



# LUTHERAN LIFE

**Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod  
Florida-Georgia District  
September/October, 2024**



# LUTHERAN LIFE

Lutheran LIFE is the official newsmagazine of the Florida-Georgia (FLGA) District of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The Mission of the FLGA District is to serve, assist, and encourage congregations in the ministry of Jesus Christ. People of the FLGA District are equipped, empowered, engaged in the Master's business ... connecting people to Jesus. Lutheran LIFE is designed to inform LCMS church and school members of the activities, personalities and resources offered by the Synod and the District. Lutheran LIFE may also provide a forum for readers to express their views and ideas on a wide range of topics. Lutheran LIFE is published bi-monthly. News items and photos are encouraged. Please send scanned photos as a .jpg, .png or .pdf attachment rather than embedded in emails.



Florida Georgia-District LCMS  
Lutheran Ministries Center  
5850 T.G. Lee Blvd, Suite 500  
Orlando, FL 32822  
Toll-Free: (877) 457-5556

[www.flgadistrict.org](http://www.flgadistrict.org)

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

[flgadistrict.org/lutheranlife](http://flgadistrict.org/lutheranlife)

James Rockey,  
*District President*  
Kathy Keene,  
*Exec. Asst. to President*  
Jennifer Tanner,  
*School & Youth Ministries*  
Cindy Hammerstrom,  
*Exec. Asst.*  
*School & Youth Ministries*  
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*Finance/Administration*  
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*Communications Specialist*  
Jay Wendland,  
*LCEF District VP*  
Rusty Huseman,  
*District Legal Counsel*  
John List, *Publisher & Communications Director*

# DISTRICT CAPSULES

## Transferred Into FLGA from Other Districts

06/16/24.....Ms. Tais Brekke (C) from NE  
07/01/24.....Rev. James Thelen (O) from NE  
07/03/24.....Dr. Joan Davis (C) from Rocky Mtn  
07/04/24.....Rev. Robert Leiste (O) from KS  
07/21/27.....Rev. Dr. Roy Peterson from SW  
07/29/24.....Rev. Jeffrey Wilhelm (O) from MI  
07/30/24.....Rev. Lawrence Goetz (O) from CI

## Transferred Out of FLGA to Other Districts

06/05/24..... Rev. Dr. Alemu Sernessa (O) to OH  
06/15/24..... Rev. Dr. Edward Andrada (O) to MO  
07/01/24..... Mr. Luke Beck (C) to Pacific SW  
07/01/24..... Ms. Angela Rush (C) to Central IL  
07/08/24..... Rev. Brendon Moore (O) to KS

## Initial Placements

06/09/24..... Rev. Timothy Mehl (O) from Concordia Seminary as Associate Pastor at St. John/Ocala, FL  
06/23/24..... Mr. Thomas Schulteis (C) from Concordia/Nebraska as Director of Parish Music, Grace/Winter Haven, FL  
06/30/24..... Rev. Deon Hull (O) from Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO as Sole Pastor, Peace/Okeechobee, FL  
07/21/24..... Ms. Macy Gebhardt (C) from Concordia/Nebraska as Teacher at Holy Trinity/Tampa, FL  
08/11/24..... Ms. Betsy Courtney from Concordia/Nebraska as Teacher, St. Michaels/Fort Myers, FL

## Ordinations

06/30/24.....Rev. Deon Hull (O) from Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO as Sole Pastor, Peace/Okeechobee, FL

## Installations

06/09/24.....Rev. Timothy Mehl (O) as Associate Pastor at St. John/Ocala, FL  
06/23/24..... Rev. Daniel Sparling (O) as Sole Pastor at Good Shepherd/Gainesville, FL  
06/23/24..... Mr. Thomas Schulteis (C) as Director of Parish Music at Grace/Winter Haven, FL  
06/30/24..... Rev. Deon Hull (O) as Sole Pastor at Peace/Okeechobee, FL  
07/14/24..... Rev. Daniel Ritter (O) as Senior Pastor at Our Savior/St. Petersburg, FL  
07/21/24..... Rev. James Thelen (O) as Sole Pastor Marco/Marco Island, FL  
07/21/24..... Dr. Joan Davis (C) as Principal at Immanuel/Brandon, FL  
07/21/24..... Ms. Christine Ressler (C) as Teacher at Immanuel/Brandon, FL  
07/21/24..... Ms. Macy Gebhardt (C) as Teacher at Holy Trinity/Tampa, FL  
07/28/24..... Rev. Dr. Paul Burtzlaff (O) as Sole Pastor at Amazing Grace/Oxford, FL

08/04/24..... Rev. Robert Leiste (O) as Transitional Interim Minister at Son Life/Boynton Beach, FL  
08/04/24..... Rev. Jeffrey Wilhelm (O) as Senior Pastor at Trinity/Fort Lauderdale, FL  
08/11/24..... Ms. Betsy Courtney (C) as Teacher at St. Michaels/Fort Myers, FL  
08/11/24..... Ms. Chloe Brock (C) as Teacher at St. Michaels/Fort Myers, FL  
08/25/24..... Rev. Russell Anderson (O) as Sole Pastor at Trinity/Holly Hill, FL  
09/01/24..... Rev. Roy Peterson (O) as Sr. Ministry Advancement Officer for Lutheran Hour Ministries, St. Louis, MO

## Status Change

04/24/24.....Rev. Roland Feickert (O) from Candidate to Emeritus  
04/24/24.....Rev. Kenneth Roberts (O) from Candidate to Emeritus  
05/01/24.....Rev. John Johnson (O) from Active to Emeritus  
06/20/24.....Ms. Michelle Pitts (C) from Active to Candidate  
07/01/24.....Rev. Carl Schneider (O) from Active to Emeritus  
07/01/24.....Rev. C. Scott Gress (O) from Active to Candidate  
07/01/24.....Rev. John Kyle (O) from Active to Candidate  
7/01/24..... Rev. John Mackowiak (O) from Active to Candidate  
7/01/24..... Rev. Jeffery Moore (O) from Active to Emeritus  
07/01/24.....Rev. Wilfredo Rivera, Sr. (O) from Active to Emeritus

## Called to Glory

03/27/24..... Ms. Laurie Wahner (C)  
05/27/24..... Rev. Dr. Milan Weerts (O)  
06/18/24..... Rev. Mark Flory (O)  
06/29/24..... Rev. Jerrold Collins (O)  
08/21/24..... Rev. Dr. Erich Heintzen (O)

## Removed from the Roster

07/15/24..... Mr. Steve Hoffschneider (C)  
07/25/24..... Rev. Thomas Wendt (O)  
08/01/24..... Dcs. Diana Bermudez (C)

## Closures

06/01/24..... Marathon Lutheran School, Maraton, FL closed.

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



# freepress

Lutheran LIFE is mailed free to all congregation members of the FLGA District. Send us your news! Attach photos of at least 300 pixels in .jpg or .png or .pdf formats and email to [LutheranLife@aol.com](mailto:LutheranLife@aol.com). Want to subscribe? It's FREE! Send your name and address to [LutheranLife@aol.com](mailto:LutheranLife@aol.com). Want your entire congregation to receive LIFE? Send your mailing list in any format supported by Excel. Please send address corrections or deletions, to [LutheranLife@aol.com](mailto:LutheranLife@aol.com).

# RESIDENTIAL LOAN PROGRAM

FOR LCMS ROSTERED CHURCH WORKERS



LCEF is blessed to offer the Residential Loan Program to Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) rostered church workers. This program is designed to provide financial assistance to LCMS ordained and commissioned ministers, allowing them to effectively focus on their calling—witnessing and teaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ to others. Loans are available for the purchase or refinance of a primary, single-family residence only.

**Review the benefits, availability by state and eligibility guidelines today at [lcef.org/residential-loans](https://lcef.org/residential-loans).**

**800-843-5233 | [lcef.org](https://lcef.org)**

Lutheran Church Extension Fund—Missouri Synod, 10733 Sunset Office Drive, Suite 300, St. Louis, MO 63127-1020. 800-843-5233. [lcef.org](https://lcef.org). NMLS #3444. Illinois Residential Mortgage Licensee (MB.0006057). Loans made or arranged pursuant to a California Law License (6037619). For more information on LCEF's lending license go to [lcef.org/state-disclosures/](https://lcef.org/state-disclosures/). LCEF Residential Loan applications are accepted from: Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, Texas, Washington, Wisconsin. Specific state regulations are applicable in Arizona and Wisconsin. Call 800-853-5233 for details. All cash-out refinances and straight refinances in excess of 80% loan-to-value are not available in Texas. For those states not listed above, RCW mortgage loans are available through the Lutheran Federal Credit Union (LutheranFCU). Lutheran Federal Credit Union (LutheranFCU) and LCEF are not affiliated. Lutheran Federal Credit Union: 10733 Sunset Office Drive, Suite 406, St. Louis, MO 63127-1020. Phone number: 314-394-2790. Website: [lutheranfcu.org](https://lutheranfcu.org). (NMLS# 1301052).

## Are **you** eligible for this **exclusive opportunity**?

If you are a Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod rostered or lay church worker, then Lutheran Church Extension Fund's **Church Worker StewardAccount®** is for you.

Learn more about the Church Worker StewardAccount at [lcef.org/YourFuture](https://lcef.org/YourFuture).



# 3%

On balances up to \$50,000

This investment is up to 6x higher than the national average.\*

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*\*The national average is 0.47% per Bankrate.com, pulled on April 24, 2024.*



# COMPELLED!

We all know that we live in a polarized society and world. So, who or what do we blame? Opinions abound over who's at fault. It's the media, our education system, government, social media, Trump, Biden, Harris, religion, Putin, China, capitalism, wealth, poverty, race, liberals, conservatives.

## LIFELINES

You get the idea. We don't get along. We are polarized. And I'm not referring to someone else. I mean us.

This is real as we've all experienced it. One word and we become defensive or want to flee. It's sad. Worse yet, in this polarized world we live in, we quickly lose sight of the very person Christ set us free to be . . . and we fail to see, serve, and love — our neighbor. It is with that in mind that I point you to God's powerful Words in 2 CORINTHIANS 5:13-21, because they change everything. Go ahead and read it — I'll wait.

### CORINTHIANS 5:13-21

***13 If we are "out of our mind," as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. 14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15 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. 16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. 17 Therefore,***

***if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: [a] The old has gone, the new is here! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us we implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin [b] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.***



How awful that selfishness and pride lead me to be argumentative. How shameful that I let greed control my life and even my gifts in relation to Christ. How sad that my words can be driven by a desire to be right or appear better. The fight with our sinful nature is real. Yes, sin can so control and compel us. In God's family, repentant sinners run to the cross, to Christ to free us from our guilt and shame.

Yet amazingly, despite what we said or did or posted, week after week we receive from our God what we least deserve — His love! Not anger or punishment or death. Not even hell. But week after week we receive mercy, grace and forgiveness. Why? God loves us in Christ Jesus. And it is that love daily received anew by faith that fills our hearts to such a degree that it will compel us in the way we live.

That's what the apostle Paul is telling us: *"14 For the love of Christ compels us, because we are convinced that One died for all; therefore, all died. 15 And he died for all, so that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him, who died in their place and was raised again."* Get it? **Christ's Love . . . Compels Us!** It controls our lives. It's our motivation for everything we do. Why? Because we are convinced of something. We've experienced His undeserved love. We've come to know and believe that *"One died for all; therefore, all died."* In Christ we are dead to sin and alive in Christ who controls our hearts and lives. Jesus, who died for all is our compelling motivation. For our greed, our anger, hate, pride, and selfishness. He took it all on Himself so that we could be with Him forever. And so, *"And he died for all, so that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him, who died in their place and was raised again."* Christ's love is so unending and life-changing that it becomes compelling — *life changing* to the point that we *"can't help but live for Him"* instead of for ourselves. In Christ we get to be Christ's hands. We get to be generous, speak well of and defend others. Yes, Christ motivates us & compels us to live for Him!

So, what does that look like? What does it look like to have Christ's love compelling us to have Christlike love for God and for our neighbor? Paul tells us in the next verse, *"As a result, from now on,*

# 35th REGULAR District Convention

**COMPELLED!**

June  
5-7,  
2025  
Hilton

Lake Buena Vista, Florida

*we regard no one according to the flesh.*” Instead of considering their ethnicity, education, pro this or pro that or consider how they look, or what they have.

What if, in every situation at home, work or in public, we regarded everyone from a spiritual view, as the All who Christ died to save? What if we looked at them as children of God that Christ purchased and bought back from the depths of hell when He died and rose for their sin too? Sounds like a fantasy, but it’s not. For when we realize that we all have the same need and consider Christ’s love for us . . . we’re **Compelled!**

And so, God has then given us this ministry of reconciliation. We get to serve God and serve neighbor with the Good News of reconciliation. We get to live in such a way and regard other people and serve other people in such a way that we love them just as God loved us. How? **Christ’s Love Compels Us!**

*We just can’t keep it to ourselves!*

Christ’s love is so compelling that we not only serve others in love, but we also share the message of His love. “And he has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> “*Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God is making an appeal through us.*”

Surprised? I am. Christ loves me, Christ loves you so much that He not only died and rose for us hopeless sinners to give us new life, but Christ now sends us out as His own ambassadors, daily.

Now to the world and even to us, this sounds as though we’ve lost our mind! Paul even made such an observation (v. 13). But when we consider our every sin, ugly, hateful and ungodly thought, word or action. Then we realize that in no way do we deserve His love . . . yet “*God so loved the world that He gave His Son...*” the truth is we are **COMPELLED** to share what we have received that they too may

I am excited to share with you that next June 5<sup>th</sup> through 7<sup>th</sup> we will gather at our 35th District Convention under the theme, **COMPELLED!** The Lord has called us to be His ambassadors, telling of His love for there is an urgency! Join me in praying for the Lord to continue to use us as His along-siders so that many may be reconciled through Christ’s love!

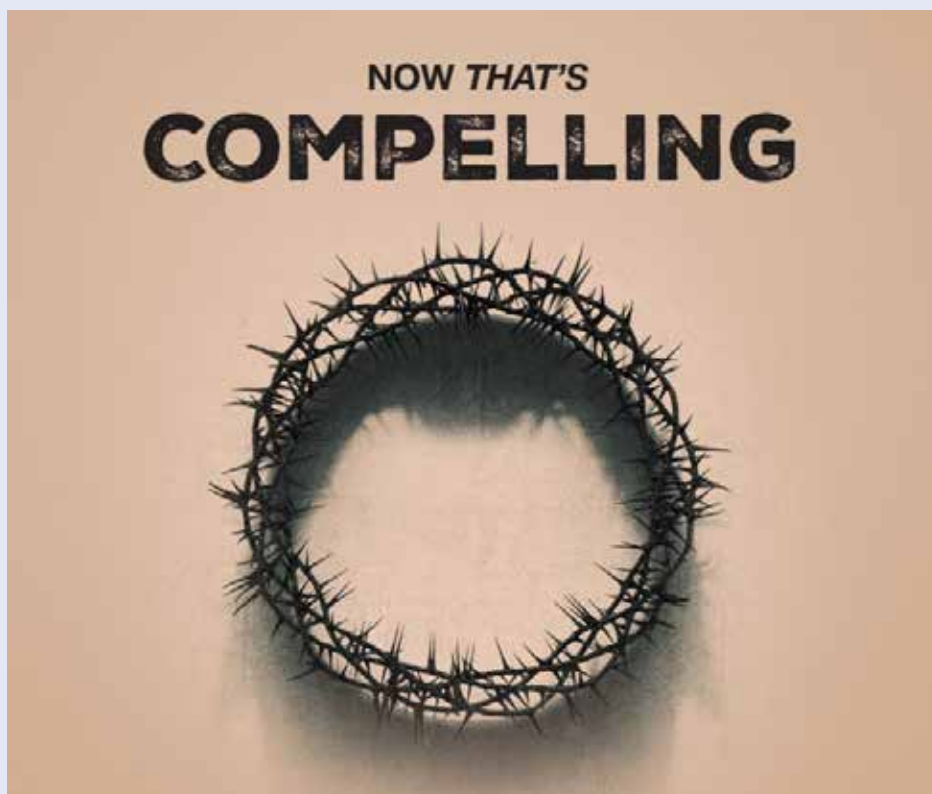
What a privilege to be the hands of Christ! What a privilege that with new life in Jesus, you get to live on behalf of Jesus. Other people get to see Christ’s love in your work and the way you conduct yourself. Others get to see Christ’s love in how you carefully choose your words and posts on social media. Other people get to see Christ’s love in how you look for ways to use your financial blessings to serve the Lord.

In all of this, God’s plan is that they would see Christ and His love in and through us! And we do this because, *Christ’s Love Compels Us so that they too might Live!*

*James  
Rockey*



PRESIDENT  
FLORIDA-GEORGIA DISTRICT  
LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD



# ENDURE

2025 LCMS YOUTH GATHERING  
HEBREWS 12:1-3

**JULY 19-23, 2025**  
**NEW ORLEANS, LA**

Held every three years since 1980, the LCMS Youth Gathering provides thousands of youth and adults the opportunity to come together as a community of God's people to be encouraged in their walk with Jesus Christ and learn about the Christian faith and their Lutheran identity. This Gathering is more than the five days of the event. The preparation process for the Gathering brings together young people and supportive adults to encourage each other in their baptismal identity. The Gathering provides young people a vision for the vastness of Christ's Church and equips them for vocational service as they continue their walk with Jesus.

This event is organized by LCMS Youth Ministry in Saint Louis, MO. For additional ways to connect to LCMS Youth Ministry, please visit their website at [www.lcms.org/youth](http://www.lcms.org/youth).

If you are planning on bringing a group to the LCMS Youth Gathering in 2025, please note that the **MAILERS ARE ON THEIR WAY!**

Get ready, adult leaders — the Gathering mailers are headed to your church's mailbox! Don't let it go in the trash — talk to whoever handles your mail at church to let them know it's important. Be on the lookout for a purple envelope packed with all the details needed to register your group for #LCMSYG, including your Congregation ID! Your Congregation ID is required to register. **REGISTRATION INFORMATION ONLINE**

Gathering Registration information is now available on the Gathering Website. You will be able to complete the registration worksheets online, and you can also mail them beginning November 1, 2024.

The webpage includes resources like Gathering 101, Registration Book, and Registration Worksheets and Forms. In the upcoming months, there will also be step-by-step videos that will walk adult leaders through the registration process. If you have questions you may also contact the FLGA District Coordinators:  
Cindy Hammerstrom | [chammerstrom@flgadistrict.org](mailto:chammerstrom@flgadistrict.org) | 407-258-5042 or Bethany Nummela-Hanel | [brnummelahanel@gmail.com](mailto:brnummelahanel@gmail.com) ●

## Early Childhood Students Receive Family Faith Kits



**Amazing Grace/Oxford, FL's** Early Learning Center held a "Welcome Back Family Chapel" where the children sang, and the 4-year-olds were excited to receive Family Faith Kits that will help their parent(s) continue to teach them about Jesus at home.

Ed and Sue Williams provided the Faith Kit boxes and Joyce Meyer filled them with a children's Bible, sing-along audio music, Lutheran Hour Ministries "The Spiritually Vibrant Home" and other devotional resources. Pastor Paul Burtzloff and Diane Biel (above photos), ELC Board of Directors members, presented them to the children. Vickie Verbeck and her team served pizza to the crowd! ●



# Lutheran Haven Dedicates Newly Renovated Assisted Living Facility

Lutheran Haven dedicated “The Harbor” in late August to a crowd of more than 150 residents and friends who joined together along with their Board of Trustees in prayer and worship to dedicate their beautiful congregate care facility.

The Rev. John Elliott led the service and Lutheran Haven Trustee and SELC District President, The Rev. Waldemar Vinovskis, spoke of the history of this facility and remembered his attendance at its groundbreaking many years ago.

“The Harbor will be a place where care is given, His word is heard, His sacraments are distributed and celebrated, and His name glorified,” he underscored. The vision of Lutheran Haven has been to gradually move toward an aging in place model of care by expanding their assisted living rooms and adding several new and expanded services. By renovating their former nursing home and expanding into additional assisted living spaces, they have been able to add numerous amenities giving them the capacity to further integrate their

expansive community.

“Our goal was to increase the use of these former spaces for the entire Lutheran Haven community so our residents can more easily interact with each other regardless of whether they are living independently or need the additional care of assisted living,” offered Mary Ann McCunn, Development Coordinator for Lutheran Haven Foundation. “This significantly adds to the sense of community and has been the overarching vision for The Harbor.”

According to McCunn, previously, it was not unusual that when an independent living resident moved to the Assisted Living Facility, they felt a little isolated from various community activities which were held in other buildings on campus. Now, several activities and services are more readily available by bringing them under one roof. This includes:

- Outpatient physical therapy
- Additional physician office spaces and exam rooms
- Larger chapel space for Sunday worship services

- A large multi-purpose room for various activities
- New and expanded dining space
- A pub and game room
- The relocation of our Pastoral Care Team
- Beauty Salon
- Respite rooms for when a resident is discharged from the hospital but needs a bit more care before returning home. Respite rooms can also be used for a caregiver who simply needs a break from the daily caregiving needs of a loved one.

The Lord designed us to live in community regardless of age. God created us to live life with others. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:20. Now, our community, in its entirety, can gather for worship, fellowship, and recreation, along with the expanded healthcare services this new renovation provides.

In photo below — Pastor Elliott leads the service of dedication. ●



# Community Connections & Ministry Moments

The Coaching Leader was listening to head elder, Paul, and the congregational president, Jake. They seemed to think that their church really needed contemporary worship. Then they turned to The Coaching Leader and asked, “What do you think?”

and money into technology and musicians... and likely that would be your focus instead of loving people in the name of Jesus. Then no matter what you think of contemporary worship, it’s hard to compete with what people can easily find online or around the corner at another church.

tutoring caring ministry would give us every reason to make friends with our neighbors, love them and be “little Christs” for them. It would be a great excuse to show them Jesus.”

Jake then said, “Right and if we work to involve them they will feel like they are doing something meaningful beyond themselves.”

“Now that sounds like a real game changer! And it’s exactly that kind of selfless love that set apart the early church in a hostile Roman empire” said the coaching leader. “And when they fall in love with you, they will fall in love with Jesus, and if they have no religious background, which most don’t nowadays, they will likely be ok worshipping Jesus the way you do, contemporary or not.” Jake then turned to Paul and said sheepishly. “Of course! The answer is loving people in Jesus’ name.” ●

## What Helps a Congregation Thrive?



**Scott Gress**  
Lutheran Counseling Services  
Leadership Coach  
Florida-Georgia District  
scottgress@me.com  
561-542-4472

He responded by asking a question, “What is the real difference between a congregation that thrives and one that doesn’t?”

Paul and Jake started naming some things. Then Jake remembered a recent conversation with the pastor of a growing church in another state where his daughter attended. “Her pastor told me it came down to people loving Jesus and then loving other people. But I still think the answer is contemporary worship.”

The Coaching Leader said, “It would seem like a good idea to offer something that would appeal to people’s tastes. Kind of like good business — offer what the people want.” Then he asked, “Yet what are people actually craving: contemporary worship or loving relationships?” They both replied, “Well, it’s probably loving relationships.”

“Of course. People today are often lonely and looking for significance. If you started a contemporary service you’d pour lots of time and effort

But more importantly, we assume that’s what people want but sadly they aren’t even looking! Sadder still, most wouldn’t even know if you offered it, and wouldn’t care.”

Then the coaching leader asked. “What was that neighborhood ministry you both were excited about?” Paul and Jake had previously mentioned a neighborhood tutoring and help center idea. There was nothing like that in South county. “If you put your time and effort behind that and invited your neighbors to participate — Christian or not — they will be moved seeing Christ’s love in you and through you.”

Paul said, “Yeah and the

**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](http://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](mailto:scottgress@me.com), 561-542-4472.**





# Concordia University/Ann Arbor To Shut Down Majority of On-Campus Academic Programs After 2024-25

Nationwide, colleges and universities are facing unprecedented challenges. Demographic shifts resulting in fewer college-aged students, changing economic demands, and rising competition are impacting enrollments, especially in the Midwestern United States and most certainly among smaller private institutions like the Lutheran higher educational institutions like those in the Concordia University System (CUS).

Concordia University/Ann Arbor [CUAA] will transition a large number of its academic programs to online-only learning after the next school year in an effort to cut costs. The LCMS Ann Arbor university currently offers 53 on-campus academic programs. Only seven will be offered in the 2025-26 school year. On-campus classes and activities will remain on campus during the 2024-25 school year.

These pressures, combined with the return of high inflation, have created profound disruptions in the higher education marketplace, undermining the financial stability of many institutions. A \$9-million budget shortfall is anticipated at the Ann Arbor and Wisconsin campuses for the next year.

Concordia/Ann Arbor (CUAA) explored pathways for the campus to work toward autonomy within the CUS. A special task force with expert representation from across the Synod provided reports and recommendations from committees related to accreditation, financial, legal, and LCMS identity matters.

After an in-depth analysis of these reports, CUAA concluded that it did not have the resources to pursue autonomy from its larger affiliate at Concordia/Mequon, WI, but the plan was to keep the Ann Arbor campus open past June 2025. CUWAA's leadership has reaffirmed its commitment to continue Ann Arbor's academic programs and as many co-curricular activities as possible for the 2024-2025 academic year. After June 2025, Ann Arbor will continue to operate



with a carefully curated portfolio of academic programs.

Diagnostic medical sonography, nursing, radiology technology and rehabilitation science are the only on-campus undergraduate offerings remaining after next year, graduate programs in occupational therapy, physical therapy and physician assistant degrees also will be offered on campus. Seven programs, mainly focused on education-based degrees, will be offered online. All other programs will be cut completely, university officials said.

With regard to athletics, all intercollegiate sports that can be conducted with adequate roster sizes will continue throughout the 2024-25 academic year, including participation in any postseason competitions. From current reports, roster sizes for most sports appear to meet these requirements.

Following the 2024-25 academic year, all intercollegiate athletic programs on the Ann Arbor campus will be discontinued. CUAA students who have been receiving university athletic scholarships will continue to receive that level of institutional aid from the university — even once CUAA athletics concludes as long as they remain a full-time student pursuing their initial degree. Current and prospective students have the option to transfer to the CUW campus to participate in the sport to which they are committed. The amount of financial aid for full-time students will not change.

“This has been a painful process for our entire Concordia family,” states CUWAA President Dr. Erik Ankerberg. “While this isn’t the outcome many people have hoped for, I rejoice that our Lutheran

mission will continue in Ann Arbor. As our CUWAA family heals and finds a new path forward, I am grateful to each and every member of the Concordia community for their fervent prayers. For the sake of our students and in service to our Lord, we will embrace the opportunity to forge a new path forward.”

Despite these changes, CUWAA says they will continue to:

- prioritize their Lutheran missional commitments;
- provide current students with a pathway toward degree completion;
- maintain a presence in Michigan and achieve a financially sustainable model;
- communicate clearly and consistently throughout the transition.

In a recent comment, CUWAA President Ankerberg stated, “Concordia University Wisconsin is doing all it can to maintain a physical presence in the Michigan District. We are prioritizing our missional commitments as part of the Concordia University System by seeking to serve as many LCMS students as possible and by rebuilding our church work programs to meet the needs of the church today and into the future.

“We are also promoting our strongest academic programs — including health care and legacy liberal arts education — as means to encourage students to find other vocations through which they can serve their neighbors. Finally, the university is making these necessary changes so the Ann Arbor campus not only survives but is sustainable and successfully carrying out its work for generations to come.” ●

# Largo Congregation Celebrates Spirit Night at Dairy Queen



Spirit Night at **Christ The King/Largo, FL** was filled with families — who showed up to support the beginning of the new school year. The Dairy Queen ice cream treats were just a bonus. ●

# St. Pete Launches New School Year With FUNdraiser, Run

School Principal Nicole Clifton was a good sport when **Grace/St. Petersburg, FL's** school kicked off the new year with a FUNdraiser and Booster Run. "We have the best staff hands down!" stated teaching assistant, Susan Royall. "Ms. Clifton is a true leader who makes everyone's day just a little brighter." ●



## AS LIFE HAPPENS, WE'RE HERE TO HELP.

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**CU** FEDERAL CREDIT UNION

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Churches often face the dilemma of focusing on kingdom possibilities or being cautious due to potential liabilities. Each approach leads to different outcomes. Churches that prioritize kingdom possibilities focus on growth and outreach. They invest in community programs, missions, and innovative ministries.

This proactive approach can lead to increased membership, stronger community ties, and a vibrant church life. Most importantly, this priority can lead to raising up more workers for the harvest. Isn't that what we are all about?

By embracing kingdom possibilities, churches align their activities with their spiritual mission. This fosters a sense of purpose and fulfillment among the congregation, encouraging active participation and deeper spiritual growth. Moreover, focusing on kingdom possibilities encourages long-term planning

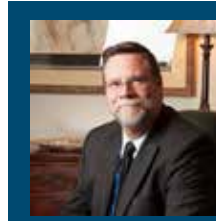
and sustainability. Churches can adapt to changing needs and continue to make a significant impact in their communities over a period of time.

On the other hand, Churches that concentrate on potential liabilities prioritize risk management. They allocate resources to legal compliance,



insurance, and safeguarding against potential issues. This ensures stability and protects the church from unforeseen challenges.

Addressing potential liabilities can reduce stress for church leaders and members.



**William "Rusty" Huseman**  
Florida-Georgia District  
Legal Counsel  
RustyH@LutheranLegalLeague.com  
904-591-4822

By proactively managing risks, the church creates a secure environment, fostering peace of mind. However, a strong focus on potential liabilities may limit innovation and growth.

Churches might miss opportunities to expand their ministries and reach new people, leading to stagnation. The most effective strategy involves *balancing kingdom possibilities with managing potential liabilities*. By addressing risks while pursuing visionary goals, churches can achieve sustainable growth and make a lasting impact.

While we must be mindful of the risks associated with our ministries, we are comforted by Jesus words: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." [MATTHEW 6:33] ●

## Zion/Ft. Myers Celebrates Fifth Anniversary of Advent Devotions Booklet

**Zion/Ft. Myers, FL** celebrates their fifth year of publishing an annual Advent devotional with an expansion of the outreach initiative. "This is the first time we've had a distribution point through Lee Health," says project manager Dr. Mary Manz Simon. Lee Health is the highest rated hospital in Southwest Florida. Parents of students who attend Zion's recently expanded school program will receive a copy in their monthly carline packets.

"In addition, new distribution outlets for *Zion Rejoices!* have been added by individual Zion members who accepted the challenge to share the Good News of Jesus," Simon continues, "New distribution sites include a book club, thrift shop, food

pantry and medical offices. Funding by anonymous donors allow the 44-page booklet to be given away without cost."

"Each year these books become more popular and the number produced and distributed is always increasing," says Zion's Senior Pastor The Rev. Dr. Curtis Deterding. "This year we are printing 1,600 devotional books — the largest number ever."

Content was written by 20 Zion members. The 2024 theme highlights Christian virtues as the "silver threads" that bring readers closer to

the manger. Each daily devotion includes thoughts that link faith and life, a prayer, Scripture references and "bonus content." A complete schedule of holiday worship services is offered on the back cover of the booklet.

"Even in a society that commercializes Christmas, the holidays still offer an obvious opportunity to share the world-changing news of Jesus' birth," Simon concludes. "The entire congregation has accepted that challenge." ●



# Meet the Vicar

## Erick Quezada Serving St. Paul Boca Raton, FL



Each year members of **St. Paul/ Boca Raton, FL** eagerly watch “call day” — when the two LCMS seminaries recognize and celebrate calls. This year’s service was held April 23, 2024, and Lutherans nationwide are able to watch the live-streamed service on Facebook or YouTube or through other streaming services. Families of those receiving calls are able to participate in these joyful celebrations — and learn where the vicars, pastors and deaconesses will be heading in the



The Rev. Stephen Carretto installed Erick Quesada as the new 2024-2025 vicar at all three services.

upcoming year. Concluding students receive their first calls to ministry and second-year students receive their assignments for vicarages and deaconess internships.

“For St. Paul members, it’s always interesting to see where ‘last year’s vicar’ who has finished his final year of seminary studies will be headed,” John List, a member of St. Paul said. “It’s also an opportunity to see if we will be receiving another vicar/intern for the following year — and who he is and where he comes from.”

This year’s intern is Erick Quezada who hails from Edgewater Lutheran Church in Eastvale, California. Coincidentally, Erick’s pastor and one of his mentors from Edgewater is Pastor Joshua LeBoriosis — one of St. Paul congregation’s former vicars!

Erick is the youngest of five children in a close-knit, blended family that puts an emphasis on “being together.” He is from Corona CA — a vibrant, culturally diverse community located in the heart of Southern California. According to Erick, “Corona has more than 394 acres of parks, with sports fields, basketball courts, playgrounds, tennis courts, two skateparks and an outdoor pool. Our family spent a lot of time just ‘being together’ and enjoying the outdoors.”

Erick’s mother immigrated to the CA from Mexico and his stepdad boasts German heritage which Erick joked brought the “best of both cultures into the family — Latino vs. Germanic.” His father is a chiropractor and his mom and dad started their own practice shortly after they married.

“The whole family would go to flea markets and swap shops and set up a massage booth and offer participants complimentary massages — just to establish a clientele. It worked and his parents have successful been

entrepreneurs since theirW launch.

Erick’s grandparents were also role models for him — his grandfather was an LCMS pastor in the Tampa Bay, FL area and his grandmother an English teacher. As a result, Erick — along with his siblings — developed excellent speaking and vocabulary skills.

Erick attended Concordia/ Irvine, CA but transferred to California State University/San Bernardino primarily to keep his educational costs minimized. During his university years he considered a career in the military.



Erick Quesada was the featured speaker at St. Paul’s “Senior Saints” September luncheon. Each year Boca’s Saints have the incoming vicar introduce himself to their group of more than 60 lunch participants.

Erick’ mentors gave strong encouragement for him to consider the ministry. “I learned that God doesn’t always call the **equipped** — but **equips** those he calls,” he concluded.

Following his intern year he’ll return to Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO for his final year. ●

# District Members Participate in Kenya Mission Trip

by Scarlet Holcombe  
LWML FLGA Mission Trip Coordinator

During this past August, 2024, several Florida-Georgia District members and two additional individuals participated in a mission trip to Point of Grace Academy (POGA) outside Kisumu, Kenya.

For 13 years, POGA has given a top-notch education to the students from all areas of Kenya. From its start in 2011 — with just 11 students — it had grown to more than 600 elementary students and more than 200 high school students. POGA provides for their spiritual growth with chapel services, as well as religious instruction during the week. This past year, POGA added a clinic to their campus, which services the student body as well as the surrounding community. This clinic currently sees approximately 50 people weekly, providing standard medical care.

During the week-long trip, team members worked with the students and taught religious stories. They also helped in the medical clinic assisting the technicians and workers. Each morning began with a delicious breakfast before beginning the various activities of the day. The group received a Bible verse each day to contemplate as they went about their activities. The group met regularly for a delicious lunch and then began afternoon activities which included discussion with groups of students or playing some games.

Supper followed the afternoon activities with a devotion lead by Pastor Dennis Meeker, one of the founders of POGA. On Saturday the group hosted a supper for the students — helping serve the meal. The meal consisted of rice, chicken, chapati (flatbread), cabbage, and watermelon, along with a soda to drink. This meal helped the students and team to get to know one another.

On Sunday the group worshiped at the POGA chapel, with the FLGA District pastors helping in the service. Pastor Jeff Moore preached on John 6 and Pastor Tim Brown lead the liturgy. The children sang beautifully during this service.

On Monday, the group handed out dresses and shorts sewn by the FLGA and Michigan District LWML to the girls and boys of POGA. They also sorted through the donated supplies for the classrooms and the pharmacy — including supplies, clothing items, Bibles and catechisms that had been in checked luggage — 32 bags in total. ●



Mission Team:  
Kneeling—  
Elise Roberts,  
Vicky Manietta;  
Standing  
from left —  
Ann Barber,  
Deaconess  
Lorna Meeker,  
Kaye Wolff, Jan  
Garner, Rev.  
Dennis Meeker,  
Anna Moore, Rev.  
Jeff Moore, Lisa  
Moore, Shelley  
Brown, Ada  
Jarmosevich,  
Rev. Tim  
Brown, Scarlet  
Holcombe.



At left — some  
of the dresses  
sewn by LWML  
members  
from FLGA  
and Michigan  
Districts.



At left —  
The pastors  
dedicated  
the donated  
paraments. From  
left, The Revs.  
Edwin Nyago,  
Jeff Moore,  
Paul Okeyo, Tim  
Brown.



Another team  
shot — Kneeling:  
Vicky Manietta,  
second row:  
Elise Roberts,  
Ann Barber, Jan  
Garner, Kaye  
Wolff. Back  
row: Scarlet  
Holcombe,  
Shelley Brown,  
Rev. Tim Brown,  
Rev. Jeff Moore,  
Lisa Moore, Anna  
Moore, Ada  
Jarmosevich,  
Deaconess Lorna  
Meeker

# Fall Pastors Conference Gathers in Daytona Beach

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



Scott Rische



Bob Newton



Dave Wesche

District clergy will gather in Daytona Beach, FL for the 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 opens at 10 am on Monday, September 23rd. Closing worship with Holy Communion will be held at 10:30 am on Wednesday. Clergy will be sent back home as the body of Christ to their congregations and neighborhoods, he concludes." ●

### 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

### BREAKOUT SESSIONS WILL BE LED BY:

- Rev. Dr. Rick Armstrong
- Rev. Dr. Victor Belton
- Rev. Dave Ficken
- Rev. Paul Heins
- Rev. Ben Hoyer
- Rev. Chad Lakies
- Kathy Meier
- Rev. Dr. Peter Meier
- Rev. Dr. Tilahun Menedo
- Megan Miessler
- Mr. Nick Moss
- Rev. Matt Peoples
- Rev. & Mrs. Ron & Barb Pennekamp
- Anette Shanks
- Rev. Andy Schermbeck
- Jennifer Tanner
- Mr. William Utech
- Rev. Paul vonWerder
- Rev. Dr. Greg Walton
- Rev. & Mrs. Dave & Sally Wesche

### SPECIAL BREAKOUTS PLANNED FOR PASTORS' WIVES



Ministry wives will have special breakout sessions — with lunch included at the mid-day session. Details in your registration packets.

- Session 1..... Ministry Wives Meet Up
- Lunch ..... Led by the Wellness Team
- Session 2..... Led by Kathy Meier
- Session 3..... Led by Anette Shanks

# First/Gainesville, FL Hosts “Welcome Back BBQ”

**First/Gainesville, FL** packed the Besalski Fellowship Hall at its annual Welcome Back BBQ on August 25th — immediately after the service. This is a multi-generational event to celebrate a new school year for all their college students, Open Arms kiddos, and public school attendees. It is a necessity to decorate in GATOR ORANGE and BLUE and showcase the culinary talents of congregation members. The event celebrated that it was a packed house!

Kitchen crew shown from left to right — Angie Burr, Brandi Dotson, Mark Hoyer, Leeann Lee, Christa Vigil, Jack Halabrin, Laura Hoyer. Far right — Mark Kann, Congregation Elder and Chef Extraordinaire! ●



## Registration is Open for Youth Ministry Weekend

Middle School students will attend a Jesus-centered, fun filled weekend while High School students with leadership potential will experience training in their leadership skills and fellowship with other high school youth from throughout the District.

### High School Leadership Event

The High School Leadership Event is designed for youth who want to increase their leadership skills, form lasting friendships, build a supportive peer network, and strengthen their faith in Jesus. High School youth will be put into small groups of 4-5 for the weekend. Teambuilding and relationship-building experiences will be used throughout the weekend to train and equip the youth to go back to their congregations as active participants in the ministry of the local church and grow in their

personal walk with God. The HSLE is capped at 60 youth participants (30 freshmen/sophomores and 30 juniors/ seniors). Freshmen and sophomores will undergo a Youth Lead Training experience. Juniors and seniors will undergo a vocational/calling.

Participants will be in God’s Word together throughout the weekend, have time for personal devotion, and will worship together on Sunday morning.

### Middle School Youth Gathering

This year’s theme for the Middle School Youth Gathering is based on MATTHEW 11:28 focusing on how Jesus is here to give us rest from life’s daily pressures. Cassie Moore,



a former FLGA District DCE, will be the speaker again this year. She has a particular passion for engaging with youth and Gen Z.

“Tribe and Tongue,” who played at the LCMS Youth Gathering, will be leading the participants in song and worship.

This event will be a fantastic opportunity to connect, grow, and experience the excitement of a larger gathering. The activities planned, such as Mass Events with a speaker and band, breakout sessions, servant events, and games, will provide opportunities for spiritual growth, learning, and fun. Designed for 6-8 grade youth, small and large groups can attend ●

# District's Early Response Team

As shared by Joel Mathews and Jim Rice

Florida-Georgia Lutheran Early Response (FGLER), has been awarded a \$10,000 National Disaster Response Grant from The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The grant has been awarded as part of the Synod's effort to equip disaster response organizations so they can assist in the church's response to serve others in the wake of disasters. FGLER will utilize the grant as matching funds to purchase equipment and an enclosed trailer that will enable volunteers to conduct disaster cleanup.

As a Recognized Service Organization of the LCMS, Florida-Georgia Lutheran Early Response serves and assist pastors, congregations, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), and their communities throughout the District area and beyond by providing training in disaster preparedness and response, disaster and emergency readiness planning, and management of disaster events for churches and LCMS Districts.

In the early morning hours of Sunday, May 26, tornado sirens sounded in Benton County, Arkansas. It wasn't the first time they had sounded, as tornados had struck nearby in Oklahoma, Arkansas, Nebraska, Missouri, Iowa, and Kentucky several times over the previous week.

One of the hardest hit areas was the Rogers and Bentonville area of northwest Arkansas. The National Weather Service reports that at least seven confirmed tornados — including an EF3 (the largest ever recorded in Arkansas) — touched down. An F3 tornado has winds estimated between 162-209 mph. Homes, businesses, buildings, and trees were destroyed; sadly eight people died. Within hours, the Mid-South District of The LCMS, coordinating with the five LCMS congregations in the area, quickly geared up for a response from LCMS Disaster Response's Lutheran Early Response Team (LERT) volunteers to come in to assist with recovery efforts.

Mid-South District Disaster Response Coordinator (DDRC) Janet Simko arrived and set up operations at Holy Trinity/Rogers, AR. The church opened its doors to house and feed the LERT volunteers. Members of the church brought in an abundance of food and drinks, and prepared breakfast and dinner, for them for the five weeks of operations.

DDRC Simko began the heart-rending task of damage assessment, meeting with church members and their neighbors who had sustained damage during the storm. She conducted assessments of the damage

to determine if the LERT volunteers could help, primarily in clearing tree debris. More importantly, she listened to their stories, letting them share their experiences of the storm and the stresses of trying to recover.

In the five weeks of operation, a total of 50 LERT volunteers from nine different states assisted 35 homeowners, and removed 315 trees from their properties. These trained LERT volunteers brought equipment, including chainsaws, aerial lifts, tractors and skid steers.

## FLGA Responds

Directors Joel Mathews, wife Kathy, and Director Jim Rice, traveled to Rogers from Florida with one of FGLER's two skid steers.

When Mathews arrived on June 12, there were two other volunteers who had been working for three days manually dragging tree debris to the curb. One of those volunteers, Ricky Gross, said that "More tree debris was moved [by the Bobcat MT100] on their first day then they had moved in three days!" Needless to say, they were overjoyed with the arrival of this equipment!

Both Rice and Mathews are trained LERT chainsaw operators, taking turns between cutting and skillfully operating the MT100 on the often-challenging Arkansas hillsides. During their stay, they were joined by volunteers from Kentucky, Wisconsin,

# Eliexer Ramirez Installed to Shepherd

The Rev. Eliexer Ramirez was received into the LCMS/FLGA through Colloquy from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. He is a Cuban immigrant who had been a Baptist pastor in Cuba and also taught in a seminary. Before emigrating to the United States, he discovered Lutheran Biblical Doctrine.



He was unaware that there were "different" Lutherans and ended up in the ELCA. After settling in Miami, FL he began serving a growing congregation there. Furthering his education he felt drawn to the more conservative LCMS.

"Pastor Ramirez was approved for Colloquy in early fall 2023. I searched for a congregation to have him "placed" (called)



# Tackles Arkansas Tornado Clean-Up

Illinois, and Missouri, clearing tons of tree debris.

Mathews shared the story of one job they worked: “Pappa John, 79, with tears in his eyes, related how he and his family had heard the storm come through, and then the crashing of trees around their home. When they emerged from their home, they discovered more than a dozen trees had come down or were broken in their yard, yet their house was untouched. After finishing the work we preparing to leave when Papa John shared with us: ‘God was watching over us then, and now he brought you here. There is no way I could have been able to do in months what you guys did in two days!’”

## *Serving Christ through serving others!*

At another location, while the LERT volunteers were removing a large damaged oak tree from a back yard, Katherine, a neighbor, hesitantly stopped and asked Mathews if the LERT volunteers would be able to help her. She had two large oak trees come down, and two other large trees were damaged. A tree company had charged her \$8,000 to remove the two oaks and cleanup the broken limbs on one tree. The company left ten feet of trunk attached to the large, downed trees and butchered the other tree. The LERT team took care of the trunks and tree in the back yard for



her — without charge.

The stories from survivors abounded. More than a month after the storm, the tears and quaking voices still came as they shared with LERT volunteers. Many related how God was watching over them and brought them through the storm. It was an opportunity to pray with them, hug them, and ultimately demonstrate the love of Jesus Christ through LERT disaster response. The hospitality shown by members of Holy Trinity was unbelievable! They

frequently expressed heart-felt thanks to the LERT volunteers for their work.

Partnering with the Florida-Georgia District, FGLER is a volunteer-based nonprofit that provides disaster response training and some equipment for volunteers, and helps churches coordinate disaster responses. Information on how you or your church can receive LERT disaster response training, or how you can get involved with FGLER, can be found at [www.fgler.org](http://www.fgler.org). ●

## Prince of Peace/Hollywood, Florida

like a new candidate but eventually in March, 2024, I introduced him to Pastor Juan Martin at **Prince of Peace/Hollywood, FL,**” explains FLGA President James Rockey. “It was an amazing match for everyone! My wife, Martha, was there with me that day and as things unfolded we both were blessed to watch the Spirit orchestrate the Lord’s plan.”

Prince of Peace eventually called him and he was installed in May. When Pastor Ramirez began to offer worship, it was the first “in-person worship” in more than four

years. Since then the congregation has celebrated eight baptisms, has been restoring the campus and facilities that were in great need of repair. Prince of Peace has had as many as 50 people in worship and the congregation is working on an outreach plan to the surrounding area.

“This man has great gifts,” Rockey emphasizes. “It is all about mission and reaching the community for Christ. I foresee great things ahead for this long-established Hollywood LCMS congregation. Prince of Peace is located at 3000 N 75th Avenue, Hollywood, Florida 33024.

Pictured far left with The Rev. Eliexer Ramirez are four women who were baptized this past summer. At right — The Rev. Eliexer Ramirez. ●



# Are You Ready For Some . . .

by President James Rockey

# H

How did you complete the title to this article? As we are now entering Fall, I have a feeling that most of you read it, “Are you ready for some

Football?!” Although I enjoy the college football season, well — Gator Football season — that’s not what I have in mind.

What is on my mind is the fact that before those players or any of us when we were playing sports went out onto the field, it was essential that we prepared both individually and as a team.

Right now, across college campuses, players are in the weight rooms, running and doing every sort of conditioning available to get ready. In addition, they are honing and learning skills, plays and even trying to learn about their opponents. In short, before the coach or referee says, “Let’s Play Ball,” there’s work to be done for us to be ready.

We are on the verge of a new fall season of mission and ministry. The question before us and every

member of the Body of Christ should be, are you ready?

I believe Martin Luther understood such a need for preparation. Consider this from the Preface to the Large Catechism: “But for myself I say this: I am also a doctor and preacher, yea, as learned and experienced as all those may be who have such presumption and security; yet I do as a child who is being taught the Catechism, and every morning, and whenever I have time, I read and say, word for word, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, the Psalms, etc. And I must still read and study daily...”

My prayer for each of us — and for all those within our congregations, schools and various ministries — is that they be encouraged to prepare. Note the following verses that call for such preparation:

**1 TIMOTHY 4:8** — For while bodily training is of some value, (training in) godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

**1 PETER 3:15** — But in your hearts

revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

**2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17** — All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

**EPHESIANS 6:13** — Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

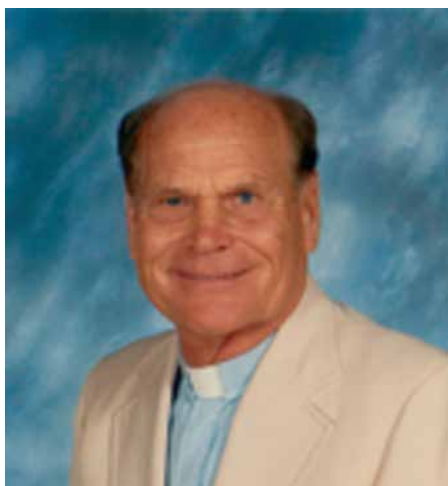
In truth, the season of mission and ministry never ends. Our District has always been about the “mission of God,” committed to connecting people to Jesus as we live as along-siders. The season is before us, and its prospects are promising and exciting! I look forward to continuing to personally prepare and to prepare alongside of you so that we might see many more experience the joy of the Lord’s salvation through Christ! ●





# PASSAGES

## District Icon and Campus Theologian Pastor Erich Heintzen Carried Home to Jesus



The Rev. Dr. Erich Heintzen III (Emeritus) passed away on August 1, 2024 following a massive stroke.

Heintzen graduated Concordia Theological Seminary/Springfield, IL in 1961 and served his first parish in Dickinson, ND. The next 20 years were dedicated to campus ministries at University of North Dakota, University of Denver, Colorado Women's College, and Florida State University. Heintzen's passion for campus ministry can be attributed to his father. In 1941 Heintzen's father began 17 years of service as the first full-time pastor of University Lutheran Chapel at the University of Illinois. In 1958 he left to teach Church History at the Springfield LCMS Seminary and rose to the rank of Full Professor serving the Seminary as a member and chairman of multiple committees.

Campus ministry has a long history in the LCMS that dates back to September 1920. The work in Champaign began in 1941, when Heintzen's father was student pastor. Heintzen purchased a house on the corner

lot where the church is currently located. For the first decade, students met in the campus Episcopal church. With the increase of students following World War II, the present church building was built in 1951 and dedicated in 1953. A student center was added to the church in the 1960s. Schuermann now serves this congregation as its sixth called pastor.

The FLGA District's Pastor Heintzen served at Our Savior/St. Petersburg, FL, from 1980-2000. After his retirement, he continued to serve at Our Savior as Pastor Emeritus, teaching Bible studies and visiting homebound members. Heintzen had a tremendous spiritual impact on many in the Our Savior congregation and beyond.

Pastor Heintzen served as a voting pastoral delegate to the 60th Regular Convention of the LCMS in July, 1998 held in St. Louis, MO.

He was active in numerous leadership roles in the FLGA District. After his retirement in 2000, he continued as Minister of Senior Adults and in other teaching and supportive



capacities. He leaves behind a Gospel-centered ministry filled with care, compassion and sharing of God's living love to those whose lives he touched.

He was a great pastor, father, husband, friend and mentor. He is survived by his wife of 65 years, Barbara, and sons Paul and Erich IV, and grandchildren. He is preceded in death by son Mark. His spirit will live on forever in the memories we cherish and the love we shared. A memorial service was held on August 17th at Our Savior/Saint Petersburg, FL. ●

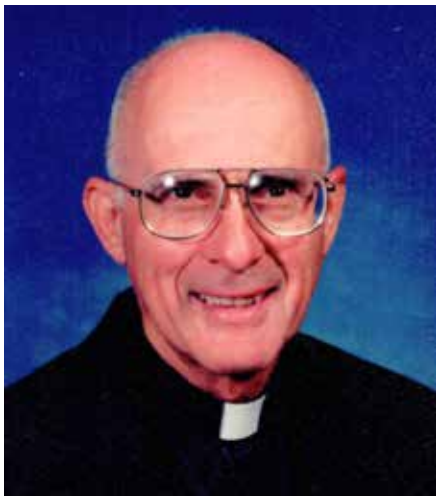
*Below — Pastor Heintzen, at right, with Our Savior's Pastors Chris Futch and Dan Ritter*





# PASSAGES

## Pastor Ron Schuette Passes Peacefully



Rev. Ronald H. Schuette was born in Washington, MO, and attended grade school at Immanuel Lutheran School. He was influenced by his pastor and his father to consider the ministry as a career and therefore spent his high school and junior college days in Concordia, MO, at St. Paul Lutheran School, a boarding school for young men

in those days. He graduated from Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO in 1963.

Pastor Schuette passed on July 14, 2024.

His first call was to Martin Luther Chapel in Pennsauken, NJ, as an associate pastor and this is where he met and married his wife, Sandra Meddaugh Schuette. They were married in October of 1965 and two years later he was called to an inner-city church, Our Savior/Brooklyn, NY. All three of his children, David, Christin, and Esther were born during the eight years he served there. The rest of his pre-retirement years were spent at St. Paul/Miami, FL, where he fulfilled his dream of starting a Lutheran School.

Rev. Schuette retired in the fall of 2002 and moved to Eureka, MO, to be closer to his roots and his father, Waldemar Albert Schuette, who was still living at

the time. He served from 2003 until 2016 as visitation pastor for St. John's/Ellisville, MO.

He is survived by his loving wife Sandra Schuette; three children, David (Jen Kilps) Schuette of Minneapolis, MN, Christin (Matt) Hager of Batavia, IL, and Esther (Neal) Armstrong of Oak Park, IL; five grandchildren, three sisters and many nieces and nephews.

Rev. Schuette enjoyed travel, playing guitar, art and calligraphy, golf, tennis, but mostly serving his Lord Jesus and helping people as God put them in his path. Dementia took away the events of his whole life, but not his memory of people. What a blessing that he was able to remember dear friends, family and loved ones until the very end of his life.

His Memorial Service was held at St Mark's/Eureka, MO in early August. ●

## Pastor John Hopkins Enters Eternal Rest

The Reverend John R. Hopkins, 62, of Bourbonnais, IL passed away Saturday, August 10, 2024. He was born May 1, 1962 in Kansas City, MO, the son of George and Joan (Gabrielson) Hopkins. John married Donna Arand in 1985 in Overland Park, KS.

John was a pastor for 29 years — many of those in congregations in the FLGA District LCMS (St. Petersburg, FL, Savannah, GA).

He was an avid Kansas City Royals and Kansas City Chiefs fan and a proud alumnus of Kansas State University. John was known as a dad joke connoisseur. He enthusiastically loved the Lord and wanted everyone to know.

Most recently John was a member of St. Paul Lutheran/Kankakee, IL. Surviving is his wife, Donna of Bourbonnais; three sons, Nathan (Kourtney) Hopkins, David (Laura McCauley) Hopkins, Jacob Hopkins, all of Bourbonnais; and one daughter, Rachel Hopkins, of Nairobi, Kenya

His memorial service was held on August 15, 2024, at St. Paul's/Kankakee, IL.

Memorials may be made to Lutheran Church Charities K-9 Comfort Dog Ministries. ●



# Redeemer/Stuart Educator Passes After Cancer Battle

December 24, 1960 — August 12, 2024



Carol Ann Sieling Chorley, 63, a Lutheran school teacher for four decades and resident of Alexandria, MN, passed away on August 12, 2024, after an extended battle with cancer. Carol was born on Christmas Eve in 1960, and was welcomed to her Minnesota home by her parents Arlin and Elaine Sieling and four older siblings. She was baptized in January of 1961, and she confirmed her faith in May of 1975.

Chorley attended St. Paul/Perham, MN Lutheran School in her elementary years, and then Perham public schools where she graduated with the Class of 1979.

Carol attended Concordia College/St. Paul, MN where she played baritone in the band and majored in elementary education. After graduating in the spring of 1983, she received a call to teach at **Redeemer/Stuart, FL**, where she lived and taught for 22 years. During that time she taught 4th grade and directed a children's puppet ministry as well as a clown ministry! She also met her husband Tom Chorley, and they were married in 1992.

After experiencing two major hurricanes one week apart, she and Tom decided to move home to Minnesota. Carol took a 4th grade teaching position at Zion/Alexandria, MN. She hated to resign in 2023 due to her health. Carol loved gardening,

painting, and enjoying her cat.

Carol was a wonderfully caring aunt to her 13 nieces and nephews. While living in Florida, she always came home to Minnesota at Christmas with gifts. All of them recall the year Carol made individualized shirts for each one with their name and something that reflected their personality. Carol took time to get to know them as young adults, and had lengthy conversations with them at family gatherings.

Carol was predeceased by her father, Arlin, her step-father Lyle, her mother Elaine, sister-in-law Deb (Sieling), and aunts, uncles, and cousins. She is survived by her loving husband Tom, sister Bonnie (Del) Stohs, brothers Bob, John (Annette), and Dan (Lori), Tom's step-sons Karl and Steve, Tom's cousin, Terri; along with her nieces, nephews, aunts, and cousins. ●

## Jerrold Collins

The Rev. Jerrold Collins, 79, (Emeritus) was welcomed into the arms of Jesus on Saturday, June 29. Rev. Collins was an Emeritus worker in Tallahassee, having served in the Northwest Ohio District as well as in the FLGA District. His memorial service was held at **Epiphany/Tallahassee, FL**, on July 13. Though Jerrold may have slipped beyond the veil of mortality, his essence lingers like a faint fragrance in the air, a lingering reminder of the beauty and complexity of the human experience. ●

## Pastor Mark Flory Called Home

Rev. Mark St. Hillier Flory, 74, was carried home to heaven June 18, 2024. He was a devoted husband to Cheryl Siefert-Flory for 46 years and blessed with two children, Matthew and Lisa. He loved his communities, friends, and his churches that he pastored for 38 years in Michigan and Florida. Mark's life is reflected in Ephesians 2 v. 4-9: "But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions. It is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast." Mark was preceded in death by his mother, Esther, his sister, Toni, and brother, Art. He is survived by his wife, Cheryl, children Matthew and Lisa, along with his brother, Bill, and sister, Cheri.

A memorial service was held at St. James/Grand Rapids, MI and also at Memorial service was held at **Bethany/Leesburg, FL**. ●



# 2025 Veterans of the Cross Gathering



HE Restores  
My Soul

## VETERANS OF THE CROSS

A Gathering For All Retired  
Lay & Rostered Servants of Christ

St. Stephen Christian  
Retreat & Conference Center  
Titusville, Florida • March 10-12, 2025

# ing Theme & Speakers Announced

“The greatest blessing any of us can know is to be bought and born into the flock of God,” exclaims Ruth Wiedenmann, Veterans of the Cross Event Chairperson.

**“The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.” — [PSALM 23:1]**

“The pressures of this world can lead us astray. Like sheep we wander off and no longer enjoy the true joy found in following the voice of Jesus,” she continues. “We get disorientated by injustice, drained by conflict, disappointed by outcome, or dis-heartened by suffering.

“Like King David we plead ‘Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.’” [PSALM 51:12].

Those who attend the 2025 Veterans of the Cross Gathering will rediscover the meaning of the beloved words of Psalm 23, especially vs. 3 **“He restores my soul, He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.”**

God will use the gathering’s sessions, fellowship, and worship to bring fresh strength, hope, comfort and encouragement to His flock. This Gathering is for all retired lay and rostered Servants of Christ. Plenty of rest, reflection, and replenishment await all attendees. Participants are invited to come and enjoy the ‘still waters’ of the Indian River at the St. Stephen Christian Retreat and Conference Center in beautiful Titusville, near the Space Center.

“The Rev. Dr. Dale Meyer will be our keynote leader and festival worship preacher. The Rev. Dana Brones from **Bethlehem/Jacksonville Beach, FL** will be our Bible Study Leader,” Wiedenmann offers. “President James Rockey will be leading the gathering’s opening devotions. Registration details will be coming in the next issue of Lutheran LIFE.” ●

## Keynote Speaker Festival Worship Preacher



*The Rev. Dr. Dale Meyer served 12 years in parish ministry (St. Salvator/Venedy, IL; St. Peter/New Memphis, IL; Holy Cross, Collinsville, IL; and various vacancies in the Southern Illinois District). He was The Lutheran Hour speaker for 12 years and served 22 years at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO — the last 15 as president. He currently is writing the Concordia Commentary on 1 Peter.*

*Meyer, with his wife, Diane, lives in Collinsville, IL. They have two grown daughters, Elizabeth (Darren) Pittman who is a director at Concordia Publishing House and Catharine (Charles) Bailey, legislative director for United States Senator Mike Braun of Indiana. The Meyers have five grandsons, Christian, Connor and Nicholas Pittman, and Andrew and Jacob Bailey.*

## VOC Event Bible Study Leader



*The Rev. Dana Brones, pastor of Bethlehem/Jacksonville Beach, FL will serve as the Bible Study Leader for the event. A Denver, CO native, he did his undergraduate work at Concordia Teachers College (now Concordia University), Seward, NE. He is a 1983 graduate of Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO.*

*Brones planted Fuente De Vida (Fountain of Life) Lutheran Church in Puerto Ordaz, Venezuela. The first young man he confirmed in 1986, later became the pastor of that congregation and ultimately, the president of the Lutheran Church of Venezuela.*

*Prior to his call to Bethlehem in 2000, he served three congregations in Pennsylvania. He’s been senior pastor since 2004.*

*Pastor Brones is happily married to Diane. They have six children: Rick, Justin, Joel, Jonathan, Paul and Lena.*

# FLORIDA GEORGIA

*Out and About in the District*

Area clergy gathered on Sunday, July 21, 2024 for the installation of The Rev. James (Jim) Thelen as pastor of **Marco Lutheran Church, Marco Island, FL**. Pictured are The Revs. [front row from left] Gary Koltz, President James Rockey, James Thelen, Mike Ramey, David Barber; [back row]: Richard Browning, David Bass, Hank Simon, Rich Mokry, Vicar Rochenel Jean Jacques, Saint Luc Charelus, Jon Zehnder. ●







San Juan Family Day — this was the big event helping with their Family Day — where our high schoolers led crafts, kickball, soccer, made lunch bags, sang hymns, and performed a drama for their youth.



Above — Sunday worship in Mayagüez. Below — we enjoyed their divine service — in Spanish! We had a translator who helped us understand both the sermon and liturgy — some parts were familiar to us.

## Lakeland Youth Enjoy Puerto Rico Mission Trip

### St. Paul/Lakeland, FL

recently took eight high schoolers on a mission trip to Puerto Rico through the LCMS Office of International Mission.

“We did a variety of projects ranging from building a boat (out of cardboard), painting, tearing down a wall, putting on a drama of Jesus calming the storm (in Spanish!) and much more!” offers Haley Moses, St. Paul’s student DCE intern this year.

“We were graciously hosted by Iglesia Luterana Principe de Paz in Mayagüez, Puerto Rico,” she continues, “and made great relationships with the missionaries who live there. One of the biggest impacts on the Lutherans in Puerto Rico and our group was getting to gather for a family day event and by gathering together in Sunday worship.

“This was a mutually beneficial experience for both of us, because we saw the greater body of Christ at work, and the reminder of the hope that we have in Jesus that one day we will all be united! St. Paul/Lakeland is excited about the possibility of going back and continuing to grow the relationships that have begun to form with the Lutheran churches in Puerto Rico.” ●



Jesus Drama — the high schoolers planned out the skit and built the set. They theme was “Jesus Calms the Storm,” and one of the congregation members did a dramatic reading from the children’s storybook, in Spanish.



Church Members, Missionaries, and our group: This picture was taken at the end of our Family Day in San Juan. Most of the families left when the event was over, but a few of the members stayed all afternoon to play more games and talked with the



**Woodlands/Montverde, FL** DCE Betsy Burnham and youth were recognized and presented with the “Golden Plumber Award” for putting servant leadership into action during their summer mission trip called Week of Hope in Charleston. ●



Nicole Clifton, principal at **Grace/St Petersburg, FL** and Heather Lowing, principal at **Trinity/Delray Beach, FL** were selected for the Van Lunen Fellowship for Christian School Leaders. They will spend the year learning and practicing executive leadership skills to support excellence in school ministry. ●

*Below left, Pastor Tony Durante with the principal and administrative faculty of Mirror Lake Elementary School, Plantation. At right, OSL Member Judy Watson with Tropical Elementary School Counsellors Megan Niesel and Kristen Tobacco, and Pastor Tony.*



With Broward County schools reopening in mid August, **Our Savior/Plantation, FL** took advantage of outreach opportunities. The Rev. Tony Durante delivered backpacks donated by Office Depot to



both Mirror Lake and Tropical Elementary Schools in Plantation. He read a Bible verse and said a prayer with faculty during both visits. Judy Watson of Our Savior’s outreach board accompanied

him for the delivery to Tropical Elementary where school counsellors Megan Niesel and Kristen Tobacco received the backpacks. Both schools are seeking volunteers to help with mentoring and reading to the students. ●



The Angel Ministry group of **Prince of Peace/Orlando, FL** has been donating handmade items to be given to children who are transported to area hospitals in times of trauma by the 1st Responders of Fire Station #11. “Four of us recently toured the brand new station in August 1 and delivered 35 ‘critters’ — which total 671 items since we started this quarterly project in August, 2019,” explains Lu Burchfield, POP’s Angel Ministry Coordinator. “We are a small — but mighty — group and we are thankful to Thrivent for their financial support to this program.” The ladies with the first responders are (above from left) Lu Burchfield, Stephanie Carbonell, Sonia Tellez, Emily Isip. ●



**St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL** staff rocked the first day of school while posing in front of the eponymous “rock” that fronts the driveway. This rock gets painted frequently for special congratulatory events and holidays. In the right photo, for example, the staff — along with K9 Comfort Dog, Jemimah, — dressed for breast cancer awareness month, the annual October event that invites people to wear pink clothing or accessories to show their support for breast cancer awareness and research. The school’s 2024-25 theme this year is from HEBREWS 12:1-3 — “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” ●

# District Middle School Youth Gather at Luther Springs



Adults and Middle School Youth of the FLGA District had an impactful week this past June at Luther Springs and the Gainesville, Florida area. The camp was at full capacity with the 60 students, plus their adult leaders from

seven Florida congregations: **Beautiful Savior/Sarasota; Grace/Naples; Holy Trinity/ Tampa; St. Michael/Ft. Myers; St. Paul/Boca Raton; St. Paul/Lakeland; and Woodlands/Montverde.** ●



Sunday School at **First/Gainesville, FL** launched on September 8th with a rally day celebration. Attendance has been growing and the steering committee met to finalize the curriculum. They are shown — from left: Ed Shiver, Sheryl Shiver, Jennifer Spillane, Susan Bolch, Marge Polkowski, Katherine Gross, Leeann Lee (not pictured, Pat Lopez). ●

# Carmellia Browning Celebrates 100th Birthday at King of Kings/Talking Rock

At the conclusion of worship on August 18th, a beautiful cast iron bench was presented to King of Kings/Talking Rock, GA to commemorate Carmellia Browning's 100th Birthday! The back rest of the bench appropriately depicts the "Tree of Life." The bench will be installed under the portico as a resting spot out of the weather for those being picked up after church.

A celebratory group photo was taken to commemorate the event. Participants also enjoyed a pizza party with many members of her family, including her sons Roger and his wife Kathy Browning from Talking Rock and Scott Browning from Monticello, Georgia.

When Carmellia moved to Jasper, Georgia ten years ago, her

first order of business was to find a Missouri Synod Lutheran Church where she could worship. She quickly found the welcoming family of King of Kings, a mission congregation worshipping in a small, converted commercial building. As the church grew, a beautiful new sanctuary was constructed on Appalachian Circle. The congregation also called a full-time minister.

Carmellia became a model of faithfulness, rarely missing worship on a Sunday. Now 100 years old, petite and always wearing a pretty hat, Carmellia can be found on Sunday morning, sitting on the second row of the church close to the organ to be able to hear her favorite Lutheran hymns and enjoy the sermons of Pastor Jeffrey Jensen. ●



*Above — The Rev. Jeffrey Jensen blesses the "tree of life" bench (also shown at left) for King of Kings — commemorating the 100th birthday of Ms. Carmellia Browning (far left). Her two sons are seated on each side of her in the photo below.*



# Weston Welcomes New Members



The Rev. Scott Henze welcomed new members last month to **St. Paul/Weston, FL**. He also recognized 17 young participants to their first communion. ●



# Redeemer/Stuart Holds Second Annual Evening VBS

**Redeemer/Stuart, FL** shared God's love through "Scuba" Vacation Bible School from June 3-7 with participants ranging in ages from 3-10. This year they also provided a special Bible Study for parents. This is the second year Redeemer held VBS in the evening hours, directed by Director of Family and Youth Outreach, Katie Wenger (at right). ●



# Port Charlotte Congregation Hosting January Hymn Fest

Save the date! **Trinity/Port Charlotte, FL** will host noted hymnwriter The Rev. Stephen Starke on January 24, 2025. Starke will discuss three interesting hymn topics and then serve as the narrator for a hymn festival of his own compositions.

The hymnfest kicks off at 9 a.m. with three discussion topics:

- What Makes a Hymn a Hymn?
- Our Lutheran Heritage
- How Can We Sing the Lord's Song in a Foreign Land?

The free event is open to the public. At 4:30 there will be a hymn sing with the organist being noted composer Dr. John Behnke. Behnke is Trinity's resident organist. A freewill offering will be taken to help support future church music events at Trinity.

Rev. Stephen P Starke has always had a heart for hymns. At a young age, Starke played hymns out of The Lutheran Hymnal and read

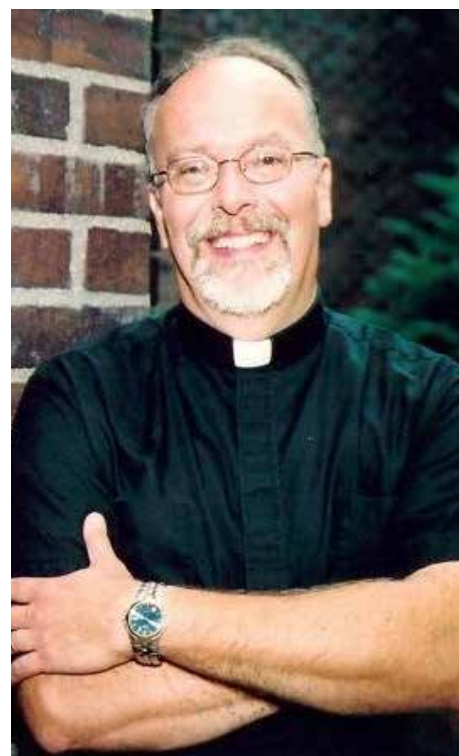
through the hymnal to pass the time before Sunday services.

Pastor Starke graduated from Concordia University/Chicago, IL with a BA. While completing his MDiv from Concordia Theological Seminary/Fort Wayne, IN, he attempted his first hymn text and was encouraged to write more. Since that time, he has written more than 175 hymns inspired by music and the Scriptures.

Starke received an honorary doctor of letters degree from Concordia University/Irvine, CA, and an honorary doctor of divinity degree from Concordia University/Mequon, WI.

It is through the medium of hymns that Pastor Starke desires to preserve and pass on the truths of the Gospel for generations to come.

Trinity Lutheran Church of SW Florida is located at 1379 S. McCall Rd., Port Charlotte, FL 33981. ●



## Russell Anderson Installed as Interim Pastor, Trinity/Holly Hill

The Rev. Russell Anderson was born in Worthington, MN and at age 12 his family moved to Milwaukee, WI, where he graduated from Concordia High School and Concordia Jr. College (1971). He received his BA degree from Concordia College, Fort Wayne (1973). He attended Concordia Theological Seminary in Springfield, Ill. /Fort Wayne, IN where he received his M.Div degree in 1977. While he was on Vicarage in 1976, he had two summers of Linguistic training in preparation to receive his first call as a missionary to Nigeria (1977-1987).

As Anderson awaited his next call he served as an Interim Pastor at St. Matthews/Worthington, MN. From 1989-1999 he served as a missionary/pastor at Resurrection/Orangeville, Ont. In Dec 1999 he was called by LC-C as a missionary to Kiev, Ukraine. As he awaited his next call, he helped out at Immanuel/Pensacola, FL. His last call before retiring was to St Peter Lutheran in Ocheyedon, IA, which became a dual parish with Zion Lutheran (2001-2013). Upon retirement he moved to Palm Coast, FL and has served a number of churches as a pulpit supply pastor or vacancy pastor for Messiah/Brunswick, GA; Trinity/Holly Hill, FL; and St Peters/ Middleburg FL.

Pastor Anderson enjoys serving the church in this way and now serves **Trinity/Holly Hill, FL** as interim. He and his wife Harriet will be celebrating their 50th Wedding Anniversary this year and she has faithfully followed him wherever the Lord has sent them. They have been blessed with 10 children (who are spread around the world) and 23 grandchildren. ●



*Participating in Pastor Anderson's Installation, from left — Pastors Ken Roberts, District President James Rockey, Russ Anderson and Jeff Moore*

# First/Gainesville Celebrates 45th Anniversary of “One of its Own”

This past June 2, **First/Gainesville, FL** celebrated the 45th Anniversary of the ordination of First’s Vacancy Pastor, Jonathan Rockey. Pastor Rockey was ordained on June 3, 1979 — the recent celebration took place on June 2nd, 2024 — at the same church — with many of the same members having attended both services!

A celebratory party was held in the Besalski Fellowship Hall. The late Pastor Bob Besalski was Pastor Jonathan’s pastor growing up and presided over his ordination.

Jonathan Rockey was confirmed

at First/Gainesville, FL on March 19, 1967, and graduated from Gainesville High School in 1971. During his high school years Jonathan was a very active member of the parish. In 1971, he enrolled at Concordia College/Austin, TX to begin his pre-seminary studies. He later graduated from Concordia Senior College/Fort Wayne, IN and enrolled at Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO.

Jonathan spent two summers in Chattanooga, TN: in 1975, doing summer vicarage at St. Phillip’s Lutheran Church, under the direction of Reverend Albers; in 1976, working

in youth leadership at St. Phillip’s.

Jonathan was married to Katherine Tobin of Memphis, TN in August of 1977. They spent the following year on vicarage at Outer Drive Faith Lutheran Church in Detroit, Michigan.

Upon his graduation from seminary, Jonathan and Kathy served St. John’s/St. Louis, MO.

First/Gainesville, FL is working with Pastor Rockey as they go through their current call process. ●



At left — Pastors Besalski and Albers look on while Kathy places her handmade stole on Jonathan. Also shown are elders of First/Gainesville, including Jonathan’s father Bob Rockey.

Below — The Rockeys with a few members, from front left clockwise around the table: Will, Julie, Kathy and Jonathan, Debbie, Sheila and Judy.

Below left — Kathy & Jonathan Rockey among their sea of celebratory balloons.





# Student Musical Examines an “APP” to Know More About God

The students at **First/Clearwater, FL** presented the musical iAM on Thursday, May 16. The set was an APP factory where the lead game designer, Solomon (played by 8th grader Timothy Ivanov) was creating an APP called “iAM” for kids everywhere to learn who God really is. Along the way, he realizes that we need more than just knowing information about God, as demonstrated by the robot Serious (played by 6th grader Mark Ivanov) who has the entire Bible stored in his memory and is programmed to search there for answers. What we need is God in our real lives as the Holy Spirit is at work within our hearts. Getting scanned in, playing the games, discovering names of God were brought to life through several fun songs. More than that, the songs were filled with the truth of the gospel. The musical was directed by Minister of Music, Ann Hinz along with teacher Natalee Hallsted, with sets and costumes designed by Ellen Bowlin and lights and sound managed by Rick Howard. ●



# Prince of Peace & Principe de Paz Combined VBS

Eric Gerken, Director of Family and Youth Ministry for **Prince of Peace/Orlando, FL** reported a successful Vacation Bible "Camp" under the theme "Scuba." At right is Eric and Brenda Gerken with the Scuba stage. Below are the Scuba camp participants and volunteers who worked hard to make the week successful. ●



## Two LCMS Musicians Come to FLGA District



Thomas Schulteis has been named Director of Worship Arts at **Grace/Winter Haven, FL**. He is a 2024 graduate of Concordia University/Seward, NE. ●



Jacob Ferns has been named Minister of Music at **St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL**. Jacob comes from Allen Park, MI where he has been serving multiple LCMS congregations as visitation organist. ●



**Good Shepherd/Gainesville, GA** celebrated 26 new members this past June — half of them joining by transfer, and the other half joining by affirmation of faith. With an average Sunday attendance of 110, this represents a significant increase for the congregation.

Appropriately, the sermon text for this new member Sunday was taken from 2 CORINTHIANS 5:11-17 with a focus on *The New Has Come*.

“We are blessed as a congregation, and a community, to have all these new members join us in our mission to know Christ and love one another,” offered Pastor Dan Sparling. “We are also reminded that in a world of persuaders, each of us, new members, existing members, and members that haven’t yet found their way to us, need to be persuaders for the Gospel. And so, together, we take up this challenge to wake up each day

realizing that the new has come. That He has made us, each and every one of us, temples of the living God.

“In 2 CORINTHIANS 4:16 we read, ‘I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.’ Knowing this, we go forward boldly, empowered by the Gospel, to transform our homes, and invest our time, talent, and treasures in our community for Him,” he concluded. ●



The “Phils Friends” packing party was a resounding success today having produced 100 Phil’s Friends cancer care packages. Of the total, 40 of them will immediately go out via FedEx to Florida cancer patients. Three are already in the hands of participants to give out personally to someone experiencing cancer. According to Lois Schaefer, “We had 32 volunteers on site plus dozens ahead of time making this packing party possible. Phil Zielke joined us personally via zoom to launch the party. He explained the origin of the ministry, explained how it’s functioning today, and offered a prayer of blessing.” ●

# Pastor Tony Durante Leads Student Delegation in Goodwill Ambassadorship Tour to Japan



The Rev. Tony Durante, **Our Savior/Plantation, FL**, participated in a goodwill ambassadorship tour to Japan from June 7 to June 15, 2024. Pastor Tony volunteered as a chaperone for student ambassadors of Sister Cities of Delray Beach on a trip to Miyazu, a city located in Kyoto Prefecture, Japan, a port town on the Sea of Japan.

Since September, Pastor Tony has been instructing Atlantic Community High School Juniors Leah Green, Katelynn Foster, Daniel Halpern and Emily Joseph in Japanese language, culture, history and etiquette in preparation for their four-day goodwill visit to Miyazu, Japan — Delray Beach's sister city for 47 years.

They were also joined by 2020 Student Ambassador Emma Garcia-Delgado, whose planned visit was cancelled due to the pandemic four years ago. The students stayed in the homes of Miyazu high school students and attended classes with them. Many lifelong friendships were formed that week.

The delegation also presented the Miyazu Mayor Masafumi Kizaki with a gift from the City of Delray Beach. The last two days of the trip Pastor Tony took the students on a sightseeing tour of Kyoto with the help of co-chaperone Nancy King, a board member of Sister Cities of Delray Beach.

In photo at left, the delegation is pictured with Aiko Morikami, a relative of George Morikami, after whom the Delray Beach eponymous Japanese museum is named.

Below, the group appears with the Mayor of Miyazu, Japan. ●



On July 15, 2024, Pastor Tony Durante, left, presented Delray Beach Mayor Tom Carney with a letter from Miyazu Mayor, Masafumi Kizaki.



# Thrive Community Lending Provides Microloan For Ukraine Eatery in Georgia

A Ukraine-based eatery has opened its first U.S. location in Roswell, GA. Lviv Croissants is a chain founded in the city of Lviv, Ukraine that has expanded to 189 stores across Ukraine, Poland and Slovakia.

Ukraine native, Pastor Petro Dudnyk, serves as the franchisee for the Georgia location. Dudnyk, also co-owns a Lviv location in Kramatorsk, Ukraine. He came to the U.S. in 2022 for his son's wedding and remained after war broke out in the country. He funded his portion of the U.S. location through Thrive Community Lending, which provides microloans for refugees and immigrants.

The Lviv eatery has been popular for 37 years, offering quality food, coffee and ambiance. The menu for the Roswell facility will be similar to European locations. Savory sandwiches on the American menu include the pastrami croissant; the Lviv croissant with salami, ham, Swiss cheese, lettuce, cucumber, tomato and garlic sauce; roasted pepper chicken; Italian charcuterie with salami, prosciutto and capicola; and a turkey avocado BLT

Sweet croissant offerings include a strawberry and mascarpone croissant and an option filled with pistachio cream, while savory breakfast croissants include one filled with cabanossi sausage, Swiss cheese, egg and Sriracha aioli and another with lox and cream cheese

Mid day menu items include a handful of salads, soups and sides, as well as an extensive beverage list with espresso drinks, teas, lemonades and smoothies.

In addition to bringing a flavor of his home country to the U.S., Dudnyk also hopes to bring awareness to events unfolding there. The beverage cups will feature a QR code enabling guests to get information on United for

Ukrainian (U4U) Kids, a program that Dudnyk and his wife started to connect orphans from Ukraine to host families in America for one month. Last year, they connected 100 kids — many of whom lost a parent to the war— with host families in the U.S.

Inspiritus — formerly Lutheran Services of Georgia and Lutheran Services in Tennessee — has

promoted programs that enhance the stability, wellness, health, and safety of individuals and families. Since their founding in 1981, Inspiritus has touched the lives of more than 100,000 people, empowering those whose lives have been disrupted to discover their strengths and resilience, accompanying them as they grow into vibrant contributors to their community. ●



*Petro Dudnyk (right) with Inspiritus President & CEO John R. Moeller Jr. (left) at the opening of Lviv Croissant in Roswell, GA.*



## Lake Worth Celebrates Vicarage Program After Two Decades



The Rev. Jake Roedsens, Sole Pastor at **Our Savior/Lake Worth, FL**, installed Vicar Euder Paul as their pastoral intern for 2024-2025. Vicar Euder Paul is the first vicar the congregation has had since 2001. A reception was held after the service. A vicar in the LCMS is a student who serves in the church as a part of the seminary education process. The four-year masters degree program includes two years of academics and the third year internship in the field. Students return for a fourth year to Concordia Seminary prior to graduation and eventually ordination. ●

## St. Petersburg Congregation Drops Drawers for Students

**Our Savior/ St. Petersburg, FL** collected 996 pairs of underwear — donated on Undie Sunday! The congregation collects underwear for local school children in need who attend schools in the congregation's immediate area. ●



## Deon Hull Ordained, Installed at Peace Okeechobee, Florida



June 30 was a joyous day of celebration at **Peace/Okeechobee, FL**, as The Rev. Deon Hull was ordained and installed as sole pastor.

The Rev. Stephen Carretto, Vice President of the FLGA District performed the Rite of Ordination and Installation and The Rev. Andrew Scherbeck preached. In photo above — are Pastors back row L-R: Andrew Scherbeck, Richard Cox, Anthony Arias, Kevin Parviz (Chai v'Shalom, St. Louis), James Olckers, Stephen Carretto; front row L-R: Scott Burmeister (Christ the Redeemer, Tulsa, OK), Robert Maulella, Deon Hull, Scott McLean, William "Butch" Rains (Zion/Guthrie, OK), and Richard Norris. Pastor Norris was Deon's vicarage supervisor. ●

# Largo Congregation Operating Successful Food Bank

by The Rev. Dr. Victor Belton, Vice President FLGA District

Stop by **Christ The King/Largo, FL** on any Saturday morning at about 10 AM and you will find Pastor Joe Adams visiting with a number of people outside their Christian Ministry Center. (CMC) They are talking about current events and whatever other subjects come up as they are together.

They are building community.

What you cannot see is that inside the CMC are a number of volunteers — 25 on any given week — attending to the ministry of unpacking and sorting fresh fruits, vegetables, non-perishable food items, breads, and meats in preparation for the opening of the Christ the King Food Bank at 1:00 PM. About 15 minutes prior to opening, registration begins, numbers are assigned, and the doors open for the clients to begin coming in to 'shop' for food.

Those being served come from Largo, Seminole, Clearwater and all around Pinellas County. There is also a foreign contingent from places like Cuba, Brazil, South Africa, Portugal, Bosnia, and Ukraine. Some of the most recent arrivals are not yet proficient in English but understand and appreciate the assistance offered by this group of dedicated saints.



C. J. Philips

One grateful regular, C. J. Philips, who recently lost her husband, views these Saturday gatherings as an opportunity to experience time with others who

care. C. J. volunteers setting up for the day. The early arrivals have said, "You have the best volunteers who serve with a smile and are always very kind and gracious. This is a blessing every week for us. It's not just the food — we are treated like family."

Sometimes the Boy Scouts come and assist guests by carrying groceries to their cars.



Joe Adams, Pastor CTK/Largo

C. J. has captured the heart of Pastor Adams. He describes this ministry as, "we build community, in the community while the people are waiting in line." That is one of the reasons Adams comes early — he meets and greets those in line and spends time in fellowship and prayer for and with those in need.

Future plans at Christ The King may include an occasional sit-down meal in the ministry center. This ministry began about four years ago when the congregation's administrative assistant, Pauline Pereira, began giving away bags of food to those in need who came to the office. The need became so great that the ministry transitioned from an occasional bag of food from the office to become the Christ the King Food Bank. Pauline knows that witness to Christ is important, so they do much of it through the signage around the hall. Those signs include scripture passages and sentiments such as, "This is what God has given us, so this is what we have to give to you."

The food bank feeds approximately 175-200 families each week with the kind assistance of stores like Publix, Walmart, Aldi, and



A client's shopping box

Winn Dixie. Hope Villages give USDA food donated by the government. There are also individual donors and gifts from the congregation and members of the community.

The temperature on the day I visited was 95 degrees with a heat index of 105. That is warm indeed. Fans were going on high to keep the air moving around because the air-



Early arrivals await the opening of the Christian Ministry Center

conditioning in that portion of their campus is no longer working. It will take about \$150,000 to purchase new units or they could use some donations to purchase more fans.

No one was complaining, however, about the heat, including the clients/guests. In fact, one volunteer said, "It is warm in the building, but we will keep on pressing in to serve those in need."

To volunteer or make a donation, visit their website at <https://www.cktlm.org/foodpantry/>

District participants were on **Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO** campus for initial training for the Center for Hispanic Studies (CHS). Martha Guerra is the new intern. Katherine Sanabria is also a deaconess intern and has been enrolled in the program for the past year. Pictured are, from left, Rev. Miguel Sanabria, Jr, Associate Pastor of **Immanuel/Brandon, FL**, Rev. Paul Flo, and Rev. Ely Prieto (in clerical collars), Directors of the Center for Hispanic Studies, Martha Guerra, a new student in the CHS Deaconess Program and member of Immanuel/Brandon FL, and Katherine Sanabria, a current student in the CHS Deaconess Program and member of Immanuel/Brandon FL. Both pastors and deaconesses are prepared for ministry through this program. Pastors completing this program are recognized as ordained ministers of religion by the Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod. ●



Also run out of Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO is the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology (EIIT). The Rev. Tony Durante is a mentor for the EIIT. While on campus, Miguel Sanabria and Tony Durante met up for this photo opportunity. Pastor Durante received his ministerial degree through the now defunct DELTO (Distance Education Leading to Ordination) program. That program has been replaced by the Specific Ministry Pastors program. ●



Several DCEs gathered at David Weidner's recent memorial service held at St. Luke's/Oviedo, FL on Saturday, July 13, 2024. The message was delivered by The Rev. Dr. Richard Armstrong. Honorary pallbearers were James Lohman, Kurt Bickel, Daryl Pichan, Nick Moss, Margaret Hinchey, Leslie Sullivan, Steven Christopher, Heidi Wuggazer and Emily Moss. A luncheon was served after the celebration of Weidner's life. ●





Barbara Poston was presented with the Good Samaritan Award from Lutheran Services of Florida. She was honored for her many volunteer activities and dedication to **Our Savior/St. Petersburg, FL.** ●

Also at **Our Savior/St. Petersburg, FL** — the incoming eighth-graders completed their mural in the school's courtyard. This is an annual tradition by the eighth grade students — in the school colors. The mural has their mascot Spartan and a handprint of each student surrounds the logo. Principal Wendy Morris coordinated the project. ●



**Our Savior/St. Petersburg, FL** celebrated Cannoli Sunday — with member Deb Murray and her team (Sara and Oliver) putting together more than 370 Sicilian pastries given to their congregants! ●



Pastor Eliexer Ramirez, was installed at **Prince of Peace/Hollywood, FL**, having come into the LCMS through Colloquy from the ELCA. Prince of Peace had not had public worship since the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. Since Pastor Ramirez' installation, they have had six baptisms! The congregation is also in the process of painting the church and — most importantly — aggressively seeking to connect with their neighboring community in Southeast Florida. In photo above, Pastor Ramirez is pictured with four ladies baptized this past spring. ●



The Rev. Dr. Kent Fuqua was installed as the Vacancy Pastor for **Faith/New Port Richey, FL** on September 1, 2024.

Following the commission of its congregation in 1957, Faith has been a vibrant part of the New Port Richey community. In 2017 they celebrated their 60th anniversary.

Clergy participating in the installation service are shown, from left, The Revs. Roger Keller, Ken Redmann, Kent Fuqua, President James Rockey and Dick Arndt. ●



**Ascension/ Casselberry FL** sponsored a Baby Shower Breakfast for Redeeming Life Ministry (RLOM). The congregation was invited to a delicious breakfast and baby bottles were collected totalling more than \$1,800! RLOM's Executive Director, Sheryl DeWitt, gave a presentation on the history of RLOM. ●



**Timothy/Woodstock, GA** hosted another great VBS under the "SCUBA" theme. 96 children, preschool through rising 5th grade kids learned about diving into a friendship with God. The 44 volunteers were helping the children learn that God is a friend who is real, cares for us, is trustworthy, loving and is eternal. During the week, VBS families were asked to bring food items to Timothy's Food Bank — such as cereal, peanut butter, jelly and canned fruit. A total of 242 lbs. of food was collected. ●



In early May, **Our Savior/Plantation, FL's** Pastor Tony Durante gave blessings to nurses at Encompass Health and Rehabilitation Hospital of Sunrise, FL as part of Nurse Appreciation Week. The chief nursing officer of the facility invited Durante to come that day and lead a Blessing of Hands Ceremony, a tradition believed to have been started by Florence Nightingale in the 1800's. The ceremony involves anointing the hands of nurses. Pastor made the sign of the cross on their hands in frankincense scented oil and read from PSALMS and the Gospel of MATTHEW — on Jesus' teaching us that we care for our Lord as we care for "the least of these his brothers." The tradition of anointing of nurses' hands was established as an affirming gesture reminding them that their hands are means to deliver godly compassion to patients. ●



**St Paul/Weston, FL** had a successful VBS week. More than 320 participants are shown with their youth crew leaders. ●

Please send address updates, cancellations, additions, news and photos to: [LutheranLife@aol.com](mailto:LutheranLife@aol.com)

Lutheran Life  
Florida-Georgia District  
Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod  
5850 T. G. Lee Blvd., Suite 500  
Orlando, FL 32822-4410

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Lutheran Church Charities Comfort Dog Ministry is a national human-care ministry embracing the unique, calming nature and skills of purebred Golden Retrievers. The LCC K-9 Comfort Dogs are a bridge for compassionate ministry, opening doors for conversation about faith and creating opportunities to share the mercy, compassion, presence and proclamation of Jesus Christ.

And they're on the ground in Winder, Georgia just 72 hours after the tragic school shooting at Apalachee High School on Wednesday, September 4th. Winder is about 50 miles northeast of Atlanta.

**Trinity/Athens, GA** and Pastor Tim Davis are serving as the host congregation for our Comfort Dogs

Two 14-year-old students and two teachers were killed in the school shooting. Nine other people — eight students and one teacher — were wounded and hospitalized, all of whom are expected to survive.

The suspect, Colt Gray, 14, a student at the school, and his father were questioned by law enforcement last year regarding "anonymous tips about online threats to commit a school shooting," according to FBI Atlanta and the Jackson County Sheriff's Office. At that time, there was no probable cause for arrest. The shooting is at least the 45th school shooting in 2024 and the deadliest this year, according to news reports.

Colt surrendered immediately after a school resource officer rushed in and confronted him — just minutes after the first shots were fired around 10:20 a.m.

Two days later, on Friday, he was charged with four counts of murder. The suspect's father, Colin Gray, 54, was arrested on four counts of involuntary manslaughter, two counts of second-degree murder and eight counts of cruelty to children. Colin gave his son an AR-15 style rifle as a gift, two law enforcement sources said. It's unclear when he gave the gift, but it was after authorities interviewed the father and son last year in connection with threats to

## LCC Comfort Dogs On The Ground in 72 Hours After School Shooting

carry out a school shooting. Colt was a new student at Apalachee High, having only been there for a partial day. The day of the shooting was his first full day at the school — so it's unlikely he even knew his victims.

At a Friday hearing, Judge Currie Mingledorff told Colt Gray that if convicted he could be executed. The judge later had to call the teenager back into his courtroom to correct himself: The maximum penalty for a minor is life in prison

We grieve deeply for this devastating loss due to a senseless act of violence. Let us hold in our prayers the students, faculty, parents



The LAST  
WORD



John List  
FLGA District  
Communications Director  
Editor, Lutheran Life  
[lutheranlife@aol.com](mailto:lutheranlife@aol.com)

without the possibility of parole, under a landmark 2005 Supreme Court decision acknowledging that developing brain science shows adolescents lack maturity and should not be put to death for a crime — however horrendous — they committed before adulthood.

Nine Comfort Dogs headed to Winder. Four FLGA Comfort Dogs: — Moriah, St. Luke's/Oviedo, FL; Jemimah, St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL; Peace, Trinity/Orlando, FL; Hope, Faith/Marietta, GA; — joined five other canines from North and South Carolina, Tennessee and as far away as Nebraska.

and family members and the Winder community traumatized by this act. And may we also pray with our actions, as individuals and as a society, to take the necessary albeit difficult steps to end gun violence through principled personal decisions and public policy.

Let us also keep LCC Comfort Dogs in our prayers as they interact with the Winder community suffering and in need. These gifted canines, deployed in times of disaster and crisis, will most certainly bring comfort to all those affected, including the first responders and the volunteers who serve them.

LCC never charges those served. To donate to this specialized ministry, visit their website at [www.lutheranchurchcharities.org/give-lcc-dr.html](http://www.lutheranchurchcharities.org/give-lcc-dr.html) Help them provide the mercy, compassion, presence, and proclamation of Jesus Christ to those who have suffered and are in need following natural disasters.

