



Presented by

**Michigan District**

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



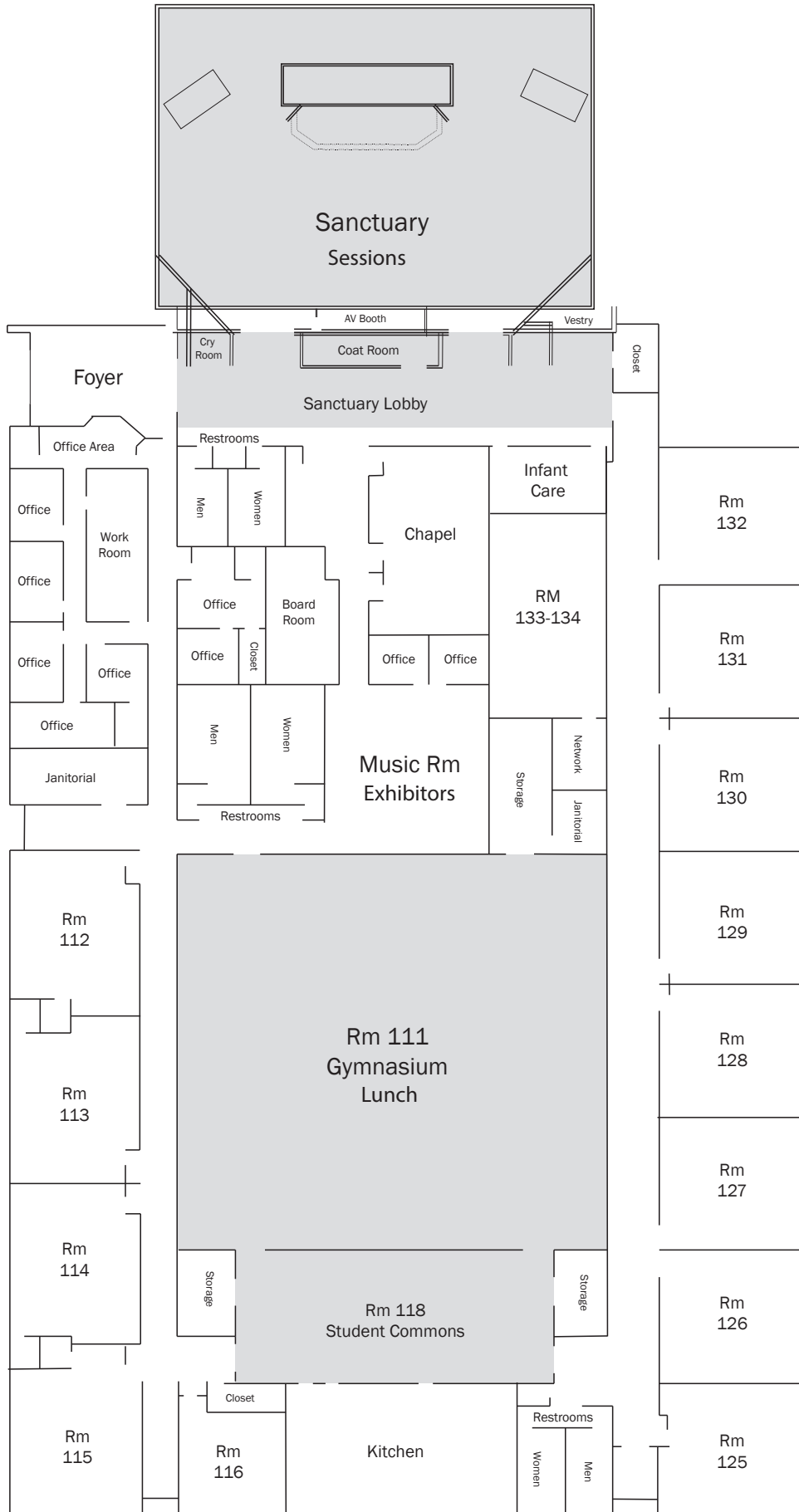
**We Are Not Alone:**

*Engaging YOUR Community Together*

**1 Kings 19:18**

**Saturday, February 1, 2025**  
**Our Savior Lutheran Church, Lansing**

# Map of Our Savior



# President's Welcome

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Welcome to this year's Theological Conference, *We Are Not Alone: Engaging Your Community Together*. Through a combination of speakers, videos, shared experiences, displays, and some conversation, our day together could just change your life, your congregation ... and hopefully your community.

Remember the Prophet Elijah? He was discouraged because it looked like God's Kingdom was in retreat and he was the last one left to do anything about it. Ever feel like that? Ever feel like as a Christ follower you are more and more alone ... and they're coming for you?

Not a chance! Jesus is at the right hand of the Father building his Kingdom and the gates of hell can't prevail against His work. God picked Elijah up, strengthened him, then sent him back to serve with the assurance that there were 7,000 others out there still engaged in the Kingdom.

Us too! We are not nearly as alone as we might feel. Things are not as hopeless as they might seem.

Together let's let God pick us up, strengthen us, then send us back to serve with the assurance that *We Are Not Alone*. In our hours together, I hope to capture your imagination: what other Christ followers are out there in our communities with whom we can work to share the Gospel, serve people, and love God?

Tired. Sure. Disappointed. Now and then. Discouraged. It happens.

But give up? Not a chance! God is with us. And God brings us together to go out and serve together. And so, *We Are Not Alone!* Let's engage our community together. Let's experience the power of community in the Body of Christ for the community around us.

*"[Elijah] said, 'I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.' And the Lord said to him, 'Go ... I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal'" (1 Kings 19:14-15, 18a).*

Thank you to Our Savior congregation for again hosting this conference. We are grateful to her leaders, volunteers, and Pastors Wangelin and Deneen.

...eyes on Jesus...



Rev. David A. Davis, President  
Michigan District, LCMS



## Keynote Speakers

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### Rev. Jeff Cloeter

Rev. Jeff Cloeter is the Senior Pastor of Christ Memorial Lutheran Church in St. Louis, Mo. Cloeter has worked in youth ministry, church planting, and senior leadership; served on the board of directors for the Lutheran Foundation of St. Louis, and the founding board of Momentum Academy in the City of St. Louis. He founded and serves as director of The Harbor Leadership Collective, and also serves on an ecumenical council called Oikos. Cloeter is the author of *Loved & Sent*, and blogs at [sixthgen.com](http://sixthgen.com). He is married to Bobbi and they have four children.



### Dr. Rachel Ferguson

Dr. Rachel Ferguson is the Director of the Free Enterprise Center at Concordia University Chicago, Assistant Dean of the College of Business, and Professor of Business Ethics. She is an affiliate scholar of the Acton Institute and co-author of *Black Liberation Through the Marketplace: Hope, Heartbreak, and the Promise of America*.





### **Mrs. Sherri Huston**

Sherri Huston serves as Director of Membership, Church & Ministry Alliance, with Alliance Defending Freedom. In this role, Sherri develops relationships with churches and ministries to help them acquire the legal resources needed to defend against religious liberty challenges. In addition, Sherri oversees the direction and growth of the program. Over the past 30 years, her career has spanned numerous industries and operational leadership roles. Sherri and her husband Kerry live in Arizona. They have two children and two grandchildren.



### **Rev. Dr. Joel Okamoto**

Rev. Dr. Joel Okamoto is the Waldemar and Mary Griesbach Professor of Systematic Theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo., where he tries to embody and promote good theology. He was raised in Michigan, where his father served as a pastor for more than 35 years.

## **Schedule**

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2025 Michigan District, LCMS Theological Conference

### **We Are Not Alone: Engaging Your Community Together**

Please visit the exhibitors in the sanctuary lobby during breaks/lunch.

- 8:15 a.m. Registration/Fellowship
- 8:40 a.m. Music by Mr. Peter Prochnow
- 8:45 a.m. Opening | Rev. David A. Davis, President
- 9 a.m. Video | Rev. Bryan Schindel – Cross and Resurrection, Ypsilanti
- 9:05 a.m. Session 1 | Rev. Dr. Joel Okamoto
- 9:50 a.m. Video | Rev. Michael Vieregge – Our Shepherd, Birmingham
- 9:55 a.m. Session 2 | Dr. Rachel Ferguson
- 10:40 a.m. Break
- 10:55 a.m. Video | Rev. Timothy Kern – Our Savior, Marlette
- 11 a.m. Session 3 | Mrs. Sherri Huston
- 11:45 a.m. Conversation
- 12:15 p.m. Lunch
- 1 p.m. Video | Rev. Brian West – Holy Cross, Jenison
- 1:05 p.m. Session 4 | Rev. Jeff Cloeter
- 1:50 p.m. Conversation
- 2:15 p.m. Panel Discussion
- 2:50 p.m. Final Comments / Closing Prayer

### **Compassion Ministry**

Thank you for your donations to the Food Bank at Our Savior, Lansing.

➔ Video recordings of sessions will be available after the conference.  
 You will be notified by email of their availability.  
 ➔ A conference evaluation will be emailed to you today or scan the QRcode; please take a moment to share your comments with us. Thank you.









2025 Michigan District, LCMS

## Jr. High Youth Gathering

August 12-14, 2025 | Frankenmuth, Mich.

[michigandistrict.org/jrhigh25](http://michigandistrict.org/jrhigh25)



# Save the Date



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Marvin Olasky's *The Tragedy of American Compassion*, 1994.

In this classic work, the former editor of *World Magazine* covers the historic Christian philosophy of charity, which emphasized honoring the dignity of the person by prayerfully considering what help would be best for them as an individual and offering them opportunities for exchange. He then describes the deterioration of charitable approaches due to the rise of the social gospel and state crowd-out of private charitable efforts. Olasky presents his "7 Marks of Compassion": A for Affiliation, B for Bonding, C for Compassion, D for Discernment, E for Employment/Exchange, F for Freedom, and G for God. This book influenced 90's welfare reform.

John M. Perkins' *With Justice for All: A Strategy for Community Development*, 2011.

Baptist minister and founder of the Christian Community Development Association, John M. Perkins argues for his "Three R's of Community Development": Relocation, Reconciliation, and Redistribution. He believes that neighborhoods can be transformed when those called to the work move into the neighborhood, break down racial and economic barriers, and bring the personal skills and networks of those better off to bear on those that need to develop their human and material capital.

Robert Woodson's *Lessons From the Least of These: The Woodson Principles*, 2020.

The director of the Woodson Center in Washington, D.C. argues that the greatest asset in neighborhood stabilization are particular neighbors themselves, who he refers to as "Josephs." Because of their local knowledge and neighborhood credibility, Josephs can be effective in a way that no outsider can. But they ought to be paired with "Pharaohs" who invest in their highly effective but decentralized efforts.

Brian Fikkert's *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor... And Yourself*.

The founder of the Chalmers Center places effective poverty alleviation in the context of our philosophy of human nature. With a full view of who we are as creatures made in the image of God, we see that poverty is much more than mere material lack. Simply supplying someone's immediate material need may actually be directly harmful if it treats them like a 'number,' divides them from their own abilities, or from their communities.

Robert Lupton's *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help, and How to Reverse It*.

The founder of Focused Community Strategies in Atlanta tells the story of how he awoke to the way his efforts in the neighborhood were undermining people's dignity and making them even more dependent on others. He also presents a block-by-block approach that requires deep personal presence, a long-term commitment, and dignifying assistance that encourages ownership and work. This is his "Oath for Compassionate Helpers":

I will never do for others what they have the capacity to do for themselves.

I will limit one-way giving to crises and seek always to find ways for legitimate exchange.

I will seek ways to empower by hiring, lending, and investing and offer gifts as incentives to celebrate achievements.

I will put the interests of those experiencing poverty above my own even when it means setting aside my own agenda or the agenda of my organization.

I will listen carefully, even to not what is being said knowing that unspoken feelings may contain essential clues to healthy engagement.

And, above all, to the best of my ability,

**I WILL DO NO HARM.**



*Save the Date*

**Lutheran Adult Gathering  
Mackinac Island, Mich.  
October 9-11, 2026**

[www.michigandistrict.org](http://www.michigandistrict.org)

**BEYOND THE  
BREAKWATER**

At Messiah, you will learn what *Beyond the Breakwater* is all about—mobilizing the church and caring for your community. To be the church is to reach one more life with Jesus by throwing out a lifeline to those who would never walk through the doors of your church and otherwise drown. After an introduction, we will spend some time in the community to observe and experience *Beyond the Breakwater* in action. You will gain knowledge of the structure, driving force, and activities within Messiah's ministry to the community. We then would encourage you to make a return trip and bring others with you, so they can experience for themselves what it means to go *Beyond the Breakwater* in their community.

**Sign up today to join us at Messiah, Midland!**

- February 25
- March 18
- April 29
- June 10
- August 26

**\$30/Person**

[michigandistrict.org/events](http://michigandistrict.org/events)

# Join a Ministry



The Michigan District welcomes volunteers on a regular basis at several ministries around the state. Take a look at our volunteer opportunities, complete an interest form online, and you will be contacted by someone from that ministry!



**MEALS**



**PRE-NATAL CLINIC**



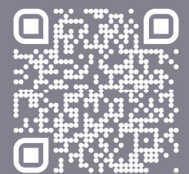
**TUTORING**

**Make a difference in another's life today!**

[michigandistrict.org/joinaministry](http://michigandistrict.org/joinaministry)



**All Nations Celebration  
March 15, 2025 | 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.  
St. Luke, Haslett  
Register online at [www.michigandistrict.org/allnations25](http://www.michigandistrict.org/allnations25)**









# GET EQUIPPED

## FOR EFFECTIVE GOSPEL MINISTRY

Share pictures and stories at  
→ #miLCMS

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Stay current on Lutheran news from around the state, connect with fellow Lutherans, and be inspired in your daily Christian living.

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→ [michigandistrict.org/blog](https://michigandistrict.org/blog)

**Michigan District blogs** support the District's critical targets: Great Commission, Great Compassion, Healthy Congregations, and Healthy Workers. The blog can be easily shared through social networks and email. We are always looking for guest writers; to submit your article visit [michigandistrict.org/storybucket](https://michigandistrict.org/storybucket).

**A new chapter for Michigan In Touch is coming April 2025!** Stay tuned for more details.



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Contact: Laura Thomas, Development Department; 734.665.3791



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