

LUTHERAN LIFE

**Lutheran Church-
Missouri Synod
Florida-Georgia District
August September October 2025**



NEVER FORGET

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

07/01/25 Ms. Megan Hunt (C) to IN
07/01/25 Mr. Timothy Leech (C) to IN
07/01/25 Ms. Karla Hardies (C) to MI
07/31/25 Rev. Robert Leiste (O) to KS
08/03/25 Ms. Emily Gierse (C) to IN
08/15/25 Ms. Barbara Stoeppelwerth (C) to OK
08/18/25 Rev. Clarence Rogers (O) to Ctr IL

Transferred Into FLGA from Other Districts

07/15/25 Rev. Lang Yang (O) MI
08/02/25 Mr. Nick Utech (C) IA East
08/10/25 Rev. Shaun Daugherty (O) WY
08/15/25 Rev. Timothy Schutt (O) Suthrn
08/18/25 Mr. David Christian (C) MO
08/18/25 Ms. Judith Christian (C) MO
08/20/25 Ms. Brittany Strohschein (C) SE
08/25/25 Rev. Steven Braun (O) Eastern

Initial Placements

04/29/25 Rev. Stephen Wareham (O)
from St. Louis Seminary as Sole
Pastor Messiah/Valdosta, GA
04/29/25 Rev. Jacob Scheler (O) from St.
Louis Seminary as Associate
Pastor St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL
04/29/25 Rev. Timothy Handrick (O) from
St. Louis Seminary as Sole Pastor at
All Saints/Blairsville, GA
07/10/25 Ms. Julia Schulteis (C) from
Concordia/Wisconsin as
Teacher at St. Paul/Peachtree
City, GA
08/03/25 Mr. Jacob McGee (C) from
Concordia/Irvine, CA as Teacher
at Grace/Winter Haven, FL
08/24/25 Ms. Haley Moses (C) from
Concordia/Irvine, GA as DCE at
St. Paul/Lakeland, FL

Installations

06/29/25 Rev. Roy Peterson (O) as
Associate Pastor St. Michael/
Fort Myers, FL
07/06/25 Ms. Karina Levine (C) as Teacher
Immanuel/Brandon, FL

07/06/25 Mr. Nicholas Harding (C) as
Music Director/DPM St. Paul/
Peachtree City, FL
07/06/25 Mr. Samuel Fishburn (C) as
Teacher Immanuel/Brandon, FL
07/13/25 Rev. Stephen Wareham (O) as
Sole Pastor Messiah/Valdosta, GA
07/13/25 Rev. Joseph Adams (O) as Sole
Pastor LC Redeemer/Vero
Beach
07/27/25 Rev. Timothy Handrick (O) as
Sole Pastor All Saints/Blairsville, GA
08/03/25 Rev. Jacob Scheler (O) Associate
Pastor St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL
08/03/25 Mr. Jacob McGee (C) as Teacher
Grace/Winter Haven, FL
08/10/25 Ms. Rebecca Houston (C) as
Principal Faith/Eustis, FL
08/10/25 Mr. David Maser (C) Principal
St. Michael/Fort Myers, FL
08/17/25 Rev. Shaun Daugherty (O) as
Sole Pastor Faith/Marietta, GA
08/24/25 Ms. Haley Moses (C) as DCE at
St. Paul/Lakeland, FL
08/31/25 Rev. Timothy Schutt (O) as Sole
Pastor Zion/Fort Myers, FL

Status Changes

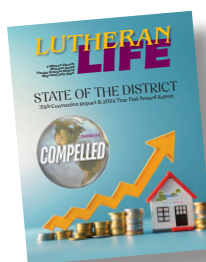
06/25/25 Rev. Isaac Baroi (O) from Active
to Emeritus
07/01/25 Rev. Peter Meier (O) from Active
to Emeritus
07/01/25 Ms. Tais Brekke (C) from Active
to Candidate
07/13/25 Rev. Richard Lohmeyer (O) from
Active to Emeritus
07/28/25 Rev. David Weshe (O) from
Active to Emeritus
08/01/25 Ms. Lisa Jaeger (C) from Active
to Candidate

Called To Glory

06/09/25 Rev. Lee Stisser (O)
08/15/25 Rev. Dennis Glander (O)

free press

Lutheran LIFE, the bi-monthly magazine of the Florida-Georgia District of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, is **mailed free** to all congregation members of the District. Send us your news! Attach photos of at least 300 pixels in .jpg or .png or .pdf formats and email to LutheranLife@aol.com. Want



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United States Set to Celebrate Our Semiquincentennial

The Declaration of Independence – formally The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America in the original printing – is the founding document of the United States according to the free encyclopedia, Wikipedia.

July 4, 1776

On July 4, 1776, it was adopted unanimously by the Second Continental Congress, who were convened at Pennsylvania State House, later renamed Independence Hall, in the colonial city of Philadelphia. These delegates became known as the nation's Founding Fathers. The Declaration explains why the Thirteen Colonies regarded themselves as independent sovereign states no longer subject to British colonial rule, and has become one of the most circulated, reprinted, and influential documents in history.

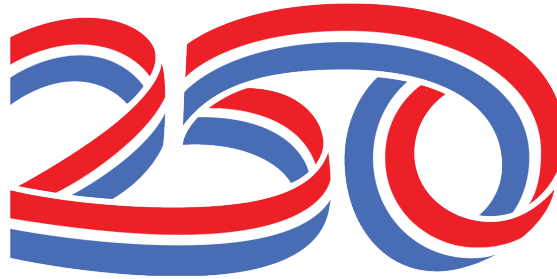
September 11, 2004

The 25th anniversary of the September 11 attacks will be on September 11, 2026 and commemorations and special events are already being planned for this significant milestone. The New York Yankees will host the New York Mets at Yankee Stadium on September 11, 2026, to honor the victims of the attacks. A special 9/11 Day of Service and Remembrance is also planned and organization, churches, temples and even mosques as well as individuals are being invited to participate in volunteer projects and other tribute activities to transform September 11th into the largest day of service in U.S. history.

The 9/11 Promise Organization will host a commemorative multi-

day run from the Pentagon to Ground Zero on September 2026. The relay-style run will raise funds for scholarships for the children of

AMERICA



fallen and disabled first responders and military personnel.

Congress is considering the "25th Anniversary of 9/11 Commemorative Coin Act" to mint coins to honor the anniversary and support the National September 11 Memorial & Museum.

"Our American Story" is a project to collect and preserve an audio and visual archive of everyday Americans sharing their stories. "America's Field Trip" includes an ongoing contest for students in grades 3 through 12 who submit essays or artwork for the chance to visit historical and cultural landmarks.

The U.S. Legislation has passed the House of Representatives to authorize the burial of a time capsule at the U.S. Capitol on July 4, 2026, to be opened on July 4, 2276 and a National Bell Festival is planned to coordinate the creation of a new public bell to honor 250 years of women's contributions to the country and will lead nationwide ringing tributes.

Several historically significant cities are hosting major events for the Semiquincentennial – including Philadelphia: As the birthplace of American independence, Philadelphia will be a central hub of activity.

Red, White & Blue To-Do: A massive Independence Day festival on July 2, 2026, with a parade, concerts, and games.

Global Sports Events: The city will host FIFA World Cup matches at Lincoln Financial Field, with one game scheduled for July 4, 2026. It will also host the MLB All-Star Game in July 2026.

The Museum of the American Revolution will debut a major exhibition called The Declaration's Journey. A time capsule will also be buried on Independence Mall.

New York City is planning a large international flotilla of tall ships and naval vessels to take place July 3–8, 2026, in the Port of New York and New Jersey.

FIFA World Cup will include will several matches during June and July 2026.

The nation's capital will host events across its major museums and landmarks throughout 2026. The National Mall will be transformed into the Smithsonian Festival of Festivals for nearly a month in the summer of 2026 and a three-day festival is planned to include a historic reenactment of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 2026.

The famous Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts will feature new works by American composers and a visual art installation made from contributions by 250,000 people across the country.

March 9-11, 2026

The FLGA District's Veterans of the Cross will convene for their annual gathering with a special emphasis on the nation's semiquincentennial and the anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. See story page 16.

What Happens When We Step

I know your deeds – that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth.

— REVELATION 3:15-16

I have a sense that most of us would agree, we love being comfortable. We commit our time, energy and resources to keeping ourselves, well, comfortable! If it's cold, we turn up the heater. If it's hot, we turn down the air conditioner. We often go to the same restaurants or even sit in the same pew, because . . . it's comfortable.

Yes, maybe this even aligns with how we often joke about "Change?! Change!?"

Who said anything about change!" We like things the way they are because . . . we like being *comfortable*. This shows up in our friendships as well. Our friends tend to

be those we feel most comfortable around. People who are the most like us. Now there's nothing inherently wrong with being comfortable. The problem is when we become too comfortable!

You see, our heavenly Father didn't create us just to be comfortable. He didn't put us here just to sit back and enjoy a life of leisure or pleasure. No. He calls us to lives of significance, something much bigger than our comfort.

One of the hardest areas for many of us to be challenged over our comfort is in relationships. That may not surprise you when you consider some of the data out there. The average person has about three to five good friends, though this number varies, with some studies indicating that a significant number of adults have only one or two. And eight percent of Americans say that they have no friends. It makes sense then that we don't make room for anyone new, when we realize how we get caught up or are so comfortable

with a person right away, it's easy to move on without noticing that person's needs or thinking of how we can be a blessing.

Yes, for many of us, truly seeing the people around us and engaging them doesn't come easy. Even after church, when there are new people. We look at our watch or phone and focus on our agenda and end up missing that new family we could invite to join us for lunch or just introduce ourselves.

The same is true for ministry at church. As part of the body of Christ we are called to use our

gifts. But before we give ourselves a chance, we tell ourselves we'll only serve in our area of experience or skill. But when there's nothing in our area of interest, we do nothing. Instead of only looking to get

involved in the areas we feel most comfortable in, why not ask what the most pressing needs are and fill those even if it's not our first choice? LUKE 10:2 says, *The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.* Part of following Christ's example is to become servants and allow Christ to use us in unexpected ways.

I shared the following in my September Email Blast: "I once led a devotional from 1 TIMOTHY



with our circle of friends.

Our comfort can therefore hinder or even shut down us living for God's bigger purpose in our lives. Maybe we had an opportunity to share God's love with someone struggling with loneliness, or maybe it was a chance to be challenged by a fresh perspective and new insight. Maybe it's how we focus on our needs without thinking of the other person. So, if we don't connect

Outside Of Our Comfort Zone?

LIFELINES

2:8: I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing. I asked everyone to literally lift their hands as we entered a time of intercession. Right before I closed my eyes, I saw that everyone had their hands up. During this time of prayer we prayed for our church family and our community, specifically asking God to lead us out into the community. We prayed for wisdom and unity. One leader then prayed something powerful like this: 'God, the longer I keep my hands raised, the more uncomfortable I get . . . but that's a good thing because I'm too comfortable and I want you to make me uncomfortable.' Evangelism will have little effect if we don't love the lost, even those we're uncomfortable around."

I think we all realize how easy it is to get into a routine or habit that becomes a rut. We can be so focused on our lives and our comfort, that we fail to see how God is bringing something new our way. God has a greater plan than any of us can imagine. But that likely means that we will have to get out of our comfort zone and get our hands dirty in living as Christ's witnesses and servants.

I've read REVELATION 3:15-16 many times, it wasn't until I related it to when I worked at the country club restaurant that the imagery John used became meaningful. Making sure that everything arrives at a customer's table at the right temperature is a delicate balance because no one wants his hot food cold or cold food hot. Few things are worse than watching someone eagerly bite into a seemingly warm dish only to spit it out because it was unexpectedly cold. In context, these verses are a part of a series of letters John wrote to the newly

formed churches in Asia Minor after his revelation or encounter with Jesus. The last letter mentioned was to the Church at Laodicea on the Lycus. In it we read that Jesus wasn't pleased with their current condition. Their deeds were lukewarm —neither hot nor cold— and because of this, John described Jesus spitting them out of his mouth.

What happened in the church of Laodicea to warrant such a strong image? Well, the heart of the matter was that like the Church at Ephesus, they'd abandoned their "first love" (REVELATION 2:4); they'd become comfortable and complacent, their hearts cooled and indifferent to the power of the Gospel to transform lives.

How easy it is to criticize the Church of Laodicea and feel that we're different from them. But in reality many professing Christians sit in similar churches today, having lost their passion and devotion for the things of God. It shows up as we go through the motions of worship while we think about what we're doing next or worry about beating the crowd at the restaurant.

We participate in the Lord's Supper with little thought and return to our seat as though we're still carrying the burden of our sin rather than rejoicing in the forgiveness received. We pray using a memorized prayer over a meal as though we're on autopilot with little thought or thanks.

Although we often fail to heed Paul's advice ROMANS 12:11, "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual

fervor, serving the Lord," the Lord never forsakes us or leaves us without hope. In verses 18-22, the imagery John penned clearly demonstrated the Lord's desire to restore our connection and fellowship broken by sin: white garments to cover their shameful, spiritual nakedness, healing salve to open their eyes to their passive and lethargic condition, and His knocking at the door to once again reunite and commune with them intimately. The ever-faithful Savior, Jesus stood ready to forgive and forget to renew fellowship with His children as they repented of their unfaithfulness. Although the church had wandered away from the Lord, He still loved them and wanted them to return to Him with open hearts and souls on fire fully devoted to following Christ.

Today as we live in that forgiveness, may we move outside our comfort zones! ✝



*Moving On Out
From My Comfort Zone,*
PRESIDENT FLORIDA-GEORGIA DISTRICT
LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

James Rockey

Tracy Cripe Named District Treasurer

Mr. Tracy S. Cripe, 61, a member of **Grace/Jacksonville, FL** and a partner in the CPA firm of Mathews & Cripe, LLC, Jacksonville, Florida, has been appointed treasurer of the Florida-Georgia District LCMS. Cripe has been in the Florida-Georgia District for 34 years and a member of the board since 2022 and served on the 2025 Florida-Georgia District floor committee for Administration and Theology.

With more than 28 years of accounting, tax and software consulting experience, Tracy is proficient in a range of accounting



software including Quickbooks, Peachtree, Sage Businessworks and Creative Solutions Accounting.

Tracy has extensive experience providing a range of financial services tailored to individuals and small businesses in and around Jacksonville including tax preparation and planning, bookkeeping, estate and trust taxes, business consulting and payroll services. Both the firm and Tracy are members of the AICPA and the Florida Institute of CPAs (FICPA). The firm was founded in 2007.

Cripe is a graduate of both Orlando College and the University of North Florida with accounting degrees.

— J.L., Editor

ONBOARDING



District Team Members Added to continue the vision of serving and encouraging congregations in the ministry of Jesus Christ.

Tais Brekke Joins District Staff

Ms. Tais Brekke has joined the FLGA staff as communications specialist. Her responsibilities include developing and producing digital and print communications to support the district's goals. This involves content creation, social media management, and event coverage to inform congregations and the wider public about the district's activities.

"Her key responsibilities include content creation: writing, editing, and designing print and digital materials like the weekly newsletters, brochures, and announcements," explains Laura Zirbel, FLGA Executive Director for Finance and Administration. Brekke will report directly to Zirbel. "She'll be involved in our District website and social media content

— creating, updating, and managing material to ensure accurate and current information as well as coordinating media and public relations, proactively identifying opportunities and creating press releases to highlight district events and achievements.

In addition to attending and covering district events, programs, and conferences, she'll work with various media formats, including text, graphics, animation, and video files —implementing communication strategies that align with the district's vision of serving and encouraging congregations in the ministry of Jesus Christ.



Tais Brekke is a graduate of Concordia University/Chicago, IL, where she studied to become a Director of Christian Education (DCE). Her background is centered on ministry within the LCMS with specific experience in youth and family discipleship and

communications.

Her background includes a year-long DCE internship at Trinity/Elkhart, IN, and later served as the Director of Kids and Family Discipleship at Holy Cross/Kearney, NE. Most recently she served at **Our Savior/St. Petersburg, FL** for one year.

— J.L., Editor

Eric Sahlberg Named District Missions & Outreach Executive

The Rev. Eric Sahlberg has accepted the call to serve the Florida-Georgia District as Executive Director for Missions and Outreach. He has most recently been serving as Senior Pastor at Mt. Calvary/Acton, Massachusetts. He became the Senior Pastor there during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, after beginning service there in 2018.

Pastor Sahlberg holds a Master of Divinity from Concordia Seminary/Saint Louis, MO, and a graduate degree from Arizona State University's W. P. Carey School of Business.

Previous positions have included leading a church plant called Connecting Point Church in Marlborough, MA. He provided pastoral care following the Boston Marathon, offering emotional support to runners, volunteers, and staff.

Eric is married to Amy, who he met in the ninth grade! They were in confirmation class together but didn't start dating until college.

Prior to his ministry career, Eric worked in business in supply chain information technology for Fortune 500 companies. He's done extensive world travel.

Eric and Amy have three daughters, Caitlyn, a teacher in Northern Thailand at a Christian

school north of Bangkok; Emma, who is coming to Orlando with them; and Allie, a graduate of Concordia/Wisconsin, a nurse in the greater St. Louis, MO area.

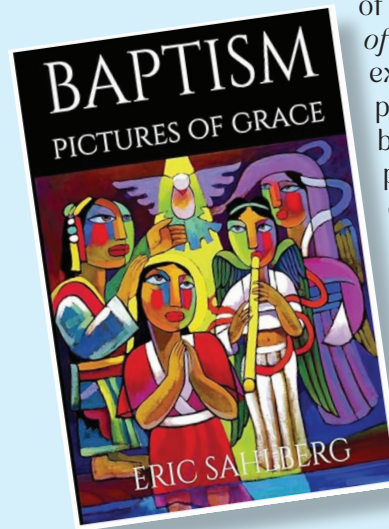
The three church plants Eric was involved in include two English speaking and one Ethiopian. He has been through the three-year church revitalizing program at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, MO through the National Mission Office. He's trained to lead outreach, strategic planning and the engagement of inactive members.

"I am extremely enthusiastic about our vision and ministry targets over next decade seeking 20 church plants," Sahlberg said. "I am thrilled about what God has laid on the hearts of the Florida-Georgia District."

During a recent tele-conference with the District's board of directors, Sahlberg discussed looking forward to best practices over the weeks, months and years ahead. "Am I really going to go?", a question he put before the board.



Eric and Amy Sahlberg



Sahlberg is the author of *Baptism Pictures of Grace*, a book that explores many questions people have about baptism. The book provides Biblical examples of baptism, historical references in the early church and the powerful way lives are changed by God's grace. The book is perfect for individual study, small group Bible study or a baptism orientation

class. He also contributes to a blog focused on ministry, mission, and discipleship topics.

Sahlberg has been through the Pastoral Leadership Institute (PLI), the LCMS organization called to develop the leaders of Christ's church, to lead with grace, courage, strength, passion, and influence, resulting in thriving ministries, healthy families, and disciplined communities. Sahlberg praised the training he received there for helping him better lead and stabilize ministry during the pandemic.



— J.L. Editor

District Icon, Kathy Keene, Retires as

Long-time District icon, Kathy Keene, has announced her retirement as the Executive Assistant to the District President at the Florida-Georgia District of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS). She has held this role since 2012.



"In her position as my assistant, Kathy provides administrative support for all areas of the President's office and is a point of contact for a variety of district matters," explains FLGA District President James Rockey. "Her duties have included helping congregations with matters related to the vicarage program, assisting in district-wide events like our conferences, convocations and conventions – including the LCMS Synodical Convention. She will most certainly be missed and I'm grateful she'll be intimately involved in training her replacement in the near future.

"My Administrative Assistant retired around the time the District Board of Directors made the decision to close Woodlands Lutheran Camp," illustrates Richard Neubauer. "I had known and worked with Kathy – who was on the Woodlands staff – and knew she was active in her church there. She had a heart for ministry and was also familiar with the District and the LCMS. With her history with the Camp and her background, I felt she could be the

right person to assume the role as my Administrative Assistant.

"I talked with Kathy about the position, telling her I thought she was the right person and asked if she had any interest in it. She did have an interest, but saw the daily commute as a possible issue. After more discussion and further thought on her part, she accepted my offer," Neubauer continues.

"Looking back, I would say her knowledge, skills and servant heart exceeded my expectations. Kathy was always very organized, quickly grasped every aspect of the position, and was a great support to me. She was an invaluable resource as we worked through the many issues with closing Woodlands. Kathy quickly became involved in the LCEF ministry and assisted with conferences and promotions. Her attitude was always cheerful and she handled phone conversations very well. Kathy was the right person for the position,"

"I joined President Greg Walton's Florida-Georgia District (FLGA) Team in January 2010, after Richard Neubauer's retirement – inheriting Kathy as my Executive Assistant and we were responsible for the FLGA Finance & Administration and the FLGA Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) activities," offers Dan Reichard. "I could not have asked for a better partner!

"I saw a lot of 'unused capacity' in Kathy and provided her ways to 'expand her reach'. Early in my District career, we were asked to present at Prince of Peace/Orlando, FL (an Educators' event organized by Mark Brink). As I had not yet done any 'formal FLGA presentations,' I asked Kathy to lead the session. She did an excellent job and her efforts became the basis for my ten (10)

years of sharing the "LCEF Story" (Investments, Loan, and Ministry Support).

"In addition, along with Teammate Mary Byrd, Kathy helped to nurture and grow a struggling LCEF Congregational Advocate network; expanding from just a few Congregations to over more than 40.

"Looking at the magnitude of coordination for our District, my opinion was that Kathy was the best support person on the team.

"I suggested to President Walton that she should be his Executive Assistant. During preparation for a FLGA event, Kathy assisted Greg and David Weidner in the planning. At the conclusion of the FLGA function, she informed me that she was joining Greg as his Executive Assistant. They had a blessed and hugely successful relationship. It weakened my team in the short-term, but it blessed the FLGA team. I was then equally blessed by adding Debra (Talbot) Arrington – a true gem!"

"What can I say about my dear friend, Kathy Keene," begins FLGA District President Emeritus, the Rev. Dr. Greg Walton. "We had a wonderful working partnership. Ironically, I *rescued her from her role with the LCEF District Vice President Dan Reichard*. In the vacancy of Administrative Assistant, Dan asked me who I wanted to serve in that role, and I told him Kathy Keene. Dan was gracious for the most part, never letting me forget this, and Kathy became the Administrative Assistant to the District President. In the end, Dan hired a wonderful assistant in Debbie Arrington, who has been a tremendous asset to the Florida-Georgia District.

"Over the years friendship with Kathy blossomed into a true

District President's Executive Assistant

partnership. Wisely leaning on her expertise proved beneficial to me, my family and the whole Florida-Georgia District. Always with a true servant heart, Kathy was detail oriented, abundantly hospitable, and incredibly efficient. She was recognized and celebrated by many of my colleagues on the Council of Presidents and made me the envy of most. She was deeply loved and appreciated by the District President Administrative Assistants (DPAA). Personally, Kathy was a tremendous support, loyal and protective, always with words of encouragement.

"In difficult times, she helped me see the cup half full when I saw it half empty," Walton emphasizes. "She had an innate ability to know what I needed even before I did and made my role as District President a joy. She was an important and integral part of my ministry, a trusted confidant, my personal editor —often exasperatingly correcting my grammar and giving me deeper and different perspective.

"Kathy was a sounding board and is a dearly loved friend I knew I could always count on — even now in my retirement from the District. While new roles and new locations have changed the nature of our partnership, the friendship remains deep, and Edith and I still consider Kathy and Jeff to be part of our family.

"Her cheerful countenance, her friendly greeting on the phone, her thoughtfulness and insight will be missed by many across the Florida-Georgia District. My hope is she will always know what a difference she has made in so many lives through her service. We wish her all the best as she moves into a new phase of ministry and life, now as a blessing to Redeeming Life.

Keene is joining Redeeming Life Ministry — the Christ-centered nonprofit based in Sanford, FL, that provides a safe and nurturing home for single, pregnant women in crisis. She'll be working part-time as the Executive Assistant to Sheryl DeWitt, the co-founder and CEO of that ministry, an RSO of the LCMS.

Redeeming Life provides residential maternity homes in both Florida and Illinois with plans for expansion in Missouri. It provides a safe environment for expectant mothers to live, and a separate transitional home supports graduates of the program as they begin independent living.

"I'm looking forward to working with the great team that is already in place at Redeeming Life," Keene elates.

Redeeming Life was founded on Christian principles, emphasizing faith, family, and education to help residents grow spiritually and emotionally. Keene's last day in the District Office is November 7, 2025.



Kathy Keene with The Rev. Jay Winters, Vice President and Chairman of the District Board of Directors (at left) and President James Rockey. The board presented Kathy with flowers at the last board meeting knowing she wouldn't be attending future meetings.



FLGA District Youth Attend LCMS

Almost 600 youth and adults from congregations across Florida and Georgia joined more than 20,000 participants at the 2025 LCMS Youth Gathering in New Orleans, July 19–23, 2025. The Gathering opened with a high-energy Mass Event in the Caesars Superdome, where District youth and leaders from **Prince of Peace/Orlando, FL** helped “raise the roof” as they marched in with the LCMS Youth Gathering Jazz Band.

Midweek, the FLGA District filled the historic Joy Theater for the District Event – a late afternoon of dinner, games, and the opportunity connect with one another. President James Rockey and Jennifer Tanner, Executive Director of Schools and Youth shared words of encouragement, calling on congregations and leaders to continue investing in the faith formation and leadership of young people. Afterward, hundreds of FLGA District participants joined a traditional New Orleans “Second Line,” dancing and parading through the French Quarter to the Superdome behind a jazz band – a joyful witness of faith and community spirit.

“Throughout the week, youth participated in service projects around the city through neighborhood cleanups, shelter supply packing, even blood and hair donations,” offers Tanner. “They also attended sessions led by inspiring speakers on discipleship, faith, relationships, and even tough topics such as doubt and trusting the truth of Scripture.”

The Gathering concluded with a powerful worship service with communion, where LCMS Synod President Matthew Harrison preached the sending message. Teens returned home “to run with endurance,” eager to bring the joy and momentum of the Gathering back to their home congregations and communities. Spirit-filled and energized, FLGA youth are ready to carry forward what God began in New Orleans – with eyes already looking ahead to the 2028 Gathering in San Antonio, Texas.



FLGA District President Rockey worked the District’s youth booth.



FLGA District Youth inside the Joy Theater for their event.



The youth attending NYG from **St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL**

Youth Gathering in New Orleans



The Rev. Jeff Shanks, Senior Pastor at **St. John/Ocala, FL** serves communion.



Pastor Dave Bass (second from right) and members of **St. Michael/Fort Myers, FL** youth poke some fun at LCMS President Matthew Harrison's famous mustache.



The Rev. Tim Droegemueller, Senior Pastor at **Living Faith/Cumming, GA** participates in worship.



At right, Jennifer Tanner walking with FLGA District youth in the Second Line. Lizzie Comfort Dog from **Trinity/Savannah, GA** takes a break with District youth (left photo). Comfort Dog Peace from **Trinity/Orlando, FL** was also in attendance at the gathering.



Four Eyes. Two Beards. One Heart: Stories from the LCMS National Youth Gathering

by William “Rusty” Huseman, District Legal Counsel

At the LCMS National Youth Gathering, 20,000 students showed up full of energy and faith. And right in the middle of it all, there we were — two attorneys!

Two attorneys.

One simple booth.

No brochures re: law school.

No advice on how to live their lives. Just a space for something way more important: their stories.

We weren't there to recruit anyone or hand out career tips. We weren't there to talk about us. We were there to remind these young people that whatever path they choose, whatever vocation God calls them into, they can live their faith there too. Their walk with Christ isn't separate from their job, their passions, or their daily life. It is the job. It is the calling.

As they shared their stories with us, we handed them something small but meaningful. We brought 4,500 Lil' Jesus figurines, and they were gone in hours. Our instructions were simple: take one, and keep it with you always, to remind you that you are a child of the King.

If you take two, don't leave New Orleans until you have given that

second one to someone who you want to bless.

By day three, students were coming back. Just to say hi and grab some candy. We were asked if we had any more Lil' Jesus and we told them no. Once student was asked how many she had on this, her last day, and she said she only had one. Being the smart-pants I am, I asked, "But you took two, right?" She nodded. "So who did you give it to? A friend? A teacher?" She said, "No. I gave it to a homeless man outside."

That's the kind of ministry we



saw. No spotlight. No platform. Just real, simple love in action. A reminder that anyone, anywhere, can be blessed. Maybe that man tossed it in his pocket and forgot about it. Or maybe, for a moment, he remembered that he has a Savior too.

Before they left, we gave the students a challenge. Come back in three years. Find our booth. Tell us what you've been doing. And share one story about how living your faith in your vocation or in your life made your walk with Christ stronger. We told them that when you share your faith with others; at work, at school, in the everyday life; it doesn't just bless them . . . it changes you too.

We pray for others all the time, but often, God's biggest blessings hit us when we're lifting someone else up. We want to hear their stories so we can share their stories with the next group of first-timers attending the National Youth Gathering so they too know they're not alone. So they too can see that this faith isn't a one-weekend thing. It's a life thing.

Steve and I were blown away by these young men and women of the LCMS. As we walked around New Orleans, people stopped us to say how impressed they

were with the students. Folks in the city kept saying how refreshing it was to see young people not just being courteous and kind, but boldly professing their faith. And even when Westboro Baptist Church showed up to protest on the last day,

our kids didn't flinch. They held their heads high. Some walked in singing. Unshaken. Unbothered. Unashamed of the Gospel. It was one of those moments you don't forget.

Because it wasn't loud arguments or anger that answered the hate. It was joy. It was peace. It was faith lived out in real time. These young people didn't just talk about Jesus, they showed Him! In how they responded . . . in how they carried themselves. That's what a witness looks like. Not with signs or shouts, but with calm strength and a spirit that refuses to be shaken. It was a blessing to watch and a reminder that sometimes the loudest Gospel can still shine through in silence and song. Four eyes. Two beards. One heart. And a thousand stories still to come.



What Happens After You Report Child Abuse

by William “Rusty” Huseman, District Legal Counsel

As legal counsel to the Florida Georgia District, ministries, churches, and faith-based schools, I am often asked about the complexities of child abuse reporting laws in Florida and Georgia. Both states impose strict obligations on institutions, faculty, administration and individuals to report any suspicion of child abuse – regardless of the circumstances or the reputation of the individuals involved. It is critical for ministries to understand that reporting requirements are mandatory, not discretionary, and that failure to comply can expose the organization and its leadership to significant legal and civil liability.

In both Florida and Georgia, any person – meaning any individual regardless of profession, role, or connection to the child – who has reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been abused, abandoned, or neglected must report the information to the appropriate authorities. In Florida, this means contacting the Florida Department of Children and Families. In Georgia, reports are made to the Division of Family and Children Services or to local law enforcement.

Although certain individuals, including clergy, teachers, and school administrators, are specifically designated as mandatory reporters, both states go further by imposing this duty on *every member of the public*. This broad approach ensures that no potential abuse goes unreported simply because the observer was not acting in an official capacity.

Both states provide immunity to those who report in good faith,



even if the allegations ultimately prove unfounded. Conversely, a failure to report can lead to criminal charges, administrative penalties, and civil lawsuits. Consider this all too common and difficult scenario. A form of suspected child abuse is reported internally to the administration of a church or school. Acting appropriately, the administration suspends the employee in question, either with or without pay, and immediately makes a report to the appropriate office of Child Protective Services. The ministry subsequently receives confirmation that an official investigation has been opened. However, complications often arise when the accused employee is a long-time, well-regarded member of the staff.

The administration – after facing internal and external pressures – may begin to question whether it was necessary to report the matter and may seek to retract the complaint or otherwise interfere (positively or negatively) with the investigation. It is critical to understand that once a report is made, the church or school cannot withdraw the complaint!

The duty to report is a legal obligation based on the suspicion of abuse, not the outcome of any

internal investigation or the subjective belief in the employee's innocence. Attempts to retract a report or even with the best intentions obstruct the investigation could expose the ministry to allegations of witness tampering, obstruction of justice, or civil claims for negligence. Interfering with an active child protection investigation can also severely damage the institution's credibility and ministry reputation, regardless of legal consequences.

Ministries must be prepared to navigate these emotionally charged situations with a clear understanding of their legal duties. Policies should be in place to ensure immediate reporting, suspension of the accused employee pending investigation outcomes, and full cooperation with authorities.

Administrators should avoid conducting internal reviews that might be seen as efforts to discredit the initial report. Compassion and fairness for the accused are important, *but they must never override the primary obligation to protect children and comply with state law.*

Churches, schools, and ministries should proactively train staff on mandatory reporting obligations and consult legal counsel as soon as a suspicion arises. Proper adherence to reporting laws not only fulfills biblical and moral obligations, but also protects the institution's mission, reputation, and legal standing in the eyes of the congregation, the community, and the law.

Is the Lord calling you to serve in Africa?



The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod Office of International Mission is looking for people from all walks of life to join our team as volunteer coordinators, business managers, theological educators, and more. To help you discern, consider joining us on a Missionary Formation Trip, November 4-14, 2025, to explore ongoing international mission work

in Kenya & Tanzania and prayerfully consider the opportunities to serve. To make it accessible to potential missionary candidates, the total cost for both ground expenses and airfare is \$1,000. If this is of interest to you, please apply today! Please feel free to share this opportunity with any LCMS folks you know who might make good missionaries.

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2026 National Association of Directors of Christian Education Conference To Be Held in Boca Raton, FL

The 2026 National Association of Directors of Christian Education (NADCE) National Conference will be held in Boca Raton, Florida, from January 21–23, 2026. The theme announced is “Rest Assured: Seen by God, Sustained by Grace,” inspired by Psalm 139.

“This year’s conference invites DCEs to embrace the powerful truth that they are fully seen by God and lovingly sustained by His grace,” explains Jeremy Becker, chair of the NADCE 2026 Conference Planning team.

Inspired by Psalm 139, Rest Assured calls ministry leaders to pause, breathe, and enter the sacred space of rest that God freely gives. This theme weaves together rest, trust, and surrender – three things that often elude leaders caught in the hustle of doing God’s work. It’s an invitation to step away from the anxiety and weight of expectations and step into the Sabbath rhythm God offers. It’s a reminder that we are not the savior – God is – and that His ways are higher, His love deeper, and His promises as countless as the grains of sand.

St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL is serving as the host congregation with hotel accommodations nearby at the Embassy Suites by Hilton Deerfield Beach Resort & Spa. The oceanfront facility is walking distance to a wide range of beachside restaurants and the world-famous Deerfield Beach Pier.

Early registration opened in August and goes through September 30, 2025. The early registration price for members of NADCE is \$225. The cost

increases by \$50 to \$275 on October 1st. There is also a discounted rate for NADCE members where multiple staff members from the same congregation are attending or who are serving on the conference planning team. Student interns have an early registration rate of \$125, which includes those who are serving in that capacity in January 2026. Past and present program directors have an early registration fee of \$125, which also applies to emeritus members who have retired from the DCE ministry.

Registration includes transportation to and from the Fort Lauderdale airport and to and from St. Paul Lutheran Church and the Embassy Suites hotel. Meals included are dinner Wednesday, lunch and dinner Thursday, and lunch Friday.

NADCE is a professional organization and a Recognized Service Organization (RSO) of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS). Its mission is to support Directors of Christian Education (DCE) and other church professionals in their ministry. The organization hosts a biennial conference to provide support, connection, learning, and fellowship.



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Veterans of the Cross Announces Dates, Keynote Speakers

Troubling finances, looming medical difficulties, horrors of war, violence and unrest in the news, family stresses and demands, and our own imperfections are towers of doom waiting to collapse. Christ, our refuge and strength, takes us through the chaos and reminds us to "be still, and know that I am God."

"As we look forward to celebrating our nation's 250th anniversary and approach the 25th anniversary of 9-11 we are facing turbulent times," explains Ruth Wiedenmann, chair of the VOC committee.

"But Christ is most certainly still with us. He reminds us that in His presence there is peace, connection, and

rest. Christ Jesus reminds us that He delights in us, and He's building a future Kingdom where one day the chaos of life's worries will 'finally' be still, forever."



*The Rev. Dr. Gerald "Jerry" and Terry Kieschnick
The Rev. Dr. David "Dave" and Judy Benke*

Keynote speakers – The Rev. Dr. Gerald Kieschnick and his wife, Terry, and The Rev.

Dr. David Benke, and his wife, Judy – will be taking gathering participants first-hand through the events surrounding the series of coordinated terrorist attacks resulting in the deaths of nearly 3,000 people.

Registration opens on the FLGA website October 15.. Participation costs are \$525 per couple (two to a room) and \$350 per person (single occupancy). These costs cover all meals and lodging for the duration of the gathering at the St. Stephen Christian Retreat and Conference Center.

"The facilities are clean and accommodating. The food is abundant and the campus enables us to move from sessions to dining facilities

to our private rooms with ease," Wiedenmann concludes.

To register, please visit <https://flgadistrict.org/events/>



Synod Files Lawsuit Against Hong Kong International School Association

On Sept. 10, 2025, in Hong Kong, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) reluctantly filed suit against Hong Kong International School Association Limited (HKISAL). HKISAL was formed in 1974 to administer Hong Kong International School (HKIS) on the LCMS' behalf and in conformity to an Operating Agreement, also signed at that time. This agreement was restated and reaffirmed in 2002 and 2013.

For almost 60 years, the LCMS has sought to bring its nearly two centuries of experience and dedication to Lutheran education to the people of Hong Kong. When the Hong Kong community approached the LCMS about starting a school for an American-style, Christian education, the LCMS gladly stepped up and answered the call by establishing HKIS. For many years, HKIS grew in size and prestige, becoming one of the premier international schools of Asia.

The Statement of Claim (SOC) alleges, however, that HKISAL has lost its way and no longer administers HKIS in a way that upholds the LCMS' commitments to the parents and students of Hong Kong. As a church body, the LCMS is concerned that the unnecessarily high fees and debentures charged by the school make it a school of the wealthy elite rather than a school for any and all. The SOC also alleges other breaches of the Operating Agreement, such as the refusal of HKISAL to appoint a head of school that is called and placed by the LCMS Board for International Mission.

Due to its concern for HKIS' reputation, the LCMS has for years attempted to discreetly work with HKISAL to correct these issues, lest the school suffer undue harm. The intransigence of HKISAL, however,

has forced the LCMS to take legal action. The LCMS is seeking to have HKISAL operate HKIS in accordance with the Operating Agreement, failing which the LCMS would seek to remove HKIS from the Repulse Bay Campus so that the LCMS can work with the Hong Kong Education Bureau to establish a new LCMS school on that land.



Christian Preus

Christian Preus, chairman of the LCMS Board of Directors, stated today in Hong Kong: "As alleged in the SOC, HKISAL has been drifting further and further from operating HKIS as an LCMS school. Because of our deep commitment to provide the education we have promised, the LCMS has concluded that it is unfortunately necessary to file the SOC to resolve the disputes, while at the same time plan for a possible new school in Hong Kong."

The founding of the new school, Hong Kong Pacific School (HKPS), is subject to resolution of the litigation, the approval of the Hong Kong Education Bureau (EDB) and the eviction of HKIS from the



relevant land. HKPS would seek to fulfill the LCMS' commitments to the Hong Kong community for an American-style, Christian education. Also subject to approval of the EDB, HKPS would offer lower tuition and fees, not charge priority access debentures, and provide more opportunities for scholarships and financial aid. For more details about HKPS, visit hongkongpacificschool.com.



Kingdom Seed Investments are one-time mission start-up investments intended to help established congregations, existing ministries, and new starts begin new ministries which reach new people in new locations. Kingdom Seed Investments are to be used for outreach projects which are intended to be long-term and self-sustaining beyond the initial Kingdom Seed Investment. For all the information about obtaining a Kingdom Seed Investment and to complete an application please visit the FLGA District Website: <https://flgadistrict.org/kingdomseeds/>

How can we revitalize a plateaued or declining church? This is a common concern. It speaks to the love for your church and the Lord Jesus. Yet the answer might not be what you expect.

Churches weaken and shrink for many reasons. It might be easy to overlook that it is happening until there is a problem that grabs your attention. Yet if one looks deeper, there are other symptoms that may be found: the purpose may be blurred, member involvement is low, programs are eliminated, morale is weak and there may even be some conflict.

So where does one even start to make healthy changes when there are multiple symptoms?

You won't be surprised to hear

another and by God's grace living selflessly. This likely involves addressing some intentional shifts in mindsets, assumptions, behaviors and routines which may seem unfamiliar: Away from an I'll just do it myself approach (few in charge) to a more intentional practice of apprentice, discipling or empowering others (many engaged in a serving pathway).

Away from an internal focus (doing things just for your church) to more of an external focus (done for those not yet in church or even not yet in the faith). Away from a consumer (what I want) assumption to a servant mentality

other shifts can be depicted with a Venn Diagram of three intersecting circles which represent three important elements for revitalization. Over the next few



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months we will review those and many other things. If you would like to talk through these things and explore how we may customize something for you, reach out to us. We look forward to being of service.



that the first thing to prioritize is boldly proclaiming sin and grace through Jesus Christ. He is the Lord of the Church and the source of forgiveness and strength to live a new life, even a new life for your church. He alone can help a church confess their sins, shift their assumptions, habits and behaviors to live a new chapter of life together.

After that it is a matter of being like minded (ROMANS 12:10; PHILIPPIANS 2:2-4; COLOSSIANS 3:12-14 and others) in loving one

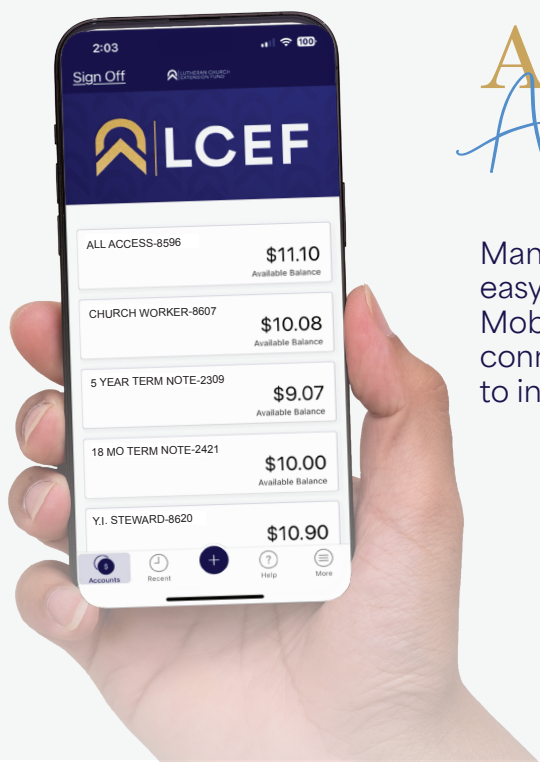
(how may I bless others). Surprisingly much less of attractional (how can we get them to come to us) through our programs or service, to an incarnational (we go to them) ministry.

Finally, less of a group or crowd mentality (plan a class, program, event for a group) to a customized, one at a time, interpersonal mentality.

Each of those shifts involve practical to-do items and even some to-don't-do items. These and



Rev. Scott Gress is a Professional Certified Coach and believes in Growing People for Ministry with a focus on leadership, discipleship and teamwork. Contact Scott if you are interested in working with him or your church. You can contact Scott through email scottgress@me.com or his blog page scottgress.com or at 561-542-4472



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FLORIDA GEORGIA

Out and About in the District

Weston Welcomes New Members



St. Paul/Weston, FL joyfully welcomed new members into our congregation during our recent New Members Sunday on August 17th. It was a special morning of worship, fellowship,

and celebration as we gave thanks for God's work in bringing these individuals and families into our church family. We look forward to walking together in faith and service as part of the body of

Christ. Here are some pictures of our Newest Members!

From Left to Right: Julie & Patrick Webster, Oneida Family; Maries, Jason & kids, Grisel & Ben Perez.



Trinity/Delray Beach, FL teachers stepped out for a new school year photo last month. All Trinity's teachers are certified and licensed professionals – meaning they have met specific state-mandated requirements for education, skill, and competence to teach in public schools. It also involves completing state-approved coursework in educational theory, pedagogy, and classroom management.

Trinity/Rockledge Introduces School Counselor

Rebekah Morin has joined the faculty of **Trinity/Rockledge, FL** as the school counselor. Rebekah is a registered marriage and family intern and registered mental health counseling intern. She received her master's degree in clinical Mental Health Counseling with a concentration in Marriage and Family Therapy from Palm Beach Atlantic University and holds a certification in Play Therapy. Rebekah brings a wealth of

experience from her years in education to the field of counseling.

Accustomed to working with families of diverse backgrounds, she is passionate about helping individuals, couples, adolescents and children navigate the uncertainties of life. Rebekah is the mother of three grown children. In her free time she enjoys, gardening, photography, walking and a day at the beach.



Tim Schutt Installed at Zion/Fort Meyers

The Rev. Tim Schutt was installed as Senior Pastor at **Zion/Fort Myers, FL** on September 1, 2025. Prior to accepting the call to Zion, Schutt served at St. Paul's/ Garden Grove, CA, St. Johns/ Union, IL, Atonement/Metairie, LA (including during the COVID-19 pandemic), Pastor Schutt was also a featured speaker for the 2016 LCMS Southern District conference while with Atonement.

He graduated Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO with his Master of Divinity. His undergraduate work was at Concordia/Irvine, CA where he received his Bachelor's degree in Theology/Theological Studies.

Tim married his wife, Rose, in 2011. They have three children.

At right – Tim and Rose Schutt.



Stephen Wareham Installed as Sole Pastor in Valdosta



The Rev. Stephen Wareham was ordained and installed on July 13, 2025, at **Messiah/Valdosta, GA**, where he assumes the role of Sole

Pastor. FLGA District President James Rockey officiated along with Pastor Richard Lohmeyer.

Wareham is the son of Jon Wareham, principal at Faith/Marietta, GA. Stephen, 35, is a member of the U.S. Marine Corp. and a recent graduate of Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO.

Pastor Wareham has two children who live with their mother in Lexington, KY: his daughter Lily, who just turned 16, and his son Caleb, who is 14.

He attended Faith/Marietta Church and School from pre-school through 8th grade and then North Cobb High School nearby in Kennesaw, GA. After high school, he served on active duty as a United States Marine from 2009 to 2013 as a helicopter mechanic in Jacksonville, NC.

In 2018, he received his B.A. in Psychology from Concordia University/Chicago, IL and proceeded to work for both the Social Security Administration and the IRS before being accepted to Concordia Seminary for the 2021-2022 school year. While at Seminary, he served at Bethlehem/St. Louis, MO, and had his vicarage at Our Savior/Fairfax Station, VA. He graduated on May 17, 2025.

In addition to his role as Sole Pastor at Messiah/Valdosta, Pastor Wareham plans to serve as an active-duty Chaplain in the United States Navy. He has been accepted into the Navy's Chaplain Candidacy Program and received his commission as an inactive-reserve Navy Chaplain with the rank of O-1/Ensign on March 16, 2025.

Wareham's hobbies cover a wide range of areas, especially when it comes to the outdoors, where he loves to hunt and fish,

hike, camp, and rock climb. He also enjoys doing maintenance around his yard, the house, or car. To relax, he likes to grill, cook, read sci-fi/fantasy novels, play tabletop or video game RPGs, and build Legos (especially Star Wars) and other models. He looks forward to serving Jesus Christ, the congregation of Messiah Lutheran Church, and the community of Valdosta in his position as Pastor.



Back Row: Pastors Richard Lohmeyer and President James Rockey. Front Row: Tim Barber, Richard Boyd, Stephan Wareham, Gary Bowman, Steven Fair, Earl Steffens, and John Lehenbauer

Richard Lohmeyer to Serve in Transitional Capacity at Trinity/Fort Pierce, FL

Trinity/Fort Pierce, FL welcomed and witnessed Rev. Dr. Richard Lohmeyer at an installation service the first weekend in September. Lohmeyer will serve as Transitional Interim Pastor for the congregation. The Revs. Ronald Engel and Albert Matlock officiated.



Woodlands Youth Experience Busy Summer



During their summer break, **Woodlands/Montverde, FL** youth were able to serve in a variety of ways. They helped run Vacation Bible School for 81 kids. Their middle school students attended the FLGA District Servant Camp, where they enjoyed a range of activities each day plus served with non-profit organizations in the Gainesville, Florida area.

Woodlands' high school students had several members attend the LCMS National Youth Gathering in New Orleans, LA – and worked with 700 other youth and leaders to paint a chain link



fence around an underserved middle school.

As they explored the city, youth enjoyed having locals and visitors ask why there were so many teenagers on all the streets. It gave youth a chance to say they were there for a church youth event and to grow in their faith. All of these youth used their summer to put their faith in action, while having fun at the same time. They lived out the words of 1 John 3:18, "Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth."



Our Savior/Plantation, FL recently held their dedication for teachers and Pastor Tony Durante performed a "blessing of the student backpacks."

Durante is a native of Delray Beach, Florida and former police officer with the City of Delray Beach, Florida where he currently serves as one of their chaplains. He is also a police chaplain for the City of Plantation and the Town of Hillsboro Beach, Florida.



Haley Moses Named Director of Youth Ministry at Lakeland

St. Paul/Lakeland, FL celebrated the installation of Haley Moses as she stepped into her new role as our Director of Youth ministry. Moses has served for the past year as the congregation's Director of Christian Education Intern.

She joins St. Paul as their second DCE.

"We are beyond thankful for her heart for ministry, her passion for walking alongside youth and families, and the many ways God is already working through her here," emphasized Senior Pastor Andy Ritchie.

In between services in August, the congregation gathered for a reception full of smiles, hugs, and celebration.

Below left – Haley cuts her celebratory cake. Below, conducting the installation service, are Nick Moss, Director of Congregational Life, Jennifer Tanner, FLGA Executive Director for Schools and Youth Ministry, Senior Pastor Andy Ritchie and Associate Pastor Ken Sherman.



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Athens Volunteers Provide Encouragement to Disaster Response

During calendar year 2024, **Trinity/Athens, GA**, received grant funds from several Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod sources for the purpose of beginning a disaster response food ministry.

Their first step was to find and secure a mobile kitchen (a surplus military trailer) that could be taken to disaster sites where it could be used to cook and prepare meals for relief volunteers. The mobile kitchen would be manned by Trinity members. Twenty Trinity members were secured, trained and certified by Lutheran Church Charities' Lutheran Early Response Teams (LERT).

When disasters strike, lives, homes, businesses, churches — everything and everyone can be affected. LCC/LERT volunteers respond quickly to serve people affected by disaster.

An ELCA congregation, Mt. Pisgah Lutheran in Hickory, NC, was devastated by Hurricane Helene and for more than a year they have been in the thick of the disaster and relief efforts. Early in 2025 Pastor Tim Davis, committed Trinity to help in the relief effort.

During the the first week of August, numerous Trinity members began preparing food and meals for a deployment to the Hickory/Hendersonville, NC area. Four members of Trinity's LERT team hauled the mobile kitchen to Mt. Pisgah and operated it there for five consecutive days — from August 10-15. Three meals per day were served to 30 workers who had been trained to operate chainsaws, construction equipment and more. More than 450 meals were served to work crews from Calvary Lutheran in East Meadows, NY and St. James Lutheran in St. James, NY. These teams brought more than chainsaws and construction tools — they brought compassion

and spiritual encouragement to those still recovering from Hurricane Helene.

LCC/LERT disaster response staff, chainsaw instructors and experienced volunteers helped these two New York teams with Trinity's team operating the mobile kitchen and providing the meals.

"It's about restoring hope, encouraging the weary, and sharing Christ's love with every saw cut, every conversation, and every prayer lifted in service," explains Bill Malueg, a member of the responding team from Trinity/Athens, GA. The photos show the meals and serving line, relief volunteers, Trinity food prep, and mission banner "a cup of cold water".



Retired Lutheran Principal's Book Details Living With Cancer

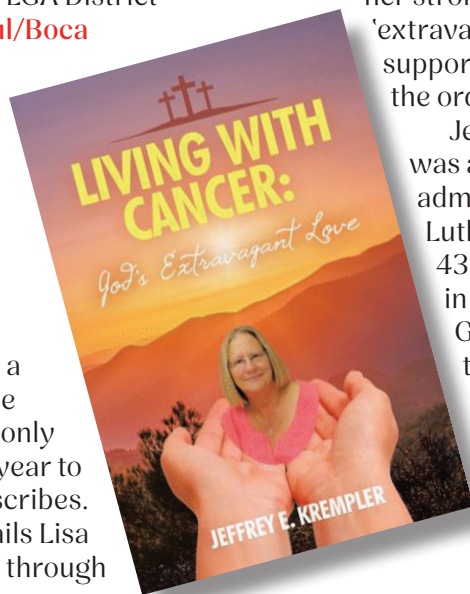
"Living With Cancer: God's Extravagant Love" is a book authored by Dr. Jeffrey E. Krempler, retired FLGA District Principal at **St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL**. It was published in the summer of 2025.

"The book is a testimony to the faith and strength of my wife, Lisa, during her three-year journey with pancreatic cancer, a period in which she was initially given only three months to a year to live," Krempler describes.

"The book details Lisa and my navigation through

the difficulties of cancer treatment and how Lisa's faith sustained her. This journey was a testament to her strong faith and God's 'extravagant love,' which supported her through the ordeal."

Jeffrey Krempler was an educator and administrator in Lutheran schools for 43 years — primarily in the Florida-Georgia District of the LCMS. He was married to Lisa Ann Levine for 46 years before she passed away.



"My aim is to provide help and insight for other couples or individuals who are dealing with a cancer diagnosis," Krempler concludes.

The book is available in both hardcover and paperback from multiple sources including Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Walmart and E-Bay.



Jeff & Lisa Krempler

Food Bank of Plant City Receives Contribution from Hope

The United Food Bank of Plant City has been and continues to be an integral part of the mission and ministry of Hope/ Plant City, FL, and their pastor, The Rev. Dean Pfeffer. For several years the congregation has gifted many organizations in their community as well as the Florida-Georgia District and LCMS with

portions of the proceeds from the congregation's annual Turkey Supper and participation in the Florida Strawberry Festival.

This year Hope presented a check for \$500.00 to the food bank to support their ongoing work as they strive to end food insecurity for those in need in the Plant City community. In 2024 the

food bank distributed more than 4 million pounds of food to more than 89,000 individuals and 26,000 families.

According to Hope's Sr. Pastor, Rev. Dean Pfeffer "The ongoing work of The United Food Bank is essential to our community. We are so blessed to assist in reaching out and helping so many in Plant City that need that extra hand. God has blessed us at Hope to be a blessing to others and we joyfully strive to share the blessings that come from our Lord's giving hands."

Pastor Pfeffer has served on the Food Bank board of directors for over almost 15 years and has served as board secretary, vice chairman and chairman.

Pictured at left are The Rev. Dean Pfeffer (center) presenting the congregation's gift to Food Bank Director, Mary Heysek, as they are surrounded by a number of Food Bank volunteers.



Woodlands Introduces Outdoor Classroom and Wonder Grove

Woodlands/ Montverde FL

kicked off a new school year with a joyful noise. The congregation's halls and the beautiful outdoor campus are alive with excitement.

According to Amy Roegner, church secretary, "we are beginning a brand-new school year under our mission of Connecting People to Jesus. Our 2025 theme, 'Make a Joyful Noise!,' is already echoing through the laughter, songs, and prayers of our community.

"This year, we are blessed with 115 students representing 90 families, supported by our dedicated team of 23 teachers and substitutes. A highlight of this new school year is the grand opening of our outdoor classroom, 'The Wonder Grove.'"

Woodlands has created this unique learning space to invite children to explore God's creation through hands-on experiences in the mud kitchen, creativity at the art center, engineering in the building area, and reflection in their outdoor chapel.

"The year began with our first chapel gathering – where the children learned about God's creation and how everything He made was for them," Roegner continues. "Their wide-eyed wonder and heartfelt singing made it clear that 'Make a Joyful Noise!' is more than a theme – it's a way of life at Woodlands."



floridageorgia
district

Youth Ministry WEEKEND

November 7-9, 2025

REGISTRATION IS OPEN!

Both events will be held on November 7-9, 2025 at Lake Yale Baptist Conference Center
The price is the same for both events and includes the weekend program, plus food and lodging.

\$205 per person | through 9/22 | Early Bird

\$230 per person | through 9/30 | Regular Registration
(scholarships are available)



The High School Leadership event is designed for youth who want to form lasting friendships, build a supportive peer network, and strengthen their faith in Jesus.

Participants will be empowered to actively contribute to their local church and grow in their personal walk with God

To get all the information and to register, visit the website.



John 1:5

The light shines in the darkness

Our speaker, Rehema Kavugha, currently serves at Lutheran Church Extension Fund as Director of Synod Relations. She is excited to dig into our theme. Triibe and Tongue will be the house band again this year.

All 6th - 8th grade youth are invited!

To get all the information and to register, visit the website.

<https://flgadistrict.org/ymw/>

If you have questions about either event,
please contact Cindy Hammerstrom at 407-258-5042
or chammerstrom@flgadistrict.org

Following Deferred Convertible Vicarage, Tim Handrick Installed At All Saints/Blairsville, GA



The Rev. Timothy Handrick was ordained and installed the last Sunday in July at **All Saints/Blairsville, GA**. Handrick had served as their Deferred Convertible Vicar while enrolled in Concordia Seminary's Residential Alternate Route [RAR] program. Students in this program study alongside those in the M.Div. Program, including the study of the New Testament on the basis of its original language, Greek. The key differences from the M.Div.

Program are a reduced number of courses and Old Testament studies are carried out on the basis of the English language.

"Tim Handrick was placed by our St. Louis Seminary as our congregation's Vicar with the prayerful intention that it would become a Call to serve All Saints upon my retirement," states The Rev. Dave Wesche. "We were made aware of Tim by FLGA District President James Rockey since he knew of my impending retirement.

As a family, the Handricks love to explore the Blairsville, GA community, tucked in the Chattahoochee National Forest and the Blue Ridge Mountains, making it a natural wonderland with Lakes Nottely and Winfield Scott nearby. The Appalachian Trail also passes through the area. Handrick is passionate about providing opportunities for people to serve the community and really appreciates seeing all ages within the body of Christ join together for a common purpose.

Jacob Roedsens Installed at Trinity/Delray Beach, FL

The Rev. Jacob Roedsens was installed at Trinity/Delray Beach, FL on Saturday, September 13, in a 4 pm worship. President James Rocky preached.

Trinity was founded in 1904, making it one of the oldest Lutheran congregations in Florida. The original church building was constructed in 1904 and is now designated as a historic structure by the City of Delray Beach.

What began with a small group of families in 1904 has grown into an eight-acre campus that includes a thriving school and the church.

Before his call to Trinity Lutheran, his most recent career history includes serving Our Savior/Lake Worth, FL. He began there after graduating from Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO.

His path to the ministry began in 2010 when he enrolled in night classes at Concordia/Wisconsin to earn an undergraduate degree toward becoming a minister.



Roedsens worked for about 10 years in store management for major retailers like Menards, Home Depot, and Lowe's. He also worked as the State of Wisconsin's Medicaid Ombudsman. He was born and raised in Madison, WI.

Jacob is married to Cecilia, and together they have three children: Aria, 16, Isaiah, 14, and Joshua, 11.

Roedsens serves the FLGA District as the South Palm Beach Circuit Visitor – Circuit 19.



Trinity/Albany, GA

welcomed new members by the Profession of Faith on Sunday August 17, 2025.

Pictured from left are;
Norman Williams
Ronald Williams
Rev. Gary V. Bowman, Pastor
Alicia Barbour
Timothy Stubbs

Second Level Nears Completion at Habitat Clinic & Care Center

Habitat for Children Ministries was formed as a 501(c)(3) organization in 2005. It was founded by Meschac St Amour who also serves as President. HFCM is recognized as a non-profit ministry working in Haiti, Guatemala and the United States for the good of the less fortunate children and families throughout the areas. Meschac St Amour reports that the second level of the Clinic and Care center is nearly complete. "Haiti is filled with many stories of struggle and resilience," he offers, "and I am pleased to report on our activities here."

"There is a fresh water pump that doesn't have the capacity to meet the demands of the people.

They stand in line for a turn but the well cannot keep up with the requirements. The mobile clinic continues to meet the need for healthcare in the community," he continues, "and families depend on this important service, to provide proper support for timely and effective care."

"We can use donations to help us acquire medical supplies and equipment. We also need help for Dorsaint Wilbens. He crashed while riding a motorcycle and was released from the hospital because there was no available room there for him to stay while he recovers."

Information about the organization is available on their website

habitatforchildrenministries.org/



Vicar Tracy Bovee Installed at Weston

Vicar Tracy Bovee was installed as the new vicar at **St. Paul/Weston, FL** on September 7, 2025. Bovee is a native of Florida, residing in Weston, and has been a member of St. Paul/Weston since its founding in 1988. In that time, he has been a member of the voice and bell choirs, a member of the church's men's group, and a lay minister at St Paul since 2004. In 2024, he started the process of applying to Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO, and was accepted into the Special Ministry Pastor (SMP) program at the Seminary in 2025. He now will serve his vicarage under the supervision of Pastor Scott Henze, working in visitation and Word and Sacrament ministries.

Tracy holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in English Literature with Minor in Computer Science from Florida International University, and has worked in a variety of mostly accounting roles in local South Florida companies.

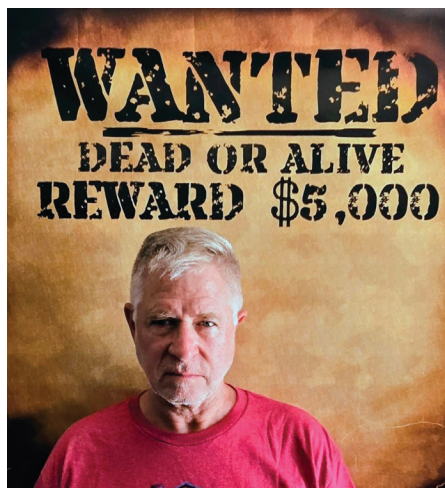
In addition to his work with the Seminary and St. Paul, he is employed as Accounts Receivable Administrator at LockTight Impact Windows, Doors & Roofing in Dania Beach. When not at church or work, he enjoys walking and swimming, spending time with family and friends, is a voracious reader of many books, and works on the hobby of plastic and miniature model building.

Tracy's favorite Bible verse is Romans 8:38-39: *"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

Watch for Vicar Tracy to be flipping brats on the grill at St. Paul's annual Oktoberfest, scheduled for Friday, September 19th from 6:00pm-9:00pm.



Above – Vicar Tracy at Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO
Below – a group of St. Paul/Weston members enjoying some good old-fashioned Gemütlichkeit This year's Oktoberfest is slated for Friday, September 9, from 6 to 9 pm.



Have you seen The Rev. Dr. Peter Meier? There may be reward money for the individual who spots him in the northern part of the United States. It seems his wife has kidnapped him and may be holding him hostage in the family camper.

At right, **Trinity/Delray Beach, FL** congregation enjoyed the Sunday Singers – comprised of 2nd-5th graders.



Our Savior Celebrates the Relaunch of Stephen Ministry, Middle-School Students Present Peter Pan Jr.

"At **Our Savior/ St. Petersburg, FL**, caring for one another has always been at the heart of our mission — and we are excited to share the official relaunch of our Stephen Ministry program under the dedicated leadership of Natalie Velez," emphasizes Catrina Earls, Director of Communications and Administration for the congregation.

Stephen Ministry is a nationally recognized, proven, and effective way to extend Christ-centered care within a congregation and the broader community. The program equips and supervises trained volunteers — called Stephen Ministers — to provide one-to-one, confidential, and compassionate support to individuals facing life's difficulties. Whether someone is navigating grief, illness, job loss, family challenges, or other struggles, a Stephen Minister offers consistent presence, prayerful listening, and

emotional support.

According to Catrina Earls, each Stephen Minister is a congregation member who undergoes extensive training by Stephen Leaders, ensuring they are well-prepared to walk alongside those in need. "Typically, a Stephen Minister meets with one care receiver at a time, spending about an hour each week offering understanding and encouragement.

"We are grateful to Natalie Velez's vision and commitment, and a newly trained group of

congregation members has stepped forward to serve in this vital ministry. Natalie has worked tirelessly to rebuild and reinvigorate Our Savior's Stephen Ministry team, ensuring we continue to meet the evolving needs of our church family and community."

Together, through Stephen Ministry, this team is charged

with reaffirming Our Savior's mission to share God's love by supporting those who are hurting — one relationship at a time.

The school's theater program, featuring its "Middle School Spartans," presented Peter Pan Jr., a 60-minute adaption of the Tony Award-winning 1954 Broadway musical, which famously featured Mary Martin in the title role. It includes the show's most iconic songs.

The students acted, sang, worked on costume and set design.



St. Paul Boca Raton Welcomes Back Former Vicar, Jacob Scheler, as Associate Pastor

The Rev. Jacob Raymond William Scheler was installed as Associate Pastor of **St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL**, on Sunday, August 3, 2025 in an afternoon service with a dinner afterwards. President James Rockey preached. Scheler joins The Rev. Stephen Carretto's ministry team.

Coincidentally, Jacob was born at Boca Raton Community Hospital, Boca Raton, Florida, on January 23, 1995 and delivered by Dr. Benjamin Kennedy, a member of St. Paul. Jacob was baptized at Hope/Pompano Beach, FL on February 12, 1995, where his father, The Rev. Jason Scheler, was serving. Pastor Jason Scheler is now serving at Hope on the Beach/Santa Rosa Beach, FL, in the Southern District of the LCMS.

Jacob graduated from the Collegiate High School of Northwest Florida State College, Niceville, Florida, an innovative charter school that consistently ranks among the top high schools in Florida. He entered Nova Southeastern University, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, with a course of study in biology and pre-med – an academic pursuit aimed at preparing students for medical school. His minors were in business and marine biology. Following graduation in December, 2016, Jacob began studying for the Dental Admission Test (DAT).

During the following year, Jacob had many opportunities to serve at his home congregation of Hope on the Beach Church in administration, outreach, technology, and youth ministry. Through these experiences and the work of the Holy Spirit, Jacob answered the Spirit's prompting to start his pastoral education through Concordia Seminary/ Saint Louis, Missouri in the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP)



Participating clergy (above) included Jacob's father, The Rev. Jason Scheler, shown also at left with Jacob's mother, Kristie and his wife, Shelby with daughter Adalynn. Pastor Steve Carretto is at far right in the clergy group photo.

program – a distance learning program that leads towards ordination. In 2021, Jacob felt led to enter into Concordia Seminary's Residential Master of Divinity Program to continue and enrich his theological education and pastoral formation. While there he was blessed to captain the seminary's soccer team and build numerous lasting relationships through intramural sports.

During his theological education, Jacob married Shelby Slaner on May 20, 2023. Together they completed his third-year vicarage assignment at St. Paul/

Boca Raton, FL. After returning for his final year at the seminary, he completed studies in May, 2025, and was ordained into the Office of the Holy Ministry at Hope on the Beach on July 13, 2025. Jacob and Shelby have one daughter, Adalynn Marina, born on January 24, 2025. Jacob is enthusiastic about joining the ministry team incorporating St. Paul's Christian Day school which is operating at capacity. The congregation is about to launch Phase 2 of an extensive capital campaign to expand the campus facilities.

St. Paul/Weston, FL sent a sizable group of teens to the National Youth Gathering in New Orleans, LA. They're shown here with Jeremy Becker (far left) Director of Youth and Family Ministry and Pastor Scott Henze (back row far right).



Joy Beach takes a "selfie" with five ladies who attended the NYG from **Redeemer/Stuart, FL**, as they enjoy a Café au Lait at one of the Café Du Monde locations in the French Quarter of New Orleans, LA.

St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL, students and adult leaders took a moment to pause in one of the many New Orleans, LA sites in between mass events and service projects.



St. Paul/Lakeland, FL, had their biggest group ever attend the LCMS National Youth Gathering! Nearly 60 youth gathered at 4 am in the church parking lot to board a bus taking them to the Tampa Airport where they boarded flights to New Orleans, LA.

St. Paul/Weston's Pre-School Receives National Accolade

St. Paul Lutheran Church & Pre-School/Weston, FL, has been awarded the 2024-25 "Premier Parent Choice Award" – an honor given to K-12 schools by the national survey platform ParentPulse. The award recognizes schools that achieve a Net Promoter Score (NPS) of 80 or higher based on feedback from student's parents.

The award is determined after ParentPulse conducts surveys by sending out questions via email and text to a portion of a school's parents each week. This differs from a single, one-time survey and creates a continuous stream of feedback for the organization.

A school's NPS measures how likely parents are to recommend the school to others. Scores of 80 or higher are considered "world-

class" and qualify a school for the Premier Parent Choice Award. To be eligible, a school must be a ParentPulse client and have surveyed parents for a full cycle between September 1 and May 31 of a given school year.

Beneficiaries: The award benefits schools by helping them drive new enrollment through positive word-of-mouth marketing. It also indicates that school leaders view parents as important "customers" and

are committed to asking for feedback and adapting to their needs. Weston's parent satisfaction score ranked among the highest in the country.

Mrs. Kathy Henze is Director of the Pre-School, and is responsible for the

overall academic, administrative, and personnel management including creating and managing a curriculum that aligns with the school's mission and promotes the spiritual, social, emotional, intellectual, and physical development of their students. She is also charged with ensuring the program meets state and local licensing requirements, as well as maintaining a safe and healthy environment.



Kathy Henze

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We are *the* credit union of The LCMS.



Our Savior/Lake Worth Celebrates National Bible Bee Proclaim! Day

A group of local elementary and middle school students presented "scripture from the heart" to **Our Savior/Lake Worth Beach, FL**, as part of an official National Bible Bee Summer Study Proclaim Day.

National Bible Bee Proclaim! Day is the culminating gathering of the NBB Summer Study. Participants (ages 7-18) who've completed their eight-week Discovery Journal curriculum during the Summer Study get to publicly recite their memorized Scripture passages. This event may include recitations, games, quizzes, and opportunities to receive medals or certificates, all designed to celebrate the participants' hard work and faith journey.



After Proclaim! Day, students proceed to take the National Bible Bee Competition Qualifying Test, and the highest scorers (top 120 per division) are invited to the national competition.

The program and awards presentation took place Saturday, August 9, 2025, and concluded with an ice cream sundae bar

celebration. This local group was just one of more than 300 National Bible Bee Summer Study groups taking place across the nation. The kids met at a park in West Palm Beach throughout the summer to encourage each other to learn and memorize scripture in a fun way.

More information on the program: biblebee.org/.

Rebecca Houston Joins Faith/Eustis Staff as Principal



Faith/Eustis, FL has announced the installation of their new principal, Rebecca Houston. On Sunday, August 10, 2025, Faith welcomed this new chapter and

dedicated their devoted staff to support and guide the 244 students entrusted to their care for the 2025-2026 school year. Houston previously served at

Trinity/Rockledge, FL where she was instrumental in the implementation of their nationally certified outdoor classroom for students.

Hope/Plant City and St. Paul/Lakeland Coordinate Pantry

On the third Thursday of each month, a line begins to form in the parking lot of **Hope/Plant City, FL**, in anticipation of their monthly "Moving Hope Mobile Food Pantry." For several years Hope has partnered with **St. Paul/Lakeland, FL**, the sponsor of the pantry, to help reach those who are dealing with food insecurities in the Plant City community. But more than those lining up, you will also find a host of volunteers from both Hope and St. Paul there to serve and pray with those who came seeking physical food as members of Hope also provide spiritual support through members of their prayer team who are also available, the distribution of literature and prayer in both English and Spanish.

But still even more, through the support of Concordia Gospel Outreach, Arch Books are made available to all families as well to help teach Scripture and bring God's Word to life in their homes.

As is Hope's tradition, proceeds from their annual Turkey Supper are shared within the Plant City community and beyond. Pictured presenting a portion of those proceeds to the Moving Hope ministry are (from left) Rev. John Cobos of Inglesia Luterana Esperanza (Hope's Spanish ministry), Hope's Senior Pastor, Rev. Dean Pfeffer and Cheryl Taylor of St. Paul who is the coordinator of Moving Hope.



Zion Expands Audience for Advent Devotions

Zion/Fort Myers, FL, celebrates the sixth year of publishing an annual Advent devotional with another expansion of the seasonal outreach initiative.

"This is the first year in which Zion will offer a Spanish edition," says project manager Dr. Mary Manz Simon. "Mission Chair Joseph Nobile, who is spearheading the effort, has embraced this effort with the zeal of a First Century disciple."

According to Nobile, "The most exciting aspect of the Spanish language devotional is the ability to reach a new audience." He adds, "I hope to see wide eyes and smiling faces when the booklets are handed to our Spanish-speaking neighbors." The Spanish edition will be distributed and used as a talking point in various locations. Zion editions are targeted to the area around the church, including Harlem Heights.



Additional copies of the Spanish edition, with a custom front cover, are being printed for distribution by another area congregation, Pelican Community Center and Lutheran Church/Naples, FL. Nobile notes that "Advent devotionals are brand new to people in these Spanish-speaking communities."

Funding by anonymous donors allows the 44-page,

professionally produced English booklet to be given away without cost. The Spanish editions are funded through Zion's Mission Board. Families in Zion's recently expanded school will receive the English edition in monthly carline packets. As in the past, additional distribution points will include a thrift shop, food pantry and medical office.



PASSAGES

Former Trinity/Tampa Pastor, Lee Stisser, Passes



The Rev. Lee Howard Stisser, 79, former pastor at Holy Trinity/Tampa, FL, died on Monday, June 9, 2025, at St. James Hospital with his family by his side. He was born on April 15, 1946, in Wellsville, NY, the son of the late Howard and Ruth Ella (Ballerstein) Stisser. On December 2, 1967, in Bronx, NY, he married Christine E. Benda, his wife of 67 years, who survives.

Lee was raised in Wellsville, graduating in 1964 from Wellsville High School. He continued his education at Concordia Lutheran College in Bronxville, NY, earning his Masters of Theology in 1991. In response to the draft, he enlisted in 1966 with the United States Army, serving for 22 years, and retiring with the rank of First Sergeant.

He was a previous manager for Butler-Larkin. After his ordination in 1991, he was called to St. Paul's/ Buffalo, NY, serving there until 2000, when he was called to Holy Trinity/Tampa, FL where he served until his retirement in 2011. After his retirement, he continued to fill in as guest preacher at local churches as needed. Pastor Stisser was also a conductor with the Florida Railroad Museum in Parrish, FL.

In 2015, he was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, receiving treatments and participated in clinical trials in Tampa before recently moving back to Hornell to be near family.

Services were held in New York with memorials to the Alzheimers Association.

Former Trinity/Orlando Pastor, Dennis Glander, Called Home

Rev. Dennis Glander was called to his heavenly home following a short illness. His constant companion and wife, Janice, was with him to his last days on earth and was a comfort to him and appreciated by his four boys.

Pastor Glander remained active in the church for many years following his formal retirement in his 70's. He served at Trinity/Corona, SD; Faith/ Highland, MI; Our Savior/Bad Axe, MI; Holy Trinity/Blackduck, MN; Trinity/Harvel, IL; Our Redeemer/ Baker, LA; Peace/ Warren, MI; and at Trinity/Orlando, FL, before retiring in Orlando. He was

preceded in death by one son David in 1977 and his wife Ruth Patricia Glander in 2013.

Following the passing of his beloved Pat, he was rejuvenated when he met and married his beloved Janice. He is survived by wife Janice Glander and four sons and their wives; Dennis & Colleen Glander, William & Cindy Glander, Matthew & Deborah Glander, and Karl & Ginny Glander, 16 grand children, and 16 great grandchildren, and one great great grandchild. Funeral service was held at Prince of Peace/Orlando, FL on Saturday September 6.



Please send address updates,
cancellations, additions,
news and photos to:
LutheranLife@aol.com

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Get On Board With Pastor Appreciation Month!

Pastor Appreciation Month – sometimes called Clergy Appreciation Month – is celebrated every October. This is a time for congregations to honor their pastors for their hard work, dedication, and service. Sure, they really only work one day a week (unless you also have a Saturday night or midweek service), but they put a few hours into the preparation for that day.

The observance is believed to trace back to biblical references. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul advises followers to give “double honor” to church elders who teach and lead well (1 TIMOTHY)

The official month-long observance was established in 1992, with the American Christian organization “Focus on the Family” helping to promote it on a national level. Traditionally Pastor Appreciation Day is observed on the second Sunday of October – this year the 12th.

How it is celebrated? I can suggest a variety of ways!

My congregation decorates a large box/carton with bright paper and leaves it in the narthex for several weeks leading up to Pastor Appreciation Day. A slot is cut into the carton where our members can drop handwritten notes and cards. Our congregation’s board of elders encourage our members to make those notes personal, with heartfelt messages that are especially meaningful to

our pastors. We also encourage monetary gifts – no matter how small the amount. Those can come in the form of checks, cash, gift cards for restaurants or stores. Some members include VISA cards that can be used at places related to the pastor’s interests. Grocery



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gift cards are always appreciated as are gift cards for gas purchases.

Some of our members offer services like bringing the pastor and his family a special meal during the month, offering to take care of the family house and pets to give them a weekend away. You might consider motivating the youth group to detail the pastor’s automobiles.

Other members take the family to brunch on a predetermined day, while others take him golfing, fishing, to lunch on the boat or offer tickets to theater, sporting events, the local movie house.

Simply praying for your pastor and their family is a powerful and

important gesture . . . but let’s face it, we should be doing that all year long and not just during the special month of appreciation.

At my congregation, our Board of Elders divvies up the promotional opportunities to ensure widespread knowledge of pastor appreciation. We make announcements about a month ahead of time at the beginning of each service and encourage the entire congregation – from our youth to our seniors – to get on board and begin to think of ways to honor our pastors for their hard work and special efforts. We also put notices in our congregation’s newsletters, e-mail blasts and bulletin/ worship folders. I also tell our members if they have a specific gripe about something – like the way he runs a meeting or chants the Words of Institution – they should also include their name, e-mail and the make and model of the car they drive so our pastors are able to know which car to flatten the tires after worship on Sunday morning.

Be sure your congregation’s lay leadership grabs hold of Pastor Appreciation Month . . . even if you don’t present the cards and gifts until later. The important thing is to underscore how important our pastors are to us, especially in these days of pastor shortages.