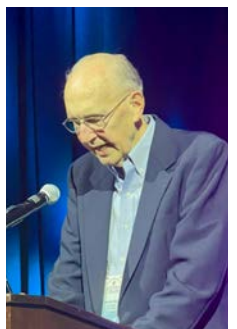
- The Rev. Greg Finke, a neighborhood missionary in League City, TX, a Houston subdivision. Finke and his wife are best known for coming alongside a congregation and leaders to determine the congregation’s level of readiness for engaging the Father’s redemptive mission with Jesus.
- The Rev. Dr. David Kim, founder of a non-profit ministry called Glocal Mission also based in Houston, TX, under the ecclesiastical supervision of the Texas District of the LCMS.
- Leah Abel, a facilitator who designs events for teachers, youth leaders, and clergy as well as managing large events like the LCMS Youth Gathering and the Lutheran

Education Association Convocation.

All three keynoters proclaimed the theme ‘LIVING AS ALONG-SIDERS — Disciples Making Disciple Makers!’”

The Presidents Equip Conference completely sold out several weeks beforehand as the capacity was reached for attendance in the main ballroom of the conference facility.

Anniversaries were celebrated. Karaoke was performed. Worship was especially powerful with a mixture of contemporary and traditional music. The message was delivered by FLGA 1st VP, The Rev. Dr. Victor Belton. 



LUTHERAN LEGENDS

Florida-Georgia District LCMS Presidents Equip Conference



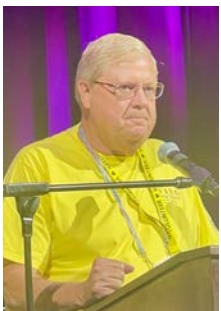
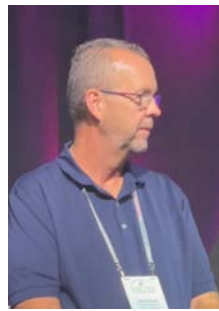
Special guests and true Lutheran Legends were welcomed to the stage during the President's Equip Conference. They are shown here, from left, President Emeritus Gerhard Michael and his wife Joan; President James Rockey and his wife Martha; President Emeritus Thomas Zehnder; President Emeritus Greg Walton and his wife Edith; Schools and Youth Ministry Executive Emeritus Mark Brink and his wife Mary Beth. 

Presidents Equip Conference



Pastor Dan Prugh (left), Holy Trinity/Tampa, FL, served as the moderator for the panel discussion involving questions and answers for the keynote speakers.

Leah Abel, David Kim and Greg Finke responded to questions with informative responses resulting in plenty of spirited discussion. 



Presidents Equip Conference

2023 Educator Anniversaries Celebrated at the PEC

10 Years

Jessica Anaya
 Lisa Casey
 Jessica Claxton
 Betsey Courtney
 Anne Dobbins
 Elaine Futch
 Emily Gierse
 Gary Hickey
 Karen Jackman
 Katie Lane
 Amanda Moratelli
 Lucy Mulford
 Tammy Owens
 Keisha Reynolds
 Lisa Slavin
 Sue Stark
 Christine Szesnat
 Celeste Wilcox
 Susie Woods

15 Years

Angie Burr
 Trisha DePasquale
 Stephanie Edgar
 Melissa Fowler
 Kellica Neptune
 Jess Potter
 Jennifer Reese
 Sara Willocks

20 Years

Jennifer Follett
 Jennifer Kard
 Chris Miller
 Mary Rode
 Rick Ruedlinger
 Ronda Schwartz
 Kisha Torres
 Kelly Weeks
 Michael Wenzlaff

25 Years

Susan Bain
 Karen Blank
 Nichole DuBois
 Eric Gerken
 Peggy Jo Griffin
 Doug Meissner
 Lyn Senkarik
 Michelle Spellman

30 Years

Priscilla Flynn
 Stephanie Letournea
 Wendy Nika
 Carol Schroeder
 Lynn Tomich
 Sharon Wallace
 Liana Diaz

35 Years

Liana Diaz
 Denise Gosch
 Susan Hopper
 Jim Richards
 Cindy Sharman

40 Years

Mark Abresch
 Edna Busch
 Brenda Dobler
 Karen Smith

45 Years

Beth Ahrens

50, 55 & 60 Years

Frank Ahrens
 Ralph Utech
 Carl Schiefer



2023 Clergy Anniversaries Celebrated at the PEC

10 Years

Pastor Richard Cox
 Pastor Andre Mezilus
 Pastor Joseph Signore

15 Years

Pastor Troy Countryman
 Pastor Michael Hanel
 Pastor Bernard Julmiste
 Pastor Daniel Prugh

20 Years

Pastor Steve Anderson
 Pastor Thomas Beaverson
 Pastor Mark Eisold
 Pastor Wilton Heyliger
 Pastor Chris Johnson
 Pastor Anthony Mandile

25 Years

Pastor Richard Browning
 Pastor Robert Davis
 Pastor Timothy Davis
 Pastor Daniel McPherson
 Pastor Michael Popp
 Pastor James Rockey
 Pastor Kevin Yoakum

30 Years

Pastor Edward "Ted" Andrada
 Pastor Paul Burtzlaff

35 Years

Pastor Daniel Bartley
 Pastor C. Scott Gress
 Vicar Deon Hull
 Pastor Patrick McKenzie
 Pastor Luis Santana
 Pastor Thomas Wenndt

40 Years

Pastor Dana Brones
 Pastor Richard Norris

45 Years

Pastor Michael Mast
 Pastor Wayne Riddering

60 Years

Pastor Alan Koch



Cris Escher, John Roth, Mark Brink and Meschac St-Amour take a moment to discuss how their organizations might collaborate to bring relief to the people of Haiti. Escher and St-Amour are with Habitat for Children Ministries and Roth and Brink are with Mission: Haiti.

Take a Look at PEC Participants:

Pastors	136
Vicars	5
Deaconesses	7
Volunteer Youth Leaders, DCE, DCM, DFLM.....	22
Educators & School Administrators	564
Lay people.....	235

Participants 969

District Hosts LCMS Second

For the second time in the past year, the FLGA District was privileged to host the LCMS Black Clergy Conference (BCC). **St. Paul/Jacksonville FL** was the host congregation in Spring, and this past October 9-12, **Rivercliff/Sandy Springs, GA** hosted the group of nearly 100 participants from across the nation.

Under the theme, "Empowering and Advancing the Next Generation," the BCC has developed a five-point Vision:

▲ 1. ~ **Communication** — keeping the church at large in touch and up to date with news and issues impacting ethnic groups within the church.

▲ 2. ~ **Ministry Focus** — creating multi-generational dialog between church leaders and members that leads to a mind-shift which strives to engage people who are not currently engaged.

▲ 3. ~ **Ownership** — encouraging congregations and partners in Black Ministry to invest financial and other resources which will advance Black Ministry for the sake of the next generation.

▲ 4. ~ **Recruitment** — identifying individuals for professional church work and congregational leadership.

▲ 5. ~ **Revitalization** — intentionally partnering with congregations, schools, institutions, agencies and partner ministries to recreate, reorganize and restructure in a way that effectively reaches the next generation.

The Rev. Dr. S. T. Williams, Jr., St. Paul Lutheran, Los Angeles CA., serves the BCC as President. Rev. Dr. Victor Belton, FLGA District 1st Vice President and Rev. Dr. Wilton Heyliger, pastor of Incarnate Word, Stone Mountain, GA., worked with Atlanta area pastors Terrell Davis and Carl Morten to prepare a vibrant program. Sisters in the Spirit, led by DCE Michelle Pitts, **Our**



Above: Victor Belton, FLGA District 1st Vice President with Jeff Jordan, pastor of Rivercliff/Sandy Springs, GA. Above right: The Rev. Dr. Dien Ashley Taylor, Atlantic District President of the LCMS. He is the first black District President in the LCMS.



Above: Peter Meier, FLGA Executive Director | Missions & Outreach with Lophane Laurent Field Director, Mission: Haiti. At right: Wilton Heyliger, pastor at Incarnate Word/Stone Mountain, GA addresses the conference.

Savior/Plantation FL, offered a program for women. Global mission work and mission partners, worship and fellowship, along with the Five-Point Vision were the focus. Wednesday afternoon featured a bus trip to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Center, Historic Black College

and Universities in Atlanta, Olympic Park, and dinner at Historic Pascals Restaurant.

The next BCC is planned for April 9-11, 2024 at Concordia Theological Seminary/ Fort Wayne, IN. For more information, contact Rev. ST Williams, pastorwilliamsjr@yahoo.com.

Black Clergy Conference

Black Clergy Conference



Photos are of the Black Clergy Conference — both members and guests. The ladies are primarily the spouses of the pastors and some are members of "Sisters in the Spirit" — a faith-filled ministry made up of women of color, promoting Christian principles and a positive self-image in the family, church, African and African-American Communities, and in the larger community. They were addressed by Michelle Pitts, DCE at Our Savior/Plantation, FL (inset at right).



Stepping Stones' New Life Village Benefits from FLGA District Grant and Kingdom Seeds Program

Natural disasters have affected communities across the globe this past year to some degree. **Stepping Stone Ministry's New Life Village** property was among those affected by the storms.

Extremely cold winter weather in December, 2022 resulted in a major pipe bursting leading to flooding in the main house. This incident followed the completion of some major renovations. This situation turned out to be significant setback for the ministry taking place at New Life Village.

A disaster relief grant from the Florida-Georgia District helped make a significant difference.

In addition to the winter pipe burst issue, New Life Village property also was impacted by the tornado weather that hit Georgia in 2023 — leading to significant damage to their barn. Volunteer leaders associated with Stepping Stones ministry



quickly replaced the barn roof and workers also completed construction of the outdoor worship space which was supported through a FLGA District Kingdom Seeds Grant.

Above photo — New Life Village's Barn. 

Boots, Bowties and Bling Gala Held for Redeeming Life




Sheryl DeWitt, Executive Director of Redeeming Life Ministries, addresses guests at the gala.

The Redeeming Life Maternity Home Gala was held on October 14, 2023. Motivated by God's grace, Redeeming Life Outreach Ministries seeks to reach out with the love of Christ to support single expectant and postpartum mothers. This is done 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.

Redeeming Life is a pro-life ministry that supports the mothers, whether they choose to place their baby for adoption or to parent. Either way, they walk alongside them in their journey. Every woman who calls Redeeming Life home will find help, love, and support.



Shown above are Rev. Tige Culbertson/St. Luke's, Oviedo; Rev. Kris Whitby, Asst. to the President, Northern Illinois District; Rev. Wally Arp/St. Luke's, Oviedo; Rev. Ed DeWitt/Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, Sanford, FL. Pastor DeWitt, Co-founder, President and Chairman of the Board for Redeeming Life Outreach Ministries; Rev. W.R. Vinovskis, SELC District President; Rev. James Rockey, President, FLGA District. 

FLORIDA GEORGIA

Out and About in the District



Trinity/Toccoa, GA held a back-to-school bash late August offering school supplies and backpacks to the community. ☩



Trinity/Athens, GA celebrates Pastor Timothy and Tami Davis for 25 years in the ministry. ☩

Redeeming Life Maternity Home Moms Continue Education


“New crayons, new backpacks — it’s back to school time here,” reports Sheryl DeWitt, Executive Director for **Redeeming Life Ministries/Sanford, FL**.

“We have two residents who are returning to their studies. One mom is training to be a dental technician and one mom is studying to become an RN. We are so proud of these women as they work, attend classes and parent their little babies. They are working so hard to be able to live independently!”

According to DeWitt, Redeeming Life continues to hear from pastors, laypeople, and district workers about the opportunity to open a maternity home in their part of the country. “We know God is leading His church to help with housing, help and hope for courageous women who choose life for their babies.

“Spiritually, we know we cannot live independently of the Lord. Throughout history, people have tried to live fully without God, but He created us to be part of His family and we need His love and grace,” DeWitt says.

Redeeming Life’s East Dundee, IL facility is well under way. “After a few slowdowns this spring and summer over unexpected problems and the required fixes, our new Illinois maternity home is once again smelling like sawdust and progress. We’ve held a program called ‘Sponsor-a-Room’ and it’s off to a good start — with several bedrooms and other areas in the home sponsored by churches who will raise the money to furnish that area. With funding levels from a few hundred to thousands of dollars, the program has something for everyone.

Redeeming Life Outreach Ministries is a Christ-centered maternity home offering love, hope, and a future to single pregnant women in crisis. Based in Central FL and expanding to Northern IL, Redeeming Life Ministries is a Recognized Service Organization (RSO) of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. 




Moriah, St. Luke’s/Ovideo, FL comfort dog, visited Redeeming Life Ministries/Sanford, FL to meet some of the babies.



At the September 21st meeting of the Plant City YMCA, **Hope/Plant City, FL’s** Sr. Pastor, Rev. Dean Pfeffer was recognized for his years of service on the YMCA Board of Directors.

Pfeffer retired from the YMCA Board following 10 years of service which included two terms as chairman, two terms on the Tampa Metro YMCA Board of Oversight, and as chair of various local YMCA Committees. Although he has left the board, he assured Plant City YMCA Director that doesn’t mean he and his wife will not remain supporters of the branch and the activities of the Y within the Plant City community.

Pictured receiving his award is Pfeffer (right) and Plant City YMCA Director, Paul Conley. 



Faith/Marietta, GA installed Amy Kurtz (right) as their Principal on August 6. She is pictured with Jennifer Tanner, District Executive Director for Schools & Youth Ministry. 

Besalski Fellowship Hall Dedicated at First/Gainesville



Pastor Bob Besalski and his wife Elaine with one of their daughters in front of the new dedicatory sign over the Fellowship Hall doors.




President James Rockey blessing his brother, Jonathan, during the installation.

FLGA District President James Rockey installed his older brother Jonathan as the Intentional Interim Pastor at **First/Gainesville, FL** on September 24th. Jonathan came out of retirement in Alaska, with much encouragement from his childhood Pastor (now emeritus) The Rev. Robert Besalski, to help his childhood church during their search for a new Pastor.

Rockey is a familiar name and family at First/Gainesville — and the congregation is happy to have Pastor Jonathan back, if only for a short time.

On the same Sunday, the Fellowship Hall was dedicated to Pastor Besalski and his wife Elaine in thanksgiving for their many years of service at First Lutheran. A short dedication ceremony and reception were then held in their honor in the newly named hall.

In photo at right, Pastors Bob Besalski (seated) with Jonathan and James Rockey. 

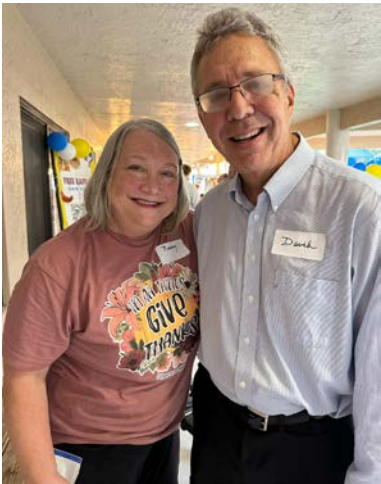


Our Savior/St. Petersburg, FL youth held a successful toy drive this fall benefiting The Christmas Toy Shop — a non-profit, all volunteer organization dedicated to ensure children have a Christmas during difficult economic times. The organization has been distributing toys to less fortunate children in Pinellas County for 102 years. 

Weston Hosts Free Community Oktoberfest



Blessed with good weather and abundant food (and pretzels and beer!), **St. Paul/ Weston, FL** held Oktoberfest mid month with an authentic oompah band, bratwurst, German potato salad and an enormous dessert table with German chocolate cake. 🐟



St. Paul/Weston Installs Two New Ministry Partners

Ximena Karadima
Ministry Coordinator

Ximena was born and raised in Chile. She has a Bachelor's Degree in Tourism Administration and has experience managing sales teams in an international language teaching school and in a small cruise company in Patagonia. She is married and a proud mother of two daughters. Ximena finds joy in exploring new places and delving into history. She speaks Spanish, English and she can read French.

Patricia Cellari- Tamayo
Publications Coordinator

Born and raised in Quito, Ecuador, Patricia's pursuit of education led her to obtain a master's degree in business administration and Entrepreneurship from Nova South-eastern University. Prior to joining St. Paul, Patricia worked in sales and digital marketing across industries with strategic approach to business growth. She enjoys a passion for traveling, history and experiencing different cultures. She is happily married and is a proud mom of two kids. She is fluent in Spanish and English.



Ximena



Patricia

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Trunk and Treat Celebrated at Timothy/Woodstock



On Saturday afternoon, October 14, 2023, **Timothy/Woodstock, GA** sponsored a community Trunk and Treat. Approximately 27 families decorated their car trunks, handed out candy to more than 200 children and their parents. Other treats included ice cream, Gideon Bibles, LHM children's booklets and Thrivent T-shirts. They used the opportunity to advertise plans for their 2024 Vacation Bible School program. Families were also encouraged to bring canned goods for the congregation's Food Bank Ministry. That's Pastor Dan Brammeier as the Mandalorian trooper at left. ☩


Teachers Presented to St. Paul/Weston, New School Year



Pastor Scott Henze and the congregation of **St Paul/Weston, FL** recognized their teachers last month during morning worship. ☩

Operation Christmas Child at St. John/Ocala Continues to Grow

This year **St. John/Ocala, FL** broke another record for shoeboxes collected for Operation Christmas Child. After gathering 716 boxes in 2022, they set a goal of 800 for 2023. The total has grown ever since the congregation began collecting specified items each month throughout the year — culminating with the Church and School community coming together for a packing party.


“We put together 799 on the packing party, and since then we’ve had donations of ‘Wow’ items to push past 820 boxes,” said Pastor Jeff Shanks. “That equates to 820 children around the world receiving a box.” 



Patrick Galligar Installed at Faith/Lecanto, FL



The Rev. Patrick Galligar was installed October 9, 2023 at **Faith/Lecanto, FL**. Participating clergy are shown at left, Front row: The Rev. Pat and Gina Galligar with FLGA District President James Rockey. Second row: Jonathan Rockey, Danlias Howe, Joseph Signore, Terry McKee, Blair Clark, Tom Beaverson. Third row: Jeff Shanks, Ron Biel, Steve Lane, Doug Bock.

Pastor Galligar previously served Zion/Marengo, IL and St. Peter’s/Columbus, IN. 



Grace/St. Petersburg, FL, had the pleasure of having Rev. and Deaconess Payne visit during Labor Day weekend. The LCMS Office of International Missions has called Rev. Payne and Deaconess Kean Payne's family to serve as missionaries to Tanzania. The Payne's visited during Labor Day weekend and presented to the congregation and the following Tuesday they presented to the school's students, the Grace Wildcats. Everyone learned about the lives of school children in Tanzania, and about the seminary where they will be teaching future Tanzanian pastors and deaconesses. In above photo, Grace's Pastors John Kyle and Kevin Loughran are shown with the Payne family and Deaconesses May Itzcovitch and Camille Cox. ☩

Amazing Grace/Oxford, FL held a ribbon cutting ceremony to dedicate the new addition and expanded building and playground area at their campus. They are now able to serve 123 children.

The Amazing Grace Early Learning Center (AGELC) began construction in October, 2022 and now has two classrooms for each age group from one-to-four-year-olds, a large indoor activity room and an additional playground area. The administration office also was remodeled for the director and office staff.

The multipurpose room will serve as a gathering place for the whole school and a space for children to play in inclement weather. During non-school hours, it is available to the congregation and school families and friends for events.

"We are wholeheartedly committed to learning and developing through active play, and our new center will allow us to serve and teach even more children as they learn and engage in God's wonderful world," said ELC Director Aimee Knoepfel. "The ELC Board of Directors wishes to thank Dinkins Construction and the countless people who contributed to the completion of this amazing addition to our school through their time, talent and treasure!"

Amazing Grace was established by the FLGA District in 2005. In 2018 Amazing Grace began operation of an Early Learning Center on its campus. This fully licensed, professionally staffed facility offers children from 12 months to 4 years an opportunity to meet Jesus and learn basic Christian principles to guide their development. Currently, every classroom is full, but parents are encouraged to add their children to the school's waiting list because openings do become available during the school year when families move. ☩



Pastor Tim Davis and visiting Pastor David Fererwitz share the children's message at **Trinity/Athens, GA.** ☩



Aimee Knoepfel, Director of Amazing Grace's ELC, cut the ribbon with a handful of ELC students while Intentional Interim Pastor Jack Mackowiak looks on.

Charles Kanefke Installed at St. Peter/Dahlongega, GA



Participants — from left — Gerhard Michael, Jr., retiring, St. Peter/Dahlongega; Richard Carlton, member, St. Peter; David Kruger, interim, Savior of All/Cartersville, GA; David Wesche, All Saints/Blairsville, GA; and Northeast Georgia Circuit Visitor; Paul Droutz, member at Oak Road/Lilburn, GA and supervising pastor at St. John the Apostle/Buford, GA; Timothy Davis, Trinity/Athens, GA; Victor Belton, FLGA First Vice President; Dan Sparling, interim, Good Shepherd Lutheran, Gainesville; Timothy Droegemueller, Living Faith Lutheran Church, Cumming; and Joseph Song, Stepping Stone Mission, Duluth. Also in attendance with his family was Brian Wachter, Specific Ministry Pastor in training at St. John the Apostle Lutheran Church in Buford.

The Reverend Charles J. Kanefke was installed as the first resident pastor at **St. Peter/Dahlongega, GA** on June 4. Preaching the sermon and presiding over the rite of installation was FLGA District President, The Rev. James Rockey.

Assisting in the service were the Rev. David Wesche, Circuit Visitor, Rev. Dr. Victor Belton, Region One District Vice President, Rev. Dr. Gerhard Michael, Jr., liturgist; and area LCMS clergy bringing words of blessing.

Following the service, the congregation hosted a reception to welcome Pastor Kanefke, his family, and guests who were in attendance.

Kanefke brings to the ministry 20 years of service in the computer industry and deep

involvement as a lay person in his local congregation. He served as a Technical Director, Project Manager, Systems Engineer, and Systems Administrator in the world of work, and in his congregation in a variety of roles but especially as a youth leader and elder.

Hailing originally from Saddlebrook, NJ, where he heard the call to pastoral ministry, he entered Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO, from which he graduated in 2007 with a Master of Divinity degree. Called to Trinity/Cape Coral, FL, he has served as their pastor since his ordination in July 2007. He and his wife Kim have four adult sons.

According to Rev. Gerhard Michael, retiring mission pastor at St. Peter, "This installation was a most joyous event, as it

marked another milestone in the congregation's effort to reach out more fully to its community. The only formal Lutheran presence in Lumpkin and Dawson counties beginning in 2008, it was chartered as a congregation in 2018, and after 15 years was able to call and install its first resident pastor, truly a day of rejoicing."

The mission effort was begun by Wayne and Nancy Kuhlmann, a lay couple from Living Faith/Cumming, GA and assisted by a number of different pastors until December, 2013, when Pastor Michael assumed the pastoral leadership. Since September 2020, Rev. Dr. David F. Kruger has assisted him. These "semi-retired men" have now "passed the baton of leadership" to Pastor Kanefke.





Trinity Breaks Ground For New Sanctuary

Trinity/Trinity, FL broke ground September 10th marking the start of construction for a new 5,400-square-foot combination sanctuary and fellowship hall. With planned completion in early 2024 this marks the next phase of a long successful ministry to the Trinity, FL area. Trinity is located at the junction where Pasco, Hillsborough and Pinellas Counties meet and The Trinity Community is named after Trinity College of Florida, a Bible college founded in 1932, when it relocated to the first occupied site in the communities developed by James Gills in the late 1980s.


The congregation's multiple ministries includes monthly breakfasts for the homeless population of Moonlake, annual Vacation Bible School programs, a Senior Wish Tree at Christmas, Adopt-a-Highway program, LWML, Saturday Children's Ministry, and a recently started on-line prayer request ministry.

As part of his remarks Trinity's Pastor Marc Nauman said "God has been so faithful to our congregation and I can't wait to see how He works through the people of Trinity to make a greater impact in our community. This new sanctuary will play a big part in helping us do that!"

Congregational President Marc Truit added "Trinity, Florida is at the epicenter of growth in one of the fastest growing regions of the country. Our congregation's need for growth is right in line with the needs of our community. Ground breaking is a celebration of a lot of hard work by many involved. I am honored to have served a role and I cannot wait to realize

our upcoming ability to serve our community growing needs with our expanding Sanctuary."

During the four year planning and permitting phase of the hurricane resistant, 140 MPH rated structure, costs for the multimillion dollar project nearly doubled, making financing especially challenging, and signifying a true leap of faith by this congregation. Completion of this work will ultimately provide space for additional ministry to this community especially with the repurposing of Trinity's original 1,650 SF multi-purpose building to provide much needed office space and classrooms, and soon a new Rebecca's Garden of Hope children's ministry.

Guests for this event included Pastor Paul Meseke, representing President James Rockey of the FLGA District and Jay Wendland District VP of LCEF. Also Rev. Steinke, and wife Freda, Rev. Arndt and wife Pam, and Rev. Meeker. Representing Hawkins Construction Co. Todd Mullins, Josh Spooner, Jeff Stoneburner, John Frangos, and Dave Ritenour. Also Walter Baker, Architect and wife Linda, Carol Williams, CDD manager for the community of Longleaf, and Les and Lorna Wright overseeing the construction for Trinity. 



At left, artist rendering of the new sanctuary

The Ocala Christmas Light Spectacular Gets Ready for a Bigger 2023 Event

Cover Story

Christmas comes early at **St. John/Ocala, FL**. “In fact it comes year around as we once again make preparations to offer the Ocala Christmas Light Spectacular for the whole community,” offers

The event is almost two miles of driving through a magical Christmas display at the Florida Horse Park south of Ocala. It features giant light displays (including a huge lighted nativity) and new this year — some are even synchronized to music. Friday through Sunday there is Santaland with of course,

everyone’s favorite from the North Pole. Every night of the week there is a giant walk through area which includes the Christmas Labyrinth (which tells the true story of Christmas).

There are bouncy houses, art and food trucks and more. It is put on in part by sponsors to help keep the per-carload cost down and powered by a huge team of volunteers. Ocala Christmas Light Spectacular runs nightly from the Friday after Thanksgiving through December 30th — but is closed December 24th/25th).

“You could get involved by any or all of the following:

1. Come and bring a car load to enjoy the experience.
2. Contact us and volunteer according to your schedule.
3. Become a personal or business sponsor to help make this happen,” said Tracy Williams, one of St. John’s event coordinators. Tracy can be reached at St John at (352) 629-1794. 



At left — Pastor Jeff and Anette Shanks take a minute to visit with Santa last year. Photos above show music participation, the labyrinth, ice skating and the 1.8-mile drive through the festival of lights.

LWML/ District Scholarship Spotlight

We are highlighting two very different ladies — both with the same vision for their church worker future. Both are attending Concordia University Wisconsin in Mequon.

Rachel Lingsch is a sophomore this year attending on campus. She is from **Grace/ Naples FL**, where her father Rev. Keith Lingsch is the Pastor. Her mom is a teacher. Rachel is an excellent student with a 4.0 GPA and is active in many extracurricular activities. She is an accomplished flute player and her major area of study is Director of Church Ministries (DCM) specializing in youth work.



Rachel Lingsch


Laci Vonada worked in corporate America and was very active in outreach activities at her church. She is now an Administrative Assistant from **St. Paul/ Lakeland, FL**. While living in South Florida she was the Gold Coast LWML Zone's Outreach Vice President. Her family moved to Central Florida and after the birth of Abigale, her 2-year-old daughter, she felt led by God through prayer and council from her pastor to pursue a degree in church work. Laci found the DCM program at Concordia. She is currently in her third semester at CUW, working on her Bachelor of Theology and certification as a Director of Church Ministries.




Laci Vonada & Abigale

DIRECTOR OF CHURCH MINISTRIES: DCM

This is a relatively new program in the LCMS and only offered at CUW. Graduates in this program will be eligible to be a rostered church worker. This is what Concordia University Wisconsin says about this program: "The beauty of 'the Body of Christ' is that each of its members has a unique and vital role to play. The same goes for church-workers. While the Church needs well-trained ministers for the pastoral office, it also needs 'Faithful Aarons' who can support the work of their pastors. Perhaps the Lord is calling you to 'hold up the prophet's hands.'"

Concordia's Director of Church Ministries (DCM) program will provide candidates with the theological training and skills to make an impact wherever they are asked to serve. Graduates will be prepared to be a professional church worker, assisting the pastor in developing and leading congregation ministries. This may include supporting Bible studies, community outreach, mercy work, and administrative duties. Because no two graduates will have the exact same roles, course participants and graduates will benefit from management and leadership courses that will help adapt to any situation." 



During October of each year **Trinity/Athens, GA** dedicates quilts and yarn works that the "Sew and Sew" ladies group made. These items are then given away to various community needs. In October of this year they had 70 quilts and numerous knitted items to give away. They will go to Trinity's military veterans (30) and the Lauren Greene Cancer Center as well as homeless individuals. Since inception Trinity has donated more than 1,000 quilts worldwide to various needs. 



St. Paul/Boca Raton 7th Grade Youth Retreat to Lutherock



Thirty-nine seventh graders from St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL traveled 16 hours to Lutherock in Newland, NC to grow in experiences through God's

Creation — using team building, mountain climbing, rock climbing, high ropes, zip lining, cave exploring and campfires. Students come

away from the opportunity with stories of overcoming challenges and applying their new perspective to their life of faith. ▲



Fort Lauderdale Lutheran Legend Cliff Berry Called to Glory

Clifford Livingston Berry, Sr. passed away October 2, of this year. A native of Fort Lauderdale, FL, he was the fourth of five sons born to Rena and Martin Berry on March 23, 1930. Along with his brothers, Gene, Martin and Curtis, Cliff was educated at Trinity Lutheran Church & School/Fort Lauderdale, FL.

After graduation Cliff joined the Air Force, and while stationed in San Antonio, Texas, he met his future wife, Betty. They were married in 1951 and returned to Fort Lauderdale. He began his career in Port Everglades working for Pacific Molasses.

In addition to his full-time job, Cliff became a hardworking entrepreneur on the docks of Port Everglades. In 1958, with just 10 employees, he founded Cliff Berry, Inc. and began branching out into the fields of oil and chemical clean up and disposal. Other family businesses followed, including Port Everglades Overnight Trailer Park and Poplar Lodge Supper Club.

Cliff was awarded the Coast Guard Distinguished Public Service Award in 1991, the highest honor the USCG gives to a civilian other than the Life-Saving Award and in 2001 he was awarded the prestigious Seafarers Golden Compass Award given to outstanding contributors.

In the Lutheran community Cliff and Betty Berry were devoted members and life-long supporters of Trinity Lutheran Church — especially the school for more than 70 years. From churches and community organizations, to schools and the Little League, Cliff Berry has been a lifeline of support for groups that improve the quality

of life in his native Fort Lauderdale and the Port Everglades community.

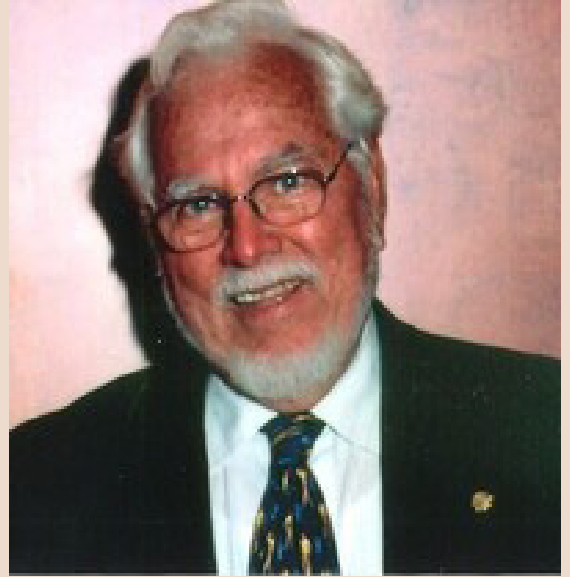
Cliff and Betty also led the way in forming Lutheran High School of South Florida — a first among LCMS congregations in Southeast Florida. Cliff helped corral more than a dozen LCMS congregations stretching from Hollywood to Pompano Beach into an association that served the high school-aged students coming from those congregations.

The Berrys regularly provided financial support to many educational institutions as well as the Florida-Georgia District. They also participated in the development of the Cooperative Feeding Program of Broward County. Cliff was also famous for his barbecues and golf tournaments that enabled dozens of organizations to raise their own funds.

When asked about the special influences in his life, Cliff named two — his faith in God, and his lifelong partnership with his wife, Betty, who predeceased him this past February 9th. Their strong Christian faith most certainly shaped their extraordinary generosity — believing that God had blessed the two of them with everything they had, so that they could be a blessing to others.

Cliff is survived by his six children: Cynthia Berry, Sandra Berry, Candace (Donald) Church, Barbara Berry, Kimberlee (Joseph) Sawyer and Clifford Berry II, 11 children, and five great-grandchildren.

Memorials can be made to the Seafarers' House, a non-profit organization where Cliff Berry chaired the board of directors.



Seafarers' House is supported by the faith-based community as well as by labor, business and civic leaders with a mission "to offer refuge, resources, renewal and respect to the maritime community through multi-faith service." Open throughout the year, Seafarers' House is a safe, friendly place where mariners can connect with their families, relax, or get emergency assistance if needed. With the help of its supporters and volunteers, Seafarers' House offers many services including low cost international phone calls, free transportation, Internet access, counseling services, emergency assistance and liaison with authorities as well as recreational facilities. Seafarers' House was recently honored as the 2012 Seafarers' Center of the Year by the International Committee on Seafarers' Welfare — the first American agency to receive this international honor. Seafarers' House annually hosts as many as 150,000 visits by cruise and cargo ship crew members as well as port workers.

A Celebration of Life for Cliff Berry was held on October 17th at the Fort Lauderdale Yacht Club. ☩

Editor's note: This month, Pastor Scott Gress, Leadership Coach with Lutheran Counseling Services, interviews The Rev. Jacob Roedsens, pastor at **Our Savior/Lake Worth, FL**. This interview will reveal some of the things he and his congregation are doing and what ministry moments are emerging.

SG: Pastor thanks for talking with us. What connections and relationships has OSL had with the community?

JR: Historically we have had a food bank and thrift store housed on our property and an Alzheimers

Community Connections & Ministry Moments

adult day care. We welcome the neighborhood association to meet on our campus. Plus we have also had various small churches and ministries meet here and use our facilities over the years. Currently we have a Karate Studio, an Indonesian church, a Guatemalan Maya Center Preschool and we're talking with another church who may plug into our campus in the near future.

SG: You are also involved in the community. What is that and how did that start?

JR: Recently I've been asked to join two important councils in the community. Two key things led to those invitations. The first is our church has been hosting the local neighborhood association meetings. What happened was that I got to know a city commissioner who lives in the area and comes to the meetings. She asked me to apply to join the city's business advisory board.

I interviewed for it and we are just beginning to organize our work. The second relationship began when I took the time to sit down and get to know the principal of the high school across the street from the church.

The principal introduced me to the director of a program called The Community Leadership Council. It is part of a community partnership sponsored by University of Central Florida. The purpose of this initiative is to identify the areas of education

and schooling that are lacking and address them as a community before they become a problem. They believe in collaboration. As a result there is a law enforcement representative, parent, school administration, city hall, church, and a human needs

nonprofit all included on this leadership council. My role will be the church representative.



Scott Gress
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SG: That sounds amazing. What mission opportunities do you see there?

JR: The missional purpose in my opinion is two-fold. First, meeting the needs of the people — both students and teachers. Secondly, once those needs are met, continue to build relationships with the people and when possible pray with and for them. In other words, bringing Jesus into the situation and circumstances when possible.

SG: I would imagine that church members and community members will get to know one another through all of these community connections as well.

JR: Absolutely. If they are not coming to us on Sunday then we can certainly go to them and show them Jesus.

SG: So true. If Jesus calls His church to be the salt of the earth then this gets the salt out of the salt shaker. Thanks Jake.

JR: Thank you. 



'Pastor Jake,' (above) as parishioners call him, spearheaded the building of a new church sanctuary, which features traditional stained-glass windows by McMow Art Glass of Lake Worth. McMow designed 16 windows for the new sanctuary, which opened in 2021. Fourteen are leaded stained glass, like the windows behind the altar, and two are in the 'dalle de verre' style used in the church's 1960 sanctuary, which was destroyed by Hurricane Wilma in 2005. Our Savior Lutheran of Lake Worth was founded in 1927.



Church Planting In Puerto Rico

District Partners With LCMS Missionaries to Plant Churches in Puerto Rico

For the past two years, FLGA District has been a partner with the LCMS church planting efforts in Puerto Rico. In early October, FLGA Director of Mission and Outreach, Rev. Dr. Peter Meier and his wife, Kathy Meier, attended a meeting of the Puerto Rico FORO in Mayaguez, PR, which gave first hand information about mission work on the Caribbean island.

The FORO is a group of congregations, individuals and Districts that support mission work in a particular location and who meet once or twice a year to learn the culture, the mission strategy and see for themselves how the Gospel is being shared. FOROs are now the primary means of direct support for international mission work around the world. Latin American FOROs were the first to adopt the FORO concept.

In Puerto Rico, the LCMS has three church plants: a brand new one in the capitol city of San Juan, another in the southern city of Ponce, and a third on the west coast city of Mayaguez. The primary mission strategy in Puerto Rico involves several components: Preaching the Gospel, community outreach, church planting and education.

The mission team is comprised of Missionaries Rev. James and Christel Neuendorf (Ponce), Rev. Adam and Christine Lehman (San Juan and Ponce), and Rev. Gustavo and Ruth Maita (Mayaguez) together with Volunteer Coordinator Ashley Lehr (Mayaguez).

"The vision is to plant a fourth church and for each of the four churches to plant three additional sites, which will one day be served by local planters and pastors, raised up from the communities," explains Dr. Meier. "These sites will allow anyone on the island to have easy connections with our Lutheran missions. What a great example of multiplication—of churches

and of harvest workers!"

"The FORO gave a weekend example of a team experience as our group toured and worshiped at all three churches, enjoyed a night tour of Ponce, learning the culture and history of Puerto Rico, and had a morning cultural experience in Mayaguez touring a Rum distillery and shopping at the 150 year old Franco bakery," Meier continues. "We enjoyed a typical Puerto Rican lunch in the home of a church member, as well as meals at the Mayaguez church prepared by church members. The FORO meeting focused on mission strategy at each of the three church plants, and a financial report detailing how FORO dollars are spent."

To learn more about the FORO and mission work in Puerto Rico there will be an opportunity on January 9 for a "Transformation Tuesday" — featuring the Maitas and Ashley Lehr. Volunteer Coordinator Ashley Lehr invites short-term volunteer teams to come for mission trips and to learn about life on the island. Watch District E-News and website for registration information: www.flga.org/transformationtuesdays/



Pastor Gustavo and Ruth Maita serve the Lutheran church, Iglesia Luterana Principe de Paz in Mayaguez. They are pictured here with their two children, Isaac and Mikayla.

or contact Meier at pmeier@FLGADISTRICT.ORG. 



The FORO group pauses their city tour for a photo at the Ponce City Plaza fountain, Fuente de los Leones (Fountain of Lions).

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Reminiscing About Dallas & Susan Gibson,

Even hurricanes and hardships could not stop Dallas Gibson from singing his favorite children's hymn, "I Love to Tell the Story of Jesus and His Love." Long before the Florida-Georgia District was formed, Dallas Gibson was a pioneer Lutheran preacher in Greater Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

After graduation from Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO in 1926, he accepted a call to serve a Southern District preaching station in Fort Lauderdale. He was ordained on September 5, 1926 — to become the pastor of a small group of residents to become Trinity Lutheran Church. He preached his first sermon there on September 12, 1926.

When Pastor Gibson went to preach his second sermon, he found that the congregation had vanished! They had been blown off the map on September 18 by one of the most devastating hurricanes ever to hit Florida.

A stalwart survivor, Dallas Gibson mopped up the receding waters and struggled to minister to the 18 surviving parishioners who had not abandoned Florida. In 1932 he urged his small group of about 40 members — who had officially organized Trinity in January 1927 — to purchase plots of land that included an abandoned awning shop.

This building became the first church and was later used to house a kindergarten, a first grade and a social hall. Dallas and his new bride, Susan, lived next door in a modest parsonage that remained their home for decades. Their screened-in front porch doubled as a Sunday School room, where chirping canaries cheerfully commented on Concordia program pamphlets.

South Florida in those days was a torturous place to live. An alligator from a nearby canal

once trudged across the church property and even with screens on the windows, mosquitoes infested the church. Singing the words, "I love to tell the story," Pastor Gibson was the first to climb a ladder to paint the awning shop church. He fought sandspurs and weeds while canvassing the area for new members.

His second-hand Model T Ford broke down regularly. Most of his calls were made on foot. Years later Dallas helped pour cement and lay concrete blocks for the first sanctuary and school buildings. During World War II he brushed up on his German and boarded a Nazi submarine that had been captured by U.S. troops and brought to Port Everglades. Pastor Gibson preached the Gospel to those on board.

At Trinity he continued that linguistic skill by conducting a church service in German every Sunday evening until 1955. Dallas Gibson was a strong advocate for Lutheran schools. Susan and he established Trinity Lutheran Day School in 1933 with just 13 students. Dallas used his carpentry skills constructing some of the desks and chairs himself. The school burgeoned and succeeding classrooms through grade eight were added.

Each week he would play a spirited game of tennis with any student available after school. Despite insurmountable odds and lack of funding, Gibson founded a Lutheran high school by 1945, the first in South Florida. The school peaked in enrollment at 341 students in grades kindergarten through twelfth in 1948.

His dedication to the school never ceased. During a crucial football game in which there were no extra players for subs, a player broke a shoelace. During a time-out, Pastor calmly carried an extra shoelace to the field. It was another way of singing "Jesus and His love."

Dallas Gibson was instrumental in planting other Lutheran churches and schools in the Fort Lauderdale area. In January of 1953, he urged members in Hollywood to form St. Mark's. Later he urged a group to form Grace in north Fort Lauderdale, which later added a preschool. In July 1955 a third group and Pastor Gibson held their first service for Faith west of Fort Lauderdale, where Susan Gibson started a kindergarten in September 1955. As a class level was added each year to grade eight, the enrollment reached 350 pupils. Pastor and Susan continued to serve Faith until 1976.

In September 1975 Dallas Gibson experienced a series of heart attacks, which resulted in his resignation as pastor of Faith effective February, 1976. Had his health lasted until September 5, 1976, he would not have missed a single church service in 50 years. Dallas Gibson passed away in May, 1980.

People remembering Pastor Gibson said he communicated his Christian faith as greatly as his sermons, was a plain man who spoke and acted with such sincerity and humility that his life became his sermon.

A pioneer for the Lutheran faith in South Florida, Dallas Gibson was a planter of churches and a steadfast advocate for Lutheran day schools and high schools.

Susan Gibson was one of the District's great teachers and matriarchs. Dallas fondly told everyone how he found his wife in the Five and Ten Cent store where she was employed after she moved from her position as a public school teacher in Alabama. The recent seminary graduate and his "dime store" sweetheart were married on November 24, 1927. Susan's genteel graciousness and melodious Alabama accent warmed the

District Servants of Christ

ANNIVERSARY ARCHIVE




hearts of parishioners and went on to win new members in every new setting. In 1933 Susan was the only teacher in Trinity's newly established parochial school of 13 pupils. She refused to accept any salary for her teaching, and for the rest of her lengthy teaching career she taught voluntarily with steadfast love and without pay.

Susan was a soft-spoken yet surprisingly strong missionary for the growing church and school. Early Sunday mornings she would travel by car to pick up and deliver students for Sunday School, week after week. She always arrived on time to graciously greet people at the church door, then stood by Pastor's side to say a word as

worshippers filed out of church.

Susan's calm demeanor, gentle strength and humble Christian faith were her hallmarks throughout her many years of service. Largely through the efforts of Susan and Dallas Gibson, the District LWML was officially organized on September 30, 1945, at Trinity/Fort Lauderdale. In September 1955 Susan began a kindergarten at Faith. She encouraged another new Lutheran school in 1956 at St. Mark's/Hollywood, which became a reality in 1957.

Susan Gibson's legacy remains, fondly remembered by the Lutheran schools she helped establish and by hundreds of students whom she taught so lovingly. For Dallas and

Susan their students became their sons and daughters born of labor and love for the Lord. The song they sang so often, "I Love to Tell the Story of Jesus and His Love," is still being sung today in the churches and schools they established. 

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 past research. Biographies have been edited for space.

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The LAST WORD

Remembering and Celebrating Cliff & Betty Berry

I met my friend Cliff Berry 50 years ago while I was a college student at Valparaiso University in Indiana. A few of my fraternity brothers suggested we escape the frigid weather of the Midwest for our ten-day spring break. Valpo's campus was called "the tundra" for a reason during the winter months when heavy snow would blow down from Lake Michigan.

We headed to sunny Fort Lauderdale where the "guilty ladies" would often host barbecues at their homes to ensure our students would get a few good meals while in town. Valparaiso University Guild was heavily invested in recruiting students, raising funds to support the students' physical and spiritual welfare, and serving as ambassadors for Valpo. One of the mom's in Valparaiso's guild knew this guy who owned a trailer park at Port Everglades and directed us there for safe haven during our spring break. We pitched tents and had access to showers, rest rooms and even a swimming pool.

Cliff and Betty Berry, the owners, invited us up to their private residence for dinners, card games, fellowship and Bible study. They only had two rules: #1 is that we had to have a designated driver when venturing to the famous Fort Lauderdale strip, and #2 is that no matter how late we were out on Saturday night we had to be in church on Sunday morning.

Trinity/Fort Lauderdale was the church home of the Berry family and Cliff and Betty were legends when it came to supporting the congregation's many ministries — especially the grade school known as Lutheran Central School.

Fast forward to graduation and one of my best friends received a call from Central's principal Orlyn Schlie to teach at the school. Praise the Lord . . . spring break could continue! Good friends still would venture to Fort Lauderdale each spring and crash

the small apartment of Gary Groth. Schedules didn't always coincide so while we frequented places like the Candy Store, the Button, Penrods and the Elbow Room — and came home well after midnight — poor Gary had to get up the next morning to teach.

After a few bachelor years, I married my college sweetheart, Eileen Bishop, and we eventually relocated to Fort Lauderdale and even lived in the

same apartment complex as Gary. We joined Gloria Dei/Davie — a congregation that launched in the living room of Jim and Joan Schoeff — another pair of Lutheran pioneers who saw a need for a congregation and high-school west of Fort Lauderdale. With the help of Lutheran Church Extension Fund — and plenty of planning by a handful of charter members they acquired about 20 acres of land.

Lutheran High School was fed by more than a dozen congregations from North Miami and Hollywood to Pompano Beach, Florida. Cliff and Betty Berry were tireless recruiters, promoters and friends to Lutheran High.

They were famous for hosting golf tournaments and barbecues to raise funds for teachers and administrator salaries and operations.

Pastors can be protective of their flock — especially when it comes to wallets of their members. Cliff was a master at corralling pastoral and congregational participation. Endlessly! He was a gifted mentor to me and many others during my tenure as board chairman of Lutheran High School.

Betty was called to Glory this past February. Now Cliff has joined her just eight months later. I know Cliff missed her dearly. It's comforting to know she welcomed him to his heavenly home. They left a passionate family who I know will continue their legacy. ☩



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