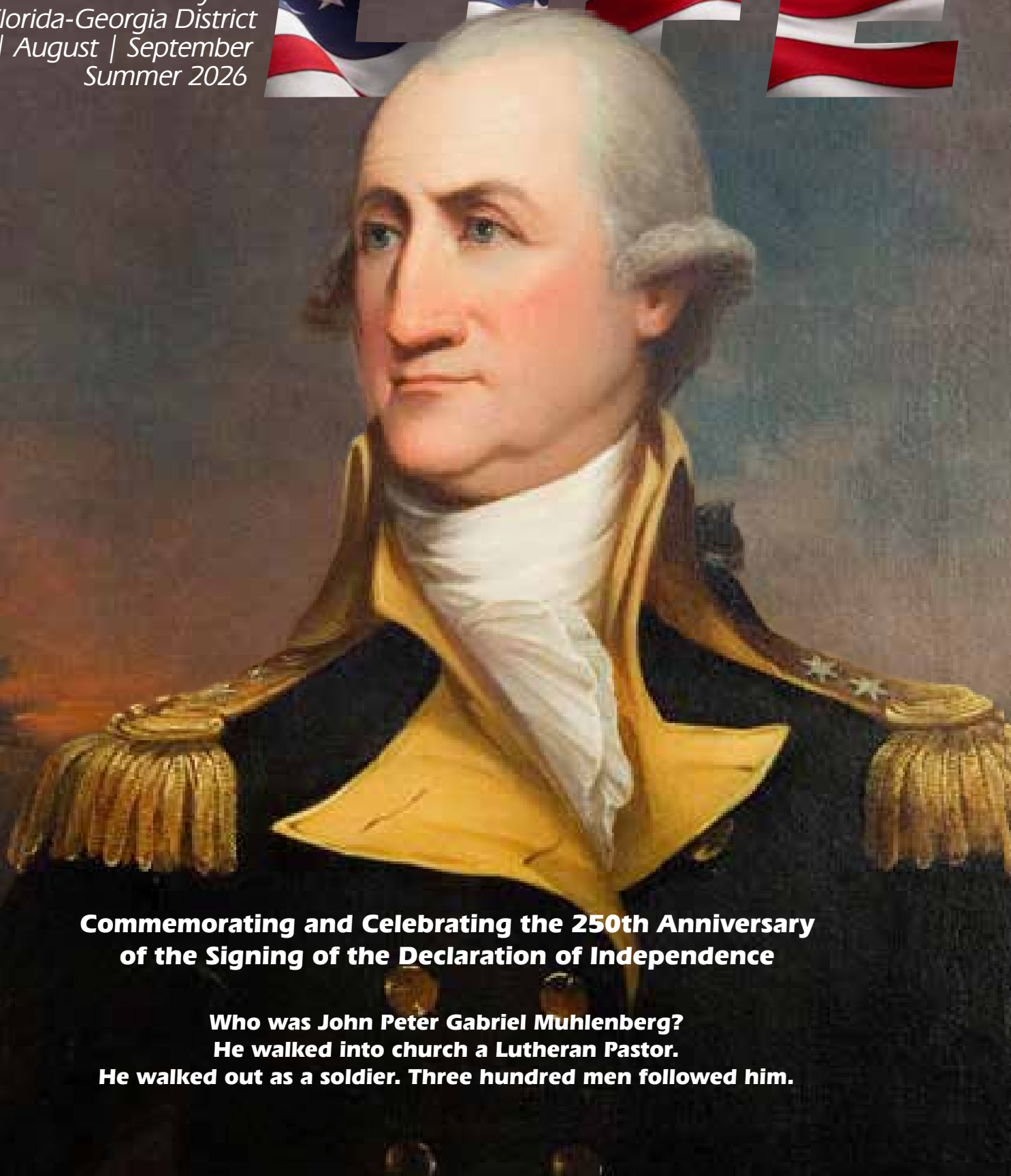


LUTHERAN

Lutheran Church-
Missouri Synod
Florida-Georgia District
July | August | September
Summer 2026



**Commemorating and Celebrating the 250th Anniversary
of the Signing of the Declaration of Independence**

**Who was John Peter Gabriel Muhlenberg?
He walked into church a Lutheran Pastor.
He walked out as a soldier. Three hundred men followed him.**

LUTHERAN LIFE

Lutheran LIFE is the official newsmagazine of the Florida-Georgia (FLGA) District of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The Mission of the FLGA District is to serve, assist, and encourage congregations in the ministry of Jesus Christ.

People of the FLGA District are equipped, empowered, engaged in the Master's business ... connecting people to Jesus.

Lutheran LIFE is designed to inform LCMS church and school members of the activities, personalities and resources offered by the Synod and the District. Lutheran LIFE may also provide a forum for readers to express their views and ideas on a wide range of topics and those opinions may not necessarily be those of the District or the LCMS. 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

03/16/26..... Ms. Deborah Hammes (C)
to Rocky Mountain
07/15/26..... Ms. Alexis Dippel (C) to Texas
05/01/26..... Mrs. Beth Leech (C) to Indiana
07/01/26..... Mr. Michael Yurk (C) to Indiana
07/01/26..... Mrs. Amanda Yurk (C) to Indiana

TRANSFERRED IN FROM OTHER DISTRICTS

06/06/26..... Mrs. Teckla Coerber (C) from SELC

INSTALLATIONS

04/19/26..... Rev. Robert Davis (O) Sole Pastor
Epiphany/Lake Worth, FL

CALLED TO GLORY

06/15/26..... Rev. Alberto Lazaro Garcia (O)
06/19/26..... Mr. Ralph Herbert Bickel (C)

STATUS CHANGE WITHIN DISTRICT

07/01/26 Mrs. Lorie Trzeciak (C)
from Candidate to Emeritus
07/1/26 Ms. Julie Garland (C)
from Candidate to Emeritus

REMOVED FROM THE ROSTER

05/15/26 Sonja Seppa-Gorwood [Removed by President]
05/15/26 Ella Lehl [Removed by President]
05/15/26 Sara Steinbauer [Voluntary Removal]
05/15/26 Lana Baldwin [Removed by President]
06/23/26 Jane Tinder [Voluntary Removal]
07/01/26 Connie Richberg [Removed by President]

CONGREGATION CHANGES

03/01/26..... Siloe Hatian/Naples, FL new active
congregation in Southwest Circuit 17

ABBREVIATION KEY

(C) Commissioned Minister
(E) Emeritus
(O) Ordained Minister
(SP)..... Sole Pastor
SRP)..... Senior Pastor
(AP) Associate Pastor
(Asst)..... Assistant Pastor
(SMP)..... Specific Ministry Pastor
(TIM)..... Transitional Interim Minister
(D) Deaconess
(Exec)..... Executive Administrative Pastor
CSL Concordia Seminary St. Louis
FTW..... Concordia Seminary Ft. Wayne

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



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How about it? Do you ever feel like life is out to get you? Do you find yourself reflecting on what you are dealing with now or what you've been through in the past whether recently or long ago?

The truth is, most of us would all say, yes. We easily "remember our affliction...the bitterness and the gall." No, we may not describe it using those words, but the truth is we live in a world that is filled with suffering, disappointment, struggles, hardships, sickness, brokenness, hate, and challenges that at times seem like they never stop coming.

You see, hope is not an absence of suffering, difficulty, hurt, sickness or whatever. Hope is what we have in the good and the bad. Hope is a reality, no matter what!

You might be saying to yourself, "Come on President Rockey — get back to reality! Stop espousing platitudes! Hope is a reality, no matter what! Really?"

I love this section of Scripture from the Prophet Jeremiah. He lays it all out. He cries out as he remembers his "affliction, wandering, the bitterness and the gall." You get it. You can't really forget those things. So, he says, "I will remember them."

without fail. "Because of His great love we are not consumed." These circumstances, our suffering or whatever will not consume or destroy us. His character is unchanging. He is the God of mercy. "His compassions never fail. They are new every morning." They are ours in and through Christ Jesus who conquered Satan, sin and death!

Each morning, I make the sign of the cross over my heart and remember my baptism while the water runs over my head. Every morning I remember what God has given me. Every morning, His mercies and love are new. His love, His mercy and His forgiveness are there again and again. No Matter What? Really!

No Matter What! Really?

¹⁹ I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall.

²⁰ I will remember them, and my soul is downcast within me.

²¹ Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope.

²² Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.

²³ They are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness.

²⁴ I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."

—LAMENTATIONS 3

How about it? Do you ever feel like life is out to get you? The truth is, none of this should surprise us when we consider that we live in a sin tainted and infected world.

Such realities are certainly part of life in this world. Yet they not only impact us as we journey through this world, but they show up in the Church as well. There too you and your congregation may have gone through or be going through some challenging times. You may lack needed resources; you may have conflict or wonder if your congregation will even survive.

Yet my dear friends and fellow servants of Christ, you and I always have hope! Always.

It's like he's saying there right here in the forefront of my mind.

What I absolutely love is his transition. "Yet"! What? He just laid out the ugliness and pain of what he'd been through and now he says something as though he's just going to toss it aside. Listen carefully to what he says. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope. The first time I remember reading and really processing this Scripture, I was visiting my mother-in-law, who was in hospice. When I read it, I wanted to know what the "this" was that he called to mind. Listen.

Our God is unchanging. Our circumstances may change, but He does not. He is the God who loves

*Your Fellow Servant
and Witness, Really!*



James Rockey

PRESIDENT FLORIDA-GEORGIA DISTRICT
LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

BIRTH OF A NATION: THE AMERICAN

*Are Lutheran pastors today viewed as community leaders?
Are they speaking out on issues that affect our life together?*

Reported by John Frerking

A Summary of The Revolutionary War

The British treasury was decimated by the French and Indian war in America. King George III needed money . . . France and Spain threatened the Empire. To secure money from the colonists he imposed more than 20 taxes without their input. The colonists were upset because this was “taxation without representation.”

Colonial protests resulted in the Boston Tea Party where 92,000 pounds of tea were dumped into Boston Harbor. The Battles of Lexington and Concord incited louder demands for revolution. *The Declaration of Independence* was signed in July, 1776, the Seven-Years War (French and Indian War) ended with battles of Saratoga and Yorktown — sealing victory — and leading to recognition of the American independence. A new government was formed by colonies based on the Constitution. Many loyalists returned to Britain or fled to Nova Scotia or other Canadian territories after war.

Churches Supportive of The Revolutionary War

Edmund Burke (1729–1797) was an Anglo-Irish statesman, author, and philosopher widely regarded as the philosophical founder of modern conservatism. Born in Dublin, he spent most of his life in London serving as a prominent member of Parliament (MP) within the Whig Party from 1766 to 1794.

He is celebrated for his masterful oratory and his distinct approach to political theory, which prioritized historical context, tradition, and gradual reform over abstract ideas. Burke stated that the major characteristic of the Americans was their religion, and especially its resistance to human authority.

Protest of the Protestants

Protestants were Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists, and Lutherans whose leadership was “bottom up,” not “top down” like the Roman Catholics and Anglicans. A great majority of Americans were churchgoers. Travelling evangelists like George Whitfield and Samuel Davies reached thousands. Printed sermons in newspapers supported revolutionary ideas.

Lutheran Involvement in the Revolutionary War

In 1776, in Pennsylvania, 15,000–20,000 Lutherans were spread across 230 congregations. They were not all committed patriots. Some remained neutral or loyal to the British crown. One Lutheran family stands out. Henry Melchior Muehlenberg (1711 to 1787). Henry was born in Germany and was sent to America in response to Lutheran congregations needing pastors. He labored 45 years, traveling, corresponding, and setting the course for early Lutherans. Muehlenberg established the *first* Lutheran synod when delegates met in Philadelphia.

He wrote a Lutheran liturgy — The “*Patriarch of the Lutheran Church*” (formerly the LCA). He is universally recognized as the foundational figure who unified and structurally organized the scattered, independent Lutheran congregations in colonial America into a cohesive denomination. The reference to “formerly the LCA” connects his legacy to the modern corporate lineage of American Lutheranism.

The Lutheran Church in America (LCA) was a major denomination existing from 1962 until 1987. The LCA traced its structural and liturgical roots directly back to Muehlenberg’s original 1748 organization. In 1988, the LCA merged with two other

bodies to form today’s Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

Muehlenberg is remembered in our church year calendar on October 7th — Because October 7 marks the exact date of his death in 1787, this festival is officially observed across the major Lutheran bodies in North America. It is included in standard liturgical resources such as the *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (used by the ELCA) and the *Lutheran Service Book* (used by the LCMS). His son, Peter Muhlenberg (1746–1807) was an American clergyman, Continental Army major general, and early political leader. As the eldest son of the patriarch Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, he became one of the most famous figures of the American Revolutionary War.

Henry’s other son, Frederick, served as a member of the Continental Congress and became the very First Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. A Lutheran pastor, and a “forgotten hero” of the revolution. On January 21st, 1776, in a small church in Woodstock, VA, he delivered a sermon that became legendary. He quoted ECCLESIASTES 3, “. . . a time to be born, and a time to die; A time for peace and a time for war . . .” He is celebrated for dramatically discarding his clerical robes, revealing his military uniform to lead troops into battle, exemplifying the “Fighting Parson” archetype of the era. It underscored his commitment to the American cause, and led the men of the congregation into the bright sun and went on to lead 300 or more soldiers under his command and joined George Washington.

This Lutheran clergyman endured the hardships of Valley Forge and fought with Washington at Yorktown, VA. After the war, he worked with Benjamin Franklin in establishing state governments.

Peter Muhlenberg was Washington’s confidante. As a Brigadier General, Peter organized



REVOLUTIONARY WAR

What does our declining worship attendance say about our future as a nation?

the 8th Virginia regiment. His military judgment, bravery, and strategies were pivotal in winning crucial battles. He advised against attacking Philadelphia in the winter months — as too many troops were sick, frostbitten, lacking shoes and proper nourishment. Peter recommended staying at Valley Forge through the winter. He became friends of Nathaniel Greene, Daniel Morgan, and Thomas Jefferson. Today in Allentown Pennsylvania stands Muhlenberg College. In Trappe, Pennsylvania, one can tour the Muhlenberg home and see the statue of Peter in his clerical/ military uniform in Woodstock, VA.

Women of the Revolution

Women boycotted British goods as members of the “Daughters of Liberty” and chose to weave their own cloth and make their own clothing to support patriot causes. “The Ladies Association of Philadelphia” organized a massive fundraising effort in 1780 to pay Continental soldiers who never recouped losses from their farms or were never reimbursed for their expenses. Some notable women:

Esther de Berdt Reeds wrote a pamphlet, “*Sentiments of an American Woman*” inspiring women across the colonies to donate their time and money.

Throughout the colonies, women participated in the “Offering of the Ladies” and collected more than \$300,000 (\$6 to \$8 million in today’s values) Continental dollars to aid the army and gave it to Washington to pay his troops.

Washington asked to use it to purchase clothing for his troops. The ladies agreed, bought the linen, and made the shirts!

Deborah Sampson successfully disguised herself as a man to fight for American independence at a time when women were strictly forbidden from military service. She bound her breasts, cut her hair, and donned

men’s clothing to enlist in the Fourth Massachusetts Regiment of the army. She used her brother’s name who had died in infancy.

Martha Custis Washington brought supplies to Valley Forge, set up sewing circles with officer’s wives, visited and comforted the soldiers.

Mercy Otis Warren fought for equal rights for women, advocated for girls’ schools, the “Conscience of the Revolution.”

American Clergy

The clergy we’re expected to be “The Conscience of the People”, advocating for a godly life and encouraging community involvement. They also considered themselves as leaders in the fight for freedom. Here are just a few of them:

David Caldwell led troops while showing no emotion when told his home and precious library had been burned to the ground by British soldiers.

Jonah Stearns sacrificed his estate to support the war effort.

Thomas Reed marched with 50 others to Philadelphia to fight General Howe and assisted Washington with his knowledge of terrain around Elks Ferry.

William Graham saw a group of soldiers needing training so he joined them in the war!

Elizur Goodrich led 900 men in an advanced company.

Austin Roe was part of Washington’s “Culper Spy Ring,” an American intelligence network operating out of New York City. The ring used “ciphers” (secret codes), invisible ink, and couriers to provide Washington with critical information on British troop movements.

Samuel McClintock fought at Bunker Hill, in his clergy robes!

Some Interesting War Facts

- 45% of the population supported the revolution.
- The Continental submarine (“American Turtle”) was designed to place underwater bombs on vessels but was never used.
- Continental Congress hired and paid “pirates” to attack British ships, and agreed to split the proceeds 50/50 with them.
- Many women disguised themselves as men and fought in many of the battles.
- Washington developed a special method to give smallpox vaccines to the army.
- When George Washington took command of the Continental Army in 1775, he already possessed significant military leadership experience, though he had never led a large-scale, professional army or a multi-regiment field force in a major war.
- George Washington championed and funded its use, the invisible ink was actually invented by James Jay, an American physician, amateur chemist, and brother of Founding Father John Jay. Washington was so enthralled by the technology that he referred to it as “white ink” or “sympathetic stain.” Most standard invisible inks of the era — like lemon juice or milk — could be revealed simply by holding the paper over a flame or lightbulb. The British knew this trick and routinely heated intercepted mail. Jay’s invention required two separate chemical components. The message was written with a chemical liquid that dried completely clear. It could only be revealed by brushing a second “counterpart” chemical reagent over the paper. Without the second bottle, heating the paper did absolutely nothing.
- James Madison designed a “from the bottom up” style of government... “WE THE PEOPLE” What does that mean to you today?



2026 President's Equip



President's Equip Conference

Rosen Centre Hotel • Orlando, FL
September 30 – October 2, 2026

Service Project

This year's service project is collecting fully assembled disaster-relief hygiene kits. These kits will be taken by FLGA Disaster Response and used when teams are deployed to help those affected by disasters.



Registration
is now open!

Hotel Reservations
at \$169/night

Shareable Resources
Available Online

Learn more about the President's Equip Conference at flgadistrict.org/pec

Keynote:
Dr. Eugene P. Kim



Keynote:
Megan Miessler



Keynote Focus

Two outstanding keynote speakers will guide us in reimagining what it means to flourish in today's rapidly changing world. Dr. Eugene P. Kim and Megan Miessler, both respected experts in their fields, will share timely wisdom to help us thrive where God has called us.

Flourishing in a Changing World invites Lutheran educators, pastors, DCEs and lay leaders to gather in hope and shared purpose amid rapid cultural, technological, and ministry change. According to President James Rockey, "this Florida-Georgia District conference moves beyond the simple adoption of new tools to explore the ethical, theological, and instructional implications. Workshops and conversations will focus on worker well-being, vocation, and faithful leadership in a fast-paced world."

Grounded in Scripture and centered on Christ, participants will be strengthened through worship, keynote insights, and meaningful connection—leaving equipped to see change not as a threat, but as an opportunity for joyful, resilient, and flourishing ministry.

Registration is open! Discounted early bird closes in August. Please visit the website for all information and to register.

flgadistrict.org/pec/

Save The Dates!

PRESIDENT'S EQUIP CONFERENCE

Wednesday, September 30,
through Friday, October 2, 2026

Registration is Open!

WHEN: Wednesday, September 30
through Friday, October 2, 2026
WHERE: Rosen Centre Hotel,
9840 International Drive
Orlando, FL

VISIT WEBSITE: flgadistrict.org/pec/

Earlybird costs, details, perks and more on the website.
Early Registration Closes in August!

Conference Announced



**PRESIDENT'S EQUIP CONFERENCE
SERVICE PROJECT**

A good disaster-relief hygiene kit should focus on basic cleanliness and disease prevention, while being compact, affordable, and easy to distribute (travel size only).

KITS MUST INCLUDE:

- Tooth brush
- Toothpaste
- Shampoo
- Conditioner
- Deodorant
- Bar of soap
- Hand Sanitizer

This year's service project is collecting fully assembled disaster-relief hygiene kits. A good hygiene kit should focus on basic cleanliness and disease prevention for moments when basic essentials are difficult to find. The best kits are compact and easy to distribute. These kits will be taken by FLGA Disaster Response and used when teams are deployed to help those affected by disasters.

Service Project Resource Kit

This year's service project will benefit those affected by disaster. Congregations will collect the above specific items and assemble them as directed. The fully assembled kits will be dropped off at the Conference and will be distributed to disaster affected areas by FLGA Disaster Response.

A Sampling of Some of the Workshop Opportunities:

These are some of the workshop breakout sessions designed to provide practical, niche training that directly expands on the event's theme. These breakout sessions split attendees into smaller rooms to learn, discuss, and practice specific skills in a more intimate setting. These sessions typically last between 45 and 60 minutes and focus heavy attention on audience interaction, real-world application, and peer networking. You can read more about these sessions and the workshop leaders on the event's website: flgadistrict.org/pec/

- ▶ Faithfulness and AI: Building a Relational and Redemptive Policy
- ▶ What does it mean to flourish as a church worker?
- ▶ Innovation doesn't have to compete with faithfulness.
- ▶ You Carry a Movement Within You
- ▶ Faithful Staffing Decisions in Changing Ministry Seasons
- ▶ Lessons from a Griever
- ▶ How NOT to Let Issues Prevent Relationships
- ▶ Don't Be Your Authentic Self - Be Your Best Self
- ▶ My Life Through Johari's Window
- ▶ Making Bible the Best Part of Their Day
- ▶ Passport Adventures: Inspiring Young Minds to Discover the World
- ▶ Shining in the Classroom:
Fostering Engagement Through Faith and Positivity
- ▶ More Than A Checklist
- ▶ Your Church's Digital Front Door- Helping Visitors Find You Online
- ▶ Flourishing on the Vertical Screen:
Videobased Social Media Discipleship
- ▶ Visual Faith® Practices in the Era of Distraction
- ▶ The Revelation of Jesus
- ▶ An Excellent Task:
The Pastoral Ministry According to the Pastoral Letters
- ▶ Doing the #1 Thing Asked of Us
- ▶ Flourishing and AI: Designing Your Own Lutheran AI
- ▶ Working with Complicated People
- ▶ Faithful Leadership in Changing Times:
Holding Fast to Word and Sacrament
- ▶ Get One More for Jesus
- ▶ Leadership — Flourishing — Wellness
- ▶ Burnout Recharge for Re-engagement
- ▶ Creating Inviting Culture: Helping Your Members Invite Others
- ▶ AI for Sermons & Bible Class
- ▶ Analyzing and Using Data to Drive Improvement
- ▶ The Other Subjects
- ▶ Making Reading Groups and Centers That Work (Tech Free)
- ▶ Mathematizing Early Childhood
- ▶ Revelations 7:9: Engaging the Coming Nations
- ▶ Trauma Is the New Mission Field
- ▶ Raising Your Congregation's or School's Profile in the Community
- ▶ Motivate, Don't Manipulate
- ▶ Visual Faith® Practices
- ▶ Woven Together in Christ
- ▶ Luke-Acts: Key Foundation in a Changing World
- ▶ Supporting Healthy Identity and Relationships in Middle School
- ▶ Managing Legal Risk Without Losing Mission Focus
- ▶ Revolutionary Leadership:
Courage, Clarity and Calling in an Age of Artificial
- ▶ It is the Little Things that can make a BIG Difference
- ▶ Rhythm-Based Discipleship: Formation That Fits
- ▶ Does What I Do Matter?
- ▶ Raising New Church Workers by Caring for the One You Have!
- ▶ Apologetics in a Secular World
- ▶ Teaching and Preaching are not the Same
- ▶ Church Planting
- ▶ Bridging Literacy and Science Through Picture Books
- ▶ Back to the Basics
- ▶ Joining Jesus as a Family:
How to Raise Children to Be Lifelong Followers of Jesus
- ▶ Hospitality Beyond Borders: Welcoming Others and Enemies
- ▶ What Does Disaster Relief Look Like?
- ▶ Growing Through Change: Ministry and Daily Life
- ▶ Mathematizing Early Childhood
- ▶ Charitable Strategies to Maximize Impact
Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCD), and much more



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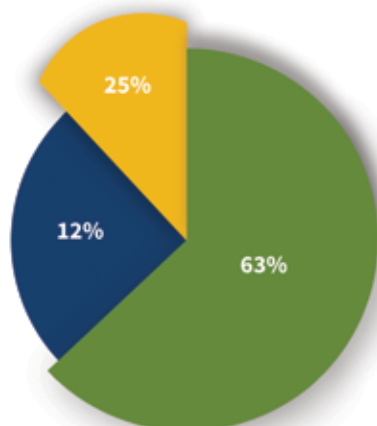
2026 Budget Summary Annual Total:

\$3,007,731

Synodical Pledge

Administration & Finance

District programs: missions & outreach, helping congregations with the call process, schools & youth ministry, and preparing church workers



The Florida-Georgia District remains committed to faithful stewardship of the resources entrusted to us for ministry. The District concluded 2025 in a strong financial position. We are deeply grateful to our congregations and donors for their faithful support and continued partnership in ministry.

Unrestricted congregational giving totaled just over \$2.2M and continues to serve as the primary source of support for the District's ministry operations. Total unrestricted supporting revenue was \$2.8M, consisting of congregational giving, additional donor gifts, accreditation and teacher certification fees, interest income, and donor-restricted gifts released in accordance with donor intent to support current-year ministry expenses. In addition, convention and conference activities generated an additional \$545,000 revenue.

Expenses, which include Program and Supporting Services, totaled \$3.2M and remained below total revenue, resulting in an increase of approximately \$198,000 in unrestricted net assets.

Net donor-restricted assets increased by approximately \$296,000, this was attributed to new restricted gifts, restricted investment earnings, and changes in the value of endowments and investments, less amounts released to fund ministry activities as donor restrictions were satisfied.

Ministry in Action:

Program Services expenses totaled approximately \$2.1M and supported congregational services, including schools and youth ministry, mission and outreach efforts, Synodical support, and the preparation of church workers. Approximately \$100,000 was invested in scholarships and educational programs that support the

development of future church workers. Total expenses also included Supporting Services costs of \$1.1M associated with the 2025 District Convention, ministry support and administrative operational services, as well as Ecclesiastical support provided through the President's Office, Vice Presidents, Circuit Visitors, Board of Directors, and related District functions.

Year-End Position:

At December 31, 2025, the District reported total assets of \$11.1M and total net assets of \$10.1M. Of that amount, approximately \$5.1M consisted of donor-restricted net assets designated by donors to support specific ministry purposes and future ministry opportunities. This includes approximately \$1.8M restricted for current ministry activities and \$3.3M in endowment funds and perpetual funds established to support future mission and ministry efforts.

Mission Advancement Endowment funds totaled approximately \$58,000 at year-end, and by June 2026 totaled \$1.3M. Donor-restricted funds are utilized only as donor purposes are fulfilled, and all restricted and endowment balances are fully funded and maintained in accordance with donor intent. Cash and cash equivalents totaled \$4.9M. Other than its long-term office lease obligation, the District remained debt free.

Ministry Investments:

Looking ahead, the 2026 budget plan reflects the District's commitment to investing in ministry opportunities that align with our Ministry Targets by strengthening congregations, support church planting and outreach, prepare future church workers, and expand

ministries throughout the Florida-Georgia District. Building on the District's strong financial position, resources have been strategically allocated to Synodical support, program services which include mission and outreach initiatives, congregational support, schools, youth ministries, and leadership development.

Independent Audit:

The District's financial statements were audited by an independent certified public accounting firm, which issued an unmodified opinion, indicating that the financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position and results of operations of the District in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles.

Complete audited financial statements are available on the District website and provide a more detailed review of the District's financial position, operations and stewardship of resources.

Respectfully Submitted,



Statements of Financial Position

Audited Results

ASSETS	2025	2024
Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$4,918,268	\$4,710,977
Accounts Receivable	24,857	20,111
Prepaid Expense	39,523	80,091
From Split-Interest Agreements	19,186	38,856
Property and Equipment, net	225,529	219,787
Advance Sites	595,730	577,970
Long-Term Investments	2,072,421	2,065,207
Note Receivable	248,020	269,270
Restricted funds held by third-party trustee	2,293,262	2,059,469
Right of Use Asset	626,369	710,172
	\$11,063,164	\$10,751,911
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	2025	2024
Accounts Payable	51,020	157,477
Deferred Revenue	16,875	15,083
Lease Liability	692,917	772,104
Other Liabilities	222,780	222,780
Total Liabilities	983,592	1,167,444
NET ASSETS		
Without Donor Restrictions	4,940,143	4,741,531
With Donor Restrictions	5,139,429	4,842,936
Total Net Assets	10,079,572	9,584,467
	\$11,063,164	\$10,751,911



Ministry Targets



Christian Identity

Cultivate the Christian Identity of Every Disciple

We will equip, empower, and engage workers and lay leaders to help individuals fully understand their Christian identity as disciples created, loved, redeemed, and sent by God.



Healthy Ministry

Support Church Workers and Leaders in Healthy Ministry

We will equip, empower and engage workers and lay leaders in healthy ministry practices for self and others.



Engage Community

Help Congregations Engage Their Communities

We will equip, empower, and engage workers and lay leaders to move beyond the church doors and become actively involved in their communities.



Shared Purpose

Foster a Sense of Shared District Identity

We will equip, empower, and engage workers and lay leaders to align Florida-Georgia District congregations around the God-given culture of disciple-making.

Our Ministry Targets guide us as we carry out the Mission and Vision of the FLGA District. They help us to serve, assist, and encourage congregations in intentional ways so that the people of the FLGA District are equipped, empowered, and engaged in connecting others to Jesus in the communities God has called them to serve.

Missions & Outreach

Missions and Outreach reflects our deep commitment to **Healthy Ministry** and **Shared District Identity** by partnering with congregations to encourage, equip, and provide ministry resources. Through in-person and online leadership development like Missionary Pathway, Mission Field in your Backyard as well as providing individual mentoring, and coaching we are helping church pastors, church planters and everyday missionaries share Christ throughout the District

We continue to **Engage Community** through mission support of campus ministries, RSO's, additionally Kingdom Seed Investments and Miracle Grow grants help churches and emerging ministries flourish and reach new people. Through REV7:9 training, we equip leaders to reach across cultures. In 2025, **five new multi-ethnic ministries were established**. Prayer is at the heart of this work, and we invite you to join us every morning and evening at 10:02, to pray Luke 10:2, for the Lord to raise up more workers for His harvest.

\$390K
in Synodical
Missions Support

4th Year
Supporting
Puerto Rico FORO

3
Supported Campus
Ministries

7
Kingdom
Seed Grants

7
Seed Sower
Grants

8
Supported
RSOs

Coaching & Evangelism Training:

One to One
Church Planting
Training

Prayer
Resources

Mission
Field in
Your
Backyard

Seasonal
Devotions

Kairos
Network
Missionary
Pathway
Cohorts

Schools & Youth Ministry



47

Schools in Accreditation
oversight and review for
continuous improvement
and strategic planning

\$9,000

for Hearts for Jesus
mission organizations



School and Youth Ministry equips schools, congregations, and youth leaders to nurture the next generation of disciples. Through doctrinal training, teacher certification, leadership development, and mentoring, students and educators are strengthened in their **Christian Identity** while remaining firmly grounded in God's Word.

By investing in worker wellness, school board training, church-school partnerships, and leadership support, we foster **Healthy Ministry** throughout the District. Students are encouraged to **Engage Community** through outreach opportunities, servant events, and mission experiences that share Christ's love with others. District-wide Educators Conferences, youth gatherings, youth and school leadership events, and collaborative training strengthen our **Shared District Identity** as we partner together to connect people to Jesus and equip future leaders for Christ's Church.

Resolution
Management
Counseling

Leadership
Training

School Board
Training

Board & Policy
Development

Lutheran
School
Job Postings

4 Official
Conferences

Youth Leadership
Mini Conference

Youth Ministry
Weekend

District Event at
2025 LCMS Youth Gathering

Educators' Conference

ANNUAL REPORT

Program Services Highlights for the Year End December 31, 2025



Preparing Church Workers



Preparing Church Workers focuses on supporting and creating **Healthy Ministry** by providing various financial assistance options to qualified students and church workers. Every year, students can apply for scholarship funds. A scholarship committee reviews applicants and approves grant dollars to support educational costs at the various Concordia learning institutions. The District supports qualified students' educational costs through the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology (EIIT) and Center for Hispanic Studies (CHS).

15

Student Aid Grants supporting individuals preparing to serve as full-time church workers

4

Scholarships supporting students at the Ethnic Institute of Theology

10

Scholarships supporting students at the Center for Hispanic Studies

6

Church workers received Educational Debt Repayment assistance

26,000

Lutheran Life subscribers received 5 publications

60

Treasurers trained

2

Legal Resources

165

Participants in FLGA's Ministerial Assistance Program through Lutheran Counseling Services

4

Disaster Response Grants

Humanitarian Aid Grants

6

72

Congregations and schools used Ministry Safe Abuse Awareness Training

Congregational Services

Congregational Services supports mission work in our member congregations, as well as their members and communities. This program focuses on several mission targets. Through providing Disaster Response Grants and President Circle Grants to those affected by natural disasters and in monetary crisis we prioritize our ministry targets of sustaining **Healthy Ministry** and **Engage Community**. This last year we continued our partnership with Lutheran Legal League, Ministry Alliance, Lutheran Counseling Services and Ministry Safe which allows free membership and free abuse awareness training and furthers the focus on uplifting and sustaining **Healthy Ministry**. We also work to build our **Shared District Identity** by providing our free publication of Lutheran Life magazine to our congregations, and schools. Through our various conferences and workshops, we train, equip and empower attendees in our **Christian Identity** so that they may share the gospel with those around them. Annually, the Student Debt Repayment Program issues grant dollars to assist our qualified rostered church workers with funds to reduce educational debt as they are working in the Florida-Georgia District.

2 Official Conferences

Veterans of the Cross

Pastors Conference

Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod partners, pastors and lay leaders lay groundwork for new congregations, evangelism and deeper partnership at home and in Puerto Rico.

FORO Ignites Church-Planting Momentum Across Puerto Rico — “Christ’s Love Compels Us”

Reported by John List

FORO (Spanish for forum) refers to an officially endorsed international mission and support framework organized by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) committed to supporting ministry and church-planting in Puerto Rico. It is building momentum as teams and partners prepare concrete steps to extend Christ’s kingdom across the island.

Twice a year, missionaries gather with partners — people from churches, organizations and schools. They sit down together, and they talk. They talk about making disciples, planting Lutheran churches and mission work. They talk about what’s happening on the ground. About the needs of the people they serve. About what’s working — and what’s not. The missionaries speak, and the partners listen. Then, everyone has a chance to respond.

Florida-Georgia District President James Rockey has applauded the effort, emphasizing urgency in sharing the Gospel “as we await our Lord’s return” and celebrate the life-change already underway. We’re seeing the impact of people discovering the message of grace and salvation by faith alone,” Rockey states. “To watch new people share, invite and live as Christ’s witnesses is a powerful sign of God’s work.”

President Rockey knows the dynamics of establishing new ministries firsthand, having planted **Amazing Grace/Oxford, FL**. That congregation was planted in June, 2007 with 13 people to serve the expanding population growth surrounding The Villages. They

organizers are anticipating about 900 this year.

The FORO model isn’t a top-down model. It’s not about one group making decisions for another. It’s truly collaborative. It’s mutual listening, mutual learning and mutual support. It’s

A FORO gathering in Puerto Rico where missionaries present detailed progress reports on their current church plants and mercy ministries. Local leaders outline their immediate challenges, such as building repairs, staffing shortages, or community needs. Teams review attendance, baptism numbers, and community outreach metrics to measure impact.



broke ground on their primary Worship Center in September 2013 and officially dedicated it in November 2014. He explains that new church plants often reach more new believers than existing congregations — a dynamic FORO hopes to multiply across Puerto Rico.

A strong, collaborative team has been developed surrounding FORO. FORO missionaries will be present at the forthcoming Presidents Equip Conference (PEC) this fall in Orlando. That conference will provide an opportunity to learn more about FORO and how a congregation or school might partner with them. PEC drew more than 1,000 attendees in 2023;

about aligning around a common strategy, one that comes not from an office thousands of miles away, but from the wisdom and experience of experts: the missionaries, who are living the mission every single day.

FORO partners bring their resources to the table — not just financial, though that’s part of it — including their human resources and knowledge. For example, at a FORO, an accountant might offer ideas on financial decisions, a nurse might offer insight on how to support health education, or someone from a congregation may simply bring encouragement and a willingness to help in any way they can. ■



Bound by Gratitude, Blessed by Freedom

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with brooks, streams, and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills. When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you. You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” But remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.

— DEUTERONOMY 8:7-18

This recent July 4th we celebrated our nation’s 250 Birthday. Our freedom is one of the greatest blessings we have as a nation. We truly are a blessed people...with freedom and security like no other nation on earth. As such it would be very easy to just focus on the many freedoms that we have. Yet where do we begin when there are so many different kinds of freedom? There’s the “freedom of...”, the “freedom from...” and the “freedom to.” All of these have a place in our lives as citizens of the United States, but this adjacent reading from Deuteronomy is calling us to consider two things: one, the source of our freedom and two, the key to our remaining free.

Throughout my years as a pastor, I have been blessed to lead nearly 25 mission teams around the world. On these trips, we learn a lot...about the Lord, His power, His love, His provision and His mercy and grace. And, we learn about ourselves, what it means to be valued, loved and one of the Lord’s own. We also come to see our shortcomings, our sin and God’s redeeming work. We discover anew our gifts and His plans to use each of us...and we learn about one another, our uniqueness’s while having the same needs, and our freedom in Christ that enables and calls us to live every day for Him.

Often as I reflect on the ministry and work done on those trips, I realize how vital it is to stay focused and on track. Whether it was in the planning months before or the time there...or staying on task at the work sites...or listening and effectively responding to the needs of those you are ministering to or those on your team. Underlying it all is the question of; How do you stay on track in your faith life and remember the source of your freedom?

God’s Word calls us to recognize that the Lord Himself is the source of our freedom and how we must cling to this freedom He has given us. Our reading takes place after the people of Israel have been rescued out of slavery in Egypt and brought into the promised land. Yet God knows His people...they have short memories and are easily led astray. As such the Lord warns them of the very real danger of forgetting what He had done for them, of forgetting the true source of their freedom and blessings.

This is a concept that we can easily relate to. For we too get so involved in the busyness of life, activities and the enjoyment of our blessings that we end up seeing (or acting) as though we alone are the source of our freedom, success and our country’s greatness. But as we celebrate our independence and our freedom, we are reminded that all this comes from the Lord!

Even the prologue to the Declaration of Independence directs credit to God Himself when it says: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights... Or skipping ahead a century to Abraham Lincoln’s Thanksgiving Day Proclamation (1863) where he wrote: It is the duty of nations as well as of people, to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God; to confess their sin and transgressions in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations are blessed whose God is the Lord. He then goes on, We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven...but we have forgotten God...we have imagined in deceitfulness of our hearts that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own.

With both the words of our Lord in our reading and these historical writings, may we truly pause and remember. May we remember that our greatest “freedom” is that which Christ won for us and all people through His suffering, death and resurrection. May we celebrate that Christ won for us freedom over Satan, Sin and Death!

Then, let us also remember the freedom and blessings we have as people of this blessed nation! May we take heed in the warning to never forget nor take our freedom for granted, but remember, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord!”

Celebrating and sharing our freedom together, - James Rockey

University of Michigan Engulfs Concordia Ann Arbor

The University of Michigan Board of Regents has approved the \$60 million purchase of Concordia University's 140-acre Ann Arbor, MI campus at 4090 Geddes Road, with a closing date scheduled for June 30th pending due diligence.

The acquisition – initiated by Concordia – features academic and administrative spaces, residence halls, athletic facilities, The Chapel of the Holy Trinity, and the historic Earhart Manor. Future site development will involve due diligence and coordination with local officials, residents, and community

up by Concordia Ann Arbor and the neighboring Waldenwood subdivision. But the stone-walled mansion the Earharts built in 1936 still stands on Geddes Road near US-23.

In the early 1960s, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod bought the land for Concordia College from Richard Earhart and the house from the Earhart Foundation. The campus, designed by architect Vincent Kling in a 1960s modern style, was dedicated in 1963.

The institution was originally established as Concordia Lutheran

for admissions visits and campus guests, the historic building also held offices for the admissions and advancement staffs and athletic coaches.

The former theater and ballroom had been used as a meeting space and small classroom, and the main floor living room, library, and living room were used for campus guests and special events.

U-M President Domenico Grasso and the Board of Regents explicitly confirmed that the university will preserve signature physical and natural facilities, specifically naming Earhart Manor and the Chapel of the Holy Trinity due to their immense historic significance. They have indicated they plan to prioritize the property for "community use." Regent Paul Brown suggested this could include transforming the surrounding historic grounds into open public green spaces or a public park and that the Chapel of the Holy Trinity might be used for weddings and worship for students, faculty and the community.

The LCMS Board of Directors acknowledges the significant emotional impact on the community resulting from the sale of the CUAA campus. Proceeds from the \$60 million transaction will be reinvested into Lutheran

higher education, with a focus on training church workers through the broader Concordia University System. They also acknowledged the deep emotional impact the sale of the Geddes Road campus has on students, alumni, and local congregations who felt a close connection to the site. They recognized that this transaction marks the conclusion of a chapter many in the community hoped would remain open.

While the university's advancement team launched a capital fundraising campaign in 2017 to honor the theological legacy of the "Maier men" – Dr. Paul Maier and his father, Lutheran Hour founder Dr. Walter A. Maier – the initiative was structured as a broader outreach to external donors rather than a direct personal bequest. Exact dollar amounts that have been raised were not revealed.

The campus library that stands on the Geddes Road property is the Zimmerman Library. Plans had been discussed for a significant theological library to be named after the Maiers. Upon Dr. Paul Maier's passing, Concordia Ann Arbor received a significant gift. The library was part of an earlier vision for campus growth when enrollment was expanding. With the entire Geddes Road site



Earhart Manor

The Earhart family's 400-acre estate along the Huron River included a small golf course for Harry Boyd Earhart (H.B.) to practice his swing, forty acres of woods where he went horseback riding, and formal gardens and a greenhouse where Carrie indulged her love of flowers. Today, most of the estate has disappeared, swallowed

Junior College, but underwent multiple name changes over time. The institution changed its name to Concordia College when it began offering four-year degree programs in 1976, and ultimately became Concordia University Ann Arbor in 2001.

Most recently, the Earhart Manor served at CUAA's front door welcoming students

Campus for \$60 Million — Despite Alumni Backlash

Reported by John List

being turned over to U-M, CUAA has halted all capital campaigns and construction plans for the library on the property.

Moving forward, Concordia is consolidating all of its operations entirely onto its nearby North Campus on Plymouth Road, focusing exclusively on its online and graduate healthcare offerings.

Faced with severe cash flow shortages and near-bankruptcy, CUAA was acquired by Concordia University Wisconsin on July 1, 2013. The merger was approved by the Higher Learning Commission to prevent the Ann Arbor school from closing permanently. Officially, the school became Concordia University, Inc. — operating under a “one university, two residential campuses.”

According to the LCMS, despite seeing significant student enrollment growth on the Michigan campus following the Wisconsin merger, the Ann Arbor campus continued to run operational deficits over the years. Because maintaining two massive, standalone residential campuses became financially unsustainable for the joint institution, the unified the CUW Board of Regents made the decision to downsize, leading to the University of Michigan sale. Following the university’s

decision to wind down the vast majority of its traditional in-person undergraduate offerings (including nursing, rehab sciences, and diagnostic medical sonography), students in these fields were given three primary options: 1) transition directly to a residential, in-person format at the main Concordia University Wisconsin (CUW) campus in Mequon, Wisconsin 2) opt to complete their degrees remotely through CUW’s established online platform; 3) students can choose to leave the university system entirely, Concordia partnered with other institutions to establish formal teach-out frameworks. These agreements ensure credits transfer smoothly so students can graduate from a nearby university without a loss of academic progress.

Students enrolled in graduate healthcare programs (such as Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, and Physician Assistant Studies) along with online education programs face no academic interruption. These core programs have been fully preserved and consolidated at Concordia’s separate North Campus on Plymouth Road (located about three miles away from the sold Geddes Road property). ■

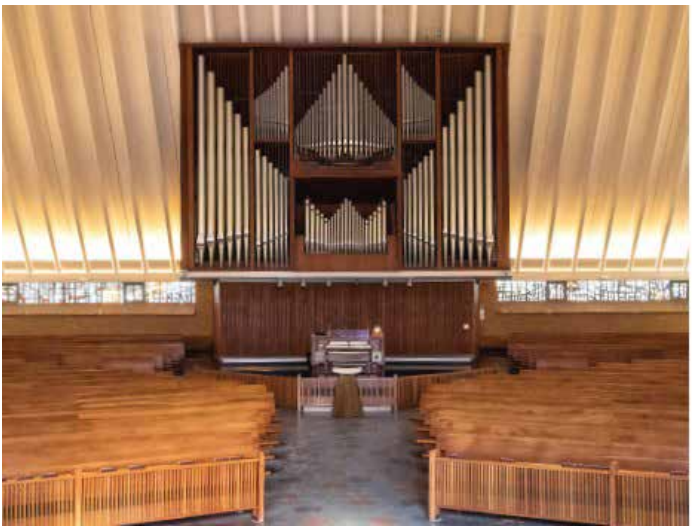
—JL



Kraft Center for the Arts



CUAA Cardinal Field House



Chapel of the Holy Trinity Pipe Organ

“Tis the Season”

This experience is etched in our memory for a lifetime. We knew he was coming, and we couldn't stop him. We didn't know how bad it would be, and who would bear the worst of the destruction. This was where roughly two million of us along the SW coast of Florida found ourselves on the morning of Wednesday September 28, 2022 as Hurricane Ian made his approach.



Hurricane Ian visible satellite image from the GOES-East satellite orbiting 22,236 miles above the earth's surface at the equator on Wednesday morning September 28, 2022, prior to landfall at Cayo Casto at 3:05pm EDT. High clouds are being carried northeastward by SW upper level winds ahead of a surface stationary front stretching from the Carolina coast across southern Georgia into the western Florida Panhandle.

Our power went out at 7:45 that morning, about 12 hours before the worst of the storm's fury was expected. Heavy rain and gale force winds had already come calling. By 10:00am our street was under six inches of water. I looked at the radar loop on my phone and said to my wife Kay. "We're between heavy rain squalls, if we leave now, I believe we can make it to the highway and get out." If Ian's eye would follow the morning forecast path, just off the Gulf coast to our west, storm surge would be forced into Charlotte Harbor, up the Myakka River, and our home would certainly be flooded, a life-threatening situation. We indeed

made it to the highway, and across the state to West Palm Beach for the night.

Now, just a couple years later, many still suffer from hurricane induced PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder), compounded by Hurricanes Helene and Milton in 2024. Several of our church members, neighbors, and friends have left because of it. Since 2016, in the last 10 years, 10 hurricanes have hit in the Florida-Georgia District. Seven of them have been major storms with sustained winds in excess of 110 mph. In a perfect world this would never happen, but we all know, this is not a perfect world! Stuff happens, bad stuff...ever since mankind's fall into sin chronicled in Genesis chapter 3. "Cursed is the ground because of you." (verse 17) God said that to Adam, and it applies to all of us still today.

Hurricane intensity is typically expressed in windspeed, but winds are not the

only demon. Storm surge, the local rise in sea level due to that wind pushing water toward the coastline and inland is the deadliest and most destructive element. Torrential rain brings catastrophic flooding, and tornadoes spin up in the rain bands spiraling inward toward the eye of the storm. These are not just for those of us near the beach, but can strike 100s of miles inland, as was especially the case with Helene in 2024. I remember Tropical Storm Alberto (not even a hurricane) which stalled and

flooded out much of the southern two thirds of Georgia back in 1994.

What's the best way to be prepared for storms like this? "Proper prior planning prevents pitifully poor performance." Knowing what to do in advance, and doing it, will make a huge difference. First and foremost is protecting your life and health, and your family. Know your potential risks. Do you live in a flood zone?

Elevations under 20 feet above sea level are at substantial risk. Are you situated in a river valley? These are especially prone to flash flooding from the torrential rains running off and water forced up rivers due to the surge. Large trees close to the house are a major hazard when winds gust over 100mph. As the storm approaches, know where to get reliable information. The National Hurricane Center (NHC) and the National Weather Service (NWS) are valuable resources for forecasts and safety tips. You'll find them at nhc.noaa.gov and weather.gov. The Florida National Weather Service meteorologists are offering



(This is AMAZING!) The National Hurricane Center's graphical forecast for the path and intensity of Ian issued at 11:00am EDT on Friday September 23rd, more than five days prior to Ian making landfall. At that point the storm had not yet reached tropical storm status and had yet to be "named". The forecast track was nearly exactly the same as what ultimately occurred! The only difference was in the timing, the center moved ashore about 7 hours later than forecast 5 days in advance.

Tropical Trouble?

Reported by Brian Albrecht

a free online Tropical Training Week July 27th through the 30th. Georgia residents are welcome to take part too. Type FTTW2026 into your search engine for information and to register. Find a local TV news station that has certified meteorologists on staff that have been in your area for several years and have the most experience with these storms.

The best are those who stay calm in all situations and don't give in to sensationalism and hype. Should you need to evacuate, where would you go? Don't necessarily follow the crowd. Choose a route that as much as possible takes you at a 90-degree angle from the storm's projected path. Also, anticipate long delays in traffic. The number of evacuation routes is limited. Leave early if you can! Riding the storm out can be a terrifying experience. Prayer, preparation, and an understanding of what's happening can ward off panic. Betty Clemens, an 85-year-old member of Trinity Lutheran Church of SW Florida, recalls her experience with Hurricane Ian.

"The howling of the wind and the constant high pitch wail, lasting for hours, were deafening. Cell service went out and all contact with family and friends was lost."

As night fell so did the cage of her screened porch, and two huge tree limbs onto her roof. She laid on her bed and sang the hymn "Lord Take My Hand and Lead Me." Stanza two was most comforting.

"Lord, when the tempest rages, I need not fear, for You, the Rock of Ages, are always near. Close by Your side abiding, I fear no foe, for when Your hand is guiding in peace I go." Then she noticed the wind shifting and began to fear the

worst. "I thought of the surge they said would be worse than the wind. I felt like Peter when he got out of the boat and walked on water. First, he did fine, until he lost his focus on Jesus. I lost my focus and became afraid of the surge. I needed a plan. How in the world am I going to get on top of my roof? I have this big oak tree in front of my house. I could grab onto that and as the water went up I'd go up too and then swim over to the roof. Then I had this horrible memory of a book I had read where a hurricane had swamped the smaller islands near Key West (1935 Labor Day Storm). Months later skeletons were found in the trees where people had tried to get high enough but didn't make it. Oh, dear God, please don't let me die in a tree!"



The outdoor worship at Trinity Lutheran Church of SW Florida on Sunday October 2nd of 2022. 75 people took part in the worship that day. Our individual padded chairs were hauled out by those most able bodied. Our gracious and merciful God provided much lower than normal humidity, and nice fresh breeze and a crystal clear blue sky for the occasion.

Ian took a turn, but not for the worse, at least for Betty and for Kay and me. Ian's eye passed to our south and east. The surge never came our way, but more than eight hours of 150 to 200 mph winds did along with 20 inches of rain.

So here we are, "Tis the season!" *hurricane season* again. What are we in for this year? For all of us in the Florida-Georgia District last year was a quiet one. Not one hurricane made landfall



Brian Albrecht
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in the US. This year our forecast is optimistic. A quieter than normal season is expected mainly due to a developing El Niño. But just what is an "El Niño" anyway? Simply stated, it's a natural swing in the pattern of the winds and waters of the tropical Pacific Ocean just south of the equator.

When warmer waters flow eastward across the Pacific it's called an El Niño. When the opposite occurs, and colder water flows westward away from South America it's tagged a "La Niña." In the transition from one to the other we get neutral conditions. The name "El Niño" comes from the 19th century fishermen along the Pacific coast of South America. They would notice a warm ocean current arriving every few years. This drastically reduced their catch and the food supply of coastal

Peru. This warm water seemed always to arrive at Christmas Time, so they named it "El Niño de la Navidad" —

The Christmas Child. ■

Mission:Haiti Charity Dissolves as Island Unrest and Budget Shifts Halt 25 Years of Lutheran Relief

Reported by John List

After a quarter-century of providing vital humanitarian aid and spiritual care, Mission:Haiti has officially dissolved its operations within the LCMS Florida-Georgia District. They were an affiliated ministry that operated through FLGA as an LCMS district-affiliated mission rather than a standalone national LCMS Recognized Service Organization.

Spearheaded by Helen Roenfeldt and an energetic founding team from **Gloria Dei/Davie, FL** and surrounding congregations, Mission:Haiti was designed to address urgent vulnerabilities through medical clinics, food distribution, and student sponsorship programs, the charity spent decades serving as a critical pipeline of relief from regional Lutheran congregations directly to vulnerable Haitian communities.

Pastor Darrell Stuehrenberg was one of Helen's catalysts and heavily involved in recruiting volunteers both for mission trips and to secure funding. The compounding logistics of severe, ongoing civil unrest on the island, paired with evolving structural re-alignments within the Florida-Georgia District's broader missions and outreach budget, ultimately forced the ministry to wind down its corporate structure.

"While the official entity has closed, its historical impact remains a testament to the Florida-Georgia District's enduring legacy of cross-cultural engagement and disaster response through larger, synchronized synodical operations like LCMS Disaster Response, LCMS International Mission and Habitat for Children Ministries, Inc.," emphasizes FLGA District President, The Rev. James Rockey.

"In 1999, our dear sister Helen Roenfeldt began Mission:Haiti with the help of many others

leading to what would become a decades-long relationship with the people of Haiti," explains David Vangsness, Mission:Haiti Board Chairman for the past decade. "As she pulled so many of us into this relationship, we came to know deeply why Helen had such a love for Haiti and its people. I was privileged to work in Haiti with Helen on many trips, and was constantly awed by her organizational skills and seemingly unending work-ethic."

The political and security crisis in Haiti has escalated to a point where operating a localized, independent charity became practically and logistically impossible. Following the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse, the total collapse of governmental authority created a severe power vacuum.

Heavily armed gangs capitalized on this void, seizing control of an estimated 90% of the capital city, Port-au-Prince, and aggressively expanding their territory into many of the rural areas. This volatile environment dismantled the foundational frameworks that international ministries rely on to execute their work.

"Our inability to travel to Haiti has significantly exacerbated these challenges," Vangsness continues. "There is no indication that the security situation in Haiti will improve in the foreseeable future. We have not been able to expose new people to the country. We have not been able to visit the people we seek to serve or our projects on the ground. Lophane, our Field-Director, has suffered the indignities of our immigration system and is dealing with what has become a near permanent separation from his family. He is unable to return to the U.S.

where he was instrumental in our outreach efforts. We are confronted with declining revenue and engagement.

"Helen was ever vigilant to avoid the stigma of the 'white man's burden' or hurting when one should be helping. Her admonition was always: 'Only Haitians can 'fix' Haiti.'"

Mesach St. Amour is President of Habitat for Children Ministries, Inc. (HFCM) whose primary and most public international mission focused on serving impoverished families in rural Haitian communities like La Jeune, Haiti [see story next page]. The ministry focuses heavily on supplying school resources, running mobile midwife services, and constructing essential infrastructure — such as the Pediatric Medical and Dental Clinic and Maternity Center in La Jeune. The operation is headquartered at 555 SW Cashmere Blvd, Port Saint Lucie, FL 34986.

HFCM operates a "Shoe and Sock Drive" requesting new or gently used shoes and socks to protect vulnerable children and support homeless outreach initiatives. They also work to provide medical supplies to stock the Habitat First Aid Center and Pediatric Clinic in La Jeune. HFCM will accept over-the-counter pain relievers, bandages, gauze, antiseptic ointments, blood pressure cuffs, infant scales, and thermometers. Beyond medical supplies, they gather backpacks, pencils, notebooks, and school supplies ahead of the academic year for children in their education sponsorship pipeline.

For more information about supporting HFCM,, see this issue page 24, and visit their website at habitatforchildrenministries.org



Habitat Care Center Nears Completion, Bringing Hope and Healing to Haiti

“Despite difficulties working in Haiti, we are grateful to share that the Habitat Care Center is quickly approaching the final stages of construction.



By the grace of God, we have come a long way, and we hope to complete the project very soon,” states Meschac St. Amour, President of Habitat For Children Ministries, Inc.

According to St. Amour, with construction nearly finished, only a few essential touches remain: laying the tile, applying the final coat of paint, and installing doors and windows. These small but critical steps will unlock the center’s full potential to serve many more in need.

“The Habitat Care Center is more than a building; it is a sanctuary where lives are transformed daily. In recent weeks alone, medical teams have provided life-saving care

to two young individuals suffering from severe anemia and a 40-year-old woman living with HIV who urgently required medical attention,” St. Amour emphasizes.

One poignant moment remains etched in memory — a late-night cry for help from a pregnant mother searching desperately for a safe place to give birth. The center staff answered, providing comfort, safety, and care when it was needed most. Stories like these underscore the vital role the Habitat Care Center plays in a community where many have nowhere else to turn.

Currently, only one midwife serves the center’s maternity patients — more than one is needed — to meet the growing demands. Each childbirth requires careful monitoring, and emergencies can endanger both mother and baby. The ministry is prayerfully seeking to sponsor two additional midwives to ensure every mother receives the attention she deserves.

Visits to nearby hospitals reveal heartbreaking conditions — patients lying on floors due to a lack of beds, and families struggling to access even basic medical care. These sights fuel the urgency of this mission and the importance of the Habitat Care Center’s continued growth. The second story of the center, still under construction, represents hope for increased capacity — to provide emergency care, safe shelter, and a place of refuge for those in

crisis. Completing this expansion will equip the center to meet the rising needs with greater efficiency and compassion.

“While financial donations are important to finish the construction and hire necessary staff, the ministry’s greatest need is prayer, St. Amour emphasizes. “Supporters are asked to pray for:

- the provision of resources to complete construction;
- strength and wisdom for staff and volunteers;
- safety, comfort, and healing for every person walking through the center’s doors. With every prayer and contribution, lives are changed. The partnership between the ministry and its supporters is the cornerstone of this vital work.



The Habitat Care Center is a testament to what faith, care, and community can achieve. As it nears completion, its doors will open wider, bringing healing and hope to more families who long for a brighter tomorrow.

Meschac St. Amour can be reached at Habitat For Children Ministries, Inc. | 555 SW Cashmere Blvd, Port Saint Lucie, FL 34986. Telephone: (561) 536-3177 or visit their website at hfcmm.info. ■



Dale Meyer Receives Doctor of Laws From Concordia/Nebraska

The Rev. Dr. Dale Meyer received the Concordia University, Nebraska Doctor of Laws degree, which is conferred upon individuals who have distinguished themselves through prolonged superior service in their field of endeavor. Meyer is president emeritus and professor emeritus of Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO. He retired in 2020 after 15 years as seminary president.

Dr. Meyer first joined the faculty as a guest instructor in 1979, then served as an assistant professor until 1984. In 2001, he rejoined the faculty as professor of practical theology in addition to his role as president. He previously served as the Gregg H. Benidt Memorial Chair in Homiletics and Literature and served as the interim president and became the 10th president of Concordia Seminary in 2005. After earning a master of divinity from Concordia Seminary, Meyer earned a master of arts and doctor of philosophy in classical languages from

Washington University in St. Louis, MO. He completed his bachelor of arts at Concordia Senior College/Fort Wayne, IN.

Meyer has served The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and the church at-large in several capacities. He served as third vice-president of the LCMS from 1995 to 1998. He was a charter board member of the Association of Lutheran Older Adults (ALOA), has served as an honorary director of God's Word to the Nations Bible Society and as a member of the Standing Committee on Pastoral Ministry for the LCMS.

Meyer was pastoral advisor for the Southern Illinois District of the International Lutheran Laymen's League and has served as first vice president, second vice president, secretary and circuit counselor of the LCMS Southern Illinois District. He served on the board of trustees of the American Bible Society from 2001 to 2013. Meyer has written numerous sermons and columns for Lutheran Hour Ministries. He



has authored and various Bible studies and devotionals and contributed to many journals and resource publications. Meyer has been speaking and preaching for 50 years. His areas of interest and study include 1 Peter, the church in a changing culture and the Sabbath applied to life today. ■



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Modern day Christians frequently cite Matthew's famous Great Commission passage as Christ's mandate to share the good news. However, MATTHEW 28:18-20 is not central to Luther's theology of sharing the faith. Instead, Luther leans on MARK 16:15-16, *"Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."*

Luther comments on Mark's text nearly every year because the three-year lectionary for sermons did not exist in the 1500s. Luther comments on MATTHEW 28:18-20 once in a sermon in 1525. However, Luther writes more than one hundred pages of comments on MARK 16:15-16 in

the sum of the gospel. Luther writes: "The chief article and foundation of the gospel is that before you take Christ as an example, you accept and recognize him as a gift, as a present that God has given you and that is your own ... See, this is what it means to have a proper grasp of the gospel, that is, of the overwhelming goodness of God ... See, when you lay hold of Christ as a gift which is given you for your very own and have no doubt about it, you are a Christian. Faith redeems you from sin ... then the other part follows: that you take him as your example,

The transformation in Luther's thinking crystallized in his 1522 Christmas Postil. Luther insisted that "the chief part and ground of the gospel is that, first of all, before you grasp Christ as an example, you receive and recognize Him as a gift and present, given to you by God



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to be your own." This reordering proves fundamental: faith must precede works, reception must precede imitation. The gospel

presents Christ's deeds not so we can copy them, but so we can depend on them, since they express "the overwhelming goodness of God ... the great fire of

the love of God for us." This gift-centered Christology transforms how believers understand their entire existence — no longer striving to earn standing with God through moral achievement, but resting in what has been freely given and then compelled by Christ's love, you are moved outward by the gospel to live in grateful service to share this good news with your neighbors. ■

The Sweetness of the Gospel: Why Luther Looked to Mark to Move the Church

the context of Christ's ascension. Through Luther's focus on Jesus ascension and reign the emphasis is on Christ's mission and the Church's mission.

For Luther, it was the irresistible sweetness of the Gospel that moves you. It is the gospel or the good news about God's mercy and the forgiveness of sins that would resound throughout the whole earth to the most distant corners — even right here in Florida, Georgia and the Bahamas. God's salvation is something sweet, something wonderful, something only the gospel can give.

In the beginning of the 1522 Church Postil, Martin Luther teaches clearly about what one ought to seek in the gospel. He points out that all parts of the New Testament have one single Gospel. But the gospel contains two components: First, the main theme of Christ as gift and second, the consequent theme of Christ as example. These parts are

giving yourself in service to your neighbor just as you see that Christ has given himself for you ... Christ as a gift nourishes your faith and makes you a Christian. But Christ as an example exercises your works. These do not make you a Christian. Actually they come forth from you because you have already been made a Christian."

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF:

- ✗ In what ways do you to see Christ as gift before seeing him as an example?
- ✗ How does Christ as gift shift the way you articulate and share the gospel with your family, friends and neighbors?
- ✗ What are some ways that Christ is a divine gift for you?

What is revitalization? One's thoughts of revitalization will likely depend on reversing what got your attention in the first place. It may be attendance, money to pay the bills or re-igniting that favored ministry. For us, revitalization means God's people faithful in worship, growing in Christ — while also being selfless in blessing others with God's heart that desires to see more people baptized and proclaim faith in Jesus.

Yet revitalization can be a mystery. It may seem perplexing to see your church stuck. You love your church but for outsiders your church may be invisible.

What to do? In previous columns we have talked about five shifts in mindsets, assumptions, behaviors and routines plus three "realms." For today we will look a bit closer at the first shift: away from an "I'll just do it myself approach" (few in charge) to a more intentional practice of apprenticeship, discipling or empowering others (many engaged in a serving pathway).

The reality is that there is a direct relationship between how many are involved in something other than worship and one's spiritual growth, frequency of worship and the health and vitality of the church. In other words, the less people who take responsibility for something beyond themselves, the less likely they will have a sense of ownership.

Put positively, when you prioritize engaging and involving people in your church, in taking on even some small piece of responsibility, they will more likely take their church membership and their faith more seriously! The temptation is to just do it ourselves (whatever the "it" is). Our accomplishments feel good and we may like the control!

We feel valued when we deliver the thing, call the people, provide the ride, make the visit, bake the cake, set up the chairs, take out the trash, fix the piece of equipment and so on. But if we do not prioritize intentionally inviting and involving someone to join us, even if it is making a few phone calls, we miss a rich, golden opportunity to bless them!

We are not referring to

public announcements or making sure those opportunities are listed in the bulletin. Those are essential to keep people informed and invite them to pray! It really comes down to one person talking personally to another. P.S. we're not talking about your circle of friends! We're talking about the inactive member spouse, the newer member, the younger attendee who sits alone etc.

Such invitations say, "I like you . . . you are important . . . you can make a difference!"

Volunteerism is relationally driven far more than it is about the task. Also, don't dismiss this because you think they will say no. Keep inviting people to take on some small responsibility: bring the donuts, host the meeting at their home, join you in cooking, etc. That's the "on ramp." Then along the way those with more capacity will take on more responsibility.

Of course you feel responsible and you don't want to be lazy. But with this shift you are helping people move

from being spectators to getting in the game! This is important for pastors too. So first, model the way. Serve with integrity and humility — lifting and advocating for others. Find someone to take with you when you do things and encourage them to replicate this with another! Second, share what are doing with other leaders in your church and give thanks to God. Then encourage



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them to mentor someone as well. Third, when you are involved in planning activities remind one another that the first goal is to engage and involve others early in the planning process: the inactive, even non-members, the youngsters and those who will likely participate later. Afterwards, intentionally celebrate what God has done.

Then watch what happens! People will increasingly lean on God to do something in His name - including your current leaders! They will increasingly be in worship and to pray for God's help as they carry out their new role in XYZ ministry. They will want to be there to greet the other member friends they were with while serving. They will tell their friends what they are doing. They will have more incentive to support the ministry through their prayers and even their offerings. God and church and the body of Christ will become much more important to them. ■

Rev. Scott Gress is a Professional Certified Coach and believes in Growing People for Ministry with a focus on leadership, discipleship and teamwork. Check out The Coaching Leader podcast and Scott's YouTube channel for more on revitalization. Contact Scott if you are interested in working with him or your church: scottgress@me.com, scottgress.com or at 561-542-4472



The Mystery of Revitalization Part 6

Redeeming Life Outreach Ministries In Planning Stages for St. Louis Maternity Home

Redeeming Life Outreach Ministries (RLOM) is a Christ-centered non-profit organization that operates residential maternity and transitional homes for single pregnant women in crisis. Founded in December 2013 and based in Sanford, Florida, it is a Recognized Service Organization (RSO) of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

"Our theme continues to shine throughout the year at our maternity and transition homes," states Darci Fraker, RLOM's social media and communications consultant. "We are incredibly grateful for the opportunity to walk alongside moms and their precious babies through the

blessings of home, help and hope during this special season of life. We're also excited to share that, over the past few months, baptisms have taken place at both of our maternity home locations – a beautiful reminder of God's grace and blessings at work in our ministry."

Recent baptisms include Mia and her sweet baby – baptized at Immanuel/East Dundee, IL. Grace and her baby were baptized at Lutheran Church of the Redeemer/ Sanford, FL.

"We thank God for the gift of baptism and the promise that they are dearly loved children of God. RLOM is thankful for the support provided, giving us the blessing

to walk alongside the moms and babies in our homes and witness these beautiful moments of faith, hope, and new life," Fraker says.

Jessica Thompson shares that "plans are underway for a third location of Redeeming Life Outreach Ministries in St. Louis, Missouri. "Currently, we are working to raise awareness and establish partnerships with area churches, as well as applying for grants and seeking financial donations that will be used towards the purchase of a St. Louis home," Thompson explains. "Our prayer is that we can be ready to serve women and babies in Missouri by the end of 2027."

Visit RLOM's website to learn more: rlom.org. 



[UNFILTERED]



SAVE THE DATE

Mark your calendars for the Middle School Youth Gathering and The High School Retreat. The date is November 6-8, 2026 and it all takes place at The "Lake Yale Baptist Conference Center, a 288-acre full-service Christian retreat, camp, and ministry center located about an hour north of Orlando.

This one weekend, one location, will encompass two incredible events: The Middle School Youth Gathering and The High School Retreat offer faith-filled experiences tailored to each age group. More details, registration information, and pricing will be coming soon.

High School Retreat

This is a brand-new opportunity for high school students – replacing the former High School Leadership Event. The Retreat is open to all high school students. It will deepen their walk with Christ and let them form meaningful connections through engaging Bible studies, powerful speakers and worship. The Retreat will also be a time for fun - roasting marshmallows over a campfire, playing outdoor games and much more.

Middle School Youth Gathering

More than 400 middle school youth from all around the FLGA District come together for an exciting weekend. They experience mass events, powerful speakers, breakout sessions, and games that provide opportunities for spiritual growth, learning, and building connections.

Watch for more information coming soon.

Ministry Sabbaticals: For the Health of the Church

A healthy ministry does not happen by accident. It grows when a congregation plans intentionally, supports its leaders well, and invests in practices that strengthen both church workers and the people they serve.

One practical way to do that is through a ministry sabbatical. When a congregation makes that investment, the benefits often extend far beyond the individual worker and can strengthen the health of the entire church.

As many congregations face longer vacancies because of church worker shortages, caring for the workers the Lord has already placed in their ministries is a wise and timely step. With about a 20% vacancy rate in the LCMS, many workers are serving under growing pressure while trying to keep up with ever-evolving ministry challenges.

At a time when fatigue and burnout are rising, a ministry sabbatical offers a faithful and practical response. Rooted in

Scripture, a sabbatical creates space for church workers to rest, refresh, and reconnect so they can return to ministry with renewed energy and focus.

Interest in sabbaticals is growing across the broader church. A 2022 article from Lifeway Research argued that many pastors need a substantive break rather than a change in calling, and some Christian denominations have incorporated sabbatical planning more intentionally into ministry life.

In the LCMS, congregations are already prompted in call materials to consider whether a sabbatical is offered. Building on that growing awareness, Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF), through Grace Place Wellness, now encourages sabbaticals by offering a ministry sabbatical scholarship.

For the third year, LCEF is offering six scholarships through the Grace Place Wellness Ministry Sabbatical Scholarship as seed money for rostered church

workers taking their first sabbatical. This year the scholarship amount is \$7,500 per scholarship. The current application is for those planning a sabbatical in 2027 or beyond, and the deadline is October 31, 2026.

Funds may be used to help cover vacancy costs or other portions of the sabbatical. Additional information is available at <https://lcef.org/grace-place-wellness/>, where church workers and congregations can also find a guide for creating a ministry sabbatical policy and resources for planning a sabbatical well. Grace Place Wellness also offers coaching for church workers and the lay leaders who support them.

Now is the time to begin the conversation in your ministry. For additional information, contact Rev. Dr. Greg Walton at greg.walton@lcef.org. A ministry sabbatical can strengthen the wellbeing of church workers and, in turn, the health of the church. ■

Are you a rostered church worker who has never taken a sabbatical? Here's a meaningful opportunity designed specifically for you. LCEF is offering the Grace Place Ministry Sabbatical Scholarship to support first-time sabbaticals focused on physical, emotional, and spiritual wellness. Grants are available to help cover salary support, interim staffing, travel, retreats, education, or other related expenses.



This program is open to all rostered workers—pastors, Directors of Christian Education (DCEs), teachers, administrators, deaconesses, and other commissioned or ordained workers serving in LCMS congregations, schools, or ministries.

To learn more about how to apply visit: lcef.org/grace-place-wellness/ or contact Pastor Greg Walton at greg.walton@lcef.org.

FLORIDA GEORGIA

Out and About in the District

Weston's "Resurrection Run" Had 97 Participants

The Resurrection Run (Rez Run) is an annual 5K fundraiser hosted by the youth of **St. Paul/Weston, FL**, held every Easter Sunday. The event typically begins around 7:45 AM following the church's outdoor sunrise service.

Participants gather at St. Paul's campus before heading to the adjacent Tequesta Trace Park for the run. The run raises funds for the church's youth ministries, specifically for mission-related trips like the Spoke Folk Tours and the LCMS Youth Gathering.

Participants can join in person or through a virtual option with an entry fee of \$35, which includes a race shirt and a finisher's medal.

This past Easter there were 97 participants according to Jeremy



Becker, St. Paul's Director of Youth and Family Ministry.

This year the top three female finishers were Mikayla

Becker, Natalie Becker and Cintia Castagnino. The top three male finishers were Joe Eastep, Mathias Roberts and AJ Whitton. ■



Redeemer Stuart took two middle school handbell groups to the Music in the Parks Festival at Universal Studios in Orlando. Both the Bells of Praise and Beginning Handbells received straight superior ratings under the direction of Joy Beach. The Bells of Praise also received Best Overall with both groups receiving the highest scores of the day. ■

Prince of Peace/Orlando Feeds 444 Families, 1,878 People

Reported by Tom Hirsch

Our June 27, 2026 food distribution at **Prince of Peace/Orlando, FL** again gave us a challenge of helping so many people with a smaller number of volunteers than usual.

At 6:37 am, the parking lot was full and five overflow vehicles were parked at the curb on Curry Ford Rd. By 6:45 am, seven more vehicles had arrived, bringing the total parked along the curb to 12 vehicles. As the food pantry staff and volunteers worked in temperatures just below 80 degrees to move the food to the parking lot and set up the operation, approximately 11 people seeking food who walked to our church were standing in line, and people continued to come every minute on foot and in vehicles.

By 7:40 am, the car count on Curry Ford Road was 59 – stretching past the Avery Place Apartments, and was a block short of the Oxalis Avenue/Raper Dairy Road intersection.

A few minutes later, all of the preparation was done, and Associate Pastor Rev. Adolfo Borges led the opening prayer. We had about 35 volunteers and staff working the event at that time, plus about 10 members of our Spanish-speaking congregation, **Principe de Paz**, directing vehicles and pedestrians in the parking lot, and registering the families. The first vehicles in line entered the food loading area at 7:56 am.

Fortunately, as the morning progressed, about 12-15 additional volunteers arrived, and their help was essential – especially inside the Bickel Building – to pack bags of food, and move items to the parking lot as needed. Two girls from Winter Park High School, and Martin, a previous volunteer who is an Aveda Institute student studying



barbering also arrived to help. The number of people packing bags began with about five volunteers, and as more people arrived to help, the number grew to about ten.

Our staff and volunteers worked continuously as the heat rose into the mid-80s by mid-morning. At the end of our sweat-soaked efforts, we blessed 444 families, totaling 1,878 people with the food they urgently needed. This includes 60 people who walked to our church campus. These numbers are in line with the

number of people we have served the last several months. We gave away all of the 1,523 lbs of fresh corn on the cob that we had, and two pallets, totaling 335 lbs of baked goods.

At the next food pantry workday, we will estimate the number of food bags packed, the number of food bags remaining, and the amount of frozen meat and produce that we gave our food clients, and provide an updated report. ■

The Rev. Tom Boeck has accepted the call to **Trinity/Summerfield, FL** and was installed there on June 28, 2026. He comes from Peace/Conway, Arkansas.

Boeck began his work in the Florida-Georgia District while serving as Vicar at Faith/Marietta, GA. Following his graduation from Concordia University/Mequon, WI he studied the Specific Ministry Pastor program at Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO graduating in 2016 and then obtained his Master in Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary/Fort Wayne, IN. Boeck also served as Associate Pastor at Marco/Marco Island, FL from 2018-2020 and Senior Pastor there from 2020-2023.

Pastor Boeck is married to Sharon Boeck who has extensive experience in education in Georgia. She also was the Community Resource Manager for The Shelter for Abused Women & Children in Naples, FL. ■



Bless Broward: Building a Brighter Future Together

This past March 14, 2026, roughly 100 people from Broward County Florida local Lutheran congregations participated in "Bless Broward," a morning of community service at various locations in the area.

"Our Savior/Plantation, Shepherd of the Coast and Trinity in Ft. Lauderdale all sent combined teams of volunteers into the community to share the love of Jesus," Pastor Tony Durante explained. "Departing from Our Savior, a caravan of spring carolers visited the residences of the homebound and ailing, and a half-dozen drivers delivered bags of groceries to eight families in need.

"A group of 16 walked from Shepherd of the Coast to sing carols at two neighboring nursing homes. A team of 44 adults and youth gathered at Trinity to visit crews on merchant ships at Port Everglades to share the word of God, pray, sing and deliver care packages with Gideon Bibles."

The Lippman Youth Shelter in Oakland Park completed the third phase of a Serenity Garden project begun during Bless Broward, 2025. Many volunteers also helped with the City of Ft. Lauderdale's beach clean-up. Our Savior Lutheran School's National Junior Honors Society students and parents plus youth from American Heritage Girls Troop 1483 joined volunteer groups at the beach, Lippman Youth Shelter and Port Everglades.

"Members of **St. Paul/Weston, FL** participated in two of the activities. Each of the service projects were well attended by parents and students from Our Savior and Shepherd of the Coast's schools. The community service day began at Our Savior as Bless Plantation in 2023 with a goal of mobilizing laity in community outreach by creating an opportunity for them to share their

passion with others. As the annual event broadened to include other congregations and sites in other cities in the following years, it has since been called, "Bless Broward."

In photos below, from top, Pastor Jeff Wilhelm, **Trinity/Fort Lauderdale**, prays with merchant ship crew members at Port Everglades; Volunteers participating in Fort Lauderdale beach cleanup; Pastor Tony Durante and members of **Our Savior/Plantation** visit homebound and nursing home families. ■





Lutheran University Students Retreat to St. Augustine

Reported by Piper Countryman

The University of Florida and Florida State University's Lutheran student fellowships set their rivalry aside for a weekend and went on a retreat to St. Augustine together.

Christ Our Savior/St. Augustine, FL hosted the group of 12 college students, six from UF and six from FSU. The groups arrived the evening of Friday, April 17, and began the retreat with a Bible study led by FSU's group. Saturday's weather was very hot and sunny, and the group enjoyed the beach for a few hours.

Sunburned, sandy, and sweaty, the group was excited to shower after the beach but were met with the unpleasant surprise that the YMCA where they made a reservation to shower was closed. However, the Lord provided an even better alternative. After searching for other places to shower, the group drove back to Christ Our Savior and were met by a woman finishing up her altar guild work. She offered the showers at her home five minutes from the church to the students,

whose only other option was a YMCA 50 minutes away.

Finally clean, the students shared a meal and UF's group led a Bible study. University Lutheran/Tallahassee's Pastor Jay Winters joined them. They walked around enjoying downtown St. Augustine to end the day.

Sunday morning the group attended Christ Our Savior's Bible study and worship. A delicious lunch cooked by some church members was savored by the students and the congregation, then the college groups headed back to Gainesville and Tallahassee.

This was the first time these student fellowships have done a retreat together but not the last. It was encouraging to spend time with

other Lutheran college students and hear about their fellowship activities. At the end of the event, the students knew people in their own group and the other fellowship much better. Plans for the groups to spend a day floating down a spring together at the beginning of next school year are already being organized. ■



Honoring the Hands that Heal



Pastor Tony Durante at **Our Savior/Plantation, FL** gave blessings to nurses at Encompass Health and Rehabilitation Hospital of Sunrise as part of Nurse Appreciation Week this past May. The chief nursing officer of the facility invited Durante to come that day and lead a

Blessing of Hands Ceremony, a tradition believed to have been started by Florence Nightingale in the 1800's. The blessing involves anointing the hands of nurses. It is an affirming gesture reminding them that their hands are means to deliver godly compassion to patients.

Durante offered scripture readings and prayer, and encouraged the nearly twenty nurses who attended the gathering. He pronounced a blessing upon each nurse as he poured water over their hands. Our Savior Member Mercedes Camacho was among the nurses who participated in the ceremony. ■



Four students were baptized by Pastor Jacob Scheler at a special religious milestone event held during an end-of-school-year chapel service at **St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL**. "The school community gathered to congratulate the students, reinforcing our mission of discipling families and celebrating milestones together," Pastor Scheler said. "We regularly host these focused "Baptism Bash" chapel days to give students who are ready to make a public profession of faith a dedicated opportunity to be baptized surrounded by their peers, teachers, and family members." ■



Amazing Grace Honors First Responders With Steak Luncheon



Amazing Grace/Oxford, FL served filet mignon, mac & cheese, Olive Garden salads, rolls, and a



host of homemade desserts to the men and women of the Wildwood Police Department during national Police Week in May. "We wanted to thank them for their service and all they do for our community," Pastor Paul Burtzlaff shared. "The

officers and staff certainly enjoyed the filet mignon, but even more, they appreciated the opportunity to spend time with our courageous first responders and engage in meaningful conversations." Pastor Burtzlaff was the grill master for the event. ■

District Educator Completes Second "Extravagant Love" Book

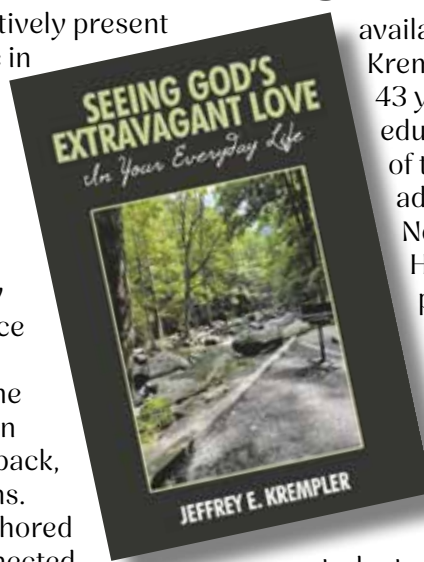
Dr. Jeffrey E. Krempler's book, *"Seeing God's Extravagant Love in Your Everyday Life,"* is a Christian devotional and spiritual growth book focused on recognizing divine affection amidst the chaos



of modern schedules. Through 14 short chapters, Krempler addresses core themes and content — such as slowing down to pause busy, daily routines to become aware of God's presence. He emphasize that divine love

is not rare, but actively present "all over the place in everything, every day."

The book provides perspectives meant to help people personally feel and experience how much they are truly loved. The book is available in hardcover, paperback, and Kindle editions. Krempler also authored a highly interconnected companion book titled "Living With Cancer: God's Extravagant Love," which frames these spiritual concepts through a personal testimony about his wife Lisa's cancer journey and enduring faith. Dr. Krempler was married to his wife, Lisa Ann Levine Krempler, for 46 years until her passing in December 2024. Both books are



available on Amazon. Krempler dedicated 43 years to Lutheran education, spending 35 of those years in school administration across New Jersey and Florida. He has served as the principal of **St. Paul Lutheran Church and School/Boca Raton, FL** and is currently Interim Principal guiding the faculty, staff, and hundreds of

students from preschool through 8th grade while the school is in the search process for a permanent Principal. Krempler has been heavily involved in the LCMS Florida-Georgia District educator networks and local education workshops. ■

Trinity Partners With Longleaf Elementary Via Miracle Grow Investment

The Miracle Grow Grant is a micro-grant provided by the Florida-Georgia District of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) to fund community outreach and mission activity projects. In August, 2025, **Trinity Lutheran Church/Trinity, FL** received a Miracle Grow Grant to partner with Longleaf Elementary School, a highly-rated Pre-K through 5th grade public neighborhood school located in New Port Richey, within the master-planned Longleaf community, just down the road from Trinity Lutheran Church. The grant enables the congregation to participate in a range of activities.

"First, we were able to display a canvas banner alongside the driveway for student pick-ups for the entire school year," offers John Dupps, Director of Community

Engagement for Trinity. "Then, we were able to participate in the fall open house where we handed out all 50 tri-fold brochures for our congregation – in the first 15 minutes! We also conducted an unofficial poll of parents asking about their primary concerns and received 40 responses. We also gave out bracelets and candy to the kids, and almost ran out. We also accumulated a number of email addresses from parents agreeing to receive our congregation's newsletter."

Trinity also donated a large amount of medical supplies to the Longleaf Elementary School clinic last fall. "We collected so many supplies that we ended up also donating to a middle school nearby. Then in October, we sponsored a Trunk or Treat event where we handed out approximately 600-700 pieces of candy, and another 200 tri-fold brochures about Trinity Lutheran.

"This past Thanksgiving, we were

asked to donate 10 food baskets for needy students – which we accomplished with the help from Thrivent Action Team. We were invited to offer Crismons for sale, made by our Ladies Guild, at a November veterans tribute at the school where we were the only Business Partner participating," Dupps continues.

"At Christmas we were asked again for 20 food baskets and we managed to pull this together with help from another Thrivent Action Team."

Earlier this year, Longleaf's school principal visited our recently completed church building and met with Pastor Marc Nauman. During that visit, leadership was informed that there was a dire need to help with providing school lunches to needy students. Trinity has been able to contribute \$500 – raised during a recent Chili Cook-Off.

"Later we were able to provide a breakfast for the 120 teachers, staff and administrators of Longleaf – as part of the PTA sponsored Staff Appreciation Week," he says. "We were once again appreciative of Thrivent helping make this a reality.

"These successful events were *only possible* because as a Business Partner of LLES we were welcomed into the school and kept informed about activities and the needs there," Dupps concludes. "We are extremely thankful to the Florida-Georgia District and the Miracle Grow Grant program for making this possible." ■

Bill Wilsher Receives Good Samaritan Award

Saturday, June 20, Bill Wilsher received an award for community service at Lutheran Services Florida's (LSF) Good Samaritan Award banquet. Bill, a former member of **Trinity/Delray Beach, FL** (Pastor Tony Durante's previous congregation) is well known for volunteering



his expertise in garden-scaping for non-profit organizations. When **Our Savior/Plantation, FL** planned a tranquility garden at the Lippman Youth Shelter for Bless Broward Community Service Day in April 2025, Rev. Durante remembered Bill and asked if he would design a peaceful space for the shelter's children and staff. Bill exceeded every expectation. He visited the property multiple times, met with church leaders and shelter staff, and produced detailed, hand-drawn plans for the garden

and for both the front and back grounds as well. He donated the designs and contributed many of the materials needed for the project. True to his word, Bill was present for all three phases of installation. He worked alongside volunteers, guiding them and getting his hands dirty to ensure the vision became reality. Our Savior submitted Bill's name for the Good Samaritan Award, in gratitude for all his contributions to the tranquility garden effort. Bill was one of twenty recipients of the award at the June 20 banquet held at **Christ the King/Miami, FL.** ■

New LCMS Mission Community Forming in Sebastian/Barefoot Bay

Reported by Eric Sahlberg

According to the Florida REALTOR Association, Florida's population is projected to grow by 11.1 percent during the next ten years. The Florida-Georgia District is proactively planting new LCMS churches to welcome incoming residents. The newest frontier for this outreach is the Space Coast region, specifically the communities of Sebastian and Barefoot Bay.

This burgeoning mission was sparked by Pastor Bruce Rudolf's

vision for a Lutheran church situated between Vero Beach and Palm Bay.

Thanks to the foundational efforts of Pastors Tony Steinbronn and Joe Adams, a dedicated group of locals recently gathered to explore launching the ministry. In May of this year, I met with these area Lutherans to officially begin praying, planning, and charting the path forward for this new community. If you have a friend or relative living in the Sebastian/

Barefoot Bay area of Florida that could be a part of this new community, please have them contact Pastor Bruce at (772) 321-8692 or barefootrevl@gmail.com. If you would like to explore starting a new church in your community, please contact me at the Florida Georgia District at (407) 258-5051 or my email address at esahlberg@flgadistrict.org. ■



Pastor Eric Sahlberg takes a selfie with members of the formation committee



Timothy /Woodstock, GA enjoyed a successful Vacation Bible School week in June with "Rainforest Falls." More than 100 children in preschool through 5th grade participated in the daily themes of "God is our Creator, He knows everything about us, He is our safe place and loves us. God is never

ending". Each theme was based on Bible stories. More than 40 volunteers were Timothy members and people from the community. The children and their families also brought nonperishable food items for Timothy's church-sponsored community food bank. ■

Lakeside/Venice Announces 2026-2027 Concert Series



The second annual concert series has been announced by Dr. John Behnke, Minister of Traditional Music at **Lakeside/Venice, FL**. The concerts are of sacred music and fit with

September/October Concert

Lakeside's mission of proclaiming the Gospel and witnessing faith to the community. All concerts take place on Sundays at 4 pm, providing a variety of music through the organ, voice, handbells, and piano.

The initial performance is **Sunday, October 18**, with an organ program entitled "**Going for Baroque**" with music by German, French, and Italian organists from 1600-1750. Renowned composers like Johann Pachelbel, Johann Sebastian Bach, Dieterich Buxtehude, and François

Couperin will be showcased in the repertoire.

Dr. Behnke was Professor of Music teaching organ and directing the Alleluia Ringers at Concordia University/Wisconsin from 1986-2015. He remains an active composer with more than 600 published compositions with nineteen different publishers in the US, Germany, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Each year he has numerous organ, choral, and handbell compositions published by Concordia Publishing House.

November 15th Concert



November 15th presents amazing tenor Michael Bodnyk. He sang last February and returns by popular demand. Bodnyk is the

Minister of Music at St. Armand's Key Lutheran Church/Sarasota. He earned his Master of Church Music degree from Concordia University Wisconsin.

December 20th Concert

December 20th is Lakeside Advent/Christmas Carol Concert presented by the Lakeside Ringers and Singers with guest instrumentalists and Dr. Behnke on the organ. This popular concert includes the most beloved Christmas carols and hymns.



On **March 21st** noted composer and virtuoso pianist Joel Raney comes to Lakeside. Joel is a music editor for Hope Publishing Company and a prolific composer of church music for choir, piano, handbells, and instruments. His compositions are played by church musicians all over the world. He will be joined by flutist, Raymond Stolarczyk, son of Rev. Brian and Sarah Stolarczyk and Lakeside organist, Dr. John Behnke. ■

January 17th Concert



January 17th, Grammy nominated mezzo-soprano and radio personality for the classical music station

WSMR, Thea Lobo along with organist Sam Nelson will combined for an Organ and Voice concert Nelson is the Organist and Choir Director at Church of The Redeemer in downtown Sarasota. He is a graduate of Boston University and is a frequent organ soloist around Sarasota.



February 7th Concert



February 7th brings handbell soloist Ron Bellamy and accompanist, Linda Lorgus to Venice. Bellamy is the director of the Philadelphia Handbell Ensemble, and an established handbell soloist. Lorgus was a music editor for the music publisher, JW Pepper. Both are also very much involved as church music directors. Ron has been a featured soloist for a number of Handbell Musicians of America conferences.

March 21st Concert

Celebrations Abound at First/Gainesville

On May 22nd, **First/Gainesville, FL's** Preschool – Open Arms Child Development Center – celebrated their 18th VPK graduation in the Sanctuary. The children marched in to Pomp and Circumstance played by Stephanie Smith, First's Director of Music. The children performed five songs, accompanying each one

with sign language. Their teacher Chrystal Simmons has been at Open Arms for 17 years and has taught American Sign Language to each of her students. First is extremely proud of the job done by the staff to prepare the children for Kindergarten while giving them the good news of Jesus Christ.

The Godwink Mission at First / Gainesville, includes Lake Forest

Elementary School as one of its outreach partners. Throughout the year, the mission supports the school by providing supplies, teacher appreciation gifts, clothing, and shoes, and at the end of the school year, books for students to take home. More than 400 books were distributed in June. At the request of the principal, two students were also presented arcade gift cards in recognition of their top performance on state assessment tests. At the beginning of June, the congregation celebrated a milestone 75th wedding

anniversary with Bob and Dottie Mounts. Bob and Dottie were joined by their family and the congregation for a luncheon and a slideshow celebrating their many years together. In photo at left – one of Lake Forest students with her principal. Below, Bob and Dottie celebrating 75 years of marriage. ■



On June 14, **First/Gainesville, FL** welcomed 17 new members to the congregation. Some were transfers and others took Pastor Chris Kollman's "Lutheran 101" class.



Thrills & Skills: St. John Basketball Camp a Success

The 26th St. John Basketball Camp was host to more than 100 campers (grades 3-9) at **St. John/Ocala, FL** – and was a rousing success, according to Camp Director John Westol.

"The camp featured a variety of activities, including 'station' sessions, a 'competitive skills' (free throws, one on one, hot shot, and 3 on 3) sessions, as well as 5 on 5 games after the first day," Westol emphasized. The camp was held from June 1-5 and ran from 8 am until noon each day.

According to Westol, campers were divided into three groups – "High School," (consisting of grades 3-4), "College," (grades 5-6) and "NBA" (grades 7-9). Campers – depending on their ability – were distributed into one of the three divisions for the drills and competitions.

First launched in 2020, The St. John Basketball Camp has been held each year (except during the COVID pandemic) and is open to all basketballers wherever they reside. This year the camp featured

youth from Jacksonville, FL and Greenwood, IN!

"Each morning included an opening devotion by one of the coaches or pastors at St. John and midway through the morning, a "Coaches' Corner," featuring one of the area coaches in a 10 minute session," Westol continued. In addition to St. John teachers and coaches on staff, many of the St. John (and area) students assisted in coaching and helped as volunteers.

Next year's camp dates have been announced as June 7-11, 2027.

First/Clearwater Honors Natalee Hallsted

First/Clearwater, FL celebrated the retirement of Mrs. Natalee Hallsted on June 7, 2026. Hallsted faithfully and joyfully served First Lutheran for 33 years. Congregation members, colleagues, current and former



students and parents came together to honor and thank her for her unwavering dedication, love, and ministry to the community.

She has served as a Pre-School teacher, Kindergarten teacher, 4th and 6th-grade teacher, health, science, athletic director, volleyball

coach, Student Council advisor, Children's Church, VBS, Stephen Minister, school musical director, handbell choir member, STEAM teacher, mentor, and, most recently, as 2nd and 3rd-grade teacher. Hallsted will be greatly missed.



Former Lake Worth Beach Vicar Accepts Wichita, Kansas Call

Former Florida-Georgia District Vicar Euder Paul has accepted a call to St. Andrews/ Wichita, KS as sole pastor. St. Andrews has served northwest Wichita since 1971 and considers themselves a neighborhood congregation – but their “neighborhood” reaches out even beyond the city limits of Wichita.

Euder and his wife, Judelande, will make their move to Wichita sometime this fall. The congregation has been served by vacancy and guest pastors – most often The Rev. Tom Harmon, a retired, well-respected pastor in the Kansas District.



Euder Paul is ordained on Sunday, May 24, 2026 at Concordia/Sarasota with Rev. Dr Brian Stolarczyk officiating as the circuit visitor. Paul was a member at Concordia and enrolled in the Masters of Divinity program. He completed his studies in January of this year and was called to serve in Wichita Kansas.

Because Euder Paul completed his Master of Divinity coursework, he received a Candidate Call from the LCMS Kansas District to fill the sole, full-time pastoral office at St. Andrews Lutheran Church. This officially concludes the congregation's vacancy period.

“Euder Paul is extremely liturgical and so being in a congregation that appreciates the liturgy will be a great fit,” offers The Rev. Jacob Rodesens, Euder's supervising pastor during his vicarage at **Our Savior/Lake Worth, FL**. “He was very well loved

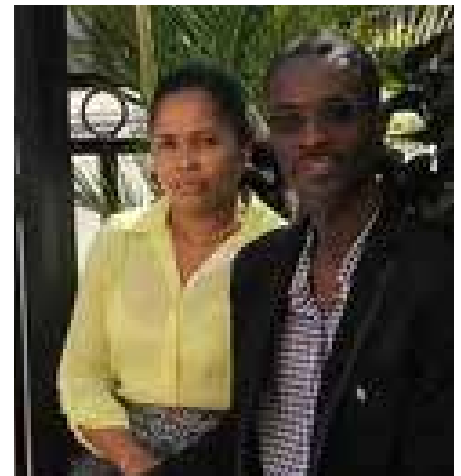
at OSL and it was great to have him on board. OSL had a long history of vicars and so many people had the opportunity to share stories of past vicars with him.

“Vicar Euder had one semester left of seminary after vicarage so he finished his MDiv in the winter and graduated and received his call in May.” Pastor Roedsens now serves at **Trinity/Delray Beach, FL**

Euder Paul was born in Aculdu-Nord, Haiti into a family of five children – three girls and two boys. He is the youngest sibling. He was raised as a Christian in a simple and humble family, baptized on September 23, 1982 by Reverend Father Raphael Bruno in the Parish of Our Lady of the Nativity (Aculdu-Nord, Haiti). He received his first communion on July 11, 1993 by Reverend Father Michel Reynold in the same Parish. Later, in June of 2001, Vicar Euder received the sacrament of confirmation from His Excellency Monseigneur François Gayot at the Cathedral of Cap Haitien (Haiti).

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

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



Euder Paul with his wife, Judelande Aubin

in 2020. “A priest friend of mine gave me the contact information for Concordia Lutheran Church in Sarasota, Florida. I met Rev. Stephen E. Gaulke and spoke with him resulting in the process of becoming an official member of the LCMS,” he continues. “Working with the Florida-Georgia District and Concordia/Sarasota, I applied for Concordia Seminary/Saint Louis, MO to study and see how God calls me to become a Lutheran pastor.” In January of 2022, Euder married Judelande Aubin. ■



Vicar Euder Paul with Pastor Jacob Roedsens at his ordination service at Concordia/Sarasota, FL



Wilfredo Ramirez has been called to serve **Christ/Lakeland, FL** and **Grace/St. Cloud, FL** as both congregations expand their Hispanic ministry. Pastor Ramirez entered into the LCMS through the pastoral Colloquy process, the rigorous theological and administrative pathway by which ordained ministers from non-LCMS backgrounds secure formal admission into the LCMS clergy roster. Derived from the Latin word for conversation, it evaluates an applicant's character, ministry history, and doctrinal alignment. Shown in left photo above at the Christ/Lakeland installation are, front row, from left, The Revs. Zang Yang, Miguel Sanabria Jr., Wilfredo Ramirez, Chris Hazzard, James Rockey, Doug Kallesen. Back row: Charles Reich, John Hohe, Eduardo Martinez, Tom Bock, John Kyle, Peter Meier. The right photo is Pastor Ramirez's installation at Grace/St. Cloud. The pastors, front from right are Ken Green, Miguel Sanabria, Sr., Miguel Sanabria, Jr., Wilfredo Ramirez, Hector Parodi, Chris Hazzard, Doug Kallesen, Peter Meier, Tony Steinbronn, back row are Mark Mueller, Eduardo Martinez, John Hohe, Adolfo Borges, and Eric Sahlberg. ■



St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL students in Grades 1-8 performed "Willy Wonka Jr." for their annual spring musical production in May. The stage cast involved 40 middle schoolers who auditioned for their roles, 41 choir students from grades 3-5 in a special stage scene, 4 alumni production assistants, and the exuberant sound of our St. Paul Students singing each song directed by Ms. Rebecca Schaffer, St. Paul's Music Teacher. ■



There were 38 graduates in St. Paul's 8th grade class this year. They posed for a class photo outside before graduation with their green and white balloons. ■

Marco Island Donates Sneakers & Financial Support to Laces of Love

Marco Lutheran/Marco Island, FL has donated 142 pairs of sneakers and \$6,340 to Laces of Love, a nonprofit that provides new shoes to low-income and disadvantaged children, many of whom live on Marco Island or in Collier County. Data derived from the Census Bureau estimates that 12 percent of children under 18 on Marco Island and 15.7 percent of children in Collier County live below the poverty line.

"A simple gift – shoes – brings with it a sense of dignity, confidence, and the pure joy any child deserves," said Jeanne Nealon, president and co-founder of Laces of Love. "Each pair of shoes represents hope, love, and encouragement for these children. One young boy proudly laced up his new sneakers and whispered, 'I finally feel like everybody else.'"

The Marco Lutheran congregation has supported Laces of Love for the past 11 years, helping supply local children with properly fitting athletic shoes. Shoes are distributed to local children through partner schools, including Tommie Barfield Elementary, Manatee Elementary and Middle Schools, the Marco Island Charter Middle and High Schools, and Lely High School. Donations included a range of sizes, from toddlers to teens. Monetary gifts help cover hard-to-find larger sizes – up to size 22.

Connie Wuellner, coordinator of the collection at Marco Lutheran,



said "This drive is one way the church can support students' day-to-day needs and help them feel confident at school. We're honored to walk beside Laces of Love to help students put their best foot forward in shoes that fit!" ■

AS LIFE HAPPENS, WE'RE HERE TO HELP.

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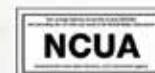
Credit Cards

Refinances



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Eleven students (at left) from infant through sixth grade were baptized during a chapel at **Redeemer/ Stuart, FL.**

This is the second annual baptism chapel. They are shown at right with their families. ■



King of Kings Honors Jefrey Jensen

King of Kings/Jasper, GA

gathered after worship service in December to mark the 30th anniversary of the ordination of Reverend Jefrey Jensen. He has served there since 2020.

To recognize Pastor Jensen's years of service, friends and family presented him with a beautiful original framed painting of trees with the engraved scripture 1 PETER 1:3-9 – "*Praise to God for a Living Hope.*" He was showered with cards and expressions of appreciation as well-wishers gathered for cake and punch in the narthex after worship. A display of clippings and photographs

chronicled some of Pastor Jensen's ministry as a reminder of the hundreds of lives he has touched in the name of our risen Savior.

"I am blessed to serve the Lord Jesus Christ and his bride, the church, for the past three decades. I have learned so much from you and others I have served alongside over the years. It is a true honor. I trust that our labors in the Lord are not in vain. There will be, by God's grace a rich harvest. My ordination anniversary is really Paige's and my anniversary as she has been an indispensable part of my ministry – always willing to offer assistance and being grace-filled due to the challenges that clergy families face. I am also grateful for Noah and Micah. They, too, have aided and supported me in innumerable ways. It is such a blessing to see them living out our shared faith in Jesus," Pastor Jensen emphasized. ■



Unique Strategic Partnership Launches in Delray Beach and Hobe Sound Florida

On Sunday, May 17, both **Trinity Delray Beach, FL** and **Bethel/Hobe Sound, FL** held separate congregational votes and each voted unanimously to move forward with a shared ministry plan. The decision follows months of prayer, conversation, and discernment between leaders and members of both congregations.

"In December 2025, Bethel voted to close both its church and school and had received multiple offers from outside organizations interested in purchasing the property," offers Trinity's Senior Pastor Jacob Roedsens. "After learning of the closure and pending sale opportunities, our leadership joined with Bethel's leadership and began conversations in early 2026 to explore alternative possibilities for ministry and long-term Kingdom impact."

As discussions continued, leaders from both congregations met regularly to pray, evaluate options, and consider whether God was opening a new path forward through a multi-site ministry model. That process ultimately led each congregation to consider and affirm this shared vision.

"For Trinity, this moment represents both continuity and a new opportunity. Having experienced 122 years of God's faithfulness in ministry, Trinity is grateful for the Lord's blessings in the past and looks forward with hope to expanding ministry, strengthening Christian education, and continuing Christ-centered outreach for generations to come," Pastor Roedsens concludes.

The Hobe Sound campus is now officially a campus of Trinity Lutheran Church and School. ■



Pastor Jacob Roedsens is Senior Pastor at Trinity/Delray Beach, FL and Trinity/Hobe Sound, FL. He accepted his call to Trinity in August, 2025. He was officially called to serve Our Savior/Lake Worth, FL in 2018 right after graduating from Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO.



Pastor Scott Jensen has served Bethel Lutheran Church and Preschool in Hobe Sound since November, 2023. He was offered and encouraged to stay in Hobe Sound but had received a call to Mobile, AL and accepted that call after prayerful consideration.



The Hobe Sound campus is spread over five acres on US 1/Federal Highway. Trinity's Delray Beach site occupies an eight-acre footprint located at NW Fourth Street and Swinton Avenue. It features a 12-building campus built out progressively over decades. It houses the oldest existing church building in the City of Delray Beach, originally constructed in 1904. A 10,000-square-foot facility built in 2013 accommodates early childhood programs. A covered walkway system with elevator access was completed in 2024 to connect multi-story educational spaces. Trinity's highly structured Pre-Kindergarten through 8th Grade (PK-8) educational framework, configured across specific developmental tiers, accommodates roughly 450 total students.

Invest Together in Faith

Now is the time to make the most of the blessings God has entrusted to you. With Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF), you gain a trusted partner who shares your Lutheran values, helping you achieve financial growth while making a meaningful difference in the LCMS community.

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Prince of Peace and Príncipe de Paz Celebrate Pentecost Together

Prince of Peace / Príncipe de Paz Lutheran Church, Orlando FL celebrated Pentecost with a vibrant bilingual worship service that brought the entire congregation together in worship and praise. While the congregation normally gathers for three separate Sunday services—traditional, contemporary, and Spanish-language worship—Pentecost offers a special opportunity for all members to unite in a single celebration.

During the service, The Revs. Ken Green and Adolfo Borges led portions of the liturgy in

both English and Spanish, with translations projected on screens so all worshipers could participate fully. Pastor Borges preached seamlessly in both languages, reflecting the unity and diversity of the congregation.

Music directors David Ludwig and Andres Soler prepared combined choirs and musicians for the special occasion. The music featured hymns sung together in English and Spanish, while other selections alternated between the two languages, creating a joyful expression of shared faith. The Pentecost celebration

beautifully reflected the message of Acts 2—one Spirit speaking through many languages and cultures.

Through worship, music, and fellowship, the congregation rejoiced in God's love for all people and celebrated the profound unity found in Christ. ■

Below — The Revs. Adolfo Borges (left) Pastor of Principe de Paz, and Ken Green Pastor of Prince of Peace led portions of the liturgy in both English and Spanish.



Traditional, Spanish and contemporary choirs combined for the bi-lingual worship.

In June, **Prince of Peace/Príncipe de Paz/Orlando, FL** had more than 60 volunteers host Rainforest Falls Vacation Bible Camp for 117 children from the church, Preschool and community. This registration total was the highest in memory as participant totals have steadily climbed. They were blessed by some dedicated and talented Youth volunteers leading the various crews.

Children and volunteers together learned about God's creation while also exploring the Nature of God. "Getting to Know God" is POP Kids Community Club theme for their monthly family events.

The children raised more than \$850 in offerings during the week for LCMS Missionary Makia Adler currently serving in the rainforests of Belize. Makia made daily videos for the children "live from the rainforest" where she helped emphasize the daily themes. ■



Youth volunteers led various crews during the week-long VBS



Bethlehem/Jacksonville, FL celebrated True North VBS with more than 77 children as they discovered that Jesus is our unchanging guide through every season of life. Their mission project was also a success – raising enough money to purchase four sheep—which also meant our vicar had to make good on his promise and take a pie in the face! As we celebrated an amazing week, we also said a heartfelt goodbye to Darlene Maxwell, who faithfully served as our VBS Director for the past seven years.



Bethlehem also gave thanks to God for the opportunity to welcome 26 new members into their fellowship. After completing our New Member Class and learning more about our faith, our congregation, and opportunities to serve, these new brothers and sisters in Christ were officially welcomed into our church family. We rejoice in God's continued work of growing His Church and pray that these new members will be richly blessed as they worship, grow, and serve alongside us. ■

The **Martin Luther Chapel/Marathon, FL** congregation in the Florida Keys celebrated Mother's Day by honoring their mothers. Senior Pastor, The Rev. Anthony "Tony" Mandile said "We were honored to celebrate these amazing women and pray their hearts were filled with joy." ■





Columbus, Georgia Congregations Perform Last Supper

On the evening of April 1, 2026, **Lutheran Church of the Redeemer/Columbus, GA** presented Ruth Elaine Schram's "The Living Last Supper," offering a moving and meaningful beginning to Holy Week.

Approximately 25 members of the Redeemer congregation, along with two members of the **Bethlehem/Columbus, GA** congregation, joined together to bring this powerful production to life. Preparing for an event of this size involved many hands and many talents.

Careful research was done to recreate the foods that would have been eaten in biblical times. Before the performance, guests were served a period-accurate meal featuring fish, chicken, hummus, matzah bread, haroseth, apricots, dates, nuts, honey cakes, and fig bars. Congregation members also designed and created costumes, built the set, gathered props, and prepared the program.

Throughout March, the actors rehearsed twice weekly. Many studied the lives and personalities of the disciples they portrayed,

adding depth and authenticity to their performances. Pastor John Bumgardner further enriched the production by sharing clear insights into each disciple's background and character.

Members of both congregations, along with guests from the community, attended the presentation. For all who participated and attended, The Living Last Supper made Holy Week especially meaningful and provided a memorable way to share the Gospel message. ■

SPOKE FOLK
BIKING - MUSIC - COMMUNITY - DISCIPLESHIP



St. Paul/Weston, FL's Bobby and Trisha DePasquale — along with some of St. Paul Youth — will bike through Ohio with Spoke Folk from June 24–July 5, 2026.

Spoke Folk is a unique music and discipleship ministry for youth and young adults that combines worship, fellowship, spiritual growth, and mission outreach. Through music performances, devotions, and Christ-centered community, this ministry has been impacting lives and strengthening faith since 1979. ■



Hope/Plant City, FL Recognizes Pfeffers Decades of Service, Participates in United Food Bank

On Sunday May 31st, the members and staff of **Hope/Plant City, FL** surprised their Sr. Pastor, The Rev. Dean Pfeffer and his family as they recognized his 30th anniversary as Hope's Pastor. Little did he know that plans that were in the making for this special occasion, but the congregation was able to totally surprise him at the beginning of morning worship that day.

During the morning announcements, Pastor Pfeffer shared an inspiring update with the congregation, presenting tithes to several community organizations. These gifts were made possible through the generous proceeds from the annual Turkey Supper and our participation in the Florida Strawberry Festival. After the morning worship service, the congregation gathered in Hope's beautifully decorated Fellowship Hall for a special brunch in his honor. The hall had been transformed that very morning, all while keeping the plans carefully hidden from Pastor Pfeffer. It was a joyful and memorable celebration of his leadership and dedication to Hope's church family.

Pictured above are Pastor and Liz Pfeffer along with their grandchildren, (from left: Evan, Alex, Ryan and Ellie). ■

The United Food Bank of Plant City has been and continues to be an integral part of the mission and ministry of **Hope/Plant City, FL** and Pastor Dean Pfeffer. For any years the congregation has gifted organizations in their community as well as the Florida-Georgia District and LCMS with portions of the proceeds from the congregation's annual Turkey Supper and participation in the Florida Strawberry Festival. This year Hope presented a check for \$2,000.00 to the food bank to support their ongoing work as they strive to end food insecurity for those in need in the Plant City community. In 2025 the food bank distributed more than four million pounds of food to the community.

This year's donation is directed towards "break bags" that the food bank provides for children when school is not in session. They anticipate distribution of

more than 12,000 bags during the summer break.

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

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



Rev. Dean Pfeffer presenting the congregation's gift to Food Bank Director, Mary Heysek.



Members of **Holy Trinity/Tampa, FL**, celebrated Pentecost Sunday by having the Epistle, Acts 2:1-21, read verse by verse in alternating foreign languages. Verses were read by members in German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Japanese, English, Telugu, and French. The service concluded with the congregation singing "Brothers and Sisters in Christ" by candlelight. ■

Empowering the Future: More Than \$100,000

Reported by Rebecca Hartmann

A total of \$100,425 in scholarships is being awarded to 28 Florida-Georgia District students who applied and met the requirements for District education scholarships. These future church workers are pursuing professional church work education and attending Synodical seminaries or a Concordia university.

Ethnic Initiative Institute

Some of the scholarship recipients are part of the Ethnic Initiative Institute (EIIT) or Center for Hispanic Studies (CHS). Because the demographics of regions like Florida and Georgia are rapidly shifting, the FLGA District relies heavily on these two paths to seed, train, and ordain multi-ethnic leaders to serve directly inside local immigrant and minority communities. The EIIT is specifically designed for men who want to serve as pastors and women who want to serve as deaconesses within immigrant and ethnic minority communities in North America. The target is immigrants or first-generation non-Anglo individuals who are already active leaders within an ethnic congregation.

Center for Hispanic Studies

The CHS offers targeted theological education and leadership in the Lutheran tradition — completely in Spanish, focusing entirely on U.S. Hispanic and Latino communities. Unlike traditional seminary tracks, the majority of the instruction is delivered in Spanish. The curriculum is specifically contextualized to navigate the cultural nuances and staggering diversity found across various U.S. Latino demographics. It is primarily a four-year distance-learning program. It blends online extension courses with intentional,

week-long residential intensives on the Concordia/St. Louis, MO campus. CHS offers a four-year distance certificate program to become a rostered pastor or deaconess. However, unlike the EIIT, qualified students who are academically prepared can also advance into a formal Master of Arts (M.A.) Program with majors in Systematic or Practical Theology, entirely taught in Spanish.

Traditional seminary degrees require full-time physical relocation and steep tuition costs. Because EIIT and CHS students are usually working-class adults already embedded in local mission fields, standard financing does not fit their lives. The FLGA District leverages its localized student aid and scholarship structures to pay for these specific modules, ensuring that tuition costs do not disrupt localized Hispanic or multi-ethnic church planting movements.

How Can Students Benefit?

A category of future church workers for the FLGA District's recipients will be featured in the next few issues of Lutheran LIFE. Please use these introductions to our student future workers as a list for your prayer time with the Lord, continuing to lift them up in prayer as they pursue their education for a life of service to our Lord and God's people.

Currently the funds for these awards come from the District as well as Lutheran Church Extension Fund. Future District's Mission Advancement Initiative will help with funds for the growing number of requests for scholarships. Of the funds raised, approximately \$2 million will be endowed for supporting the studies of new church work students through financial aid, generating more than \$100,000 annually.

Supporting the District Scholarship Fund

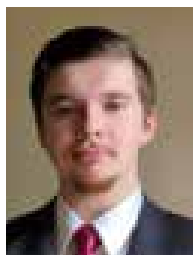
To discover how you can support the FLGA District Scholarship Program through Mission Advancement, please visit flgadistrict.org/mission-advancement.

The District takes great joy in coming alongside our future church workers. Congregations are encouraged to utilize the resources available by *Set Apart to Serve* — a synodwide effort to build a culture of church work formation and recruitment throughout the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The goal is to ensure that the church continues to have pastors who proclaim Christ and administer the Sacraments, as well as commissioned church workers who assist in teaching and sharing God's Word in various full-time vocations. The initiative emphasizes that God calls workers through influential adults such as parents, pastors, and church workers, who can guide youth toward considering church work. (lcms.org)

On the adjacent page is an introduction to our scholarship recipients who are attending one of our Synod's seminaries to become a pastor or deaconess. Future issues will introduce students from our Concordia universities as well as those pursuing their education through EIIT and CHS. These church workers are truly a part of God's answer to our District's 10:02 prayer which is based on LUKE 10:2, asking God to provide workers for the harvest. We thank God for them and for God's call on their lives to connect people to our Savior! ■

in New Educational Scholarships Unlocked

Meet Just a Few of the Scholarship Recipients



Derek Arrington will be a first-year seminary student at Concordia Seminary/St. Louis. His home congregation is Holy Trinity/Masaryktown, FL



Joshua Gillespie is entering his second year at Concordia Seminary/St. Louis. His home congregation is St. Peters/Middleburg, FL.



Tristan Jones is entering his 4th year at Concordia Seminary/St. Louis. His home congregation is St. Paul/Weston, FL.



Caleb Newberry is entering his first year at Concordia Seminary/St. Louis. His home congregation is Holy Trinity/Kingsland, GA.



Joshua Wareham is entering his final year at Concordia Seminary/St. Louis. His home congregation is Faith/Eustis, FL.



Kyle Beckstrom will be a first-time seminary student at Concordia Seminary/St. Louis. His home congregation is University Lutheran Church & Student Center/Tallahassee, FL.



Mark Harrison is entering Concordia Theological Seminary/Ft. Wayne, IN. His home congregation is Grace/St. Petersburg, FL.



Andrew Cheyne is entering his second year at Concordia Seminary/St. Louis. His home congregation is St. Paul/Lakeland, FL.



Janet Oliver begins her first year of the Deaconess program at Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO. Her home congregation is Saint Michael/Fort Myers, FL.



Jonathan Munnicha will begin his fourth year at Concordia Seminary/St. Louis. His home congregation is Holy Cross/Stockbridge, GA.



Richard Harry will be entering his second year at Concordia Seminary/St. Louis with an anticipated graduation date of 2029. His home congregation is University Lutheran Church & Student Center/Tallahassee, FL



Peter LeBorion is taking classes from Concordia Seminary/St. Louis. He is continuing his journey from a Director of Christian Education to a Specific Ministry Pastor to a General Pastor with an anticipated completion in 2030. His home congregation is Mount Calvary/Warner Robins, GA.



Raleigh Sims has one academic year remaining in the Specific Ministry Pastor to a General Pastor program with Concordia Seminary/St. Louis with a target completion date of May, 2027. His home congregation is Ascension/Casselberry, FL.

Please also lift up in your prayers these Florida-Georgia District students who are beginning their vicarage year: Tanner Gossman, Ryan Hicks, and Stephen Peeler.

FLGA District's Cooperative School: and Advent/Boca Raton —

Historical Overview The ALC Era (1970s):

Under the long-term leadership of its foundational pastor, The Rev. Dr. Ronald Dingle (who arrived in 1967), the congregation operated as a prominent member of the American Lutheran Church (ALC) denomination. The LCMS and the ALC were in formal "Altar and Pulpit Fellowship" from 1969 to 1981.

The 1988 Merger:

On January 1, 1988, the American Lutheran Church merged with two other Lutheran bodies to create the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Consequently, Advent Lutheran Church automatically transitioned into an ELCA congregation.

Modern Affiliation:

In 2010, Advent left the ELCA. The catalyst was sparked by the ELCA's August 2009 Churchwide Assembly decision regarding human sexuality and the ordination of partnered gay and lesbian clergy. Following the congregation's departure from the ELCA, they joined Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC). The LCMC is an association of autonomous Lutheran churches with a "centrist" theological position in American Lutheranism — sitting between the more progressive Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the more conservative Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). Rather than a traditional denomination, the LCMC explicitly models itself as a post-denominational movement focused on the local congregation.

St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL (LCMS) was established in 1957 on the east side of Boca Raton on the south side of Royal Palm Road. They gathered in an historic building originally occupied by Boca Raton Community Church (the city's first church established in 1925).

In 1962 St. Paul moved to their current campus at 701 W. Palmetto Park Road. The original historic site transitioned into the Debbie Rand Thrift Shop, an organization established to raise the \$3.5 million required to build Boca Raton's very first local hospital. The thrift shop operates today on Meadows Road near the main hospital.

In 1962 kindergarten was not required in the public school system. Advent began their kindergarten in 1968 and added a preschool program in 1971. At that time parents desiring further Lutheran education sent them to Trinity/Delray Beach, FL. Trinity was the only Lutheran school in the area, operating since 1948. In the late 1960s demand had grown to the point Trinity could no longer accommodate students from all three congregations.

St. Paul established a 1st grade in 1971 but did not have plans at that time to add more grades in the future. Parents requested more grades be added to accommodate students through 8th grade. Advent and St. Paul, together, formulated an education committee to consider

the possibility of a Lutheran school system operated by the two congregations. It was felt that using existing facilities (with some modifications) a complete elementary school could be put into operation.

St. Paul first added 2nd grade and shortly after added 3rd and 4th grades. Advent could then institute grades 5 through 8 — or 6 through 9. Both school boards felt the schools could be self-supporting since tuition would cover salaries, books, equipment, custodial and administrative services.

In 1972 Advent called Mr. Ralph Bickel and he accepted their offer. The cooperative school between the LCMS and ALC became a reality. Preschool and kindergarten programs were operated on both campuses. St. Paul housed grades 1 through 7 and Advent added 8th to make the program complete. At that time Junior High School consisted of 7th, 8th and 9th. High School comprised 10th through 12th. In the late 1970s and early 80s, Boca Raton transitioned to today's Middle School model of 6 through 8 and High School having 9 through 12.

A school bus owned and operated by St. Paul shuttled students between the two Boca Raton campuses. Advent frequently had their teachers

PIONEERS OF THE FAITH

St. Paul/Boca Raton, Florida — LCMS — American Lutheran Church



The St. Paul owned school bus was operated by Advent teachers to shuttle students between campuses.



In 1973 St. Paul completed four classrooms a library and administrative offices at 701 W Palmetto Park Road.

driving the bus (Mark Brink was one who later became the FLGA District's Executive Director for School & Youth Ministries).

In fall of 1973, St. Paul completed construction of four classrooms, a library and administrative offices. That year Advent called a male teacher to teach 8th grade and

initiate the physical education program and handle both coaching and teaching in the Advent/St. Paul upper grades.

The response to the establishment of this innovative cooperative Lutheran education institution was extremely favorable — especially as the athletic

program evolved and both Advent and St. Paul began competing with Trinity and other Lutheran and non-Lutheran Christian schools in Broward and Palm Beach Counties. Both schools operate enrollment at near capacity — often with waiting lists for particular grades. ■



The first sanctuary and campus of St. Paul Lutheran Church was located at 180 E. Royal Palm Road in Boca Raton, FL near the community variety store. The congregation was established at this site in 1957, and the school opened its doors on the same property five years later in 1962. As the church and school experienced rapid growth throughout the subsequent decades, the congregation relocated to 701 E Palmetto Park Road where they exist today.



Advent's campus as it looked in the early 1970s. Unlike St. Paul Lutheran, which relocated from its original downtown spot, Advent Lutheran established its roots on Yamato Road, where it has operated both its Advent Church Boca and Advent School for more than 50 years. The expansive property houses their early childhood, elementary, and middle school facilities, alongside their worship spaces and senior living community.

PASSAGES

Remembering Dr. Alberto Garcia *Trailblazing Professor and Champion of Hispanic Ministry*

The Rev. Dr. Alberto Lazaro Garcia was called to his heavenly home by God on June 15, 2026, at the age of 79. He lived a life rooted in faith, family, and service. He was a scholar, a professor, an author, and a loving husband, father, and grandfather.

Garcia was born on May 2, 1947, to Antonio Garcia and Norma (Giro) Garcia in Havana, Cuba, and immigrated to the United States with his brother Ernest in 1960 as part of Operation Pedro Pan. He met Moraima “Mori” Yates, a Lutheran, while still in high school, and married her in 1968 at **St. Matthew/ Miami, FL**. Alberto’s commitments to Mori and the Lutheran church defined him for the rest of his life. God blessed Alberto and Mori with two children, Yvette and Albert Phillip, and with one grandchild, Alana Marie Garcia Barton. Of his many titles, “Papa” was his most cherished. He baptized Alana and delighted in dressing up as St. Nicolas every December. His retirement to Atlanta can be entirely credited to his desire to play an active role in Alana’s life. He enjoyed traveling, singing, dancing, and playing the guitar.

Dr. Garcia was the *first* Cuban exile ordained as a Lutheran pastor. He retired as professor of theology-emeritus at Concordia/Mequon, WI.

Behind every title was a deeper story: a pastor’s heart that never stopped beating for the people on the margins. His academic path alone tells you something about his persistence and his



curiosity. He earned his Associate’s degree from Concordia/Austin, TX, his Bachelor’s in Philosophy with honors from Florida Atlantic University/Boca Raton, his Master of Divinity from Concordia Theological Seminary/St. Louis, MO, and both his Master of Theology and his PhD with honors in Systematic Theology from the Lutheran School of Theology/Chicago, IL. Concordia/Bronxville, NY later honored him with a Doctorate of Humane Letters, honoris causa, in recognition of a life of scholarship and service.

From 1991 to 2013, he served as professor of theology and Director of the Lay Ministry Program at Concordia/Mequon, WI, teaching not only theology but faith and culture, and

world religions in North America. He carried a distinction that mattered deeply: he was the *first* Latino professor at a LCMS seminary, opening a door that had not been opened before him.

Before that — from 1979 to 1987 — he served at Concordia Theological Seminary as Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology and Director of the Hispanic Studies Program. He taught as an adjunct professor at Florida International University/Miami, FL from 1988 to 1989, and for during a period of three decades — from 1989 to 2022 — he shaped students through the Hispanic Ministries Program at Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO.

Before the classroom ever called him, the church did. He pastored urban congregations among Latino communities of diverse cultural backgrounds, first in Chicago, IL from 1974 to 1979, and later in Hollywood, FL from 1987 to 1991.

Pastor Garcia was also a writer, a thinker who believed faith and culture were never meant to live apart. In celebration of the Reformation and in pursuit of a more inclusive church, he co-authored *Wittenberg Meets the World: Re-Imagining the Reformation at the Margins* with Rev. Dr. John A. Nunes, former President of Concordia/ New York.

Garcia also co-edited *Our 95 Theses: 500 Years after the Reformation* with Justo L. González, a prominent Cuban-American historian, theologian, and ordained United Methodist minister. He co-edited *Theology of the Cross for the 21st Century: Signposts for a Multicultural Witness* with Victor Raj, distinguished theologian, author, missiologist, and Professor Emeritus of Exegetical Theology at Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, and *Christ and Culture in Dialogue: Constructive Themes and Practical Applications* with Angus Menuge, Professor and Chair of the Philosophy Department at Concordia/Mequon.

Dr. Garcia was preceded in death by his parents, Antonio Garcia and Norma Triana. He is survived by his wife of 57 years, Moraima (Yates) Garcia, two children, a granddaughter, brother brother-in-law and a host of nieces and nephews, and a menagerie of pets.

He leaves behind a legacy carried forward in the family he loved, the students he taught, the congregations he shepherded, and the doors he opened for those who came after him. A memorial service will be held at 2 pm on August 15, 2026, at St. Mark Lutheran Church, 2110 Brockett Rd., Tucker, GA 30084. ■

PASSAGES

District Education Icon, Ralph Bickel Passes Into the Arms of Jesus

Ralph Herbert Bickel was born in Saginaw, Michigan on June 19, 1930, the youngest son of Florence and Ernst Bickel. He was baptized into the Christian faith on July 3, 1930 and confirmed on April 18, 1943. His father served as the Principal at Zion/ Iva, MI, a Saginaw County lumbering town with its own post office from 1894 to 1904, but transitioned to a farming community after all the trees were harvested.

When Ralph was 12, his father was tragically electrocuted and died. Shortly thereafter, Ralph and his mother moved to Frankenmuth, MI to find work. Ralph also worked — he liked to make sure people knew that he worked in the brewery and drove a beer truck.

God looked after them and Ralph learned to work hard, to persevere and to appreciate the blessings God bestowed on them. At age 14, Ralph hitchhiked from Frankenmuth to River Forest, IL to attend Concordia Lutheran High School and later, Concordia Teachers College where he played baseball and basketball. He liked to brag that he got to scrimmage with Goose Tatum, Marques Haynes, and Showboat Hall — the Harlem Globetrotters. That was a big deal for a sports lover like Ralph.

While at Concordia, Ralph met Mary Jane Goff, whom he courted and married shortly after graduation in 1952.

Days later, they headed to Delray Beach, FL where they began their assigned teaching ministries. Ralph was the first Principal at **Trinity Lutheran Delray Beach, FL**. The



school grew quickly in numbers and with a stellar reputation in South Florida.

Those were pioneering days for Lutheran education in Florida and Ralph was a leader among his peers, serving as the head of the Florida-Georgia District Education Committee, and President of the District Teachers Conference. He also served as a consultant to congregations planning to start new school ministries.

Ralph also served as a member of the committee that formulated plans for the Director of Christian Education training program in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. While serving in Delray Beach he was involved in community civic organizations and served as President of the Delray Beach Little League Baseball Organization that

he co-founded.

In 1967, Ralph accepted a Call to serve as Director of Christian Education at Immanuel/Lima, OH, so he and Mary and their five children, David, Martha, Mary Beth, Kathy and Mark, loaded up the car and headed north. Shortly after arriving at Immanuel, the pastor of the church — who was also the District President — became blind and Ralph was thrust into the role handling his original call while serving alongside his pastor and essentially leading the congregation in his stead.

Ralph's servant nature shone through as he willingly took on that task. In 1972, another unique opportunity came along. **Advent/Boca Raton, FL** was searching for a Principal whose call would be to start a school from scratch. Ralph followed the guidance of the Holy Spirit and accepted the Call to Advent. Ralph and Al Gunderman, the Director of Christian Education at **St. Paul/Boca Raton, FL**, created a plan to develop what they called a "cooperative school." St. Paul established grades K through 5 and Advent would have middle school grades 6-8. A bus ran between the two schools to accommodate parents who had students enrolled in both locations.

Both schools flourished — and continue to do so.

Ralph retired in 1994. Shortly after retiring, Ralph stepped in to serve as Principal for one year

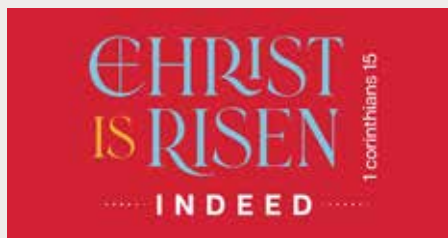
when his successor was diagnosed with cancer. Once again he was willing to take on a servant role to be "the bridge" for ministry.

During the course of his ministry, Ralph impacted the lives of thousands of students and their families with his leadership, strong faith and Christian witness. He was honored to be the recipient of the Lutheran Schools, "Teacher of the Year" award as well as the Behnken Medallion.

Mary Bickel passed away in April of 2003. It was unexpected and Ralph was heartbroken. But a man who was born during the Great Depression, who lost his father as a young boy, and who relied solely on God's goodness and mercy, drew on that strength to move forward once again.

Once again God blessed Ralph with a wonderful wife by the name of Nancy with whom he shared many adventures and 23 years of marriage. Ralph and Nancy have been active members at Advent as well as at **Mountainside Lutheran Church in Linville, North Carolina** where they spent many enjoyable summers.

Ralph was a willing servant of the Lord and was truly a pioneer of Lutheran school ministry in Florida, and now he rests in peace in the arms of Jesus. Well done, good and faithful servant. ■



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Challenger Joel Biermann Pushes Election to Third Ballot

LCMS Presidential Election Reveals Desire for Change

The Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison has secured a historic sixth term as president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) after a historically narrow runoff election that exposed deep divisions within the LCMS. Harrison barely cleared the mandatory 50% majority threshold on a third-ballot runoff. The election marked the very first time the synod advanced to a third ballot since adopting its modern internet voting system.

Facilitated by an independent election contractor, the high-stakes vote concluded ahead of the upcoming national LCMS synodical convention to be held July 18-23, 2026 in Phoenix, AZ under the theme "Christ is Risen Indeed."

Out of 5,038 total valid votes cast by pastoral and lay delegates in the final round, the official tally finished as follows:
Matthew C. Harrison: 2,524 votes (50.1%); Joel D. Biermann: 2,414 votes (47.9%); Benjamin T. Ball: 100 votes (2.0%).

The exceptionally close race — decided by just 110 votes between the top two candidates — signaled a strong appetite for change across the denomination. In the second round of voting Harrison led Biermann by just 14 votes. While Harrison's supporters celebrated his continued theological focus on confessional Lutheranism and traditional practices, opposition observers noted that nearly half of the voting delegates actively cast their ballots for a return to a greater focus on mission and outreach while standing solidly on our confessions. Structural anxieties, pastoral formation shortages and



Matthew Harrison



Joel Biermann

The LAST WORD



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FLGA District
Communications Director
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paths, and the sheer length of Harrison's 16-year tenure motivated the late surge for challenger Joel Biermann.

Harrison has spent 16 years leading the LCMS through a period heavily focused on classical Lutheran doctrine, international church partnerships, and conservative cultural witness. Known for his "top down" management style operating on a global, divine hierarchy, Lutheran churches are most often built on the theological principle of the "priesthood of all believers," which affirms congregational self-governance and emphasizes an

ecclesiastical structure where the congregation and its people are at the top and the synod is advisory.

Biermann emerged as the primary catalyst for change during the election cycle, leveraging his prominent academic Seminary profile to build vast momentum among younger pastors and lay leaders. A widely respected — though occasionally polarizing — theologian and author, Biermann's platform resonated with a significant portion of the Synod that sought a fresh approach to pastoral formation, theological education, and structural transparency within the church's institutions. His influence spans decades of pastoral formation, District lectures, and widely read publications. He completed his Master of Divinity degree at Concordia Seminary/St. Louis, MO. After serving 11 years as a parish pastor, he returned to the Seminary campus from 1998 to 2002 to complete his doctorate in systematic theology and immediately accepted a call to join the faculty upon graduating in August, 2002. His ability to draw nearly equal voting strength to an incumbent President underscored that a significant segment of the LCMS views him as a unifying, wise leader capable of addressing institutional stagnation and navigating complex internal church politics.

May this election journey be used by our Lord to bring greater unity, a diversity of people in leadership, more focus on Christ's mission through His Church and Kingdom growth through new believers. ■

—JL