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IN TOUCH

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

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Encouraged, Connected, and Unstoppable: People of Hope

by Rev. David A. Davis

We are People of Hope. We believe that Jesus continues to do what He has done: build His Kingdom in us and through us. While it might not always look like it, that is the case. We are certain of it even if we cannot see it. That is what it means to be people of hope.

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“We are not as alone
as we might think.”



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Discouragement surrounds the Church. Numbers are down. Pews are empty. Nones are up. Hand-wringing books about the Church abound. Because we are people of hope, while the discouragement surrounds us, it does not stick to us.

Discouragement started to stick to the prophet Elijah. While he had an amazing victory over the prophets of Baal, he was down. He had run afoul of Jezebel and her husband Ahab. He was convinced he was a goner.

“I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too” (1 Kings 19:10).

Do you remember what YHWH said? “Last one? Not even close! There are over 7,000 others who have not bowed their knees to Baal.” Things were not as bad as Elijah thought. He was not as alone as he thought.

You too. Us too.

We are not as alone as we might think. Not only is Jesus with us (*“Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” [Matthew 28:20]*), but there are more Christ followers around us than we might realize. Your church might be emptier than it once was, but not everyone’s is. It might look like the secular culture has triumphed, but Jesus is still at work by his Spirit. It’s not unlike that famous line from Mark Twain: *“The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated.”*

Throughout this year across the District we are going to focus on this reality. We are not alone. God is building His Kingdom. “Last one left? There are 7,000 others who have not bowed their knee to Baal.” We should be encouraged. And we should be determined to work together in that reality.

Our consideration of this theme will begin with the *We Are Not Alone* Conference. We look forward to church members and their pastors from around the state to gather for encouragement but also to better understand how we can live out our “not aloneness” as we work together in ministry with other Christians in our community.

This theme that will focus on continued encouragement, networking, and community engagement will continue throughout the year in various other conferences, training, and communication pieces.

The high point of the year will be our District Convention, June 22–24, at Concordia University Ann Arbor. While we normally have 800 or so participants, we hope to engage well over 7,000 people in the convention this year. How? Starting with participation in pre-convention Bible studies and later, during the convention, with opportunities for service as delegates, hospitality workers, food providers, worshippers, ministry representatives, and visitors. Plan now to get connected.

Someone has said that pessimism is a sin for people of hope. Not sure on that. But I am sure of this: As people whose hope is in the crucified, raised, ascending, reigning, and returning Jesus, and as people who are part of the Communion of Saints, while from time to time we may get discouraged, we maintain hope. We are certain that God is with us and for us, and we are certain that there are more with us than we realize.



So people of God, serve your Savior with gusto. Be dauntless and hopeful. That’s the sort of people we are: People of Hope. ■

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

Bringing Hope to Young Hearts

by Steven D. Schave

This year, I had the chance to lead a mission team to Moose Lake, Manitoba, and quickly realized how meticulous one needs to be with the responsibility for leading a team, especially when it includes family, friends, and fellow church members. Planning for a mission trip involves coordinating flights for them and their gear, transportation, lodging, and communication in remote areas. My contingencies had contingencies, such as paper maps and satellite GPS, but despite all the planning, things can still go wrong in the mission field.

However, God has a way of working things out. Our faith may be tested by unexpected challenges like wildfires, flat tires, or last-minute changes to plans. In this fallen world, things are bound to go wrong. From a larger perspective, we are constantly bombarded with news about all that's wrong in the world. So much time can be spent on analyzing the problems without focusing on what we can do to help make it right.

My family experienced a heartbreaking incident while serving the community. My wife, a deaconess in the church, had just finished a VBS craft with the kids when one little boy ran outside abruptly. Concerned, my wife went to check on him and found him at his mother's gravesite in the adjacent cemetery. He wanted to hang his VBS craft on her grave marker. My wife was deeply moved and went out to pray with this child and his older brother who was also standing beside his mom's grave.

"How can we possibly make this right?" you might ask. Many children at such a young age already have a

significant number of loved ones laid to rest.

Every day, I had the chance to teach them the meaning behind the colors of the beads in the cross necklaces we had given them at the beginning of the week. The white bead on the necklace symbolized the perfect world that God created, the black bead symbolized our rebellion that led to suffering and death, and the red bead represented the cross of Christ. But then, there was a gold bead. That was the bead that represented heaven.

I had the blessing to tell the children about the day that will come soon when everyone in that cemetery next door will be made alive again. Everyone who is baptized into the resurrection of Christ, and believes, will live with Jesus forever in heaven, including our loved ones who die in the faith. To close, I reminded the children of our VBS theme, which focused on the armor of God for protection and the sword of the Spirit that God gives them to fight off the enemy.

Every hour spent volunteering with LAMP and every dollar donated for mission trips truly is an investment in making things right. This is all because Christ died and rose again to make things right again in the world. The children are forever grateful for how LAMP tries to make things right in their lives. They are thankful for hugs and piggyback rides, for giggles and joy, and most of all, for hope and purpose. ■

Rev. Dr. Steven D. Schave is the Executive Director for L.A.M.P. - Lutheran Association of Missionaries and Pilots Inc. (Canada) and LAMP Ministry Inc. (U.S.).



Church Worker *Burnout*



Burnout is the feeling that you're at the end of your rope with effort and that there are too many things on your plate; that the expectations placed on you (by yourself or your supervisor) are greater than your capacity to do them; they are unrealistic. It's when you're tapped out and don't have energy (physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual).

Burnout does not mean you should quit the ministry. If you can identify it and find things that can help you cope, you can get through it.

There's a difference between being stressed and being burnt out. It's important to learn to identify in ourselves and in our schedules when we need a break. It's a lot of balancing and knowing yourself and seeing where you're at. There are times when you have greater capacity; there are times when you don't.

What Leads to Burnout?

Unrealistic expectations. Realize that working with people, especially when dealing with faith practices, is not cut and dry. Getting into demographic data can help you set realistic expectations. But setting goals is a good thing and failure is also good, because if you don't fail it means you're not even trying, and you're not going to learn.

Trying to manage stress by working more. Ministry is never done, so don't push yourself through in hopes it will get better after "just this one event." Learn to take a step back to breathe and allow your emotional/mental state to level out. It doesn't all rely on you. This is the Holy Spirit's work. If you need a break, take it; the world is not going to fall apart.

Isolation. Being focused solely on what you're doing and not taking part in other ministries or interacting with them. Find a cluster near you; find a community that you can talk ministry with. Even if you're an introvert, you need other people to talk to. Consider joining a local Bible study where you're not the leader. Be in the Word. Sometimes reading the Bible can feel like work, because that is part of your call. Find ways that you can be filled with the Gospel.

Lack of delegation. Sometimes we don't have many people available, but the more people you can ask for help, the better. You may feel guilty about delegating parts of your job. But your job is to bring the Gospel to people. If you're delegating, you're still bringing the Gospel to people. You find someone and prepare them to share the Gospel. It takes work to build a community of people you can delegate to. Sometimes the church worker's job is to do everything the pastor doesn't have time to do ("and all other duties as assigned"). But don't be afraid to have conversations with leadership if you're finding yourself spending a lot of time

doing things that are not part of your call.

Signs and Symptoms of Burnout

- Exhaustion that doesn't go away.
- Negativity/bitterness about the job in general.
- Anxiety-induced insomnia. Poor sleep magnifies all other issues.
- Reduced productivity.

Healthy Habits

- Learn to say no.
- Use your vacation time. Use your sick/personal days.
- Join a cluster group.

When you're in burnout, it is sometimes hard to identify. That's why it's important to be in a ministry cluster group or pastoral winkel. By gathering and establishing relationships, others can help you realize when you're showing signs of burnout.

Resources

- Recommended book: *Don't Burn Out, Burn Bright* by Jason Young and Jonathan Malm
- The Michigan District, LCMS offers many free resources for professional church workers. Visit michigandistrict.org/churches/church-worker-care/ to access them. For mental health case management and referrals, contact Deaconess Christie Hansard, RN, BSN.
- LCMS Worker Wellness Retreat grants help with rostered church workers who desire to participate in a retreat program through a Recognized Service Organization (RSO). Please complete an online form to apply for a grant. Funds are limited. Visit michigandistrict.org/churches/church-worker-care/resources/. Please note that, prior to applying, you must speak to your district president about your desire to receive a retreat grant. He or his representative will review your application. ■

This article is a compilation of excerpts from The Professional Church Worker Vlog by Luke Esselman and Tyler Seehafer. The Professional Church Worker is a vlog by Luke Esselman, Commissioned Ministry Advocate for the Michigan District, and Tyler Seehafer, Director of Youth Ministry and Media at St. Paul, Ann Arbor. They discuss information, hot topics, and issues that pertain to the lives of Professional Church Workers. You can see the playlist of episodes, including two on burnout, at www.youtube.com/@michiganLCMS/playlists.

JANUARY 2025

Requiem for the CEF Spotlight in the Lutheran Witness

For numerous years, many of you have opened your *Lutheran Witness* magazine to the centerfold, bypassing other articles, to read about what's going on at Church Extension Fund.



With so many entertainment options on demand right at your fingertips, it is refreshing to sit down with a printed magazine and read about how God is using CEF to build His Kingdom.

Sometimes the articles have been about churches, both big and small, undertaking building projects to provide space and place for the Gospel to be proclaimed. Other times, the articles told the story of the impact of a housing loan on

a church workers life and family. CEF has also brought to your attention the grants and services we provide to support Michigan District ministries and make the lives of ministry workers a little bit easier. Each story is unique, and underneath each story, it tells you about how CEF is a blessing to ministries in Michigan.

During the course of time that we have been putting an article in the *Michigan In Touch*

supplement, a lot has changed at CEF. We've used this space to tell you about staffing changes, and to express our gratitude for the years of service from people like Paul Wills and Ron Steinke. We changed our logo and colors in 2019. We changed the wording of our mission statement in the last couple of years. Here it is:

Church Extension Fund serves as trusted and innovative stewards of financial resources by providing investment and lending products to help Lutheran ministries and church members build God's Kingdom.

It's important to note that through all these changes and over all these years, our overall mission to provide for Lutherans and Lutheran ministries is unwavering. Be it a church like St. John, Rochester, Good Shepherd, Lake Orion, or



Immanuel, Leland, or a ministry reaching out to those who don't yet know Jesus, like Concordia University Ann Arbor, MOST Ministries, or Lutheran Special Education Ministries, CEF and it's ministry partners are answering Jesus' command in the Great Commission.

You will be seeing another change in the next couple months - a new printed

newsletter- which will contain even more stories of ministry in the Michigan District as well as the things you have come to expect from the *Michigan In Touch*, including the CEF Spotlight. This change will take the articles you've come to love and rely upon out of the *Lutheran Witness*, and into this new newsletter. As part of the mission statement above, we believe this change is good

stewardship of the financial resources entrusted to us.

If you have any questions or if you would like to receive the new newsletter, please contact CEF at 800-242-3944 or by email at cef@mi-cef.org.

We are thankful to you for reading the Spotlight stories and for sharing your feedback with us!



"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Matthew 28:19-20



Photo courtesy of Elisa Schulz Photography

Great and Important Work

by Richard Koehneke

Pastoral ministry is great and important work—not usually the sort of work this world honors, but the labor of love, the patient perseverance that God honors and blesses. Pastoral ministry often happens in ways that are hidden from human sight, ways that are not revealed until the next generation or the generation after that, or perhaps only in the light of eternity.

When you don't see the results of your efforts, please remember that the one who plants is often not the one who harvests. In nearly four decades of parish ministry, in ways beyond enumeration I was the beneficiary of the efforts of those who came before me. The seeds that they planted in their generation came to fruitful maturity in my ministry, but if they had not done what they did, I never would have seen what I saw.

As you go about the work of sermon preparation and preaching, worship planning and leading, class preparation and teaching, meeting deadlines of every description, dealing with staff concerns, addressing relational issues in the congregation, helping people handle life crises and calamities, visiting the sick in the hospital and the home and the nursing home, rejoicing at the birth of a baby or the new birth of a believer in holy baptism, helping dying people face the facts of their condition with the eyes of faith in Christ, walking with grieving families through their pain and sadness, helping couples prepare for the great adventure of marriage, addressing the moral issues that are so rampant in our society, discipling seekers and reaching out to unbelievers, working with lay leadership, dealing with the church budget, representing Christ in your community, enduring all those evening meetings—all the while trying to manage your own household well and trying to take care of yourself—know this:

You are doing great and important work. You are making a Christ-like difference in this world and for eternity. You are touching lives with the truth and love of Jesus Christ. Thank you for your faithful ministry.

“And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6). He who called you is faithful, and He will do it. God bless you and keep you safe and strong in His loving care. ■

Rev. Richard Koehneke (Emeritus) lives in Ft. Wayne, Ind.

“ You are making a Christ-like difference in this world and for eternity. ”



Photo courtesy of The Luke Clinic

Linda's Journey: A Testament to the Joy of Volunteering

by Penny Armbruster

Linda Schilbe has been the coordinator for The Luke Clinic's resource closet for the last three years. She is living proof that age is no barrier to volunteering. She started by coordinating the donations as they arrived at the office and organizing the wonderful new storage space Living Water Church of Whitmore Lake gave us. Eventually, she decided to come down to Detroit to staff the Baby Closet in person.

At first, Linda had safety concerns, but she has since grown to feel secure in the clinic. A sense of peace now marks her interactions with people outside the clinic, as she trusts the Lord to watch over her. Despite her initial concerns, Linda is drawn to spending time in the clinic. She takes great joy in serving the clients, particularly in providing them with special items tailored to each mother and child—from a long-awaited baby stroller to a simple bib that celebrates becoming an older sibling.

When asked what the hardest part of her volunteer role is, she quickly replied, "Telling a patient we do not have what she needs." One of her favorite moments is when a previous client, struggling with her circumstances, asked if she could come and help Linda in Catori's Closet. Together, they reorganized the closet layout after the client recommended some changes. It was an opportunity to spend time together and bless this mom with a moment of connection at a time when she needed

to be loved and appreciated. This time, it took the form of working on a project together; another day, it might be a hug, a time of prayer, or receiving a specially chosen gift that Linda had put aside for them. These moments make volunteering one of Linda's great joys.

When asked if she could use any help, she smiles and nods, "We are blessed to receive gently used donations that need to be sorted and washed. We could also use someone who can clean any donated equipment and ensure it is safe. Each mom receives a bag of essential supplies a few weeks before her due date—we always need these items." Linda is blessed to be a blessing and encourages others that you are never too old to volunteer. Her journey is a testament to the joy and fulfillment of serving others, and her story inspires us all to find our own ways to serve.

You will find a link to Amazon and Walmart wish lists at thelukeclinic.org/donate-items. ■

Penny Armbruster currently serves as the Executive Director of The Luke Clinic. In 2025, she will transition into a part-time role, focusing her efforts on fundraising to support the future growth and sustainability of The Luke Clinic.

**THE LUKE
CLINIC**
SAVING LIVES
EMPOWERING WOMEN
BUILDING FAITH

LUTHERAN LAYMEN'S LEAGUE

LHM Satellite TV Programing in Middle East

With recurring political turmoil, social instability, and high unemployment rates among the challenges faced each day, people throughout the Middle East and North Africa search for hope and peace for their lives that are often filled with emptiness. Desperate for hope, they question the best path forward for themselves, their families, and their countries.

In much of the region, personal interaction involving religion can violate the law or risk peoples' safety. Written materials entail tight government restrictions. Moreover, because illiteracy is particularly high in many countries, much of the population turns to social media videos and satellite television broadcasts as primary sources of information. Individuals can visit digital platforms or tune in to programs from the privacy of their homes without fear of backlash.

Over the past several years, Lutheran Hour Ministries® (LHM) has partnered with SAT-7 to produce satellite TV programming that shines the light of Christ into dozens of countries throughout the Middle East and North Africa. Many viewers watching these broadcasts have never heard about Christ or have incorrect knowledge about Christianity.

Many viewers reach out to the SAT-7 audience relations

team through social media following the broadcasts seeking more information about what they heard and how it can fill the emptiness in their lives. One program viewer shared, *"In talking with your team, I learned more about God's love and how His love can fill every need and void I have. God's Word is truly real, and the first steps are prayer and getting close to God. Thank you for talking this through with me. I am now seeing change in my life."*

In addition to reaching people through satellite TV broadcasts, LHM has also encountered tremendous success sharing God's love with people in this region through four social media platforms. In the past year, LHM messages have reached tens of millions of people, and nearly 1.5 million from throughout the region have responded by subscribing to LHM pages. LHM staff has had conversations with tens of thousands of these individuals where they shared the message of God's hope and love for their lives.

To learn more about this ministry or for more information, visit lhm.org.



LUTHERAN WOMEN'S MISSIONARY LEAGUE





Important Dates/Deadlines

January 31, 2025 - Circuit Forums Deadline

February 22, 2025 - Nominations Deadline

February 22, 2025 - Overtures Deadline

April 5, 2025 - Regional Pre-Convention Meetings

For forms and additional information visit:
michigandistrict.org/convention

REGISTER TODAY!
 Our Savior, Lansing, Mich.
 February 1, 2025
michigandistrict.org/theo25

Cost:
 \$35/person
 \$25 student rate
 includes lunch

SPEAKERS:
 Rev. Jeff Cloeter
 Dr. Rachel Ferguson
 Rev. Dr. Joel Okamoto
 Mrs. Sherri Huston
 Rev. David A. Davis

We Are Not Alone:
Engaging YOUR Community Together
 1 Kings 19:18

A Conference for Church Members and Church Workers

Church Extension Fund

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 a new worker?
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Calendar of Events

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

JANUARY 2025

- 1 New Year Holiday
DISTRICT OFFICE CLOSED
- 7 Board of Directors
Christ Our King, Saline
- 21 Beyond the Breakwater
Messiah, Midland
- 26–2/1 Lutheran Schools Week
- 30 Michigan Lutheran Leaders and Ministries
Shepherd of the Lakes, Brighton

FEBRUARY 2025

- 1 We Are Not Alone Conference
Our Savior, Lansing
- 6–7 Snow Tire Conference
Bavarian Inn, Frankenmuth

MARCH 2025

- 8 Building Up the Kingdom in Joy Conference
St. Luke, Haslett
- 8–9 State Basketball Tournament
Concordia University & St. Paul, Ann Arbor
- 18 Board of Directors
First, Charlotte
- 28 Online Parish Nurse Zoom Meeting
Zoom

APRIL 2025

- 5 Regional Pre-Convention Meetings
Detroit, Livonia, Pinconning, Grand Rapids
- 25–27 The Katie
DoubleTree by Hilton, Bay City

MAY 2025

- 6–7 West Pastors Conference
Great Wolf Lodge, Traverse City
- 13–14 South & East Pastors Conference
Bavarian Inn Lodge, Frankenmuth
- 14–15 Circuit Visitors Conference
St. Lorenz, Frankenmuth
- 17 Regional Track Meets
Locations TBD
- 19 Board of Directors Meeting
Location TBD
- 20–21 North & East Pastors Conference
Bavarian Inn Lodge, Frankenmuth
- 31 State Track Meet
Concordia University Ann Arbor

Calls and Roster Update

ORDAINED

Calls Accepted

- Rev. Robert Allmann (Merrill, MI) to IIM, Holy Cross, Dodge City, KS
- Rev. Robert Appold (Grand Rapids, MI) to Assistant Pastor, Mount Calvary, Greenville
- Rev. Mark Hanneman (Raymond, NE) to Director of Advancement, Grace Point, Lincoln, NE
- Rev. Keith Lemley (Washington, MI) to IIM, Trinity, Clinton Twp.
- Rev. Jonathan Moyer (Highland, MI) to Associate Pastor, Faith Viera, Rockledge, FL
- Rev. Alexander Schrader (St. Louis, MO) to Sole, Our Saviour, Armada

Status & Title Changes

- Rev. Timothy Azzam (Oscoda, MI) to Emeritus
- Rev. Peter Berg (Beverly Hills, MI) to Emeritus
- Rev. John Rathje (Ypsilanti, MI) to Emeritus

Transferred Into District

- Rev. Alexander Schrader (St. Louis, MO) from Missouri District
- Rev. Jacob Wagner (Saginaw, MI) from Minnesota North District

Transferred Out of District

- Rev. Robert Allmann (Merrill, MI) to Kansas District
- Rev. Peter Berg (Beverly Hills, MI) to English District
- Rev. Mark Hannemann (Raymond, NE) SELC District

Called Home

- Rev. Samuel Sherouse
- Rev. Jeffrey Walsh

COMMISSIONED

Calls Accepted

- LaPerriere, Sandra (Cq. Concordia, Seward, NE) to St. Peter, Macomb

Change of Status

- Phifer, Jennifer (Trinity, Paw Paw) to Candidate
- Wert, Emilyann (Our Savior, Grand Rapids) to Candidate

Transferred Into District

- Brand, Lisa (Minnesota South District) to Immanuel, Bay City
- Schultz, Jane (Texas District) as Candidate
- Zucker, Denys (Minnesota South District) as Candidate

Transferred Out of District

- Phifer, Jennifer (Candidate) to Texas District

Called Home

- Groll, David
- Stresman, Shirley

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



GET EQUIPPED
FOR EFFECTIVE GOSPEL MINISTRY

- Start A Ministry
- Events
- Resources
- Calls & Vacancies
- Join A Ministry
- Ministry Finder
- Blog/Podcast
- Stories & Highlights

Visit us today at
michigandistrict.org