



The outdoor gathering area has giant sails for shade and expansive river vistas

The St. Stephen Christian Retreat and Conference Center sits on the west bank of the Indian River in beautiful Titusville. The serene campus grounds include a swimming pool and abundant green space with shaded seating areas. Some of the breakouts meet “down by the riverside.”

The gentle sounds of nature, combined with the calming waters, create an atmosphere of total relaxation. It’s the perfect setting to meditate, reflect, and reconnect with oneself and with others. Away from the hustle and bustle of daily life, you’ll find a space where serenity reigns, allowing you to rejuvenate both mind and soul.

A beautiful communion worship service takes place the last evening of the conference with a chance afterwards for more socialization.

The Kennedy Space Center, the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, and the Valiant Air Command Warbird Museum are all nearby. The Brevard County Enchanted Forest boasts miles of hiking trails allowing visitors to enjoy the natural beauty of the region. Wildlife observation, nature photography, and hiking are popular recreational activities. The Enchanted Forest is just 10 minutes from the retreat center.

The facilities are clean and accommodating. The price of the gathering includes meals and rooms based on double occupancy. Registration opens on the District website on October 15.

Participation costs are \$525 per couple (two to a room) and \$350 per person (single occupancy). These costs cover all meals, lodging and snacks for the duration of the gathering.



“Blessed is the nation
whose God is the Lord,
the people whom He
has chosen as his heritage.”

— Psalm 33:12

VETERANS OF THE CROSS



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Christ IN OUR CHAOS



REMEMBRANCE
REDEMPTION
REFORMATION

VETERANS OF THE CROSS

March 9-11, 2026

**St. Stephen Christian
Retreat & Conference Center
Titusville, Florida**

2026 Veterans of the Cross Gathering — Celebrating our Freedoms in Christ

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. 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.

Our keynote speakers — The Rev. Dr. Gerald Kieschnick and his wife, Terry, and The Rev. Dr. David Benke, and his wife, Judy — will be taking us first-hand through the events surrounding the series of coordinated terrorist attacks resulting in the deaths of nearly 3,000 people.

Come to the 2026 Veterans of the Cross Gathering and be reminded that we can overcome the chaos of this life because we are empowered by the strength of Christ to proclaim the Good News, to boldly stand up for the faith within us, and to celebrate the freedoms found in living in our nation.

Keynote Speakers Are Legendary “Legacy Lutherans”

The Rev. Dr. Gerald “Jerry” Kieschnick is a long-serving leader within our Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod — notably serving three terms as our 12th National President from 2001 to 2010. His career spans roles as parish pastor, District President, and a foundation executive. Dr. Kieschnick has authored several books including *“Waking the Sleeping Giant: The Birth, Growth, Decline, and Rebirth of an American Church.”* The book highlights the history of the LCMS and looks to the future and the potential of our national church body and Christendom as a whole.

Before his national role, he led the LCMS Texas District for ten years. While District President, he also chaired the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations.

Pastor Kieschnick was ordained in 1970 and served as a pastor for congregations in Mississippi and Texas, including churches in Biloxi, MS, and Beaumont and Georgetown, TX. Following his term as LCMS president,

Kieschnick returned to Texas and held a position at Concordia University/Austin, TX from 2011 to 2015.

In 2016, he rejoined the Lutheran Foundation of Texas (now Legacy Deo) in a leadership capacity. He retired in 2025 from his role as CEO.

Terry and Jerry Kieschnick have been married 60 years and have two adult children. Throughout Rev. Kieschnick’s extensive career, Terry supported him and participated in his ministry.

During the years her husband served as president of the LCMS, Terry often joined him on church-related travel. A 2004 trip to Asia noted that her presence “opened and built bridges” for the Lutheran mission movement there. She and Jerry also served as guest hosts on a tour with The Rev. Dr. Paul Maier.

Terry remains a constant supportive partner in Dr. Kieschnick’s life.



The Rev. Dr. Gerald “Jerry” and Terry Kieschnick

The Rev. Dr. David H. Benke is the retired President/Bishop of the Atlantic District of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. He represented the eastern half of New York State for the LCMS from 1991 to 2015. Ordained into the Holy Ministry in the Missouri Synod in 1972, he has served as Pastor of St. Peter’s/ Brooklyn, NY, for more than four decades and served as President of the Atlantic District from 1997 until his retirement in 2015.

Born and raised in Milwaukee, WI, Benke is a product of the Lutheran educational system from grade school through graduate school, attending schools in Milwaukee, Fort Wayne, St. Louis, and New York. He received the Doctor of Ministry degree from New York Theological School in 1983. He has received several honorary doctorates, including one from Concordia/ Bronxville, on whose Board of Regents he served for more than two decades.



The Rev. Dr. David “Dave” and Judy Benke

Judy has been married to David for 57 years. She received her Ph.T. (putting hubby through) degree in 1972 when he graduated from Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO. They moved to the New York metropolitan area in 1973 to serve in Lutheran Schools and inner-city ministries.

Judy began her career as an educator, completing her MS in Administration and Supervision from Hunter College (NY, NY). She served as Director of St. Peter’s Pre-school (Brooklyn, NY) for twelve years. She served on the board of The Lutheran Counseling Center for nine years and as Chair of the Board for six years. Judy received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Lutheran Schools Association for beginning many early childhood centers throughout the metropolitan New York City area. She also helped secure a \$1 million loan from the Missouri Synod, to support the original Nehemiah housing project plan.