

June/July 2020

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IN TOUCH

A publication of the Michigan District of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
The Lutheran Witness Michigan District, LCMS Supplement

HEALTHY CONGREGATIONS

The Return of the Gathered Saints from Pandemic Exile

by Michigan District

As we consider initial steps to God’s people once again gathering in our sanctuaries across the Michigan District after the “Stay Home, Stay Safe” order due to the COVID-19 pandemic, **we’re suggesting that we take a cue from Nehemiah’s** return from the Babylonian Exile in order to rebuild the breached wall of Jerusalem. To think that we will simply be going back to business as usual is most likely very short-sighted. Society will have changed. Our people will be changed by their experience(s); and our manner of ministry will be changed: some good, and some difficult to understand at this time.

Nevertheless, we offer the following as a way to think about it and add a few suggestions along the way. We want to express thanks to some thought starters provided through an article by Ken Braddy, Jr., a Thom Rainer webinar on April 16, 2020, and the Protocol for Churches and Places of Worship provided to us by the Texas District.

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Photo courtesy of Elisa Schulz Photography

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Rev. Dr. David P. E. Maier, President
Debby Fall, Editorial Manager

Linda Ekong, Art Director
Elisa Schulz, Staff Writer/Copy Editor

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Michigan District, LCMS
3773 Geddes Rd
Ann Arbor, MI 48105

888.225.2111
intouch@michigandistrict.org
michigandistrict.org

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Nehemiah experienced the following:

1. He got permission from the king and received right of passage and provisions for the work (Neh. 2:4–9).
2. He made a personal evaluation of the situation (context) with a small group of advisors (Neh. 2:11–18).
3. He divided up the work among several team leaders (Neh. 3).
4. He encouraged the many joining in the effort to stand strong against opposition (Neh. 4 and 6).
5. He directed ministry to meet the needs of those in the community who were suffering want (Neh. 5).
6. He kept track of people and accounted for them because people are really important to God (Neh. 7).
7. He arranged for God’s Word to be proclaimed that led to repentance and renewal and a celebration that is described in this way: *“The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away”* (Neh. 8–12; see esp. 12:43).
8. He instituted some lasting reforms ... some things would not go back the way they were (Neh. 13).

ONE: He got permission from the king and received right of passage and provisions for the work (Neh. 2:4–9)

- Realize that the return to our “normal” activities of gathering in larger groups will most likely be gradual and regional ... perhaps even county by county. Listen to state and local authorities and be prepared to respond.
- How will you respond if only 10 people with social distancing may gather at a time initially? One hundred? Will you offer multiple services in place of one or two?
- How will you recognize social

distancing in your sanctuary, assuming that is still a reality for the foreseeable future? Here are some concrete health protocols to consider:

- Strongly encourage the at-risk population to watch or participate in the service remotely;
- Designate an area inside the facility reserved for the at-risk population, or offer a service for at-risk population attendees only;
- Ensure proper spacing between attendees by 1) keeping at least two empty seats (or six-foot separation) between parties in any row (each family cluster should have at least two empty seats on either side); and 2) alternating rows between attendees (every other row left empty).
- Again, stay informed and follow state and local authorities’ guidelines, even if difficult.
- Continue, and even increase, the level of sanitizing in your facilities (and among your people) that you were using prior to the stay at home order.

TWO: He made a personal evaluation of the situation (context) with a small group of advisors (Neh. 2:11–8)

- Take time NOW to engage in conversation with your congregation’s leaders regarding the planned return of His people to the sanctuary. Do not assume you can simply flip a switch and all will be back to the way it was. Have the conversation now.
- Study your facilities. Should some areas be “off limits” at first? What will be the traffic flow of people between services? Communion? How will we seat people in the sanctuary? Consider: 60%-80% of seating capacity may be “full” in people’s minds.
- Circuit pastors can also be discussing now some of the details that each is considering. Shared wisdom through conversation will be essential as we serve our people well.
- You may hear that one congregation out in rural Michigan is doing one thing while a congregation in an urban area is not able to do the same thing at present. Remember, context is critical as we make our way forward. Help your people understand this as well.
- Spend time now considering what actions your leadership team will need to take in order to re-engage with small to larger gatherings. Conversations now will curtail conflicted relationships later. Rule of thumb: under-promise and over-deliver in regard to ministry offerings on your campus at this stage.
- Pray with and for your leaders. Affirm them because this is going to be more effort than we can readily imagine.

THREE: He divided up the work among several team leaders (Neh. 3)

- Establish necessary work teams for your unique situation:
 - Worship team:
 - Instead of a choir practicing “together,” perhaps special music is provided through soloists or family units as a gift to fellow worshippers.
 - Common cup is not a good idea at this time. How will you distribute the Lord’s Supper?
 - The offering plate will not be passed for the foreseeable future. How might we make the offering a meaningful part of worship together while practicing proper social distancing?

- A technology team may be very useful as many members will still shy away from gatherings for some time to come and therefore your online presence will continue to be helpful and essential.
- Maintenance team:
 - Who will take the responsibility to wipe down door handles, tables, chairs, railings, faucets, and toilet seats during and between gatherings? What equipment do they need? Where will hand sanitizer/wipes be placed and who will keep them in stock? Here are additional health protocols for facilities: 1) disinfect seats between services; 2) disinfect any items that come into contact with attendees (hymnals, etc); 3) place readily visible signage to remind everyone of best hygiene practices; 4) if your church provides meals for employees, volunteers, or attendees, have the meals individually packed; 5) maintain rigorous sanitation practices like disinfection, handwashing, and cleanliness when preparing or serving anything edible.
 - Who will structure the space to respect social distancing restrictions that may well be in place for some time?
- Hospitality team:
 - How can we show hospitality to members and guests without handshakes and hugs and intimate conversation around the coffee urn?
 - Coffee may need to be poured and handed out by individuals rather than self-served. Will we even have donuts?
- Financial team:
 - It is very possible that you will need to rethink your entire ministry plan.
 - How will you communicate the financial picture with your people?
 - Communicate understanding.
 - Communicate essential ministries and what the new plan is going forward (staff, programs, facilities, mortgage, etc.).
 - Teach biblical stewardship.
 - Communicate a passionate plan forward under God's blessing.
 - What other teams can you think of that need to be considered?
 - What about different groups such as quilters, sewing, and others? How will they meet—if at all?

FOUR: He encouraged the many joining in the effort to stand strong against opposition (Neh. 4 and 6)

- Talk again with your leaders now. Work toward consensus



- as a team of leaders. Stand together.
 - If you do nothing, you will be criticized by some.
 - If you attempt anything, you will be criticized by some.
- Communicate. Communicate. Communicate. Communicate with your people by mail, by phone, by email, by announcement during your recorded services or while livestreaming services.
 - People do not like changes.
 - They really don't like SURPRISE changes.
 - Let them know that some things will need to be different.
 - Let them know how diligently and prayerfully your leadership team has worked on these needed arrangements for us to come back together in some manner.
 - Express thanks to team members by name in your communications.
- Did we mention "Stand together"! Pray together.

FIVE: He directed ministry to meet the needs of those in the community who were suffering want (Neh. 5)

- Carefully listen to the spiritual and physical and emotional needs of your members. You may be hearing more now than ever before about people who are hurting.
 - Can you train your Elders to be care-givers?
 - Are personal visits a possibility?
 - Is there a family or individual who needs financial assistance in a critical way?
 - Plan ahead as to how the Body of Christ (individual members of it) might be enabled to respond to these needs.
- Carefully listen to your community for the spiritual, physical, emotional, and social needs being expressed.

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Could the stay-home order teach us to be more *biblical families*?

by Kimber Walsh

Lean in. We've heard it before. We've been asked to do it before. We've asked it of our congregation members before—to invest in our church and its ministries. We want them to seize the opportunities we have before us as a church and go for it.

Of course, staying home means we cannot worship corporately at church—which we are not supposed to give up (Hebrews 10:25). Of course, staying home also means fasting from the Lord's Supper—of which we are to partake often for the forgiveness of sins and the strengthening of our faith. But staying home also brings with it the opportunity to be more diligent about worshiping as a family in our homes, which many of us have let slide under “ordinary” circumstances.

Imagine families who previously didn't know what to do together in the area of discipleship, jumping in together and worshiping regularly at home.



God has called each of us to lead our families in discipleship at home—to preach and teach the Bible to our family (Ephesians 6:4); to be a discipleship center (Genesis 18:19); to impress the hearts of the next generation with a love for God (Deuteronomy 6:5–7); to pass on faith (Psalm 78:1–8; Deuteronomy 32:44–47; Ephesians 6:4); and to teach spiritual lessons to our children (Proverbs 1:8, Proverbs 7:1, Proverbs 23:23–26)—and this time of staying home allows us to do these things with greater intentionality.

At Redeemer, Jackson, we as a congregation began looking at our role to worship at home as a family for a few months prior to the stay-home directive. We hosted Dr. P.C. Mathew from Urban India Ministries (urbanindia.org) to learn about becoming missional families and one element of that is becoming worshiping families. We identified six areas that we can be utilizing to worship at home (these are put forward by Dr. Rob Rienow of Visionary Family Ministries (visionaryfam.com))—Bible reading, singing, activities, catechism, discussion, and prayer—and we hosted a training to look at how we can be worshiping families. Unbeknownst to us, a pandemic was coming when we'd have the perfect opportunity to stop talking and start doing.

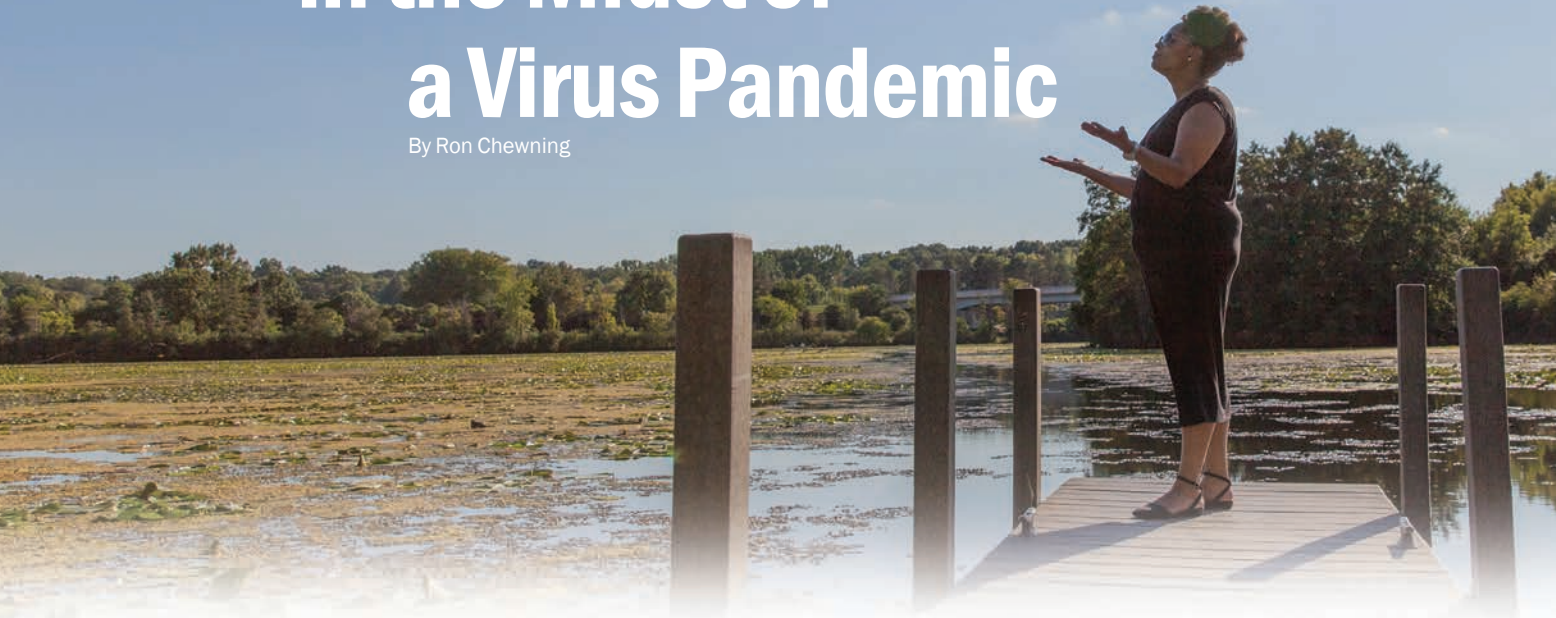
Families can now seize the opportunity and “Lead In.” Each week, families have resources to worship at home incorporating all six areas around the lectionary texts and allowing them to lead the faith conversations prior to each Sunday’s corporate worship service. The goal is to follow God’s design for discipleship happening at home first then being reinforced at church. Imagine families who previously didn’t know what to do together in the area of discipleship, jumping in together and worshipping regularly at home. Imagine families bonded as they could only be through the Word of God. Imagine kids during Sunday morning worship excitedly exclaiming, “My dad taught me about this!” “We did this in family worship!” “We talked about that this week!” Imagine adults already digging into the texts for Sunday and being all the more encouraged by what the pastor is preaching and teaching on those texts instead of entering “cold.” Could the stay home order teach us to be more biblical families? It certainly could! ■

Kimber Walsh is a child of God, wife, mom, Director of Family Life Ministry at Redeemer Lutheran Church in Jackson, Family Life Educator, and Team Leader at Concordia Center for the Family.



Count your Blessings in the Midst of a Virus Pandemic

By Ron Chewning



For many of us, the COVID-19 pandemic is perhaps the biggest life-changing event that we as a country will face. Fortunately, our generation has missed the great depression and world wars which caused even greater lifestyle changes than what we are facing today. As we all know, this pandemic has caused the closing of schools and colleges, the cancellations of sporting events, and job losses for many people. Churches are no longer holding in-person services, concerts are cancelled, vacations postponed, etc. The coronavirus has caused significant declines in the world's financial markets, decreasing the value of people's investments and retirement funds.

It is easy for people to become bitter and frightened in these circumstances, and many will blame God. God's Word tells us of a better way: *"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you"* (1 Thessalonians 5:16–17). These verses give us actions that will enable us to overcome the worst circumstances. We aren't told just to "feel better" but to *"rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks..."*

There's a lot to give thanks for, too, when we're going through difficult times. God is with us, and He is control. What a joy we have knowing that we have God's presence and protection. We have God's strong

and abiding presence through His Word and Sacrament. Each and every day, we have the opportunity to turn to God in His Word to be uplifted and refreshed even when the world around us seems to be closing down. Through the faith that God gives us, we know it is God's will that we rejoice in Him and seek His peace in the midst of this virus pandemic.

“God is with us, and
He is in control.”

In the midst of this crisis, the Church still continues its vital mission and ministry. Jesus tells us, *"I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"* (Matthew 16:18). God promises us that nothing

will overcome the Church because it rests on Jesus. The Church is here to minister to the bitter, frightened, and doubtful. We encourage your prayers and ask you to continue your generous giving. The virus will keep us away from church for a while, but we do ask that you continue your faithful giving. May God help us all during these challenging times to be the light that He wants us to be. ■

Ron Chewning serves as Chairman of the Michigan District Stewardship Committee. Previously he served as the East Coast Regional Vice President for the LCMS Foundation. In the late 1990s, Chewning developed and began Stewardship Advisors, which produces and provides year-round stewardship education resources to congregations. He is a member of Our Shepherd, Birmingham.

Fear of Death

by Paul Clark

“Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, He himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death He might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery” (Hebrews 2:14–15).

The fear of death is a side effect of one thing and one thing alone—**sin**. If man had not sinned, there would be no fear of death, because there would be no death. Romans 5:12 teaches us clearly, *“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned ...”*

So, yes, the *fear of death* is real, because *death* is real. And we all have to contend with it.

But compounding this fear of death during the COVID-19 pandemic is the additional burden of *social distancing*. We have been isolated, cut off from those we love, and not able to easily join our church family for services and activities. By the time this magazine is published, things may or may not have improved. *We just don't know*, and we *hate* that. We hate the unknown, the uncertain, the obscure.

Here is what is **NOT** uncertain: **Jesus Christ, through His death on the cross, and His resurrection from the dead, brings to ruin the one who has the power of death, the devil.** But there's more: **And He delivers all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.**

That is you, dear sister or brother!

That is *me*. **Delivered from lifelong slavery!** Death no longer can terrify us. We have **the blood of Jesus**—*poured out for us!* Satan and death now have no power over the baptized child of God. As Paul Gerhardt says in his great Easter hymn (LSB #467, stanza 6), Christ *“rends death's iron chain; He breaks through sin and pain; He shatters hell's grim thrall; I follow Him through all!”*

Yes, even though we die, **yet** shall we live.

Yes, our times abound with fears and anxieties. Uncertainties. *How long* will this virus wreak havoc? *How many* lives will be lost? As pro-life Christians, we grieve over *every* human life lost, knowing that life indeed is a precious gift of God. But we also speak the good Word of Jesus Christ—the *Gospel treasure*—that *because* Jesus died for us and rose again, we are not alone in this battle. Christ walks with us all the way. He holds us in His hand, and He works all things for our eternal good.

Please remember, also, dear people: during this pandemic, when other news gets the back burner, **the lives of innocent babies** continue to be exterminated on a daily basis. Please continue to pray for an end to abortion, and do what you can to speak, write, help, serve, and donate, for the work before us is far from done. Each and every baby is precious to our Lord and should be to us. As we do what we can by social distancing and sanitizing our hands to protect others whose lives are valuable, so we continue to speak and act on behalf of the multitude of unborn children whose lives are equally valuable.

Thanks be to God for the victory we have in Jesus—victory over Satan and death and hell. Christ is risen indeed! May He bless you, protect you, deliver you from your fears, and calm your troubled hearts. In the midst of this cloud of uncertainty regarding this virus, regarding our nation and economy, regarding the future—**THIS is certain ... Jesus Christ is risen from the dead! He lives and reigns to all eternity!** He is your Savior and your Deliverer. Do not fear. Your *future*, your *inheritance*—is **certain**. In **JESUS**. Amen. ■

Rev. Paul Clark has been the pastor of St. Paul, Fowler for 31 years. He serves as President of Lutherans for Life of Michigan, as well as the Pastoral Counselor. He serves also as the District Life Coordinator for the Michigan District – LCMS. Rev. Clark and his wife Elizabeth have been married for 40 years and have three children through the blessing of adoption.

“Christ walks with us all the way. He holds us in His hand, and He works all things for our eternal good.”



June/July 2020

Immanuel Lutheran Finds New Ways to Serve with a CEF-funded Childcare Center



Immanuel Lutheran has found a new way to serve and enrich the community by creating a childcare center, in the process it also helped return Immanuel Lutheran School to full capacity.



“Our members have always been very well invested in CEF instruments. Now we were ready to use this wonderful resource for financing.”

Pastor Mark Loest
Immanuel Lutheran Church
and School, Saginaw

“There have been times in our history when most of our members were from farming families. At other times, it was families of autoworkers who mainly carried our church.” says Pastor Mark Loest of Immanuel Church and School, near Saginaw

Today it’s different. Employment opportunities from the agricultural and automotive industries were already declining in the Saginaw Valley for some decades. Then the Great Recession hit. And while there has been slow but sure recovery, there’s little expectation for the region to return to its former industrial heights.

Yet, Pastor Loest is confident of Immanuel’s future. “There’s a feeling of growth here,” he says. “People can sense it. They know they’re welcome in our church, even if they don’t descend from the founding families. When new members join us, they connect quickly, and before you know it, they’re taking on leadership roles.”

Uniting to Build

Immanuel Lutheran Church dates to 1846 when Lutheran pioneers from Germany settled Frankentrost, meaning “the consolation of the Franconians,” and immediately established their church and school. “Education has

always been central here,” Pastor Loest says. “We can see how key it is to our congregation’s continuing strength.”

Still, it was hard for Immanuel to escape the trend of falling enrollments that many Lutheran schools have recently experienced. A few years ago, there were some empty classrooms—a concern to be sure. But in the congregation’s typical can-do view, they saw opportunity as well. “We decided to experiment with childcare,” says Pastor Loest. “There was a need in our community—another way for us to serve.”

Before long, the new childcare venture helped return Immanuel Lutheran School to full capacity, and it had become apparent that the childcare services would outgrow their home in the existing school building. Church members agreed with the judgment of Immanuel’s Building Committee that a new childcare center would need to be added.

The church’s “Uniting to Build” campaign began. Pledges and contributions came in quickly from members, while estate giving and a series of creative fundraisers further strengthened the financial base. Bigger contributors were offered ways to be formally recognized; many chose to create memorials to family members who had passed.

Welcoming and Warmth

Yet Immanuel couldn’t go it alone. “We turned to Church Extension Fund for help,” notes Pastor Loest. “Our members have always



Thanks to CEF’s help, the foundation is set, and the walls are up for the new childcare wing at Immanuel.

been very well invested in CEF instruments. Now we were ready to use this wonderful resource for financing.”

Immanuel took out a CEF construction loan and got to work. The new childcare center opened this spring. It features rooms for care and an office for the center’s director. All regulations for childcare beginning at 6 months of age are met. The decor conveys welcoming and warmth, while attesting to the love to be shared in Jesus.

“What may be best of all,” says Pastor Loest, “is that our childcare helps to introduce our congregation to other community members who might never have visited us.”

Meanwhile, preschool through Grade 8 classrooms are also getting attention at Immanuel. “Operation Take Back the School” is devoting much of the money raised from church members to improvements at every grade level of the school.

Making the Best of It

These school updates show how Immanuel makes the best of any situation. Another example: This past Thanksgiving, a shearing wind took down power lines around the church. Despite the outage, church members still wanted to meet. “Our Thanksgiving service is especially important,” says Pastor Loest. “We make in-service gifts of money and food for our Christian Care team to distribute to people in need.”

Church elders brought generators and shop lights. There was just enough power for dim lighting and a microphone. No heat. Yet church members called it the best service ever. “It was like the Grinch stealing Christmas,” says Pastor Loest. “We were all reminded of the true meaning of Thanksgiving—and of the many great blessings we have here.”



Church Extension Fund

Church Extension Fund ■ Michigan District of The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod

3773 Geddes Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48105-3098 ■ www.mi-cef.org

Offices: 800-242-3944

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Being Lutheran by Lori S. Wieneke

My husband and I have been blessed to have been raised in the Lutheran church since birth. We have grown in our faith, and over the years have become members of Lutheran church communities that love Jesus and love others deeply and want to share the Gospel with people outside of our own church walls. Unfortunately, when some people find out we are Lutheran, they have openly shared that they've perceived our church body as an exclusive, "stuffy" denomination. That is just one of the many reasons that led us to faithfully commit to the **Here We Stand** campaign, because we see "being Lutheran" as living joy-filled, passionate lives helping others learn just how "*wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ*" (*Ephesians 3:18*).

A few years ago I was blessed to hear President Michael Newman from the Texas District speak on our Lutheran heritage and our missionaries who reached out to the world. His message spoke to me deeply and made me wonder how God could use me personally as a leader in our church and our family to "GO!", to look for ways to reach others and not simply wait for people to come through our doors.

As a Board member of the Michigan District and a called Children's Ministry Director, I believe the **Here We Stand** campaign is a fantastic way to help pass on the Gospel message to others. With the Church Worker Scholarships, people can follow their call to be missionaries in their field who might not have been able to do so without these generous financial contributions. I personally love the Innovative Missional Ministry

emphasis of the campaign because I fully believe unchurched people don't look for a church building; however, when they are wholly loved and cared for by people in their community being the hands and feet of Jesus without expecting anything in return, they get to experience that same grace and mercy we have been blessed to receive.

Our church, St. Matthew Lutheran in Grand Rapids, also believes strongly in contributing to **Here We Stand** and feels blessed to be able to make a difference following our church's mission of being "Followers of Jesus, Wherever We Are." With the changing times and the recent COVID-19 pandemic, I'm personally excited to see how our churches and the great leadership of our Michigan District uses the resources we have given to carry out its mission and ministry to the fullest in new ways.

Mrs. Lori S. Wieneke serves on the staff of St. Matthew, Grand Rapids and the Board of Directors for the Michigan District, LCMS.



Here We Stand

A "By the Numbers" look at the **Here We Stand** Campaign

(through April 30, 2020)

\$6,903,238.30
\$6,638,084.48
\$203,473.60

Total campaign gifts, pledges, and goals
Cash received which includes \$600,000 CEF Matching Funds
Outstanding commitments (pledges)

\$1,336,060.81
\$2,868,328.49
\$1,020,768.20
\$1,616,400.60

Total given/pledged for Professional Church Worker Scholarships
Total given/pledged for Innovative Missional Ministry
Total given/pledged for Michigan District Endowment
Total given/pledged for International Ministries



Here We Stand

Bible verse: **Psalm 71:17-18**

"O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come."

herewestand.michigandistrict.org

LUTHERAN LAYMEN'S LEAGUE

Spiritual Conversations in the Digital Age

Lutheran Hour Ministries (LHM) has partnered with Barna Group—an industry leader for research-based insights about faith and culture, leadership and vocation, and generational groups—on a critical three-year study of faith in America. This bold new collaboration will allow LHM to create resources and online courses that address the needs of both the church and non-church.

Evangelism has changed in the past 25 years. The ways Christians share, how often they engage in spiritual conversations, and their goals for sharing faith are now different. The attitudes and responses of those who hear the Gospel have also evolved. Technology and rapid cultural shifts, including the impact of social media, have redefined the ways we communicate.

Spiritual Conversations in the Digital Age focuses on this shifting definition of evangelism and the perceptions of faith sharing from both the sharer and the hearer. Through this research, church leaders can coach Christians to be effective in sharing the unchanging Good News in the digital age. The ways we share our faith have changed, but the Great Commission remains.

Spiritual Conversations in the Digital Age Starter Kit

Discover the delight of spiritual conversations with tools

for your individual and congregational outreach. Each kit includes one Barna SCDA monograph, *The Reluctant Witness* book, workshop DVD, selected Project Connect booklets, 25 Curve Cards, and online course information.

The Reluctant Witness: Discovering the Delight of Spiritual Conversations

Don Everts grew up assuming that spiritual conversations are always painful and awkward. But his surprising—and sometimes embarrassing—stories affirm what Scripture and the latest research reveal: spiritual conversations can actually be a delight. With original research from the Barna Group on spiritual conversations in the digital age, this book offers fresh insights and best practices for how to become an eager conversationalist.

LHM Workshops

Drawing on Barna Group data contained in the 2018 monograph *Spiritual Conversations in the Digital Age*, Lutheran Hour Ministries is offering two workshops: *Eager Conversationalists* and *The Spiritual Conversation Curve*.

For more information on these resources and workshops, visit lhm.org.



LUTHERAN WOMEN'S MISSIONARY LEAGUE

CONVENTION NEWS!



CONVENTION NEWS!

Due to COVID-19 the 2020 Convention in Gaylord has been cancelled.

There will be a Virtual Convention Saturday, July 11

You can view online: Opening Workshop, Bible Studies, Mission Speakers

Delegates will need to register to vote on: Mission Grants, Mite Goal, Bylaws and Officers.

There is NO COST to delegates; we need your vote!



Go to the LWML web site to register.
<https://lwmlmichigan.org/>

College Week at Camp Restore Detroit

In early March, Camp Restore Detroit hosted its first College Week. Campers from four different institutions came together in Detroit for a week of service and education. They served in partnership with a local community center, organized a tool shed, cleared blight and trash, boarded up abandoned houses, and helped out with urban farming.

Each day ended with a time of learning about asset-based community development. Dr. Mark Koschmann, from Concordia University St. Paul, spoke on the topic of *Faith and Justice in the City*. Great discussion followed and a panel of community leaders described their part in the restoration of Detroit and answered the

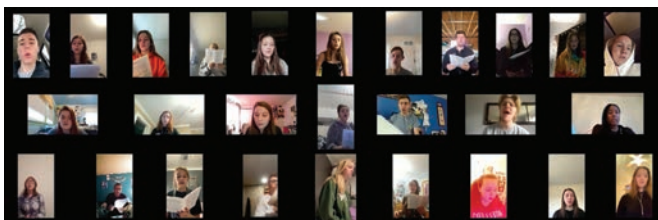


Photo courtesy of Camp Restore Detroit

students' questions.

The campers hailed from Virginia Commonwealth University, Concordia Ann Arbor Student Ministry, Inver Hills Community College, and Concordia University St. Paul. The Michigan District provided funding for speakers and additional staff needed for the week.

A Musical Blessing from Lutheran Westland



Lutheran High School Westland's Music Director Travis Cook had seen numerous musical videos that looked like a Zoom conference and was inspired to create one with his Honors Choir.

But problems with video connections and internet speeds make it almost impossible to create this with Zoom, so Cook taught himself how to edit video through online YouTube tutorials. Then he gave each member of the choir their assignment—to find a quiet place to sing the Old Irish Blessing. Some students recorded themselves in their cars, others in their rooms, and one student did it in the family barn.

Singing by themselves with no director or other students to help out posed some challenges. Many students worried that it might not be perfect or even good enough. LHW senior Hannah B. kept practicing and waited until the last possible minute to submit her part to Cook. *"I had been practicing all week,"* said Hannah, *"and it was not going well, but then I decided to do it anyways because I wanted to be included."*

At a time when the seniors would be entering their final days of high school, the pandemic days were unlike anything they could have imagined. Kenedee G. called it *"crazy."*

All of the students were disappointed they couldn't hang out with their friends, but being able to create this

video was a blessing.

What they put together was beautiful and received an incredible response from their community. You can view the video at www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Dsrs9LNQQU.

Hope is Here

Hope is Here is a devotional moment shared on the Michigan District Facebook page (facebook.com/milcms) each weekday evening at 7 p.m. These hope-filled messages are given by Rev. Dr. David P. E. Maier, President of the Michigan District, LCMS. Along with encouragement and a prayer, a hymn is shared by The Hymnal Project (thehymnalproject.com).

Hope is Here is designed for hearts and minds to be at rest and encouraged during the pandemic and a time set apart to be filled with the good gifts of God.

The *Hope is Here* 10-minute video spots began on Monday, April 13. You can access them all on the District's YouTube Channel (youtube.com/michiganLCMS).



Photo courtesy of Rev. Dr. David P. E. Maier

Special Recognition

Michigan District Welcomes New Pastors and Vicars

The Michigan District welcomed 6 pastoral candidates, 6 vicars, 2 deaconess interns, and 1 deaconess to its roster this spring.

On Tuesday, April 28, students received calls and assignments to serve during one of the most unique Call Day celebrations in Concordia Seminary, St. Louis' 181-year history. Call Day 2020 was held as an online-only event for the first time because of the Coronavirus pandemic. First ministry calls were announced at a single worship service shared at csl.edu/callday and on YouTube. Vicars assigned to the Michigan District are Andrew Berg (St. Lorenz, Frankenmuth); Adam Flanick (Messiah, Clio); Ian Heinze (Our Savior, Lansing); Bryce Rosche (St. Matthew, Westland); and Álvaro Witt Duarte (Trinity, St. Joseph). Candidates receiving their first placement in Michigan from CSL are Jacob Buday (St. Matthew, Lexington); Kevin Dykstra (Open Arms, Belleville); and Austin Wellhausen (St. Matthew, Walled Lake).

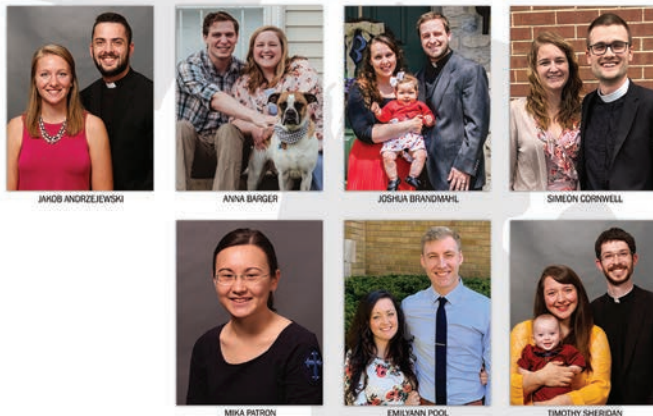
LCMS MICHIGAN DISTRICT



CONCORDIA SEMINARY, ST. LOUIS



LCMS MICHIGAN DISTRICT



CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, FT. WAYNE



On Wednesday, April 29, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind. (CTSFW) held its online-only Call Day service. First ministry calls were announced at a single worship service shared at callday.ctsfw.edu. One vicar was assigned to the Michigan District: Joshua Brandmahl (Trinity, Reese). Deaconess interns assigned to Michigan are Anna Barger (Ephphatha Lutheran Mission Society, Hartland) and Emilyann Pool (Our Savior, Grand Rapids). Mika Patron was placed as deaconess at Grace, Auburn. Candidates receiving their first placement in Michigan from CTSFW are Jakob Andrzejewski (St. Paul, Royal Oak); Simeon Cornwell (St. Matthew, Spring Lake); and Timothy Sheridan (St. Luke, Harrison).

Please keep these students and their families in your prayers as they transition from seminary life into vicarage and full-time ministry.

The Return of the Gathered Saints continued from page 3

- Now may well be the Church's finest hour as we respond with service, care, prayer, and the message of hope in Jesus.
- This is not just the pastor's job. It will have to be the Body of Christ working together to serve the community in Jesus' name. We beg you, Pastor, release your people to serve in Jesus' name however they find means and opportunity.
- Get prepared to respond, but don't wait until you're prepared or you may never respond. God will provide through you as you step out in faith to serve in His name.



Photo courtesy of Elissa Schultz Photography

SIX: He kept track of people and accounted for them because people are really important to God (Neh. 7)

- Pay close attention to worship attendance by families and individuals as you return to your worship space. This is not only to know who is there but, equally as important, who is not there.
- Be especially aware of seniors and those with continuing health concerns, both in your congregation and in the community. How might ongoing connections be maintained?
- Some will indeed be fearful to return initially for any number of reasons. Reach out to them. Do not ignore them. You may well have created some means of pastoral care during this pandemic. Work to keep it robust going forward. Develop a team to work on this and follow through.
- Continue your online presence as you have been doing during this present crisis. There are methods of intelligently determining how many people are receiving the ministry of the Word through this means.
- Study these attendance figures in the sanctuary and online and watch for trends. Adapt your methods without changing your message and observe any effect on the trends.
- Notice especially people who first met your ministry online if/when they show up in your sanctuary. Celebrate and serve them well.
- Notice renewed contacts with former inactive members who may well have "found their way home" through this pandemic crisis. Welcome them and celebrate their return (See Luke 15).
- Discover on your own and/or borrow ideas from others how to track your membership and worship attendance going forward with an ongoing online presence.
- Remember: We count people because people count to God.

SEVEN: He arranged for God's Word to be proclaimed that led to repentance and renewal and a celebration that is described in this way: "The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away" (Neh. 8-12; see esp. 12:43)

- Let every weekend worship gathering be a LITTLE EASTER!
 - Let God's Spirit create a hunger for fellowship with His people around His Word and Sacraments!
 - Let His Spirit lead us in true repentance for taking our opportunities to gather for granted, or even to have considered such gathering together as an interruption in our busy lives!
 - Let His Spirit create in us a contagious joy that mere walls cannot contain!
- Our joy in the opportunity to gather again with God's people to worship our Savior and to celebrate the saving work of God should be loud and bold.
- Make the praises of God from the lips of His people resound outside the walls of the sanctuary. We have learned that living as His called out people in Jesus is more than gathering together on a Sunday morning! Let us encourage one another to continue to live as His witnesses in our homes and communities.
- Let His Spirit cause us to be contagious with His love and life as we witness to Jesus in new ways and old ways alike.

EIGHT: He instituted some lasting reforms ... some things would not go back the way they were (Neh. 13)

- Some things will have to wait:
 - Handshake and/or hugs of greeting;
 - Door greeters in close contact with worshippers arriving;
 - Pastor greeting worshippers at the door with a handshake;
 - Use of the Common Cup when celebrating the Lord's Supper;
 - Sharing of the peace;
 - Passing the offering plate;
 - Adults packed into a small classroom for Bible class. (We do encourage Bible classes to continue online with Zoom or Go to Meeting, etc., or in-person Bible classes to be held in adequate space for social distancing requirements.)
 - Children's Sunday School or Bible classes in small classroom using shared materials.
 - Online options may continue to be the norm for the near future.
 - Provide parents with adequate instruction, directions, and materials for at-home, Christ-centered

instruction and craft activities for little ones.

- Youth groups may function differently than before, but don't give up gathering together online, using social media to connect and instruct and serve. Families have been interacting during these days—how might this become part of your youth ministry?
- Vacation Bible School may have to be delayed until later in the summer ... perhaps as a “Going Back to School Celebration” event.
- Some things may need to continue:
 - Face masks;
 - Sanitizing hands upon entering the building;
 - Social distancing;
 - Intentional care for those needing to stay away from larger groups because of health concerns;
 - Using social media to engage a larger community with the message of the Gospel. Let us not set aside what we've been learning! It's another tool in our ministry tool chest.
 - Concern for our neighbors, whether they are members of our congregation or not. Let us not lose the willingness and compulsion to care for and serve our neighbors in the name of Jesus.
 - The engagement of so many members in caring for one another. Let us continue to encourage every Jesus-follower to be in ministry to those in our fellowship and those who are yet outside of faith in Jesus. We've

learned some new skills and have built some new spiritual muscle, so let's stay with it!

- Online instruction for all ages. Again, we've learned so much. Let's not waste anything that God has enabled us to gain through this experience.
- Providing opportunity for automated, electronic, or online giving of tithes and offerings.

Obviously, this article could not exhaust all the items that your congregation will need/want to consider and perhaps implement as we come back together after the COVID-19 “Stay Home. Stay Safe” order is lifted. We provide this as a discussion starter for you and your leadership team. In addition to preparing to return to our gathering physically as the fellowship of believers, we encourage you to also engage with at least three specific questions:

- 1. What have we learned about ourselves and the Lord's ministry through us because of this pandemic?**
- 2. What new or renewed truths have surfaced, and what new skills for ministry have we developed?**
- 3. How might the Holy Spirit want to leverage our learning and our experience to expand His Kingdom's reign through us, His people? ■**

This article was written by the Congregation Ministry Facilitators of the Michigan District, LCMS: Rev. Galan Walther, Rev. Randy Johnson, and Rev. Dr. Robert Kasper.

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Interest rate is fixed for the term of note. Rate is as of June 2020 and is reviewed and may adjust monthly. Applies to new or existing dollars. New and maturing IRAs only. Early Termination Penalty will apply. Multiple accounts are subject to a minimum investment of \$100,000 with a maximum aggregate investment of \$500,000. The information provided here is not an offer to sell or a solicitation of an offer to buy CEF securities. The offering of CEF securities is made solely by our Offering Circular. CEF will offer and sell our securities only in states where authorized. The securities are subject to certain risk factors as described in our Offering Circular. CEF investments are not insured by the FDIC, SIPC, or any other governmental agency.

Calls and Roster Update

ORDAINED

Change of Status

Rev. Robert Bartz (Three Rivers) to Emeritus
Rev. David Boedecker (Marshall) to Emeritus

Called Home

Rev. Herbert Graupner
Rev. Leroy Westphal

COMMISSIONED

Calls Accepted

Berry, Jenna (Concordia, Ann Arbor) to Shepherd's Gate, Shelby Township
Cody, Robert (Living Word HS, Jackson, WI) to St. Lorenz, Frankenmuth
Drinan, MacKenzie (Our Savior, Lansing) to St. Lorenz, Frankenmuth
Farny, Hillary (Cq. Concordia, Ann Arbor) to Shepherd of the Lakes, Brighton
Patron, Mika (Concordia, Fort Wayne) to Grace, Auburn
Petzold, Julian (Trinity, Clinton Township) to Valley, Saginaw
Sievert, Benjamin (Rockford, Rockford, IL) to St. Lorenz, Frankenmuth
Wolter, Anthony (Concordia, Seward) to St. Peter, Hemlock

Transferred Out of District

Bailey, Bonnie (Emeritus) to Mid-South District

Transferred Into District

Peltier, Carol (Ohio District) as Candidate

A complete up-to-date listing of Calls and Vacancies can be found at michigandistrict.org.

Calendar of Events

Please check the District website for the latest updates and detailed information as COVID-19 concerns continue.
michigandistrict.org/events.

JULY 2020

- 2-3 District Office Closed
- 4 Independence Day
- 20-23 A2E Sports Camp/VBS
Our Savior, Flint

AUGUST 2020

- 1-2 Here We Ride Event
- 3-5 Principals' Summer Conference
Higgins Lake
- 9-11 Board of Directors' Retreat
Great Wolf Lodge, Traverse City
- 12 Early Childhood Conference
Shepherd of the Lakes, Brighton
- 15 All Women's Retreat
St. Lorenz, Frankenmuth

SEPTEMBER 2020

- 4 District Office Closed
- 7 Labor Day
District Office Closed
- 13-15 Deacon Conference
Camp Arcadia
- 21-23 Introduction to Intentional Interim Ministry Conference
Michindoh, Hillsdale
- 23-25 Best Practices Heartland
St. Lorenz, Frankenmuth
- 23-25 Continuing Education Intentional Interim Ministry Conference
St. Lorenz, Frankenmuth
- 23-25 Circuit Visitors' Conference
St. Lorenz, Frankenmuth

OCTOBER 2020

- 9-11 Lutheran Adult Gathering
Grand Hotel, Mackinac Island
- 14-16 One Michigan One Mission
Lansing Center, Lansing
- 20 Board of Directors
Camp Arcadia
- 21-23 District All Staff Retreat
Camp Arcadia
- 30 Reformation Day



Because of social distancing and limited gatherings, you can join *Here We Ride* right at home on your local trails and in your neighborhoods. Grab your family and your bikes, set your goal, collect pledges, and complete your ride on August 1 or 2. Afterward, collect your pledges and divide the proceeds between your favorite church/school and the Michigan District *Here We Stand* campaign.

For more information or to register visit:
herewestand.michigandistrict.org/hereweride