

LUTHERAN LIFE

Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod
Florida-Georgia District
January/February 2025



LUTHERAN LIFE

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



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DISTRICT CAPSULES

Transferred Out of FLGA to Other Districts

01/01/25 Ms. Amy Kurtz (C) to MidSouth

Initial Placements

09/11/24 Vicar Brian Wachter from Concordia Theological/Fort Wayne, IN to St. John the Apostle/Buford, GA

Ordination

01/12/25 The Rev. Brian Wachter (SMP Pastor) St. John the Apostle/Buford, GA

Installations

11/01/24 Rev. Richard Mokry (O) as Sole Pastor transitioning from Interim at Peace/Naples, FL

01/12/25 Rev. Brian Wachter (O) as SMP at St. John the Apostle/Buford, GA

Emeritus

01/01/25 Rev. John Lehenbauer (O) from Active

01/01/25 Rev. Keith Enko (O) from Active

Called To Glory

05/28/24 Mr. Lawrence Eichert (C)

11/27/24 Rev. Peter Kolb (O)

12/13/24 Mrs. Lisa Krempler (C)

12/24/24 Rev. Gary Dehnke (O)

01/03/25 Rev. John Dede (O)

Status Changes

11/01/24 Rev. Aaron Reinking (O) from Active to Candidate

12/01/24 Ms. Denise Gosch (C) from Active to Candidate

12/01/24 Rev. Richard Cox (O) from Active to Candidate

01/01/25 Rev. Keith Enko (O) from Active to Emeritus

01/01/25 Rev. John Lehenbauer (O) from Active to Emeritus

01/01/25 Ms. Betsy Sabbides (C) from Active to Candidate

01/01/25 Rev. Keith Enko (O) from Active to Candidate

The Florida-Georgia District will host a **FREE Treasurer's Workshop** via ZOOM on **February 15, 2025, from 10 am — 1:30 pm** Eastern Standard Time. Join Elaine Sommerville as she explores 10 areas of tax and financial accounting rules that can hinder church operations. The session will include basic operating principles for compensation planning and reporting, expense documentation, and navigating the confusing changes in the rules related to the Fair Labor Standards Act. It will also discuss the challenges facing churches who are operating schools. In addition to the presentation, participants should bring their own questions to address during the meeting's Q&A period. Rusty Huseman of the Lutheran Legal League will be on hand to answer questions and participate in discussions. Huseman is Legal Counsel to the Florida-Georgia District LCMS.

Registration is open on the FLGA Website:
flgadistrict.org/ under the "Events" tab!

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A blessed New Year to you, my dear friends and fellow servants of Christ! I don't know about you, but the way I approach the start of the New Year seems to have changed. In the past I would reflect on the year, celebrate the blessings and consider my failures and how the year ahead could be different. Then it seemed I was coming up with the same "resolutions" about areas I wanted to address, improve or master. Yet in recent years I have found myself reflecting and praying over the meaning of LIFE.

Now as you read that familiar phrase, "The meaning of Life," I bet your mind filled with thoughts over why you are here, what's your purpose, what kind of spouse, friend, parent, neighbor, employee or child you are and, what does that have to do with "the meaning of life." Although those are appropriate questions, I believe there is another valuable question to be

asked. According to the Lord, what is His focus and priority?

As biblical Lutheran Christians, that's the place to start, right? We don't just go with what we come up with, think or feel, but instead we go to the Lord in His Word and prayer and seek the answer from God Himself. So again, "What is God's focus and priority?" The answer is quite simple but profound — It's All About LIFE.

It's always been about life! Go back to the very beginning and consider *GENESIS 2:7* — *Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.*

It's All About

God made us and gave us life to love us and be in relationship with us. I love that. I love that God breathed His very breath into me and you and He gave us Life so that we could be in relationship with Him for all eternity. To honor, love and serve Him. And isn't it wonderful that even when sin separated us from Him, His focus and priority was still all about life? He wanted us to be in relationship with Him not only in this world and for this life, but for all eternity! So, consider this sampling of verses that continue to drive home that Life is God's focus and priority:

JOHN 14:6 — *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

JOHN 3:16 — *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."*

JOHN 6:35 — *"Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."*

Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.



ROMANS 6:23 — “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

JOHN 10:10 — “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came so that they may have life and have it abundantly.”

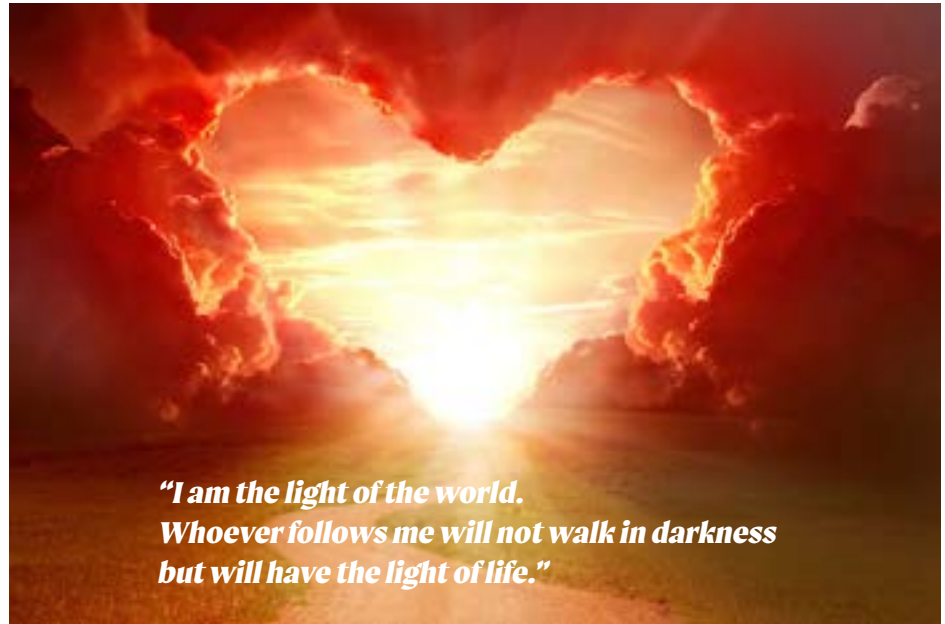
LIFE!

JOHN 8:12 — “Again, Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”

JOHN 11:25-25 — “Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.”

GALATIANS 2:20 — “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Incredible and what Good News, that God’s priority and focus has been and will remain in this New Year, LIFE! Yes, it’s always been about God giving us life through His Son and living in relationship with Him here, now and in eternity. So, maybe this year, as you begin to



wonder what your life is all about or even ask that age old question, “What is the meaning of life?”, read these Scripture verses. Listen carefully to the Word of God for you and know that you are loved, valued for with God . . . It’s All About Life!

One final thought — if you agree that it is all about life, then this is not only true for you or me. As those who have experienced and know that God has given us Life and wants us to experience His love and live in that relationship — remember it is for everyone! I therefore remind you of the privilege and calling you have. Paul writes in EPHESIANS 5, “For you once were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light . . . Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.” This month is referred to as “Sanctity of Human Life Month.” I pray that you consider, pray and recognize that with the Lord, Life is sacred. All human life. May we be those who honor, respect and defend all human life, because with God “It’s All About Life!” ■



*Walking Along-side others...
Sharing Life through Christ!* **James Rockey**
PRESIDENT FLORIDA-GEORGIA DISTRICT
LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

In today's world, Lutheran churches must be vigilant in safeguarding their congregations and facilities from potential threats, including those posed by extremist groups. Here, we provide practical steps and strategies for ensuring the safety and security of your church and congregation while maintaining an environment of worship and community.

million of additional funds to protect faith-based institutions and nonprofit organizations against targeted attacks. Additionally, FEMA also has grant money to aid faith based organizations with grant money for target hardening and other physical security enhancements and activities to nonprofit organizations that are at high risk of terrorist attack.

This cannot be overstated!
Establish a strong relationship with

vigilant without causing unnecessary fear. To the extent you have not already done so, promote an open-door policy for reporting concerns or observations, as a well-informed community is often the first line of defense. Protect sensitive information such as congregational directories, event schedules, and financial records, and avoid publicizing detailed schedules for high-profile events or visitors to minimize risks. To that end, we

Is Your Congregation Ready to Respond to an Potential Threat?

by Rusty Huseman, Florida-Georgia District Legal Counsel

Begin by evaluating the vulnerabilities of your church property and operations. Consider entry points, parking areas, and gathering spaces. Assess risks such as unauthorized access, lack of surveillance, or outdated safety protocols. This assessment forms the foundation for developing an effective security plan.

Investing in security measures is essential. Install surveillance cameras to monitor key areas, including building and campus entrances and parking lots,

your local police department. Invite them to conduct site visits and offer security recommendations. Invite them to meet with your staff. Often local law enforcement may be able to provide you with a security assessment walk-through of your property. Additionally, request regular patrols during services or special events, and ensure they are familiar with your emergency plans.

Develop comprehensive emergency response plans tailored to potential scenarios such as active shooters, bomb threats, or natural disasters.

For your information and use, the Florida-Georgia District has developed several "template" policies that should prove helpful in tailoring policies for your ministry. Include clearly marked evacuation routes and safe zones, designate individuals responsible for contacting emergency services and disseminating information, and practice these plans regularly with staff and members.

Equip your church leaders, ushers, and volunteers with training to recognize suspicious behavior or unattended items, use de-escalation techniques to manage potentially volatile situations, and respond quickly and effectively to emergencies. Monitoring who enters and exits the building is also critical. Limit open doors to one or two monitored entry points during

recommend you carefully evaluate your use of social media (Facebook, Tik Tok, X, etc.) and what information you publish.

Building relationships with other faith-based communities and local organizations can foster mutual support and understanding. Strong community ties can help reduce risks and promote a sense of unity. For larger events or high-risk situations, consider hiring trained security. Ensure they are vetted thoroughly and understand the unique needs of a faith-based environment.

Safety plans should be living documents, regularly reviewed and updated. While uncomfortable for some members of the congregation, churches should conduct drills to ensure familiarity with procedures and adapt plans to address new challenges or threats. Stay informed by monitoring updates from trusted sources such as law enforcement, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), or other security organizations.

Notably, the DHS issued a bulletin on October 24, 2024, emphasizing the importance of vigilance in houses of worship due to an increased risk of targeted violence. This guidance reinforces the need for faith communities to adopt robust safety measures.

By taking these proactive steps, our churches can create a safer environment while preserving the welcoming and peaceful atmosphere that defines our houses of worship. Protecting our congregations is not just about security — it is an act of stewardship, ensuring that our churches remain available for all who seek solace and spiritual connection.

If you are an active member of a Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and need legal assistance or have any questions you would like answered, I invite your inquiry at Rustyh@lutheranlegalleague.org. ■



and use alarm systems to alert authorities in case of emergencies. Ensure exterior areas are well-lit with perimeter lighting to deter criminal activity and use locking mechanisms to secure doors and control access points.

In October, 2024 the Department of Homeland Security announced \$210

services, assign greeters or ushers to observe and welcome attendees, and implement visitor sign-ins for large or unusual gatherings.

Once again, your local law enforcement agency can be a valuable resource for your congregation and school. Encourage your members to remain

Lutheran Hour Ministries Seeks Congregation Ambassadors

Lutheran Hour Ministries [LHM] aims to energize, equip, and engage laity for outreach. Through partnering with congregations, LHM can help equip members. In order to effectively facilitate those partnerships, they recruit members from the congregations to serve as LHM Ambassadors.

What is an Ambassador?

An Ambassador is a congregation member who nurtures a relationship between LHM and their congregation for the purpose of sharing resources and helping others use them.

What does an Ambassador do? Being an Ambassador is easy! You simply start by checking your email for the latest trainings and Ambassador-related information.

LHM Ambassadors are also invited to a yearly Lutheran Layman's League (LLL) convention to learn about LHM resources and how to use them, and network with other individuals who are also excited about sharing their faith.

Simple ways Ambassadors use LHM's resources are:

- Leading Bible studies, book studies, and listening groups
- Stocking Project Connect booklet racks
- Hosting LHM Sunday at your congregation

What are the benefits of being an Ambassador?

- 20% off purchases at shoplhm.org;
- A monthly email with the latest products and programs;
- Resources to display and promote LHM during special events;

To learn more about the LHM Ambassador program or to request supplies for an upcoming event, contact Suzie Sallee at 1-800-944-3450, ext. 4214 or via e-mail at ambassador@lhm.org.

Simply click the button below to fill out the LHM Ambassador application. We look forward to partnering with you and your congregation in Bringing Christ to the Nations—and the Nations to the Church. ■

Thinking About Retirement? Concordia Plan Members Urged to Participate in District Workshop



Workers enrolled in the Concordia Retirement Plan pension — especially those age 50 or older who are thinking about retirement — are invited to attend this virtual workshop to learn more about retirement planning. Spouses are also encouraged to attend. The virtual workshop will be held Wednesday, February 5, 2025 from 4:30 to 6:30 pm Eastern Time. Please register by February 4th!

Topics to be covered include:

- the social/emotional aspect of retirement,
- sources of retirement income,
- health care in retirement,
- how to initiate your CRP pension benefit,
- legacy plans.

Register at concordiaplans.zoom.us ■

LCMS YOUTH MINISTRY



Save the Dates

March 4, 2025 | Gathering Registration Price Increase (\$475)

April 30, 2025 | Team Flex Applications Close

May 1, 2025 | Deadline for Express Registration

May 28, 2025 | Last Day for Substitutions and Cancellations

May 29, 2025 | Gathering Registration Closes

July 21, 2025 | Florida-Georgia District Special Gathering Event

July 19-23, 2025 | 2025 LCMS Youth Gathering

HE Restores My Soul

March 10-12, 2025

2025 Veterans of the Cross Registration Is Open

“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 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 disheartened by suffering.”

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.

“Don’t hesitate! We expect this event to sell out quickly!” she concluded. “Tell your friends to register now — registration closes February 14th, 2025. If you have any questions, please contact Kathy Keene in the District Office.”

Register on the FLGA District website either using the QR code below or at flgadistrict.org/voc. ■

REGISTRATION COSTS:

(Includes meals & lodging)

Two people to a room.....\$500.00
Single room \$350.00
Commuter.....\$75.00 per day
Commuter for just Wednesday.....\$15.00
Worship is on-site this year in “the upper room.”
Contact Kathy Keene in the FLGA District Office with any questions: kkeene@flgadistrict.org.



REGISTER HERE:



VOC 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.



This event will sell out! Registration Closes February 14, 2025



**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**

Each issue of Lutheran LIFE will profile the young men serving their vicarage internships in the FLGA District

Meet the Vicar

Euder Paul Serving Our Savior/Lake Worth Beach, FL



Vicar Euder Paul was born in Acul-du-Nord, Haiti into a family of five children — three girls and two boys. He is the youngest sibling. He was raised as a Christian in a simple and humble family, baptized on September 23, 1982 by Reverend Father Raphael Bruno in the Parish of Our Lady of the Nativity (Acul-du-Nord, Haiti). He received his first communion on July 11, 1993 by Reverend Father Michel Reynold in the same Parish.

Later, in June of 2001, Vicar Euder received the sacrament of

confirmation from His Excellency Monseigneur François Gayot at the Cathedral of Cap Haitien (Haiti).

“My educational, religious and social training included primary studies at the Holy Name School of Jesus led by a group of nuns in my native village,” Euder explains. “My high school studies were at Notre-Dame College and Bell Angelot College in Cap-Haitien (Haiti). I learned Christian, educational, social and human values that would inspire me to be a priest someday in the future after my academic training. I thought I would always be a good priest following Jesus Christ, serving the Church and the whole world.”

After extensive education and training in the Roman Catholic Church, his story with the Lutheran Church (LCMS) begins in 2020.

“A priest friend of mine gave me the contact information for Concordia Lutheran Church in Sarasota, Florida. I met Rev. Stephen E. Gaulke and spoke with him resulting in the process of becoming an official member of the LCMS,” he continues. “Working with the Florida-Georgia District and Concordia/Sarasota, I applied for Concordia Seminary/Saint Louis, MO to study and see how God calls me to become a Lutheran pastor.”

In January of 2022, Euder married Judelande Aubin, who remains in Haiti because of the immigration process. He is hopeful she can join him in the United States prior to his ordination. He is serving at Our Savior/Lake Worth Beach, FL under the supervision of The Rev. Jacob Roedsens. ■



Above — Euder Paul with his wife, Judelande Aubin, in Haiti, and below — with Pastor Jake Roedsens.



The Rev. Jacob Roedsen installs Euder Paul as Our Savior/Lake Worth Beach, FL as vicar for 2024-2025



Our office gets a lot of calls from our congregations regarding whether they should lease unused property to another person or entity. This conduct has become a way for congregations in the Florida-Georgia District to maximize the use of their facilities and, of course, provide additional revenues. While traditionally such leases were with other faith-based organizations, there is a growing trend of property leasing to “for-profit entities.”

Both arrangements have their benefits and challenges, including potential issues with state property taxes. One of the key advantages of leasing to another faith-based organization is mission alignment. Shared spiritual values often lead to smoother collaboration, with fewer concerns about how the property will be used. Such arrangements can foster interfaith unity and provide opportunities for joint events and community outreach within the scope of our LCMS doctrine.

Weighing the Pros and Cons of Leasing Church Property in Florida and Georgia

Leasing to a for-profit entity, however, offers the potential for higher financial returns. Businesses, such as daycare centers, private/charter educational institutions, or event venues may be willing to pay market rates, making these arrangements financially attractive for congregations that are struggling with rising operational costs. Of course, this really is a function of good negotiation with the potential tenant.

Leasing to a for-profit entity, however, introduces a significant challenge — including, state property tax liabilities. In both Florida and Georgia, churches generally enjoy property tax exemptions for facilities used exclusively for religious purposes. When a portion of the property is leased to a for-profit entity, that

exemption may be partially or fully revoked for the leased space. This can result in the church being required to pay property taxes on the portion of the property used for commercial purposes, which can offset or even negate the financial benefits of the lease. We have seen a substantial rise — especially in South Florida — in the City/County seeking to revoke such tax protections even though the tenant may also be a non-profit entity. The tax liability would likely revert back to when the lease was enacted.

In other words, the tax liability could, in some cases, result in the loss of the property because payment of the tax bill would be difficult to fund. Navigating state property tax regulations is further complicated by differing laws and interpretations. In Florida, property tax exemptions are strictly enforced, and leasing to

common, particularly when multiple parties need access to the same spaces at similar times (parking, restroom, kitchen facilities). Increased use of these facilities can lead to faster wear and tear, raising maintenance costs.

Legal complexities, such as zoning restrictions and liability



William “Rusty” Huseman
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Legal Counsel
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issues, must also be addressed to avoid future disputes. These items, and more, should be fleshed out in the lease to avoid all ambiguity between the parties. Churches should draft detailed lease agreements that specify terms such as rent, scheduling, maintenance responsibilities, and liability

coverage. For leases with for-profit entities, it’s crucial to outline tax implications and determine how any resulting tax liabilities will be handled.

Leasing church property in the Florida-Georgia District can provide significant financial and community benefits, but it requires careful planning.

Congregations must weigh the potential for mission alignment, financial returns, and legal or tax implications. You are welcome to contact me directly or by consulting with your legal and financial experts. Most importantly, congregations must ensure that their leasing arrangements align with its mission, complies with state laws, and provides a sustainable path forward for their ministry and community outreach efforts.

If you are an active member of a Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and need legal assistance or have a legal question you would like addressed in this forum, please email me at RustyH@lutheranlegalleague.org. ■

LCMS Office for National Missions Hosting Conference

The *Mercy: Love Throughout Life* conference, hosted by the LCMS Office of National Mission, will take place March 14-15, 2025. Conference sessions – all of which will be livestreamed – will take place in three different locations. Participants may attend in-person at one of these locations, or they may watch online.

The three in-person locations will focus on the following subject areas:

- ❖ Concordia University, Irvine, Calif., will host sessions on marriage, life and the family at its Concordia – Spectrum Campus.
- ❖ Grace Lutheran Church in St. Petersburg, Fla., will host sessions on spiritual care.
- ❖ The LCMS International Center in St. Louis, Mo., will host sessions on advocating, teaching and caring for human life.

Featured presenters will include:

- Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison, LCMS president;
- Deaconess Dr. Tiffany Manor, LCMS Office of National Mission managing director;
- Rev. Michael Saleminck, executive director of Lutherans For Life;
- Rev. Dr. Alfonso Espinosa, senior pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Irvine, California;
- Rev. Dr. Brian Heller, manager of LCMS Specialized Spiritual Care Ministry.

A Spanish track will also be available. The sessions, conducted in Spanish, will be made available to watch online.

Early-bird registration – which includes meals and snacks – is \$49 per person through February 14th. After that, registration will be \$74 per person. In-person registration closes on March 7th.

Online registration (which can be used by an individual, couple, family or group) is \$29 and will be open until the first day of the conference. Both in-person and online attendees will have access to recorded sessions for 60 days after the conference.

All students at the Concordia universities and seminaries have free admission to this conference. To register, they will need a valid Concordia email address for verification. For more information, email SpecializedCare@lcms.org ■

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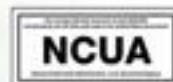
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Pastor John had been out Christmas shopping with his son Peter who was tired and annoyed with all the shopping. He asked, “Why do we bother to buy and give so many gifts?”

Pastor John replied, “well, Jesus is quoted as saying, ‘It is better to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:35). Peter was just honest enough and brash enough to push back on his dad. He replied, “Yeah, but dad, other people? What about me?” Pastor John calmly replied, “Sure, it is nice to receive gifts. Yet Jesus said giving is better. What do you think He meant?”

Peter answered a little disrespectfully, “Better for who? If giving gifts is so great, what do you get out of it?” His dad the pastor then asked, “What makes you feel the best, getting a new thing or giving something to someone else?” With that Peter had to think. “Well Dad, it’s true, I feel good when I



to receive.” Pastor John smiled and asked, “Do you want to preach next Sunday?” ■



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

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

know I helped someone. Like when you brought us to that place to volunteer that time.”

Now it was Dad’s turn to not be satisfied. “What else?” So Peter thought again. He said, “Happiness isn’t really about things. I need certain things but I can often do without stuff and still be happy.” John replied, “That’s a really mature answer. So what does this have to do with Jesus and Christmas?” Peter said, “Now you’re making me think. I mean, Jesus wants us to live for Him but it all started with Him giving Himself to us on Christmas... and on Easter too!”

“Yes! Great thought!” said John. “So what does this have to do with love and giving gifts?” His son Peter sat quietly in the car for a time and then said, “Dad, I remember you said a Bible passage in a sermon a few weeks ago, ‘we love because He first loved us.’” “Yes, from 1 John 4.” “So,” Peter continued, “we are to be all about loving others and doing for others, whether they are naughty or nice, because that’s what Jesus did for us.” John then replied, “I couldn’t have said it any better myself, Peter.” He continued, “Yes, when we really get how deep and undeserved the love of Jesus is for us, then His invitation to love, forgive, sacrifice and give to others and even forgiving others is a no brainer.” Peter then said, “It is better to give than

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*APY is the Annual Percentage Yield. Rates are subject to change at any time and are not guaranteed. **New money only (Effective April 1st, 2024, transfers and/or rollovers from existing accounts at LutheranFCU are prohibited)

NCUA

Three-Day Conference Designed to Help

A three-day theological conference – The Maier Conference – has been designed for young men confirmed in the church who want to learn more about a vocation in the Office of the Holy Ministry. It will be held at **Zion/Winter Garden, FL.**

Primary speakers include The Revs. Adam Koontz, Matthew Wiedtfelt, Andrew Preus and Reed Schoaff. Along with the presentations, participants will also have Matins and Vespers services, meals, barbecue, softball games, and other events.

Adam Koontz

Pastor Koontz served on the faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary/Fort Wayne, IN from Fall 2019 until Spring 2022. A 2014 CTS MDiv alumnus, he was the pastor of Mount Calvary/Lititz, PA, and planted Concordia/Myerstown, PA. He successfully defended his dissertation on the imitation of Paul in the Greco-Roman world in January 2020 and was awarded the PhD in Religion from Temple University in May 2020.

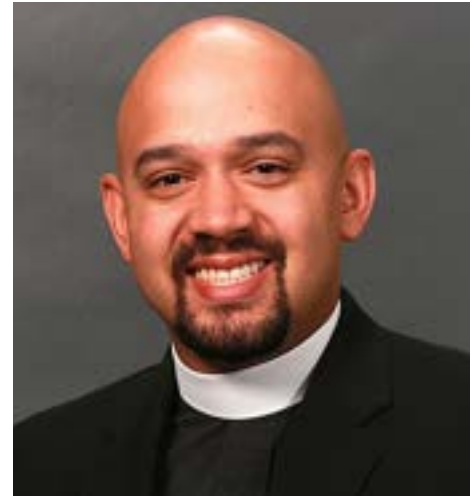
Born in Pittsburgh, and raised in a small town in central Pennsylvania on the Appalachian Trail, he met and married his wife, Jennifer, while an honors major in comparative literature at Swarthmore College outside Philadelphia. He currently serves as Pastor at Redeemer/Oakmont, Pennsylvania.

Matthew Wiedtfelt

Pastor Matt Wiedtfelt is the Assistant Vice President of Admission and Director of Christ Academy (a youth vocational discernment program) at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne. He has been given the opportunity to work with men and women, young and old alike as they explore



Adam Koontz



Matthew Wiedtfelt



Andrew Preus

possible service in the Church and world. He is a speaker, teacher, and lecturer on the topics of Christian leadership and vocation, at local, district and synodical conferences, convocations and other gatherings. He is currently a Ph.D. student at Concordia University Chicago in Organizational Leadership with a focus on pastoral leadership.

Andrew Preus

Pastor Preus received his Master of Divinity from Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary in St. Catharines, Ontario, graduating



Reed Shoaff

in 2013. He studied at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne the following year and graduated with his Master of Sacred Theology in 2017. He was ordained on August 3rd, 2014, in McGregor, Iowa. He served Trinity Lutheran Church and St. Paul Lutheran Church in Guttenberg and McGregor, Iowa, from 2014 until July 2021. Pastor Preus is the eighth son of Rev. Rolf and Dorothy Preus. He married Leah (Fehr) on August 7, 2009, and they have seven children.

Men Explore Vocation in Pastoral Ministry



Reed Shoaff

The Rev. Reed T. Shoaff is pastor of Salem Lutheran Church in Taylorsville, NC and a member of the faculty for Luther Classical College lutherclassical.org/ He is a graduate of Concordia Theological Seminary/ Fort Wayne. He and his wife, Emily, have seven children. Together they educate their children at home and enjoy singing Lutheran hymnody, playing music, and reading.

Pastor Shoaff is active in promoting classical Lutheran education in the South and reprinting old Tennessee Synod publications.

Conference Dates

The conference is slated for May 2, 2025 beginning at noon and ending Sunday, May 4. Questions may be directed to Clay Goupil at claygoupil@gmail.com.

Costs for registrants range — students are \$30 and adults are \$40 which includes meals. Registration is open at zionwg.org/event-details/the-maier-conference



THE MAIER CONFERENCE THREE-DAY SCHEDULE

Day 1 • Friday, May 2

12:00 - 3:00 PM Registration
3:00 PM Opening & Greetings
3:30 PM Keynote Adam Koontz
4:30 PM Meet & Greet
5:00 PM Vespers Roberto Rojas
6:00 PM Barbecue @ Zion
7:00 PM Softball Game

1:00 PM Speaker Clayton Goupil
2:15 PM 15-Minute Break
2:30 PM Panel Discussions
3:45 PM 15-Minute Break
4:00 PM Speaker Andrew Preus
5:00 PM Vespers Adam Koontz
6:00 PM Dinner On Your Own

Day 2 • Saturday, May 3

8:00 AM Coffee & Donuts
9:00 AM Matins Matt Wiedtfelt
10:00 AM Speaker Willie Grills
11:00 AM Table Workshops
12:00 PM Catered Lunch

Day 3 • Sunday, May 4

9:00 AM Diving Service
(Optional) Reed Shoaff

Robert Besalski Endowment

[Gainesville, FL—] After Florida-Georgia District icon, Pastor Robert Conrad Herman Besalski, passed away in November, 2023, the family collaborated to design an educational endowment specific to young men seeking to enter Concordia Seminary/Saint Louis, MO for the purpose of entering into the pastoral ministry.

“Throughout Bob’s career, he inspired countless young men and women to study for the ministry through both college and university relationships,” explains Bob’s widow and life partner, Elaine Besalski. “One of the hallmarks of Bob’s ministry was his knack for encouraging young men to consider the ministry in the LCMS and women to consider both the teaching and DCE professions. First/Gainesville trained more than 40 vicars through Bob’s years there. Bob was mentor and friend to all of those men — men who went on to faithfully serve the church. Whether through personal conversations, mentorships, or simply leading by example, Bob’s influence helped shape those lives.”

As a result, The Robert Besalski Student Support Endowment has been created by the Besalski family at Concordia Seminary/Saint Louis, MO.

“The mission of Concordia Seminary is to prepare pastors for the holy ministry of Word and Sacrament in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod,” emphasized The Rev. Dr. Thomas Egger, President of Concordia Seminary. “Through this endowment — which will be managed in partnership with the LCMS Foundation — the Besalski family has joined us in this special aspect of the Lord’s work in a way that will last for all time.”

“Go and make disciples!” was the charge of Bob — his call and his commission,” stresses Florida-Georgia District President, The Rev. James Rockey. “Bob was an important part of my life and one of the original Along-Siders! I am a son of First/Gainesville, FL, the congregation Pastor Besalski served for 34 years. Initially I served as First’s janitor, painter, handyman and student — where I watched and listened as Pastor Besalski taught confirmation and Bible classes. “I watched him raise up vicars and

youth workers. He was truly the ‘hands of Jesus!’” President Rockey concludes. “Bob served our District in many ways: on the Veterans of the Cross Committee, District Stewardship Committee and regularly as an interim and vacancy pastor.”

“For me, Pastor Bob was another dad,” states Jonathan Rockey, brother of President Rockey and interim pastor at First/Gainesville. “As a young man and later as a pastor, he took me under his wings. He encouraged me. He listened to me. He gave me opportunities to serve at First Lutheran. He loved me like another father. As you walk down the hall inside the church office at First/Gainesville, you will see pictures of all the pastors, vicars, and other church workers — but I’m suggesting that there are pictures missing! How about the pictures of people who are serving in ministry because of Pastor Bob’s influence? Through Pastor Besalski and First Lutheran, 40-50 pastors are serving or have served. I know that for me, second to God Himself, Pastor B was the primary encouragement for me to enter the ministry,” Jon Rockey concludes.

“Bob Besalski became my pastor when, as a ten year old new Floridian, I — along with my family — joined First/Gainesville. The Besalskis were also neighbors who lived just a block away from our home, so it is fair to say that he was also a family friend; however, his pastoral influence on me was so profound that I can only think of him in respectful clerical terms. In other words, even in my sixties, I could never call him Bob,” offers The Rev. Thomas Fast, pastor at St. Matthew/St. Charles, MN.

“Pastor Besalski was always friendly and engaging. He came to some of my little league and junior high basketball games and even took me to some University of Florida ‘Gator Games.’ But it wasn’t until my 8th grade year, in his Catechism class, that he began to subtly and not so subtly encourage me to consider preparing to become a pastor. I cared so little for the idea of being a pastor that I didn’t even oppose it. I ignored his encouragement as if it were nothing.

“Yet, he persisted! In fact, he

even increased his efforts. When I was in high school, he asked me to participate in the leadership of the congregation by attending elders’ meetings and by reading the Scriptures in the Services. As I began to mature, he took me to various meetings of pastors so that I would get a feel for the collegiality of those in the Ministry. He also began to occasionally take me out to breakfast or lunch (a practice which lasted the rest of his life) to discuss the matters of the Ministry or just to catch up with each other as friends,” Fast continues.

“Eventually, as I prayerfully re-examined the beauty of the Christian gospel during my senior year of high school, I remembered his encouragement regarding the Ministry. I remembered it fondly, as well as with fear and trepidation. In part my fears arose because I was not a serious student in high school, so I was concerned I wouldn’t be prepared for the rigors of pre-ministerial studies. But even more so, I feared most every aspect of the responsibilities given to a pastor. I was overwhelmed at the thought. I simply didn’t believe I was up to it.

“I’ll never forget the day I was confirmed (Palm Sunday, 1988), when Pastor B. leaned over to me as we were shaking hands with the parishioners of First/Gainesville. He said to me: ‘You better get used to doing this on Sundays. You’ll be doing it a lot as a pastor.’ I knew that day I would end up serving our Lord and His church,” Fast emphasizes. “I am delighted that an endowment has been established at Concordia Seminary in Pastor Besalski’s name. It is exceptionally fitting. I am certain he would be humbled by such a thing. I also think he would take great joy in continuing to help young men prepare to be pastors, as the Foundation will undoubtedly do.”

“I was finishing up my vicarage at First Lutheran in June 1993 going over my vicarage report in the sanctuary with Pastor B,” expresses The Rev. Jon Thomas, now senior pastor at St. John/Mansfield, TX. “It was embarrassingly and undeservedly positive. Which is why I was shocked to hear him tell me, ‘I think you

Fund Announced For Future Pastors

need to get out of the pulpit.' Am I that bad of a preacher, I wondered? 'No! But when you're out of the pulpit, they see your heart.'" Pastor Bob transformed the way I preach. He was such an encourager.

"In August 1992, Hurricane Andrew devastated southern Florida. As a Michigan native, I didn't know anything about hurricanes — but I quickly learned the impact that they have," Thomas remembers. "Pastor B and I loaded a trailer full of donations and drove south in 100 degree heat before unloading supplies as we prayed for those people. He led with compassion and generosity. Every Friday morning we had breakfast together where we talked about ministry and more importantly about life. He was the father that I wished I had," Thomas continues. "All of those traits, I would come to realize over the years, came from his dynamic, personal relationship with Jesus. He was modeling fatherhood because He knew the perfect Father. He modeled generosity and compassion because he knew Jesus who gave His life that we could have life. He gave encouragement because he knew the Spirit of God who encouraged him. He wanted everyone to know Jesus. And as long as I have breath in my lungs, I will continue his legacy."

"Bob was truly a blessing to our ministry. God used him well to influence and shape future pastors. What a joy for him to be resting with Jesus," offers The Rev. Dr. Brian Kneser, another former vicar of Pastor Robert Besalski.

"Pastor Besalski was my pastor from the time I was four-years old until he died," says The Rev. Graham B. Glover, pastor at Abiding Savior/Gainesville, FL. "Outside of my father, grandfathers, and father-in-law, there is not a man I have known who has had a more profound impact on my life than he did. I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that I am the person I am today because of Pastor B. His influence continues to influence almost everything I do as a pastor."

"Dad loved to tell stories about his time at the seminary," states Carolyn (Carrie) Besalski Adams, one of Bob's daughters. "The stories varied from roommates to professors, close friendships, hazardous all-night trips home for breaks, tackling Greek and Hebrew, and especially his series of odd jobs. The stories were always colorful and entertaining but at the core was his financial struggle.

"He would take any job he could find including janitorial, waiting tables, bartending, pallbearing, Christmas tree salesman, mover. When Dad — as a pastor's son — would describe the difficulty of his financial situation, it was heartbreaking to realize the sacrifices he and his family were making for him to finish his studies."

In his memory, the Robert Besalski Student Support Endowment has been established as a need-based award so other young men studying for the ministry might not feel that strain on their studies. It gives them access to financial aid to allow more time for study.

"This endowment will help other young men with limited finances make their way through the seminary," Adams continues. "As my mom underscored, Dad had an extraordinary gift for recognizing potential candidates for the ministry. He would see qualities in young men that maybe they didn't see in themselves. Most of those men went on to the seminary and became pastors, serving their own congregations while spreading the Gospel and hopefully influencing other young people toward God's work. One of them — Pastor James Rockey — is serving as the Florida-Georgia District President and a member of our synod's Council of Presidents!

"Since Dad's death, we have received cards and notes from dozens of pastors and church workers in whom Dad took an interest in, mentored, influenced, encouraged, and supported. Their stories are similar and very familiar



to us. He was a true servant of Christ out in the mission field. He lived every day of his life with the biggest heart, the most generous spirit, genuinely interested and involved in every relationship he had. The emptiness he left in our hearts will be diminished not only by knowing that his legacy is providing support for future pastors but also memorializing the life of a man who exemplified integrity, generosity, and a steadfast commitment to serving others. Through this lasting tribute, his influence will continue to inspire and shape the lives of those called to serve ensuring that his spirit of kindness and dedication lives on," Adams concludes.

Those wishing to participate in the Besalski endowment fund for Concordia Seminary may make checks payable to Concordia Seminary and make a notation toward the Robert Besalski Endowment Fund. Checks can be mailed to 801 Seminary Place, St. Louis, MO 63105. Questions for the Besalski family may be emailed to Carrie Adams at cbadams60@hotmail.com ■

Dates, Speakers, Details Announced for FLGA District Convention

The 35th regular convention for the Florida-Georgia District LCMS is slated for June 5-7, 2025 at Embassy Suites in Lake Buena Vista South in Orlando, FL. The convention planning team met at the district office on January 22, 2025 for a comprehensive formulation of details and announced the theme: "Compelled!" based on II Corinthians 5:14-15 "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again."

Meridith Swanson designed the event logo with a global graphic depicting the mission outreach opportunities we have for communicating Christ's love.

In the Bible, the word "compel" can have both negative and positive connotations. It can mean to force someone to do something, but it can also mean to urge someone to do something through love and truth. C.S. Lewis explains in his book *Surprised by Joy*, how these words have been twisted over time. The words "compel them" actually imply divine mercy. Lewis says, "...the words "compelle intrare," compel them to come in, have been so abused by wicked men that we shudder at them; but, properly understood, they plumb the depth of the Divine mercy. The hardness of God is kinder than the softness of men, and His compulsion is our liberation."

The three-day event will be themed: Day 1 "Compelled to Believe," Day 2 "Compelled to Live as Alongsiders," and Day 3 "Compelled to no longer live for self but for others."



Bill Harmon

The convention's Essayist will be The Rev. Dr. Bill Harmon, President of the Southeastern District LCMS. Dr. Harmon has deep roots in Baltimore, MD. He is a graduate of Emmanuel Lutheran School, Baltimore Lutheran (now Concordia Preparatory School), Concordia/Bronxville, NY, Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO, and Regent University/Virginia Beach, VA, where he earned a Doctor of Ministry in leadership, renewal, and coaching.

The convention's Bible Study Leader will be The Rev. Dr. Lucas Woodford, President of the Minnesota South District LCMS and Associate Pastor of Trinity/Farmington, MN. He is the author of *Great Commission, Great Confusion, or Great Confession?* He is co-author with Harold Senkbeil of *Pastoral Leadership: For the Care of Souls* and their book on contextual mission, *Culture of the Word*, is forthcoming. He has written numerous published articles.

Dr. Woodford is a member of the Board of Regents of Concordia University/St. Paul, MN. He has served as an adjunct instructor for Concordia Theological Seminary/Fort



Lucas Woodford

Wayne, IN and the Institute of Lutheran Theology in Brookings, SD. Dr. Woodford is a Fellow in the Collegium of DOXOLOGY: The Lutheran Center for Spiritual Care and Counsel, charged with research, writing, and speaking regarding the care of souls in the contemporary context. He frequently presents on matters related to soul care, missiology, marriage, sex and gender issues, as well as critical race theory.

New this convention — voting delegates must have a "smart device" such as a phone, tablet or laptop. All platforms will work -- Apple, Android, etc. Delegates will access documents during the convention via this method and will use their personal devices to vote.

Registration is open now at the FLGA District website for both participation and credentials: flgadistrict.org/convention2025/ ■



Dates:
June 5-7, 2025

Location:
Embassy Suites
Lake Buena Vista South
4955 Kyns Heath Road
Kissimmee, FL 34746
(407) 597-4000

District Room Rates
Hotel Reservations:
www.book.passkey.com/event/50850748/owner/10810031/home

Convention Planning Team:
James Rockey, District President; Kathy Keene, Convention Coordinator; Jay Winters, Convention Manager; Laura Zirbel, Voting Manager; Greg Michael, District Secretary; Jennifer Tanner, Stage Manager; Pat O'Brien and Brian Stolarczyk, Parliamentarians; Peter Meier, Volunteer Management; Cindy Hammerstrom, Registrar; Ken Green, Judge of Elections; Debbie Arrington, Exhibits; Adolfo Borges, Chaplain; Jay Wendland, Convention Support; John List and Meredith Swanson, Communications and Publicity; Charles Reich, Worship Chair; and Thomas Schulteis and Jacob Ferns, Music. Grace/Winter Haven, FL will serve as the sponsoring congregation.

LCMS Receives Grant for Youth Ministry Development

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) has received a \$250,000 grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. to support efforts to help member congregations develop effective ministry for youth. The grant was awarded through Lilly Endowment’s Thriving Congregations Initiative. The aim of the initiative is to



encourage the flourishing of congregations by helping them deepen their relationships with God, enhance their connections with each other, and contribute to the vitality of their communities and the world.

In 2016, LCMS Youth Ministry launched a multi-year study on millennials and the church. In 2020, a summary of the study, *Relationships Count: Engaging and Retaining Millennials*, was released in e-book and paperback formats. From that research and conversations around it, additional resources were developed, including a book, *Seven Practices of Healthy Youth Ministry*.

The LCMS, as a confessional Lutheran church body, holds to the Word of God as the center of its doctrine and practice. Its approach to youth ministry reflects the conviction that when that Word is shared through intentional, Christ-centered relationships, lives are changed.

The grant will support a new program called “Practicing Healthy Youth Ministry,” which will begin by creating a network of 35–40 facilitators across the LCMS. The facilitators will receive training and then, during a five-year period,

will work to build intentional relationships with youth ministry practitioners and LCMS districts and congregations in order to share research, strategies and resources for a relationship-based approach to youth ministry.

Congregations will be invited to reflect on their ministries to young people, recognizing strengths and exploring opportunities for growth.

Best practices will be identified and shared across congregations, and the wisdom gained will be used to help inspire congregations to sharpen their mission to serve young people and families and to create or enhance youth ministry resources. The ultimate goal is to encourage healthy and thriving youth ministries that lead to the retention of young people in the church. Dr. Mark Blanke, professor emeritus and director of the Institute for Religious Education at Concordia/Nebraska, will serve as the project’s contracted coordinator and facilitator.

The Rev. Dr. Mark Kiessling, director of LCMS Youth Ministry, said, “We are thankful to God that LCMS congregations intentionally care for young people in their churches and schools. This focus fits well with Lilly Endowment work to support healthy congregations and

the passing of the faith to the next generation. This grant will help fund opportunities for youth ministry practitioners and congregations to learn from each other, build a network for mutual sharing and support, and provide resources to congregations that will help them make lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ.”

If your congregation is interested in being involved in the “Practicing Healthy Youth Ministry” program, information is available at youth.ministry@lcms.org.

Lilly anticipates the first connection with facilitators will begin in late spring 2025. ■



PASSAGES

Jesus Calls Pastor Peter Kolb Home

The Rev. Peter Kolb was promoted to heaven on November 27, 2024. During his lifetime, Peter served his Savior first as a Lutheran educator and after seminary, as a Lutheran pastor. He retired from Faith/Dunedin, FL after serving Grace/St. Cloud, FL and Celebration/Seymour TN.

Pastor Kolb was always sharing the message of salvation. In 2017, Peter enjoyed his last call with his wife Mary and sailed from Dunedin to Grenada on their boat, "Last Call." Captain Kolb and Mary had many friends at their Dunedin Boat Club!

Peter was born January 8, 1951, to Erwin and Bernice Kolb who preceded him in death. Peter leaves behind his beloved wife of 52 years, Mary, his children, Paul and Stacy, and his sisters, Kathy Sauer and Denise Kolb. Peter touched many lives, not only as a pastor but as a friend to many in the local

boating community, as well as in their extensive travels.

Mary Kolb, a native of Seward, NE, graduated Concordia High School, Seward, and studied at Concordia/Ann Arbor, MI.

A celebration of Peter's life will take place at St. Timothy Lutheran Church, Tarpon Springs, FL on February 1st at 11 am. ■



Peter & Mary Kolb aboard their sailboat, "Last Call"

Former DCE at Prince of Peace/Orlando, Lori Bachmann, Enters Eternal Rest



Lori Lynne Bachmann, 67, most recently of Brownsville, Texas, entered eternal rest on Saturday, December 14, 2024 at her residence.

Lori was preceded in death by her father William A. Bachmann and her mother "Puff" Younkes; and her brother Billy Bachmann. She is survived by two sisters, four nieces; and 10 grand-nieces and nephews; and many amazing life-long friends.

Despite chronic pain and migraines from trauma at age 20, Lori dedicated her life to serve God, as a true servant leader. In addition to her time at Prince of Peace/Orlando, she served in Wisconsin and Texas.

A celebration of Life will be held on February 22, 2025, at 2:00 p.m. at St. Paul/Harlingen, TX. ■

District Educator, Lisa Krempler, Passes in December

Lisa Ann Levine Krempler, 71, passed away peacefully in the comfort of her home, on December 13, 2024, after a three year battle with pancreatic cancer. Lisa was born on June 23, 1953 to Robert and Toni (Seeman) Levine in the Bronx, NY. She attended Concordia College/ Bronxville New York and received her Bachelor's degree in English and Education. During her 43 years in the teaching ministry, she taught PreK, high school English, and middle school language arts at Redeemer Lutheran/ Westfield, NJ, Covenant Christian School in Fanwood, NJ, First Lutheran School/Clearwater, FL and her last 27 years at St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL, where her husband, Jeff, served as principal until his retirement.

She is survived by her loving husband of 46 years, Jeff Krempler and their children, Marisa, James (Valerie), Zach (Ercilia), and Amy (Drew), her eight grandchildren, Rocco, Sebastian, Sarasofia, Mia, Ava, Chance, Cruz, and Kyla, as well her brother, John and niece, Ashley.

On Saturday, January 4, 2025 the Krempler's congregation and school families at St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL celebrated her life with both words and song. The Rev. Steve Carretto delivered a moving message of love in addition to singing "Nothing Else," the praise and worship song by Cody Carnes.

Ms. Jan Tumminello, a long-time friend and teaching parnter to Lisa,

shared many stories about their more than two decades of teaching in the Lutheran school system together. Like sisters, they could bicker and challenge each other — always making up and moving forward with bright ideas that they shared in the classroom. "Lisa silenced my rough edges, loved her students immensely and was a true friend and soulmate" Tumminello said. "We made a great team."

All four of Lisa's children brought moving remembrances with stories about family game nights — emphasizing the competitive nature the Kremplers had. Humorously they remembered how Lisa thought it would be a good idea to have both winners in the "sons" and "daughters" categories of each challenge.

Daughter Amy elected to enter the nursing vocation rather than following in Lisa and Jeff's education arena. She spent the last weeks of Lisa's life as a constant companion offering help and comfort. She read a letter to her mom to the congregation.

Husband, Jeff, thanked everyone for their endless love and support — and for the bulk of the participants — wearing something orange (Lisa's favorite color) to her memorial service. He thanked her medical team, her Hospice team, her many friends and emphasized how proud he was of his children in their love, support and words they delivered. He also told the story of how he met Lisa at Concordia/ Bronxville, NY and how they coincidentally received their first calls to Redeemer/ Westfield, NJ. Their friendship grew in that environment.



David and Helen Janisko traveled from North Carolina to attend Lisa's memorial service. They had taught with the Kremplers in Westfield, NJ and then again at First/Clearwater, FL before moving into the educational arena of South Palm Beach County, Florida. The Janiskos were at Trinity/Delray Beach, FL and the Kremplers eventually at St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL.

Memorials may be made to the St. Paul Lutheran School Scholarship Endowment Fund. Lisa will be laid to rest privately at Boca Raton City Cemetery. ■

Gospel Musicians To Appear in February in St. Cloud Concert

Dave and Barb Anderson will appear in concert at **Grace Lutheran Church/St. Cloud, Florida** on Sunday, February 23, 2025, at 3:00 p.m. The church is located at 1123 Louisiana Ave, St. Cloud, FL 34769.

The 90-minute concert will include a sharing time of their Bering Sea rescue story.

Dave and Barb have recorded more than 40 albums of gospel music. They are Dave and Barb Anderson are Phoenix, AZ residents and have presented concerts throughout America and around the world for almost 40 years. The Andersons have been on the forefront of worship renewal in America and abroad. ■



Synod and District Pioneer in Black Ministry, John Dede Enters Eternal Rest

The Rev. John Quintus Dede died peacefully on January 3, 2025, after a brief illness. His daughter, Elizabeth, was by his side.

John was a faithful pastor in the Lutheran Church and served most of his ministry in Florida. He was born and raised in Milwaukee, WI., but did not like winter. While still a seminary student, he met Ginger Stallmann in Holyoke, MA, and one year later they were married. Their first assignment was to Selma, AL, in 1956. At the time, the South was rigidly segregated, and public education was not available for African American people. They served five small Lutheran congregations — each with schools.

Rev. John was a professor of Latin at Alabama Lutheran, one of just five higher education institutions in the United States that were established before the Civil Rights Act of 1964 with the intention of primarily serving African Americans. Eventually Alabama Lutheran became Concordia/Selma, one of the LCMS Concordia colleges.

Their daughter, Susan, was born in Selma in 1957. Later that year, the family was sent to Nigeria, West Africa where Pastor John served seven Lutheran congregations. He also served as principal of Lutheran School Afaha Etokin Nigeria. A daughter died in infancy there, and

in 1960, their daughter, Jocelyn, was born. Later that same year, Nigeria celebrated its independence from England, and after the celebrations, the family returned to the U.S. for a one-year furlough.



Ginger & John Dede

While on furlough in Massachusetts, John received a call to start a mission congregation in Fort Lauderdale, FL. In 1961, the family moved there, and Elizabeth was born thereafter. Here John served The Lutheran

Church of the Good Shepherd/Fort Lauderdale, FL, a small African-American congregation in the still rigidly segregated South. John and Ginger were actively involved in tearing down racial walls

years of age. The family faithfully served there for more than 20 years, helping to start a Spanish-speaking congregation, a full-time pre-school and an elementary school.

In 1989, John received a call to Bethany/Leesburg, FL, where he and Ginger served until their retirement. They remained active members until 2017.

In September 2017, John and Ginger moved up to Americus, GA, to be near their daughter, Elizabeth. They both remained active members of the LCMS until their deaths.

A memorial service will be held on March 15, 2025, at St. Andrew's Lutheran Church in Plains, GA, and their ashes will be buried at the Picnic Hill Cemetery at Koinonia Farm in Americus, GA. Rev. John Dede is survived by his daughters, Susan Heckler (Douglas) of Southport, NC; and Elizabeth Dede of Americus. A son, Charles Dede (Houston Carruth) of San Antonio, TX. He is also survived by four grandchildren, Michael Heckler (Mary), David Heckler (Allison Key), Ethan Moore, and Andrew Moore; two great-grandchildren Henry Heckler and Mark Heckler.

In addition to his parents, John was preceded in death by his wife, Virginia Stallman Dede, a daughter Jocelyn Moore; a sister, Jane Powel and two brothers, Albert Dede and Roland Dede. ■

through worship, table fellowship, and faithful acts of civil disobedience — including helping to integrate the public beaches in Fort Lauderdale. They also were enthusiastically involved in the integration of Lutheran Central School on the campus of Trinity/Fort Lauderdale, FL. Their son, Charles, was born in 1963.

In 1968, John received a call to Miami, FL, to serve a racially and ethnically diverse congregation — Mount Olive/Perrine, FL where he led the congregation in expanding the kindergarten to include day care for children from three to five

Family was instrumental in integrating Fort Lauderdale's beaches

Synod and District Servant, Board Member of Stepping Stone, Gary Dehnke, Passes Late December

Gary Dale Dehnke was called home to be with his Lord on December 27, 2024. Born in Eau Claire, Wisconsin on October 7, 1943, to Adolph and Lilly (nee Honadel) Dehnke, the youngest of eight children with six sisters and one brother. He was both baptized on November 7, 1943, and confirmed in 1957 at St. Peter's Augusta, WI. Growing up on a dairy farm provided both discipline and freedom and he kept busy with chores in the morning and mischief in the afternoons.

At 15, Gary's family moved from the farm to Fall Creek, WI, where he graduated at 16 years old from Fall Creek High School as Salutatorian.

Following high school graduation, Gary attended the University of Wisconsin/Eau Claire, WI for two years and then worked at American Motors until he reached the age when he could follow God's call to serve the church and study at the Lay Training Institute at Concordia College/Milwaukee, WI. During those years, Gary completed field work at three different congregations in Milwaukee and Racine. Upon graduation in 1966, he left Wisconsin to serve as Lay Assistant at Ascension/St. Louis, MO. It was here that Gary met Christine "Chris" Poynter, who was completing her year-long teaching internship at Ascension Lutheran School. Their mutual competitive natures were bonded playing hangman on Chris's classroom chalkboard. They were married at Ascension on June 19, 1971.

Gary's evolving career in the ministry took them to three different states in eight years. In 1976, with one child in tow, the growing family moved to Santa Rosa, CA, where Gary served as Assistant to the Pastor for five years at St. Luke's. Gary and Chris had three more children before Gary felt God calling him toward preaching and leading his own congregation. He enrolled in Concordia Theological Seminary/Fort Wayne, IN in 1981 where, motivated by the needs of a growing family, he completed three years of academic study in two years. Gary received his vicarage assignment to Trinity/Algona, IA in 1983. The congregation liked him well enough to call him as pastor without delay, and Gary was ordained and installed at Trinity in 1984 — his first congregation as pastor. In Algona, Gary embraced small town life once again. He filled summers with "teaching" his sons to detassel in cornfields and more than once participating in BRAK: Bike Ride Across Kossuth and RAGBRAI: Register's Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa. He played racquetball with congregation members and regularly accepted gifts of produce from friends' farms and gardens.

In October 1990, Gary received a call to return to St. Louis as pastor at St. Johns. While it was difficult to leave Iowa, Gary, Chris, and family were welcomed by many old friends, and the city full of Lutheran schools offered many teaching opportunities for

Chris. Gary served as pastor of St. Johns until his (first) retirement in June 2009. By then, Gary had performed 194 weddings, confirmed 388 confirmands, and baptized 458 infants, children, and adults, including the weddings of two of his children and baptisms of most of his children and grandchildren.

Retirement provided more opportunity to travel, and Gary and Chris visited their kids and grandkids as often as possible, but after a couple of years, it was not often enough. They moved in 2011 to Grayson, GA, to be near their five grandsons living in the Atlanta area. Gary's only reservation about the move was a fear of not having opportunities to preach.

God had other plans for him! A retired LCMS pastor is in high demand in Metro Atlanta. Gary served many congregations surrounding greater Atlanta, including two long-term, year-plus interim positions at Grace in Midtown and Oak Road in Lilburn, where he then celebrated his second and third retirements. In addition to his ministry in various congregations, Gary served as Circuit Counselor in FLGA and other districts. He was a member of the Board of Evangelism and Board for Missions of the Missouri District. He served as the Community Spiritual Director of Show Me Lutheran Teens Encounter Christ (TEC) and Spiritual Director for many TEC retreats. Gary was a member of the Lutheran High School Association Board in



St. Louis and served as vice-chairman of the Partners in Urban Ministry Board.

Gary taught Bible study with Stepping Stone Ministries in the Atlanta area and served on the board. Gary volunteered weekly at the Southeast Gwinnett Cooperative Ministry in Grayson, Georgia, speaking with clients to match services with their needs.

Gary was a lifelong Packers fan and considered himself an ambassador for Green Bay after leaving Wisconsin. Gary was a diehard fan of the St. Louis Cardinals, an affinity that began during his time at Ascension. He enjoyed an unusual perk of his clerical collar — a clergy pass to Busch Stadium. For many years, Gary and a guest (often one of his children) attended games courtesy of the St. Louis Cardinals organization. He is survived by his wife of 53 years, Chris Dehnke. A memorial service was held January 18, 2025 at Saint Mark/Tucker, GA with a family interment in Fall Creek, WI at a later date. ■

Corporate Transparency Act in Limbo Pending Appeal

Lutheran Legal League has received several calls regarding certain solicitations from organizations, including the respective Secretaries of State (FL/GA). The following is probably more detailed than necessary, but it is important information for our ministries and good information for those in your lives who own a business. In sum, our corporate entities (churches, schools, RSO, etc.) are exempt under the Corporate Transparency Act (CTA).

be maintained in a secure, non-public database by FinCEN, accessible only to authorized parties such as law enforcement agencies and financial institutions conducting due diligence. The law, however, provides several exclusions to its reporting




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The Act was enacted as part of the Anti-Money Laundering Act of 2020, which represents a significant reform in the United States’ efforts to combat financial crimes, including money laundering, terrorism financing, and corruption. The CTA requires certain entities to disclose beneficial ownership information (BOI) to the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN), which will strengthen the government’s ability to track and prevent illicit activities involving shell companies. Under the CTA, domestic and foreign corporate entities registered to conduct business in the U.S. must disclose key details about their beneficial owners, including their full legal name, date of birth, current residential or business address, and a unique identifying number, such as one from a passport or driver’s license.

A beneficial owner is defined as an individual who, directly or indirectly, exercises substantial control over the entity or owns at least 25% of its ownership interests. The disclosed information will

requirements, aiming to reduce administrative burdens on entities already subject to significant regulatory oversight or deemed low risk for illicit activities. Publicly traded companies registered under the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 are excluded, as they already disclose ownership information to the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). Similarly, large operating companies with more than 20 full-time U.S.-based employees, over \$5 million in annual gross receipts or sales, and a physical operating presence in the U.S. are exempt.

Landmark Ruling Halts CTA Reporting Requirements, Including January 1, 2025 Reporting Deadline

Other exclusions apply to entities regulated under federal or state laws, such as banks, credit unions, broker-dealers, insurance companies, and investment advisers, as they already provide similar disclosures to regulatory authorities. Nonprofit organizations and other tax-exempt entities under Sections 501(c)(3) and related provisions of the Internal Revenue Code are also exempt.

The CTA’s reporting requirements were scheduled to take effect on January 1, 2024, with existing entities required to comply by January 1, 2025. However, on December 3, 2024, the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Texas issued a nationwide preliminary injunction halting the enforcement of the CTA. Judge

Amos Mazzant ruled that the law is “likely unconstitutional,” citing concerns that it infringes upon states’ rights and oversteps federal authority.

This injunction temporarily suspends the CTA’s reporting requirements, creating uncertainty for non-exempt corporate businesses preparing to comply with the January 1, 2025, deadline. In response, the U.S. Treasury Department has appealed the ruling, emphasizing the CTA’s importance in protecting the financial system from illicit activities.

The appeal process is ongoing, and the final outcome remains uncertain. As a result of the injunction, FinCEN has paused the enforcement of the CTA’s reporting requirements. Businesses are advised to stay informed about developments in this case and consult legal professionals to understand their obligations. While the CTA is currently stayed, future legal decisions may reinstate its provisions, necessitating compliance.

In summary, and although our Ministries are exempt should the Act be reinstated, the CTA’s enforcement has been temporarily halted due to a federal court ruling questioning its constitutionality. The Treasury Department’s appeal is pending, and businesses should monitor the situation closely to ensure readiness for any changes in compliance requirements.

If you are an active member of a Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and need legal assistance or have a legal question you would like addressed in this forum, please email me at Rustyh@lutheranlegalleague.org. ■

LCMS Disaster Relief and LERT Teams Provide Real Help After Hurricanes In SW Florida

In the aftermath of Hurricane Ian in 2022 and Helene & Milton in 2024, the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS) Disaster Relief office and Lutheran Early Response Teams (LERT) demonstrated its commitment to supporting congregations and families across the Sarasota Circuit.

Through direct financial assistance and coordinated volunteer efforts, multiple congregations received tangible help during critical times of need. The impact of this assistance reached beyond individual congregations. Local pastors, including Rev. Brian Albrecht of **Trinity Lutheran Church of Southwest Florida/Port Charlotte, FL** and Rev. Dr. Brian Stolarczyk of **Lutheran Church of the Cross/Port Charlotte, FL**, worked with Rev. Dr. Ross Johnson from the LCMS Disaster Relief office to secure grants for affected families.

Mr. Jay Wendland and Rev. Dr. Peter Meier on behalf of the Lutheran Early Response Teams (LERT) provided essential services such as tree removal, helping clear damage and begin the recovery process for Rev. Steve Anderson of **Good Shepherd/Sarasota, FL**.

The breadth of support became evident as Rev. Stolarczyk worked with eleven families who faced significant challenges with insurance coverage. These included a LCMS clergy widow, three congregational widows, and a single mother with teenagers. Many discovered their insurance provided less coverage than expected, or found damage classified as flooding and therefore excluded from coverage. One example highlights how LCMS Disaster Relief provides crucial support to those who have long served our church community.

A widow caring for her elderly mother received assistance after their condo flooded. The mother had dedicated twelve years to teaching in LCMS Elementary Schools in Lester Prairie, Minnesota and St. John's Buckley, Illinois, where her husband had also taught for 23 years until 1974. The daughter continued this legacy of service, teaching Sunday School, assisting with church renovations, supporting children's programs, and even serving as a treasurer across multiple congregations. Their situation grew

more complex when the daughter faced surgery and complications while transitioning her mother to assisted living.

The LCMS Disaster Relief grant provided essential support during this challenging period, helping address repair costs they had been forced to charge to credit cards while paying for temporary housing. These real examples demonstrate how LCMS Disaster Relief and LERT Teams provide concrete assistance when congregations and church families face natural disasters. Their work ensures that our church communities can recover and rebuild, maintaining our mission of service and fellowship even in challenging times.

For information about disaster relief assistance or to support these efforts, contact the LCMS Disaster Relief office in St. Louis, MO or Mr. Jay Wendland at the Florida Georgia District office in Orlando. Please know that your gifts of time, talents, or treasures to these organizations have provided real help to fellow Lutheran Christians recovering from disasters. Those gifts are tangible ways that hurting people experience the grace of our Savior Jesus. ■



Photo showing tree damage at Good Shepherd/Sarasota, FL



Photo from a member of Lutheran Church of the Cross/Port Charlotte, FL



At left — photo from a member of Lutheran Church of the Cross/Port Charlotte, FL

Below — Southwest Florida suffered from major tree damage that required weeks of clean-up time.



FLORIDA GEORGIA

Out and About in the District

St. John the Apostle Installs Brian Wachter



The Rev. Brian Wachter was ordained and installed for the mission and ministry at **St. John the Apostle/Buford, GA**. The service was held at **Good Shepherd/Gainesville, GA** on Sunday, January 12. Circuit Visitor Pastor Dave Wesche was authorized by President James Rockey to preach and officiate the proceedings because of his inability to attend due to the inclement weather.

Governor Brian Kemp had declared a statewide “State of Emergency” ahead of the fast-moving snow storm that moved through Georgia beginning Tuesday, January 14th. Travel to northwestern Georgia was severely impacted.

St. John the Apostle congregation celebrated this conclusion to a long journey of Pastor Wachter in the completion of his

SMP formation. Pastors from the NE Georgia, Atlanta North, and Atlanta South Circuits participated and laid hands of blessing upon Pastor Wachter.

Pictured from left to right are The Revs. Gerhard Michael; Tom Barton; Tom Artelt; Tim Droege Mueller (Living Faith/Cumming); CJ Kanefke (St. Peter/Dahlonega); Brian Wachter (St. John the Apostle/

Buford); Dave Wesche (All Saints/Blairsville); Tim Davis (Trinity/Athens); Andy Schroeder; Dan Sparling (Good Shepherd/Gainesville); Aaron Reinking; Paul Droust; Andy Wrasman (Oak Road/Lilburn); Greg Michael (Christus Victor/Athens); Joe Warnke (Christ our Savior/Griffin); and Bill Lindenmeyer. ■



On Saturday, December 14, groups of carolers from **Our Savior/Plantation, FL** visited addresses in the community to share the news of Jesus’ birth. That afternoon a group of 30 children and adults divided into two caravans to visit six addresses in the Plantation and Sunrise area. The carolers sang to residents at Covenant Living, patients at Encompass Rehabilitation Center, and to homebound members. They sang a couple of traditional Christmas carolers, read the Nativity Story from the Bible and prayed for those they visited at each stop. ■



St. Paul/Weston, FL children performed C.A.K.E at both 8:30 and 11:00 am worship services in december. C.A.K.E. stands for Christmas Acts of Kindness and was incorporated into a musical. The children are shown with Jeremy Becker (at far left), Director of Christian Education, Assistant Director, Amanda Mananzan in black shirt, Kids Choir Director, Irene Villanueva, back row second from right, and Pastor Scott Henze. ■

Bethlehem/Jacksonville Beach

By God's grace alone, **Bethlehem/Jacksonville Beach, FL** has been a fixture in the hearts of many people. In joyous celebration and thanksgiving, the congregation and friends of Bethlehem came together to host a two-day celebration during Reformation-day weekend.

The theme — 75 years of God's Grace: From Generation to Generation — was woven throughout. Members of all ages worked hand in hand to bring the best of Bethlehem to the community, all while praising the One from Whom all blessings flow.

“Blocktoberfest”: A Day to Welcome the Community

A vibrant Oktoberfest- themed block party was hosted for the community. A way to witness to and give back to others, the party was an incredible success. More than 250



A food station offered delicious Reformation-themed treats.

people stepped foot on the grounds, many of them new to Bethlehem.

Balloon arches, large Oktoberfest inflatables and the smell of fantastic food drew in people passing by. Visitors took tours of the sanctuary, and were given an understanding of what Lutherans believe.

“Parents of our preschool were able to interact with church members in fellowship,” explained The Rev. Dana Brones, Senior Pastor. “Strangers stopped in for fantastic food. Two special young adults hosted an iced coffee bar that was such a big hit it, it will become a weekly feature in our

courtyard on Sunday as an icebreaker for visitors.

“Ending the night with an outdoor service, we witnessed both those walking and driving by stop and listen in to the service. It was a powerful reminder that there are those looking to find God's Word even in our own community.”

Sunday: A Celebration of Faith and Fellowship

A Reformation Day divine service kicked off day two of our celebration. The Rev. Dr. Glenn Nielsen, Director of Placement, Certification and professor



The Rev. Dr. Glenn Nielsen, Director of Placement, Certification and professor of practical theology at Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO served as guest preacher.



Pastor Nathan McCarty gives tours of Bethlehem's sanctuary to guests.



One of Bethlehem's former vicars points to the poster announcing the two-day celebration on campus.

75 years of God's Grace: From Generation to Generation Celebrates Diamond Jubilee

of practical theology at Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO graciously guest preached, highlighting the effect Bethlehem has had on 14 generations of vicars and the congregations they would go on to serve.

Echoing the theme of the weekend, the altar candles were extinguished at the end of the service by grandfathers and their grandchildren.

The afternoon was focused on fellowship and celebrating the relationships Bethlehem has formed with a Harvest Festival for the congregation. There was no shortage of food. A special shout out goes to the church's "Holy Smokers" — a group of dedicated men — who served an impressive amount of food over the two days. Hayrides, bounce houses and games brought joy to so many families that day.



The congregation has many hands that designed and implemented the two-day anniversary celebration. The Rev. Dana Allen Brones and Rev. Nathan McCarty are shepherding Bethlehem. ■

Above — a hayride around Bethlehem's campus was enjoyable with perfect weather.

At left — the congregation had displays including photos and awards and greetings and letters from the past 75 years.

At right — the iced coffee station was such a hit the congregation plans to include it regularly on Sundays in the courtyard.



Below — Bethlehem's pastoral leadership team includes, from left, Pastor Nathan McCarty, Vicar Jacob Manning and Senior Pastor Dana Allen Brones.





As the congregation celebrated with love the 4th Sunday in Advent, District President James Rockey served as a special guest while the members of **Hope/Plant City, FL** welcomed new members during their worship. As a part of their welcome, each member was presented with a Christmas ornament reflecting the theme of Red Letter Advent that the congregation had been studying this Advent season. The ornaments reflected each week of Advent — Hope, Peace, Joy and Love.

Each new member had an ornament placed on the Hope Family Christmas Tree that bears their name.

Pictured with Hope's Sr. Pastor, The Rev. Dean Pfeffer is District President James Rockey as they welcomed the new members.

Pictured are from left: Esther French; Jack & Mary Laughlin; Martha Herbert; Steve & Sherri Thomas, Karen Bergmann; and Sheri Lord. Absent from photo are Jim and Donna Macha. ■



Redeemer/Stuart, FL's "Heart Lifters" make cards for members and shut-in's for each holiday throughout the year. They recently made Christmas cards to send in the mail. This group is coordinated by Sally Hellyer. ■



On Sunday, December 15, **First/Gainesville, FL** enjoyed a presentation from Pastor & Mrs. Jon Rockey regarding their recent experiences in Germany, Czech Republic and Austria as part of the Wittenberg English Ministry. It included a slide presentation in the Besalski Fellowship Hall accompanied by German cookies. ■



Proclaiming “Jesus is Born” was heard at the Sunday School and Preschool programs during Advent at **Timothy/Woodstock, GA**. Sunday School students presented a Christmas program entitled “Follow the Star.” The preschool program was entitled “The Greatest Gift.” The music ministry presented a Christmas Cantata on Dec. 22 involving the congregation, handbell and adult choirs in a Christ-focused service. ■



Pastor Scott Henze, **St. Paul/ Weston, FL**, celebrated two adult baptisms in December — Mel Harris and Natalie Greiner. ■



The Rev. Keith Lingsch installed The Rev. Rich Mokry as Transitional Interim Minister for **Peace/Naples, FL**. The congregation shared nativity sets, Christmas cookies and sang carols during the fellowship hour that followed. Pictured are, from left, Vicar Timothy Abel, Rev. Dr. Rich Mokry, Pastor Keith Lingsch Southwest Circuit Visitor elect. ■

Women of Woodlands Rejuvenate Congregation's LWML

“The Women of Woodlands” at **Woodlands/Montverde, FL** rejuvenated the LWML group with an afternoon tea and guest speakers. Debbie Queen, organized a key group of Woodlands leaders to renew the women’s ministry of service and fellowship. According to Deaconess Liz Borth, Crystal Varga, from Pretty Please Catering, shared her skill in making a charcuterie board that every woman took home or enjoyed immediately. The Women of Woodlands meet quarterly for special events and weekly for Bible study. ■



On Wednesday December 18th The Rev. Jacob Roedsens, pastor at Our Savior/ Lake Worth Beach, FL was invited to give the invocation and benediction for the Palm Beach County Sheriff’s Office annual awards ceremony. ■



St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL congregation prayed over Pastor Steve Carretto and Jessica at all three services in early November in recognition of October’s Pastor Appreciation Month. They were presented with a large box filled with gift cards, checks and personal notes of appreciation. ■

Stuart Lauches After School Service Club



Redeemer/Stuart, FL's school has started a Service Club led by Principal, Karyn McChrystal and DCO, Katie Wenger. The group meets after school once a week with projects to give back to the congregation and school community. In December they put together treat bags that were given out at Redeemer's soup kitchen. All of the recipients were very appreciative of the special treats given to each of them. The bags were also given to children who attended Redeemer's Christmas Eve services. ■



Red Sock Project Yields Bikes & Helmets

The Red Sock Project started as the brainchild of one of **Faith/Lecanto, FL's** members, Marge Sawyer. The idea was to put a dime in a designated sock in January, two in February, three in March, and so forth. At the end of the year, the group doing this came together and combined their donations to purchase bicycles for the Citrus United Basket Christmas event.

For the past three years, the entire congregation at Faith/Lecanto has been involved — enabling them to purchase more bicycles and helmets. In 2022, 26 bikes and helmets were purchased. In 2023, 27 bikes and helmets were purchased. This year, they were able to purchase 30 bicycles and helmets.

Candy Lott led the charge for Faith, with the event being part of a Thrivent Action Team to benefit the community. Lott worked closely with Walmart in Inverness to get the best bike and helmet prices. The 30 bikes were purchased on November 30th — however, only 12 were assembled, and 18 were still in boxes.

“We didn't know what we were going to do, but the Lord solved it,” Lott said. “Our faithful trustees gathered on Monday, December 2, and assembled all the bikes in about an hour.”

Citrus United Basket (CUB) President Steve Savino picked up the bikes the following Monday, December 9, and the distribution program began on December 16 and ran for five days, with raffle tickets drawn daily for the bicycles.

CUB runs the program as a local distributor for the nationally recognized Marine Toys for Tots. In addition to bicycles, CUB collects hundreds of toys to ensure that more 800 children in Citrus County have a special, and memorable Christmas morning. ■

Redeemer Hosts Sold-Out Orchestra Concert

Redeemer/Stuart, FL hosted the Atlantic Classical Orchestra in December for a sold out concert. The orchestra is based in Vero Beach with a concert schedule that brings classical music to Florida's Treasure Coast. ■



“Music at **St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL** is developed around goals and objectives that allow students to glorify God through music, to actively make music and to foster critical thinking skills in creativity and listening in music,” emphasizes Rebecca Schaffer, music teacher. “Music instruction includes opportunities in singing, rhythm, movement, and instruments. Students share in collaborative games and group work to practice music skills. This active music learning involves the students in the process of imitation, experimentation, and personal expression. All students share in performances throughout the year including Christmas services, Grandparents’ Day, and a major spring musical.”

Middle school (6th-8th grade) students may audition for the extracurricular musical drama cast for the St. Paul Spring Musical. Previous productions have included Willy Wonka, Seussical, The Wizard of Oz, and Mary Poppins.

This year’s Christmas program included full choirs, bell choir and a special ukulele choir — of Portuguese origin and popularized in Hawaii. It generally employs four nylon strings. The tone and volume of the instrument vary with size and construction. Ukuleles commonly come in four sizes: soprano, concert, tenor, and baritone. Ms. Schaffer has been teaching the ukulele this past term.

Middle School Choir includes 6th-8th grade singers. Handbell choir is offered beginning in middle school with sixth grade learning the basics of ringing. The advanced handbell group combines 7th and 8th grade in a group named “Falcon Ringers.” Students involved in these music performance opportunities are involved in additional concerts at St. Paul and in the greater Boca Raton community. St. Paul students have shared their music at the Lynn Cancer Institute, Boca Raton Regional Hospital, Boca Center Christmas Tree Lighting, St. Paul Lutheran Church worship, and service projects. The Middle School Choir and Falcon Ringers also compete in the Florida-Georgia Lutheran Schools Music Festival every year to be rated by judges and receive constructive comments to strengthen their musicianship and performance technique. ■



The middle school Bells of Praise from **Redeemer/Stuart, FL** performed at various assisted living and rehabilitation places in the Stuart area during the month of December bringing joy to all of the residents. The group is directed by Joy Beach. ■



Our Savior/St. Petersburg, FL had an angel tree set up in the narthex during Advent. Each congregant was able to pick a child or young adult to adopt for gifts by choosing an angel tag. For the past six years, they have teamed up with Sabal Palms Health & Rehabilitation in Largo FL, to grant wishes to their residents. Each angel tag contains the name of a child or young adult, their age, and some Christmas wish list items. This year they had more than 50 presents to distribute to the children at Sabal Palms. St. Petersburg's Middle School students did an incredible job of shopping for gifts, handing out presents, singing Jingle Bells, and interacting with the residents. God has blessed their church and school community with giving hearts, and loving spirit, all the while giving Him the glory! ■



Our Savior/St. Petersburg, FL held its annual Plaid Shirt Sunday late last year. Everyone came to worship dressed in their best plaid outfits. After service, they enjoyed homemade pie and a photo booth. Above — Pastor Chris Fuchth and Elaine. ■



Redeemer/Stuart, FL entered a float in the 2024 Stuart Christmas Parade winning the “Classic Christmas Award.” The float was designed and built by Josh and Jen Evans. The theme for the parade was “Christmas at the Movies.”



Our Savior/St. Petersburg, FL (at left and above) celebrated Castaway Day on Monday, January 27, 2025 — kicking off Lutheran Schools Week. It was all about setting aside hinderances. ■



During Lutheran Schools Week the students from both Shepherd of the Coast/Fort Lauderdale, FL and St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL combined worship during chapel one day. Their student councils also worked together on a service project. The staffs from the two schools are shown here: Front row — David Harvin, Neelaveni Jayakumar, Susan Franskousky, Middle Row — Concepcion Reyes, Donna Evensen, Kate Frazer, Rebecca Schaffer, In back — Raymond Harless.



Messiah/Tampa, FL commissioned two new Stephen Ministers on January 5, 2025 by Rev. Mark Adrian. Messiah's Stephen Ministry group has been active since 2009. Pictured from left are Jenny Tait, Stephen Leader Sandy Hansen, Stephen Leader Jody Schweichler, new Stephen Minister Nathan Solem, new Stephen Minister Chris Smith, Victoria Glisson, Terry Picillo and Stephen Leader Norma Halfmann. Stephen Ministers go through 50 hours of Stephen Ministry Training prior to their commissioning and are now ready to have a one-on-one Christian Care Receiver. Stephen Ministry is a faith-based organization out of St. Louis, MO who will celebrate 50 years of serving during 2025. ■

The Rev. Christopher Kollman preached his last sermon at **Redeemer/Vero Beach, FL** January 26, 2025 after almost seven years serving that congregation. He, along with wife Stephanie and their three boys, Micah, Jacob, and Zachary, are headed back to **First/Gainesville, FL** — where Chris did his vicarage back in 2010-2011. He'll be installed as Senior Pastor at First on Sunday, February 16th at 4 pm.

Prior to Redeemer/Vero Beach, Pastor Kollman served 5.5 years at Messiah/Mounds View, MN. He is a Concordia Seminary graduate class of 2012. ■



St. Paul/Weston, FL offers a one-day class entitled **“Discovering Life with God”** which is offered several times a year. This class is an introduction to what Lutherans believe and teach and is open to those coming from a different faith background, anyone wanting to deepen their life in Christ, or as a refresher. They will be welcoming their newest members on Sunday, February 23rd at the 11:00 AM Service. ■



Our Savior/St. Petersburg, FL held a “Share-A-Thon” in November to help hundreds of area families who were impacted by Hurricanes Helene and Milton. The storms were just two weeks apart in September and October, 2024. The congregation donated a fellowship hall full of items to be given out to the surrounding community. Hundreds of families came and were able to replace items lost in the storm or items needed for their households. ■



Anita Shawver Receives Anderson Award at St. Paul/Boca Raton

The Jane Anderson Teacher of the Year Award is given annually to one of the teachers who displays the same commitment to Lutheran education as Jane Anderson did for many years at **St. Paul Lutheran Church and School/ Boca Raton, FL.**

Jane worked well into her 90's to enrich the lives of our students and families. She tutored and coached students and was passionate about Lutheran education. A memorial was established by the Anderson family to recognize outstanding teachers and to encourage them to strive for excellence.

This year's recipient is Mrs. Anita Shawver, a technology teacher. Mrs. Shawver's teaching touches the lives of students in kindergarten through 8th grade. Her servant's heart is displayed daily as she assists the entire St. Paul family in the areas of technology and beyond.

Pictured at right with Anita Shawver and Mark Anderson, Jane's son, are four of the former award recipients — Laurie Exner (2022), Jen Majhess (2024), Rebecca Shaffer (2021), Sara Willocks (2023). Unable to attend was Sue Merritt, the 2022 winner. ■



Lake Worth Beach Congregation Partners With High School Teen Parents



Our Savior/Lake Worth Beach, FL partnered with Lake Worth Community High School's Teen Parent group (at right). The group welcomes mothers and fathers who stay enrolled in school. They work with the students as a support and education motivation group. Frequently food is provided and a speaker is invited to share a topic for the meetings. Our Savior offered prayers and local church support. Our Savior is directly across the street from the high school.

Lake Worth Community High School (LWCHS) is the oldest continuous high school in Palm Beach County. Built in 1922, it is located in the city of Lake Worth Beach, along Florida's Eastern Coast. The local community regards LWCHS as a landmark. Through innovative leadership, enthusiastic faculty, and strong collaborative partnerships, this beloved high school has experienced continuous revitalization. ■

Macon, Georgia Congregation Displays Two Christmas Trees

Why are there two Christmas trees in the Chancel?

Just as the Garden of Eden featured two special trees, the tree of knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life, so, too, have many LCMS churches over the years featured two Christmas trees flanking their altars.



“In post-Civil War years, after H.C. Schwan’s Christmas-tree custom had taken hold in America’s upper Midwest, many congregations, Lutheran and otherwise, began erecting two, not one, trees in their Chancels,” explains The Rev. Laird W.



Van Gorder, pastor at Lutheran Church of the Holy Trinity in Macon, GA

“The idea was based on the Eden trees. The tree on the left of the altar (the worshipers’ left) represented the tree of knowledge of good and evil from which Adam and Eve disobediently ate. This tree would be dark and dreary with no lights or ornaments. This tree would have apples (portraying the forbidden fruit), 33 in number, one for each year of Christ’s earthly life.

“The tree on the right of the altar,” Van Gorder continues, “was the tree of life, or salvation. This

would be beautifully lit with candles and adorned with 33 white roses, an allusion to SONG OF SONGS 2:1, where Christ, the groom of the Church is likened to “a rose of Sharon.”

Atop the tree was a five-pointed star, symbolic of the head, arms and feet of Jesus. From this star would extend three white strands of satin, representing the grace of God flowing through Christ to the earth below.

Overtime, the practice of having one grim and one pretty tree was phased out in favor of having two pretty trees. ■

District’s LWML Travels to Kenya’s “Point of Grace Academy”

The Florida-Georgia District LWML will travel once again to the **Point of Grace Academ/Kisumu, Kenya**. The mission trip — a repeat event — will be July 20 through August 1 of 2026. Scarlet Holcombe reports that the mission trip costs are approximately:

- Airfare: \$1400 to \$1900
- Ground Fees (food, hotel, laundry, ground transportation, travel insurance): \$1200 to \$1500
- Optional safari and sight seeing in Nairobi: \$400 to \$500.

“All you need is your passport!” states Holcombe, “we will handle all the rest of the details for the trip.”

Point of Grace Academy in Kisumu Grace Academy exists to support comprehensive care to the abandoned, orphaned, and needy children of Kenya through means of

education, proper food, shelter, love, and medical care. Children come from a range of backgrounds. They might have a father, a mason, earning about \$8 per day. He can take care of his family but not provide education. Other children come from different families wanting an education. Currently there are about 20 Samburu children — a semi-nomadic people who live in the arid regions of north-central Kenya. They are very poor. Their children leave home and maybe see their families just once a year — if there is food for them to return. At grace they learn English and receive an education.

Point of Grace students are applying to university, technical schools and colleges and are being accepted after receiving a primary education at Point of Grace. ■



For mission trip information, contact Scarlet Holcombe, LWML FLGA Mission Trip Coordinator, at 404-323-1323 or scarlet2@mindspring.com

First/Gainesville Has Busy Advent and Christmas Season

The annual Advent By Candlelight for the ladies returned to **First/Gainesville, FL** this year with more than 100 ladies in attendance. The theme was “Christmas begins with Christ.” First’s sisters from across town, **Abiding Savior/Gainesville FL**, joined along with many friends and family from our congregation. A full dinner of Beef Bourguignon was prepared by member Christa Vigil and hostesses brought a variety of desserts and decorated their respective tables.

Barbara Hughes and Sheila Dungey organized the event as well as decorating the food tables. An Advent wreath, made by member Christine Dietrich, was the door prize for one lucky attendee. Music Director Stephanie Smith played piano for the many Carols sung during the evening. It’s a wonderful way to get into the Christmas spirit. Photo at right — Advent By Candlelight organizer, Sheila Dungey, at her decorated table.

November and December were busy times at **First/Gainesville, FL**. An Oktoberfest scheduled on September 29 was blown away by a hurricane. It was rescheduled for late November in conjunction with a seminar on estate planning led by Pastor Jonathan Rockey, Diana Raasch from LCEF, Katherine Gross from Thrivent Financial, Jon Visscher Senior Wealth advisor, Bruce Helling Attorney and Chair of the Endowment Committee, Zana Dupee Attorney and MBA, and CPA Brandi Dotson, church Treasurer.

Good food and good information was in abundance. First member Mark Kann made schnitzel, spaetzle, bratwurst, sauerkraut, potato salad, and cucumber salad. Pastor Rockey’s wife, Kathy and Mark Kann’s mother, Linda made German desserts. Several members took the opportunity to dress in the German style.

Four times each year the congregation fills Publix grocery bags with food items for Gainesville Community Ministries’s food bank. November included items for Thanksgiving as well as the regular monthly supplies. Photo at right — a total of 75 bags was delivered by Laura Hoyer and Stephen Cade.

Godwink was equally busy collecting shoes (20 pair), coats (31 to be exact — because many children were coming to school without one). Additionally, small gift items for a Christmas market for the younger grades at the local school, Lake Forest Elementary, were collected to enable the students to purchase for their siblings and parents with coupons they have been earning throughout the year. Team members helped set up the market the last week of school before winter break.

In November Godwink responded to a request from the principal for morning snacks for Lake Forest as well, since not all the students eat breakfast before they arrive. In addition to winter clothing for the school, Godwink collected warm weather items — coats, gloves, scarves, and socks for Grace Marketplace, the local homeless shelter and clothing items and personal care items for our local special needs school, Sidney Lanier Center.

Godwink also sponsored a collection of baby items for two of First Lutheran’s newest little members.

Several members of the congregation decorated small table top Christmas trees and did a home visit to some of the homebound members. While many of the members attend services online, nothing beats a personal visit. In photo above — Linda Wendling and Judy Varady setting up the store. At left — Maggie Steube with her tree. ■



Thrive Students Heading to Seamark Ranch



Thrive/Estero, FL has announced a Mission trip — March 2nd - 6th, 2025 to Seamark Ranch in Green Ranch, Florida. Seamark Ranch is a nurturing Christian home and family system that gives children from families in crisis the tools they need for a brighter future. Through a family home model, a specialized residential school and the lessons of life on a working farm community, Seamark Ranch provides the ideal setting for love, stabilization, healing, education and empowerment.

As a fully operational ranch they need assistance with maintaining the grounds, food pantry inventory management and cleaning.

The Rev. Dr. John Roth is pastor at Thrive/Estero. They have a vibrant student ministry program centered around Florida Gulf Coast University.

Plant City's Annual Turkey Supper Yields Two Gifts



On Sunday December 22, 2024, the members of **Hope/Plant City, FL** were excited to welcome District President, Rev. James Rockey. As a part of the service Jim Drapp, Hope's president, presented President Rockey with a check for \$2500.00 toward the District Disaster Response Fund.

The proceeds were a portion of the funds received from the congregation's 28th annual Turkey Supper on November 3rd. It has been the congregation's policy that the proceeds received from fund raising events like the Turkey Supper or the peanut booth at the Florida Strawberry Festival be given back to the church and community.

As one of our members clearly stated, "God has blessed us and it's only right that we turn these blessings around to bless others." That is just what the congregation did on the 4th Sunday of Advent with their gift.

According to Hope's Sr. Pastor, Rev. Dean Pfeffer, "it is exciting for us to reach out into our church and community and use these funds to bless, to touch and to help the lives of so many people. Especially following both Hurricanes Helene and Milton, we again have seen and experienced the leading and directing of God to be of help to others. We know that these funds will truly help those in our District during these difficult times following the storms."

Earlier in December, Pfeffer presented Mary Heysek, Executive Director of the United Food Bank of Plant City with a contribution. The proceeds also came from the Annual Turkey Supper.

According to Pfeffer, "it is a joy for us to give back to our community the gifts that God has given us. We want to show that we have been blessed in order to be a blessing to others." Pictured above with Pfeffe is Mary Heysek, Food Bank Director. Pfeffer serves on the Food Bank Board of Directors and is a past chair of the board.

Celebrating Hispanic Ministry in the Florida-Georgia District

by The Rev. Dr. Albert Garcia

Brothers and sisters in Christ I praise God for what He has done for us. Let's praise God for the recent 75th Anniversary of the Florida-Georgia District and the many years we have served united in mission and ministry.

Let's praise God because since 1961, the Florida-Georgia District has been involved in mission and ministry among Latinos and Hispanics in our district. It all began in 1961, when Pastor Eugene Gruell began outreach through The Lutheran Refugee Center (in what is known today as Little Havana) to the thousands of refugees arriving in those days from Cuba. Among those arriving was a remnant of life-long Lutherans from Havana and Isle of Pines, Cuba.

In this group was my dear wife Mori, who arrived with her family in 1960. Soon it became apparent that there was a need to provide an intentional missionary outreach to these newly arrived exiled/immigrants. Pastor Gruell asked Pastor Conrad Kellerman, the Florida-Georgia District President at that time (1948–1957), to open the doors of **Saint Matthew's/Miami, FL**, located a block from Calle Ocho.

Our brothers and sisters from Saint Matthew's were quite welcoming. This new and first mission in Spanish, grew to become the Primera Iglesia Luterana. The ministry of Pastor Gruell played a pivotal role not only in the beginnings and expansion of this ministry, but also in the providing of future pastors, deaconesses, teachers and other leaders for ministry among Latinos.

I thank God, that I was invited to visit Saint Matthew's in 1963, and that I became a Lutheran in 1964. I thank God that he also called me to be a pastor. Last September 29, 2024 marked the 50th Anniversary of my ordination. *I became the first Latino in the Florida-Georgia District to become a pastor as a result of this mission outreach.* I rejoice in taking part also in the planting of the first Latino Ministry at **Prince of Peace/**

Hollywood, FL and in educating many Latinos and North American Anglo pastors and deaconesses for missionary outreach to Latinos in the USA.

Rev. Roberto Gonzalez, who planted the first mission outreach to Hispanics at Saint Matthew/Tampa, FL (ELCA), and Rev. Alvey Yates Rodriguez, who planted San Pablo Lutheran Church/Miami, FL, are sons of the initial efforts to reach Latinos in Miami. In fact they were already Lutherans in Cuba. Both now rejoice in the church triumphant.

There are others who have also labored among us in Hispanic ministries who now are rejoicing in the heavenly Kingdom. I think specially of Pastor Gruell, Pastor Glienke, Pastor Julio Orozco, Pastor Mario Perez-Arche, and Deaconess Sarita Perez. We must also thank God for the many others who out of the district outreach to Hispanics have become pastors, deaconesses and teachers in our district. These brothers and sisters have been instrumental in planting new missions among Hispanics in South Florida as well as other parts of Florida. Thanks be to God for these wonderful blessings.

I also rejoice because the Great Commission is being carried out today among Latinos in many areas of our district. When the district's ministry began among Hispanics, it was mainly carried out because of the urgent need to serve thousands

of Cubans arriving as exiles. This does not mean that there were no Latinos in Florida before this happened. I attended Robert E. Lee Jr. High and there were a significant number of Puerto Ricans and other Latinos attending that school.

The great commission emphasis to make disciples of all people groups, all races and cultures. Today in Florida (not yet in Georgia) we also have several pastors and deaconesses from several Caribbean, Central and South American nations, as well as North American Anglos, serving Latinos in our district. I think specially of Pastor Juan Martin, Pastor Benito Perez, Deaconesses Jesse Perez and Teresita Rodriguez, Pastor Miguel Sanabria, Deaconess Flor, Pastor Rivera, and Pastor Alan Sielk.

Please forgive me for not mentioning all the names — I am mentioning primarily the old timers who have worked alongside me. Today the Gospel is being proclaimed in our district, not only among Cubans but also among just about all Spanish-speaking immigrants residing in the USA. I thank God for the work of the Holy Spirit among us. We continue to grow and add new servant leaders.

Christ is indeed present among us in our missionary outreach. There is still much that needs to be done! Will you join us knowing that our Lord walks with us and leads us in making disciples of all nations? Thanks be to God for His mercy endures forever. ■



Saint
Matthews/
Miami circa
1925

Please send address updates,
cancellations, additions,
news and photos to:
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National Lutheran Schools Week Celebrated Last Week in January

National Lutheran Schools Week was celebrated from January 26 to February 1, 2025. Our Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod schools number approximately 1,800 including pre-schools, elementary schools and high schools.

We thank God for the opportunity to provide excellent academic preparation for the students served for all ages. National Lutheran Schools Week gives us an opportunity to proclaim these great blessings within the communities we serve.

Our schools are amazing incubators for faithful witness of God's love for us through Christ by teachers and students alike.

This year daily themes were:

Monday, January 27, 2025:

THEME: Identifying and overcoming hindrances to our faith in Christ.

SCRIPTURE: "Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely" (HEBREWS 12:1).

Tuesday, January 28, 2025:

THEME: Maintaining Jesus as the focal point of our lives.

SCRIPTURE: "Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith" (HEBREWS 12:2).

Wednesday, January 29, 2025:

THEME: Reflecting on Christ's suffering and sacrifice for our salvation.

SCRIPTURE: "Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame" (HEBREWS 12:2).

Thursday, January 30, 2025:

THEME: Celebrating the joy and hope we have in Jesus Christ
SCRIPTURE: "Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the



The LAST WORD



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throne of God." (HEBREWS 12:2).

Friday, January 31, 2025:

THEME: Encouraging perseverance in the Christian faith.

SCRIPTURE: "Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus" (HEBREWS 12:1-2).

At most of our Lutheran educational institutions there will be costumes, assemblies, programs, themed chapel services and more. But what's the point of it all? Is it just to break up the monotony that is school in January? It goes beyond the crazy hair days and family nights to show students why we celebrate our schools.

Teaching can be a lonely profession. Once the kids arrive, it's usually just a teacher and aide in the classroom for the majority of the day. When the classroom door is closed, it's easy to feel cut off

from the rest of the world. But our teachers are not alone . . . all around the country, the body of Christ is learning and growing in schools. We are united in Him! This means we are a family.

National Lutheran Schools Week is like a family reunion. We celebrate our unity in Christ and encourage each other to fight the good fight and press on toward the goal.

In some assignments, students write about how their school is important and special. If students are very young and just learning about their school, they enjoy storytime with simple words and clear pictures. Older students might enjoy creating a flip book and sharing it with their families.

A "color run" (above at St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL last year) is often celebrated on the last day — Friday. It has become increasingly popular — and for good reason — they're a creative way to get everyone involved in school fundraising and can add extra excitement with added bursts of color.

Our schools are amazing incubators for faithful witness of God's love for us through Christ by teachers and students alike. Keep our schools in your prayers — from Pre-K through our colleges, universities and seminaries. They need our prayers — and deserve them. ■