



LeaderCare Retreats, February 2024. Thanks to Bryce Formwalt and the Texas District for hosting – wonderful times of fun & fellowship, worship, prayer and teaching on spiritual formation. Photos courtesy of Mike Bradley.

PIPELINES TO GREENHOUSES

By STEVEN WAGNER, *The Greenhouse Collective*

Dear fellow stewards and proclaimers of the Gospel of Christ,

If you have spent *any* time in LCMC church leadership within the last five years, you likely have heard about one challenge plaguing our movement: a clergy shortage that isn't unique to LCMC, but nevertheless a challenge that we face. I've attended three LCMC annual gatherings, and at each gathering have attended breakouts addressing this clergy shortage. Plenty of quality feedback has been offered and implemented over the last three years to improve our current call processes (e.g. finding the right church for a recent seminary graduate/a contract call for a seminarian) and yet, oftentimes the root cause underneath this shortage appears overlooked.

After each breakout, I have asked both myself and colleagues in LCMC if we are truly getting at the heart of the matter. This question still stands: where on earth do we find people who actually want to serve in vocational ministry? And when we do find these people, what then are we supposed to do? Send them a link to an LCMC partner seminary and say good luck? I wish it were that easy.

To be honest with you all, I think we, as a movement, need to see our imaginations and expectations challenged on how this challenge will be addressed. With each passing day, I cannot help but think about our imaginations and

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Mark Your Calendars:

2024 Youth Leader Webinars
May 16 August 15
November 21

NW Annual Gathering
April 12-13, 2024

LCMC Pre-Retirement Retreat
for Pastors & Spouses
April 22-25, 2024

Retreat for Pastors in Their First
Call April 25-26, 2024

Augustana District Annual
Convention April 27, 2024

Iowa District LeaderCare
Retreat May 6-9, 2024

Intro to Intentional Interim
Ministry May 20-22, 2024

LCMC Youth Gathering
July 9-12, 2024

Retreat for Retired LCMC
Pastors & Spouses
August 26-29, 2024

LCMC Annual Gathering
September 29-October 2, 2024

THIS ISSUE:

This newsletter is a publication of LCMC, an association of churches and individuals. Inclusion of articles is intended to provide information and does not imply official endorsement. Opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect an official position of the association or its Board of Trustees. We welcome comments, suggestions for stories and submissions from our members.

EDITOR: Joy Minion. CONTRIBUTORS: Renae Behrends, Mike Bradley, Scott Elliott, Randy Freund, Cindy Glessner, Becky Hand, Chuck Hunsaker, Christian Huntley, Scott Meyer, Cathy Nichol, Wendy Poch, Noah Ruppert, Julie Smith, Erwin Spruth, Ed Thomas, Kristy Thomas and Steven Wagner.

NEXT ISSUE:

To submit an article for this publication, please contact Joy Minion at joyminion@gmail.com. The deadline to submit articles for our next edition of BY THE WORD is:

May 6, 2024

ABOUT US:

We are an association of congregations and individuals, free in Christ, accountable to one another, rooted in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, and working to fulfill Christ's Great Commission and go make disciples of all nations.



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SUCCESSFUL SUCCESSION:

Providing for Tomorrow's Saints Today

BY WENDY POCH

Pastor, Spirit of Hope Lutheran Church, Parker, CO

The long-anticipated pastoral shortage has arrived, though it's only just beginning. Things are about to get exponentially more challenging, both for congregations and the pastors called to serve them. But fear not! There are many healthy things that congregations can do as they move into this new reality. One of the best is to plan for pastoral succession. The Bible is filled with examples of ministry succession: Moses to Joshua, Elijah to Elisha, Paul to Timothy, etc. Even Jesus has entrusted His Church to us as we serve Him and share His love with others.

In the days of old, pastors would typically serve until retirement, put in a month's notice, and trust that the denomination they belonged to would provide for the congregation going forward by sending them their next pastor.

Those days are gone.

FROM THE BOARD...

By RANDY FREUND

Chair, LCMC Board of Trustees

The Gospel: The Power of God

At our February meeting, the Board of Trustees put some finishing touches on the next Annual Gathering. Part of the focus included consideration of how differing congregational contexts shape ways we engage the cultural challenges before us.

Another way to ask it was, "What does it mean to proclaim the gospel in this cultural moment, given our varied contexts and distinct callings?" Strangely enough, as soon as one says, "proclaim the gospel," this is often where things can go wrong.

Sometimes we tend to think of the gospel as something we "apply" to a given situation. It is a remedy or a particular response. It is like a Coast Guard ship that

LCMC is not a denomination. We are an association of independent Lutheran congregations. Additionally, there are already not enough pastors to go around (and this is true in every branch of the Christian faith). As such, pastors and congregations need to be planning for their future. In this sense, every pastor is an interim pastor. From the first day of a new call, each pastor and the congregation they serve should be thinking about the long-term health of the congregation because, Lord willing, a congregation's current pastor will not be their last.

So, what can you be doing to ensure your congregation stays healthy, viable, and is set up for ministry success? We will be writing about a number of possibilities in future articles. But to get this thought process started, I would like to share one example of what a successful pastoral succession looks like. It is a story that I cherish because it happened in my home congregation.

Spirit of Hope Lutheran Church in Parker, Colorado, was founded in the spring of 2010. Rev. David Fisher was called to be the founding pastor. He and the congregation did all the hard work of establishing a brand-new congregation. Many of you know the joy, pain, and challenges that occur on such a journey.

Spirit of Hope began as a house church. My family and I joined this beautiful little congregation in 2011. Over the years we, like you, have strived to remain faithful to God and His Word, to serve our community and one another, and to focus on being the hands and feet of Jesus out in the world. We also constructed a church building. That process took us eight years. But we give thanks and praise to God for His faithfulness. His timing is always perfect.

While on this journey, Pastor Fisher and the congregation believed I was called to become a pastor (that's a big step for a middle-aged former



WENDY POCH

LCMS girl!). They raised me up, prayed for me, and supported me on my seminary journey. Shortly before I was ordained, Pastor Dave asked me if I might consider entering into a pastoral succession plan with him. This was not actually in "our" plan (yes, I picture God laughing when we talk about "our plans"!) as I was already knee-deep in a call process elsewhere. We prayed and discussed this possibility, went to the Church Board, who then went to the

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comes to respond to a need or a crisis. Using this analogy, we look at the challenges of our current culture. We look at the needs of our congregations or the crisis before us. We then imagine how we can "apply the gospel" to a given situation. This completely misses the mark. The gospel is not a remedy we apply.

Sometimes "the gospel" is treated like an ill-defined "brand" or "slogan." Keeping with the nautical theme, it is like a Jet Ski. We think of the gospel as energy, enthusiastic and maybe even loud. But it skims the surface and never gets into the dark and deep places of life. This also misses the true nature of the gospel – it is not a feeling, sensation, or pulse.

In truth, the gospel is more like an icebreaker ship. It creates its own path and sets its own course in the world and in the believer's life. It is its own power that breaks into our world and human lives. Like crushed ice that must yield to a mighty ship, it moves aside all things that rival its power. As Paul so boldly puts it, "*I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.*" Think of that, the gospel is the power of God. It is God's to unleash.

The only hope (for this world, our culture, and the church) is that there is a Word of promise from Christ Jesus for sinners. This, He still wills



RANDY FREUND

and promises to unleash upon a world He so loves. This Good News is the only Word that does not return empty, but accomplishes that for which is it purposed and succeeds in that for

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Succession

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congregation. Long story short, God's plans are the only ones that matter. And His plan for Spirit of Hope was that we would enter into a ten-month pastoral succession.

For the first three months, Pastor Fisher remained the senior pastor while I served as the associate pastor. The next four months we co-pastored, though always with an eye to helping the congregation turn a healthy corner. The remainder of the time I served as the senior pastor while Pastor Fisher remained on staff as a pastor but in a support role before gracefully and completely passing the baton.

In fact, pastoral succession is much like an Olympic relay race.

Initially the baton holder is running the track. At the appropriate time, the next runner has to pick up speed to match the first runner. Then the baton is passed and the second runner continues down the track as the first runner slows down and eventually rests.

Ten months was the right amount of time for us to make all the exchanges we needed to make. We did everything together so that the ministry of the congregation would not skip a beat. Oh – and we did this amid the COVID pandemic! Honestly, though, it was beautiful. God was glorified. The congregation is healthy and thriving. There is now a deep trust between me as the pastor and my brothers and sisters in the congregation, which allows God to take us all deeper and deeper into a trusting relationship with Him.

All of this is because one pastor listened to God's call to enter into a pastoral succession. Could he have served longer? Absolutely! But he also knew that just because he could, didn't mean he should. Instead, he looked toward the long-term health of the congregation he loved. Thanks be to God!

In the future, we will write more articles that share additional details about pastoral succession, the raising up of future pastors and church leaders, and other important things congregations can be doing now to prepare for the future. Until then, go in peace and serve the Lord!

Contact Wendy at:

wendy.poch@spiritofhopelcmc.org

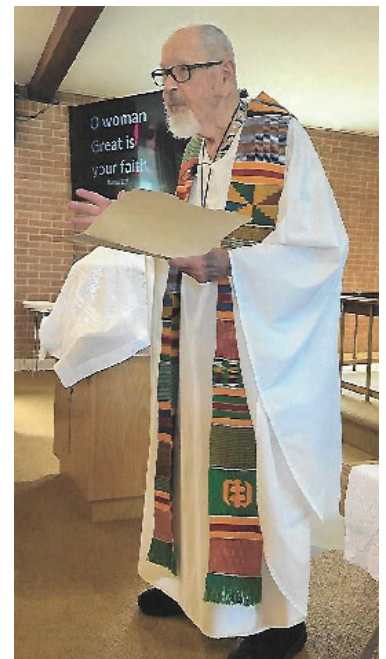
71 Years of God's Grace!

Submitted by ERWIN SPRUTH
and FAITH LUTHERAN CHURCH, COLORADO SPRINGS, CO

On Sunday, September 24, 2023, Faith Lutheran Church, Colorado Springs, CO, celebrated the 71st anniversary of the ordination of Rev. Dr. Erwin L. Spruth, more often known as Pastor Ob, Pastor Emeritus of Faith. Pastor Ob was ordained and commissioned for service in Papua New Guinea, at St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Staten Island, NY, on September 28, 1952. This celebration replaced the one planned for October 2, 2022, that had to be canceled because Pastor Ob's vehicle had been T-boned by a semi truck that was speeding and ran a red light. Pastor Ob's life was saved by God's gracious protection, but he was still hospitalized at the time of the planned 2022 celebration.

Pastor Ob had served as an evangelistic missionary in Papua New Guinea for 28 years, then as a parish pastor for a short time in Spring Valley, CA, after which he served as principal and senior lecturer at the Good News Theological Seminary in Accra, Ghana, West Africa, for eight years. After his retirement, Pastor Ob and his wife, Lorraine, settled in Colorado Springs, where he served five different congregations as interim pastor. Later, Faith Lutheran Church called him out of retirement in February 2007 to serve as their pastor. He served with Faith until April, 2015, when the Lord made it apparent to him that it was time to fully retire.

Pastor Ob continues to preach and preside at worship when the present pastor, Rev. Rick Mensing, is away for holiday or study. He continues to serve as the Lord gives him strength. Pastor Spruth firmly believes that being ordained into the Word and Sacrament ministry of God's people has no expiration date until the Lord calls one home.



ERWIN SPRUTH

SECRETARY'S REPORT.

By RENAE BEHREND

Secretary, LCMC Board of Trustees

The LCMC Board of Trustees met December 6-9, 2023, Afton, MN.

- Each day the meeting opened with prayer and devotions.
- The board reviewed and reflected upon the 2023 Annual Gathering.
- The board approved the treasurer's report and July and October minutes.
- Mike Bradley, Service Coordinator, shared his vision for the LCMC 3.0, discussed conflict management protocol, plans for the 2024 Annual Gathering, and updates on international partner relationships.
- The board approved the following congregations for membership: The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Christ, Rosedale, NY; Faith Lutheran Church, San Dimas, CA; Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Lyle, MN; Bethel Lutheran Church, Superior, WI; Iglesia Lutheran Todos Santos, Zapopan, Jalisco, Mexico; Zion Lutheran Church, Scotland, SD; The Alternative, Rock Hill, SC; St. Stephen's Lutheran Church, Portland, TX; St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Karnes City, TX; Life Lutheran Church, El Cerrito, CA; Oromo Evangelical Church, Houston, TX; and Trinity Lutheran Church, Otis, KS.
- Julie Smith shared updates on district and fellowship interaction, theological team updates, and travel and teaching engagements.
- Tim Young reviewed our strat op process and gave an update of our AIPs.
- Randy Freund shared an overview of the service coordinator review.
- The board worked on additional planning for theme and potential speakers for the 2024 Annual Gathering.
- The board adjourned the meeting and closed in prayer.

— United in Christ, Renae Behrends



RENAE BEHREND

TREASURER'S REPORT.

By CINDY GLESSNER

Treasurer, LCMC Board of Trustees

I'm pleased to report that your response to Mike Bradley's appeal covered about three quarters of what we needed to eliminate the funding gap he disclosed. Giving for December/January was \$80,00 higher than for the same period last year. THANK YOU!

We received gifts from individuals as well as congregations, which was encouraging to hear. Some said, "Hmm, I guess this means we should consider adding LCMC to our budget!" Yes! We hope every congregation will participate in funding the vision we have for serving LCMC congregations, members, and the communities touched by those congregations.

We appreciate your continued support for the vision of LCMC 3.0 and your sharing in providing growth opportunities for all our congregations, large and small.

Also, please remember we have the seminary debt relief fund available for your pastors with student debt. Remind eligible pastors that these funds are available upon application.

— Respectfully, Cindy Glessner



CINDY GLESSNER

Up Next:

2024 Zoom Youth Leaders Webinars

May 16 August 15 November 21 11:00am CST
Cathy Nichol: cathy@lcmc.net 734.788.7476

2024 Zoom Support Group for Church Support Staff

2nd Tuesday each month starting at 12:00pm CST
Mar. 12 Apr. 9 May 14 June 11
Wendy Magruder: office@augustanadistrict.org
320.234.8403

Youth Gathering Registration Deadline

April 1, 2024
Cathy Nichol: cathy@lcmc.net 734.788.7476

NW District Annual Gathering

April 12-13, 2024 Lebanon, OR
Christ Community Lutheran Church
Carol Ann Buelow: orygunparson@gmail.com
425.766.9530

Pre-Retirement Retreat for Pastors and Spouses

April 22-25, 2024
Okoboji Lutheran Bible Camp, Milford, IA
Sue Gunderson: Sue.Gunderson61@gmail.com
920.421.1944

Retreat for Pastors in Their First Call

April 25-26, 2024
Mount Carmel Ministries, Alexandria, MN
Wendy Magruder: office@augustanadistrict.org
320.234.8403

Augustana District Annual Convention

April 27, 2024
Mount Carmel, Alexandria, MN
Wendy Magruder: office@augustanadistrict.org
320.234.8403

IA District LeaderCare Retreat

May 6-9, 2024
Riverside Bible Camp, Story City, IA
Christian Huntley: christian@lcmc.net
515.209.7180

LCMC Youth Gathering

July 9-12, 2024 (See page 7 for details)

LCMC Annual Gathering

September 29-October 2, 2024



Do you know of a youth leader, volunteer, or member in your congregation who is passionate about youth ministry?

2024 Webinar dates: May 16, August 15 & November 21 at 11:00am CST. Join us!

Sign up for the emails:

<https://mailchi.mp/75a65006d3ae/youth-leader-webinars>

Like the LCMC Youth Ministry Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/LCMCYouthMinistry>

Intro to Intentional Interim Ministry May 20-22, 2024

Embassy Suites by Hilton Minneapolis Airport,
Bloomington, MN – or via Zoom

Pastors!! Come learn about Intentional Interim Ministry (IIM) and how this specialized skillset can prepare congregations during times of pastoral transitions.

Hosted by Intentional Interim Fellowship

For info & registration details, contact Dawn Spies:

info@lcmciif.org 760.208.0986

Retired LCMC Pastors & Spouses Retreat

August 26-29, 2024



Okoboji Lutheran Bible Camp, Milbank, IA

Early Registration Deadline: July 31, 2024

Space is limited - register early!

For more information, please contact:

Pr. John Nelson: 630.650.0905
pastorjohn@hosannachurch.com

Pr. Sue Gunderson: 920.421.1944
Sue.Gunderson61@gmail.com



2024 LCMC Youth Gathering

By SCOTT ELLIOTT

Family & Youth Pastor, Spirit of Joy Lutheran Church, Weddington, NC

I admit that I was hesitant to attend the 2022 LCMC Youth Gathering. As a former youth and as a leader, I had only superficial experiences with camps in the past that relied on cool catchphrases and speakers in skinny jeans. However, there was something different about the way the LCMC Youth Gathering was presented and what I heard about it from others. The theme was “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life...” Instead of entertainment and appearances, the aim of this event was to immerse youth and leaders in Scripture and every aspect of the event was grounded in Scripture.

It was, as the name states, a gathering of believers from across the country to encounter our Savior and fellowship with one another.

Worship was powerful and speakers were impactful, all because of their authenticity and their faithfulness to God’s Word. This opened the door for students to connect more deeply on a spiritual level, and not just with feelings and appearances.

The breakout sessions also had an incredible impact on my students. The ones on mental health and navigating Scripture especially resonated with them. For me, the daily devotion time for leaders was powerful. Even fellowship and recreation time was a focused time for the Holy Spirit to move among our groups.

Overall, our youth encountered God’s presence at the gathering through the preaching, teaching, and singing of God’s



SCOTT ELLIOTT

Word. This led to strengthening of our horizontal relationships and, even more importantly, the vertical relationship between each of us and Christ. Nothing against skinny jeans, but I am convinced that the emphasis of all aspects of the gathering on biblical truth is what opened the door for this to happen. I, my students, and my students’ families are so grateful for this experience and I look forward to returning this July.

To register: www.lcmc.net/youth-gathering/registration

For more information, contact Cathy Nichol:
cathy@lcmc.net 734.788.7476

Registration deadline: **April 1, 2024**
(or when capacity is reached)

Odessa Church Hosts *Bee Loved*

By Becky Hand
Pastor, Faith Fellowship, Odessa, TX

Faith Fellowship in Odessa, TX, had some extra rooms that needed to be put to use. A new support service for cancer patients was forming and needed space to work. God brought the two together and *Bee Loved* found its home.

Bee Loved is an organization dedicated to providing very special kinds of services that are unique to those diagnosed with cancer. Until recently, there was no locally designated place for cancer patients to go for clipper haircuts during hair loss, and for wigs for those who want them. These are services most don't think about until they or someone they love needs them. It is important to have a place to go that meets personal needs during such a challenging time.

At *Bee Loved*, licensed hairdressers donate their expertise

to provide the best care possible to support the self-esteem and well-being of cancer patients as they travel the difficult journey of cancer treatment. Patients are treated with kindness, respect, empathy and understanding because those providing the services are current patients, cancer survivors, or volunteers who have traveled this journey with someone they love.

Bee Loved is designed with the needs of patients in mind, providing privacy, extra time to adjust to a new "look," and caring support to help cancer patients of all ages feel good about their appearance. All services are entirely free to patients, and bringing along a "support" person or persons is encouraged. Shaving a head and trying on wigs is often filled with tears, laughter, prayers and hope.



BECKY HAND

Bee Loved also provides informal group meetings where cancer patients, along with survivors, can share experiences, ask questions, and encourage one another. These meetings are held on the 3rd Thursday of each month. A meal is offered, sometimes there are speakers, sometimes crafts, sometimes sharing stories. There is always prayer, and always room for one more. This non-profit organization has given away over 100 wigs in the past 12 months. We thank God for putting unused rooms to good use!



Left and above:
Decorations at the January 18, 2024, *Bee Loved* meeting.

Right: Cancer patient Brittany with hairdresser Penny Roberts. Brittany received a wig last fall. She died from cancer this January. Part of the January *Bee Loved* program was remembering her and her hard-fought battle as well as earning her college degree in December. Her husband and young children came to the meeting. After celebrating her and sharing the meal her boys played ping pong and air hockey.



Welcome!

Please take a moment to welcome the new congregations and the new pastors that have joined LCMC since the last newsletter!

By CATHY NICHOL
LCMC Administrative Coordinator

New Congregations

- **New Hope Lutheran Church**, Layton, UT
Pr. Bruce Grentz 801.719.6474
pastor@newhopelutheran.church
- **Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**, Naperville, IL
Pr. Tara Beth Leach 630.961.9220
tbleach@goodshepherd-naperville.org
- **Genesis Lutheran Church**, Piedmont, SD
Pr. Sierra Ward 605.269.8883
hello@pastorsieraward.com

New Pastors

Keith Ray, Lincoln, IL mrhollis57@gmail.com 217.871.5465

William Skiles, Virginia Beach, VA wskiles@regent.edu 757.352.4745

Naomi Stout, Brandon, SD naomi.stout@gmail.com 605.691.6634

Heidi Holst, Cortland, OH pastorholstihs@gmail.com 330.604.1774

Jacob Roberts, Monroe, NC djacobroberts@gmail.com 803.804.9226



Our Savior's Lutheran Church

Lyle, Minnesota

By SCOTT MEYER

Pastor, Our Savior's Lutheran Church



"It's all about relationships. It's all about connections..." I've said that in countless sermons over the years. But little did I know early in my ministry how true it would eventually turn out to be. While teaching one of my first Confirmation classes here at Our Savior's, I looked up at the old class photos from 75+ years ago. There was my mother, who had just passed away, in the Confirmation class of 1943. Then I looked at another class photo right above it, and there was her mother, my grandmother, in the class of 1919!

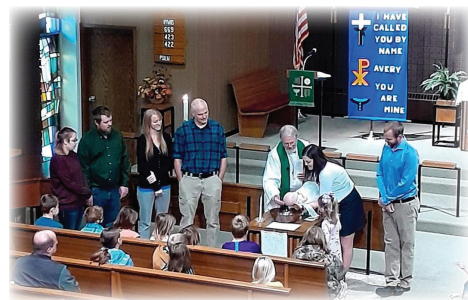
It felt like coming home when I accepted the call to Our Savior's and moved to Lyle about 5 years ago. I had already been serving 2 rural churches in the area part-time, Mona and Six Mile Grove Lutheran, and many of the members here were people I'd known all my life. When the position at Our Savior's became vacant, it made perfect sense for them to request my pastoral services here and make it a 3-point call. These churches already had a history together, many of their members are friends or relatives, and they are located only 2 or 3 miles from each other on either side of the Minnesota/Iowa border.

The theme of 'connections' is very important as these 3 congregations struggle to rebuild after the pandemic and declining membership, and as they explore new ways of working together. Worship, for instance, is happening jointly, which means there are now 60-90 people on an average Sunday morning, as compared to 15-40 in each church individually. Joint Sunday school has also been a success. It's not uncommon now to have 25 children in class; before, there was a fear in 2 of the churches that Sunday school would be discontinued.

Our Savior's voted unanimously to join the LCMC last September, and was accepted into the association shortly thereafter. Recently, Mona and Six Mile Grove have each voted to as well. All three churches are excited about the enhanced opportunities for congregational support, mission possibilities, and ministry accountability provided by LCMC. Plus, it has allowed me to connect with an active and vibrant pastors group that meets monthly for worship, support, and sharing of ideas.

Connections and relationships are crucial for our churches, as well as for us as individual believers. That's never been more true than now, during these times of decreasing church membership and growing faith skepticism. Our Savior's has benefited from its connections to these 2 local congregations and the cooperation happening between them. And I personally am blessed and very hopeful to be a part of it!

"That is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine." — Romans 1:12



GETTING TO KNOW

Greenhouses...continued from page 1

expectations being challenged by God about what He can do in LCMC to address this shortage. I firmly believe that God has already been doing some tilling work to address this challenge, long before any of us realized it. Today, I speak on the behalf of a collective who believes that God has cultivated a unique “greenhouse” that is beginning to show some sprouts after years of soil tilling and seed watering.

What makes a greenhouse unique is the ability for both growth and mobility to coexist in the same space. In the past, perhaps you’ve heard about “pipelines;” where are the next pipelines for ministry leaders going to come from? A pipeline is great for sending a located resource in one direction quickly and efficiently. When there is an abundance of an already discovered resource, a pipeline works very well. Unfortunately for us living in 2024, clergy and ministry leaders in general are not sitting in an untapped reserve that we can drill into and send to wherever our hearts desire.

A greenhouse is the best environment for seeds to flourish. Those seeds won’t bear any fruit in a metal pipeline; they need soil, sunlight, water, and care to grow and bear the fruit they were designed to bear. When it comes to nurturing young adults who will serve Christ’s church and LCMC, I believe that an approach that most resembles the environment of a greenhouse is the best for the current and future challenges we face in 2024 and beyond in LCMC.

It is with great joy that I write to you all today about the Greenhouse Collective, a collection of churches, schools, camps, and organizations committed to the holistic formation of young adults, which will in turn go a

long way in addressing our portion of the clergy shortage.

Trinity Lutheran Church (San Pedro, CA) and Faith Lutheran Church (Hutchinson, MN) have congregational-based internships that give young adults the opportunity to work in healthy, vibrant congregations in LCMC. World Mission Prayer League’s Discipleship House (Minneapolis, MN) and The Awaken Project (Alexandria, MN) are gap-year/short-term residential programs that offer specific Bible training and practical ministry experience for missions and youth ministry, respectively. Mount Carmel Ministries (Alexandria, MN) and the Canadian Lutheran Bible Institute (Camrose, AB, Canada), are long-standing hubs for the Lutheran Bible Institute that still carry forth the values of Bible study, prayer, and service in their academic and summer ministry capacities.

Each of these ministries make up a collection of local greenhouses committed to the holistic and vibrant formation of young adults. Each of these little greenhouses have challenged our imaginations about what God can



STEVEN WAGNER

do to form young adults. Are any of these greenhouses designed to be a magic bullet? Not in the slightest, but they are answers to prayer and have given hope to a movement of Christ’s church. I invite you to learn more about each of the Greenhouse Collective’s members, and if you have some young adults in your congregation who you think have gifts for ministry, send them some information on these little greenhouses and see where the Spirit leads. Thank you all for reading this article and may God bless your daily proclamation of the Gospel message.

For His Glory,
Steven Wagner
The Greenhouse Collective



**Scan the QR code for
more information about
Greenhouse Collective
ministries**

Youth Leader Webinars

By NOAH RUPPERT

Pastor, Morningside Lutheran Church, Sioux City, IA

In the heart of every thriving youth ministry lies a team of dedicated leaders, who pour out their hearts to guide, mentor, and inspire young students in their faith. These leaders have been approaching youth ministry against some of the most complicated social and emotional uncharted waters of our culture today. It is crucial that we provide them with the support, encouragement, and resources they need to flourish in their roles.

Your youth leader plays a vital role in shaping the future of the church and community!

With this in mind, we have a team of pastors and leaders dedicated to encouraging, supporting and praying for your youth leaders through **quarterly** (new for 2024) webinars. These webinars are tailored to equip and uplift those who serve in this capacity. In a world that often feels chaotic and uncertain, our youth leaders need a community where they can find strength, like-mindedness and support.

These webinars provide insights and wisdom from pastors and leaders who have served in youth ministry and desire to pass on their experience, building on it into the next generation of youth leaders. Through a series of engaging sessions and interactive discussions, participants will have the opportunity to gain practical tools and connect with other youth leaders from all over the nation, leading in small, medium, and large size churches.

Webinar Details:

- **What:** Youth Leaders Webinar
- **When:** May 16, August 15, November 21 @ 11:00am CST
- **Who:** Youth pastors, lay leaders, and volunteers
- **Where:** A zoom link can be found on the 'LCMC Youth Ministry' Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/LCMCYouthMinistry>



NOAH RUPPERT

If you are a pastor, we urge you to pass on this invitation to your youth leader so they can have this opportunity to grow.

Questions? Email Cathy Nichol at: **cathy@lcmc.net**

Congregation: Is Your Contact Information Up to Date?

By CATHY NICHOL, LCMC Administrative Coordinator

Does your congregation have a new location or mailing address?
Or a new phone number? An updated website address? Joined a new district?
Help US by keeping the profile for your congregation up to date.

Go to **<https://www.lcmc.net/update-congregational-info>**
and fill in the ALL of the fields.

If you have any questions, please contact Cathy Nichol at
cathy@lcmc.net or (734) 788-7476.

LCMC Clothing Items Available Now!



To purchase, contact
cathy@lcmc.net

From the Board

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which it is sent. The gospel is, after all, the power of God. That is enough to address this cultural moment, and in any context.

In Christ,
Pastor Randy Freund

Celebrating an Ordination Milestone?



Ordination pins are available to commemorate the special milestone in increments of 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50, 55, 60, 65.

Contact Cathy Nichol, LCMC Administrative Coordinator:
cathy@lcmc.net 734.788.7476

Pastor: Is Your Contact Information Up to Date?

By CATHY NICHOL, LCMC Administrative Coordinator

Have you moved? Do you have a new address? Or a new phone number? Perhaps you have changed congregations? Help US by keeping YOUR profile information up to date.

Go to **<https://www.lcmc.net/pastor-update>** and fill in the ALL of the fields, including **Ministry Education/Credentials**.

*If you have any questions,
please contact*

Cathy Nichol:
cathy@lcmc.net or
(734) 788-7476.

Growth & Continuing Education

By CHRISTIAN HUNTLEY, LCMC Coordinator for Leadership & Pastoral Development

With a new budget year and the turning of the calendar often comes planning for new goals and new learning. LCMC is fortunate to have great educational partners, district and association resources that support pastors and lay leaders.

How are you going to grow in ministry this year? How are you supporting your staff, ministry volunteers, and councils so they can grow? Here are a few ideas from the wide variety available this year:

- **PreRetirement Retreat for Pastors & Spouses**, April 22-25
- **Augustana District First Call Retreat**, April 25-26
- **Iowa District LeaderCare Retreat**, May 6-9

Are you ready to host a seminar or training? Contact Mike Bradley (**mike@lcmc.net**) or Christian Huntley (**christian@lcmc.net**) to schedule a workshop in your area. Opportunities include:

- **Being a Safe Place**, Mike Bradley
- **Call Committee Training**, Christian Huntley
- **LeaderCare Retreat**, Christian Huntley

Vision Planning for Districts

By JULIE SMITH, LCMC Coordinator for Districts & Fellowships

Congregations finding creative and appropriate ways to work together to address shared needs and concerns is a new way of thinking for many of us. Districts and fellowships are two of the vehicles congregations can use to find ways for cooperation and mutual support, but sometimes leaders aren't sure where to begin.

This year one of my goals is to work with our district councils in formulating and implementing their visions for what they want their district to be. I would love to do a day-long retreat with any district councils that are interested. The purpose of the retreat would be to identify what your district does well, what needs you see

in your congregations, what gifts you have to meet those needs, and what resources you need to be as effective as possible in your shared work.

If this sounds like something your district would be interested in, please talk it over with your council leadership and contact Julie at:
julie@lcmc.net

*This article has been condensed.
Read the complete article at:*
www.lcmc.net/blog

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Mission Assistance Fund

By CHUCK HUNSAKER
President, LCMC Lutheran Men



Many of you do not get to attend the Gathering each year, so you don't have the opportunity to take part in the various breakout sessions. With that in mind, here is a recap of the Lutheran Men's presentation of this past Gathering.

Lutheran Men exists for two reasons: to get more men involved in the church, and to provide support to small mission congregations. Getting men involved occurs mostly in individual congregations through men's groups, although we are available to help. Providing support to small mission congregations happens at the national level. Congregations can request support, our grant board reviews those requests, and approves/disapproves the request for funds from our Mission Assistance Fund.

Here is where we really need help from men across LCMC. We have two ways of funding our Mission Assistance Fund: the Buck-A-Month Club and the Committee of 100. For the past several years, we have awarded grants but have not had enough men contributing to replenish the money given out, so the fund is gradually declining.

If you have ever been part of a small or mission congregation, you know that money is always the key element behind every need, so Lutheran Men is a vital way these congregations can grow and continue to function.

Looking back over 2023, the Buck-A-Month Club had only 35 men contribute a total of \$420.00. The Committee of 100 only had 47 men contribute \$4,700. If those were all different men, that is only 82 men from across LCMC who gave. We did have one men's group contribute over \$3,000. LCMC has just over 800 U.S. congregations. We don't have a specific count of men within those congregations, but if each congregation averages 50 men, that would be more than 19,755 men. Only 82 gave last year, which equals about .4%.

If only 25% of men contributed to the Buck-A-Month Club...\$12 per year...that would provide \$59,328, which would allow us to continue to provide grants at the level we have been and still allow the Mission Assistance Fund to remain solvent and able to continue to provide support.

Men...we need your help! Can you donate \$12.00? The campaign month for the Buck-A-Month Club is coming up in March. There are bulletin inserts available on our web page. Please print them off, get them to the men of your congregation, and encourage them to write a check.

From the Offertory Hymn: "May our gifts be a sign of our love toward you and our desire to do your holy will."

[LCMC.net/Lutheran Men](http://LCMC.net/LutheranMen)



ED THOMAS
Pastor Spirit of Joy Lutheran Church
Weddington, NC

Devotional Series...

A WINNING HAND

[Job said to God] *“Lay down a pledge for me with yourself; who is there who will put up security for me?”*
— Job 17:3

As kids, I would occasionally play poker with my cousins. (It was for pretzels rather than money, which was good because we barely understood the game!)

Even if you barely understand poker, you’ve probably watched enough TV to see someone – out of money but desperate to keep playing – put their car keys on the table. It’s their wager, their pledge, their collateral.

In this passage, Job is desperate. He has literally lost everything. And yet he must keep playing this cruel game of life. “My spirit is broken,” he says, “my days are extinct” (Job 17:1). Thus, he throws his car keys on the table. He plays the only thing of value that he has left: *God*. He says essentially, “[God] lay down a pledge for me with yourself. I am placing you on the table. You are my only ‘security,’ my collateral.”

He’s gambling with God.
He has nothing left to lose.

Years ago I played a poker-like game with our youth. Using five or six decks of cards, I dealt five cards to each and said, “Who thinks they have a winning hand, and who wants to trade in a few cards to get a better hand?”

Most traded in.

And then we did it again ... and again ... until everyone got a winning hand.
“That’s grace,” I said.

I use this kind of image a lot in my pastoral counseling. Why? Because life in this broken world has dealt too many of us “a bad hand.” We’re born with congenital health issues. We’ve been abused as children. An accident has robbed us of vitality. Life can be hard. And yet we have no choice but to play the hand we’ve been dealt.

Yes, sometimes our physical circumstances are a given ... fortunately our hearts and minds can keep trading in cards to find hope and perspective.

Do you know people with hard circumstances who are “more than conquerors”? We ought to learn from them. Spiritually they’ve been trading in cards until they’ve found a winning hand.

And God himself – including Christ who laid down a cross-shaped “pledge for [us] with [him]self – is our collateral, our “security,” our hope, our life, our joy.

In Christ’s Love,
Pastor Ed Thomas,
a guy who has a hand full of kings because I know the King

[On the day I was asked to write this devotion, this was already my daily devotion for our congregation and friends. If you’d like to be part of this daily devotional list, email your request to pastored@spiritofjoy.us. Pastor Ed Thomas, Spirit of Joy Lutheran Church, Weddington, NC, and new member of the LCMC Ministry Board.]



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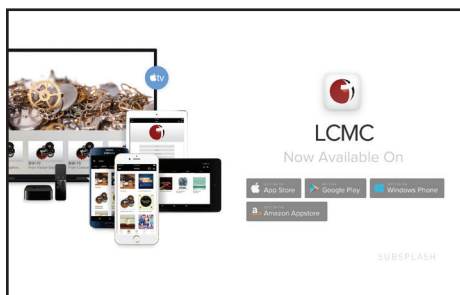
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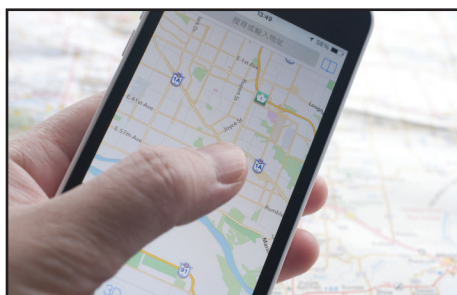


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