

November 2021

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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

Priestly Peace

by Todd A. Jones

As I have visited congregations in our District, I have witnessed the joy and the fellowship that binds God's people together. However, I have also noticed a growing sense of fear or concern that the church's best days were in the past and that the future of the local church looked doubtful and troubling. As I thought about the concerns and uncertainties felt by many in the church today, I have come to conclude that many have lost touch with their priestly calling. Without their priestly calling, they have no frame of

continued on page 2

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Table of Contents

1	Healthy Congregations
4	Healthy Workers
6	Great Commission
8	Church Extension Fund
10	Here We Stand
11	LLL
12	News & Events
12	Special Recognition
13	Convention News
16	Calls and Roster Update
16	Calendar of Events

continued from page 1

reference to process the events that are happening in the world around us. They have no lens to see God working in their very midst.

I must confess that, as I have spoken about this to a few non-seminary trained people in our congregations, they've expressed skepticism. They struggled to see themselves as priests. They could not get past the image of long black robes, clerical collars, and large crosses dangling about the neck. Perhaps that is part of the problem; we've lost this powerful image of our identity in Christ.

When Peter was encouraging the believers who were forced to flee their homes and abandon their communities, he reminded them of God's purpose for their lives in 1 Peter 2:9: "*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*" That the Lord intended all his people, not just a few, to be priests should not have been a surprise to the disciples. Peter was simply reminding them that their priestly calling was God's plan all along. The plan was first revealed to Moses in Exodus 19:6: "*And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*" God's people lost their sense of purpose and their confidence when they lost their identity as God's priests. Martin Luther revived the promise of God as he taught the reality that we are all called to be priests.

The concept of the priesthood of all believers was Luther's greatest contribution to our understanding of church theology according to the church historian Timothy George (George, T., 1988). Through his understanding of the priesthood of all believers, Martin Luther challenged the existing engine that brought power and wealth to the church of Rome. Luther would reveal in the Scriptures the powerful truth that all baptized believers not only had free access to God's grace, but also had the power to dispense, freely, the grace of God. To appreciate the radical nature of the priesthood of all believers, one needs to consider the state of the Christian church prior to the reformation.

The official teachings of Rome at the time of the reformation described the world as existing in two planes—the physical and the spiritual. The kings, princes, and governors were established by God to protect and expand the physical rule of Christian kingdoms on earth. The pope, cardinals, and bishops were ordained to protect and expand the rule of the church over the souls of the people of the world. Unfortunately, in Luther's day, the church looked and acted much like a physical kingdom. Its promotion of the Gospel was merely a means to extend the church's political influence and increase its financial base. Bishops were not appointed because they cared about the spiritual well-being of others. The appointments went to those who were willing to pay the highest price. Men were willing to pay for the privilege to be appointed to a Bishopric (diocese) because the position was a path to political power and great wealth. Money flowed into the Bishop's pockets from pious people who sought God's grace from the church. These individuals were expected to pay for the privilege to receive forgiveness, take Communion, have their children baptized, or their loved ones buried by the church. When Luther posted his 95 theses, he exposed the worldly greed of the Roman church.

We've lost this powerful image of our identity in Christ.

Over time, he would begin to articulate the radical truth regarding grace and the believer's access to God.

When we think about the Reformation, we naturally focus on Luther's teaching which freed God's people from the prison of doubt and fear built by our dependence on our works. In the Reformation, we celebrate the reality that we are saved by faith in Christ's works, not by our works. We give thanks that it is God's mercy, not our merit, that secures our salvation. Yet, the Church of Rome was attempting to keep God's grace locked up in the institution of the priesthood. It was Luther's teaching about the priesthood of all believers that returned free access to God's grace to all believers.

Starting in 1520, Luther published three critical writings that provided a blueprint for a radically new understanding of the church. The first of these works was *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*. In the book Luther wrote, "There is no true, basic difference between laymen and priests, princes and bishops, between religious and secular" (Luther, M., 1520, p. 14). In *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, published in October 1520, Luther addressed the errors of the Roman Catholic sacramental system. Luther wrote, "I have no doubt but that everyone

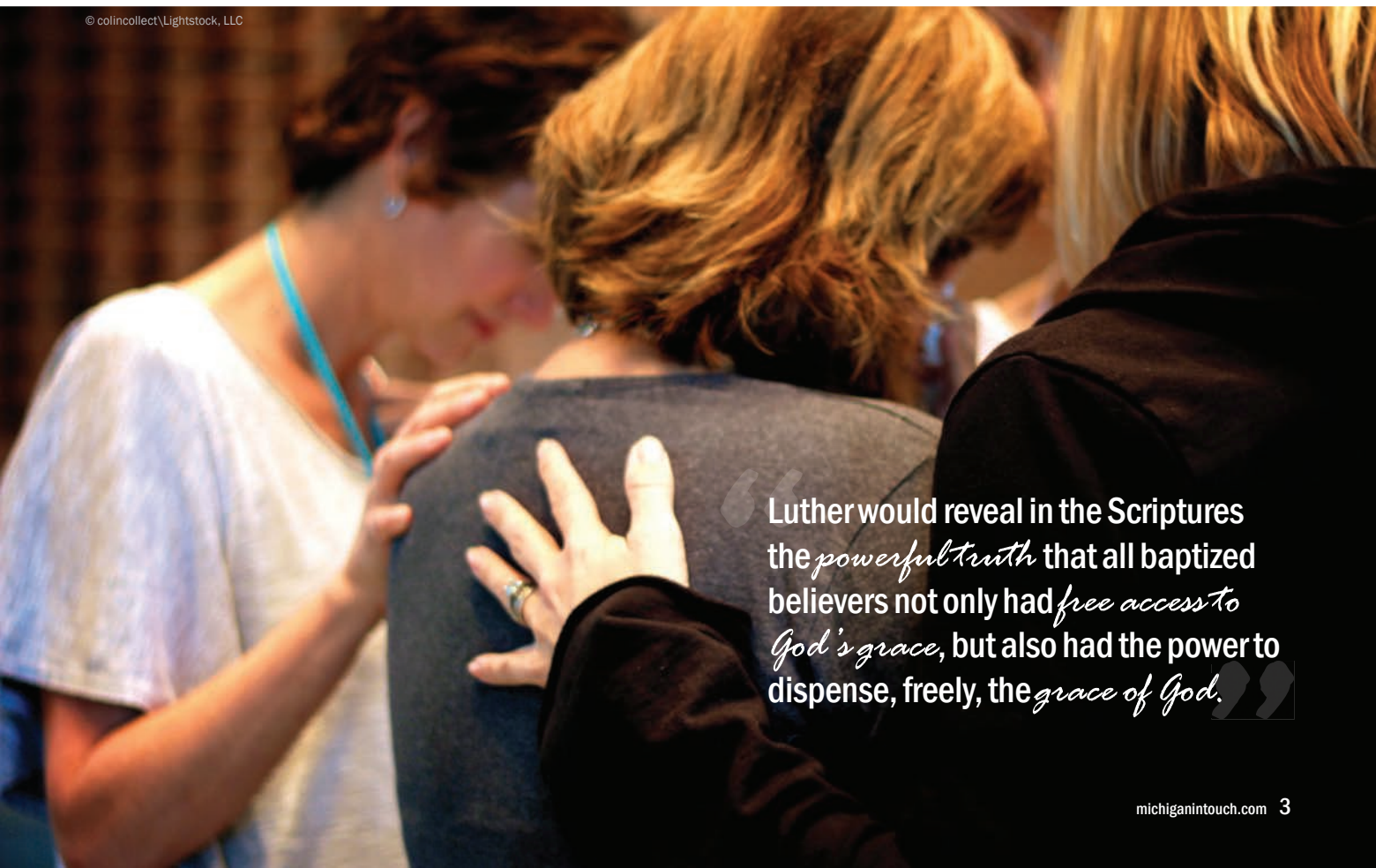
is absolved from his secret sins when he has made confession, privately before any brother" (Luther, M., 1520, p. 214). Luther would go on to declare, "The church is founded on Christ's priesthood. Its inner structure is the priesthood of Christians for each other. The priesthood of Christians flows from the priesthood of Christ" (Althaus, P., 1966, pp. 313–314). Luther identified baptism as the believer's entrance into the priesthood. He wrote: "A priest, especially in the New Testament, was not made but was born. He was created, not ordained. He was born not indeed of flesh, but through a birth of the Spirit, by water and the Spirit in the washing of regeneration (John 3:6f.; Titus 3:5f.). Indeed, all Christians are priests, and all priests are Christian" (Luther, M., *Luther's Works*, vol. 40:19).

Priesthood and Priest: Clarifying the Confusing

Luther's words describing the priesthood of all believers have caused some confusion among those who ignore the distinction between priests and the priesthood. Consistent with our Lutheran confessions, Martin Luther rejected attempts to throw out the

continued on page 14

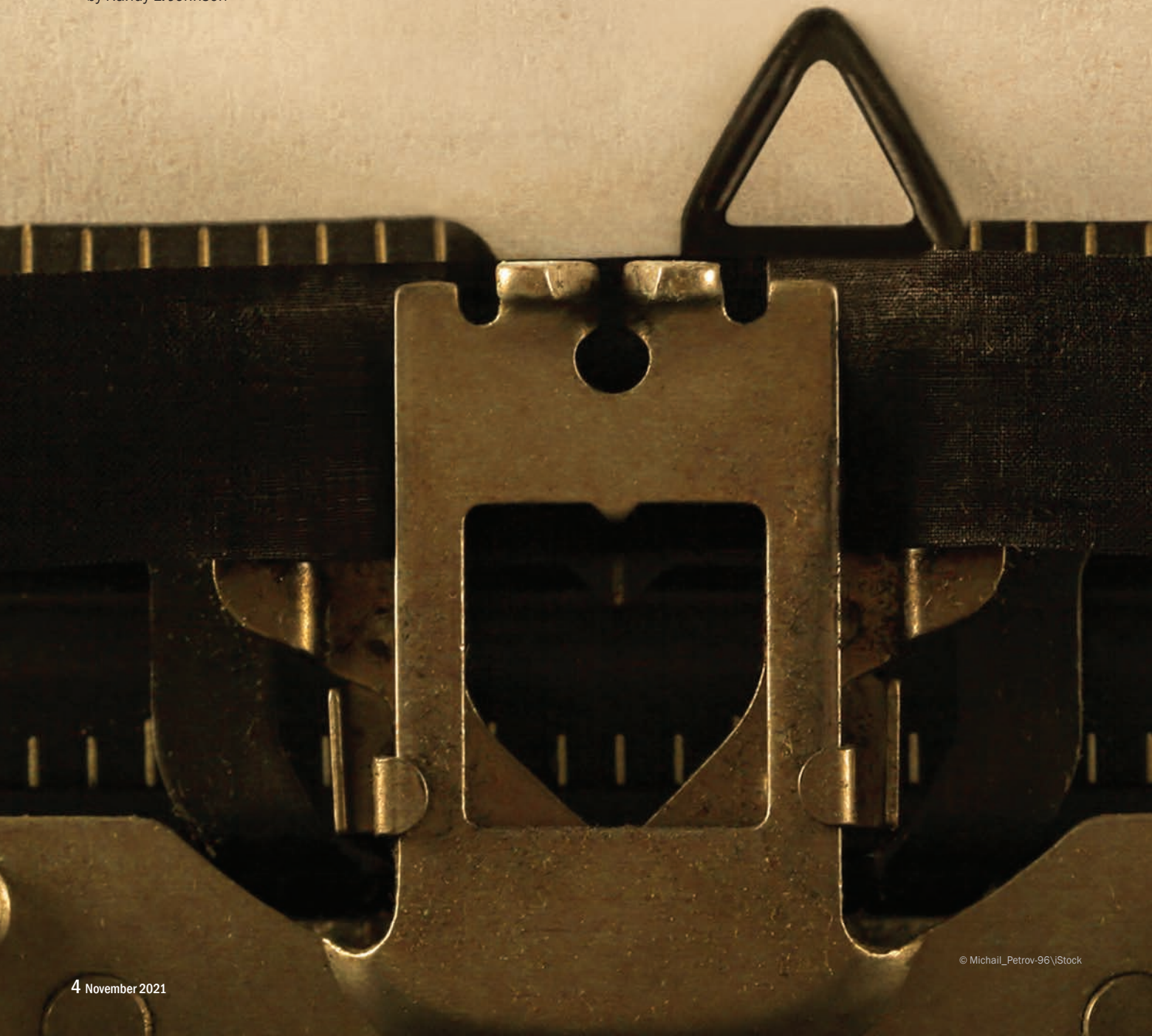
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Luther would reveal in the Scriptures the powerful truth that all baptized believers not only had free access to God's grace, but also had the power to dispense, freely, the grace of God.

Thanksgiving 2021

by Randy L. Johnson



“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ... I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want” (Philippians 4:4, 11–12, NIV).

“And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful” (Colossians 3:15).

“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

“Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe” (Hebrews 12:28).

David York gives us a definition of what Thanksliving is:

1. An attitude rooted and anchored by faith in God.
2. Contagious proclamation. One cannot help but tell people about God, Who is the true source of joy.
3. Permanent. No circumstance or condition can defeat it—ever. Even in the midst of deep sorrow, pain, and affliction, Thanksliving is both possible and appropriate.
4. Centered, rooted, fed, and focused on Christ Jesus. Without Him it is impossible to attain.
5. A mindset of contentment and peace regardless of external circumstances.
6. An obedient response to the will of God that becomes a glory offering.
7. Hopeful—one day we receive a kingdom that cannot be shaken!

Thanksgiving is a holiday set aside to remind us that we should be grateful for God’s provisions.

Thanksliving is a daily state that marks us as children of an awesome Father.

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Thanksliving is about living a life that is thankful for what Christ has done and continues to do for you. It is a life that is overflowing with Christlike living. This is what we see in the Bible time and time again. Psalm 86:12 expresses it well: *“I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever.”* In Scripture, whole-heartedness means mind, will, emotions, soul, and body. Everything about you and me gives thanks as a response to the Lord. It is an attitude that is anchored in Christ and His work in our lives.

We are called to be thankful for all God has done for

us and because of this we are to have a contagiousness about us and how we live our life. Thanksliving is lived out by being and showing our thankfulness for the sacrifice Christ made to free us from the sin that so easily encompasses our lives.

This life of Thanksliving goes with us and is in us through even the most difficult of times in our lives. A little over a year ago, our family’s Thanksliving focus was challenged when one of my grandsons was killed in a motorcycle accident. He was young, a true joy in our life, and then he was gone. The pain of that loss is indescribable, and yet I can still know that the God

“Thanksliving is lived out by being and showing our thankfulness for the sacrifice Christ made to free us from the sin that so easily encompasses our lives.”

of all grace and mercy walks with me and my family through this time. We can be thankful for the mercy Jesus showed to my grandson through his Baptism, where He gave to my grandson forgiveness and eternal life. This is what my family and I hold onto each day, knowing our grandson rests in the arms of Jesus.

Living a Thanksliving life means being centered in the life of Christ. He has called us to be in His house of worship called the church. His house of worship is where we are fed and nourished. There have been times in my life where I have been told by family members or friends that they don’t need to go to church to believe.

continued on page 15



FAM Jam Brings Flint Community *Together*

Photo by Elisa Schulz/Michigan District, LCMS

The first annual Franklin Avenue Mission Jam (FAM Jam) took place over Labor Day weekend. The hip hop festival's inaugural theme FEAR LOVE TRUST invited dancers, MC's, DJ's, and street artists—Christians and non-Christians alike—to engage and create unique material based on any aspect of Luther's Small Catechism.

Headlined by Grammy-nominated Lutheran Flame, most performing artists were Flint natives excited to share the stage with one of the premier Gospel rappers today. Street artists also came from Flint, Detroit, Lansing, Grand Rapids, Port Huron, Ann Arbor, and even as far away as Cincinnati.

Lutheran volunteers from across Michigan poured into Flint to serve the community and build relationships with the artists, neighbors, and families who came to enjoy the two-day event. An Eagle Scout candidate from St. Lorenz, Frankenmuth hand-refurbished nearly 50 bicycles and brought them to be free-raffled off for the community.

Volunteers from Light of Christ, Marysville organized the Kidz Zone, which had many games and activities to engage families. Pastor Christian Jones, Director of Franklin Avenue Mission, had also requested one activity in particular: making t-shirts that taught the colors of the Church year. He explained the request: *"While we should always be aware of our surroundings, I want kids growing up first recognizing what colors signify for the Church instead of the street. The color wheel is a First Article [of the Apostles' Creed] expression of God's creative beauty."*

FAM Jam was embraced by the entire Flint community. The Flint Public Art Project donated much of the paint necessary for artists to transform Franklin Avenue Mission's campus. Kady Yellow, director of PlaceMaking, helped network Franklin Avenue

“While we should always be aware of our surroundings, I want kids growing up first recognizing what colors signify for the Church instead of the street.”

Mission with many of the street artists that came, and held a storytime event for kids on Friday, where she told the story of street art.

Flint's highly respected Vertical Ambition Dance Company performed on Friday and hosted a workshop on FAM's basketball court. Youth and adults alike were excited to participate.

Gabrielle Davis, director of Dream League Music Mentoring Program, who was the very first artist to reach out to Franklin Avenue Mission after FAM Jam was announced, performed on Saturday both as a solo performer and later as the DJ for Mars Davis. She also hosted a youth DJ workshop on the mainstage. After the event, her social media post read, *"Today was definitely one for the books! Got to teach a DJ workshop LIVE on stage, all of the local artists did amazing, hung out with Flame and Mike Real, but most importantly, evangelism and serving the community. Thank you Franklin Avenue Mission for all that you do to make events like this happen for our city! Until next year, salute!"*

"And she is not the only artist who is already excited for FAM Jam 2022. I hope you're ready too!" said Pastor Jones.

Franklin Avenue Mission is part of the A2E initiative supported by the Michigan District's **Here We Stand** Campaign. ■



NOVEMBER 2021

Refinancing with CEF Helps Lansing's Our Savior Extend the Lord's Blessings

Two decades ago, the leaders and members of Our Savior Lutheran Church and School in Lansing could feel the winds of change – and saw the need for bold action.

Since the church's founding in 1956, Our Savior had grown to become Lansing's largest LCMS congregation. By the mid-1980s, membership had reached nearly 1,000. Meanwhile, the school—which was the original reason for Our Savior's founding—continued to add classrooms throughout the 1990s.

Yet as the 21st Century turned, Our Savior had reached a crossroads. Fewer and fewer members still lived near its original building, just south of Lansing's downtown. The congregation looked upon Our Savior's aging facilities, considered where members had mostly moved to, and projected where new members and students were most likely to come from. The question then became: "Should we stay or should we move?"

Wise Stewardship

With God's guidance, Our Savior eyed a new location in Delta Township, to Lansing's west. There, a growing population included many young families who might send their children to Our Savior's school. After years of planning, the church's move was approved, and building began in November 2007.



“We had already partnered with CEF on grants and services, and now we’re partnering on a loan that’s just right for us. CEF is a blessing to our church.”

Rev. Bill Wangelin

Senior Pastor
Our Savior Lutheran Church and School

The new school opened for the 2008-2009 academic year. Then the new sanctuary was dedicated on November 2, 2008.

In the years since, Our Savior's decision to move has been rewarded with the Lord's blessings, as the ministry has thrived. True to expectations, new members from areas surrounding have joined the church, while the school has added many new students.

During the Great Recession, which set in just as it was relocating, Our Savior, like so many LCMS ministries, practiced wise stewardship of its resources during that difficult time. For example, the church prudently deferred adding an Associate Pastor, though the need was clearly there.

Savings for the Kingdom

In 2018, Our Savior took steps to bolster its finances. The church initiated a capital campaign, relying on members' donations, to begin reducing its debt. The campaign also aimed to create a rainy day fund and provide support for missions.

As part of its financial due diligence, Our Savior contacted Church Extension Fund about the possibility of refinancing its debt. "Our church," says Senior Pastor Rev. Bill Wangelin, "was rare in the Michigan District in that CEF had not provided the original loan for our relocation work." This too was soon to change. As Our Savior approached the end of its previous loan term, all refinancing pieces began fitting together.



Savings from refinancing helped Our Savior bring on Rev. Chris Deneen as Associate Pastor. He especially works with the congregation's children and guides young family ministries.



By 2020, Our Savior and CEF were partners in a new lending relationship.

In short time, the refinanced loan's reduced interest rate began generating substantial monthly savings. Pastor Wangelin saw many beneficial ways to put these dollars back into Kingdom building. Yet one need stood out- calling an Associate Pastor; with the money saved with a lower interest rate and from the generosity of its members, Our Savior called Rev. Chris Deneen as it's new Associate Pastor in June of this year. Praise God!

A No-Brainer Change

Refinancing this loan was a unique situation for CEF and it had the added benefit of making Our Savior eligible for CEF's Investment Rebate Program. This change made perfect sense. "In fact, it was a no-brainer," says Pastor Wangelin. "We had already partnered with CEF on grants and services, and now we're partnering on a loan that's just right for us. CEF is a blessing to our church."



Since moving in 2008 to a new building in a rapidly growing area just west of Lansing, Our Savior Lutheran Church and School has added many new members and students.



Church Extension Fund

Church Extension Fund

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Books for a New Generation of Lutheran Pastors in Latin America and the Caribbean

by Cynthia Pine

*Cynthia Pine, a missionary who received funds from **Here We Stand's** International Ministry Initiative, recently returned to Michigan from two years' service in the Dominican Republic, where she served as Regional Project Manager with LCMS Latin America & Caribbean (LAC). Here she talks about one of the projects she was involved with.*

In a step of faith, the LCMS Latin America & Caribbean (LAC) regional team in 2017 inaugurated the new seminary in Santiago, Dominican Republic (D.R.) to provide formation and continuing education for Lutheran pastors who will plant and lead churches in their home country and language. The need was great. Other Spanish-language Lutheran seminaries in the LAC area were at capacity and the demand for training deaconesses was growing.

A key goal of the seminary, not fulfilled in the D.R. until now, has been to open a library to support the students' course work and continuing education. On September 12, 2021, the Seminary held a ceremony to dedicate the fifth year of classes and to officially open the Library of the "Seminario Concordia el Reformador" (SCR). In declaring "open" the facility, the Seminary's Director, Rev. Joel Fritsche, acknowledged the many hours spent by local staff, seminary students, and missionaries on behalf of bringing this library to fruition.

We know the importance of books, particularly theological books. The Dominican people love to discuss our books and the knowledge contained in them. Rev. Ted Krey, Regional Director for LAC, tells of his arrival at the airport when he first moved to the D.R. in 2009. A customs official asked him about the books in his suitcase: in particular, one in the Greek language. When Pastor Krey explained to him that this was one of the Gospels written in the author's own language, the official asked, "Why didn't my church ever tell me about that?" Digging further, he found a book in Hebrew, and after hearing Krey's explanation, the official asked the same question. Our seminarians learn the Scriptures in both those biblical languages. The seminary library now has texts—in Spanish—on reading the Scriptures in Greek and Hebrew.

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Naumann, the seminary's librarian, explains: "The primary goal of the SCR Library is to serve local students, deaconesses, and missionaries with a functioning research library." As a "research" library, no books will be lent out, only used within the facility.

This first phase of the library's development has focused on acquiring the important texts and resources needed to support students and faculty; on providing ample space for students to study; and on creating the infrastructure necessary for Phase Two, when digital books and online resources will be the focus. Another important feature of the library is that the quantity and quality of titles will help make the case for the Seminary's accreditation by the Government of the D.R. when that application process begins.

As of this writing, the library boasts three main rooms: the "stacks," where all books are housed once they are entered into the catalog and labeled; the conference room, containing a large table plus electronics for Zoom meetings; and the librarian's office with shelves for periodicals. An adjacent unused classroom holds books and shelves waiting to be processed; and a large closet for WiFi equipment and specialty cleaning products takes up the remainder of the north side, second floor of the LAC Mission's building in Palmar Arriba, just outside Santiago. You are invited to visit!

*In 2021, \$75,000 from the **Here We Stand** campaign was disbursed directly to missionaries. To learn how you too can support international mission work, visit michigandistrict.org/herewestand.*

Campaign Goal: \$10 million



Here We Stand

Campaign Progress: \$8.92 million
(as of October 14, 2021)

Participating Congregations: 175

Individual Contributors: 1,449

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

Better Together

Barna Group undertook a study to learn more about the types of people who are taking initiative in their communities—who gather, donate, serve, create, teach, mobilize, and innovate, alongside other passionate neighbors, to meet needs around them. *Better Together*, the latest report in an ongoing research partnership between Barna Group and Lutheran Hour Ministries (LHM), seeks to understand Christians who love their neighborhoods of their own volition, even outside of professional obligation or the formal structure of ministry programs.

Are you tired of hearing people dismiss the church as an irrelevant relic? (Do you secretly wonder if they are right?) In his latest book titled *The Hopeful Neighborhood*, LHM author Don Everts explores an exciting reality that is revealed in Scripture, shown throughout history, and confirmed with research from Barna and LHM: when Christians pursue the common good of the neighborhood, the world stands up and notices. This book is filled with constructive, practical ways that Christians and churches bless those around them.

The *Hopeful Neighborhood Field Guide* walks you through a simple, powerful process for blessing your own neighborhood, with six sessions on discovering the gifts

of your community, imagining the possibilities, and pursuing the common good. Included exercises and assessments provide practical tools for how to turn your hopes into a concrete reality.

Learn how to love your neighbors and your neighborhood with the new *Better Together Kit*. Each kit is filled with tools that will help you make a difference right in your own community. The kit includes a *Better Together* monograph, *The Hopeful Neighborhood* book, *The Hopeful Neighborhood Field Guide*, selected Project Connect booklets, and a pack of Neighborhood Bingo cards. For more information, go to lhm.org/together.



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— Pastor Tim Loewe,
Christ The King, Lambertville



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New Online Leader Training Helps Churches Begin or Expand Stephen Ministry

Stephen Ministries St. Louis is now training caring ministry leaders through a live, interactive online training experience called the Bridge Leader's Training Course (BLTC). This event fully trains Stephen Leaders—the pastors, church staff, and lay leaders who begin and lead Stephen Ministry in their congregation.

The BLTC draws on newly redesigned and updated Stephen Ministry resources to equip participants with the skills and know-how to lead all aspects of their congregation's Stephen Ministry. This includes training a team of congregation members as lay caregivers (called Stephen Ministers), matching them with hurting people in the congregation and community, and offering ongoing guidance and support to Stephen Ministers as they provide one-to-one, Christ-centered care to people experiencing a wide range of life difficulties.

Established in 1975, Stephen Ministry is a lay caring ministry being used by thousands of congregations of all types, sizes, and settings—across the US, Canada, and 30 other countries. Stephen Leaders in these congregations have equipped more than 600,000 people as Stephen Ministers, who in turn have cared for millions of people

in need. The new training and resources carry this ministry into the future, preparing congregations to meet the ministry challenges of an ever-changing world.

The Bridge Leader's Training Course is delivered via Zoom to cohorts of twenty people, led by two members of Stephen Ministries' teaching faculty. Each session uses a variety of teaching methods—presentation, small- and whole-group discussions, skill practice, video, and more. The course consists of ten sessions held twice weekly for five weeks or once weekly for ten weeks.

The Bridge Leader's Training Course has welcomed participants from churches across the United States and Canada, as well as from other countries including Australia, China, Germany, and Switzerland. Since the initial cohort in July 2020, more than a thousand individuals representing hundreds of congregations have completed the training from the convenience of their own home or office and are now serving as Stephen Leaders.

To learn more about Stephen Ministry, visit www.stephenministries.org or call 314.428.2600. Additional information about the Bridge Leader's Training Course is available at www.stephenministries.org/bridge.

Special Recognition

Hagenow Celebrates 25 Years In Ministry

In September, St. Peter, Hemlock members celebrated the 25th anniversary in the teaching ministry of Eric Hagenow. A graduate of Concordia University Ann Arbor, Hagenow started his first year of teaching in August 1996 and his entire ministry as been at St. Peter.



Photo courtesy of St. Peter, Hemlock

He teaches students in grades 5-8 primarily in math and became the athletic director after his first year. He has coached boys' and girls' basketball at St. Peter for many years. In 2009, Hagenow was called to be principal. Today he serves as principal, athletic director, and teacher.

In 1996, Hagenow married Margaret (Schroeder), who also teaches at St. Peter. The Hagenows have been blessed with two children, Lindsay and Brady, who graduated from St. Peter and Saginaw Valley Lutheran High School. Hagenow has been privileged to serve at St. Peter not only with his wife, but also with his father, Rev. Martin Hagenow, and his two children, both of whom work in the Early Childhood Center.

Holdorf Installed

In September, Rev. Zachary J. Holdorf (pictured front row center) was installed as Senior Pastor at Redeemer, Jackson. He earned a B.A. in History at Concordia University, Seward Neb. and then attended Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Mo. He was ordained in 2012. Pastor Zach served Trinity Lutheran Church and School in Wausau, Wisc. for 9 years, first as Associate Pastor then as Senior Pastor.

Pastor Zach preached his first sermon at Redeemer on September 26, the 60th anniversary of the congregation. He looks forward to what the Lord has in store for the family of God at Redeemer.

Pastor Zach and his wife, Katrina, have three children, Jack, Avery, and Mackenzie.



Photo courtesy of Redeemer, Jackson



IMPORTANT DATES

January 31, 2022	Circuit Forums must be conducted before this date
February 26, 2022	Deadline for all nominations, reports, and overtures
May 14, 2022	Floor Committee meetings
June 26-28, 2022	Michigan District Convention

michigandistrict.org/convention



Michigan District, LCMS presents
2022 Theological Conference
February 5, 2022 | Our Savior, Lansing, Mich.

General \$20
Student \$15

Speakers:

Rev. Dr. Dale A. Maier
Rev. Dr. Joel D. Lehenbauer
Rev. Dr. Theodore J. Hopkins
Mr. Greg S. Baylor, JD

michigandistrict.org/theological22

Priestly Peace continued from page 3

office of public ministry. The office of public ministry is not a human invention or the idea of the ancient church. As Paul declared in Ephesians 4, it was Christ who instituted the office of public ministry.

Luther stated:

For although we are all priests, this does not mean that all of us can preach, teach, and rule. Certain ones of the multitude must be selected and separated for such an office. And he who has such an office is not a priest because of his office but a servant to all the others, who are priests.... This is the way to distinguish between the office of preaching or the ministry, and the general priesthood of all baptized Christians (Plass, What Luther Says, p. 1139f.).

Luther described the call into the public ministry—that is, the call to be a priest—as coming from God through the congregation. The pastor served the public ministry of the congregation, the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments on behalf of the congregation. The power he exercised in ministry was not from the call, but the power given to all the priesthood, the power of God's promise in the Word and Sacraments.

*Therefore everyone who knows that he is a Christian should be fully assured that all of us alike are priests, and that we all have the same authority in regard to the Word and the Sacraments, although no one has the right to administer them without the consent of the members of his church, or by the call of the majority because when something is common to all, no single person is empowered to arrogate it to himself, but should await the call of the church (Luther, M., *The Pagan Servitude of the Church*, 1520, in Dillenberger, 349).*

The Bottom Line

The bottom line is this: no matter what we face—our challenges, our hardships, our uncertainties—we have the power to change the world around us by what we say and what we do because we are a member of the royal priesthood. I'm not intending to imply that you can overcome any obstacle if you just believe in yourself. I am saying God, the Holy Spirit, dwells in



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you. The Word of God has the power to give life to your words and your prayers. We have these treasures so that we can be a priest, declaring God's mercy for those wracked with guilt; proclaiming God's redemption for those who are lost; and showing kindness to those around us that they might see Jesus. I value what the Rev. Dr. Norman Nagel said in his article, *Luther and the Priesthood of All Believers*: "In talk of priests there are always two points. You cannot be a priest all by yourself. A priest is always toward someone else, toward a non-priest" (Nagel, N., 1997, *Luther and the Priesthood of All Believers*, CTQ). Dr. Nagel would go on to describe the role of the priest to face the Lord in prayer and thanksgiving and the role of the priest to face the world, to declare the Word of the Lord and His mercy. His words serve as precious reminders that we—the priesthood, God's holy people—have been invited to gather as a community to face God, to be encouraged by His Word and freed by His grace. Dr. Nagel's words also remind us that we, the royal priesthood, have the power and the call to transform the lives of those around us by bringing God's message of salvation to those who do not yet know of God's love. Our world is filled with uncertainties and the unknowns can fuel our fears. However, the one certainty that renders all uncertainties meaningless is this: God has redeemed you; and God has chosen you to be His priest. Wherever life takes us, we have the joy of declaring the praises of Him who called us out of darkness and into his marvelous light. ■

Rev. Dr. Todd A. Jones is Assistant to the President – Mission Education and Support for the Michigan District.

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Thanksgiving 2021 continued from page 5

Now, on some level that may be true, but I find an adage that has served me well that says, *"I have eaten countless meals and I cannot recall many of them but without eating those meals I would not be alive today."* I may not remember every worship service I have gone to in my life, but I have been fed by God's Word every time. Without God's life-giving Word, I would be lost. The world outside wants to pull us away from where we are fed so we can be led astray. Live the life of Thanksgiving by coming and being fed in His house by His Word and hearing all that you are thankful for in a loving God who sent His Son to die and rise to life for you.

Thanksgiving is living with a mindset of peace and contentment when external circumstances attack your peace on all sides. So many external circumstances can have such a negative effect in your life and your peace. Covid-19 is probably the most significant external circumstance that has impacted so many people's lives recently. It has threatened many people's peace and contentment. Yet, through this all, one constant that we hold onto is the fact that in all things God can work for good. God has used this time to bring families closer to one another. God has opened new doors that are being used to reach more people with His life-giving Word. God is in charge in all circumstances and, because of that, we can have peace of mind and contentment by relying on and resting in His power.

Thanksgiving is about living a life of obedience to the will of God the Father and what He has called us to do. We learn what that all entails by reading and studying His Word. We do this both in the home and at His House of worship. Thanksgiving is being a disciple. Being a true disciple is not just being a student or a learner, but a follower: one who applies what he/she has learned to all that he/she says or does in his/her life.

Thanksgiving is about living a life that is hopeful. The hope we have and hold onto is in Jesus Christ, Who sacrificed all for us. He endured torture beyond our imagination and suffered death on a cross so that you could live in this hope. The hope Jesus gives to us is the forgiveness for the sins that we have done and do each day. The old self shows its ugly head each day in so many ways that it is almost beyond belief that God could forgive you and me. Yet, He does. Not because of your actions or works, but because of Jesus Christ. Christ is this hope that gives us life. Because you have



been given this new life, now you can live that life of thanks. The life of thanks is lived by walking in the ways of Christ—loving you neighbor as yourself, sharing the love of Christ with each person you meet, and loving your enemy.

"Therefore, as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving" (THANKSLIVING; Colossians 2:6–7). ■

Rev. Randy L. Johnson serves as Assistant to the President – Congregation Mission and Ministries North Zone.

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Calls and Roster Update

ORDAINED

Calls Accepted

Rev. Keith Lemley (Washington, MI) to IIM, GoodLife, Rochester Hills

Status and Title Change

Rev. Thomas Bye (Hart, MI) to Emeritus

Rev. Gerald Corbett (Eastpointe, MI) to Candidate

Rev. Afzal Masih (Byron Center, MI) to Emeritus

Rev. Randall Schultz (Burton, MI) to Emeritus

COMMISSIONED

Calls Accepted

Felten, Michael (Concordia, Ann Arbor) to Journey, Oxford

Steuernagel, Paula (Trinity, Saint Joseph) to St. Paul, Jackson, MO

Change of Status

Hartfield, Kathryn (Trinity, Saint Joseph) to Candidate

Parrish, Elizabeth (Camp RD, Inc.) to Candidate

Transferred Into District

Lepley, Wendi (Indiana District) as Candidate

Transferred Out of District

Sankey, Brent (Candidate) to Nebraska District

Sankey, Margaret (Candidate) to Nebraska District

Steuernagel, Paula (Trinity, Saint Joseph) to Missouri District

Removed From Roster

Mohlenhoff, William

Neu, Coral

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

NOVEMBER 2021

- 1 All Saints Day
- 11 Veterans Day
- 22–23 Connections Joint District Educators Conference
Fort Wayne, Ind.
- 25 Thanksgiving
- 25–26 District Office Closed

DECEMBER 2021

- 23–24 District Office Closed
- 24 Christmas Eve
- 25 Christmas Day
- 31 District Office Closed

JANUARY 2022

- 23–29 National Lutheran Schools Week

FEBRUARY 2022

- 3–4 Snow Tire Conference
Location TBD
- 5 Michigan District Theological Conference
Our Savior, Lansing
- 26 Retirement Conference
Holy Cross, Flushing

MARCH 2022

- 2 Ash Wednesday
- 4–6 State Basketball Tournament
Concordia University and St. Paul, Ann Arbor

APRIL 2022

- 1–3 The Katie
DoubleTree by Hilton, Bay City
- 10 Palm Sunday
- 14 Maundy Thursday
- 15 Good Friday
- 17 Easter
- 24–26 Office Personnel Conference
DoubleTree by Hilton, Bay City

