

LUTHERAN LIFE

**Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod
Florida-Georgia District
June/July/August 2024**



2024
annual
report

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

01/01/24.....Rev. Keith Enko
from Mid South (O)
01/10/24.....Rev. William Lindenmeyer
from Pacific Southwest (O)
03/15/24.....Rev. Clarence Rogers
from Central Illinois (O)
04/15/24.....Rev. Andrew Schroeder
from Central Illinois (O)
04/15/24.....Rev. Arthur Boone
from Southeast (O)

Transferred Out of FLGA to Other Districts

03/01/24.....Mr. Gordon Stuckert
to English (C)
03/18/24.....Rev. Tod Shouse
to South Wisconsin (O)
07/01/24.....Mr. Gordon Krall
to Nebraska (O)

Ordinations & Installations

03/17/24.....Rev. Mark Eisold (O)
to Pelican/Naples, FL
05/12/24.....Rev. Eliexer Ramirez (O)
to Prince of Peace/
Hollywood, FL

Called to Glory

12/29/23.....Rev. Samuel Jones Stilwell
Status Change

03/01/24.....Mr. Gordon Stuckert (C)
from Active to Emeritus
03/15/24.....Rev. Tod Shouse (O)
from Active to Candidate
03/21/24.....Rev. Robert Steinke (O)
from Emeritus to Active
04/01/24.....Rev. Kenneth Garazin (O)
from Active to Emeritus

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

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As I sit here in the hospital with my wife, pondering the past eight days, my heart and mind are filled with many thoughts:

- “I never expected to be going through this again!”
- “I thought we were through this!”
- “How will we get through this?”
- “Just trust God...He’s never failed you before.”
- “What if...?”
- “When will healing come?”
- “Will healing come?”
- “Will she make it?”

But almost every time one of those questions would arise, another would accompany it.

- “How can we honor the Lord through this?”
- “Are we somehow reflecting His love and faithfulness?”
- “Are the medical staff and others experiencing Jesus through us?”
- “How can we be part of how the Lord uses ‘all things’ to work together for good?”

I have also spent time remembering our discussion driving home in January of 2017 when we were told that after eight years of monitoring, Martha finally needed to have awake cranial surgery to remove her tumor. It was on that drive that Martha said, “All I want to do is give God the glory through this!” I began to cry both thinking of all the things she could have said!

For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again . . .

We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors . . . We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.

[— 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, 20]

However, knowing what a mighty woman of faith she is, her statement was no surprise. God then used what she said as a powerful reminder of our calling as Christ followers. We are called to “point to the hope

NOW IS THE TIME

compelled by
Christ’s love.

we have,” “be His witnesses,” to “go and make disciples,” to “love as we have been loved;” and as the 2 CORINTHIANS text says, “live as His “ambassadors!”

It was on that same drive home that I shared with Martha these words of our Lord. “As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.” (JOHN 9:4).

For me Martha’s brain tumor and impending surgery back in 2017 and her current health situation are reminders, **NOW** is the time! Our calling and God’s mission are **URGENT**! Without Jesus, people are dying and going to hell! All we know is today and tomorrow may be too late! So, “**WHILE IT IS DAY, we MUST DO THE WORKS!**” We must share with others God’s unconditional love, mercy, forgiveness and life! As those who have experienced this personally, “Christ’s love **COMPELS** us!”

So back to verse 20 in our 2 CORINTHIANS reading. “Appeal.” “Implore.” “Urge.” “Now is the time.” Do you hear the **URGENCY** in these words?

While our Lord is a missionary God who is patient, desiring “all to be saved,” God’s Word makes it clear that this mission of God is moving toward a certain end. Therefore, our mission is urgent! It is to be front and center for Christians and every church. “Now is the time” to share the “Good News.” Now is the time for us to “no longer live for selves.”

Now is the time to live in such a way that others see Christ in us

LIFELINES

and be drawn to Him. Now is the time to share with others Christ’s love and be reconciled to God.

Therefore, we should always keep the reality of Jesus’ impending return in mind. He will come back! Jesus makes clear that we need not waste our time trying to determine the precise time. “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority” (ACTS 1:7). Instead, He calls us to be alert, awake (1 PETER 5:8-9) and active in His mission.

May we be filled with urgency as the Lord empowers and leads each of us to daily join Jesus on His mission that many more may be reconciled unto Him! May we go filled with the joy of our own reconciliation “living for Him who died and was raised again” for all!

NOW IS THE TIME to remember Jesus’ words, “while it is day we must do the works of Him who sent me!”

We thank the
Lord for you!

James
Rockey



My Alongsiders . . .

Although we are still on this journey with Martha’s health, we have much for which we are giving thanks to the Lord! We thank Him for you. Your prayers and encouragement and more has uplifted and strengthened us. You have been like “Aaron and Hur” holding up the hands of Moses while battling the enemy (EXODUS 17: 10-13)! You have in so many ways been our “alongsiders” and we thank the Lord for you! We rejoice that the new medications were able to control the seizures and enabled her to be discharged. After eight days in the hospital, she was tired but at home getting the rest she needs. Follow-up appointments are set with her primary care physician and neurologist — and we pray that, in time, we might reduce the meds or the way that they make her so tired. Your continued prayers and support are appreciated as we continue to walk this journey. — JR

Investigate LCEF's Ministry Expansion Campaign

Is your ministry facing challenges in expansion, repairs, construction or debt reduction? Achieving these goals can be daunting, and the path forward might seem unclear. Fortunately, you're not alone in the pursuit of your ministry's future.

Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) wants to help you with a proven program entitled Ministry Expansion Campaign, a process of growth that helps your congregation joyfully and effectively fulfill its purpose within the Kingdom.

"When it comes to raising capital for projects or dreams like this, we recognize that success is not just about finances but, more importantly, about sharing the Gospel and reaching more people," offers Tom Eggebrecht, LCEF Senior Vice President, Ministry Solutions.

"LCEF believes in aligning financial commitments with the broader vision of your ministry. God is calling your congregation into the future, and LCEF is here to help your members commit to that future within the larger context of ministry," Eggebrecht continues.

Eggebrecht explains that LCEF can make a transformative impact on your ministry through:

■ Develop Current and Future Leaders:

LCEF collaborates with your leaders, guiding the expansion campaign and nurturing a project team. The LCEF process not only aids in reaching your financial goals but also identifies and raises new leaders within your congregation.

■ Own and Lead the Project:

While LCEF facilitates and guides the process, LCEF empowers your campaign team to be true leaders. This ensures that your congregation takes ownership of both the campaign and the ensuing project.

■ Listen to Jesus:

The LCEF expansion campaigns foster meaningful communication within congregations and, more importantly, a connection with Jesus. The pastor plays a pivotal role as the voice of Christ in the


campaign, sharing God's vision for the church, scriptures supporting the project, and how God's kingdom will grow. The rest of the campaign team represents the congregation.

"We recognize that each congregation is unique — as a result, our approach is fully customizable," he concludes.



Tom Eggebrecht
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In addition, LCEF's consultants — who are ordained Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod pastors — have walked in your shoes, having been on the other side of a congregation campaign. They are deeply invested in the future of the church and are eager to walk alongside you as your ministry expands.

Additional information is available from Tom Eggebrecht at Tom.Eggebrecht@lcef.org. 

New Life Village House Restoration Underway

LCEF has granted Stepping Stone Mission with a \$150,000 Disaster Relief Loan to support the reconstruction and restoration of the New Life Village House. In


December 2022, the severe freezing cold weather that hit Georgia led to a pipe bursting in the New Life Village House and consequent flooding and other major damages.

As a result, the house had to be gutted. Since this period, they have focused on making the building useable again for mission purposes.

This incident was very unfortunate because a team had just finished some renovations and had just begun using the property for intended purposes. The LCEF loan is supporting the installation of a new roof, replacement of HVAC units and water heaters, development of a flood mitigation

flooring solution, replacement of damaged drywall, remodeling of the damaged kitchen space, and more.

"LCEF has been a critical partner in our mission center development and we praise God for the LCEF! We also praise God for the LCMS Florida-Georgia District for their steadfast support of our mission needs overall and their support of our disaster recovery needs in particular," stated The Rev. Joseph Song, founder.

"Lord-willing, it is our hope to raise support to repay the LCEF loan and incur as little debt service as possible." 



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Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) has served as the financial extension of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) since 1978, offering funding and resources in support of the church. Our investors make it possible for us to provide customized loans and support services to new and growing ministries as well as loans for Rostered Church Workers who dedicate their lives to sharing the Gospel.

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Jay Wendland

Florida-Georgia District Vice President
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District's Ministry Wives Retreat to Canterbury

More than 40 ministry wives gathered at Canterbury Retreat Center April 5-7, 2024, spending the weekend immersed in God's word, being encouraged, and getting to know new friends.

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

Deb Burma led the group through a study of Psalm 46, sharing how God helps us "Be Still and Know" through stormy situations in life. The Ministry Wives Team members shared morning and evening devotions and led a variety of optional activities including a ministry project for Phil's Friends; creating prayer cards for children and grandchildren; learning to make no-sew t-shirt bags; prayer walking or kayaking around the lake; playing games; and eating smores by the campfire!

Included among the many responses from those attending, were these comments:

- "The study with Deb Burma was excellent!"
- "This was very much needed to help the Pastor's wife."
- "[Enjoyed] meeting other wives and studying God's word together."
- "[Appreciated] the opportunity to gather with women who are partnering in ministry with their spouses and families."
- "Overall a great experience and looking forward to this becoming a tradition!"



Elaine Stier presented a quilted wall hanging to Deb Burma as a thankful remembrance of the weekend.

Breakout Sessions Planned at Fall Pastor's Conference

The Ministry Wives Team will offer three breakout sessions for wives at the Fall Pastor's Conference, September 23-25 in Daytona Beach. Future plans are also in the works to hold regional retreats for ministry wives in 2025. 🌀



At left – Barb Pennekamp participates in a prayer-path-walk around the lake. Above – Kathy Henze and Juli vonWerder prepare for a kayak excursion.



The members of the Ministry Wives Team – with Deb Burma – led a panel discussion taking questions from the group. From left, Barb Pennekamp; Elaine Stier; Barma and Sally Wesche.



The members of the Ministry Wives Team with Deb Burma – are from left, Kathy Meier, Chairperson; Kathy Keene; Sally Wesche; Barb Pennekamp; guest speaker Deb Burma, Elaine Stier; Martha Rockey; and Anette Shanks.



Registration Open for Fall Pastors Conference

T.A.G. "From Generation to Generation"



Scott Rische

Registration is open for the Fall 2024 Pastors Conference. It will be held at the Hilton Daytona Beach Oceanfront Resort, 100 N. Atlantic Ave, Daytona Beach, FL.

"You're invited to step out of our own pulpits and teaching podiums to reconnect with fellow ministers of the Gospel as we hear from experienced pastors engaged in the theology and practice of proclamation to the next generation," announced The Rev. Dave Wesche, committee chair for the conference. "Enjoy presentations from pastor-and-missionary Rev. Dr. Scott Rische, and Rev. Dr. Bob Newton along with more than 18 breakout sessions and daily roundtable discussions."

Scott Rische is the International Director of PLI. He coordinates Christian leadership training for churches in more than 22 countries. Scott's passions and callings in life are to see people come into a faith relationship with Jesus Christ, as well as to teach, encourage, develop, and mentor leaders for mission and ministry.

Rische joined the PLI team in 2011. Previously he served as a church planter, lead pastor, and founder of a church planting network. Scott received his D. Min. from Bakke Graduate University in 2006 in the area of church planting movements. Scott is a private pilot and enjoys flying, writing, music, woodworking, and anything outdoors.

Rev. Dr. Robert Newton served five terms as LCMS District President for California/Nevada/Hawaii — often running

unopposed and elected by acclamation.


According to Wesche, the committee planned the conference schedule to include plenty of free time for fellowship and collegiality.

The conference theme verse comes from Psalm 71 — O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come. The schedule is designed as such:

Monday — Transforming Personally.

Tuesday — Affecting Relationally.

Wednesday — Growing Simply.

"Check-in for the conference will open on Monday September 23rd at 10:00 am and the Closing Worship with Holy Communion will be held Wednesday morning at 10:30 am, sending our clergy back home as the body of Christ to their congregations and neighborhoods, he concludes." 



Bob Newton



Dave Wesche

PASTORS CONFERENCE COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Rev. Dave Wesche — Chair

Rev. Jeff Shanks

Rev. Andrew Schermbeck

Rev. Dr. Brian Stolarczyk

Rev. Deon Hull

Rev. Ron Pennekamp

Rev. Dr. Peter Meier

Rev. James Rockey, President

REGISTRATION FEES:

The District Congregation assessment covers the fees for FLGA called staff & 2024-2025 Vicars.

No fee for Emeritus workers who have been in the FLGA District for five or more years \$50 registration fee for all spouses and members of other LCMS Districts.

Fees can be paid through the District Website through the Give tab or by mailing in a check to the District Office: FLGA District, 5850 T.G. Lee Blvd, Suite 500, Orlando, FL 32822.



Registration To Open for Fall Educators Conference



The Florida-Georgia District Educators Conference will provide professional development for teachers, DCEs, Family Life Ministers, and administrators with keynote sessions, educator camps, plus breakout sessions will provide participants with seven hours of professional development.

Registration opens soon and will close September 2, 2024. The conference will be held at the Hilton Daytona Beach Oceanfront Resort, 100 N. Atlantic Ave, Daytona Beach, FL — the same facility as the Fall District Pastors Conference.

Keynote speakers have been announced:

Dr. Lori Elliott has served as a classroom teacher, technology integration specialist, and literacy coordinator during her almost 30 years in education. She currently serves as an educational consultant, content developer, and presenter.

Dr. Jim Pingel has served as a Lutheran teacher and executive Director of Lutheran high schools and is currently a faculty member at Concordia University/Wisconsin (CUW). Pingel went to public schools all his life as he grew up in Sun Prairie, WI. He received a well-rounded education in most aspects but didn't have the religious training and instruction. Post-high school, he went to Concordia University Wisconsin for his bachelor's degree in Secondary Education — History & Athletic Coaching. He received two different Masters degrees — one in Early American History from Marquette University and the other in Educational Administration

from CUW. In 2008, he earned his Ph.D. in Educational Leadership from Cardinal Stritch University.

Pingel plans to highlight how Lutheran school educators can always learn more from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Together, conference participants will take a deep dive into analyzing the pedagogy and techniques of our Master Teacher and explore ways to apply the His (very) best practices in our teaching and leadership vocations. Along the way, we'll encourage one another as we confront educational challenges and our own shortcomings. Pingel assures participants that they'll also take time to laugh and enjoy fellowship together as they celebrate the joys of the teaching and leading in our Lutheran schools. 



Lori Elliott



Jim Pingel

Regular Registration:
\$275 per person –
through August 23rd

Late Registration:
\$295 per person –
August 24-September 2

**Complete Conference
Schedule is at**
[https://flgadistrict.org/
educatorsconference/](https://flgadistrict.org/educatorsconference/)

Questions?
Contact Jennifer Tanner
at jtanner@flgadistrict.org
or Cindy Hammerstrom
at [chammerstrom@
flgadistrict.org](mailto:chammerstrom@flgadistrict.org)



Jennifer Tanner

Region 4 Ministerial Interview Committee Meets



Above is the FLGA Region 4 District Ministerial Interview Committee — which interviews candidates for EIIT, CHS, MDiv, SMP and Deaconesses (the various programs at the seminaries) SMP, Hispanic Institute, residential, etc. The District has one committee in each region, each with their own chair. Rev. Marc Nauman is chairing Region 4. 🌀

Plant City Congregation Helps Magnet School Students With Uniforms

In May, Rev. Dean Pfeffer, Sr. Pastor of **Hope/Plant City, FL** had the honor on behalf of the members of Hope to present a check for \$2,000 to Mr. Dennis Mayo, Principal of Plant City's Marshall Middle Magnet IB World School



for use in their student uniform and assistance program. As Mayo explained to Pfeffer, school uniforms are required of all students but being a Title 1 school, a number of families cannot afford the simple T-Shirt. These funds will be used to help those families in need receive the required uniforms for their students. The funds presented to Marshall Middle School are a portion of the proceeds Hope received from its Annual Turkey Supper in November and their participation in the Florida Strawberry Festival where the congregation sells hot boiled peanuts. 🌀

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Pastor John was amazed at Brian, the “newish” board chair. He was a normal guy who worked long hours and came to church a few times a month. Brian reluctantly took over one of the boards after the pandemic. Since then, this once dying board has really taken off. Their events

took a while to talk through but we forged a clear and simple purpose statement. Then at every meeting, any ideas or strategies or suggestions we have are always measured against that purpose. Weak ideas get strengthened or thrown out and strong ideas improve and get even better.”

Brian went on. “The next thing we talked about was how we wanted to operate. That is how to treat one another and do our work. So we made a covenant and came up with

get outsiders involved as early as possible, even and especially at the idea stage. Finally we said it was important to have fun!”

Pastor John was moved by what Brian was describing. But then he pushed Brian once more. “Brian, this all sounds great. Yet I wonder, what else are you doing? There’s a different spirit among everyone who gets involved.” Brian paused and then looked at Pastor John and said, “You preach that we are the church, sinners saved by grace, right pastor? So we treat one another with love and forgiveness. We are imperfect and need a lot of love. So I check in regularly. I call them most every month and talk to them at church or both.

have been more consistent and God is really blessing their work. People love working together and seem to make things happen.


One afternoon Pastor John was making a quick trip to his favorite coffee shop and ran into Brian. They sat down to catch up. Pastor John asked, “Brian, your board seems to be knocking it out of the park. That’s awesome. So I’m curious, what’s the secret sauce for what you’re doing?”

Brian laughed nervously a bit but then got serious. He said, “Well it comes down to a few really important things. The first thing we did as a board was get on the same page. It might sound like a dumb question but I asked them, ‘Why are we here? What is our purpose?’ It

things like listening to one another, returning phone calls and emails, attending faithfully and on time, mutual encouragement, respect and no stirring up drama! We even said a value was getting non-member spouses and friends involved in not only attending our events but asking for their ideas and even them helping to put on the programs. After all we want to help bring people closer to Jesus. So we wanted to make friends and

Community Connections & Ministry Moments

First, I ask them how they are doing. After that we talk about the project and I ask how can I help. But we always pray and ask for God’s grace and help personally and for the project. At the meetings we ask about their families and their cares and pray then too. I find that they are doing the same thing with me and one another and for those further from Jesus. Isn’t that what every board is supposed to do Pastor?”

“It sure is Brian. It sure is.” Said Pastor John. 

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



Scott Gress
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Florida-Georgia District Financial Highlights For the Year Ended January 31, 2024

Greetings! We in the District Florida-Georgia District Office thank you for your continued prayers, partnership, and financial support. We look forward to the opportunities this year to reach many for Jesus. Praying you continue to be in good health and good spirits through Him who strengthens us! On these pages is a summary of the Florida-Georgia District Financials for FYE January 31, 2024.

Overview:

Congregational giving exceeded our annual budget of \$2.15 million. The District continues to operate with no real debt and all funds with donor restrictions are fully funded. Expenses continue to be monitored closely as the missions of the District are funded according to the budgeted plan.

Statement of Activities:

Unrestricted support from congregations totaled \$2,185,972. This is \$35,972 above the budget of \$2.15 million and a 2% increase and \$46,025 above unrestricted support for FYE 2023.

Net Assets Released from Restriction are related to funds set aside by donors for a specific purpose. Net assets released from restriction decreased by \$210,522 compared to the prior year. This decrease was due to the reduction of Disaster Response funds released. Net Assets are released from restriction at the time the purpose has been satisfied.

Restricted funds are not utilized to fund operating expenses and their usage can vary greatly from year to year. Convention, conferences and workshop revenue increased by \$48,863 compared to the prior year due to District events with higher attendance compared to prior year. Gifts, property decreased from prior year as the District received property from a church closing in FYE 2023 which did not occur in the current year FYE 2024.

Other income increased by \$22,436 as compared to the prior year as the District received more donations from other agencies and individuals.

Total expenses for FYE 2024 were \$3,769,098 versus \$3,964,581 for FYE 2023, or a decrease of \$195,483. This was due to several factors: the decrease is attributable

to Congregational Services programs which decreased by \$96,329 which is the net result of an increase in conference expenses along with a decrease in the disbursement of Disaster Response grants. There was a slight increase in World and National Missions programs as Kingdom Seed and other mission support was more than prior year. Additionally, Preparing Church Workers programs expense increased as more scholarships were awarded to students at Concordia Seminaries and Universities. Mission and Ministry Support costs decreased



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by \$60,133 which is a combination of decreased rent, with increased publication costs and office operating costs. Also, a decreased cost of \$95,823 in Ecclesiastical Administration which in the current year did not include overlapping costs related to the transition of Presidential Administrations which had occurred in the prior year.

As always, we strive to be good stewards with the funds entrusted to us and work diligently to use them in a manner that meaningfully benefits and supports ongoing ministry. In July 2022, the FLGA District signed a new lease agreement beginning January 1, 2023, with our current landlord for a new space in our existing building located at 5850 TG Lee Boulevard, Orlando, FL 32822. Currently, we remain in our original Suite 500 while paying the lower rental rate per the new lease agreement.

During FYE 2024, we continued to fulfill our tithe commitment to the Synod of 17% of all congregational giving for a total of \$372,131. Additionally, we allocated \$75K or 3% of congregational giving towards the District Revitalization Fund, which helps underwrite District events such as Pastors Conference, Educators Conference,

President's Equip Conference, and other District wide events. The change in Net Assets for the past fiscal year was an increase of \$646,394. This increase was largely due to restricted funds received by the District which were related to a property sale owned by a Recognized Service Organization within the District as well as \$249,000 in donations to the 75th District Anniversary Campaign.

2024-2025 Work Program

The highlights of the 2024-2025 work program are as follows: Congregational budgeted support remains the same at \$2,150,000.

Through unanimous support of the Board of Directors, the budgeted tithe on congregational support received at the District remains set at 20%. This is broken down into two components. Synod receives 17% of this support and the remaining

3% is budgeted to further fund District Revitalization efforts. The Missions budget continues to offer 0% Mission Loans, Kingdom Seed and Miracle Grow programs exclusively. The Missions budget also supports three campus ministries and eight other Lutheran Organizations (e.g., Lutheran Services Florida and Mission Haiti), as well as taking care of various maintenance expenses at District owned property in Athens, GA; Milledgeville, GA; Fort Myers, FL; Tallahassee, FL; and Naples, FL.

We believe this work program is within our current funding forecast and it continues to enable the District to serve, assist and encourage the congregations of the District in the ministry of Jesus Christ. The Board of Directors and District Staff continue to monitor expenses and will make necessary adjustments as required. If you have any questions regarding this report, please feel free to contact me at lzirbel@flgadistrict.org — I am happy to answer any questions. Respectfully Submitted, Laura E. Zirbel, Director of Finance & Administration.

Laura Zirbel

Statement of Financial Position Audited Results

	January 31, 2024	January 31, 2023
Assets		
Cash and Cash Equivalents	4,319,490	4,249,638
Accounts Receivable	21,640	20,810
Prepaid Expense	66,851	75,684
Contributions Receivable		
From Split-Interest Agreements	37,899	45,117
Property and Equipment, net	255,860	258,550
Advance Sites	2,134,023	2,118,777
Long-Term Investments	2,554,301	2,044,376
Note Receivable	129,270	135,520
Restricted funds held by third-party trustee	1,946,659	1,849,240
Right of Use Asset	784,413	863,087
Total	12,250,406	11,660,800
Liabilities and Net Assets		
Accounts Payable	130,406	155,642
Deferred Revenue	19,910	17,787
Lease Liability	838,774	872,448
Other Liabilities	222,780	222,780
Total Liabilities	1,211,869	1,268,656
Net Assets		
Without Donor Restrictions	6,109,486	5,959,534
With Donor Restrictions	4,929,051	4,432,609
Total Net Assets	11,038,537	10,392,144
Total	12,250,406	11,660,800

Statement of Activities Audited Results

For The Years Ended January 31,	2024	2023
UNRESTRICTED REVENUES		
Congregation Support	\$ 2,185,972	\$ 2,139,947
Net Assets Released from Restriction	973,795	1,184,317
Agreements with LCEF	130,012	127,149
Convention, Conferences and Workshops	460,942	412,079
Gifts, Property	-	300,000
Other	168,327	145,891
Total revenues	3,919,048	4,309,383
EXPENSES		
Synod	372,131	364,543
Congregational Services*	1,364,477	1,460,806
Preparing Church Workers	88,554	56,331
Missions	605,067	588,076
Mission and Ministry Support	958,415	1,018,548
Ecclesiastical Administration**	380,454	476,277
Total expenses	3,769,098	3,964,581
CHANGE IN NET ASSETS		
Without Donor Restriction	149,950	344,803
With Donor Restriction	496,444	8,715
Total change in net assets	646,394	353,518
NET ASSETS - BEGINNING OF YEAR	\$ 10,392,143	\$ 10,038,626
NET ASSETS - END OF YEAR	\$ 11,038,537	\$ 10,392,144

* Includes School Ministries, Convocation, Conferences, Disaster Relief, Human Care, Church Worker Family Care
** Includes Conventions

Fiscal Year Ending January 31, 2024 annual report



Statement of Activity Glossary

REVENUE

Congregational Support: Donations regularly received from FLGA District congregations.
Net Assets Released: Funds with donor restrictions released into unrestricted revenue to support expenses related to the purpose of the donation.
Agreement with LCEF: Funds received in support of District LCEF efforts.
Convention, Conferences and Workshops: Revenue received from various District event registration fees and exhibitor fees.
Other Income: Interest income, school related reimbursements, publication income and other donations.

EXPENSES

MISSIONS: Efforts related but not limited to national missions, new mission work, campus ministries, ethnic ministries, urban ministries, congregational subsidy and related conferences and events, along with administrative costs related to missions.

CONGREGATIONAL SERVICES: Efforts related but not limited to family and church worker life, adult education, youth, schools, related conferences and events, as well as disaster response and humanitarian aid.

PREPARING CHURCH WORKERS: Efforts related to Emergent Leader program, Synod recognized training, educational debt repayment assistance and financial aid for students attending various Concordia institutions.

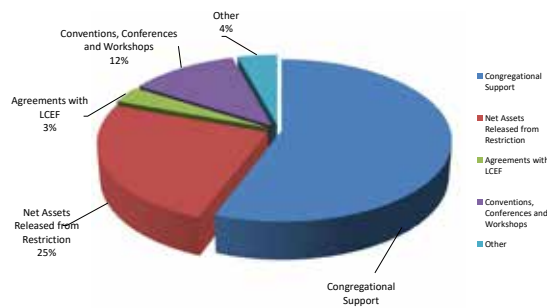
SCHOOL MINISTRIES: Efforts related to Lutheran School oversight and accreditation as well as youth related initiatives.

MISSION & MINISTRY SUPPORT: Efforts related but not limited to communications, financial and general services, operation of District facilities and District's support of LCEF efforts.

ECCLESIASTICAL ADMINISTRATION: Efforts related to President's Office, Vice President's, Circuit Counselors, Reconcilers and related conferences and events, as well as support of the District Board of Directors and its related committees.

Unrestricted Revenues for FYE January 31, 2024

Congregational Support	\$ 2,185,972
Net Assets Released from Restriction	973,795
Agreements with LCEF	130,012
Conventions, Conferences and Workshops	460,942
Other	168,327
Total	\$ 3,919,048



Expenses by Critical Target for FYE Ending January 31, 2024

Synod	\$ 372,131	10%
World & National Missions	605,067	16%
Congregational Services	1,364,477	36%
Preparing Church Workers	88,554	2%
Mission & Ministry Support	958,415	25%
Ecclesiastical & Program Administration	380,454	10%
Total	\$ 3,769,098	



Congregational Support for FYE 01/31/24

City/State	Congregation Name	Financial Support in \$	Confirmed Members	Support/Member in \$
01 Northeast Georgia				
Athens GA	Christus Victor	12,995	63	206.27
Athens GA	Trinity	12,000	177	67.80
Buford GA	St. John	304	24	12.66
Blairsville GA	All Saints	22,360	117	191.11
Commerce GA	Christ the King	4,899	39	125.61
Dahlonega GA	St. Peter	15,920	59	269.83
Gainesville GA	Good Shepherd	11,140	172	64.77
Lilburn GA	Oak Road	36,393	204	178.40
Toccoa GA	Trinity	2,025	52	38.94
<i>Circuit Totals/Average</i>		<i>118,036</i>	<i>907</i>	<i>130.14</i>

02 Atlanta North				
Atlanta GA	Grace	6,000	73	82.19
Atlanta GA	Rivercliff	77,410	284	272.57
Cartersville GA	Savior of All	12,267	155	70.27
Cumming GA	Living Faith	50,000	257	194.55
Jasper GA	King of Kings	10,974	113	97.11
Kennesaw GA	Living Hope	2,400	253	9.49
Marietta GA	Faith	10,777	238	45.28
Rome GA	Holy Trinity	0	92	0
Tucker GA	St. Mark	11,749	102	115.19
Woodstock GA	Timothy	21,320	329	64.80
<i>Circuit Totals/Average</i>		<i>202,897</i>	<i>1,896</i>	<i>107.01</i>

03 Atlanta South				
Columbus GA	Bethlehem	3,034	1	3,034
Columbus GA	L.C. of the Redeemer	3,628	168	21.60
Decatur GA	Peace	170	74	2.30
Douglasville GA	Prince of Peace	200	78	2.56
East Point GA	Christ	259	60	4.32
Griffin GA	Christ Our Savior	13,342	77	174.57
Peachtree City	St. Paul	33,583	193	174.00
Stockbridge GA	Holy Cross	0	25	0
Stockbridge GA	Lord of Life	633	23	27.52
Tucker GA	Incarnate Word	750	35	21.43
<i>Circuit Totals/Average</i>		<i>55,599</i>	<i>734</i>	<i>75.75</i>

04 East Central Georgia				
Augusta GA	Our Redeemer	49,501	378	130.95
Eatonton GA	Lake Oconee	35,571	123	288.19
Macon GA	L.C. of the Holy Trinity	1,000	17	58.82
Perry GA	Christ	3,250	164	19.82
Savannah GA	Trinity	34,150	194	176.03
Statesboro GA	St. Paul's	200	50	4.00
Warner Robins GA	Mount Calvary	70,008	475	147.39
<i>Circuit Totals/Average</i>		<i>193,679</i>	<i>1,401</i>	<i>138.24</i>

05 Tallahassee				
Albany GA	Trinity	4,300	52	82.69
Crawfordville FL	Trinity Lutheran Church	0	56	0
Lake City FL	Our Redeemer	1,100	85	12.94
Tallahassee FL	Epiphany	16,250	270	60.19
Tallahassee FL	University Lutheran Church	8,248	77	107.12
Tifton GA	Peace	3,789	29	130.65
Valdosta GA	Messiah	500	117	4.27
<i>Circuit Totals/Average</i>		<i>34,187</i>	<i>686</i>	<i>49.84</i>

06 First Coast				
Jacksonville FL	Grace	4,800	382	12.57
Jacksonville FL	Holy Cross	100	34	2.94
Jacksonville FL	Hope	3,000	42	71.43
Jacksonville FL	Our Redeemer	1,000	76	13.16
Jacksonville FL	St. Paul	8,000	93	86.02

City/State	Congregation Name	Financial Support in \$	Confirmed Members	Support/Member in \$
Jaxville Beach FL	Bethlehem	20,000	411	48.66
Kingsland GA	Holy Trinity	4,850	128	37.89
Middleburg FL	St. Peter's	13,704	217	63.15
St. Augustine FL	Christ Our Savior	2,400	72	33.33
Starke FL	Good Shepherd	0	18	0
<i>Circuit Totals/Average</i>		<i>57,854</i>	<i>1,473</i>	<i>39.28</i>

07 North Central Florida				
Chiefland FL	Good Shepherd	500	41	11.36
Dunnellon FL	Peace	3,000	61	49.18
Gainesville FL	Abiding Savior	33,300	212	157.08
Gainesville FL	First	29,990	152	157.08
Inverness FL	First	625	218	2.87
Lecanto FL	Faith	11,550	168	68.75
Ocala FL	Our Redeemer	18,333	261	70.24
Ocala FL	St. John	11,000	452	24.34
Oxford FL	Amazing Grace	52,990	305	173.74
Silver Springs FL	Forest	2,328	20	116.40
Summerfield FL	Trinity	52,250	567	92.15
<i>Circuit Totals/Average</i>		<i>215,867</i>	<i>2,460</i>	<i>87.15</i>

08 Space Coast				
Cape Canaveral FL	Christ	6,500	93	69.89
Holly Hill FL	Trinity	3,000	121	24.79
Merritt Island FL	Faith	13,750	430	31.98
Palm Bay FL	Risen Savior LC	1,200	58	20.69
Palm Bay FL	Zion Ev. Haitian Church	0	15	0
Rockledge FL	Trinity	0	131	0
South Daytona FL	Holy Cross	0	154	0
Titusville FL	Good Shepherd	2,232	116	19.24
<i>Circuit Totals/Average</i>		<i>26,682</i>	<i>1,118</i>	<i>23.87</i>

09 Orlando East				
Casselberry FL	Ascension	33,579	175	191.88
Deltona FL	L.C. of Providence	1,200	115	10.43
Orlando FL	Esperanza Viva	0	10	0
Orlando FL	Hope	13,878	63	220.80
Orlando FL	Prince of Peace	18,060	443	40.77
Orlando FL	Trinity	30,233	411	73.56
Sanford FL	L.C. of the Redeemer	8,800	66	133.33
St. Cloud FL	Grace	1,000	86	11.63
<i>Circuit Totals/Average</i>		<i>106,749</i>	<i>1,369</i>	<i>77.98</i>

10 Orlando West				
Apopka FL	St. Paul	191	43	4.44
Eustis FL	Faith	45,734	401	114.05
Winter Garden FL	Zion New Life	0	145	0
Leesburg FL	Bethany	13,007	185	70.31
Montverde FL	Woodlands	24,000	427	56.21
Orlando FL	Christ the King	2,000	204	9.80
Orlando FL	Our Savior	0	120	0
<i>Circuit Totals/Average</i>		<i>84,931</i>	<i>1,525</i>	<i>55.69</i>

11 Winter Haven				
Bartow FL	Redeemer	1,3777	24	57.38
Lake Wales FL	Lake Wales	3,000	50	60.00
Lakeland FL	Christ	16,667	192	86.81
Lakeland FL	St. Paul	20,154	1,172	17.20
Plant City FL	Hope	33,458	325	102.95
Winter Haven FL	Grace	54,000	1,038	52.02
Zephyrhills FL	Our Savior	12,994	161	80.71
<i>Circuit Totals/Average</i>		<i>141,650</i>	<i>2,962</i>	<i>47.82</i>

Congregational Support for FYE 01/31/24

City/State	Congregation Name	Financial Support in \$	Confirmed Members	Support/Member in \$
12 Heartland				
Arcadia FL	Grace	0	18	0
Avon Park FL	Christ	7,001	37	189.22
Belle Glade FL	St. Peter's	750	10	75.00
Clewiston FL	Faith	6,000	45	133.33
Lake Placid FL	Trinity	1,000	115	8.70
Okeechobee FL	Peace	6,500	279	23.30
Sebring FL	Faith	22,171	176	125.97
Wauchula FL	Peace Valley	1,200	16	75.00
<i>Circuit Totals/Average</i>		<i>44,622</i>	<i>696</i>	<i>64.11</i>

13 Suncoast				
Brooksville FL	Christ	2,508	167	15.02
Hudson FL	Hope	3,000	169	17.75
Lutz FL	Holy Trinity	7,226	138	52.36
Masaryktown FL	Holy Trinity	18,658	162	115.17
New Port Richey FL	Faith	5,958	194	30.71
Spring Hill FL	Forest Oaks	6,365	210	30.31
Trinity FL	Trinity	3,600	220	16.36
<i>Circuit Totals/Average</i>		<i>47,313</i>	<i>1,260</i>	<i>37.55</i>

14 St. Petersburg				
Clearwater FL	Bethel	4,800	553	8.68
Clearwater FL	First	8,667	195	44.45
Dunedin FL	Faith	11,078	123	90.07
Largo FL	Christ the King	12,000	367	32.70
St. Petersburg FL	Grace	10,000	512	19.53
St. Petersburg FL	Our Savior	59,102	913	64.73
<i>Circuit Totals/Average</i>		<i>105,646</i>	<i>2,663</i>	<i>39.67</i>

15 Tampa				
Brandon FL	Immanuel	5,747	324	17.74
Riverview FL	Christ the King	10,289	47	218.91
Tampa FL	Holy Trinity	5,000	218	22.94
Tampa FL	Messiah	80,296	656	122.40
Tampa FL	Zion	3,600	15	240.00
<i>Circuit Totals/Average</i>		<i>104,931</i>	<i>1,260</i>	<i>83.28</i>

16 Sarasota				
Bradenton FL	Hope	11,500	123	93.50
Englewood FL	Redeemer	0	117	0
Parrish FL	Faith	12,000	220	54.55
Port Charlotte FL	L.C. of the Cross	36,000	136	264.71
Port Charlotte FL	Trinity	5,000	114	43.86
Punta Gorda FL	Faith	13,108	248	52.86
Sarasota FL	Beautiful Savior	44,350	312	142.15
Sarasota FL	Concordia	8,000	251	31.87
Sarasota FL	Good Shepherd	10,000	197	50.76
Venice FL	Lakeside	12,000	161	74.53
<i>Circuit Totals/Average</i>		<i>151,958</i>	<i>1,879</i>	<i>80.87</i>

17 Southwest				
Bonita Springs FL	Hope Lutheran Church	1,000	320	3.13
Cape Coral FL	Trinity	6,000	153	39.22
Esterio FL	Thrive	5,000	74	67.57
Ft. Myers FL	Bethlehem	0	76	0
Ft. Myers FL	St. Michael	47,250	813	58.12
Ft. Myers FL	Zion	24,000	360	66.67
LaBelle FL	Christ the King	500	54	9.26
Lehigh Acres FL	Beautiful Savior	100	32	3.13
Marco Island FL	Marco	43,241	452	95.67
Naples FL	Grace	42,000	482	87.14
Naples, FL	Pelican	2,000	125	16.00
Naples FL	Peace	4,186	102	41.03
North Ft. Myers FL	L.C. of Good Shepherd	3,204	50	64.08
<i>Circuit Totals/Average</i>		<i>178,481</i>	<i>3,093</i>	<i>57.70</i>

City/State	Congregation Name	Financial Support in \$	Confirmed Members	Support/Member in \$
18 Treasure Coast				
Ft. Pierce FL	Trinity	2,400	88	27.27
Hobe Sound FL	Bethel	0	35	0
Lake Worth FL	New Alliance L.C.	100	3	33.33
North Palm Bch FL	Faith	7,352	162	45.38
Port St. Lucie FL	Grace	12,000	143	83.92
Stuart FL	Redeemer	85,871	485	176.44
Vero Beach FL	L.C. of the Redeemer	5,066	152	33.33
West Palm Bch FL	Redeemer	0	36	0
<i>Circuit Totals/Average</i>		<i>112,490</i>	<i>1,104</i>	<i>101.89</i>

19 South Palm Beach				
Boca Raton FL	St. Paul	23,500	1605	14.64
Boynton Beach FL	Son Life	22,442	203	110.55
Delray Beach FL	Emmanuel Haitian	0	72	0
Delray Beach FL	Trinity	20,522	350	58.63
Lake Worth FL	Epiphany	2,000	123	16.00
Lake Worth FL	Our Savior	7,958	107	74.37
Lake Worth FL	Salem Haitian	0	97	0
<i>Circuit Totals/Average</i>		<i>76,422</i>	<i>2,559</i>	<i>29.86</i>

20 Gold Coast				
Davie FL	Gloria Dei	0	266	0
Ft. Lauderdale FL	L.C. of the Good Shepherd	0	40	0
Ft. Lauderdale FL	Mont Garizim	0	87	0
Ft. Lauderdale FL	Shepherd of the Coast	0	130	0
Ft. Lauderdale FL	Trinity	2,200	40	55.00
Hollywood FL	Prince of Peace	1,000	20	50.00
Miramar FL	Miramar	1,000	33	30.30
Ft. Lauderdale FL	Le Tabernacle De La Grace	700	12	58.33
Plantation FL	Our Savior	12,300	272	45.22
Weston FL	St. Paul Lutheran Church	57,936	660	87.78
<i>Circuit Totals/Average</i>		<i>75,136</i>	<i>1,560</i>	<i>48.16</i>

21 Monroe-Miami-Dade				
Hialeah FL	Faith Lutheran Church	0	161	0
Hialeah FL	St. Andrews	1,200	34	35.29
Miami FL	Concordia	2,400	77	31.17
Key West FL	Grace Lutheran Church	0	130	0
Leisure City FL	Hospital Alma Iglesia	0	256	0
Marathon FL	Martin Luther Chapel	1,000	67	14.93
Miami FL	Bay Shore	2,500	75	33.33
Miami FL	Our Saviour	0	49	0
Miami FL	San Pablo Luterana	500	20	25.00
Miami FL	St. Matthews	2,799	73	38.34
Miami FL	St. Paul	7,844	50	156.88
Culter Bay FL	Trinity	0	10	0
Nassau Bahamas	L.C. of Nassau	0	125	0
North Miami FL	Holy Cross	15,685	165	94.90
Tavernier FL	Immanuel	1,500	51	29.41
<i>Circuit Totals/Average</i>		<i>35,401</i>	<i>1,343</i>	<i>26.36</i>

Mission Congregations/RSO Support				
Alpharetta, GA	Stepping Stone	600	—	—
Norcross, GA	Emmanuel	2,610	—	—
Tampa, FL	Messiah Hispanic	11,040	152	72.63
Fort Myers, FL	Bethlehem Haitian	340	—	—
Fort Myers, FL	Amigos Ministries SW Florida	250	11	22.73
Fort Lauderdale, FL	Trinity Haitian	600	—	—
<i>Circuit Totals/Average</i>		<i>15,440</i>	<i>163</i>	<i>94.72</i>
Grand Totals/Average		2,185,972	33,948	63.94

Editor's Note: Congregational Financial Support includes unrestricted gifts and additional gifts for missions. Confirmed Members population has been obtained from LCMS Rosters and Statistics — the latest numbers available.

FLORIDA GEORGIA

Out and About in the District



Plant City Hosts Egg-Stravaganza

Bright and early on Saturday, March 30th the members of **Hope/Plant City, FL** gathered to set up and prepare for their Annual Easter Egg-Stravaganza on their campus. This year's theme was "Road to the Resurrection."


Under the leadership of Hope's Christian Growth Ministry Team, participants were taken on a walk beginning with Palm Sunday's Hosannas, to the Upper Room, to the Garden of Gethsemane, Calvary's Holy Mountain and the Empty Tomb. All participants received a "passport" for their journey which culminated in gigantic egg hunts in Hope's Courtyard.

As a part of the fun and excitement, Hillsborough County

Sheriff's office was on hand and once again did a fly-over with their helicopter, South Florida Baptist Hospital provided games and the Plant City Fire Rescue had games and handouts for the participants.

According to event leaders, Nora Trivunovich and Kathy Drapp, "we were blessed with close to 120 participants to journey with us on the Road to the Resurrection. God truly opened up the doors for us to share what our Lord did for us and the members of Hope truly made the day possible with their participation and 'laying' of more than 2,000 eggs. It is always fun to join together with our Hispanic Ministry to reach Plant City with the Gospel. We are already making

plans for Easter, 2025 and how we can better serve our community."


Above, all participants following the final egg hunt and below, Hillsborough Sheriff's Deputies with (center from left) Hope's Deaconess Yolima Cobos, Rev. John Cobos and Rev. Dean Pfeffer. 



Deltona Congregation Contributes More Than 100 Quilts To Lutheran World Relief

Another year of nimble fingers at work! A small — but mighty — group of just six ladies from Lutheran Church of Providence/Deltona, FL has each year supported Lutheran World Relief with their quilting ministry.

“Once a year these ladies host a quilting sale and raffle and use the proceeds of the sale to fund supplies and fabric to make more quilts the following year,” explains Spring Villani a member of the congregation. “We are so proud of their hard work and accomplishments!”

According to Villani, this past year the ladies completed 162 quilts and sent 158 to Lutheran World Relief. Each box of quilts costs \$2.80 for postage. 



Pictured below are (from left) Bonnie Foreman, Carol Huebner, Inez Laylor, Danielle Cummings, Sandy Wylie and Nan Giometti



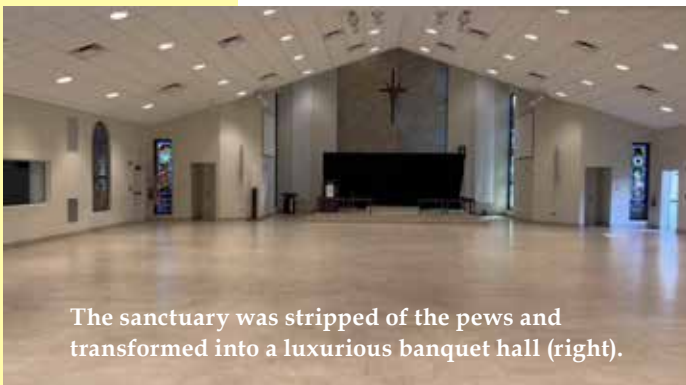
St. Paul/Weston Celebrates 30th Anniversary

"It was a 'Weekend Celebration' starting with a dinner on Friday April 12th and then Bounce House Sunday on April 14th," The Rev. Scott Henze offered. "On Friday night, we transformed the sanctuary into a beautiful banquet hall with abundant seating at round tables. A slide show of our 30-year history and a video message from Pastor Emeritus, The Rev. Tim Hartner, greeted guests. A buffet dinner included live entertainment."

At Sunday's festival anniversary worship, FLGA District President, The Rev.

James Rockey, preached and pre-schoolers sang. Afterwards there was a bounce house fun family day with burgers and music.

At near right — The Revs. Scott Henze and FLGA District President James Rockey; far right Pastor Emeritus Tim Hartner with Jeremy Becker, Director of Youth and Family Ministry. Photos below show enjoyment on the faces of some of the participants. 🌀



The sanctuary was stripped of the pews and transformed into a luxurious banquet hall (right).



Nate Guelzow Presents at Tampa Circuit Convocation

Messiah/Tampa, FL hosted the Tampa Circuit Convocation on Saturday, April 13th. More than 50 participants of the circuit congregations benefited from the keynote presentation given by Pastor Nate Guelzow of Multipli Ministries.

"Multipli exists to stand in the gap between churches and unbelievers, training the people of God with a relational, evangelistic posture and movemental practices in order to lead new communities, where unbeliever can explore Jesus," Guelzow explained.

Multipli's lead team brings 33 years of leadership training experience grounded in biblical literacy, pioneering missional practices, evangelistic discipleship, leading communities, creating content, presenting, teaching, and coaching along with facilitating the best environments for learning.

"Above all, we are life-long learners and practitioners who rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to shape, guide and lead us," he continued. "We simply share the joy of learning and the experience we have been given — after all, you can't give away what you don't have!"



The Rev. Nate Guelzow of Multipli Ministries presented at the Tampa Circuit Convocation in April.

Circuit Visitor, Pastor Gil Kuehn, **Holy Trinity/Tampa, FL**, opened with a devotion focusing on Philip and the Ethiopian wanting to understand the Prophet Isaiah.

Regional Vice President, Pastor David Brockhoff, **Holy Trinity/Masaryktown, FL**, led a Bible study on sharing the faith as a participation in the body of Christ — illustrating with a Snickers candy bar. 🍫



Woodlands/Montverde, FL celebrated confirmation on Palm Sunday, March 24, 2024. Shown with the confirmants are Pastor Joshua Pettit, DCE Betsy Burnham, and Pastor Robert Roegner. 🍫



New worship space was established at **Lutheran Haven/Oviedo, FL**, where renovations have been made in the assisted living facility. Facility work is ongoing, including in the regular worship space which is getting a face lift. Church services had to move to the new dining hall temporarily, but the "living wall" offers a beautiful backdrop for the altar, especially on Palm Sunday — as pictured. 🍫

Annual Women's Retreat Held at Amazing Grace/Oxford



Approximately 80 ladies attended **Amazing Grace/Oxford, FL's** annual women's retreat in April. Dr. Melody Stevens, Doctor of Physical Therapy, author, speaker, and health coach was the guest speaker. At the retreat, both members and guests came together to be refreshed in God's Word, surround one another in prayer, and make new plans with the Lord. The retreat provided a much-needed reset for mind, body, and spirit. The church also collected gift cards and money for SoZo Kids to benefit impoverished people living in the Ocala Forest. 🌊



Redeemer/ Stuart, FL sold "Ram Fam" t-shirts in support of the School Resource Officer Jordan Grose (right).

The class of 2019-2020 was invited back to Redeemer for a Grad Walk and to be recognized during the school's chapel service in May. This was for current high school seniors that graduated 5th grade at Redeemer Lutheran School. 🌊



St. Paul/ Boca Raton, FL celebrated confirmation on Sunday, May 5, 2024. Shown with the 17 confirmands are Pastor Steve Carretto (left) and Vicar Jacob Scheler. 🌊

Blessing the World Through Sewing



The fruition of a year of handcraft work was on display in **Abiding Savior/Gainesville, FL's** sanctuary on April 28, as 20 beautiful quilts adorned the pews for dedication during morning worship. The congregation's sewing group volunteered uncoun-

hours over the last year to plan and assemble the quilts that are being donated to Lutheran World Relief.

Abiding Savior's sewing group joins those from many other congregations around the country to provide thousands of quilts each year. They offer comfort, warmth

and even shelter for needy people throughout the world. The love of Jesus is poured into every quilt. The loyal quilters include Linda Struckmeyer, Barbara Moore, Teri Radillo, Dianne Brown, Cindy Brannon, Candi Steinway, Karen Nobles and Charlene Stroehlen. 🌊

LCMS FLGA District's Navy Chaplain Leads Children's Chapel

Chaplain Pon Chanthaphon of USCG District 14, led the children's chapel at Cross Academy (a ministry of **Our Savior/Waimalu, Hawaii** LCMS) celebrating the Month of the Military Child where some students were children of military families of various branches stationed on Oahu Island. Military children sacrificed alongside their parents in their own ways like frequent moves leading to leaving friends behind and dealing with long separation times due to their parents being away for trainings or deployments in weeks and months long. There were more than 135 students plus adult staff and parents in attendance. 🌊



Saint Michael Experiences Unexpected Teammates!

After decades of sports games played by athletes in our Lutheran schools, there are not too many surprises any more. However, the events surrounding the spring flag football and girls' soccer seasons remind us that our teammates may be right beside us but not on the official roster.

The seventh and eighth grade boys on the **Saint Michael/Fort Myers, FL** flag football team were ready to defend their two-year-running state championship title. About two weeks before the tournament, an unexpected turn of events left the team without a coach, who was also the athletic director. The team fathers stepped in so the boys could finish their season in Fort Myers as well as play in the Lutheran state tournament on May 10.

First year physical education teacher Cary Cooley became a vital contributor as she ventured into an unknown world of lining fields, booking the right referees for the final home games, and ensuring

trophies were available to be awarded to the first and second place Suncoast League soccer winners.

"The athletic director at Saint Francis Catholic School has been a huge help — giving me quick advice and even offering to order the trophies for the final tournament game we were hosting," commented Coach Cooley about Saint Michael's nearly seventy year rival. As acting athletic director, she rearranged her time to celebrate her son's birthday to be at the end of the girls' soccer tournament game against longtime rival Saint Francis to award Saint Michael that championship league trophy.

But God was not finished with His creativity of pulling together unlikely teammates to complete the season at the Lutheran state flag football and girls' soccer tournaments hosted by **Grace/St. Petersburg, FL**. The girls were slated to play first so they left Friday morning before dawn


to head north. Having a daughter and son on each team, Saint Michael alum Sabrina Lundbohm arrived early. She was approached by a tournament official asking where our guys were. She told her they were supposed to play at 9:00, an hour and a half earlier than what they had originally been told.

Lundbohm immediately sought out the tournament organizer to explain their unique situation and that the guys (except her son) were still on the road. It was discovered that an email with an updated schedule had been missed. The tournament leader explained over the phone to Coach Cooley that they could push it back to 9:30, but if they didn't make it in time, they would need to forfeit the game.

Lundbohm called the football coaches and found out the GPS estimated time of arrival would be 9:30 if there was no delay with Friday rush hour traffic. Braxton Rhone, one of the dads helping out Coach Cooley, commented the next day, "the boys learned

a powerful lesson that day. They couldn't understand why I wasn't angry. I explained that there was nothing I could do except drive the boys safely and see what God did."

Little did he know that God gave those who were already in Saint Petersburg the idea that the Saint Michael girls soccer players who were sitting the bench during their first game as well as some younger boy siblings could join the lone 8th grade football player Weston Lundbohm on the field for warmups, preparing to play until the guys got there. As the game was just about the start, three players arrived and raced to the field. Within a few plays, the whole team arrived. They went on to win that game and the next two, only allowing one touchdown the whole tournament.

The Saint Michael teams left Saint Petersburg as state champions for the third year in a row! The girls placed third, but they were number one in the hearts of those football players, coaches, and families. 





The Reverend Mark Eisold was installed on Sunday, March 17, 2024 as Pastor and Mission developer of **Pelican Lutheran Church/Naples, FL**. Pastor Eisold was previously installed as missionary developer out of **Grace/Naples, FL**.

Pelican Lutheran now has its own ministry. Pelican continues to be fruitful in reaching the nations that make up southwest Florida, as it works together in

partnership with the Churches of the Circuit and District!

Participating in the instillation are, back row from left, Vicar Niclau Alcena, Bethlehem Haitian LC/ Immokalee, FL; Deacon Mark Greul, Hope/Bonita Springs; Andre Mezilus, Bethlehem Haitian LC, Immokalee, FL; FLGA District President James Rockey; front row from left, Pastors Hank Simon, Zion/Ft. Myers, FL; Mark Eisold; Bob Scudieri, Peace/Naples, FL. 🌊




St. Peter/Dahlonega GA held their ground breaking service and reception this past March. Pictured are contractor Christopher Hayes (Jectar Builders); Fred Wiedenmann (Building Committee Chair); and Pastors Charles Kanefke and The Rev. Dr. Gerhard Michael (retired). The congregation looks forward to serving individuals and families more effectively — not only in Dahlonega, but also in the surrounding area. The new building (shown above) will include a dedicated sanctuary for worship, a generous space for education and fellowship, administrative offices, and a large foyer for welcoming guests. Construction has begun and is expected to be completed late this year. Until the new church is ready, St. Peter will continue with services at 109 Tipton Drive, Dahlonega. Sunday morning Bible study for all ages is at 9:15 a.m. followed by a 10:30 a.m. worship. 🌊



Pastor Jacob Roedsens, **Our Savior/Lake Worth Beach, FL**, celebrated Easter sunrise service on the sand with more than 400 from throughout the community attending. This is an annual service for Our Savior. 



In what has become an annual tradition for the Human Care Ministry Team at **Hope/Plant City, FL**, "Love Baskets" were prepared and delivered to the congregation's shut-ins. Under the leadership of team leader, Sandy Howell members of Hope donated gifts of activity/puzzle books, greeting cards, notebooks, pens, night lights, stamps, basic hygiene items and candy. The items were lovingly packed and delivered by team members to each shut-in. Pictured following the packing event are some of the team's members: (from left) Sally Kimbrell, Sandy Howell and Sandy Bessie. 

Food, Fellowship Celebrated at First Lutheran/Gainesville, FL

During Holy Week at First/Gainesville, FL food played an important part in the preparation and celebration of Lent and Easter. On Maundy Thursday, Pastor Jonathan Rockey led a re-creation of the Passover meal shared by Jesus with his disciples in the upper room in Jerusalem. Kathy Rockey and her team prepared lamb, unleavened bread and charoset to accompany a lesson about Passover. More than 50 people attended. On Easter Sunday an Easter brunch was served between services. A buffet of assorted breakfast goodies greeted worshippers. Sheila Ebert used the German Ostereierbaum (Easter egg tree) as a table decoration for the event. Easter brunch has been a tradition at First for many years.

The children participated in an Easter egg hunt between services. 🐣



The head table for the Passover dinner included (from left) Kathy Rockey, Pastor Jonathan Rockey, and Angie Burr, Director of Open Arms preschool.



The kitchen crew consisted of Jack Halabrin, Jean Halabrin, Mark Kann, Kathy Rockey, Christa Vigil, Mark Hoyer, Laura Hoyer






Lions and Tigers and Bears! Oh My!



Our Savior/St. Petersburg, FL middle school drama students presented The Wizard of Oz. Staff members involved in the production were Mrs. Elaine Futch, Ms. Tammy Sojka, Mrs. Carla Adams, and Mr. Eric Fountain. 

St. Pete Mission Team Travels to Cuba



This past February, 14 members from **Our Savior/St. Petersburg, FL** took a mission trip to Cuba to help meet the needs of a local village. With generous donations from the congregation, the mission team was able to bring 1,400 pounds of medicine, vitamins, clothing, sports equipment, and other supplies to the people of Cuba. The team also spent time leading worship, painting the interior of the building, and putting on a Vacation Bible School for the youth. 




Junior Honor Society Participates in Beach Cleanup


Our Savior/St. Petersburg, FL's National Junior Honor Society participated in a community service project doing a beach clean up at Gulf Stream Park. 




St. Petersburg Students Showcased in the Arts

Our Savior/St. Petersburg, FL students were showcased recently in both music and graphic arts. Their middle school students played steel drums, sang in the chorus and had their artwork displayed. 



Clothes to Kids, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that provides new and quality used clothing to low-income or in crisis school-age children, free of charge. **Our Savior/St. Petersburg, FL** collected chapel offers of \$283 and 123 pairs of "gently worn" shoes to donate to Clothes to Kids. 



Living Faith/Cumming, GA received 26 new members at the Vigil of Easter through the Adult Catechumenate process. The congregation is served by The Rev. Tim Droegemueller. 

Stuart's Student Bell Choir Serves Community

Redeemer/Stuart, FL students in the bell choir continue to perform in nursing and assisted living facilities throughout the greater Stuart area. Two Middle School Handbell groups received superior ratings from the Music in the Parks Festival at Universal Studios on May 11th. Both groups are directed by Joy Beach. 🌊



Boca's School Performs "Annie" to Packed Performances

St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL presented the musical "Annie" on May 17th for two packed performances bringing the community together. Grades 1-8 sang the beloved ensemble songs as Middle Schoolers performed the roles on stage. The cast of 40 delivered the heartfelt story that highlights Ephesians 1:4-8 "God decided in advance to adopt us into His own family." Like Warbucks showed to Annie — only love and hope

from our Heavenly Father welcome us home in perfect belonging as His child. Congregation members were involved in sewing costumes and loaning the 1930s props! Students in the elementary choir had their moment on stage to delight the crowd for "You're Never Fully Dressed Without A Smile." 🌊



Pastor Jake Roedsens, **Our Savior/Lake Worth Beach, FL** presented the opening prayer and closing benediction for the Palm Beach Sheriff's Office 2024 Annual Fallen Deputy Memorial Service. Pastor Roedsens serves as a volunteer chaplain for the PBSO. 🌊



Annie and Warbucks performed a tap dance for "I Don't Need Anything But You."



Miss Hannigan, Rooster and Lily

Holly Hill Celebrating 75th Anniversary

Trinity/Holly Hill, FL is engaged in a year-long celebration of their 75th Anniversary. Sunday, May 19 was the third of five emphases. In January they celebrated the 75th of their first service. In March they celebrated their first communion service. May 19th led to the celebration of Trinity's acceptance into the LCMS with a special worship service,



led by The Rev. Billy Brath, LCEF VP for Ministry Services. Many of the ladies dressed as though they were in the 1940's or 50's, hats, gloves and all. A barbershop quartet, the Ebb Tides, serenaded participants at the potluck dinner.

The FLGA District was just eleven months old in 1948 when they called a Missionary at Large, the Rev. Albert J. Schulz, to the Daytona Area. The first servicetook place January 2, 1949 in the Seventh Day Adventist Church rented for \$10 per week. In May of 1949, the FLGA district at convention accepted Trinity into membership and approved the financing plan for purchase of the Holly Hill corner on Ridgewood

and 12th Street. The District would purchase the property, allowing the congregation a free grant of \$10,000 with the balance a loan to be repaid at \$5 per month, per thousand dollars. 🌀



Recognizing members that have been at Trinity/Holly Hill for 72 of the 75 years

Aquatic Center Dedicated at The Haven



On Friday, April 26th, the **Lutheran Haven/Oviedo, FL** Board of Trustees gathered to dedicate the Lutheran Haven Aquatic Center to the glory of God and all the donors

who made this possible. The Rev. John Elliott (at left under an arch of balloons) welcomed the crowd with the invocation, "Let the gates be opened in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

Rev. Wally Vinovskis, SELC District President and Trustee of Lutheran Haven spoke about how long the idea of a pool had been discussed among the Trustees and the joy of what was being dedicated. Pastor Raleigh Sims, Lutheran Haven Resident Living Administrator thanked the Foundation Resident Advisory Committee for their work raising the needed monies — much of it raised during the pandemic — along with the contractors who worked so diligently to complete the Aquatic Center. It will be used for fitness and rehabilitation as well as for pleasure.

Each donor was invited to paint a tile which created a mosaic of kindness for their Donor Appreciation wall (below). 🌀



Habitat for Children Ministries Seeks



Habitat for Children Ministries, Inc. [HFCM] was formed as a 501(c)(3) organization in 2005. It was founded by Meschac St Amour who also serves as President. HFCM is recognized as a non-profit ministry working

in Haiti, Guatemala and the United States for the good of the less fortunate children and families throughout the areas.

"We at HFCM have a passion to help children reach their goals at an early age, so they can support themselves as well as their families and the communities where they live," explains St Amour. "By donating to HFCM, you become a part of our family. We hope that our cause ministers to your heart and inspires you to make a difference in the life of a child. Our vision is to see a transformation in the lives of young children and orphans in need by giving them hope. The priority of our ministry is to focus on the welfare and long term development of our youth to help them understand how adequate education and good health choices will have a positive impact on their future."

Back Pack Supplies Needed

HFCM is beginning to collect back packs and other school

supplies needed for their once a year Back to School program in La Jeune, Haiti. In the midst of everything else that is currently going on in Haiti, HFSCM is still working with the people in remote areas of countryside.

"We have started to gather as many supplies as necessary," St Amour says. "Donors can make a significant difference in the life of a child through a one-time or monthly donation to our education program. We ask donors to consider to give the gift of education to children in poverty. A new back pack full of supplies can change how a child starts school. They are instantly prepared will be ready to learn."

Contribution opportunities are available on the HFCM website: habitatforchildrenministries.org/

Missionary Flights

On Tuesday, March 19, 2024, Missionary Flights International carried four passengers, including Meschac St Amour, from the United States to Haiti. As there is so much turmoil in Haiti at this time, the flight experienced turbulence for the entire four and half hour trip, giving the passengers a preview of what was to come.

"We landed safely in Cap Haitian to clear through customs and then continued our journey to our destination in Pignon, Haiti," St Amour offers. "Unfortunately,



the people here are starving. I am grateful to MFI because I had an opportunity to bring in some ramen noodles, dry milk, peanut butter, and medical supplies for 100 people — but it's just not enough."

The people all over Haiti are struggling because of the violence in Port au Prince. It has blocked aid and everyday necessities from getting to small villages because there is no gas for the vehicles to travel. Staple products such as rice, beans, and oil are too expensive for residents to purchase — even when they are available. HFCM is approximately three to four hours driving time from the capital of Port au Prince.

"I have been speaking with groups of people in the United States to help with future food shipments, but the Haitian families need help now. We at HFCM want to continue our efforts in helping as much as we can for as long as needed because we know of the political hardships that continuously affect this country.

"On Sunday, March 24th, we went to the countryside to distribute food at a church where our missionaries have visited in the past. It was a beautiful day! The service was great, and we were able to provide some relief," he continues. "The people at church were very hungry and they said that this was 'a gift from God.' We'd like to continue to support the church and the people



Replenishing Help for Haiti

with food because the country is still blocked in some parts. Hunger has increased because food is expensive, and these people do not have bank accounts or any way to get funding — so even friends or relatives living outside of Haiti have no way to get funds to them. HFCM wants to encourage anyone who is interested in helping participate through our programs. This way, we can continue to provide food for those in need. We encourage you to join in our efforts by donating to Habitat to help those who are hungry. We know that with your prayers and financial support, we can help many people and make a difference. The pastor and the congregation at church were very happy and hope for more support



soon. Without outside support in these trying times, it's unclear where their next meal will come from."

Prayers For Haiti

On Sunday, April 7, 2024, HFCM organized a prayer day for Haiti. During that time of prayer, participants prayed to God for the situation of violence to stop — or calm down. The event was called "Habitat Unity Group Day of Prayer." Prayers asked God to be merciful to the people of Haiti because they are hungry, and everything is getting cost-prohibitive.

"The people can't afford to buy food anymore, the trucks that carry merchandise to the countryside are forced to pay gang members at every stop, many hospitals have started closing their doors, and patients are forced to return home because there is no medicine and gas for the hospitals to work as they should.


"We also offered up praises and thanks to all the people who help us and our organizations to continue with God's work while everything is going on in Port-au-Prince. HFCM is still working diligently in the countryside to deliver food and take care of sick people; we praise God for that opportunity!

"Speaking with a friend from Port-au-Prince last week, he told me that humanitarian colleagues emphasized that these departments



do not have sufficient infrastructure, and host communities do not have sufficient resources to cope with the large number of people fleeing Port-au-Prince. Also speaking with a police friend over the weekend in Port au Prince, he said that of the 53,125 people who fled Port-au-Prince from March 8-27, nearly 80% already had been forced to abandon their homes and were living with relatives or in crowded and unsanitary makeshift shelters across the capital. The countryside is getting filled quickly, and they are now dealing with a lack of everything.

"More than 85% of Haitians leaving the capital have been crowding into buses, risking travel through gang-controlled territory where rapes have been reported and armed gunmen have been known to open fire on the public transport," St Amour concludes. "The transitional council, which will be responsible for choosing a new Prime Minister and Council of Ministers, has yet to be formally established. So, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. [2 CORINTHIANS 4:18]

For more information — or to help, visit habitatforchildrenministries.org/ 





The church is often silent about these issues or speaks of them as if they are “out there” — but as they increasingly permeate every corner

of society, they also affect our brothers and sisters in Christ.

When God’s design is rejected, the whole community suffers. Often, suffering parents or struggling individuals are too afraid to speak up about these issues within their church communities, afraid of awkwardness or shame. In this silence, many Christians are bearing burdens alone — burdens that are extremely heavy to bear.

At the 2019 and 2023 synodical conventions, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) passed resolutions calling on the church to “address sexual orientation and gender identity issues” — to start intentional conversations, and to enable LCMS pastors, church workers and laypeople, through resources and support, to carry on these conversations within their congregations.

This past April, the Created Male and Female: In His Image Conference was held at the LCMS International Center/St. Louis, MO. It was one of the first of a series of conferences to be led around the country by the LCMS Recognized Service Organization DOXOLOGY, funded by a grant from the LCMS Office of National Mission (ONM). The ONM will cover 10 conferences in 2024 and 10 more in 2025.

The conference’s two days of sessions were led by the Rev. David C. Fleming, DOXOLOGY’s executive director for Spiritual Care; Dr. Beverly K. Yahnke, DOXOLOGY’s executive director for Christian Counsel; and the Rev. Matthew Wurm, senior pastor of Mount Calvary Lutheran Church, Brookings, S.D.

Tailoring the content for three different “tracks” — clergy, laypeople, and educators and other church workers — the sessions were oriented around four major topics: pastoral care for cohabitating couples, support for families of children who identify as transgender, tactics for navigating difficult conversations and conflict, and Christian worldview and sexuality.

A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

Wurm, who started a support group in his congregation for members dealing with these issues in their families, spoke on pastoral responses to cohabitation and transgenderism. His talks included:



Stacey Eising is a Staff Editor and Writer for LCMS Communications

— how can we plug them in to our church communities?”

Fleming’s talks focused on the Christian response to the culture’s view of sexuality. His points included:

▲ A reminder of Satan’s constant attacks on the church — making Christians ashamed of God’s truth, turning us against one another in anger, oppressing our consciences and leading us to despair — and the protection and cleansing that comes through Christ’s forgiveness.

▲ The need to emphasize the value and sacredness of the body in a culture that demeans and degrades it. Our bodies are not our own but belong to the Lord and are temples of the Holy Spirit. Through Christ, God

God’s Design for Sexuality:

▲ The need for pastoral discernment when responding to cohabitating couples, rather than a one-size-fits-all “ultimatum strategy” or “relational strategy.”

▲ The importance of presenting a positive vision of the goodness of marriage to cohabitating couples, rather than simply condemning their sin. “Light a candle in the midst of the darkness,” said Wurm. “It will draw people to it.”

▲ The increasing warnings children are receiving on social media not to speak to pastors about their gender identity — and the subsequent importance of equipping laypeople and teachers to respond to these questions with God’s truth.

▲ The opportunity to create places in our churches both to support members who are dealing with these issues in their families, and to include those who are coming out of the LGBTQ+ community. “Those people who desire this chaste, faithful life

sees us as we will be, “without spot or wrinkle.” This hope is there for all who repent.

▲ The importance of emphasizing the beauty of marriage and explaining how it is designed and given by God — while also upholding the value and purpose of the celibate single life. “Our society is billowing darkness. It’s all around us. How do we repel the darkness? The only way is to hold up the light. And nobody else is going to do that but the church and Christians — nobody else is going to hold up the light of the beauty of God in His Word and in the saving work of Christ but us. That’s our job, our beautiful confession,” said Fleming.

Yahnke’s talks focused on practical strategies for having difficult conversations. Her points included:

▲ Statistics that show the rising fear and difficulty of conversation in general in our culture, due to the mistrust people have of one

another, and the fear of strong negative reactions from others.

▲ The importance for Christians (especially pastors) of coming together and seeking advice from one another about areas of uncertainty.

▲ How misunderstanding and division can spread through parishes “like wildfire,” and the importance of addressing conflict in the congregation immediately and with love.

▲ The value of patience and long-term trusting relationships when it comes to difficult conversations about sexuality and gender identity. “Be prepared for many conversations with that person. Give up the notion that you’re going to change them. It is the Holy Spirit who does that. Our prayer should be: What might I say that can be useful to them in this moment?”

▲ The importance of reminding ourselves that the struggling

two decades ago. Desemone has been looking for answers about how to address the situation as a Lutheran ever since. Recently, she and her husband have started a support group at their church for families that have children struggling with transgenderism or homosexuality.

“There are so many. And many people with much more painful stories than ours,” said Desemone. “We have lots of grandparents that are coming to [our support group] that are just painfully watching their grandchildren go through this, as their parents have made bad decisions.”

“My experience has been wonderful here,” said Terri Schmitt, a pastor’s wife who also has a family member who struggles with one of the issues addressed at the conference. “I love the respect here, the love of the Word of God held as holy and true, and the tools they


conference is how Gospel-focused it’s been,” continued Rev. Schmitt. “We can forget that these folks are children of God who still need to be reached out to, still need to be counseled and brought back to repentance, ... the Lord’s Supper, ... the church [and] God’s arms. I think we’re too quick to say, ‘No, don’t do that,’ and too slow to say, ‘Come and receive forgiveness.’”

“I was confronted with these issues in New York, and then I moved to Arkansas, thinking it wouldn’t be so bad, and [I] found out it’s really bad there too. So, it’s everywhere. And the church is struggling to respond to that,” said the Rev. Dr. Leroy Leach, a retired pastor and former Concordia College New York professor who currently resides in Conway, Ark.

“The sessions have been very helpful,” continued Leach. “The ... Synod is being proactive in helping people understand how to address this with the love and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The focus is on the grace and forgiveness and love of the Gospel.”

More of these Created Male and Female conferences will be scheduled soon in districts across the LCMS.

We give thanks to God for our partnership with DOXOLOGY and their dedication and work to bring these conferences to the LCMS,” said the Rev. Dan Galchutt, executive director of the LCMS Office of National Mission.

To see more resources that have been created to address issues of sexual orientation and gender identity, visit lcmslife.org/created-male-and-female. 

Starting the Conversation

person is not the enemy, but is “a person for whom Christ died.”

IMMENSELY HELPFUL

The conference drew a variety of attendees, especially pastors seeking to better address these topics within their congregations, and laypeople with children or close family members struggling with these issues.

“It’s been immensely helpful, both personally and for my involvement in the church,” said Delores Desemone, a member of Zion Lutheran Church in Harvester, Mo. Desemone has a family member who came out as homosexual at age 15, nearly

are providing us to go about our lives and honor Him.”

“We face so many of these issues, and they’re generally not spoken of in the way we need to speak of them,” said Terri’s husband, the Rev. David Schmitt, who serves as assistant pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church in Park Hills, Mo. “Many people find shame in these situations when they arise, so they don’t speak of them. There is a lot of fear, especially since it’s so easy to take a Law-based response to these matters.”

“One of the really encouraging things about this



So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; Male and Female He created them. — Genesis 1:27

District VP Attends Synod Prison Ministry Conference

Have you ever wondered if there is a prison ministry in the Florida-Georgia District?

Good question.

I'd like your help in answering the question. President James Rockey asked me to represent the FLGA District at the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod Prison Ministry Conference at Concordia

minimum, medium, and close, and houses both adult male and young male offenders. I went to explore how we might resource prison ministry in our district.

The LCMS has a plethora of materials available through such ministries as Lutheran Hour Ministries, Lutheran Braille Workers, Lutheran Women's Missionary League, and the Synod's Specialized Spiritual Care Ministry managed by Rev. Brian Heller — to name a few. The Synod offers some paths for getting credentialed as a chaplain at various levels of service including your local fire and


police/sheriff departments. What we lack, however, are tried and true avenues to establish ministry within a given correctional institution.

The April conference highlighted what a number of people throughout the United States are doing so as to spark a fire for getting more congregations involved in prison ministry. Prison ministry could prove as simple as writing letters of

encouragement to the "brothers in blue" to visiting one on one with prisoners to establishing in-house Bible studies or worship services. The greatest challenge in the case of visitation is getting access.

If you are already doing something with prison ministry will you please email me and share the details with me. I may have resource information of which you are not aware. If you wish to start a "jailhouse" type ministry, I'd start by speaking to your sheriff or police chief and then contact me for a wide selection of materials.

For a state or federal prison the starting place as with all possible new ministries is with prayer. If a prison is located within 20 miles of your congregation, ask the Holy Spirit to help you identify a person or people who have a heart for the incarcerated. I eagerly welcome your emails and phone calls to discuss options.

The photo shows the nationwide attendance for the LCMS Prison Ministry Conference at Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO. 



David Brockhoff
FLGA District Vice President
Holy Trinity/Masaryktown, FL
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Seminary/St. Louis, MO this past April 15th and 16th. He asked me because he knew for the last ten years or so I have served on a Kairos International Ministry team that goes into Sumter Correctional Institution — a state prison for men located in Bushnell, FL, owned and operated by the Florida Department of Corrections.

This facility has a mix of security levels, including



Former FLGA Pastor Will Serve PLI as Global Executive Director

God is raising up pastors and leaders for His church worldwide. Those pastors and leaders want to effectively lead God's people to work together to make disciples and start evangelistic communities for the sake of God's mission. Growing in Christian leadership is a life-long process — pastors and key leaders need leadership learning communities and other experienced Christian leaders who are willing to come alongside them to encourage, equip and empower them in their missional leadership development, as well as in the development of missional, evangelistic communities.

PLI, based in Wheaton, IL, has invested in pastors, spouses and church leaders by building empowering relationships where confidence and courage is born. Their philosophy is that learning happens in these relationships.

Training happens at the intersection of leadership, discipleship and mission. PLI seeks to transform and equip leaders to lead change and to grow and multiply more missional leaders — believing that through training and through an equipped and

fantastic leadership in the past. The board and staff have gained the trust of congregations, leaders, and church bodies around the world, and PLI's forward-looking donors have partnered to train tens of thousands of individual leaders. It's a joy to join this team and their mission."

Haupt has been speaking, teaching and writing since 2008 and has been involved with a variety of seminars ranging from lay-focused sessions for people in Haiti to breakout sessions at conferences throughout the United States. His writing includes a translation of a sermon for Luther's Works, vol. 58, essays on the early history of the New Testament text in the writings of church fathers, his Ph.D. dissertation titled "Tertullian's Text of the New Testament Outside the Gospels," a volume of translated and edited essays by Hans Joachim Iwand on Church and Society, and a volume of translated essays on early LCMS mission.

Most recently Haupt has served as associate provost and associate professor of Practical Theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

As associate provost, Haupt



The Rev. Dr. Ben Haupt

A Concordia University Wisconsin undergraduate, he earned a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) from the University of Birmingham, U.K. (2019), and both a Master of Sacred

Vibrant Communities. Deeper Connections. Wider Influence.

transformed pastor or key leader, tens, hundreds, and thousands of baptized believers can be empowered for their participation in the mission of God.

"After nearly a decade serving parishes in ministry and over a decade forming servants at the seminary for ministry and mission, I'm excited to join PLI in helping to keep leaders thriving in ministry and mission," said The Rev. Dr. Benjamin Haupt. "PLI's global work of training leaders for Christ's mission has been blessed with

assists the Seminary provost in achieving key strategic priorities in support of the mission of the Seminary. He oversees the Seminary's recruitment and admissions teams and serves as a liaison to faculty and staff involved in accomplishing the Seminary's enrollment goals related to its residential, distance and multiethnic Ministerial Formation programs and Advanced Studies programs. Haupt has been a faculty member since 2013.

Theology (S.T.M.) and a Master of Divinity (M.Div.) from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (2011, 2005). Haupt is married to Celina. They have two sons.

After graduation he was installed as an associate pastor at **St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL** and served there until 2008. From 2008-13 he was the sole pastor of **Good Shepherd/Gainesville, GA.**

To learn more about the PLI leadership program, visit their website at pileadership.org

St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL Prayer Shawl Ministry meets monthly to enjoy Christian fellowship and to knit or crochet prayer shawls, baptism blankets, and more. The woman in the center holding the prayer shawl was a happy recipient of their work with a prayer shawl in the design of the U.S. flag to be given to her father who served in the U.S. military. 🌀



Left to Right: Val Biegler, Gail Fritche, Wilma Napoleone, Debbie Bigbee, Lili Ferrari, Luana Jade Tanaka (recipient), Andrea Houren, Bonnie Lother, Cindy Slinker.

“Art That Unites” features artworks from the Vatican Museums’ Collection of Modern and Contemporary Art together with objects from the Thrivent Art Collection. This special exhibition is a rare opportunity to admire 20th century works on paper from the Vatican alongside masterpieces from the past that were their sources of inspiration. It is also the first time that these objects from the Vatican Collection have been exhibited in the United States. It’s on display through June, 2024. 🌀



The LWML Spring Rally was hosted at **Son Life/Boynton Beach, FL**. This rally combined both the South Palm and Treasure Coast Zones. Shown are Cassie Meyer, Evelyn Maciag, Lori Durante and Carola Simpson. 🌀

Rebecca Schaeffer’s fifth grade class at **St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL** made these blankets for Phil’s Friends cancer care ministry. They will be used in a Phils Friends packing party taking place in June at **Amazing Grace/Oxford, FL**. 🌀



St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL recently honored their Fellowship Team Volunteers at a “second annual luncheon.” They had 35 participants on Saturday, May 18th. The purpose was to thank them for the efforts given each Sunday to enhance the fellowship hour between services. 🌀

Non-Compete Agreements Are A Thing Of The Past

On Tuesday, April 23, 2024, the Federal Trade Commission announced a ban of "Post Employment" Non-Compete Agreements. This is a national ban across all employment disciplines.

In a 3-2 vote, the Panel provided that the ban on Non-Competes take effect 120 days after the filing in the Federal Register. While that Final Rule has not been published yet, employers should begin to review all employment contracts that are in play now. For any contract that exists prior to the publication of the Final Rule, those too will likely be banned for workers as the Panel

determined that "non-competes are exploitative and coercive.

However, as Senior Executives an argument could be made that



William "Rusty" Huseman
Florida-Georgia District
Legal Counsel
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904-591-4822

these highly compensated executives are better able to negotiate their respective contracts and therefore, such bans for Senior Executives would receive a different scrutiny.


If you have additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at The Lutheran Legal League — a resource for our LCMS ministries,

Ministry Staff, Schools, and equally important, a resource for our LCMS members.

RustyH@

LutheranLegalLeague.com.

The Lutheran Legal League is a Recognized Service Organization (RSO), a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization that is independent of

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. RSOs operate ministry programs that foster the mission and ministry of the church. 

District Cultural Commision Celebrates Diversity

In a world rich in diversity, the All-Nations Cultural Commission (ANCC) of the FLGA, District celebrates the commitment of our congregations to multiculturalism. Throughout FLGA congregations have demonstrated a profound awareness of the significance of multicultural ministry.

Recognizing the blessings that diversity brings to our faith communities, congregations have actively participated in initiatives that honor different cultures and traditions. From incorporating diverse languages into worship services to hosting cultural events, our churches have been proactive in creating an atmosphere where all individuals feel valued and welcomed, and most importantly where God's word is proclaimed.

The impact of our multicultural ministry transcends the confines of church walls. Through various outreach programs and community endeavors, we have reached out to diverse populations and made tangible differences in their lives. One standout event is Teddy Bear Sunday at **Hope/Plant City, FL**. Their Hispanic Ministry distributes teddy bears adorned with John 3:16 Bible verses to distribute to families and children in need. This year both congregations — English and Spanish — will collect the bears.

They will be distributed by Pastor John Cobos and the Hispanic ministry. Last year's recipient was the Hillsborough Sheriff's Office.

"This heartwarming tradition not only spreads love and joy but also serves as a reminder of the boundless love and grace found in the Christian faith," explains Senior Pastor Dean Pfeffer. "Through this simple yet profound gesture, we share a message of hope and salvation with those in need."

St. Paul/Jacksonville, FL, hosted a successful Give Away Event, providing guests with their church information and giveaway items. This event attracted attendees from various ethnic backgrounds, with several expressing interest in visiting the church for worship. The week after the event, each person that signed their name and left a phone number received a "Word of Welcome" — a "thank you for coming telephone call" which answered any questions they may have and invited them to worship. As of February 4, 2024, five new guests have attended worship because of the Give Away Event.

Another cherished event was the "Fiesta Latina" — a collaborative effort with **Our Savior/Plantation, FL** and **St. Paul/Weston, FL**. This vibrant celebration brought together individuals from various

backgrounds to enjoy the music, food, and customs of Latin American cultures. Mariachis serenaded families, a Latin band enlivened the atmosphere, and a generous salsa instructor even offered impromptu dance lessons. Through the event's free raffle and the creation of QR codes to capture guest information, they extended outreach, expressing gratitude for their participation and inviting them to future worship services and events. This event exemplifies our dedication to celebrating diversity and fostering unity among our congregations.

If you have any questions or would like strategies for your congregation, please contact Dr. Peter Meier, District Mission Executive, pmeier@flgadistrict.org or Verushka Garcia, St. Paul/Weston, FL at verushka@stpaul-weston.org. They can connect you with a member of the ANCC team. Reflecting on our previous events through the year, the All-Nations Cultural Commission celebrates the impactful multicultural ministry within the FLGA District's churches and invites others to share their inspiring initiatives, as we continue to spread God's promise of love and grace. 

INCOMING



FLGA District President James Rockey attended Placement and Call Day at our two seminaries

— Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO and Concordia Theological Seminary/Fort Wayne, IN. In photo above he is shown with five of the men coming into the Florida-

Georgia District from our St. Louis, MO seminary. From left, President Rockey, Candidate Tim Mehl, heading to **St. John/Ocala, FL** as Associate Pastor; Vicar Erick Quezada, to **St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL**; Vicar Jacob Manning, headed to **Bethlehem/Jacksonville, FL**; Vicar Jacob Anderson, to **Mount Calvary/Warner Robins, GA**; and Vicar Euder Paul, heading to **Our Savior/Lake Worth Beach, FL**.


Vicar Andrew Wise is enrolled in Concordia Seminary's Specific Ministry Pastor [SMP] program, a four-year distance-education program in which men receive theological education in the setting in which they will continue to serve. He's headed to **Holy Trinity/Kingsland, GA**.

Deferred Convertible Vicar Tim Handrick has been assigned to **All Saints/Blairsville, GA**

(shown on facing page with his family.) Handrick is enrolled in Concordia's Residential Alternate Route. Students in this program study alongside those in the M.Div.



Program, including the study of the New Testament on the basis of its original language, Greek. The key differences from the M.Div. Program are a reduced number of courses and Old Testament studies are carried out on the basis of the English language.

FLGA District received two Candidates — Deon Hull, who has been serving at **Peace/Okeechobee, FL** for the past year as a convertible vicar and will be ordained June 30th, and Timothy Mehl who will be ordained by his father, Rev. Paul Mehl on May 26th. 



*Candidate Deon Hull
to Peace/Okeechobee, FL
from Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO*



*Candidate Timothy Mehl
to St. John/Ocala, FL
from Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO*



*Vicar Jonathan Poppe & Hailey
to Grace/St. Petersburg, FL
from Concordia Theological/Fort Wayne, IN*



*Vicar Edward Krez
to St. Lukes/Oviedo, FL
from Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO*



*Vicar James Gramzow
to Grace/Naples, FL
from Concordia Theological/Fort Wayne, IN*



*Vicar Timothy Handrick & Ashley
to All Saints/Blairsville, GA
from Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO*



*Vicar Jacob Manning
to Bethlehem/Jacksonville, FL
from Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO*



*Vicar Erick Quezada
to St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL
from Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO*



*Vicar Jacob Anderson
to Mount Calvary/Warner Robins, GA
from Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO*



*Vicar Euder Paul
to Our Savior/Lake Worth, FL
from Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO*



*Vicar Andrew Wise (SMP)
to Holy Trinity/Kingsland, GA
from Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO*

Dr. Jon S. Bruss Called as Seventeenth President of CTSFW Dr. Lawrence Rast Presides Over Final Commencement

The Board of Regents of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (CTSFW), has called Dr. Jon S. Bruss, associate professor of systematic theology, to serve as the Seminary's seventeenth president after his unanimous election by the designated electors.

Bruss will succeed Dr. Lawrence R. Rast Jr., who announced last fall that he would retire from the presidency at the end of the 2023–2024 academic year and return full-time to his role as professor of historical theology at CTSFW. Bruss's installation will take place during the opening service of the academic year on Sunday, September 8, 2024. Bruss will make the transition to his new role over the next few months.

Dr. Scott Murray, chairman of the CTSFW Board of Regents, announced the call shortly after the election had been livestreamed Fort Wayne's in Kramer Chapel.

"As the board chair, I can say that we have elected a faithful candidate who will lead the Seminary into the future that God has mapped out for it," emphasized Murray. "Dr. Bruss comes with superb gifts and experience for this leadership challenge. The electors found that the men on the slate of candidates were unparalleled in their quality, capacity and gifts, making the choice of the electors exciting and inspiring. The board pledges its full support to Dr. Bruss, and we ask for the prayers of the church that Concordia Theological Seminary would continue to be your Christ-centered seminary that teaches the faithful, reaches the lost, and cares for all."

Bruss accepted immediately. "I'm both humbled and deeply honored by the electors' action today," said Bruss. "After nearly six months of prayerful consideration as a nominee, and with the wise counsel of fellow Christians and brother pastors, I'm moved to accept this call and hereby do. God grant me a mouth and wisdom! I ask for your prayers for me, my family, and above all, our seminary, which has been and remains a singularly effective instrument for forming faithful servants of

Christ and His church. Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word!"

Bruss joined the CTSFW faculty in 2022 with extensive experience in higher education and pastoral ministry. He earned his MDiv in 1995 from Bethany



Lutheran Theological Seminary (Evangelical Lutheran Synod) in Mankato, Minnesota. From 1991 through 2002, Bruss taught languages, ancient history, and world literature at Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato, during which time he pursued an MA and PhD in classics at the University of Minnesota. After completing his PhD in 2001, Bruss taught classics at his undergraduate alma mater, St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, then taught at the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee, and the University of Kansas in Lawrence. He colloquized into the LCMS in 2006. In 2013, he took a pastoral call to St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Topeka, Kansas, where he served as assistant pastor (2013–2015), then senior pastor (2015–2022) until his call to join the faculty at CTSFW. Bruss's many scholarly contributions include translating various works of Martin Luther, including sermons and the *Annotations in Matthaeum*, for *Luther's Works* (CPH). From 2019 to 2022, Bruss served on the Board of Directors of the Concordia University System

(CUS) as well as the synod's 2019 Resolution 7-03 Task Force, which was charged with proposing a new governance plan for the CUS.

Outgoing President Rast also expressed confidence in his successor. "Dr. Bruss has been a wonderful addition to our faculty, and I am delighted that he will follow me as president of CTSFW."

Founded in 1846, CTSFW forms servants of Jesus Christ in a vibrant, Christ-centered theological community that engages and resources the church and the world, domestically and internationally, with distinctively Lutheran teaching, practice, and worship.


On May 17th, CTSFW closed its 178th academic year with Commencement Exercises in Kramer Chapel. During the ceremony, the Seminary conferred degrees in eight programs and presented several special honors and awards. The Rev. Theodore Krey, regional director for the Latin America and Caribbean Region of the LCMS Office of International Mission, served as Commencement speaker.

Near the end of the ceremony, Provost Charles Gieschen presented a Doctor of Divinity, honoris causa, to Dr.

Lawrence R. Rast Jr., who presided over his final Commencement as president of CTSFW. Rast was honored for his "faithful and exemplary service as a seminary professor and administrator, especially as CTSFW's sixteenth seminary president, for his courageous



witness to Christ through the teaching of the Holy Scriptures as confessed by the Lutheran church throughout the United States and the world, and for his generous service within The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod in countless ways."

In photo above, Dr. Lawrence R. Rast Jr. is hooded by Board of Regents Chairman, Dr. Scott Murray. To learn more, visit ctsfw.edu. 

LCMS Missionaries Rev. James and Deaconess Christel Neuendorf Report from Puerto Rico

As summer approaches and we come to the end of our five-year strategic plan we have the opportunity to reflect on the road so far and what is ahead. We celebrated a year since our first worship service in the San Juan Metro area and are actively seeking a larger space for the congregation because as people continue to invite their friends and family we are finding ourselves often running out of chairs — and room for those chairs! It is amazing to see all that the Lord has done in this past year.

This Spring we have new catechumens in all three church plants, and we were able to celebrate baptisms and receive new visitors. We continue to have more interest from young people and are meeting several important milestones behind the scenes including being a recognizable Lutheran identity across the island.

We are preparing for a new five-year strategic plan and identify the next set of goals for our work on the island. When the Lord came to Solomon at the time of his coronation as king of the United Kingdom of Israel, he wisely asked the Lord to give him wisdom above all things. We ask that you would also pray for us to be given wisdom and patience as we seek to make the investments of time, resources and attention that will keep us focused on the important work of establishing word and sacrament communities across the island in the best way. We look forward to sharing more soon about the important changes that we will be making to continue expanding our work of Gospel proclamation across the whole land of Puerto Rico.

In March, Elizer was baptized at the Friday Service of Word after our weekly fellowship time. We praise God for His wonderful gifts and the gifts God gave Elizer making him a child of God! We also give thanks for his family who has been faithful to bring him to church and to hear this Word. 🙏



Every Wednesday we have been gathering for worship or Bible study and then food and fellowship after as a University Ministry. For a few of the nights we had friends of the congregation and special guests come and teach about studying techniques, how to manage stress, and finally, how to eat healthy on a budget.



Blessed to have these visitors come and see us! If you are in Puerto Rico, come to one of our services! All services begin at 10AM each Sunday.




Elizer proudly displaying his baptism certificate

To read more about James & Christel's missionary work, to contribute toward their efforts, please visit www.lcms.org/neuendorf

PASSAGES

Diana Jean “Dini” Kovac fell asleep in the arms of Jesus on Wednesday, March 27th, 2024. Her funeral was held April 5th at **St. Luke’s/Oviedo, FL**.

Dini was the wife of Don Kovac, who was the former Executive Director of the Lutheran Haven, for many years.

Diana Jean (Casselman) Kovac was born October 10, 1944 in Jamestown, New York to Merle and Betty Casselman. She was baptized at the age of 10 at the U.S. Naval Chapel in Washington, D.C. and confirmed at **Grace/Key West, FL**. She and husband Don were married in 1964 at Corpus Christi, TX. Diana is survived by Don, daughter Michelle (and Tim Miller); Son Dan (and Rachel); daughter Rebecca, (and Todd Bequette) and Joshua (and Lisa); and, 13 grandchildren. Diana is also survived by sister Nancy Proux and brother Brad. Diana is a graduate of Lutheran Hospital School of Nursing, St. Louis; St. Louis University BA. She also received her Masters in Nursing from University of Florida. Diana and her family served as missionaries with Lutheran Bible Translators for 10 years in Liberia, West Africa and resumed her nursing career following her service with LBT. 



Milan Weerts Receives Crown of Life May 27, 2024

The Rev. Milan G. Weerts • November 20, 1936 – May 27, 2024

The Rev. Dr. Milan G. Weerts went to his heavenly home on May 27, 2024, where he was greeted with joy and open arms. He is survived by his wife of 64 years, Marjorie (Schmitt), sister Mary Ann (Scott), his children Drew Weerts (Mary), and Sara Ricker, Granddaughter Shannon (Jonathan), and great-grandson, Jensen.

Milan exhibited a thirst for learning on many different subjects, but most of all, he loved learning about his Lord and how he could share that ministry with others. His continued quest for knowledge culminated in earning his Doctorate in Theology from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

Milan also loved travel and traveled to as many different countries as he could for much of his adult life. He enjoyed experiencing many diverse cultures, customs, and food.

He will be fondly remembered for his sense of humor and love of storytelling. He always had a smile on his face and enjoyed making others laugh.

Milan made this remark about people asking him about the long marriage he and Marge had experienced: “I feel sad for the many younger people who ask us, how we have stayed together so long. It is simple. We forgive each other like we have been forgiven by Jesus. I’ve never had a couple to come to me and say, ‘Pastor, we are getting a divorce because we can’t



stand all this happiness we’ve been having.’ Instead they say, ‘Pastor we can’t stand all this pain we are having.’ Forgiveness removes the pain and what remains is the joy of the Lord in the Lord and each other.”

“I enjoyed him as my boss at Woodlands and working with him


on the Stewardship Committee in the District,” said Kathy Keene. “I will really miss him. He always had a positive outlook on everything he participated in.”

Milan dedicated his life to Christ and served several congregations in his career:

- Immanuel/Pensacola, FL;
- Trinity/Panama City, FL;
- Our Savior/Zephyrhills, FL;
- Our Savior/St. Petersburg, FL;
- Trinity/Orlando, FL
- St. Paul/ Janesville, WI;
- Woodlands Lutheran Camp/ Montverde, FL;
- Grace/Winter Haven, FL;
- Trinity/Jefferson City, MO;
- Faith/Eustis, FL
- Woodlands /Montverde, FL;

Some of these were in interim positions while the congregation was in the calling process.

His Celebration of Life will be held at Woodlands Lutheran Church on Wednesday, June 19, 2024 at 2:00 p.m. 15333 County Road 455 Montverde, FL 34756.

Marge served seven decades as church organist and Milan six decades in ministry. Pastor Weerts has been serving Woodlands as visitation pastor alongside Senior Pastor Joshua Pettit. 

David Weidner Called Home May 26, 2024

David Lee Weidner was born on Friday, July 13, 1951 in Corriganville, MD to Frederick and Lenora and older brother Robert. He grew up in the Appalachian Mountains playing in the creek, exploring with his many cousins, and enjoying all the fun of childhood with his close-knit community.

He attended Mt. Savage School from 1st-12th grade, graduated with honors in 1969 and went on to Frostburg State University where he earned a Bachelor's Degree in Mathematics and Economics.

While working at Camp Pioneer in Western New York, he worked closely with the Eastern District of the LCMS, and met and married Cathleen Graf in September 1974.

David accepted a job in youth ministry at St. Paul's/North Tonawanda, NY where he and Cathy started their family. Kyle David was born in 1977, and the following year the three moved across the country to Mount Olive/La Mirada, CA. Emily Cathleen arrived in 1980 and the family was complete. In 1983, he accepted a call to Trinity/Simi Valley, CA, and served the congregation as Director of Christian Education for 10 years.

In 1985, David earned his colloquy from Christ College (now Concordia University) in Irvine, CA. During this time, David began volunteering with the National Youth Gathering, and took on more responsibility until the LCMS Department of Youth Ministry called him to St. Louis to serve as the National Gathering Director in 1993 where he served until 2001.

After serving the following year as Administrator at Faith/Oakville, MO, David and Cathleen (now empty-nesters) moved to Orlando in 2002 to serve as Executive Director of Congregational Services for the Florida-Georgia District. He was with the District until his retirement in 2014.

David is survived by his loving family; former wife Cathleen Graf, son Kyle Weidner (Sophia), daughter Emily Harkins (Don) grandchildren Donny and Daisy Harkins, brother Robert Weidner (Susan) and nephews and nieces.

Greeting David in Heaven are his parents, Frederick and Lenora Weidner, and many other family members, friends, and colleagues.

"A man of ministry, faith, love, and devotion, he navigated a life and career committed to making the lives of others more fulfilling through the teachings of Christ," said Emily Harkins, David's daughter. "He will be deeply missed by many, but he will forever be in our hearts and our minds, never forgotten."

"I met Dave Weidner in New Orleans prior to a Youth Gathering when I was a parish pastor, and he was working for the LCMS," offered FLGA District President Emeritus Greg Walton. "Little did I know then what a significant role David would have in my life less than a decade later. He was among the first to heartily welcome me when I was elected District President.

"Dave was a wonderful assistant and a gem of a guy with a servant heart. He served as my right-hand man in my early years as District President and was an indispensable advisor. He was often the levelheaded voice, occasional counselor, and friend. We spent many hours of windshield time together all over Florida as he introduced me to ministries, and he was a valuable knowledge resource for me about the FLGA District and the Synod as I was adjusting to District life.

"It was a joy to work with him, and I loved him like a brother. He cared about the church, about the office, and was a special champion for the DCE ministry. He had great influence on my leadership and ministry.

"Although his illness impacted his life in many ways during these last years — my admiration and appreciation for our partnership always remained. I am so grateful he has found peace in the arms of Jesus," Walton concluded.

"Dave brought invaluable knowledge and experience to our staff. He transformed Youth Ministry while developing and fine tuning his role as Executive Director for Congregational Services," said

Mark Brink, Emeritus Executive Director for School & Youth Ministry. "Dave was a friend and counselor to scores of church workers and lay leaders, and invaluable member of our staff."

"He is now at peace, living in a perfect body with no pain and breathing clean breaths of air for the first time in so long," exclaimed Meridith Armstrong Swanson, FLGA Communications Coordinator and long-time family friend. "We miss him already, especially his laughter, love, guidance — and great hugs!"

"I miss my friend very much but rejoice that he is in the arms of Jesus and free from pain. I have learned so much with him as a friend and mentor and can't wait for the heavenly reunion. You are missed and loved David!" stated Eric Gerken, Director of Family and Youth Ministry at Prince of Peace/Orlando, FL.

"I joined the District in 2010, Dave was the guy with 'good counsel' who would listen and provide solid feedback. I always appreciated his input," said Dan Reichard, former FLGA District LCEF Vice President.

A celebration of life will be held July 13, 2024 at 11 a.m. at St. Luke's/Oviedo. 🌈



A group of DCEs wearing their "I ❤️ Dave Weidner" tee shirts at the FLGA District Gathering in 2007 — the year he was named Master DCE by NADCE.



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Save the Dates!
March 10-12, 2025
Titusville, Florida

Theme & Keynote Speakers Publicized Soon!

2025 Veterans of the Cross Gathering Announced

The annual gathering for retired pastors, teachers, DCEs, administrators and laity affiliated with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has been planned for March 10-12, 2025 in Titusville, FL.

"We'll once again enjoy the facilities of the St. Stephen Retreat Center," announced Ruth Wiedenman, event chairperson. "The committee and FLGA District Office looked at a wide selection of facilities — but none offered the convenient location, the good rates, the food services and beautiful waterfront grounds of St. Stephen Christian Retreat & Conference Center."

The committee met at the FLGA District Office on Thursday, May 16th for a comprehensive planning session. They studied the evaluation forms submitted by the gathering's most recent participants and did some brainstorming for themes and keynote speakers for 2025. The gathering theme will be announced by Fall, 2024 as well as Bible study leaders and keynote speakers.

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.

The **LAST**
WORD




"This past year's theme was 'Pace for the Race,'" said 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).

"This past year's participants discovered that 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 underscored. "There is an urgent need to persevere to serve the Lord," she concluded.

This past event's keynote speakers were Ron & Barb Pennekamp; the Bible study leader was Craig Mathews and Vic Belton served as proclaimer at the divine worship.

Retreat registration generally opens toward the end of the calendar year and is handled 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. 



Ron & Barb Pennekamp
VOC Gathering 2024
Keynote Speakers



Craig Mathews
VOC Gathering 2024
Bible Study Leader



Vic Belton
VOC Gathering 2024
Proclaimer



Ruth Wiedenmann
VOC Gathering
Event Chairperson