

June/July 2024

michigan

IN TOUCH

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



FROM THE PRESIDENT

Better Traveling

by Rev. David A. Davis

Remember the days of a family headed on vacation? The kids in the backseat excited about the destination? Mom and dad in the front navigating the map, checking the mileage, estimating times for stops along the way?

Then it started. One of the kids looked at one of the other kids “the wrong way.” “He’s looking at me! Tell him to stop.” Then there is a pinch. Maybe a Charlie horse to the thigh. Tears. Fighting. Arguing.

“Would you kids stop it?! Can’t you play ‘I’m Thinking Of’ or the alphabet game or track license plates from different states?”

“Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in
continued on page 2

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IN TOUCH

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unity” (Psalm 133:1).

This Psalm is a Psalm of Ascent, a “traveling psalm” for the journey to Mt. Zion for one of the three annual festivals. It identifies the great treasure unity is. Unity is “good,” a characteristic of God’s intended created order, how things were meant to work. Genesis describes the work of creation as good, except for one thing. It is not “good” for man to be alone, not quite how things should be. So he made a helper, Eve. He created marriage. He created family. He created siblings and extended family. He created others to join together in the experience of life. Life is not to be lived alone; it is to be lived in community, a unity. That is good.

And pleasant. Not everything that is good is pleasant and not everything that is pleasant is good. Unity is both good, part of God’s created plan, and pleasant. It is like the fragrant, perfumed, extravagant oil that is poured on Aaron, the high priest’s head and that runs down his beard, collar and beyond. It fills the air with fragrance that permeates the room.

Ahh. That is unity. Good. Pleasant. A great treasure.

But in human life it is also rare. Sin. Division. Sides. Adversaries. Cain continues to kill Abel with no end in sight.

Unity is not only a treasure, but it also needs to be a gift. (That is unity that is both good and pleasant; people can be united for evil on their own.) We cannot generate good and pleasant unity on our own. It comes only through the reconciling work of God in Jesus Christ.

“All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them,

and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18–19).

This is the Christian Church. By God’s grace in Jesus, we are united to God through faith in Jesus and thereby united with one another as brothers and sisters. Or as Paul writes, “*Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it*” (1 Corinthians 12:27).

“How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity.”

As a gift from God, we are called to be stewards of unity. The gift of unity is not disconnected from the mission of the Church to share Jesus with the world. Jesus said, “*By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*” (John 13:25). He prayed to the Father, “*May [they] be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me*” (John 17:23 NIV). There is a “fructifying” impact of unity. Our Psalm closes with praise to YHWH for the treasure of unity and its impact: “*It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore*” (Psalm 133:3). The Church’s lived experience of unity is not disconnected from the fruitfulness of the Gospel. We live, move, and have our being before a watching world.

As we consider proper stewardship of unity, let’s keep these three things in mind:

Let’s celebrate the unity we have.

Our congregations, District, and Synod have an amazing unity. We believe, teach, and confess the same things. We believe in Christ alone as the Savior of the world. We agree that Scripture is the sole source and norm for doctrine. We confess the Creeds. We hold to the Lutheran Confessions because they are a correct exposition of doctrine. The unity we have in our fellowship is really quite remarkable and well engrained. We should celebrate it.

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Ministering Through Peanut Butter & Jelly

by Jeff Heisner

There's a saying that you should spread love as thick as you would peanut butter. At Trinity Lutheran Church and School in Monroe, they are doing just that.

Throughout the month of April, Trinity Lutheran is collecting peanut butter and jelly to share with community food banks and pantries. Alison Beeker came up with the idea last year, after volunteering at a local food pantry, Oaks Village. Beeker noticed an empty shelf that only had 2 jars of peanut butter. Beeker felt God tugging at her to do something about it. She started the PB&J drive in April of last year and the church and school helped collect over 1,500 jars.

"The very first time I walked in and saw all the peanut butter last year, I was moved to tears," said Beeker.

Beeker and Trinity had a goal to eclipse 2,000 jars of peanut butter and jelly this spring, and volunteers stepped up. One family pulled up to the church and unloaded a trunk full of peanut butter—600 jars. In total, they were able to collect 2,800 jars. Trinity's pastor, Rev. Mark Duerr, has been impressed with how the church and school have responded. *"It's really awesome to see the Trinity family step forward and care for this need in our community,"* said Rev. Duerr.

Every jar of peanut butter or jelly gets a special label. The label has an invitation to join the Trinity Lutheran family at worship services on Saturday and Sunday. *"At least they're getting the Bread of Life with their peanut butter,"* said Beeker.

Beeker and the PB&J ministry is a great example how one person with an idea can make a big difference. *"It's easy, it's inexpensive, and it can make a huge impact in the community. If we all group together then we can help the people that need the help,"* said Beeker.

To find out more about the Peanut Butter and Jelly ministry, go to tlcmonroe.org or call the church office at 734.242.2308. ■

Jeffrey Heisner is the video journalist and digital media director for the Michigan District, LCMS.



Walking with Others in the *Journey of Faith*

by Ryan P. Tinetti

Earlier this year I preached a sermon in which we looked at St. Paul’s “missional mantra”: “*I have become all things to all people*” (1 Corinthians 9:22). I said that this isn’t about changing who you are so much as it’s about meeting others where they are—and from there walking with them in the journey of faith toward the Savior.

The primary context for this gentle leading to the Lord is in relationships. In his book, *Loved & Sent*, pastor and author Jeff Cloeter writes, “*Though an evangelist preaching to thousands has a role, exponential transmission of God’s love in Christ occurs through the multitude of God’s people living in relationships. It is critical to express our faith in real, natural, everyday relationships with those around us.*”

We witness to our faith, becoming “all things to all people,” in real, natural, everyday relationships. How does one go about doing that? Cloeter suggests several ways in which we can walk alongside others in the journey of faith. Let me highlight five of them.

1. Build relationships


This is of course the *sine qua non* of witnessing through relationships: actually having some! Cloeter recommends investing in those who are already part of your networks. If you don’t have any folks in that circle in need of God’s grace, consider volunteering with a nonprofit, joining a book club, or participating in a community association.

2. Earn the right to be heard

It’s a cliché, perhaps, but there is still truth in the saying that “they won’t care what you know until they know that you care.” Pastor Cloeter admonishes, “*Don’t talk until you’ve done a lot of listening.*” Being “slow to speak and quick to listen” means that, when you do speak up, your words will carry that much more power.

3. Be okay with questions

Neighbors have questions about the Christian faith, and there is a temptation never to acknowledge when we don’t know an answer. So long as you know the

A man with a black backpack is walking away from the camera in a crowd. The backpack has a silver ring and a small logo that says "VERUCCI". The background is a blurred outdoor setting with many people.

Answer, our Lord Jesus, it's okay to admit when you don't have a ready response to each and every inquiry. *"Instead of preaching the answer,"* Cloeter writes, *"wrestle through it with them. You don't need to be defensive. God can defend himself."* Wise words!

4. Tell your story

People want to know how your faith has impacted your own life. How have you seen God at work? What has your relationship with Him meant to your day-to-day existence? Cloeter quotes the poet and Christian T.S. Eliot: *"The greatest proof of Christianity for others is not how far a man can logically analyze his reasons for believing, but how far in practice he will stake his life on his belief."* Share what you're willing to stake your life on.

5. Tell the Story

"Your story is great," says Cloeter, *"but it leads to a greater story. It is the preface to the transcendent narrative that will apply to your friend."* Think about your touchstones for the Good News. I encourage the memorization of "gospel-nutshells" from the Bible, such as John 3:16 or Romans 5:8: *"God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* Ultimately, it is this message that is *"the power of God for salvation"* (Romans 1:16). Share what God staked His life on.

Comforted to comfort.

Walking with others in the journey of faith doesn't have to be complicated. The calling is expressed in miniature in this passage from 2 Corinthians:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (1:3-4).

It's as simple as this. We've been comforted by God. Where we can, we seek to bring His comfort to our friends, family, and neighbors. And wonder of wonders, He does it! ■

Rev. Ryan P. Tinetti serves as pastor at Trinity, Arcadia.



Against the Odds

NFL Player Inspires Students with Talk of Faith, Persistence

by Misty Gower

Photos courtesy of Misty Gower, Peace, Saginaw

Ben VanSumeren is different. Well, I mean, duh. He's a linebacker for the Philadelphia Eagles. Of course he's different. According to my very thorough research by typing "odds of making it into the NFL" into Google, under 2% of college players go on to play professional football.

What I'm saying is, he's *different*. To be honest, I don't know if italicizing the word even gets the point across. So I'll try here.

When I found out Ben was coming to lead a student assembly at Peace Lutheran School, I had my usual questions: Who is invited, do we want media there, how big of a deal do we want to make this, etc. Pastor Hauser said he would ask Ben's preference, and we'd go from there.

Ben's preference? Whatever Peace wanted. Whatever is helpful. He was just here for the kids.

And he meant it.

Look, the most I know about NFL players in the off-season is that Travis Kelce (Kansas City Chiefs) and

Taylor Swift (his global popstar girlfriend) have recently been frolicking in the sunshine on a romantic getaway to the Bahamas.

Yet this kid shows up on a 35-degree dreary day in Michigan to inspire kids? What gives?

"I like being home. I like being with my family," the 23-year-old told me as we waited in Pastor Hauser's office before the K-8 assembly in the gym on Wednesday. *"I spend a lot of time training and in Philadelphia away from them, so whenever I get the opportunity, I like to come home."*

"It's important to talk to the kids because I'm a big advocate for Lutheran schools, and I did K-8 in a Lutheran school (Zion in Bay City). This is really a time in their life when they can decide who they want to be. And I can say that confidently because that's what I did when I was their age (at age 6, to be precise)."

It's also a time in their life they'll tuck away this memory of meeting someone "like them" who made it

“ I went from being counted out to being counted on. ”

big. They’ll never forget it.

I still remember the speaker at my eighth-grade banquet in Livermore, KY. He was an on-air personality for our local country music radio station. He also did the daily Farm Report.

Listen, my entire home county still has one stoplight and one high school. We don’t have many local “celebrities.” But I digress.

The point is, I still vividly remember the man and the message of that visit, all these years later. Peace students will remember Ben’s visit for the rest of their lives, too.

A pro athlete telling your children that they, too, can do anything they are gifted for with hard work and eyes fixed on Jesus. That’s priceless.

“As the brother of an Emmy and Golden Globe award-winning actor (Paul Walter Hauser), I know firsthand how inspiring it is to have someone from where you grew up, go on to achieve things that only a miniscule percentage of the population achieves,” Pastor Hauser said. *“Having Ben visit our school means the world to our student body. These kids are growing up going to the same kind of parochial school Ben attended when he was a kid in Bay City. To have that same guy come home and share his story with kids from his community is incredibly meaningful.”*

“My hope is that his presence and his telling of his story might inspire our students to work hard and know that, with God’s help, anything is possible!”

Make no mistake. There’s been hard work.

“I just trust my process,” Ben told me when asked how a Lutheran school kid ends up in the NFL.

Because let’s be honest here. We’re not exactly known for football.

“I didn’t really know how the whole recruiting or anything like that worked, but I just stayed the course, and I ended up in the position where I am today,” he said.

Ben played a slew of sports growing up. After elementary school at Zion, he attended Garber High School in Essexville, where he would eventually home in on football as “his sport.”

On Wednesday, he expanded upon four main areas or points he wanted Peace students to remember for success in life:

1. Intentional focus.
2. How you do one thing is how you do everything.
3. God is watching.
4. The standard is the standard.

Ben held up his daily prayer journal, which he told students he started six years ago. It’s even more important than his daily nutrition and fitness goals, he said.

He talked about how he ended up playing college football for both the University of Michigan and Michigan State University (who does that?), “eligibility,” “transfer portals,” and other things I didn’t really understand. If you’re into stats and such, you can find those online.

But here’s what I did understand: Each step of the way, he was given very little odds of making it to the next level. Zero percent for one thing. One percent for another. By the time he made it to the NFL, he was told he had a 10% chance.

After the zeros and ones, Ben quite liked those odds. And he was quick to credit Lutheran schools for much of his success, all the way into the NFL.

“I went from being counted out to being counted on,” he told students.

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JUNE/JULY 2024

CEF Helps St. Philip's Fight the Floods

During the summer of 2021, St. Philip's Lutheran Church experienced not just one but two historic floods during what was called "the storm of 100 years" in Detroit, Michigan.

A recorded 6 inches of rainfall flooded the city within just 24 hours from June 25 - 26. This was followed by a similar storm only weeks later. A state of emergency was declared as there were thousands of damaged homes and buildings, displaced residents, and stranded motorists on flooded roads.

St. Philip's was established in 1934 and was the first black Lutheran church in Michigan. In its 90 years of service to the city of Detroit, it had never experienced flooding like this before. Congregational lay leader, Dr. Kimberly Peoples, said that the church was facing upwards of \$400,000 in repairs as their basement had nearly 2 feet of water in it - destroying the kitchen, ruining the computer lab, and otherwise causing major loss of property throughout the facility. This caused much worry, anxiety,



Dr. Kimberly Peoples

and stress as many important events and gatherings take place in the lower level. Thankfully, the sanctuary was not majorly affected by the flooding.

During this dire predicament, St. Philip's leadership decided to turn this event into an opportunity for renewal. And in doing so, they turned to a

trusted friend - Church Extension Fund. CEF was able to offer a new loan to be used for repairs. But that was only the beginning as CEF provided important advice about insurance claims, repairs, and legal considerations. With the help provided by CEF, the dedicated members of St. Philip's were able to raise the money needed for an entirely new kitchen, computer lab, fellowship hall and bathrooms - all without ever taking out a new loan!

Prior to talking with CEF, St. Philip's had filed a claim with their insurance company, but was getting the runaround about any recovery. However, after talking with CEF and hiring legal counsel (at CEF's recommendation), St. Philip's was able to get their insurance claim expedited with an offer at more than double the money than originally expected. **This is a great example that shows CEF is a trusted friend that is about so much more than making loans.**

St. Philip's then turned to their members, friends, community, and even grade school alumni as they raised more than \$200,000 for the repairs! Jim Saalfeld,



St. Philip's Lutheran Church

CEO of CEF, described this incredible action best, "They didn't feel sorry for themselves. Instead, they got busy." Everyone coming together showed the love and appreciation that the members of St. Philip's have for their historical and important church.

In May 2023, St. Philips held a dedication of its newly renovated fellowship hall. Several community and religious leaders attended. CEF was also present and the special help CEF provided was highlighted. The future is bright at St. Philip's! God is leading this

historical congregation which was able to take the negative of two floods and turn them into a blessing from God. CEF is proud to support a congregation that turns what many would view as a disaster and an end - into a wonderful blessing and new beginning.



"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."
Ephesians 3: 20-21

LUTHERAN LAYMEN'S LEAGUE

Nurturing Your Faith Free Video Bible Study Resources

God's Word provides the light we need (Psalm 119:105). Lutheran Hour Ministries (LHM) free downloadable online Bible study videos are written by pastors and other professionals. Each study has a discussion guide expanding the video footage with supporting Scripture, commentary, questions, and other features to maximize the topic.

Here are few:

Nurturing Your Faith: Patient Urgency - Session One (of 5): Maps, Means, Model

By: Rev. Dr. Michael Zeigler

When we share Jesus with others, we're eager—urgent, even—to speak the Good News. However, we do understand the need for patience in how others receive the Gospel in their lives. In *Nurturing Your Faith: Patient Urgency*, we will learn via Mark's Gospel about a map, a means, and a model for having healthy spiritual conversations with others.

Nurturing Your Faith: Patient Urgency - Session Two (of 5): Meet Them Where They Are

By: Rev. Dr. Michael Zeigler

Spiritual conversations about Jesus are important

for sharing the Good News. Getting to know someone else often requires patient listening; this helps build openness and trust. In *Nurturing Your Faith: Meet Them Where They Are*, we see how Jesus' patient-urgent model of interaction opens doors to fruitful communication.

Nurturing Your Faith: Identity (Complete with all 4 sessions)

By: Rev. Dr. John Nunes

Our identity as forgiven children of God is explored in *Nurturing Your Faith: Identity*. This four-part Bible study is written and video-hosted by Rev. Dr. John Nunes. He examines how as Christians—forgiven for Jesus' sake—we are reconciled to God. Reborn to fellowship and active community, we are inspired to praise God for His great love.

For more information on LHM Bible study videos, go to lhm.org/studies.



LUTHERAN WOMEN'S MISSIONARY LEAGUE

TASTE AND SEE THAT
THE LORD IS GOOD



PSALM 34:8



Lutheran Women
in Mission
MICHIGAN DISTRICT

Convention 2024

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Post Convention Voting Results:

Mission Grants selected

Election Results

and much more...!!

Summer School by Laura Thomas

Summertime for my kids was always full of ongoing learning opportunities through reading, workbooks, and a variety of experiences. Each one had a favorite activity and had to endure the things that weren't "favorites." I modeled our summers after my mother's version that intertwined math and writing with nature walks, science centers and historical sites. Because of her effort to create joy in learning, I still love being a student and I hope my children do, too.

Let's take this summer opportunity to create a summer school experience for you. We'll work on reading skills that will help you to understand different ways to make a gift to your congregation, school, district, and other 501(c)(3) ministries.

Cash and credit card gifts – most 501(c)(3) organizations receive cash gifts by personal check, but be aware that a cashier's check, money order, online banking check, electronic funds transfer, online gift on the organization's website, and credit card payment through mail or phone are also accepted.

Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) gifts – this is a relatively common and easy gift to make with the help of your tax/financial advisor. Generally, individuals who are 70½ years old or older may use a QCD to donate up to \$105,000 to qualified 501(c)(3) entities directly from an IRA and are able to exclude the distribution from tax. Many retirees use the QCD rules to avoid having to pay tax

on their IRA Required Minimum Distributions.

Publicly-traded securities – work through your fiduciary to make a direct donation of appreciated stocks, bonds, and mutual funds to a 501(c)(3) charitable organization to avoid capital gains tax consequences.

Donor-advised funds (DAF) – typically, donations made to a fiduciary donor-advised fund are charitable gifts received by the fiduciary. DAFs enjoy tax-free growth and allow the donor to make grant recommendations to preferred 501(c)(3) charitable organizations.

Real estate – Donation and acceptance of appreciated improved and unimproved real estate to a 501(c)(3) charitable organization can generally avoid capital gains tax consequences. Transfer of property is typically done through an attorney and may require additional steps.

Personal property – Art, antiques, fine jewelry, special collections, and other valuables can be donated to a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. The gift must be accepted and may require an appraisal per IRS guidelines.

The Michigan District Development Department is available to consult with you regarding questions about any of the above ways to give. Please contact Laura Thomas, Director of Development, at 734.213.4264 or laura.thomas@michigandistrict.org. Make a gift online at michigandistrict.org/donate/ or by phone by calling Linda Ekong at 734.213.4265.

New Beginnings

IN HIS PRESENCE

Revelation 21:5

Lodging, meals,
and gratuities at
the Grand Hotel

\$390

per person based on
quad occupancy.



Lutheran Adult Gathering | Mackinac Island, Mich.

October 11-13, 2024 | www.michigandistrict.org/lag24

Speakers:

Rev. Dr. Jeff & Renee Gibbs
Rev. Dr. Ryan Tinetti - Chaplain
Lizzie Boeck - Entertainment
100 White Flag - Music

Cost:

\$50 Registration + Lodging



Concordia Plans Mental Wellness Resource

This past spring, Concordia Health Plans members and anyone living in their households began to have access to Evernorth Confide Behavioral Health Navigator, a new and enhanced Employee Assistance Program (EAP) offering expanded mental health care. Evernorth Confide focuses on providing personalized navigation to break down the most common barriers to getting mental health care. For more information, visit concordiaplans.org.

Legislation Passes for Nonpublic Schools Support

This spring, the House Appropriations passed HB 5503 which includes \$18 million in the general fund for nonpublic schools to participate in the school safety funding. Additionally, the House mirrored the Senate K-12 budget proposal by including \$1 million to reimburse non-public schools for state-mandated health and safety protocols.

“The Michigan Association of Non-public Schools (MANS) is grateful for the first step by the House to recognize the importance of including non-public schools in safety funding opportunities. All students deserve the right to attend a safe school regardless of the name outside the building. We look forward to working with the legislature in the coming weeks to ensure nonpublic schools are included in the school lunch program and teacher workforce incentive programs,” states Mr. Brian Broderick, Executive Director for the Michigan Association of Non-public Schools (MANS).

Michigan District Superintendent of Schools, Mr. Travis Grulke shares, *“We are blessed by the partnership with the Michigan Association of Nonpublic Schools and the Catholic Conference who lobby on behalf of our schools across the state. Their call to action created more than 3,000 emails and letters to our state representatives. This is an example of how our efforts to contact our representatives in Lansing expressing our concerns can encourage our elected leaders to come to the table to do what is best for all students in the state.”*

MANS represents over 400 faith-based schools across the state of Michigan, including Catholic schools within the seven dioceses of Michigan, the Michigan District of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod schools, and the Michigan Region of Christian Schools International. More than 100,000 students attend non-public schools in Michigan.

Attend Revive Fest This Summer

On July 26–27, nationally known contemporary music artists Tauren Wells, Danny Gokey, Jordan St Cyr, The Afters, Sean Rodriguez, Dan Bremnes, and Leanna Crawford will perform at this weekend festival perfect for families, groups, and individuals. The festival will take place at the En Gedi Resort; 30321 Covey Rd; Leonidas, Mich.

Revive Fest is organized by Creator’s Praise, Mendon, a new church start in the Michigan District, LCMS. Revive Fest is strongly committed to the Great Commission Jesus gave to the Church and desires to be a conduit for God’s mission in the lives of those who attend.

For more information or to purchase tickets, visit myrevivefest.com. Group rates are available, so bring your friends!

The Heard Word! Course

Concordia Theological Seminary (Ft. Wayne) Continuing Ed will be offered August 5-7, at Grace, Auburn. Rev. Bill Cwirla will lead a discussion titled *The Heard Word!* It will be a workshop for both pastors and laypeople. Two major questions will be discussed: What should pastors expect from their hearers? and What should hearers expect from their preachers? It will be a great three days. For more information or to register, call 260.452.2204.



Professional Church Worker VLOG



A new VLOG for professional church workers was launched this past spring. Luke Esselman, the Commissioned Ministry Advocate for the Michigan District, and Tyler Seehafer, Director of Youth Ministry and

Media at St. Paul, Ann Arbor are the co-hosts. They discuss information, hot topics, and issues that pertain to the lives of Professional Church Workers. To view the first few episodes and subscribe to the vlog, visit youtube.com/michiganlcms.

Special Recognition

Welcome to Michigan!

The Michigan District welcomed six pastoral candidates and four vicars to its roster this spring.

On Tuesday, April 23, Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Mo. (CSL) held two separate worship services for assignment of vicarage and internships and for call placements, respectively. Vicars assigned to the Michigan District are Joseph Bender (Our Savior, Lansing) and Dayton Dangel (Messiah, Clio). Candidates receiving their first placement in Michigan from CSL are Jonathan Dueker (Peace, Rogers City), Morgan Garrett (St. Mark, Flint), and Dante Pronsati (St. Peter, Macomb).

On Tuesday, April 23 and Wednesday, April 24, two separate worship services took place at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind. (CTSFW) for assignment of vicarage and internships and for call placements, respectively. Vicars assigned to the Michigan District are Peter Candreva (St. Peter, Petersburg) and Jack Engelder (Zion, Kalamazoo). The following pastoral candidates received their first placement in the Michigan District: Jesse Greenhagen (Zion, Mt. Pleasant); Christian Mundorf (Lutheran Church of the Messiah, Saginaw); and Kaleb Yaeger (Trinity, Sturgis).

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

LCMS MICHIGAN DISTRICT

CALL DAY APRIL 23, 2024



JOSEPH BENDER

DAYTON DANGEL

JONATHAN DUEKER



MORGAN GARRETT

DANTE PRONSATI

CONCORDIA SEMINARY, ST. LOUIS



LCMS MICHIGAN DISTRICT

CALL DAY APRIL 23-24, 2024



KALEB YAEGER

CHRISTIAN MUNDORF

JESSE GREENHAGEN



PETER CANDREVA

JACK ENGELDER

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, FT. WAYNE



Laura Thomas is the Recipient of CUAA's 2024 *Christus Primus* Award



Photos courtesy of CUAA

The *Christus Primus Award* is a recognition given by Concordia University Ann Arbor to an individual who exemplifies service to the Church. This year's award recipient is Mrs. Laura Thomas, who serves the Michigan District,

LCMS as Director of Development and is also part of the District's Stewardship Committee. Additionally, she serves The Council of Lutheran Women as its Vice

President of Communication.

Mrs. Thomas was stunned when she heard of her nomination and selection: *"What have I done? I've just worked in different places in the Church body. Every job is so personal, so for me it's just a personal commitment to service. That's the way I operate. Those are my values. Service is very important in making sure that people are getting what they need, but also being encouraged and supported, and that's all just the way that I lead my life."*

She explains that being on the receiving end of recognition is not her *modus operandi*, as her job is about encouraging and recognizing other people. But she acknowledges that *"we are given gifts by God, and we need to use those gifts well. And if this means that, through this award, I can help people understand that using their gifts well is something that can be appreciated and recognized by people around us, then we are doing what God is asking us to do."*

Better Traveling

continued from page 2

Let's recalibrate our understanding of differences we might have.

Part of our Christian experience includes being people with different personalities, life experiences, and tastes. Some of the differences between us Christians rightly arise out of such differences and do not necessarily work against unity. When we bump up against differences between others within our fellowship, let's be careful not to cry "out of bounds" too quickly. Let's approach such differences with greater humility, kindness, and forbearance while putting the best construction on them.

Let's exercise our unity.

Part of unity is being together physically. Unity includes locality; you have to get together to be together. This includes congregants being together weekly in worship and regularly in shared study and ministry. It includes congregations getting together for Circuit



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Convocations, Forums, and area-wide ministry projects. It may include congregations meeting together to form greater partnerships, dual congregations, or a church plant. It does include pastors being actively involved in Winkel meetings, conferences, and other gatherings with fellow pastors. And it certainly includes vigorously praying for one another.

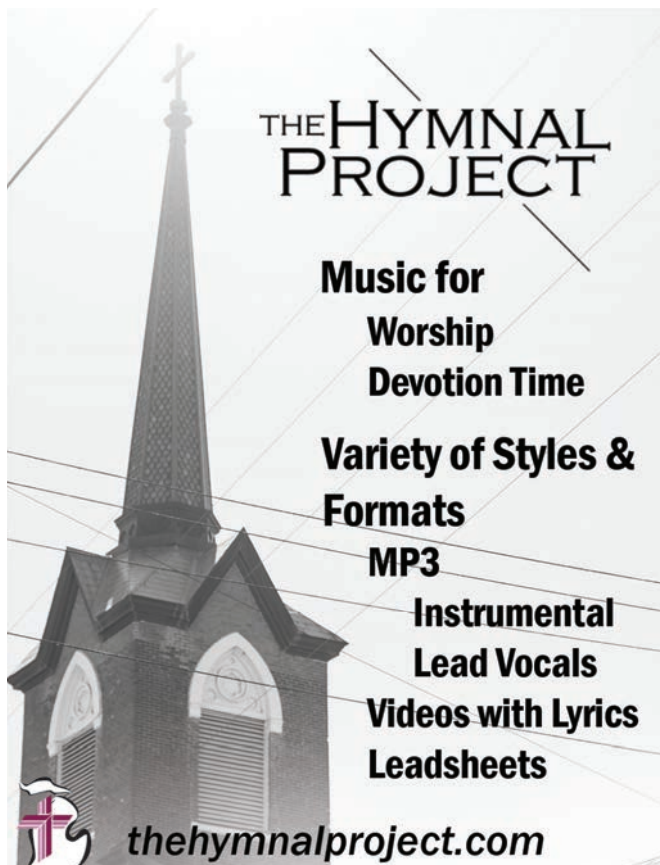
Like those who sang Psalm 133 on their way to festivals on Mt. Zion, like kids getting along in the back seat on the way to a vacation, so indeed it is good and pleasant when Christian brothers and sisters are united. It is a foretaste of heaven. It makes for a more fruitful and enjoyable pilgrimage, and it makes our witness to the reconciliation that comes in Jesus more clear.

God grant us ever better traveling. ■



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

This article is based on President Davis' sermon at the 2024 Spring Pastors Conferences.



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**A postcard, with dates and locations,
will be mailed in August.**

**More information can be found at:
michigandistrict.org/lwrgathering**



Against the Odds

Peace physical education teacher Jeremy Haggitt taught Ben at Zion. They've remained close over the years, so Haggitt asked him if he would be willing to talk to Peace kids.

"I knew he would have a great message about how hard work, dedication, and trust in God will help you achieve your goals in anything you want to do in life," Haggitt said. *"I hope that hearing Ben's message will give the students the confidence to follow their dreams and achieve their goals."*

Paying tuition for our kids to go to Lutheran school can be difficult. Teaching them to hold fast to a God whom many in the world mock is a never-ending battle.

Telling them that, even at a small school, they are making steps toward greatness—maybe even the NFL someday—seems downright impossible.

Yet this kid shows up on a 35-degree dreary day in Michigan and does just that.

My hope—my prayer—is that they believed him.

*"The values and the things that I picked up in Lutheran schools—the things that I learned at your age—were the things that I held onto. Who I was in high school, who I was in college and who I am today."**

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Photo courtesy of Misty Gower, Peace, Saginaw

Fun Facts

After his presentation Wednesday during the student assembly, Ben allowed students to ask many questions. Here are some fun facts from the Q&A you may not know:

"Do you ever play Fortnite?" Yes, a lot. But he never plays "ranked." Whatever that means.

"What is your favorite food?" Steak.

"How long will you play football?" As long as his body will allow.

Detroit Lions Defensive End Aidan Hutchinson was his roommate for three years at UM.

"Have you met Taylor Swift?" No. But Jason Kelce (Travis' brother) was Ben's favorite Eagles teammate.

He studied political science, but his dream is to be an actor.

His favorite Bible verse is Matthew 23:12, his confirmation verse: *"Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."* ■

Ms. Misty Gower is Communications and Marketing Director for Peace Lutheran Church and School in Saginaw.

*Wiki: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ben_VanSumeren

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Calendar of Events

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

JUNE 2024

- 1 State Track Meet
Concordia University Ann Arbor
- 10–12 Next Generation Pastors
Shelby Twp, Grand Haven, Bay City
- 10–14 A2E Summer Camp Detroit
Location TBD
- 18–20 FLAME Conference
Ann Arbor
- 28–30 Michigan District LWML Convention
Grand Rapids

JULY 2024

- 4 Independence Day
DISTRICT OFFICE CLOSED
- 15–18 STEM Summer Camp
The Vine, Walker
- 15–19 Special Friends Camp
Camp Copneconic
- 29–31 Higgins Lake Conference
Higgins Lake
- 30–Aug 1 Junior High Gathering
Frankenmuth

AUGUST 2024

- 4–6 Board of Directors
Bay City, Mich.
- 6 Early Childhood Directors Day
St. Lorenz, Frankenmuth
- 7 Early Childhood Educators Conference
St. Lorenz, Frankenmuth
- 30–9/2 Labor Day Holiday
District Office Closed



Calls and Roster Update

ORDAINED

Candidates Placed in the Michigan District

- Mr. Patrick Brooks (St. Louis) to SMP, Christ the King, Southgate
- Mr. Jonathan Dueker (St. Louis) to Sole, Peace, Rogers City
- Mr. Morgan Garrett (St. Louis) to Associate, St. Mark, Flint
- Mr. Jesse Greenhagen (Fort Wayne) to Associate, Zion, Mount Pleasant
- Mr. Stephen Lampi (Fort Wayne) to SMP, Messiah, Midland
- Mr. Christopher Mundorf (Fort Wayne) to Sole, Lutheran Church of the Messiah, Saginaw
- Mr. Dante Pronsati (St. Louis) to Associate, St. Peter, Macomb
- Mr. Bryan Varblow (St. Louis) to SMP, St. Mark's Lutheran Church of the Irish Hills, Brooklyn
- Mr. Kaleb Yeager (Fort Wayne) to Associate, Trinity, Sturgis

Vicars Assigned to the Michigan District

- Mr. Joseph Bender (St. Louis) to Our Savior, Lansing
- Mr. Peter Candreva (Fort Wayne) Convertible Vicar, to St. Peter's, Petersburg
- Mr. Dayton Dangel (St. Louis) to Messiah, Clio
- Mr. Jack Engelder (Fort Wayne) to Zion, Kalamazoo

Calls Accepted

- Rev. Christopher Jung (Lexington, MI) to Sole, St. Matthew, Lexington
- Rev. Keith Lemley (Washington, MI) to Vacancy, Saint Thomas, Eastpointe

Status & Title Changes

- Rev. Alexander (Bud) Koppel, Jr (Shelby, MI) to Emeritus

Transferred Into District

- Rev. Eric Nelson (Montague, MI) from Minnesota South District

Called Home

- Rev. Theodore Beiderwieden

COMMISSIONED

Calls Accepted

- Belli, Mark (Guardian, Dearborn) to Rochester Central, Rochester, MN
- Dressler, Kelly (St. Peter, Hemlock) to First, Fort Smith, AR
- Pfeiffer, Linda (First Immanuel, Cedarburg, WI) to St. Peter's, Eastpointe
- Schroeder, Lydia (St. Paul, Ann Arbor) to St. Paul, Napoleon, OH
- Tschudy, Matthew (LHSA, Rochester Hills) to Sheboygan Luth. HS, Sheboygan, WI

Change of Status

- Oldenburg, Craig (Camp Concordia, Gowen) to Emeritus
- Oldenburg, Mary (Camp Concordia, Gowen) to Emeritus

Transferred Out of District

- Heissenbuettel, Monica (Candidate) to English District
- Oldenburg, Craig (Emeritus) to Southern District
- Oldenburg, Mary (Emeritus) to Southern District

Transferred Into District

- Siebarth, Jolene (Missouri District) to Holy Cross, Jenison
- Witto, Gregory (South Wisconsin District) to Christ Our King, Saline

Resigned From the Roster

- Gruenhagen, Heather
- Pakkala, Deborah

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