

LUTHERAN LIFE

**Lutheran Church-
Missouri Synod
Florida-Georgia District
November/December 2025**



LUTHERAN LIFE

Lutheran LIFE is the official newsletter of the Florida 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, personnel and resources. District of the Synod also provides 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

08/10/25 Mr. James Wagner (C) to SELC
09/22/25 Rev. John Buuck (O) to S. Wisconsin
09/30/25 Rev. Santiago Keinbaum (O) to Eng
10/01/25 Ms. Janice Pena (C) to Rocky Mtn

Initial Placements

08/21/25 Rev. Rochel Jean Jacques (O) from Concordia/St. Louis as Associate Peace/Naples, FL

Installations

09/07/25 Rev. Richard Lohmeyer (O) as Sole Pastor T.L.M. Trinity/Fort Pierce, FL

09/13/25 Rev. Jacob Roedens (O) as Sr. Pastor Trinity/Delray Beach, FL

09/14/25 Rev. Rochel Jean Jacques (O) as Associate Peace/Naples, FL
09/20/25 Rev. Steven Braun (O) as Associate Grace/Winter Haven, FL
09/24/25 Rev. Eric Sahlborg (O) as Exec Dir Missions & Outreach, Florida-Georgia District
10/05/25 Rev. Paul vonWerder (O) as Sole Pastor T.L.M. Concordia/Sarasota, FL

Called to Glory

10/01/25 Mr. Christian Rau (C)

Celebrate the Season Advent DISTRICT DEVOTIONS

Would you like to receive our free daily Advent devotions written by District Staff and District Board of Directors? Just sign up on the FLGA District home page.

Visit www.flgadistrict.org and scroll down to the bottom of the page and select "subscribe to emails."

They'll arrive in your email box each morning during Advent!

freepress



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 to subscribe? It's FREE! Send your name and address to LutheranLife@aol.com. Want to receive LIFE? Send your mailing list in any format supported by Excel. Please send address corrections or deletions, to LutheranLife@aol.com.

Daniel Schmitt Joins Florida-Georgia District Board



Daniel and Jessica Schmitt with their family

Daniel Schmitt has joined the Florida-Georgia District Board of Directors as the lay representative for Region 2. He replaces Tracy Cripe, the former lay representative, who has become the District's Treasurer.

Schmitt's journey in ministry began in 2007 when he became a Young Life leader, mentoring high school and middle school students in their faith. After meeting his wife, Jessica, he transitioned from Young Life to First Lutheran Church, where he continued serving youth and helping them grow in their relationship with Christ.

The Schmitts moved to **Abiding Savior/Rainesville, GA** where

Daniel volunteered as the youth leader and served on the church council under the Fellowship Board for many years. Before entering full-time church work, Schmitt served the emergency medical services industry as an emergency medical technician and paramedic, gaining experience both in hospitals and out in the field. He continues to use that background to teach CPR and First Aid to people

throughout the community. For the past year and a half, Daniel has been blessed to serve as the Director of Events, Activities, and Youth & Family Ministries at Abiding Savior Lutheran Church and School, working with Pastor Graham Glover.

Ellis Named Executive Assistant to President Rocky



Andrea Ellis has been named Executive Assistant to FLGA District President James Rookley. She replaces Kathy Keene who retired in November.

Ellis is a Concordia/New York graduate and has lived in the Orlando, Florida area for the past 15 years working for New York Life, the largest mutual life insurance company in the United States. New York Life is a Fortune 500 company.

Ellis began working for the Atlantic District LCMS under then President David Benke while in college and continued to work there for five years following her graduation from Concordia.

Andrea is married to Brent and they live in the Orlando area with their two dogs.

Her first day at the District Office was November 3rd. Be sure to extend your welcome greetings to her. She can be reached at aellis@flgadistrict.org

1517. CONFERENCE

Hosted by Trinity Delray



FEB. 20 & 21, 2026



400 N SWANTON AVE,
DELRAY BEACH, FL 33444

Come hear from Chad Bird, Scott Keith, Erick Sorensen, and more as we reflect on God's Word, celebrate His grace, and be encouraged in faith.



SCAN HERE TO STAY UPDATED:

1777 Thanksgiving Proclamation by Congress

FORASMUCH as it is the indispensable Duty of all Men to adore the superintending Providence of Almighty God: to acknowledge with Gratitude his Obligation to Him for Benefits received, and to implore such further Blessings as they stand in Need of; And it having pleased Him in His abundant Mercy not only to continue to us the innumerable Bounties of His common Providence; but also to smile upon us in the Prosecution of a just and necessary War: for the Defense and Establishment of our unalienable Rights and Liberties: particularly in that He hath been pleased, in so great a Measure, to prosper the Means used for the Support of our Troops, and to crown our Arms with most signal success:

It is therefore recommended to the legislative or executive Powers of these UNITED STATES to set apart THURSDAY, the eighteenth Day of December next, for SOLENN THANKSGIVING and PRAISE: that at one Time and with one Voice, the good People may express the grateful Feelings of their Hearts, and consecrate themselves to the Service of their Divine Benefactor: and that, together with their sincere Acknowledgments and Offerings, they may join the penitent Confession of their manifold Sins, whereby they had forfeited every Favor: and their humble and earnest Supplication that it may please GOD through the Merits of JESUS CHRIST, mercifully to forgive and blot them out of Remembrance: that it may please Him graciously to afford His Blessing on the Governments of these States respectively, and prosper the public Council of the whole: To inspire our Commanders, both by Land and Sea, and all under them, with that Wisdom and Fortitude which may render them fit Instruments, under the Providence of Almighty GOD, to secure for these United States, the greatest of all human Blessings, INDEPENDENCE and PEACE: that it may please Him, to prosper the Trade and Manufactures of the People, and the Labor of the husbandman, that our Land may yield its Increase: To take Schools and Seminaries of Education, so necessary for cultivating the Principles of true Liberty, Virtue and Piety, under His nurturing Hand: and to prosper the Means of Religion, for the promotion and enlargement of that Kingdom, which consisteth "in Righteousness, Peace and Joy in the Holy Ghost."

And it is further recommended, that servile Labor, and such Recreation, as, though at other Times innocent, may be unbecoming the Purpose of this Appointment, be omitted on so solemn an Occasion.

One of the joys of following Martin Luther's example of returning daily to the core teachings of our faith is reflecting and remembering the character and nature of God. As the season of Thanksgiving approaches, I am drawn to the fact that God is omniscient. He knows everything. Certainly, we may at times act as though we are "know it alls," but our God, the God of Isaac, Jacob and Abraham, is all-knowing.

O Give Thanks . . . For the God Who Remembers to Forget!

God's complete knowledge is overwhelming, so much so that the Apostle Paul praises God lavishly saying, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?"

Amazing, right? There is not the slightest bit of information, no matter how insignificant, that escapes God. Along with that, God cannot stop knowing something He once knew — He never forgets anything. In speaking of Israel's sin and injustices, God has sworn this pledge: "I will never forget anything they have done" (Amos 8:7).

Now one of the most incredible promises we have in God's Word is His promise made to Jeremiah and quoted twice in the book of Hebrews: "I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more." (JEREMIAH 31:34). How wonderful and surprising is that! When we consider how great and how many are our sins, how incredible! To know that the God who is the "Holy One" and has eyes

that are too pure to look upon evil (HABAKUK 1:13) is able to look on us with delight as though we have never sinned . . . is absolutely astonishing! Yet the more we consider the actual language of the promise, the more challenging it becomes. Surely the omniscient God cannot actually forget our sins. Surely, He will always know the exact words we spoke, our every thought and action, every moment of our lives on earth. His

LIFELINES

God. Like speaking of God's hand, or arm, or eyes, or mouth . . . when God has no body parts. Therefore, God "remembering" Noah or Abraham or Israel means acting in accordance with His purposes for them. Therefore, God "forgetting" our sins means He does NOT act according to what we are due. As the Scripture says, He does not treat us as our sins deserve. (PSALM 103:10)

That is the mercy of our God and Savior. He does not treat us according to His justice but instead gives us the blessing of heaven . . . forever God will act as though we have never sinned! We will be clothed in white robes totally covering our shameful deeds in the gift of His perfect righteousness, undeserved mercy and grace. Yes, my dear friends, we have a God who Remembers to Forget!

During the coming weeks, take time to really remember and give thanks to our Father in heaven, the Giver of All Good Gifts (JAMES 1:17). As you do so, ponder the greatest gift and cause for thanksgiving, for our God who Remembers to Forget!



Thankfully,
James Pockey
PRESIDENT FLORIDA-
GEORGIA DISTRICT
LUTHERAN CHURCH—
MISSOURI SYNOD



not meant as though events suddenly brought Noah and Abraham back to God's forgetful mind. Rather, they are an "anthropomorphism," making the infinite God's mind and actions like our finite human conceptions by human-like language applied to

infinite mind does not become strangely absent or forgetful when it comes to our long record of sins. So how do we understand this? How does the all-knowing God forget our sins? I would suggest that His "remember" statements concerning His people help us. For example, during the flood, Genesis 8:1 says, God remembered Noah.

In the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, GENESIS 19:29 says, God remembered Abraham and rescued Lot. These statements are

Scott Henze Receives Barnabas Award

Since 2015, the LCMS Florida-Georgia District has presented the Barnabas Sons of Encouragement Award at the annual District Educator's Conference.

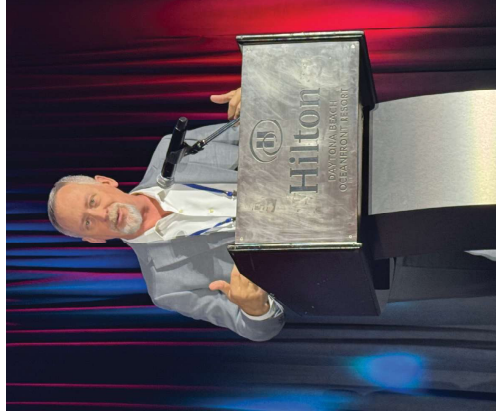
This award honors pastors who strongly support school ministries within the FLGA District.

"The purpose of the award is to celebrate the 'along side' partnership between a pastor and their congregation's school," explains Jennifer Tanner, FLGA District Executive for School and Youth Ministries. "The award is in recognition of their faithful encouragement and support for a Lutheran school or early childhood center. Pastors are nominated by school staff and parents."

The 2025 Barnabas Award Recipient is The Rev. Scott Henze, pastor at **St. Paul/Weston, FL.**

Pastor Henze has a high-profile presence on St. Paul's campus and he makes himself very approachable. On the nomination forms St. Paul's parents stated things like "Pastor Henze helps me be my best for my family and the family of St. Paul. He keeps God front and center at our school."

"Several faculty and administrative team members emphasized how Pastor Henze brings the Word of God to children in a way they can understand," Tanner



The Rev. Scott Henze



Jennifer Tanner

Wendy Niska Receives Living Light Award

Wendy Niska, a second-grade teacher at **Our Savior/St. Petersburg, FL**, was selected to receive the Living Light Award from the Florida-Georgia District. She received it at the District's annual Educator's Conference, held this year in Daytona Beach, FL.

"Wendy reflects Christ's love in extraordinary ways in her daily interactions with her students, offers Jennifer Tanner, FLGA District Executive for School and Youth Ministries.

According to Tanner, the Living Light Award honors educators who shine God's light through their actions and dedication. "During her career, Niska has impacted hundreds of students with her guidance and dedication to meeting their individual needs. She is



Wendy Niska

IRIS Lending Library Dedicated in October



known for helping her students grow in knowledge, confidence, and faith by understanding that every child learns differently. Her classroom is described as a place where students feel valued."

The award was created to honor Ben Eggers, former education and youth District ministry worker who always "exemplified living the light of Jesus." It is given to administrators, educators, and other staff members in a Lutheran school or early childhood center who serve as a witness in their school community. A nominee must receive at least three submissions from parents or staff to be considered.

"Wendy understands that every child learns differently, and she walks alongside her students helping them grow not only in knowledge but also in confidence and faith. Her classroom is a place where students feel valued. She models what it means to 'let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.' Wendy's encouragement reflect the heart of a teacher who is living love in action," Tanner concludes.

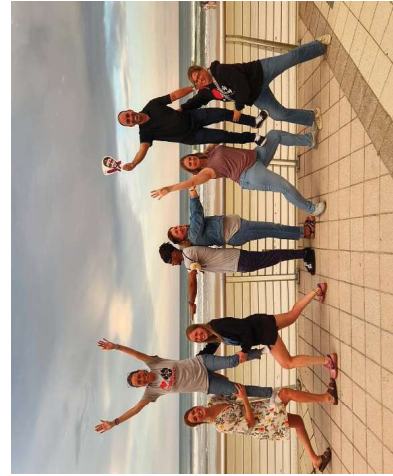
District's Educators Convene in Daytona

The LCMS Florida-Georgia District educators conference is an annual professional development event for educators, including teachers, Directors of Christian Education (DCEs), Family Life Ministers, and administrators, who work within the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) in the Florida-Georgia District. The primary purpose is to provide professional development through keynote sessions, breakout

sessions, and "Ed Camps." The keynote speakers included Sarah Salzberg. Sarah teaches Old Testament at Orange Lutheran High School in Orange County, CA. In addition, she has served as a planner and theological advisor for the LCMS Youth Gathering as well as a speaker for youth and women's retreats around the country. She earned her master's degree in Theology from Concordia/Irvine, but her pride and joy will always be Concordia/Seward where she



Trinity/Delray Beach, FL team posed for a group photo at the FLGA District Educators Conference



A few of Trinity/Delray Beach team pose on the beach boardwalk



St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL singers Pastor Steve Carretto (from left) Pastor Jacob Scholer, Garry Hickey and John List perform on karaoke night.

earned her Bachelor's in Education. Mychal Thom is a prominent educational leader in the LCMS with nearly 20 years of experience in secondary and post-secondary education and administration. He is currently an Assistant to the President and a faculty member at Concordia/St. Paul, MN.



Sarah Salzberg's message centered on the theme of God's self-limitation to human language and experience, and the idea of "The God Who Sees" us in our brokenness and need.



Mychal Thom's keynotes message was "Fueled for Today. Empowered for Tomorrow!"

Anniversary Celebrations

First	Last	School/Church Name	City, State	Years
Erica	Agosta	Epiphany ELC	Lake Worth, FL	10
Shelley	Avis	Trinity	Delray Beach, FL	10
Chloe	Brock	St. Michael	Ft. Myers, FL	10
Jessica	Carretto	St. Paul Lutheran	Boca Raton, FL	10
Kate	Corrao	St. Luke's	Oviedo, FL	10
Karen	Jackson	St. Luke's	Oviedo, FL	10
Lisa	Jackson	St. Luke's	Oviedo, FL	10
Aisho	Kanarjagan	St. Paul Lutheran	Boca Raton, FL	10
Jami	Kiser	St. Luke's	Oviedo, FL	10
Amy	Lutton	Grace Lutheran	Winter Haven, FL	10
Sara	Penning	St. Luke's	Oviedo, FL	10
Greg	Register	St. Luke's	Oviedo, FL	10
Jessica	Remmers	St. Paul Lutheran	Boca Raton, FL	10
Shireen	Rich	St. Luke's	Oviedo, FL	10
Ronda	Schwartz	St. Paul Lutheran School	Peachtree City, GA	10
Tiffany	Walker	St. John	Ocala, FL	10
Celeste	Wilcox	St. John	Ocala, FL	10
Holly	Wilhelm	Shepherd of the Coast	Fort Lauderdale, FL	10
Lauren	Willmer	St. Luke's	Oviedo, FL	10
Michael	Yurk	Faith Lutheran School	Eustis, FL	10
Total 10 years				20
Pamela	Dienrich	St. Paul Lutheran School	Peachtree City, GA	15
Jennifer	Johnson	Our Savior Lutheran	St. Petersburg, FL	15
Nathan	Loewe	Trinity	Delray Beach, FL	15
Liaandra	Slavin	Faith Lutheran Preschool	N Palm Beach, FL	15
Jenny	Wochter	St. Paul Lutheran School	Peachtree City, GA	15
Kate	Wilcox	Immanuel Lutheran	Brandon, FL	15
Total 15 years				6
Lesley	Agosta	Epiphany ELC	Lake Worth, FL	20
Tecila	Coerber	St. Luke's	Oviedo, FL	20
Julie	Dahn	St. Paul Lutheran School	Peachtree City, GA	20
Ginny	Faw	St. John	Ocala, FL	20
Anne	Fritz	Faith Lutheran School	Eustis, FL	20
Jeremy	Fritz	Faith Lutheran School	Eustis, FL	20
Jenny	Hundermark	Redeemer	Stuart, FL	20
Niki	Kneser	St. Paul	Lakeland, FL	20
Amee	Knoepfel	Amazing Grace	Oxford, FL	20
Jennifer	Loewe	Trinity	Delray Beach, FL	20
Nick	Moss	St. Paul	Lakeland, FL	20
Deborah	Riber	Grace	St. Petersburg, FL	20
Dave	Trimmerman	Grace Lutheran School	Jacksonville, FL	20
Total 20 years				13
Cathleen	Douglas	Holy Trinity	Tampa, FL	25
Michelle	Henry	Trinity	Delray Beach, FL	25
Diane	Linder	Our Savior Lutheran	St. Petersburg, FL	25
Jennifer	Tippett	Grace	St. Petersburg, FL	25
Total 25 years				4
Karen	Atkinson	St. Michael	Ft. Myers, FL	30
Joy	Beach	Redeemer	Stuart, FL	30
Tammy	Kana	St. John	Ocala, FL	30
Michael	Rottmann	Grace Lutheran	Winter Haven, FL	30
Christy	Wendblaf	St. Michael	Ft. Myers, FL	30
Total 30 years				5
Joan	Davis	Immanuel Lutheran	Brandon, FL	35
Anita	Glanzer	St. Luke's	Oviedo, FL	35
John	Glanzer	St. Luke's	Oviedo, FL	35
Joy	Beach	Redeemer	St. Petersburg, FL	35
Lori Lee	Joerz	St. Paul	Lakeland, FL	35
Dave	Leimer	Grace Lutheran School	Jacksonville, FL	35
Total 35 years				5
Kim	Berlein	Faith Lutheran School	Eustis, FL	40
Diane	Frusco	Holy Trinity	Tampa, FL	40
Jon	Peterson	Grace Lutheran	Winter Haven, FL	40
Lisa	Tino	Faith Lutheran	Hialeah, FL	40
Plar	Tucker	Faith Lutheran Preschool	N Palm Beach, FL	40
Total 40 years				5
Marie	Tillis	St. John	Ocala, FL	45
Total 45 years				1

Nicole Clifton and Entire Grace/St. Pete Team Recognized at Educators Conference

An additional "Living Light Award" was presented at this year's FLGA Educators Conference. Jennifer Tanner, FLGA Executive for School & Youth Ministries recognized the entire teaching staff of **Grace/St. Petersburg, FL**.

Educators were convening at their annual event last year. In 2024, Hurricane Milton was bearing down on the Gulf Coast. Grace/St. Petersburg, FL, was hit the hardest, suffering extensive damage and water intrusion in most – if not all – of their classrooms as well as the sanctuary. School and church staff worked together for a plan because they knew that they had to get the kids back into school. After an initial clean up period, helped by church members and other volunteers, school re-opened after about two weeks.

However "school" for the students faculty and administration looked much different. "Most classrooms were damaged," explained Nicole Clifton, the very proud Principal of Grace. "The entire preschool, all the classes, were held in our gymnasium. Each classroom had an area – no walls – just some furniture and floor mats.

The middle school classes were all held in the sanctuary and each specialty had its own area – Math, English, Religion, etc." On top of teaching under those conditions, the staff also worked after school to help with clean-up and repairs. Pastor Kevin Loughran and Principal Clifton and all the staff just worked themselves to the point of exhaustion. "But the kids were in school!" Clifton emphasized. "Donations came in from all around the country, sometimes it was a chore to just figure out how to deal with all the items.

"We opened with only nine of our 24 classrooms. Approximately 40,000 of our 56,000 square feet of campus buildings needed remediation and repair. 50,000 if you count the minor remediation and restoration work in the gym, sanctuary and science room. "The sanctuary and gym became available after five or six days," she continued. "At that time we set up partitions to move Early Education Center (EEC) into the gym and move desks and chairs into corners of the sanctuary that then needed to be moved weekly in order to hold church services. All lunches and physical education classes were held outside. The

school and business offices were moved to the EEC office area and the church office to the gym office. "The EEC classrooms received the least amount of damage and they were remediated, passed air quality inspections and built back in time for their stuff to be moved out of the gym for when students returned from their Thanksgiving break."

According to Clifton, three elementary school classrooms, the Welcome Center (regular church entrance) and music room were not reopened until after the Christmas/New Years break. "Rather than disrupt elementary students who had been relocated to the Middle School side of the building Middle School materials and students were moved from the Sanctuary to the new elementary school rooms. The art room and second grade classroom didn't reopen until after Spring Break, administrative staff returned to the front office area after Easter and the Annex rooms became available in May. We are still awaiting full access to the Staff Lounge, flooring in the sanctuary and a wide variety of punch list items," Clifton concluded.

Below – The staff of Grace/St. Petersburg with Principal Nicole Clifton, at right, holding their award.



Are You Wrestling With End-Of-Year Burnout?

As we come up on the end of the year and get into a busy Advent and Christmas season, burnout can strike. It is that feeling you get when you're at the end of your rope with effort and that there are just too many things on your plate: that the expectations placed on you (by yourself, a supervisor, your congregation, church council or board of elders) are greater than your capacity to do them; they are unrealistic. It's when you're tapped out and just don't have any energy left – whether physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual.

Burnout does not mean you should quit the ministry. If you can identify it and find things that can help you cope, you can get through it. There is a difference between being stressed and being burned out. It's important to learn to identify in ourselves and in our schedules when we need a break. It's a lot of balancing and knowing yourself and seeing where you are at. There are times when you have greater capacity; there are times when you don't.

Unrealistic expectations is one thing. We have to realize that working with people, especially when dealing with faith practices, is not cut and dry. **Trying to manage stress by working more.** Ministry is never done, so it is critical that we don't push ourselves with the hope things will improve. A common misconception is thinking you can solve it by putting in more hours. Learn to take a step back, to breathe and allow your emotional/mental state to level out. It doesn't all rely on you. This is the Holy Spirit's work. If you need a break, take it: the world is not going to fall apart. Being focused solely on what you're doing and not taking part in other ministries or interacting with them is a common mistake. It's important to find a cluster near you: find a community that you can talk ministry with. Even if you're an introvert, you need other people

Poor sleep can magnify all other issues.
• Reduced productivity.

Learn to Say No
• Use your vacation time. Use your sick and personal days.
• Join a cluster group.

When you're in burnout, it is sometimes hard to identify. That's why it's important to be in a ministry cluster group or pastoral wink. By gathering and establishing relationships, others can help you realize when you're showing signs of burnout.

Luke Esselman is a Commissioned Ministry Advocate for the Michigan District, and Tyler Seehafe, is the Director of Youth Ministry and Media at St. Paul Lutheran in Ann Arbor, MI. They produce an excellent podcast discussing hot topics, and issues that pertain to the lives of Professional Church Workers. A playlist of episodes, including two on the subject of burnout can be found at youtube.com/@michiganLCMS/playlists. They also recommend the book "Don't Burn Out, Burn Bright" by Jason Young and Jonathan Mallin.

Grace Place is a wellness ministry that is part of the Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF). Its primary mission is to support the well-being of Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) church workers and their families, helping them avoid burnout and sustain a joyful, vibrant ministry career.

The Rev. Dr. Greg Walton, Florida-Georgia District President Emeritus and Rev. Tom Eggebrecht, former pastor at Ascension in Casselberry, FL, oversee the programming and operations under the overall leadership of LCEF President and CEO Bart Day. For more information about Grace Place reach out to Walton at greg.walton@lcef.org and Eggebrecht at tom.eggebrecht@lcef.org.

to talk to. Consider joining a local Bible study where you're not the leader. Be in the Word! Sometimes reading the Bible can feel like work, because that is part of your call. Find ways that you can be filled with the Gospel.

Lack of delegation
Sometimes we don't have many people available, but the more people you can ask for help, the better. You may feel guilty about delegating parts of your job. But your job is to bring the Gospel to people. If you're delegating, you're still bringing the Gospel to people.



Luke Esselman



Tyler Seehafe

Find someone – and prepare them to share the Gospel. It takes work to build a community of people you can delegate to. If you're not a pastor, sometimes the church worker's job is to do everything the pastor doesn't have time to do. But don't be afraid to have conversations with leadership if you're finding yourself spending a lot of time doing things that are not part of your call.

Signs and Symptoms of Burnout
• Exhaustion – especially when it doesn't go away.
• Negativity/bitterness about your job in general.
• Anxiety-induced insomnia.

District's Middle School Youth Shine at Annual Event

The LCMS Florida-Georgia District Middle School Youth Gathering is an annual event that brings together middle school youth (grades 6-8) from across the district for a weekend of spiritual growth, learning, fellowship, and fun. "The gathering is designed to connect more than 400 middle schoolers in a larger community of believers, helping them grow in their faith and experience the excitement of a large-scale event," explains Jennifer Tanner, FLGA District Executive for School and Youth Ministries.

The event includes a range of activities including daily mass events with speakers and a band, breakout sessions, servant events (service projects), and various games. It was held November 7-9 at the Lake Yale Baptist Conference Center in Leesburg, Florida.



Keynote speakers included Rehema Kavugha, serving at Lutheran Church Extension Fund as the Director of Synod Relations. Prior to her current role, she served from 2013-2019 as the Director of Student Development at Concordia University/Nebraska. Prior to that she served as a Music Educator at Immanuel/Alexandria, VA and Salem Lutheran School in New Orleans, LA.

Kavugha is a graduate of Concordia/Nebraska. She calls Houston, TX home where she was

born and raised. Even though Houston, TX is home, Rehema is a first generation born in the United States and her extended family all still live in Tanzania, East Africa.

The weekend music was provided by Tribe & Tongue

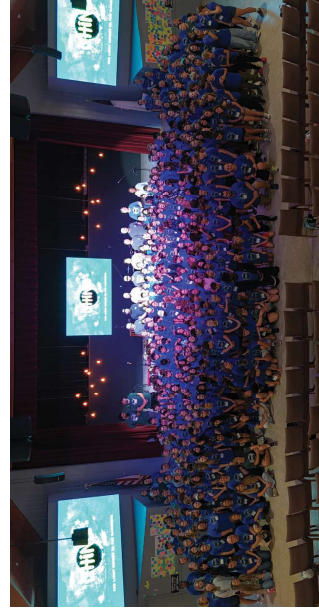


— not a traditional band but rather a collective of Christian worship leaders, songwriters, and musicians from various churches across the United States who collaborate on writing and performing music. They gather virtually to create worship songs, with a mission to produce music that is scripturally based and empowers diverse voices within the Church.

The name "Tribe & Tongue" is inspired by the biblical verse REVELATION 7:9, which speaks of a great multitude from "every

is to create music that brings together diverse voices within the broader Christian church, reflecting the biblical vision of "every nation, tribe, people and tongue" worshipping God in unity. Three of the core Tribe & Tongue team come from Trinity Klein/Spring, TX (Chris Wichmann); Salem Lutheran Church in Tomball, TX (Laura Pierson) and Redeemer Lutheran in Redwood City, CA (Brandon Li).

The theme selected for the event was "SHINE" — the light shines in the darkness.



What does it mean to be a Christian community for the city? The traditional image of a church often involves stained glass windows, traditional hymns or contemporary praise music, and a structure set apart — a sanctuary in the city, but not always truly *of or for it*.

A church for the city is about embodying a mission: becoming a church *not only in the city but for the city*. A church in the city

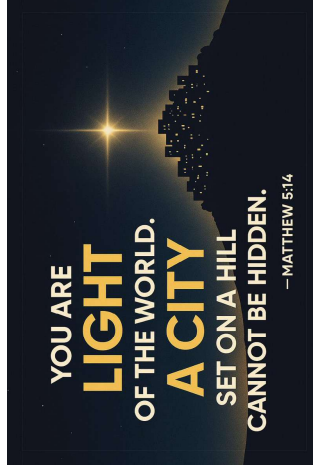
services remain the central focus, the life of the church is more than Sunday morning attendance.

Success is not just Sunday attendance — it is community transformation that builds bridges for sharing the Gospel.

A church for the city is a courageous commitment to

love for our neighbors. It mirrors how Christ loves us (MARK 12:30-31).

It requires humility, collaboration, and a willingness to share power and resources for mutually beneficial good. It



emphasizes that the health of the local church could be connected to the health of the local community

in the streets, schools, and city council chambers. The love once contained within four walls of the sanctuary becomes a powerful force of the Gospel that truly shapes the city.

A church for the city rather than simply in the city earns trust and credibility and opening doors for deeper spiritual conversations and relationships. These new connections are opportunities for sharing the good news of Jesus.

For more resources about becoming a church for your city please visit Learn About Your City at the FLGA District website at lfgadistrict.org/learn/

(JEREMIAH 29:7). When a church embraces its role as a spiritual and civic partner, a church for the city discovers that its most powerful sermons are sometimes lived out



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A CHURCH FOR THE CITY



“Every pastor is an interim pastor.”

Take a minute and let that settle in . . .

“Few pastors are eager to admit that their time with their present church will end one day. Planning for that day of succession may be the biggest leadership task a leader and church will ever face. It may also be the most important! Planning can — and should — start with pastors early in their tenure.” Those words from

transition well, to make it as seamless as possible for the ongoing momentum and future health of the ministry of the congregation. And that takes succession planning.

MALADY (the challenge)—A malady is an illness, like a malady that keeps you home, sick in bed for days, or something that causes you to have trouble or to suffer, like jet lag — a malady that affects travelers.

It is estimated that 52%

people are growing in Jesus and being used to draw others to Him; and then the pastor accepts a call, passes away, or retires.

The congregation takes a long time to find a replacement. When they do, the successor does not serve there very long. Worse, the ministry of the congregation is off kilter for a protracted amount of time; the “wind” comes out of its sails, and the ship of the church enters into the “ doldrums,” where

Passing the Baton in Pastoral Succession



William Vanderbloemen’s book “NEXT — Pastoral Succession That Works”, and other articles, struck a chord that led to a 10-year adventure of assisting the congregation where I had already served for 22 years. Let me set the context this way:

GOAL — Succession is defined as “The intentional process of the transfer of leadership, power, and authority from one directional leader to another.” It is to create a plan for what will happen when the congregation needs a new shepherd, and nearly every church will! So, the goal is to

of the clergy in The LCMS are over the age of 55 and the average tenure of serving at a congregation is nine years. In a congregation’s ministry with their pastor, it is easy to get lulled to sleep with the passing of time and start to subconsciously think, “Tomorrow will be like today, only more so.”

But the reality is, each day moves that ministry closer to the day that will be the last their pastor serves there. We are all familiar with the stories: a ministry is flourishing by God’s grace and blessing; pastor and

sometimes it never regains its former momentum and health.

MEANS — Scripture is the only source, rule, and norm for our faith and practice, for everything we believe, teach, and confess.

But the Scriptures do not offer a uniform blueprint for pastoral succession — there is no template, no step-by-step approach, there are no universal recommendations. Some say that succession is “more art than science,” meaning that the plan and details need to be tailored to each congregation and ministry setting. It is a deeply spiritual

process that calls for prayer and a recognition of God’s guidance, direction, and blessing.

The Saint Michael/Ft. Myers, FL Story — Our process of succession planning began 10 years out from what was envisioned as the date, God willing, of my retirement.

Let me break this down to steps:

First, succession planning was limited to the Board of Elders, once a year, and not shared publicly at that point, as we considered what process might serve the congregation best.

The entire Board read the book “Next” as well as other articles. Our thoughts were not only about the current ministry, but the future. It was decided that the transition should feel like a relay race exchange (like Moses to Joshua or Elijah to Elisha).

Second, after eight years, the Elders presented their thoughts to the Church Council to fund and begin meeting with a ministry consultant, a Clarity Navigator from Church Unique. This involved key leaders from the church and school working together to understand the unique culture of our ministry, our unique setting, the unique way we do ministry, and how we work together. That process also included presentations to the entire congregation.

Third, a ministry position description was developed,

highlighting the unique gifts, talents and experiences the next senior pastor would need in order to carry the ministry forward. The congregation was regularly updated and informed in worship, prayers about the process were also included each week, as well as newsletter articles of where we were in the process.

Fourth, nominations were received from the District President’s office, as well as from congregational members. The Board of Elders evaluated the 40 nominations, narrowed the list, and interviewed the top candidates. Two candidates were selected and invited to visit along with their spouse, to meet and interact with ministry staff, boards, leaders, and congregational members.

Fifth, after the initial visits, the congregation met to extend a call. An 18-day Scripture and prayer guide was shared; the called Pastor, spouse and family were invited to visit a second time. The first visit was for us to get to know them; once a call was in hand, it was their opportunity to make sure they knew us, Saint Michael.

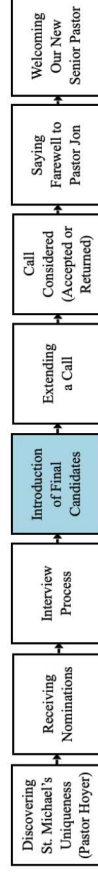
Sixth, speak to fear. When a ministry enters a time of pastoral succession, people can often feel anxious and uncertain

about the future. Jesus’ first disciples were often fearful, anxious and unsure even when Jesus was right there with them! So, we trust in God’s guidance and provision, knowing that God’s love will cast out our fears. Remind them that during this process, the mission and ministry of the church and school goes on.



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Just a final word about a baton pass — what a great visual to underscore our understanding of the public ministry of the Pastoral Office. On my last Sunday, there was a baton on the altar, which I handed to the congregational president — it was never my baton, nor was it mine to pass. On the installation of Pastor David Bass, that baton was handed to him by the congregational president. It is my hope that the process we used was as seamless as we could make it, but I can tell you — the wind of the Holy Spirit is still filling the sails and moving Saint Michael forward. We have a number of resources that can be shared. If interested, I invite you to contact me at: (239) 910-4978 or email me at jon56.zehnder@gmail.com. ■



The Mystery of Revitalization Part 2

The Bible speaks of the seed of the Word of God and of the Gospel. Then with joy we proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ every Lord's day, trusting "it will not

The second realm or circle in yellow we will call, "Growing People." We celebrate spiritual growth through the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the sacrament along with all forms of Bible Study in groups or individually. Yet we would all agree that growing people is more than just the attainment of knowledge. For example, Jesus

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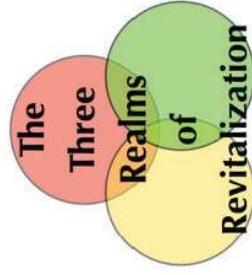
return empty" (Is 55:10) and God will bless the work. Yet we might still see attendance decline. We pray and we think about the parable of the sower, the seed and the soils. Then we rack our brains trying to figure out what's wrong or what's missing and what we can do about it.

In the last column we introduced five shifts in mindset, assumptions and behaviors that are necessary to move from declining to revitalization. In this column we will define the three realms.

In future columns we will provide more detail about living into the practices of the three realms more intentionally.

You will notice in the visual on this page, that three realms that are intersecting and work together. The first circle or realm in red or rose color is a "seaworthy" Gospel ship.

A ship is of course a metaphor used in the Bible to represent the church. So we adopt it with the point that it needs to be seaworthy. Wood alone can float on its own buoyancy and ships can have imperfections and holes in them. Yet planks or ships with holes are not going to travel well. So a functional gospel ship or church needs to at minimum be "seaworthy" and not shipwrecked (1 TIMOTHY 1:9).



through those often challenging relationships, we learn as they tell us, what would serve them, their friends and their network. This includes even enlisting them to participate in making it happen!

There are so many blessings that can result for all involved in this way the church's program steward's people's God given strengths to love those further from Jesus.

Clearly we are not talking silver bullets here. It is an intentional shift from the mindset and strategy of a "come and get it" ministry to seeking the "lost sheep" because "freely you have received, freely give." There are no strings attached! This is as Jesus instructed the twelve in MATTHEW 10:8. So keep an eye on this column as we continue together on this journey. We invite your emails with thoughts and ideas and stories of what God is doing.

The 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.

And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.

Matthew 10:7-8 KJV

Faith, Freedom, and the Classroom: What the Supreme Court's 2025 Decisions Mean for Us

Let's talk about something that might sound a little boring at first – the Supreme Court. Every year, the Supreme Court decides cases that affect how we live, what we believe, and how our schools operate.

In 2025, the Supreme Court made several big decisions about faith and education that matter for families, churches, and Christian schools like the ones connected to the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod.

The first case, *Mahmoud v. Taylor*, started when parents in Maryland said they did not want their children to take part in lessons about gender and sexuality that went against their family's faith. The school district said the children had to stay in those classes and that parents could not opt out. The parents went to court, saying they have the right to guide their children's moral and spiritual education.

The Supreme Court agreed with them. The justices said that parents have a constitutional right to direct how their children are taught on matters of faith and morality.

This is a big deal for Christian families and schools. It means the law recognizes that parents, not the government, have the main responsibility for teaching their children about right and wrong. For Lutheran schools, this case is a reminder to work closely with parents, be open about what is taught, and make sure no child is ever required to take part in something that goes against the family's beliefs.

Another case, *Catholic Charities Bureau v. Wisconsin*, focused on a church-run charity that helped anyone who needed it, not just members of its own faith. The state said the group

was not "religious enough" to get a tax benefit because it did not preach or try to convert people while it served them. The Supreme Court disagreed. The justices said that serving others out of love for God is an act of faith and deserves the same protection as any other religious work.

That ruling helps ministries like food pantries, centers, and counseling programs that serve their entire community. It confirms that helping everyone does not make a Christian ministry less religious. It actually shows faith in action.



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and uses the least restrictive method possible. The Court's discussion reminded everyone that RFRA is still a strong defense for churches and schools that face government pressure over faith-related issues.

FAITH AND FREEDOM CAN WORK TOGETHER, BUT ONLY IF WE DEFEND BOTH

All these decisions together teach an important lesson.

Religious Freedom in America is still protected, but it does not protect itself. Churches, ministries, and schools have to be careful, clear, and consistent about their beliefs. Parents and school leaders should review their policies, contracts, and partnerships to make sure nothing they sign or teach goes against their faith.

The Supreme Court's message is simple: faith and freedom can work together, but only if we defend both. When Lutheran schools and churches stay true to their mission, support parents, and serve their communities with love and integrity, they show the best of what religious freedom really means.

March 9-11, 2026

Veterans of the Cross Opens Registration on District Website

Registration is open for the annual Veterans of the Cross gathering in Titusville at the St. Stephen Christian Retreat and Conference Center. This event is open to all retired lay and

rostered Servants of Christ. "Plenty of rest, reflection, and replenishment await all attendees," Ruth Wiedenmann, chair of the VOC Committee, says.

"Participants are invited to come and enjoy the 'still waters' of the Indian River at the St. Stephen Christian Retreat and Conference Center in beautiful Titusville, near the Space Center. Troubling finances, looming medical difficulties, horrors of war, violence and unrest in the news, family stresses and demands, our own imperfections are towers of doom waiting to collapse," she continues. "But 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

building a future Kingdom where one day the chaos of life's worries will 'finally' be still, forever."

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 firsthand through the events surrounding the series of coordinated terrorist attacks resulting in the deaths of nearly 3,000 people.

Registration is open at www.lfgadistrict.org/voc/ and 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 Center," Wiedenmann concludes. "The facilities are clean and very accommodating. The food is abundant and the campus enables us to move from sessions to dining facilities to our private rooms with ease."



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

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

our private rooms with ease."



Veterans of the Cross • March 9-11, 2026 • Titusville, Florida

Jerry Kieschnick Joins PLI as Ambassador

The Rev. Dr. Gerald B. "Jerry" Kieschnick, former President of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) has been appointed Presidential Ambassador for the Pastoral Leadership Institute (PLI).

In this role, he will connect with people and invite them to partner with PLI in its mission to train and multiply leaders for kingdom impact.

He served three terms as President of the LCMS, from 2001 to 2010, before being defeated by Matthew Harrison. His tenure included leading the church body through the challenges following the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Before his national LCMS presidency, Kieschnick was the President of the LCMS Texas District for ten years, from 1991 to 2001. He also pastored several congregations in Mississippi and Texas earlier in his career.

His time as LCMS president was marked by some internal controversy. He received criticism for supporting The Rev. Dr. David Benke's participation in an interfaith service at Yankee Stadium after the 9/11 attacks, with some opponents accusing him of promoting syncretism.

Together, Kieschnick and Benke will be keynote speakers at the Florida-Georgia District's annual Veterans of the Cross Gathering, held in Titusville, FL in March.

Following his LCMS presidency, Kieschnick was involved in other ministries, including returning to the Lutheran Foundation of Texas (later renamed Legacy Deo) in 2016. He has been a guest on podcasts discussing his leadership experiences in the LCMS. In 2010, he authored a book about the LCMS titled *Waking the Sleeping Giant*.

His return to prominent national ministry after a 14-year absence from the highest levels

brand of Ben & Jerry's – a multinational ice cream company known for its unique flavors, its progressive social mission, and its unconventional history.

Haupt was appointed PLI's Global Executive Director in 2024. Prior to that Haupt served as Associate Provost and Associate Professor of Practical Theology at



and mission work to the position, including serving in a similar "Presidential Ambassador for Mission Advancement" role at Concordia University/Texas and as CEO of the Lutheran foundation Legacy Deo.

Kieschnick's long history as the national President and a District President provides him with extensive connections throughout the Lutheran community. These relationships will be valuable for advancing PLI's network and mission. Kieschnick is known for his outward-focused vision for ministry, emphasizing evangelism and church planting. This aligns with PLI's stated goal of training and multiplying leaders for kingdom impact. The PLI role allows him to continue this passion.

To announce his ambassadorship, the Rev. Dr. Ben Haupt joined with Kieschnick in a humorous video playing off the ice cream

Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO. He has also served as a pastor for St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL, and Good Shepherd/Gainesville, GA.

Interests: His interests include the history of the early Christian church, the intersection of faith and society, and pastoral and congregational leadership.

Having joined PLI in 2024, Haupt is tasked with building on the organization's legacy while developing a "fresh vision" and "dreaming new dreams" to expand its impact. In a video message, he shared his excitement about how God is leading PLI in this new season. His goal is to train 100,000 leaders by 2030 to connect many more people to Jesus. His focus on innovation and adapting the curriculum to modern challenges helps ensure the training remains effective.

Lutheran Federal Credit Celebrates First Decade



Amanda Walker, Lutheran Federal Credit Union president and CEO, is pictured with the Rev. J. Bart Day, president and CEO of Lutheran Church Extension Fund, during a 10th-anniversary celebration for LutheranFCU.

This past spring, Lutheran Federal Credit Union celebrated their 10th anniversary with an event at the Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) office in St. Louis, MO. LCEF was instrumental in helping launch the credit union a decade ago.

"We would not be here today without the faith, investment and commitment of LCEF," said Amanda Walker, LutheranFCU president and CEO. "Their belief in our mission made it possible for us to serve the financial needs of the LCMS community in a way that aligns with our shared values. We're proud of what we've accomplished together, and we're excited for what lies ahead."

"It is wonderful to see how the Lord continues to bless the faithful work of visionaries who saw the value of a credit union," said the Rev. J. Bart Day, LCEF president and CEO. "We will stand alongside to support the reach and impact LutheranFCU can make for generations to come."

As LutheranFCU looks to the future, the credit union remains committed to providing accessible, Christ-centered financial services tailored to the unique needs of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) community.

"We are incredibly blessed to serve our members and continue building on the strong foundation laid 10 years ago," said the Rev. Tom Schlund, Synod relations and marketing coordinator for LutheranFCU.

The LFCU is specifically designed for individuals, families, pastors, teachers, staff, and members across the LCMS community, including congregations, schools, districts, and synod-wide organizations. It offers a wide range of services, including checking and savings

accounts, loans (auto, personal, home), credit cards, online/mobile banking, and financial tools for both individuals and ministries.

By banking with LFCU, members invest in something greater, as the credit union's growth and operations directly support the LCMS community through various forms of giving back, helping to build a stronger church community. As a not-for-profit financial cooperative, it aims to provide competitive rates, lower fees than most traditional banks, and high-quality customer service, focusing on what is best for the membership rather than outside stockholders.

Their mortgage loans are available to all LFCU members for purchasing or refinancing a primary residence through a conventional mortgage. They also offer RCW Mortgage Loans (for rostered church workers) — a

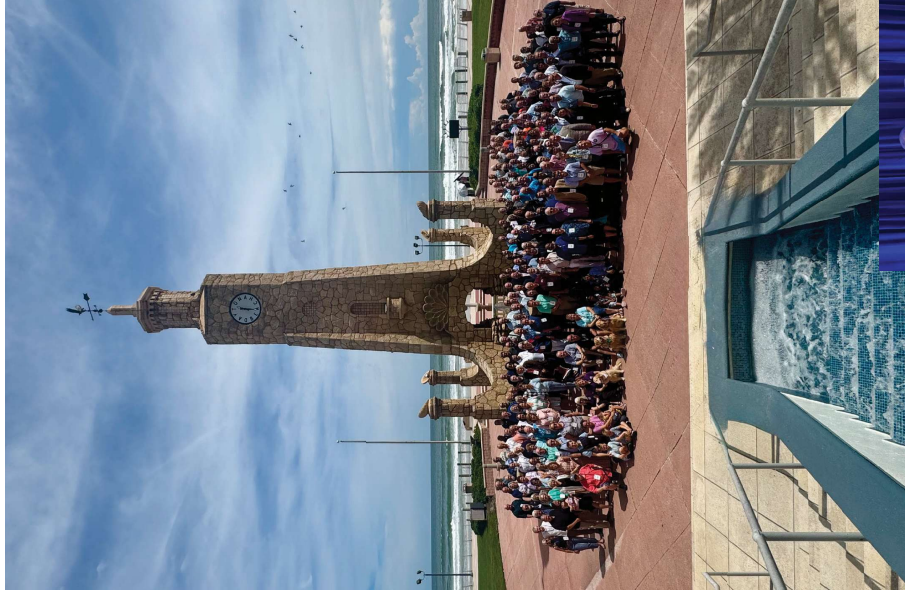
specialized program offered in certain states featuring benefits such as low down payment options, no private mortgage insurance (PMI) required, and an understanding of housing allowances as qualifying income.

In addition to mortgages, LFCU offers home equity loans — allowing members to borrow against the equity in their home for various large expenses.

Other services include motorcycle loans, consolidation loans to consolidate existing debt balances into a single payment.

As of November 2025, Lutheran Federal Credit Union auto loan rates start as low as 4.44% annual percentage rate (APR) for qualified borrowers. This is available for vehicles up to ten years old, with terms and rates varying. Motorcycle loans are currently starting at 5.80% APR.

District Pastors Convene in Daytona Beach



The 2025 Florida-Georgia (FLGA) District LCMS Annual Pastors Conference was held from September 22-24, 2025, at the Hilton Daytona Beach in Daytona Beach, FL. The conference theme was "Rivers through the Rubble: Thirsting for More in a Broken World" based on JOHN 7:37b-38.

Keynote speakers included Rev. Dr. Scott Rische, a pastor and missionary, and Rev. Dr. Bob Newton. Rische is a pastor and missionary who currently serves as the International Director for the Pastoral Leadership Institute (PLI), an organization that coordinates Christian leadership training in more than 22 countries. Newton was elected President of the California-Nevada-Hawaii (CNH) District of the LCMS in 2003 and served until his retirement in 2018. Newton and his family served as evangelistic missionaries in the Philippines from 1977 to 1983, where he planted new churches and trained local leaders. He also spent a sabbatical year (1996-1997) serving the church in Papua New Guinea.

In addition to worship, the conference included morning presentations and roundtable discussions plus multiple breakout sessions in the afternoon. A special luncheon and gathering time were also available for pastors' wives.

An anniversary celebration and closing worship service with Holy Communion concluded on Wednesday.

The 2026-2028 Pastoral Conference Committee was announced. The Revs. from each region are: Region 1—Tim Davis; Region 2—Mike Popp; Region 3—Ron Pennekamp; Region 4—Brian Tolarczyk; Region 5—Deon Hull.

Attendees at the District Pastors Conference gathered at the Tower Clock for a group photo with the Lutheran Church Charities Comfort Dogs.

At right — District President, The Rev. James Rockey, recognizes Kathy Keene, his executive assistant, who is retiring. She held the role since 2012.



FLORIDA GEORGIA

Out and About in the District

Plant City Welcomes New Members



The first Sunday in October, **Hope/Plant City, FL**, welcomed new members (from left) Cindy & Jeff McClure, Levi, Ethan, Dan, Adelyn and Hannah Slimer. They are pictured with Hope's Senior Pastor, The Rev. Dean Pfeiffer.



On September 14, 2025 Hope/Jacksonville, FL, celebrated their 10th anniversary with Reverend Patrick McKenzie and President James Rockey.



On Sunday, October 12th, members of Christ Our Savior/Griffin, GA expressed their love and appreciation for Pastor Joe and Deaconess Kate Warnke. After the morning worship service the Warnke family was presented with an Annual Family Pass to Gatorland Amusement park! Deaconess Kate quipped "We'll be visiting another congregation next year!" Pastor Joe then explained a group of birds are a flock, fish are a school, whales are a pod, and ALLIGATORS are called a CONGREGATION. A reception followed with cake and fellowship before Sunday school.



St. Paul/Boca Raton Utilitizes New Athletic Field, Hosts Florida Lutheran Athletic Association State Soccer Tournament

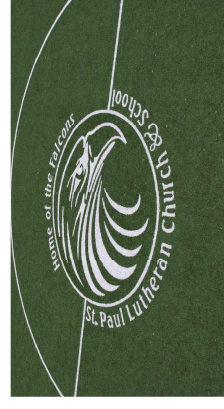


Thanks to more than 125 donors, **St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL's** new field turf is complete. According to The Rev. Steve Carretto, the field will be used daily for school use. "This fall season also brought fans, families, and teams together during the varsity and junior varsity soccer seasons and kicked off the FLAA 2025 State Soccer Tournament," he illustrates.

The La Liga Field Turf was phase one of St. Paul's Forward Together campaign, ensuring longevity in the facilities and grounds. "What a blessing it was this fall season to have our home soccer games on our campus," Carretto continues. "It brought out our staff out together with the families and it brought community onto our campus. It also was a witness to our other teams who participated in the tournaments to see how well we do things here."

of excellence with how we treat our property. It looks great! "A huge thank you towards people, all donors, being able to make the first phase a possibility of continuing to move forward together in excellence in ministry," Carretto concludes.

While this is phase one — there is also a phase two — which is a bigger project. A committee has formed to reinvestigate phase two and the future of the facilities here at St. Paul, continuing its tradition of excellence in



"It has that level of excellence for our extracurriculars, it has that level of excellence for being so consistent for our Physical Education and recess," says Pastor Steve. "It also has that consistency

Lakeside/Venice Announces Sacred Music Concert Season

Under new Minister of

Music, Dr. John Behnke,

Lakeside/Venice, FL will

be offering a Sacred Music

Concert Series of seven events

through March, 2026. Behnke

is a graduate of Concordia/

River Forest, IL, and earned his

Master of Music and Doctor of

Music degrees in Church Music

and Organ from Northwestern

University. He also studied

at the Westphalian Church

Music Institute in Germany.

He served as a Professor of

Music at Concordia University/

Wisconsin in Mequon for 29

years. From 1986 until his

retirement in 2015, He taught

organ and church music and

founded and directed the

touring handbell ensemble, The

Alleluia Ringers. From 1990 to

2019, he was the organist and

choir director at Historic Trinity

Evangelical Lutheran Church

in downtown Milwaukee,

Wisconsin.

Friday, November 21

On November 21, Dr. Behnke

will present a Thanksgiving-

themed Organ Concert

beginning at 7 p.m.

Sunday, Dec. 21, at 4 pm

is an Advent/Christmas Carol

Concert with bells, choir, and

singing.

Friday, January 16

Kicking off 2026, on January

16, at 7 pm Organist, Dr. James

Guyver will be featured. Guyver

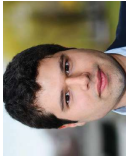
is a Florida-based organist

and church musician known

for his work as a performer



Guyver



Bodnyk



Benedum



Siebecker

and choirmaster, and he holds

advanced degrees in music and organ

performance. Guyver has performed in

various notable venues across South

Florida, particularly in the Sarasota

and Fort Pierce areas where he has

held positions as an organist and

choirmaster

Friday, February 13

February 13, Tenor Soloist,

Michael Bodnyk will perform at 7 pm.

Bodnyk is an accomplished musician,

and music director, known for his

performances in both sacred and

classical music. He has appeared

in major venues and serves as the

Minister of Music at St. Armands

Key Lutheran Church in Sarasota,

Florida. He was instrumental in the

congregation's project to install a new

custom pipe organ in 2025. He is also

co-executive director of arts at Camp

Rhythm, a musical theater day camp

in Sarasota.

Wednesday, March 4

Wednesday, March 4, at 4:30

pm, Organist, Dr. Richard Benedum

will present a 30-minute pre-service

recital with a 5 pm Lenten worship

immediately following. Then at 6 pm a

Lenten Dinner will be served.

Benedum is an organist, conductor,

music educator, and church musician,

now residing in Venice, Florida. His

career spans academic positions

and extensive work in liturgical and

concert music. He was a Professor of

Music at the University of Dayton in

Ohio and served as the department

chair for several years. He also taught

summer institutes on topics like

"Mozart's German Operas in Context,"

supported by the National Endowment

for the Humanities.

Northeast Georgia Circuit Hosts Nicene Creed Seminar

Approximately 100 people

gathered at **St. Peter/Dahlonega,**

GA October 11, 2025 to participate

in the seminar, "The Early Church's

Creed Still Speaks and Shapes Us."

According to organizers, the

event sought to take notice of

the Council of Nicaea's 1700th

anniversary to explore and

discover anew the relevance and

ongoing significance of the Nicene

Creed which we confess in many

of our worship services.

Sponsored by the Northeast

Georgia Circuit of the Florida-

Georgia District, the seminar

featured The Rev. Dr. David

Maxwell, Professor of Doctrinal

Theology at Concordia Seminary,

St. Louis, who gave six 15-minute

presentations on the Nicene Creed.

"Each of Dr. Maxwell's

presentations was followed

by 15 minutes of discussion.

Participants were seated at

12 tables for discussion and

exploration of the questions posed

by Dr. Maxwell. They were also

challenged to discern how the

Creed really speaks and applies

to us today," explains The Rev.

Dr. Gerhard Michael, one of the

seminar organizers and President

Emeritus of the FLGA District.

"Facilitators at each table helped

the conversations remain focused

and lively."

Dr. Maxwell assisted attendees

in learning how the Creed

confesses that Jesus is truly

God and fully human with His

incarnation, a truth that cannot

be compromised, because what

He did was "for us and for our

salvation." This became the

interpretative key which enabled

Athanasius to counter Arius' false

claims that Jesus was less than

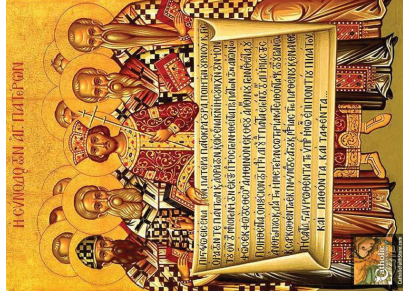
God in the full sense of the word.

In addition, Professor Maxwell

explained how the controversy

arose in part over the effort

of the church to communicate



the Gospel in a context that had

been significantly influenced by

Greek culture – especially Greek

philosophy as expressed by Plato

and Aristotle, and consequently

quite different than the Hebrew

culture of the Bible. How does

one uphold the oneness of God, as

taught in the Scripture, when Jesus

is also presented as the Lord? We

can't portray God and Jesus as two

Gods, for that would be polytheism,

equaling idolatry. That was their

challenge.

"In light of that, Dr. Maxwell

raised the question, "What is the

culture of our day to which we are

called to communicate the Gospel?

We want to get its message

through to the people of our day

without contradicting or obscuring

its content," Dr. Michael continues.

"More than likely it's different than

that of the Greek philosophers –

and different than that of the Jews

and Gentiles of Bible times. How

do we remain faithful to the God

who is revealed there and yet are

effective in communicating the

goodness of the news (= Gospel)

to the people of the 21st century,

whether they are new immigrants

or have been living here a long

time? What does it mean to

The event began with



David
Maxwell

registration at 8:15 A.M. The actual

sessions ran from 9 A.M. to 2:30

P.M. including time for a break

and lunch during the noon hour.

Opening devotions were led by

Pastor Michael, who is also Pastor

Emeritus at St. Peter, and closing

devotions by their current Pastor

Charles Kanefke. The event was

funded by a \$15 registration fee,

supported with a grant from the NE

GA circuit, and a Thrivent Action

Team grant, and hosted by St.

Peter Lutheran Church in their new

Ministry Center.

For a recording of Dr. Maxwell's

presentations: [www.youtube.com/](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBPvXpqbYUw)

[watch?v=EBPvXpqbYUw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBPvXpqbYUw).

Habitat for Children Ministries Announces 2026 Goals

For the past 19 years, **Habitat For Children Ministries** has been a beacon of hope for countless children in Haiti, faithfully providing essential school supplies to those in greatest need.

Each year, the organization has worked tirelessly to ensure that underserved students, many of whom face extreme poverty, receive the tools they need to pursue an education and build a brighter future. From backpacks and notebooks to pencils and uniforms, these supplies have helped break down barriers to learning and inspired children to dream beyond their circumstances. Habitat For Children Ministries continues to make a lasting impact, one child and school year at a time.

"For the past several years, Habitat Care Center has been a vital source of medical support for the most vulnerable children in Haiti," Meschac St. Amour, the organization's President offers. "Through its unwavering

commitment, the center has provided essential medical supplies, such as first aid kits, hygiene products, over-the-counter medications, and nutritional supplements, to children living in extreme poverty and underserved communities. These efforts have helped improve health outcomes, prevent illness, and offer hope to families with limited access to healthcare. Habitat Care Center continues to stand as a pillar of compassion and care, making a meaningful difference in the lives of Haiti's children.

our core ministries:

- Education Support: Providing school supplies, tuition assistance, and learning resources to empower young minds.
- Medical & Dental Outreach: Advancing the construction and operation of our Pediatric Clinic and Maternity Center in La Jeune, Haiti.
- Food & Clothing Distribution: Ensuring children and families have access to daily essentials and dignity.
- Spiritual Development: Sharing the love of Christ through Bible studies, prayer groups, and community worship.

We believe that God can do anything in His time. Our plans are bold, but our faith is stronger. As we walk in obedience, we trust that He will open doors, provide resources, and touch hearts, just as He always has.

And being fully assured that what He had promised, He was also able to perform", This highlights Abraham's complete confidence in God's ability to fulfill His promises and we know He will do the same for us.

Together, with your prayers and support, we will continue to be His hands and feet in the places that need Him most.
Information: www.hfcm.info



BACK TO SCHOOL SUPPLIES NEEDED

Please make donation or inquiries with
Meschac St Amour, President

WHAT IS THE NEED

- ☒ Backpacks
- ☒ Pencils
- ☒ Pens
- ☒ Crayons
- ☒ Markers
- ☒ Erasers
- ☒ Lined Paper
- ☒ Copy Paper
- ☒ Construction Paper
- ☒ Notebooks
- ☒ Calculators
- ☒ Scissors
- ☒ Financial Contributors

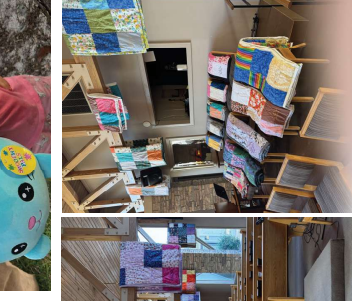
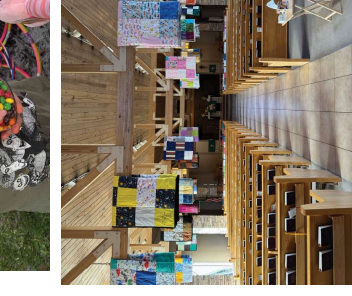
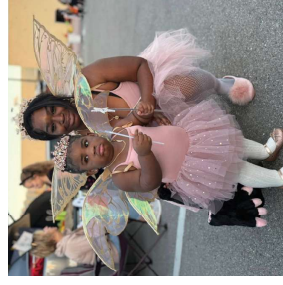
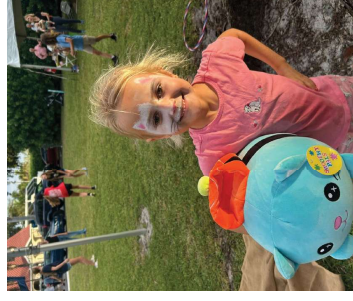
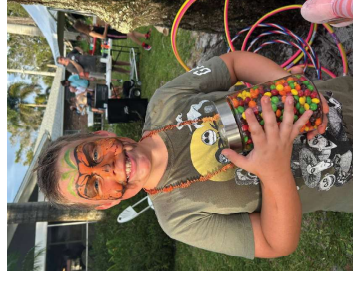
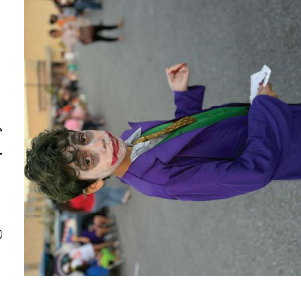
ABOUT US:
Habitat For Children Ministries, Inc is a 501(c)(3) non-profit Christian organization that seeks to build hope and inspire Haitian children through education and health care.
WWW.HABITATFORCHILDRENMINISTRIES.ORG

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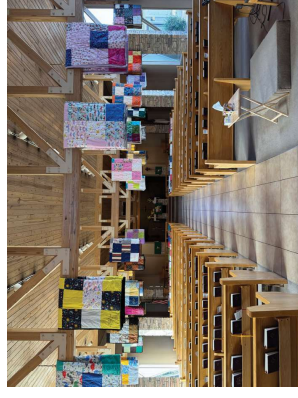
Grace/Naples, FL celebrated Oktoberfest this past month with a picnic that included face-painting, sack races and lots of good food and fellowship. The four photos at right show some of the happy participants.



Grace/Winter Haven, FL enjoyed a spirited Trunk or Treat event on Saturday, November 1st on their campus. The Trunk or Treat displays overflowed with creativity. As you can see in the photos below, participants enjoyed a huge range of fun-from fruit stands and super heroes being beams up by aliens



This year the "Sew and Sows" of **Trinity/Athens, GA** made a total of 97 quilts. There were 20 small lap quilts that were given to the Loran Smith Cancer Center for their patients and the remaining larger quilts will be given to Family Promise, a missionary group from Ecuador that serves homeless students, along with local homeless shelters. During the year the Sew and Sows have been quilting, more than 1,000 have been distributed. The quilts were blessed and dedicated at the November 12, 2025 worship service.



This past October, **Timothy/Woodstock, GA** conducted their annual Trunk and Treat with 28 car trunks decorated by congregational members and preschool families. Around 150 children attended and received plenty of treats and thanks to Thrivent Action Team funds the costumed kids received complimentary ice cream. Families attending the Trunk and Treats also brought canned goods for the church Food Bank. One trunk was decorated to promote the church's June 2026 VBS program. Most of the trunks depicted fall themes along with one trunk designed like a McDonalds Drive Thru handing out happy meals.



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- ✓ Community Building
- ✓ Constituent Support

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St. Paul/Lakeland Celebrating 30 Baptisms



So far this year **St. Paul/Lakeland, FL** is celebrating 30

baptisms. From infants to entire families, each baptism reminds us of the incredible work God is doing in our church community.

"At St. Paul, baptism is at the heart of who we are. We believe it is God's gift of grace, where He forgives sins, gives faith, and brings us into His family through water and the Word. Each time someone steps to the font, we witness God's promise in action.

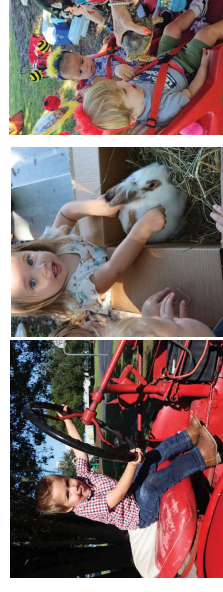
We give thanks for every person who has received this gift at St. Paul and for the faith God continues to grow in each of them. To God be the glory for every new life in Christ," Senior Pastor Andy Ritchie says.

St. Paul's Early Learning Center Hosts Farm Day

The students in **St. Paul/Lakeland's Early Learning Center** had an unforgettable day as the farm came to them for Farm Day. From their youngest 15-month-olds to our energetic Pre-K 4 students, everyone enjoyed meeting and learning about a wide variety of animals up close.

The children were all smiles as they got to view and pet animals like turtles, turkeys, pigs, horses, dogs, and chickens on leashes. Their excitement and laughter filled the air as they explored, asked questions, and discovered new favorites among their furry and feathered guests.

"Days like this remind us just how fun hands-on learning can be. We are so grateful to our teachers and volunteers who made this day possible and to the visiting friends who brought their animals to share with our students. It was a wonderful way to celebrate curiosity, nature, and God's amazing creation," offers Dr. Kelly Ogilaloro, Assistant Principal and Early Childhood Director.



First/Clearwater Hosts Spirit Night



A "Spirit Night" is a restaurant fundraiser where a percentage of sales generated during a specific time period are donated back to the partnering organization — which

in this case was **First Lutheran Church and School/Clearwater, FL**. Guests mention they are there for the First Lutheran fundraiser so that the school can receive credit for the purchase.

This was a preview for an event First has coming up on February 9, 2026 — Flame Night! It will also be held at Chick-fil-A.

Messiah/Valdosta Hosts UGA and FSU Students



Pastor Greg Michael/Christus Victor UGA at left. Pastor Jay Winters/University FSU at right. Pastor Stephen Wareham and the student retreat team.

The University of Georgia group with **Christus Victor/Athens, GA** and Student Center and the group from Florida State University with **University/Tallahassee, FL** and Student Center visited **Messiah/Valdosta, GA** for a weekend "Service Retreat." The students had times of fellowship and worship, and also completed several service projects for the members and neighbors of Messiah. They stayed in the congregation's fellowship hall and enjoyed a home cooked breakfast with Pastor Stephan Wareham and Messiah's Elders. "We were also blessed to have them join us for Bible study and worship on Sunday. We are looking forward to their next visit," Wareham said.

Hope/Hudson Celebrates Golden 50th Anniversary

In 1975, **Faith Lutheran Church of New Port Richey, Florida** initiated plans to establish a mission church in the Hudson area. The first worship service was held on September 8, 1975, at North Funeral Home in Hudson, Florida, led by Pastor Roy Lidbom.

Jump ahead and now **Hope Lutheran, Hudson, FL** celebrated 50 years of God's grace September 28th with a celebratory worship service followed by a banquet at Spartan Manor in New Port Richey.

A special slide presentation with pictures from the beginning at the funeral home, to the breaking of the ground, placing of the cornerstone and many events in between until present day was shown pre-service and at the banquet. It was a joyous celebration for all.



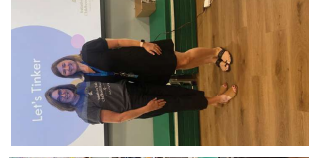
Participating clergy (from left) are The Revs. Richard Arndt, James Rockey, James Zang, David Brockhoff, Robert Steinke, Kent Fuqua.



The staff of the Early Learning Center at **Amazing Grace/Oxford, FL** enjoyed a wonderful "Professional Development Day" with Dr. Annette Anschutz from Concordia University, Nebraska.

It was a fun day filled with learning, tinkering, and new ideas. We are grateful for opportunities like this to grow together as educators—because the more we learn, the more we can bring to the children each day.

"We are thankful for Dr. Anschutz's time, her wisdom, and the joy she shared with our team," offers Aimee Knoepfel, Director of Amazing Grace Early Learning Center. "Here's to continuing to learn and grow for the sake of the kids we love!"



Redeeming Life Sunday Celebrated in

Redeeming Life Outreach Ministries/Sanford, FL celebrated its very first RLOM Sunday this year in the congregation where this ministry began in 2013—Lutheran Church of the Redeemer. The Rev. Ed DeWitt and the entire congregation welcomed women and children who have called the RLOM maternity house their home for a special worship service and lunch reception afterwards in their fellowship hall. Executive Director Sheryl DeWitt was thrilled to see women and their growing children doing so well after leaving the maternity home.

Staff members and past staff members were on hand to welcome everyone and to reconnect. Congregation members greeted guests and exclaimed over how big the children had grown, children they remember fondly as babies in their mothers' arms. New family members have been added as well, with several women

carrying new little siblings, and one woman who attended with her husband and children. It was easy to see the pride and joy shining through as the group posed for a big photo.

The day was made all the more special when one of the former residents reached out to Pastor DeWitt asking if he could baptize her two youngest children that morning, delighting both pastor and staff. "What an amazing way to celebrate the life-affirming ministry of Redeeming Life with the baptism of two new members of God's family," said one staff member. "We often say RLOM offers a home, help, and hope. That hope we have as God's own dearly loved children, baptized into the family in Christ, is our highest aim as we serve. We were thrilled that God brought us together to celebrate the ministry and added two very special baptisms!"



Sheryl DeWitt



Sanford at Founding Congregation

Redeeming Life Outreach Ministries opened a maternity home in Sanford, FL in 2013 and added a transition home several years later. In 2024, a new maternity home was opened in East Dundee, IL, which has already hosted eight women in just the first year. Plans are underway to launch a new RLOM maternity home in St. Louis soon. Congregations are welcome to hold their own RLOM Sundays or other events in support of the ministry. For more information and to get involved with this vital ministry, please visit www.rlom.org or email info@rlom.org.



Redeeming Life Expands to Chicagoland

Redeeming Life Outreach Ministries/Sanford, FL opened a second Christ-centered maternity home in the Chicagoland area in 2024. The maternity home is a result of the partnership between Redeeming Life, the NID Maternity Home Steering Committee, and Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF).

Redeeming Life's first maternity home opened in November 2013 in Sanford, Florida. The second maternity home is a

former parsonage adjacent to Faith Lutheran Church, Carpentersville, IL, in the Northern Illinois District (NID). The residents and staff of Redeeming Life will receive spiritual care from their host church, Immanuel Lutheran in East Dundee, Illinois.

The need for a new maternity home in Illinois is great because Illinois has aggressive abortion laws. Redeeming Life's goal is to provide an alternative to abortion and to redeem the lives of single

mothers and their unborn children by providing hope, love, and a future while sharing the Gospel of Christ.

The women have opportunities for growth in their relationship with their Savior, as well as career, parenting, and life skills education. These women are often at-risk of homelessness, domestic violence, or choosing abortion. As a life-affirming ministry, Redeeming Life supports mothers whether they choose to parent or place their baby for adoption.

First/Clearwater Celebrates Golden Anniversary

First Lutheran School/

Clearwater, FL has marked a remarkable milestone — 50 years of enriching lives! In 1975, the men and women of the congregation felt the need to establish a Lutheran school to provide for the spiritual needs of the children in the congregation, to spread the Gospel in Clearwater, and to pass on their faith to future generations.

After some debate about selling the five acres of the grapefruit grove on the corner of Nursery Road and Lake Street, they decided to keep the land. The result was that by the grace and blessing of God, the members of

First Lutheran started a Christian Day School.

Reflecting on the countless blessings and opportunities that have shaped the community,

First Lutheran celebrated its 50th anniversary with a dinner and trivia night on September 19 and a celebration worship service and reception, followed by school tours on September 21.

Highlights of the celebration worship were a video message from Mrs. Sandy Jungkuntz, a member of the first First Lutheran graduating class, and its Valedictorian. Current students also serenaded the attendees



The celebrations included a special worship service led by Pastor Andrew Apple with students singing and a reception in the fellowship hall following.

Frozen Musical Presented in Lakeland

This past October **St. Paul/Lakeland, FL** brought Frozen Jr. to life in the sanctuary with a week full of music, laughter, and memorable performances. The stage transformed into a winter wonderland as students shared their talents and told the story of Elsa, Anna, and the magic of Arendelle.

The excitement began with a Pre-K Sing-Along that melted hearts across the room. "Our youngest students sang their favorite Frozen songs with big smiles and even bigger enthusiasm," states Dr. Kelly Ogilaloro, Assistant Principal and Early Childhood Director. "Their energy and joy set the perfect tone for the rest of the week."

The school performance followed, giving classmates and teachers the chance to cheer on their friends. The sanctuary was filled with excitement as students watched their peers perform. Every song, line, and dance showed how much effort and heart went into preparing for the big day.

Two evening performances brought families, friends, and church members together for an unforgettable experience. From "Do You Want to Build a Snowman" to "Let It Go," every moment sparked with talent and teamwork. The beautiful set design, creative costumes, and lighting made it easy to imagine the sanctuary as the kingdom of Arendelle.

The production of Frozen Jr. was truly a team effort. Teachers, parents, and volunteers worked alongside students to bring every detail together. More than just a show, it was a celebration of creativity, community, and the joy that comes from working toward something special together.

As the curtain closed and the final bows were taken, one thing was clear, St. Paul Lutheran School's Frozen Jr. wasn't just about performing a story. It was about building confidence, sharing gifts, and reminding everyone that with love and teamwork, even the coldest days can warm the heart.



St. Paul/Boca Seventh Graders Retreat to Lutherock

St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL 7th graders enjoyed a trip to Camp Lutherock in the mountains of North Carolina. Lutherock Camp and Conference Center is located on the south slope of Sugar Mountain near Boone, North Carolina and boasts a 750-acre campus offering a range of outdoor adventures and programs year-round.

The students visited Grandfather Mountain, an iconic, privately-owned nature park and a North Carolina state park located in the Blue Ridge Mountains near Linville, North Carolina. Known for its rugged beauty, extreme weather, and rich biodiversity, it is one of the Southeast's most popular attractions.



Pastor Jacob Scheler leads the students through a study.



Above — St. Paul students perform a team-building activity. At right, they visited Grandfather Mountain on a very chilly and foggy day.



Rev. John R. Kyle was installed November 2, 2025 at **Our Savior Lutheran Church, Zephyrhills, FL**. Participating clergy (from left) are Vicar Stephen Moore, and The Revs. Steven Braun, Kevin Loughran, Bill Whitehead, Tom Block, John Kyle, J.R. Reinke, Chris Hazzard, Dean Pfeiffer, Ron Pennekamp, Charles Reich and Ken Redmann.



Our Redeemer/Jacksonville, FL recently celebrated their 65th Anniversary. They hosted the Circuit Reformation Service held also at Our Redeemer on 10/26/25. Above are participating clergy, front row from left — Vicar Caleb Gustafson with The Revs. Adam Gray, Leon Roberts, Logan Landes, Frank Marshall, President James Rockey, Peter Hoffman. Back row from left, The Revs. Nathan McCarty, Michael Popp, Jonathan Rockey and Bill Reister.

Our Redeemer/Jacksonville Celebrates 65th Anniversary



Our Redeemer/Jacksonville, FL

celebrated their 65th anniversary in a morning worship and then later that afternoon hosted the "First Coast" Circuit Six Reformation Service. The day served as a homecoming – an opportunity to welcome former members and friends. The message was delivered by The Rev. Jonathan Rockey, who was the pastor of Our Redeemer from 1983 to 1991. Pastor and Kathy Rockey traveled from their home in Alaska to participate.

The 4:00 p.m. service had more than a dozen clergy participate. Special music included choirs. The Gospel was read by Pastor Jonathan Rockey's brother, FLGA District President, The Rev. James Rockey.

Following worship at 5:30 p.m. a barbeque dinner was served in the fellowship hall.



Pastor Frank and Rebecca Marshall.



Rev. Jonathan and Kathy Rockey;
Rev. William and Susan Reister.



Martha and President James
Rockey (front) and Kathy and
Pastor Jonathan Rockey (back).

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Fourth Oktoberfest a Success at St. Paul/Weston



St. Paul/Weston, FL hosted their 4th Annual Oktoberfest with brats and beer and a lively Oompah band, plus fellowship with the church and school family and friends. At right, above, Pastor Scott Henze dances with one of the young Frauleins.

The event serves as a welcoming point of contact for the wider Weston community, inviting non-members to experience the church's community and hospitality in a fun, casual setting. It also supports the church's stated mission of strengthening families in the diverse Weston community by bringing people together for an evening of shared celebration.



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Winter Haven Circuit Congregations Celebrate Mass Reformation Worship

On Sunday, October 26th the congregations of the Florida-Georgia District's Winter Haven Circuit gathered for their annual Reformation Celebration. It took place at **St. Paul/Lakeland, FL** under the leadership of host pastors The Revs. Andy Ritchie and Ken Sherman.

A mass choir composed of members and musicians of Circuit congregations added to the worship experience. The guest proclaimer that afternoon was former District 1st Vice President Rev. Dr. Victor Belton.

As members gathered together, they heard a stirring sermon by Belton based on REVELATION 14:6-7. Belton reminded us that the eternal Gospel is ours to proclaim still today and it is our responsibility to carry that Gospel to every tribe and nation, people and language to the ends of the earth beginning in our own communities.



Participating clergy were: (front row left-right) The Revs. Ken Sherman, Charles Reich, Christopher Hazzard, Bill Whitehead, Victor Belton, Andy Ritchie. (Back row left-right) Jonathan Horsmann, Steven Braun, Dean Pfeiffer, Vicar Stephen Moore, Brian Kneser, and Tom Block.



STUDENT LOAN REPAYMENT PROGRAM

The Florida-Georgia District, LCMS

The Student Loan Repayment Program provides grants to current rostered church workers, both full and part-time, to help repay college and/or seminary education loans. Grants will be awarded based on need, an individual's personal financial contributions and commitments, special circumstances, and availability of funds. The minimum debt balance eligible for a grant is \$4,000.00. Applications will be accepted through November 26, 2025. For more information: lzibel@figadistrict.org.

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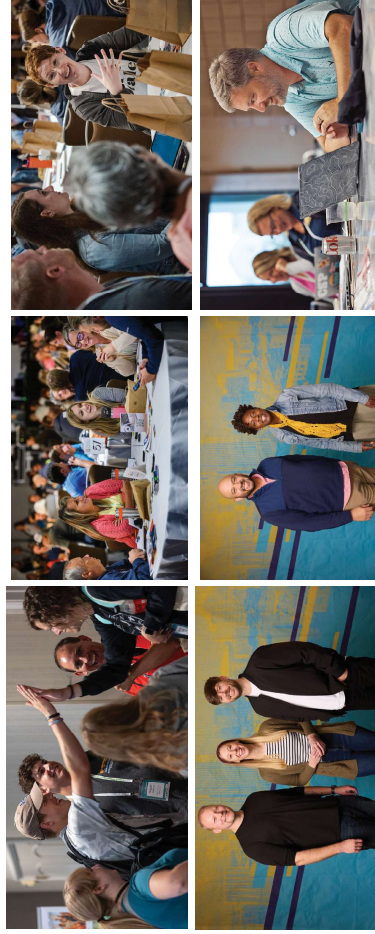


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National Lutheran Youth Workers Conference Announced



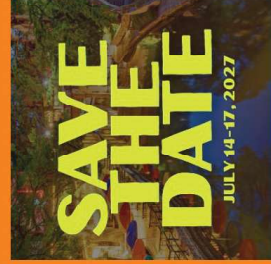
LCMS Youth Ministry Update

Mark your calendars! The **National Lutheran Youth Workers Conference** (NATIONAL27) will take place **July 14–17, 2027**, at the **InterContinental San Antonio Riverwalk Hotel** in San Antonio, Texas.

NATIONAL is a standalone **youth ministry practitioner conference** that equips and encourages youth workers and Adult Leaders from across the country. It's a time to connect, learn, and grow in your calling to serve the next generation.

Adult participants will receive a transferable, complimentary registration to the 2028 LCMS Youth Gathering, and there will also be opportunities for high school students to participate in **YouthLead** training (*Please note, YouthLead training spots will be extremely limited*).

Registration for **NATIONAL27** will open in **Summer 2026**.



Save the Date for NATIONAL27!

- 📅 **July 14–17, 2027**
- 📍 **InterContinental San Antonio Riverwalk Hotel**
- 💰 **Hotel Rate: \$142/night + tax**
- 🎟️ **Adult participants receive a transferable, complimentary registration to the 2028 LCMS Youth Gathering**

Grace/Winter Haven Shares Appreciation of New Staff

"Yes, these pastors have an awesome congregation! Yes, we certainly do and how blessed I am to say 'we!' But I am so much more blessed to say this about all of you!" exclaims The Rev. **Charles Reich, pastor at Grace/Winter Haven, FL**. "You ARE an awesome congregation of people. I love each of you. And what an awesome God we serve. He continues to do His awe-inspiring works, building His eternal family upon this earth through each of us — His redeemed sons and daughters. We have accomplished much together in the last year."

"Our vision of being deeply rooted disciples in the grace of Jesus Christ and bearing fruits of His love among the people of the Chain of Lakes region continues to be accomplished. Being a church and school our community can count on long into the future continues to be a reality."

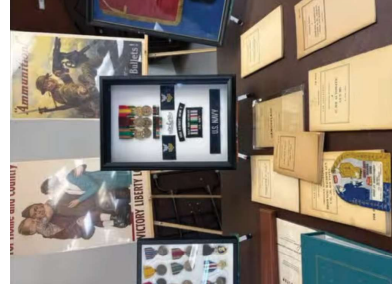
"We are proud of the improvements made to the facilities God has entrusted to us, and we continue to position them for many years of ministry. Make a joyful noise to the Lord for these great things."



Pastor Charles Reich, center flanked by Pastor Steven Braun and Vicar Stephen Moore.



Last year **St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL** Pastor Steve Carretto (at right) received a check for \$1 million along with a huge box of appreciation gift cards, notes and cash for October's annual pastor appreciation month. The check is still taped to his refrigerator. This year both Pastor Steve and Pastor Jacob Scheler (at left), along with their giant boxes filled with appreciative gifts both received Porsches. Pastor Steve got a Panamera GTS — yet by the look on his face he seems more interested in Pastor Jacob's 911 Targa.



St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL's "Senior Saints" enjoyed a special Veterans Day luncheon in

St. Paul Girls Varsity Volleyball Places Second at State Tourney

The Florida Lutheran Athletic Association (FLAA) State Tournaments take place annually in a variety of sports throughout the school year around the state. The athletic competitions are generally for middle school age groups (5th-8th grade) and are often hosted at member schools or central locations.

The tournaments feature both girls and boys junior and varsity basketball (boys and girls), soccer (co-ed), volleyball (girls) track & field, golf and flag football teams.

These tournaments involve teams from various Lutheran schools across Florida, such as St. Paul/Boca, Grace/Jacksonville, St. Luke's/Oviedo, Trinity/Delray Beach and others.

St. Luke's won the Varsity Girls' Volleyball State Championship, completing back-to-back titles. St. Paul/Boca Raton's team finished as the state runner-up in the tournament held at St. Luke's.



The St. Paul Girls Varsity Volleyball team took second place in the event. Natalie Toft received the all tournament team award. She is shown with St. Paul coaches Jessica Carretto (on left) and Kate Frazer.



St. Paul Varsity and J.V. Teams Places Second and Third at State Soccer Tourney



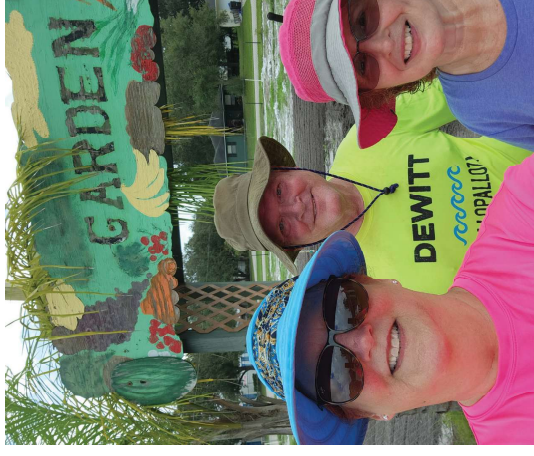
The St. Paul Varsity Soccer Team placed third in the Florida Lutheran Athletic Association State Tournament, an annual competition for students from Lutheran middle schools across the state. They are shown with coaches Gary Hickey (on left) and Pastor Jacob Scheler. The tournament kicked off at St. Paul on October 24th and the Falcons won 5-2.



The St. Paul Junior Varsity Soccer Team took second place in the Florida Lutheran Athletic Association State Tournament. They are shown here with their coaches Sean Keenan (on left) and Fernando Yanez.

Sanford Congregation Plants Community Garden

It's fall garden planting time at **Lutheran Church of the Redeemer / Sanford FL**. According to Pastor Ed DeWitt, "Our community garden will be producing beautiful green beans in time for Thanksgiving. The fresh produce is shared with the congregation and community."



Above, Pastor Ed DeWitt works with equipment to break up soil to create a seedbed.

Baby Ezra from Redeeming Life Ministries Sanford maternity home, is their little fall pumpkin. Mother and baby are thriving in the program.

RLOM Installs Deaconess Jessica Thompson

Deaconess Jessica Thompson was called and installed as program manager at Redeeming Life Outreach Ministries. In this new role, she will lead the establishment of a St. Louis, MO initiative for the organization.

Prior to this appointment, she served at St. Paul's/Des Peres, MO. Redeeming Life Outreach Ministries is a Christ-centered nonprofit and a Recognized Service Organization (RSO) of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS). The ministry supports single expectant and postpartum mothers by providing Christ-centered care and support in a safe and nurturing environment.

While based in Sanford, Florida, in the Florida-Georgia



Sheryl & Ed DeWitt are shown with Jessica Thompson, center.

The St. Louis initiative will focus on providing Christ-centered care and support for single expectant and new mothers who are homeless, abused, or at risk. Thompson's vision will likely be shaped by the ministry's established model and adapted to best serve the needs of the St. Louis community.



Matthew 11:28

District Educator, Ron Illsley, Enters Rest



Ron Illsley, born on August 26, 1956, in Key West, Florida, was welcomed into eternal rest on October 19, 2025 after a five year journey with early onset Alzheimer's dementia.

A self-described "gentle soul", Ron was beloved by so many because he loved people so well with his warm and caring nature. He faithfully loved his wife, delighted in his children and grandchildren, and extended his friendship and support to many others in his community.

Some of the people who gathered around Ron when he needed extra care were a testament to the love and care that he showed to them when they were in need. He enjoyed meeting new people and learning about their lives, and he also treasured having deep conversations. He loved music. He put his whole heart into singing or playing the trumpet, guitar, or handbells.

Although Ron had many admirable qualities, he readily admitted that he was a sinner in need of grace. When a Jewish

woman sitting next to him on a flight once asked about Christians blaming Jews for putting Jesus on the cross, he testified by saying "I put Jesus on the cross, because of my sins."

Ron is survived by his beloved wife of 48 years, Jane Illsley, his son Steve Illsley and daughter-in-law Amy Lawton; his daughter Kirsten Glinke, son-in-law Rob Glinke; his daughter Megan Sateia, son-in-law Josh Sateia; his son John Illsley, daughter-in-law Sarah Illsley; and his unofficially but very intentionally adopted daughter Kelsey Burke Arrieta, and many law Daniel Arrieta, and many grandchildren. He also leaves behind his sister Marilyn Wolf and brother-in-law Steve Wolf, and his sister-in-law Ruth Illsley. He was predeceased by his parents Joe and Helen Illsley and his brother Rick Illsley.

Ron grew up in the Florida keys, where he attended **Grace Lutheran School/Key West, FL**. The congregation was started in his maternal grandparents' living room, and his mother taught at the school as a kindergarten teacher.

Ron was proud to have graduated as a class of 1974 Conch from Key West High School where he played trumpet in the marching band and was voted best overall band member in his senior year. Ron's faith deepened after attending a youth event in high school.

Ron attended college at Valparaiso University in Indiana where he met his bride-to-be Jane and earned a bachelor's degree

in history. Ron and Jane married on August 20, 1977 at the start of their senior year. After graduating, Ron and Jane decided to serve as missionaries in Japan for two and a half years teaching English. The mission field was both exciting and difficult for the newlyweds. Upon returning to the United States, Ron got a job teaching at **Faith Lutheran School/Eustis, Florida**, where his sister Marilyn lived at the time. His son Stephen and daughter Kirsten were born in 1982 and 1984, respectively.

In 1985 Ron got a call to teach and serve as the youth director at a Lutheran Church and School in Houston, Texas where his daughter Megan was born. At the end of the year the school was going to combine grades, so Ron needed to find a new job again.

Ron got a call to teach 7th grade at **Trinity Lutheran School/Delray Beach, FL** where later he would serve as school board chairman. In 1987 he began selling life insurance with Aid Association for Lutherans (AAL), which later became Thrivent. The family celebrated his inauguration into the Thrivent Hall of Fame at a special ceremony in 2017.

A Celebration of Life service was held at Trinity Lutheran Church in Delray Beach, Florida.

District Educator, Christian Rau, Called Home

Christian Rau was born in July, 1942 in Coburg, Germany to Willy and Caroline Rau. The family, which then included sisters Annelie and Liz, emigrated to the United States in 1948 and lived with Caroline's parents for a few years. In 1950 the Raus settled in Plainview, New York and Chris went to Nassau Christian School.

Chris transitioned to Trinity Lutheran School in 7th & 8th grade excelling in athletics and won the Paul Judd Christian Citizenship award. Chris attended Concordia Bronxville Prep School for high school and continued his excellence in athletics and academics. After graduation he moved on to Concordia Teachers' College in River Forest, Illinois. He played four sports — football, basketball, tennis and baseball — in college becoming team captain in the three team sports: football, basketball and baseball.

Later in life he would be inducted into the athletic hall of fame at Concordia both as an individual and as part of an award winning basketball team. While he was at River Forest he received two invitations to Sadie Hawkins and fortunately chose to go with Maggie Knight. Three years later they were married at Grace Lutheran Church in St. Petersburg, Florida. The new couple settled in Hicksville, New York and Chris taught 8th grade at Trinity Lutheran where he had attended middle school.

In 1974 Chris and Maggie received a call to **Grace Lutheran School /St. Petersburg, FL** so they



Chris Rau was inducted into the athletic hall of fame at Concordia/River Forest, IL, both as an individual and as part of an award winning basketball team

took their three children — Sharon (1967), Gayle (1969) and Brian (1970) — and moved to the Shore Acres area north of downtown St. Petersburg.

Christian began the athletic program at Grace and was in integral part of the formation of the Central Florida Lutheran Athletic Association. He taught 8th grade most of his years at Grace, transitioning to physical education toward the end of his career.

Chris also served on the Florida-Georgia District Board of Directors and Board of Stewardship as well as having chaired the District Educators Conference. He has been an elder at Grace for decades. His love of stewardship had him serving as chair of that congregation committee as well.

He retired in 2004 after 38 years of teaching and coaching and he and Maggie spent the next 20+ years traveling and enjoying their eight grandchildren. Chris and Maggie would have been married 60 years in 2026. He was a dedicated, faithful family man who loved the Lord.

A Celebration of Life service was held at Grace/St. Petersburg, FL on October 11, 2025.

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

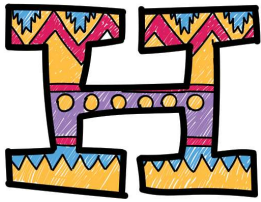
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From a Grateful Heart to Expectant Hope

*"I give thanks to my God always for you
because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus"*
— 1 CORINTHIANS 1:4



Harvest season is a time to celebrate the abundance of a fruitful year. In a similar way, we are called to give thanks for the "harvest" in our lives — the blessing of our family and friends.

This rich crop of relationships is a special gift from God, intended to nourish our souls and enrich our lives. Scripture reminds us that all good things come from God, and the people we love are a reflection of His grace.

Friends are a gift for all seasons. PROVERBS tells us that "a friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity" (PROVERBS 17:17). True friends provide unwavering support, and our friendships can refresh our souls (PROVERBS 27:9).

Family is a blessing for all generations. Whether it's the family we are born into or the family we find, these relationships are a gift. Children are a "heritage from the Lord" (Psalm 127:3), and God's love is shown to all generations (PSALM 103:17-18).

We all know that relationships can be challenging. Family drama, misunderstandings with friends, and different paths can make

unity difficult. But as Paul reminds us in COLOSSIANS 3:13, we are to "Bear with each other and forgive one another." God's grace is the foundation of our forgiveness, and we can extend that same grace to those we love.

The LAST WORD



John List
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As the season of Advent begins, we enter a period of intentional waiting and preparation. It is a time for us to prepare our hearts and minds for the celebration of Jesus' birth, and to remember that Christ will one day return.

The world around us has a different idea of how we should prepare for Christmas. It is a season of busyness, rushing, and consumerism — but Advent invites us to slow down, to be still, and to quiet the noise in our souls.

The prophet Isaiah foretold of a coming Messiah, a light to shine in the darkness. For centuries, God's people waited with hope and longing for this promised Savior. As we begin Advent, we share in this same spirit of expectation, knowing that the promises have been fulfilled in Christ.

In a world filled with chaos and uncertainty, we are anchored in the assurance that God is with us. Our waiting is not passive. We are called to actively prepare for Christ's coming by turning our hearts toward God and away from the distractions of the world.

Advent is an opportunity to practice spiritual disciplines, like prayer and reading God's Word, with a fresh perspective. We celebrate not just a moment in history, but the profound truth that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." This gift of God's tangible presence is the foundation of our joy and the ultimate purpose of our celebration.

This Advent, let us create space in our lives to encounter Jesus. In the stillness, may we hear his voice and feel his presence. By making room in our hearts for the newborn child, we can experience the abundant hope that only he can bring. *JB*