

February 2024

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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

GREAT COMPASSION

The Word Is _____

by Rev. David A. Davis

Parents often tell their little children, “Use your words.” Instead of making motions or grunting sounds, they say, “Use your words.” Words are crucial to communication. Words can develop or break relationships. Words are what we use to make things known.

We live in a world divided: this group against that group, this faction looking down on another one, my

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side against your side. We see hatred. We see discord. We see suspicion. Sadly, such worldly things are seen in congregations. The result is that people often write one another off, they exclude, they dismiss, they “other.”

It should not be so among us who follow Jesus. We are called to be ambassadors of reconciliation. We are called to treasure unity. We are called to be peacemakers.

To do so, we must “use our words.” At the heart of reconciliation, as at the heart of the Gospel, are words. Words like “forgiveness, apology, grace, mercy, humility, love, kindness, understanding, truth.” Words like “Jesus.” Words about Jesus. Words that invite people to change their minds (repentance). Words that release (forgiveness).

Hannah Arendt, in her book *The Human Condition*, considered distinctions between labor, work, and action. Labor is activity directed at sustaining life (gardening). Work is activity that leaves behind a product (make a chair). Action is activity that (way over simplified) connects and distinguishes us from one another and builds or destroys relationships (speech, hitting).

A key point in her work is that labor is undone by consumption (I eat the corn), work is undone by

destruction (I cut up the chair), but action can never be undone (you cannot un-say an insult, you cannot un-hit a friend); it can only be forgiven.

We do much acting against one another. People do much acting against us. We do much acting against God. There is only one solution: forgiveness.

The key to restored relationships, between one another and with God, is forgiveness. This is what powers and effects reconciliation. We need to be quick to forgive one another as God has forgiven us. We need to be eager to share the forgiveness that God provides in Jesus: the incarnate Word of forgiving reconciliation.

If we are going to experience a less divided, less hate-filled, discordant, and suspicious world around us, we need to dare to “use our words.” We Christians have words of reconciliation. Our words are forgiveness, apology, grace, mercy, humility, love, kindness, understanding, truth. Our word is Jesus.

In 2024, as the people of God, let’s engage in daring conversations of reconciliation. Who are you separated from? A child who has forsaken the way of Jesus? A person of another ethnic background? A stranger who looks a lot different from you? A fellow citizen who has different political opinions? A neighbor who follows a different god? An advocate of an unbiblical view of sexuality? A pastor who prefers a different style of worship?

Instead of turning our backs to or writing off someone for whom Christ died, let’s dare to engage with our words. *Let’s dare to engage with words from the Word, the Bible. Let’s dare to engage with words from the Word made flesh, Jesus.* Let’s dare to engage with words of reconciliation.

Certainly, division will always exist in the world. Jesus said so. But even as He came into the world as the word of reconciliation, He now sends us out to share the same. Divided world indeed. But by using our words, may it be less so. ■



Rev. David A. Davis serves the Michigan District, LCMS as its president.

The 2024 Theological Conference, *Love Talks: Daring Conversations Towards Reconciliation*, takes place on Saturday, February 3, at Our Savior, Lansing. Walk-ins are welcome. Speaker playlists will be available after the conference at michiganidistrict.org/resources.



In This is

by Paul R. Naumann



Love is always in season, but the month of February, with the annual celebration of St. Valentine's Day, tends to be a time when it gets especially accented. The English word "love" is notoriously ambiguous such that we often wish we had more words to choose from than just one. But the reality is that the limitation of our language forces us to say such things as "I love my wife," "I love golf," and "I love ice cream" all with the single word "love" when obviously we don't mean quite the same thing in every context of its usage. Many have pointed out, including C.S. Lewis in *The Four Loves* (1960), that in the Bible we have the luxury of several words for "love." There's a separate word for friendly or family love, and for romantic or sexual love, and for committed covenant love, and for altruistic sacrificial love even for the unlovely. But in English we often have to use some other words than simply "love" in order to be more precise in our meaning. For example, we could sign off a Valentine card simply with the word "love," but to our spouse or "lover" we might want to say something like "affectionately yours" or "yours forever," and we probably wouldn't sign off that way to our children or to a friend.

All this being the case, it's not really helpful to say, as many do these days, "love is love." The fact is, "love" needs definition and context in order to be properly understood. A heterosexual could very appropriately say to a homosexual "I love you" and mean it as a friend, as a brother or sister, and as a Christian striving to love one's neighbor as the Bible directs us to do. That love very well may need to be what we sometimes call "tough love," that is, "*speaking the truth in love*" (Ephesians 5:15) to people who may not appreciate it at the time but need to hear it nonetheless because it is in their best interest. It's this kind of love with which loving parents discipline their children, and with which God disciplines us as His children because He loves us (see Proverbs 3:12 and Hebrews 12:6).

Certainly God calls us all to love our neighbor as ourselves (Leviticus 19:18, Mark 12:31, etc.) but we love our neighbor within the appropriate and particular parameters that God has given for our love to be expressed. So it's not really a matter of "*who* you love" as much as it is "*how* you love." Loving my neighbor does not mean coveting or committing adultery with my neighbor. Our loving God out of His love for us wants the "marriage bed" (Hebrews 13:4) honored by all and kept undefiled by devoting our sexual expression to the marriage context and defining marriage as Jesus does (Mark 10:6–9).

Far better than saying "love is love" we should say, as the Bible does, "God is love" (1 John 4:16) and then let God define what love is and how it is to be expressed in the various contexts of this life that He has given us. When we do, it will often surprise us. God demonstrated His great love for us by loving us even while we were yet sinners and His enemies (see Romans 5:8–11). It's been said that Lutherans love Lent, and that's no doubt because we see God's love in the cross of Jesus. "*In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins*" (1 John 4:10). I don't know if you love this Lenten hymn or not, but it says it well: "*My song is love unknown, my Savior's love to me; love to the loveless shown, that they might lovely be*" (Samuel Crossman: 1623–1683). May the Lord bless our Lent, and bless our love for Him and each other in response to His indescribable love for us. ■

Rev. Dr. Paul R. Naumann currently serves as Senior Pastor at St. Michael Lutheran Church in Portage, Mich.

An Abundance of Relationships

by Greg Fant





When our church announced that we were partnering with MOST Ministries and a congregation in Honduras to provide an eyeglass clinic, I had this strong feeling that I should go. I had never thought about going on a short-term mission trip and even though my wife did not have the same calling, she encouraged me to go. This was how my journey to Honduras began. I had no real sense of what lay ahead. The only expectation was that we would go to share the love of Jesus by helping people get eyeglasses.

Over the next few months, I worked through the pre-trip Bible study, reviewed information on Honduras, learned a little about the culture, and read about the US State Department travel warnings. The “old man” within me regularly brought up fears—what if you get really sick, what if you get robbed, what if you get kidnapped, what if ... Satan attacks us in many ways, especially through worldly fears. “*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding*” (Proverbs 3:5) helped me through these attacks.

We were scheduled to go last fall. However, just a few days before departure, a hurricane developed and was headed for Honduras. The first question that came to mind—What was God teaching us through this delay? Was Satan attacking again? Prayer brought us through this time and the trip was postponed until June. Putting preparation aside for the winter, I started reviewing materials again in the spring. The “what ifs” were not as strong but continued to attack. What if the government thinks we are trying to smuggle glasses into the country? Thanks be to God! Through the Holy Spirit the “new man” prevailed and when we finally made the trip, it was so smooth that the experienced short-term missionaries said that it was one of the best trips they had ever been on.

None of the fearful expectations materialized—God is in total control! As Paul tells us, “*In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose*” (Romans 8:28). The expectation of serving those needing eyeglasses was fulfilled with over 500 people being served. One of the greatest

benefits of this trip was totally unexpected—connections with, and the encouragement of, our partner congregation in Honduras. Their model of serving the community was an inspiration. The reminder of our connection to saints around the world was uplifting. We worshiped together, we did our daily devotions together before opening the clinic, and we sang together—mainly one song in Spanish, but it was joyous.

So much of life is about relationships. Our relationship with Jesus is utmost. Our relationships with other members of the body can be hard work, but uplifting. Our relationships with those who have yet to know Christ can be the most challenging—especially when it is someone who wants to try on a ninth pair of glasses because they don’t like the way the other 8 look. Love must prevail, and all of this begins with prayer. Your prayers carry short term missionaries through their fears, their travel glitches, into new relationships across the world, and growth in ways we may never fully know or understand until we see Jesus face to face. May agape abound in all you do. ■

Mr. Greg Fant is a member of Our Father Lutheran Church in Centennial, CO and served as a MOST Team Member, Honduras 2023.

If Greg’s experience serving in Honduras inspired you, please check out MOST’s 2024 Mission Trip schedule at mostministries.org to see where you can serve.

Photos courtesy of MOST Ministries



FEBRUARY 2024

Family Connections: Jackie and PJ Brooks

Jackie and PJ Brooks are proud to serve at the same Lutheran church and school, Christ The King, Southgate. Jackie is the school's kindergarten teacher, and PJ is currently a vicar on the church's staff.

But neither of them ever expected to end up in a home right across the parking lot from their place of work, a commute that guarantees both of them can be involved in church ministry while also being home for family dinner every night.

In 2023, a home loan from Church Extension Fund allowed them to purchase such a house for themselves and their two boys. The competitive rates offered by CEF in the harsh post-COVID housing market have now given the Brooks' a completely unexpected gift that empowers their outreach.

In the words of Jackie, "I am constantly in awe of all the ways God has opened doors for us to do His work at Christ The King. And CEF is a recent part of how we're continually blessed."

To say the least, Jackie was shocked when PJ called her with his discovery of a home that had a backyard right next



The Brooks Family

to Christ The King. "He noticed the for-sale sign when he was driving around, and he called me immediately. Between the two of us, PJ is the dreamer. I feel like I have to be the naysayer of all his big plans, even though God usually challenges my skepticism. So when he told me he already had an appointment to walk through the home that day, I felt like I should at least go with him."

After attending the open house, PJ talked to CEF about getting

approved for a home loan. The Summer of Savings program going on at the time meant the Brooks were approved for an interest rate that was half of the market rate. Their loan officer even worked around their travel schedule to guarantee PJ could make it to a weeklong seminary class in St. Louis during the offer timeline.

Even though the home had several better offers on the table, Jackie and PJ continued to be awed by God's hands in the process. "The sellers chose us because they saw our connections to Christ The King. They knew we are people of faith, and that set us apart in their minds. So, we ended up getting the same interest rate we were paying on our previous house.

"Basically, we were able to upgrade our house for much less money than we originally paid for our previous property. All of that was thanks to CEF!" says Jackie.

Since moving into their new house, Jackie and PJ have opened the doors of their home for families at Christ The King. "We make sure that the children of Christ The King's faculty and staff know they're welcome at our place whenever their



The Brooks family and their new home purchased with a CEF Housing Loan.

parents have to stay late for work,” says Jackie. “It means they can relax at the end of the day without their parents feeling like their kids are in the way.”

It also means PJ can continue his work as a vicar and Jackie can serve as a classroom teacher while starting a new ministry outreach together as a couple. Their Family Connections ministry focuses on equipping young parents to talk about faith in their home: “We help them answer questions like:

How do you minister to your family? How do you do family devotions? How do you pray with your kids? How do you have tough conversations with relatives about your faith? It’s something we’re both really passionate about,” says Jackie.

Some of the other blessings of their new family home may feel small, but they’ve made a big impact on the Brooks’ daily lives: “Our boys also attend Christ The King School, so we get to walk to church and

school every day as a family. If any of us forget something at home, it’s a quick walk across the parking lot to grab it. And PJ was right—we still get so much time as a family.”

“We all have God-given gifts to contribute to the people around us. That’s ministry in action,” says PJ. “Thanks to CEF, our new home allows us to continue serving the community at Christ The King in beautiful and unexpected ways.”



“One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.”

Psalm 27:4

Make a Joyful Noise Unto the Lord

The 135th Tournament of Roses Parade was held on Monday, January 1, 2024, in Pasadena, California, under the theme of *Celebrating a World of Music: The Universal Language*. The iconic annual parade featured marching bands from throughout the United States, high-stepping equestrian units, and dozens of majestic floral floats. Lutheran Hour Ministries (LHM) participated for the 73rd time with a float titled *Make a Joyful Noise Unto the Lord* and was the only Christian float in the parade. It fulfilled its mission of providing a Gospel witness to viewers everywhere, from along the parade route to televisions, computers, and mobile devices worldwide. If you missed this year's parade or would like to watch it again, check out RFD-TV's playback option at www.watchrfdtv.com/play/69936. The LHM float can be seen around the 1:18:00 mark.

The float, as well as seven others, was decorated by around 4,000 Petal Pushers volunteers who traveled from all over the country, including the Michigan District, and gathered in Pasadena in December. These volunteers spent eight-hour shifts attaching thousands of roses, carnations, lilies, mums, and other flowers, as well as natural materials such as seeds, coffee beans, and leaves, to create the majestic beauty and splendor of the floral floats. Working on a variety of floats allows volunteers to work side by side with people from diverse backgrounds, believers and non-believers alike, offering an opportunity to make new friends, network, and share expressions of the faith that gives true meaning to the experience.

"I've been coming to Pasadena to participate for the past twenty-five or thirty years," says David Spurgeon, who serves as a director of Christian education at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Albuquerque, NM. He brings his



Photos courtesy of Lutheran Hour Ministry

youth group and others from New Mexico each year. He continues, *"I first started participating when I was a kid, so it means a lot to be able to bring groups of kids each year to witness this experience. It is so cool being able to show the kids the Christ-centered message that is being shared during the parade through the LHM float."*

"I was here five years ago, so this is my second time coming to Pasadena to help decorate the floats. I love flowers, volunteering, and the Rose Parade. This presents the perfect opportunity to 'travel with a purpose.' It is an indescribable feeling when you get to see your work while watching the parade. You really get attached to the floats that you worked on throughout the week," says Nechi Fullerton from Little Rock, Ark.

The LHM float is a self-funded project of the Southern California District of the Lutheran Laymen's League. The float is not included in LHM's operating budget. Contributions for the project are accepted. For more information, visit petalpushers.org.



Development

Thanks Living

The act of “Thanks Living” is contagious—have you tried spreading it yet? Knowing that we have received all that we have from God, we can share our blessings with others in a way that demonstrates His love for them. Attendees who picked up a resealable “Thanks Living” bag at the Michigan District Professional Church Workers Conference have a head start. They are on a mission to fill their bags with items to give away in person while sharing the reason for “Thanks Living,” or they will write a note explaining the “Thanks Living” lifestyle and fill the bag with something to pay forward to someone anonymously. You can do this, too! Use any bag, box, bowl, bucket, etc. to share your “Thanks Living” message and send us your stories. We want to spread the “Thanks Living” spirit and

celebrate the infectious joy it brings.

“What if before we ever begin our Thanksgiving season, we were to start living thanks before God in a continual state? What if we prayerfully recognized where all things come from every day of the year? Even more, what if our thanksgiving was rooted not in our circumstances, but in God Himself? Giving thanks to God for all His blessings and provisions at Thanksgiving time is a wonderful tradition but continuing this year around becomes more than tradition. It becomes a way of life, made possible by the love of God shown to us in Christ.”¹

Share your story at michigandistrict.org/thanksgiving.

¹ Excerpt from the November 24, 2020 blog, *Celebrating Thanksgiving by Thanks-Living*, spurgeon.org

Lutheran Adult Gathering

2024 Lutheran Adult Gathering FAQs by Kristin Wangelin

What is the Lutheran Adult Gathering?

The Lutheran Adult Gathering (LAG) is a week-end retreat with brothers and sisters of faith who come together from around the region to experience worship, encouragement, education, and time together. It is a chance to see old friends and meet new ones, to be intentional about our faith development, and to step out of the normal busy routines to be refreshed and equipped for daily life.

Who can go to the Gathering?

The Gathering is for adults of any age—whether you are in your twenties, thirties, forties, or older, you are welcome to come!

When is the Gathering in 2024?

The Gathering will be held Friday–Sunday, October 11–13, 2024, at the Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island.

What is the schedule like?

The schedule of the Gathering varies a little bit each time but begins Friday evening with a short program, a multi-course dinner, fun entertainment, and time to mingle. After a world-class breakfast Saturday morning, attendees enjoy short devotions, worship led by the band, and sessions by our keynote speakers. The afternoon includes free time to enjoy the hotel and activities on Mackinac Island. Saturday evening closes with another multi-course dinner followed by devotion, singing, and entertainment. After breakfast on Sunday, attendees gather for Bible study and worship before it’s time to check out and depart for home.

Why is it held at the Grand Hotel?

The LAG has a long relationship with the Grand Hotel (almost 40 years!), and we are thankful for the hotel’s

willingness to work with the Gathering to keep the cost at a discounted rate. Michiganders know that Mackinac Island is a true gem, and that the Grand Hotel is a world-class destination often out of reach for many vacationers. It is an incredible blessing and opportunity to gather at such a beautiful place.



Do I have to dress up?

Yes and no. Conference attire during the day is business casual, but the Grand Hotel has a dress code for the evenings which includes suit jackets and ties for men and dressy attire for women.

What is included in the cost?

The registration fee and room reservation cost include the following:

- Ferry to and from the Island
- Room for Friday and Saturday nights at the Grand Hotel
- Friday dinner, Saturday breakfast and dinner, Sunday breakfast at the Grand Hotel
- Gathering activities and speakers

What is not included in the cost?

- Ferry parking
- Transportation between the docks and the Grand Hotel (if desired)
- Lunch on Saturday

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New Initiative to Support LCMS Families

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (CSL) has received a \$1.25 million grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. to work in partnership with Concordia Center for the Family (CCF) to establish the Family Discipleship Initiative (FDI).

The purpose of the FDI is to support Christian families in the LCMS as they pass on the biblical faith and includes educating and motivating present and future pastors, church workers, and other church leaders with biblical theology, knowledge, competence, and attitudes for family discipleship. The overarching goal is to encourage and equip parents in passing on faith in Jesus Christ to their children and future generations.

FDI has two major features. First, Seminary education will equip future pastoral and deaconess students and their families with family discipleship formation to benefit their own households and the congregations they serve. Second, in cooperation with CCF, it will support families, congregations, and LCMS districts to provide home-centered models and resources for raising children as disciples of Jesus Christ.

“We at CCF share a common goal with CSL in desiring to impact the LCMS to see more and more children raised

to be lifelong disciples of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ,” said Dr. Todd Biermann, Executive Director of CCF. *“Continuing the work begun by founder Dr. Ben Freudenberg, we are committed to listening and attending to the needs of families, congregations, and districts to provide trustworthy biblical framework for family discipleship. The important position of the home for handing down the faith is clearly demonstrated by research. But even more significantly, God’s Word teaches that the family is especially called to raise up succeeding generations in the Christian faith, as Martin Luther boldly taught. We, therefore, are profoundly grateful for Lilly Endowment’s vision and generosity in providing this grant to CSL for its leadership and partnership in supporting the biblical paradigm of family discipleship.”*

Concordia Center for the Family is a RSO of the LCMS that is focused on inspiring and equipping Christian leaders to facilitate thriving home-centered family discipleship, enabling Christ’s gifts to create faith in and through families with church support. To learn more, contact Executive Director Rev. Dr. Todd A. Biermann at tabiermann@gmail.com.

Living Passion Drama

St. Michael, Richville will host its 24th Annual Living Passion Drama with performances on Friday, March 22, at 6 and 7:30 p.m., and Saturday, March 23, at 4:30, 6, and 7 p.m.

Come to the church to watch this live performance in scenes presented in the sanctuary. You will see live action scenes of what our Lord endured



Photo courtesy of St. Michael, Richville

before He gave His life for us on the cross. Because of His sacrifice, we have the promise of eternal life with Him in heaven.

Fellowship and refreshments follow the presentation. For more information, call the church office at 989.868.4791, or visit stmichaelsrichville.org/passion-drama. Bus groups, youth groups, seniors, individuals, and church organizations are welcome.

Lutheran Church Musicians of Metro Detroit

The Lutheran Church Musicians Guild (LCMG) of Metro Detroit came to an end this past summer. The guild was organized in 1956 by Victor Brott and Maria Schmitz. Through the years, it was a great benefit to all church musicians, with all-day Saturday meetings, three times a year, in various local Lutheran churches.

In later years, as the number of musicians diminished due to outward locales of the churches, meetings were only half days twice a year. Darryl Witte served for forty years as the most recent leader of LCMG and organized many sessions. He was honored for his years of service in June 2023 at Mount Calvary, Detroit.

LCMG has been a great service to many churches.

2024 Lutheran Adult Gathering continued from page 9

- Souvenirs and fudge

Why should I attend the Lutheran Adult Gathering?

Do you need a break? Do you need encouragement from fellow Christians? Do you like Mackinac Island? Would you like to stay at the Grand Hotel while the Michigan colors are in their full glory? Could you benefit from great times of worship and Bible study? Do you need an evening of laughter? If you answered yes to even a couple of these questions, then the Gathering is a great fit for you. The cost can seem daunting, but the sacrifice of \$20–25 a week until the Gathering will be enough to attend. Encourage other friends to attend with you! Maybe this weekend could be a great catalyst for Adult Ministry at your church. What a great celebration it will be when we gather for “New Beginnings in His Presence” in October 2024!

Visit the Gathering event page at: www.michigandistrict.org/lag24.



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Church Extension Fund

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Calendar of Events

For more information about these and other events visit:
michigandistrict.org/events

FEBRUARY 2024

- 3 Theological Conference
Our Savior, Lansing
- 6 Beyond the Breakwater
Messiah, Midland
- 14 Ash Wednesday
- 15–16 Snow Tire Conference
Frankenmuth
- 24 Parish Nurse Conference
Frankenmuth

MARCH 2024

- 2 Pre-Retirement Conference
Holy Cross, Flushing
- 2-3 State Basketball Tournament
Concordia University Ann Arbor
St. Paul, Ann Arbor
- 18 Board of Directors Listening Event Metro West
Trinity, Monroe
- 19 Board of Directors Meeting
Trinity, Monroe
- 24 Palm Sunday
- 28 Maundy Thursday
- 29 Good Friday
DISTRICT OFFICE CLOSED
- 31 Easter Sunday

APRIL 2024

- 12–14 The Katie
DoubleTree by Hilton, Bay City
- 20 Community Worship Network
Our Savior, Lansing
- 28–30 Office Personnel Conference
Bavarian Inn Lodge, Frankenmuth

Calls and Roster Update

ORDAINED

Calls Accepted

- Rev. Todd Biermann (Grand Blanc, MI) to Concordia Center for the Family
- Rev. Christopher Jung (Pontiac, MI) to Vacancy, St. Matthew, Lexington, MI
- Rev. Barry Mueller (Richmond, MI) to Vacancy, Our Saviour, Armada, MI
- Rev. Daniel Potts (Monroe, MI) to Sanctuary Community Pastor, Christ, Lincoln, NE
- Rev. Austin Wellhousen (Wixom, MI) to Associate, Hosanna, Mankato, MN

Status & Title Changes

- Rev. Mark Bowditch (New Era, MI) to Candidate
- Rev. Robert Dowding (Eaton Rapids, MI) to Emeritus
- Rev. Adan Garcia (Bay City, MI) to Sr., Immanuel, Bay City
- Rev. John Rathje (Ypsilanti, MI) to Candidate
- Rev. Gale Richardson (Wellston, MI) to Emeritus
- Rev. Jeffrey Wilhelm (Leesburg, FL) to Emeritus

Transferred Into District

- Rev. Dr. Douglas Kregel (Cypress, TX) from Texas District

Called Home

- Rev. Jeffery Fritz
- Rev. Robert H. Mann

COMMISSIONED

Calls Accepted

- Bickel, Reagan (Cq. Concordia, Ann Arbor) to St. Lorenz, Frankenmuth
- Volz, Hannah (Concordia, Ann Arbor) to Immanuel, Sebawaing (to serve at Christ the King)

Change of Status

- Cody, Katelyn (St. Lorenz, Frankenmuth) to Candidate

Transferred Out of District

- Buesing, Richard (Reinstated) to Missouri District
- Pidsosny, Mary (Emeritus) to South Wisconsin District

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

