

Winter 2026

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IN TOUCH

A publication of the Michigan District of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
and Church Extension Fund

FROM THE PRESIDENT

A Favored Adjective?

by Rev. David A. Davis

Not the First Choice

What do you think of my new outfit? “Stunning.” What did you think about the food at that restaurant last night? “Tasty.” What do you think of the new pastor? “Friendly.”

All of those are good, positive adjectives. Of course you can think of bad adjectives as well. Ugly. Bland. Boring.

“Peculiar” is “a not so good” adjective. Not exactly negative, but surely not positive. Certainly, not the first choice. No one wants to be seen in a “peculiar” outfit. A cook does not want to cook a meal that is

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“peculiar.” And certainly, pastors would have many other adjectives regarding desired characteristics ahead of being considered “peculiar.”

Peculiar Indeed

But that is what we are. That is what we are called to be as followers of Jesus. A peculiar people. At least that is how the old King James Version of 1 Peter 2:9 reads, “*But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*”

A peculiar people. How do you like that? There was actually a church group known by that name in the 1850’s. They had about 46 different congregations. Later they became known as the Union of Evangelical Churches. Maybe they didn’t want to be known as “peculiar” anymore.

Maybe we would rather not be known as “peculiar” either. Peculiar for KJV times means something like a “private possession”—hence “God’s own possession.” For today, as far as language goes, it is a bit more accurate. Do you like it smoothed out this way: a people for God’s own possession?

Nice, but no ring. So let’s not give up on “peculiar” too soon.

Our “Peculiar” Theme

Our District year-long theme for 2026 is *Live to Tell About It*, based on 1 Peter 3:15, “*Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.*” This is just down the “peculiar” road from 1 Peter 2:9. We will be accenting personal evangelism that grows out of, well, peculiar living.

Do we live in such a “peculiar” way that people ask us what’s going on with us that makes us different, people of hope? Do they see us living in a peculiar way that they can’t help but ask us of our hope? And if they do, what are we prepared to say?

Two Aspects

This year we will focus on two aspects of this theme.

First, we will consider in what ways should our lives indeed be peculiar, clearly reflecting that we belong to God through Jesus. What would our life have to look like so that people ask, “What’s up with you?” Does our generosity ever cause questions? Does our being people of peace and kindness cause questions? Does our choice in entertainment and recreation cause questions? Does our faithful trust in and walk with Jesus give rise to people asking, “What’s up with you?” We will think about being peculiar.

Second, we will look at our preparation to give a testimony when asked about our “peculiar” hope. Throughout the year, we will be providing conferences, workshops, and tools so that we are all better prepared to communicate clearly our hope in Christ to those who ask.

Getting Started

The kickoff for the theme *Live to Tell About It* will be a combined day-long Congregational Ministry Summit on Saturday, January 31, with a Sunday afternoon multi-site Lutheran Hour Rally featuring Rev. Dr. Michael Zeigler. More information can be found on page 8.

And So

God has loved you with an everlasting love in Jesus. He has rescued you from the deeds of darkness. He has caused His Spirit to dwell within you. Your sins, worries, enemies, and death are already swallowed up in victory.

That all changes a person. It makes an impact. Indeed, it leads us to be a “peculiar” people of hope.



Let the questions ... and answering ... begin. ■

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



Caregiver Burnout:

Why Hospice Support Matters

by Wellspring

Caring for a loved one at the end of life is one of the most meaningful acts of love a person can give. But it can also be one of the hardest. Many caregivers find themselves balancing work, family, and daily responsibilities while also trying to manage complex medical needs at home. Over time, this can take a toll physically, emotionally, and spiritually. This feeling has a name: caregiver burnout.

Understanding Caregiver Burnout

Caregiver burnout doesn't happen all at once. It often builds gradually. It can look like exhaustion that doesn't go away with sleep, constant worry, irritability, or feeling like you have nothing left to give. You may even start to feel guilty for feeling this way, which only adds to the weight you carry.

The truth is no one can do this alone. And you don't have to. Scripture reminds us that we are not meant to carry our burdens by ourselves.

How Hospice Helps

Hospice care is not just about the patient; it's about the whole family. At Wellspring, our hospice team includes a physician, nurses, social workers, chaplains, bereavement coordinator, aides, and trained volunteers who walk alongside families through one of life's hardest seasons.

Hospice can ease the caregiver's burden by:

- Providing 24/7 access to medical support
- Managing medications, equipment, and supplies so you don't have to—even being delivered to your doorstep
- Offering emotional and spiritual care for the whole

family, affirming God's presence in times of struggle

- Giving caregivers much-needed rest through respite care

Hospice support means you don't have to choose between caring for your loved one and caring for yourself. Both matter.

You're Still the Caregiver

Accepting help doesn't mean stepping away from your role. Hospice care allows you to focus more on being present with time and energy to share moments of connection, conversation, and love—while Wellspring takes on the practical care.

Your role as a caregiver doesn't end with hospice support. It simply shifts, giving you space to be a spouse, a son or daughter, a grandchild, a niece or nephew, or a friend or neighbor again. It's a chance to step back into those God-given roles while trusting that your loved one is surrounded with compassionate care.

When You're Ready, We're Here

If you find yourself overwhelmed, worn out, or simply needing support, hospice can make a difference for both you and your loved one. At Wellspring, we see this work as a sacred calling—to walk alongside you with compassion, dignity, and faith.

Call today: 989.652.4663

Visit us: wellspringlutheran.com

Email: hospiceinfo@wellspringlutheran.com

You don't have to carry this alone. As Jesus reminds us, *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest"* (Matthew 11:28).

We're here to help. ■



Strengthening Ties with South Africa

by William Wangelin

Last summer, a group of 18 people from Our Savior, Lansing (OSL) went to Middelburg, South Africa, in an “ambassadors” mission trip to forge deeper relationships, provide encouragement and support to all our ministry partners, and bless everyone that God placed in our path. We worked closely with Caring Friends, the outreach ministry team from St. Peter Confessional Lutheran Church in Middelburg, which was founded by the late Rev. Mandla Khumalo.

Caring Friends helped us with the service projects, which included a 2-day VBS at St. Peter, participating in a feeding program in Doornkop, a village outside Middelburg, and a day of service projects at St. Peter Christian College that included gardening, packing pads, and building prayer boxes. We delivered theological books to the pastors at St. Peter and to a FELSISA pastor by way of the Theological Seminary in Pretoria.

Key Outcomes

On the Michigan side, this trip brought together our church and school, as members and students contributed towards the trip in the months leading up to it. It was our school’s third trimester chapel offering, as our school has developed a close relationship with St. Peter in Middelburg. We now have seven teachers/staff that have personally been to Middelburg. It has given our school a

broader sense of the body of Christ and instilled a mission spirit. Our teachers have already incorporated things we saw on our trip into their school year here at Our Savior.

On the South African side, we observed the amazing progress that has taken place over the years (we do this trip every two years). Although they still face many challenges and struggles, there have been wonderful steps forward in ministry that we observed. So much of this is because of the partnership between Middelburg and Michigan. The “Middelburg Model” is becoming exemplary for other places in Africa.

- OSL team members served side by side with Caring Friends, encouraging and blessing this important outreach team from St. Peter. There is a mutual exchange of faith and learning as we build up the Kingdom together. We delivered valuable books and ministry supplies. We held a “Jesus Party” everywhere we went.
- Christian Outreach for Africa (COFA) Advisory Team members were able to visit firsthand and see updates on the progress at the school, Amajuba children’s home, the church plant in Doornkop, and the seminary in Pretoria, with insightful conversations.
- OSL teachers and pastor participated in part of the professional development day for teachers at St.

Peter Christian College and presented on faith integration in the classroom and smart board utilization.

- Bonds of faith, hope, and love were strengthened with the Khumalo family, Caring Friends, Mama Grace, and the pastors and members of St. Peter Confessional Lutheran Church.
- The team raised significant funds to donate food to Mama Grace's feeding program, VBS supplies which we left behind, a donation for the seminary, meals for Caring Friends on the days we worked with them, and scholarships for St. Peter Christian College. The balls, games, bubble machine, Bible character costumes, and theological books were all left in the hands of ministry partners who could utilize them. We were able to be generous on every occasion.

Planning Future Mission Trips

Our Savior has had a connection to the ministries in Middelburg since 1989. The first trip was in 2006. We currently try to go every two years with a team of 12–15 people. The next trip target date is 2027.

This is the largest team (18) that Our Savior has taken to South Africa. In March 2024, our friends in Middelburg handled a group of 30 visitors from Michigan, and the logistics went rather smoothly. Having local drivers such as Nati and Rodney is helpful. The comfortable housing at Del Roza Guest House allows our team to be refreshed and rested each morning. Working alongside Caring Friends ensures that we are assisting Africans doing ministry, rather than setting our own agenda. There are plenty of opportunities for teams to be involved in the future. These include:

- Visiting and encouraging the satellite churches / preaching stations – Witbank, Doornkop, Ekangala, Siyabuswa.
- Caring Friends Eyeglass Clinics – these are organized mostly through MOST Ministries.

Photos courtesy of Our Savior, Lansing



- Mama Grace Feeding Program – located in Dornkoop, about 30 minutes from Middelburg
- Teacher training at St. Peter Christian College
- Pastor training at St. Peter Confessional Lutheran Church
- VBS at St. Peter Christian College or at any satellite congregation
- Service projects (gardening, painting, repairs, light construction) – always alongside African partners
- Visit at Amajuba – always a highlight to play with these kids and create a warm, happy memory. Care Village is another orphanage in Middelburg that would welcome visitors.
- Seminary in Pretoria – they are in need of books and funds for building projects.

Our church has 35 years of experience with South African missions. I'd be glad to be a resource for anyone

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Introducing CrossPointe Center For the Trades

Vocational Training and Christian Living by Scott Yakimow

“Through this collaboration, students receive hands-on instruction in high-demand construction trades while being intentionally formed in God’s Word and in Christlike service to their neighbors.”

The Michigan District, LCMS is launching a new way to form skilled workers and faithful disciples through CrossPointe Center for the Trades, a Christian vocational school developed in partnership with the Southeast Michigan Construction Academy (SEMCA) in Sterling Heights. Through this collaboration, students receive hands-on instruction in high-demand construction trades while being intentionally formed in God’s Word and in Christlike service to their neighbors.

The Michigan District envisions CrossPointe as a place where congregations can encourage youth and adults who are gifted with “hands-on” skills to see the trades as a God-pleasing vocation through which they serve both church and community.

Students are dually enrolled in CrossPointe and SEMCA. On class nights, dinner is provided at 5 p.m., followed by a course in Christian theology and practice from 5:15–6:15 p.m. on Tuesdays and select Thursdays. From 6:30–9 p.m., students move into lab and classroom time for trade training. This rhythm weaves together faith formation, practical skills, and essential “soft skills” such as teamwork, conflict resolution, and communication.

For the initial launch, two trade pathways are available: a four-year Electrical program and a one-semester Introduction to Construction course. Tuition is \$2,750 for the first semester (including books) and \$2,250 for subsequent semesters, with scholarships available to help keep the program accessible. The CrossPointe curriculum is certified

by the Michigan District as Lutheran in theology and practice, ensuring that every aspect of the program flows from a Christ-centered understanding of work, vocation, and discipleship.

CrossPointe is one more way the Michigan District seeks to support congregations as they walk with young people discerning their future. Some students will go on to be pastors, teachers, or church workers; others will be electricians, project managers, or business owners. All are called to bear witness to Christ in their daily work. Please join us in praying that the Lord of the Church would bless this new venture, raise up many students, and use CrossPointe Center for the Trades to send out faithful, skilled servants for years to come.

Congregations, school leaders, parents, and potential students are invited to pray for this new ministry and to help spread the word. Enrollment is now open. To learn more, complete an interest form, or begin the application process, visit michigandistrict.org/crosspointe or contact the District office and ask about “CrossPointe Center for the Trades.” ■

Rev. Dr. Scott E. Yakimow is the Director of Mission Development for the Michigan District, LCMS.



CrossPointe Open House held at SEMCA on November 17, 2025 included a tour of the facility and hearing from District and SEMCA faculty.



Photos by Adele Werner/Michigan District, LCMS



Congregational Ministry Summit

Live to Tell About It!

Do we live in such a way that people are curious about what motivates us to live distinctively different lives? And if they did ask us, would we be prepared to give an account of the hope that is within us?

Don't miss our Congregational Ministry Summit on Saturday, January 31 at the St. Lorenz Worship and Event Center in Frankenmuth. This event will help you be better prepared to live a life that evokes questions and to give an account of that inner hope in Christ.

Rev. Dr. Michael Zeigler of Lutheran Hour Ministries will be the keynote speaker, followed by several different breakouts in the afternoon. The theme verse is 1 Peter 3:15 "*... but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.*"

If you stay in Frankenmuth after this event, you will

be able to join the Michigan LLL's Lutheran Hour Rally on Sunday, February 1, with Rev. Dr. Michael Zeigler as speaker. In order to prepare for the events, we encourage you to engage with an excellent Bible study provided by Lutheran Hour Ministries entitled *Patient Urgency*. These video-based materials are great for individual study or with a small group. They are free from our ministry partners at Lutheran Hour Ministries if you create an account and log in.

Please plan to join us. Find more information about the Congregational Ministry Summit and register now at michigandistrict.org/cms26.

For the Lutheran Hour Rally, go to mi-lll.org/. ■

Congregational Ministry Summit – January 31, 2026
Michigan LLL's Lutheran Hour Rally – February 1, 2026

St. Lorenz Worship and Event Center
850 W Genesee St
Frankenmuth, MI, 48734



Greetings from Church Extension Fund!

I hope that you had a blessed Christmas and are looking forward to a great new year. After the last Christmas cookie has been eaten, the last gift exchanged, and the final church service of the year attended, it's a great time to look ahead and plan for the new year.

2026 is a big year for CEF. We will be celebrating our 125th anniversary this summer, we have some operational improvements in the works, and we will be welcoming a new staff member to our team. On top of all that, we will have two new grants that we will be offering, all while continuing to serve the members and congregations of the Michigan District in the same high quality and relational ways you have come to expect.

I encourage you to learn more about CEF this year. Whether visiting our office and looking at our historical timeline, stopping by our booth at the many conferences we attend, or chatting with a CEF staff member at any sponsored event we assist with each year. We are always happy to talk with you!

If your congregation does not have a volunteer CEF Rep, maybe consider serving in this important role.

With all the ways to engage with Church Extension Fund I'm sure we will have multiple opportunities to visit with you during this "big" year!

Blessings!

James R. Saalfeld, CEO

CEF Charges No Lender Fees!



The Other Guys

Loan Origination Fee	\$2500*
Loan Application Fee	\$500
Underwriting Fee	\$750
Processing Fee	\$350
Document Prep Fee	\$100
Credit Report Fee	\$35
Tax Service Fee	\$75

*based on \$250,000 mortgage \$4,310



Church Extension Fund

Loan Origination Fee	\$0
Loan Application Fee	\$0
Underwriting Fee	\$0
Processing Fee	\$0
Document Prep Fee	\$0
Credit Report Fee	\$0
Tax Service Fee	\$0

\$0

Call **Shannon** at **734-213-3248** to start saving on your mortgage today!

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JANUARY 2026

Church Extension Fund Holds Leadership Conference

The 41st edition of the CEF Fall Leadership Conference took place in late September of 2025. This annual conference brings together members of congregations across the Michigan District, as well as pastors and other church leaders.

The history behind the event is quite interesting – originally styled “CEFARI” which stood for Church Extension Fund Annual Relaxation & Inspiration – the first attendees were volunteer CEF Reps. These Reps kept up to date with CEF’s marketing materials, monthly interest rates,

and served as the go-to person for any congregation members who might be interested in learning more about the ministry of CEF.

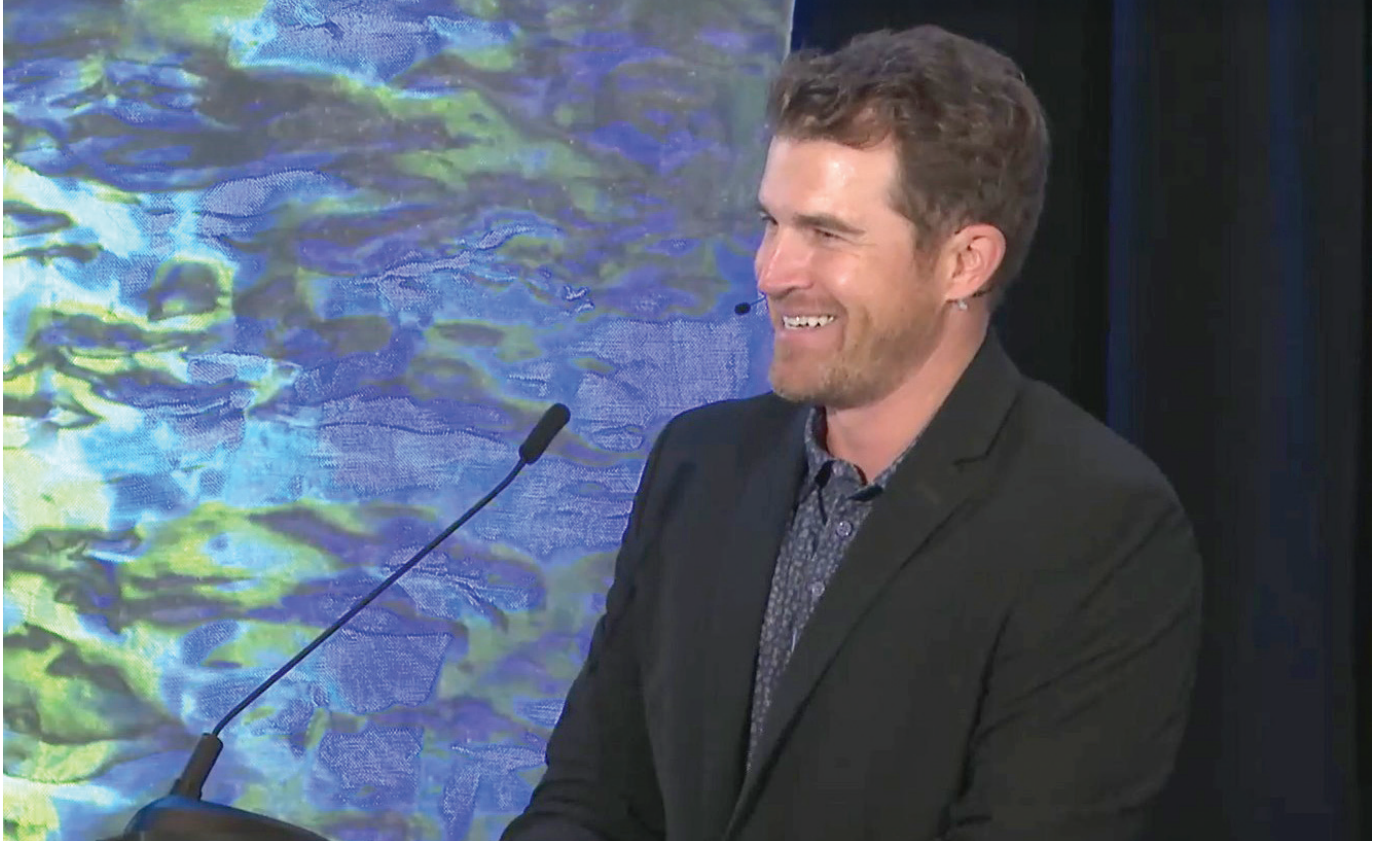
Since it’s inception in 1984, only one year has the conference not been held – 2020. Each year a group of joyful and willing

servants gathers to hear great speakers, learn about new products, grants, or services CEF offers, and see old friends and make new ones. This year’s conference was held during the last weekend in September, in Auburn Hills. It began on Friday evening with an Oktoberfest themed reception. A three piece German band in traditional Bavarian dress treated guests to a night of music and song, while the German buffet rivaled a traditional Frankenmuth spread (don’t tell St. Lorenz!)

The main conference began on Saturday, September 27th. CEF Vice President – Strategy & Marketing, Andy Sohn, set the stage with an informative introduction to the conference theme “Turning The World Upside Down” based on



The State of the Fund address with Andy Sohn, Jim Saalfeld, and John Bates.



Acts 17: 1-9. ***“These men who have turned the world upside down, have come here also... saying that there is another king, Jesus.”*** Rev. Dr. Tim Ahlman, who served as the keynote speaker, is an LCMS pastor serving Christ Lutheran Church in Greenfield, AZ. Pastor Ahlman is known for his willingness to address current topics and have the hard conversations about the life of the church. His podcasts, Lead Time & The Tim Ahlman Podcast, have garnered much attention – in Michigan particularly – after hosting many episodes surrounding the Concordia University Ann Arbor “reimagining”.

In the first keynote session, Dr. Ahlman outlined the many challenges facing the LCMS, namely, an aging and shrinking membership, a shortage of



professional church workers, and a growing tribalism in the Synod that does not talk to one another about their issues. The second keynote session offered opportunities and possible solutions to the challenges listed above. The main takeaway was that for the LCMS to “Turn The World Upside Down” with the Gospel once again, we must pray for unity based on our shared confessions, a high level of adaptability, and effectiveness as communicators both within

Rev. Dr. Tim Ahlman served as the keynote speaker.

our circles and especially to those outside of them.

Other highlights of the conference include the State of the Fund address and the much-anticipated video of recent CEF loan projects (The CEF Office), as well as an open and frank discussion with Michigan District President David Davis. A comedian, an awards dinner, and a worship service concluded the weekend. The best part? CEF pays for the whole weekend! This year marks CEF’s 125th anniversary and plans are already underway to make it the best conference yet! If you are interested in becoming your church’s CEF Rep and attending the Fall Leadership Conference, contact Rodney Barodte at Rodney.barodte@mi-cef.org or call/text him at 586-337-5070.

CEF Is Hiring!

CEF Accounting Manager

Church Extension Fund, a ministry-based financial institution located in Ann Arbor, Michigan, seeks qualified candidates for the position of Accounting Manager.

The position is responsible for a variety of accounting functions and maintaining the general accounting system for an entity with assets over \$250 Million. The individual will also complete financial reporting and is regularly engaged with the banking software system. The position is onsite and reports to the Vice President - Chief Financial Officer. A complete job description is available on CEF's website: www.churchextensionfund.com/news.

Applicants should email a cover letter with resume no later than January 31, 2026, to: Ms. Kris Nowak - Executive Assistant, at kris.nowak@mi-cef.org. Church Extension Fund, 3773 Geddes Rd, Ann Arbor, MI 48105.

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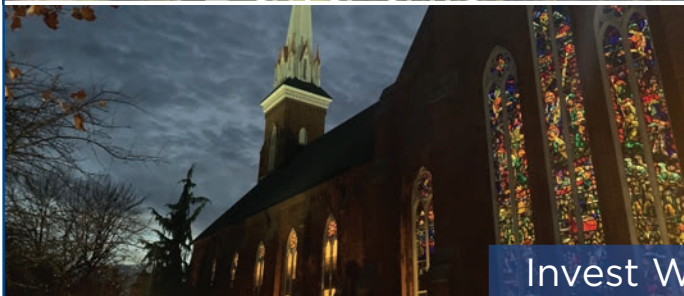


Build this

"Banks are building more branches for the first time in a decade"
4/27/24 - via Yahoo! Finance



or that?



"JPMorgan...announced plans to build 500 new branches over the next 3 years."
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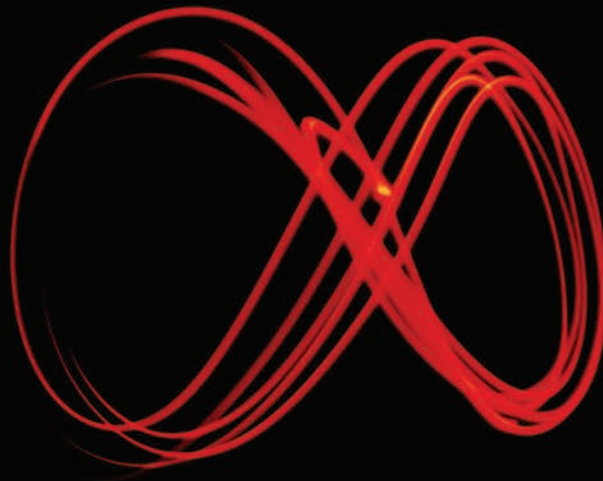
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Church Extension Fund

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www.churchextensionfund.com ■ Offices: 800-242-3944



Gratitude is Infinity

by Laura Thomas

© Yusuf Onuk/Unsplash

Most Sunday mornings I'm on the road early and traveling to meet new friends and fellow believers. Months before my visit, I see congregation names and names of leaders on paper and am eager to see and meet them in person. As the District Director of Development, I deliver District Sunday presentations to congregations to share the ways we walk together (the meaning of "synod), work together, and support each other. I am truly humbled and blessed to see God's people at work in their congregations and communities and to share new resources with them.

After 50+ visits, God has made it clear to me that gratitude is infinity. What do I mean by that?

Infinity is boundless in time, space, or quantity. It means an indefinite number or amount. It means that number that goes beyond the last one we know. And the representation of infinity is an unbroken, 8-ish-looking symbol.

Pastors, members, and guests are not boundless. There is a definite number or amount of acts of worship and service we can do. And, yes, sometimes it feels like we fill our calendars with activities that go beyond what we think we can do. But the infinity symbol reminds us that there is an unbroken, Christ-like life of gratitude that God expects (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18), deserves (Psalm 103:2–5), teaches (Ephesians 5:20), and leads (Colossians 2:6–7). He makes it boundless, indefinite, and beyond what we know.

What does this look like in some of these churches I visited? It's a warm smile and handshake that recognizes a visitor. It's an everyone-included hot meal and fellowship that fills a stomach and soul. It's a shared struggle to financially keep doors open that inspires new energy, ideas, and mission conviction. It's a music teacher conducting songs for a fidgety group of Lutheran school students who are bursting at the seams to say, "JESUS!" It's the faithful saints who have sat in the same pew for decades and continue to love God, love their families, and love their neighbors. It's our pastors and church staff members who pray for and equip us to meet our neighbors to tell them and show them why we worship and serve our faithful God.

And in those moments, my heart says, "*But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere*" (2 Corinthians 2:14). On behalf of all who serve as your ministry partners at the District, we are grateful for God's work of infinite gratitude in you! ■

Mrs. Laura L. Thomas is the Director of Development for the Michigan District, LCMS.

SUMMIT CELEBRATION

1 Peter 3:15-16

FEATURING KEYNOTE SPEAKER AND LUTHERAN HOUR RALLY PREACHER

Rev. Dr. Michael Zeigler
Speaker of *The Lutheran Hour*®

Please join us at St. Lorenz to
praise the name of our Savior,
Jesus Christ in preparation to
share the Good News to others.



**SATURDAY, JANUARY 31
+ SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 1**

**St. Lorenz Lutheran
Worship and Event Center**

850 W Genessee St • Frankenmuth, MI

Saturday, January 31

9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Congregational Ministry Summit

Sunday, February 1

2:00 p.m.

Lutheran Hour Rally

For more information or to register visit: mi-lll.org | michigandistrict.org/cms26

Michigan LLL District in partnership with the Michigan District, LCMS



LUTHERAN HOUR MINISTRIES

www.lhm.org

Jesus

IS THE LIGHT

2 Corinthians 4:6

LWML Michigan District Convention

June 26-28, 2026

Kellogg Hotel and Conference Center

Michigan State University

219 S. Harrison Rd.

East Lansing, MI 48824

www.lwmlmichigan.org

**Blessed Epiphany from
the Michigan District LWML!**

Praise God!

Mites Biennium Goal:

\$400,000

Mites Biennium Giving to

Date:

\$374,812



**Lutheran Women
in Mission
MICHIGAN DISTRICT**

The Lutheran Adult Gathering: A Weekend of Faith and Fellowship

The 2026 Lutheran Adult Gathering will take place October 9–11, 2026 at the Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island.

Brad and Kim Scott share their memories of their time at the gathering: *“While I am a lifelong Lutheran and a Michigan native, I had never heard of the Lutheran Adult Gathering or that it was held on beautiful Mackinac Island. This weekend-long event was well worth trekking up to northern Michigan in October. A beautiful leaf-peeping drive followed by a brisk ferry ride took us to a much-anticipated stay at the historic Grand Hotel. The accommodation, ambiance, and history of the hotel were all spectacular, the views from the front porch were gorgeous. Beautiful red geraniums and rocking chairs provided a wonderful setting to get to meet many new Lutherans as well as reconnecting with those we have known for years.*

The Gathering kicked off on Friday evening with a

delicious dinner in the main dining room. This was followed by a session to review the agenda and topics we’d be discussing and to introduce all the speakers. The sessions throughout the weekend helped us grow in our faith as we delved into what it meant to be a Lutheran in these challenging times. To worship in such a unique location with so many Lutherans in one room was an uplifting experience.

The social time and cocktail reception on Saturday evening, as well as dressing in our finest for dinner, conversing around the table, and time to walk the island were highlights of the weekend. It all went by so quickly; before we knew it, we were back on the ferry and heading home. We hope others will join us and bring their friends. This is a wonderful ministry, and we pray it continues for many years to come.”

Registration is now open at michigandistrict.org/lag26.



Michigan District, LCMS presents
Lutheran Adult Gathering
October 9–11, 2026 | Mackinac Island, Michigan
michigandistrict.org/lag26

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IN HIS PRESENCE
Go - Make - Share
Matthew 28:19–20

www.michigandistrict.org/lag26

Conference Registration \$50/person \$100/couple (includes ferry to the island)	Lodging at the Grand Hotel - 2 nights and 4 meals (plus taxes & fees) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Single Occupancy \$826 Grand or \$906 for Lakeview• Double Occupancy Per Person \$496 Grand/\$536 Lakeview• Triple Occupancy Per Person \$428 Grand/\$457 Lakeview• Quad Occupancy Per Person \$397 Grand/\$417 Lakeview Registration for lodging is done separately.
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Lutheran High North Students Walk for Life

On November 6, God created a beautiful day to help Lutheran North High School students celebrate the beauty of life at the March for Life at the State Capitol building in Lansing. Students heard excellent speakers, messages of love, forgiveness, and mercy. It was encouraging and inspiring to see so many high school students participate in the rally and march. *“Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord” (Psalm 127:3).*



Photos courtesy of Lutheran High North, Macomb



Photo courtesy of Faith, Prescott

2025 New Members of Faith, Prescott
Pictured L-R; Dave Tunney, Barry Wilson, Karen Reeves, Barbara Raymond, Virginia Belden, Pastor Meyer, Laura Liebrecht, Lacey Young, Pantera Young, and Dennis and Debbie Provost. (Missing Brad Miller).

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Special Recognition

Rob Kasper Retires

God's call into the ministry isn't always a clear-cut moment or a lightning strike. Sometimes it just gets unveiled as one takes a step of faith, then the next step, then the next.

Beginnings

Rob Kasper grew up at a farm in Wisconsin. He didn't like to read and did not do well in school, but he wanted to do God's will, even though he didn't know what that was. He DID know that God's will was found in the Scriptures—and that he wasn't going to read through the Bible unless someone made him. So, he asked his pastor where he could go for that to happen. The answer was to go to one of the Concordias.

Kasper ended up being accepted at Concordia St. Paul, Minn. (CSP). When he got to the school, he learned there were only three programs available: education, DCE, and pre-seminary. Not a fan of anything related to education, he defaulted to pre-sem.

At CSP, Rob met his future wife, Deb. They got married in 1979 after Rob's graduation and moved to St. Louis so he could attend the seminary. Deb also graduated from CSP as a teacher. In 1980, their first child, Rebekah, was born. The following year they moved to Las Vegas, Nev., for vicarage.

Early Ministry

Shortly before returning to St. Louis for the final year of seminary, they found out Rebekah was deaf and started their journey with the Central Institute for the Deaf (CID) in St. Louis, which immensely helped them. The circumstances led Rob to request that his first placement out of seminary be in the general area of one of five cities in the country that had good Deaf education—a total flip of their initial plans: *"We had always planned that we would be missionaries in another country, but the Lord said, 'No, you're going to be missionaries where I send you, and you need to be good stewards of your kids.'"*

Rob's first call was to Webster Gardens Lutheran Church in Webster Groves, Mo., in the St. Louis area. Their second child, Jacob, was also born deaf, and he and his sister were both able to attend CID, even after Rob took another call to Our Savior, Fenton, Mo. (also in the St. Louis area). Two other children, Gabriel and Anna, were born in those years in Missouri.

Our Savior was the place where Rob experienced his most exciting day in ministry: 16 Baptisms in one worship service—and only five of them were children. It was also there that Rob finished the coursework for his doctoral degree. The dissertation would be completed at his next call, at St. Peter, Macomb.



Photos by Adele Weiner/Michigan District, LCVS

Ministry in Michigan

At a District Convention during his time at St. Peter, Rob was elected to the Michigan District Board of Directors, where he served for a while. He also served on the Board of the Lutheran High School Association of Greater Detroit.

In 2011, Kasper joined the Michigan District staff and took up tasks such as working with larger churches and mission starts. He became one of the Congregational Mission and Ministry Facilitators (CMMF) and later, under President Davis, the Director of Leadership Development. President Davis shares, *"I am grateful for the yeoman's work that Rob Kasper has provided to the Michigan District, first as a pastor and these last many years as a lead staff member in the District Office. His analytical thinking, mission focus, and no-nonsense approach to ministry have been great blessings to many. And to me."*

When asked about his greatest joy found while working in the District, Rob said, *"Outside of great people to work with, my greatest joy has been ... raising up deacons and identifying men of character to be raised up in that way, many of whom now are SMP pastors, or they've gone through some measure of our training and said, 'You know, I think I want to be a pastor' and so they either went through seminary or are at the seminary now. To see that kind of growth ... for women too as Ministry Assistants. Generally speaking, just watching people grow and mature through shared experiences and learning in ministry."*

Looking Into the Future

Kasper concludes: *"We're all going to die. Who is going to take your place? If you're a leader in God's family, replace yourself at least four times. Because until Jesus comes, we have a lot of work to do."*

As far as plans for retirement, Rob is aiming for six months of self-care followed by repurposing. *"I'll be doing something, but for six months I just want to lean into some new rhythms and reset."* He and Deb have some travel plans as well, and they also hope to finally learn sign language. The Kaspers have four grown children and ten grandchildren.

Rob's last day of work at the District was December 31, 2025.

Kaye Wolff and Stephen Starke Honored by Concordia University Chicago

In October, at the Maroon and Gold Scholarship Fundraising Gala, Concordia University Chicago (CUC) honored alumni and non-alumni for their contributions to the Church and the world. Two of the award recipients hail from the Michigan District.

The *Spiritus Christi* Award

Established in 1966, the *Spiritus Christi* Award is presented to an individual who has performed his or her responsibilities with unusual effectiveness, influence, and with the highest quality of service to the Church at large. This year's *Spiritus Christi* Award was given to Rev. Stephen Starke (Emeritus, Bay City), who graduated from CUC in 1977.

Starke has written more than 250 hymns inspired by Scripture since graduating from Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne in 1982. He is frequently commissioned for special hymn compositions and leads workshops, including at CUC's annual *Lectures in Church Music* conference. In 2023, he received the Faithful Servant Award from the Association of Lutheran Church Musicians at their national conference in recognition of his service as pastor, hymnwriter, and editor for the Lutheran Service Book. He has served congregations in Illinois, Connecticut, and Michigan. Rev. Starke was honored with the *Spiritus Christi* medallion in recognition of his effectiveness, influence, and highest quality of service to the Church at large.

One Heart Award

Established in 2021, the One Heart Award is drawn from the meaning of "Concordia" and celebrates an individual who embodies the University's core values, excels in their chosen vocation, and expands the University's impact through their association with Concordia Chicago. The 2025 One Heart Award was given to Mrs. Kaye Dumas Wolff.

A retired information and technology professional, Kaye Wolff has dedicated decades of volunteer service to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), particularly in ministries serving minority communities. She played a key role in producing the LCMS docu-movie *The First Rosa* (2014), serving as unit production manager. Wolff has also held numerous leadership roles in the Lutheran Women's Missionary League (LWML) at local, district, and national levels. Wolff received the One Heart Award that celebrates a



Photos courtesy of Concordia University Chicago

non-alum who embodies CUC's values, excels in their vocation, and expands the University's impact through their association.

Congratulations to both honorees!

Strengthening Ties

continued from page 7

interested in partnering with the churches of the Confessional Lutheran Synod in South Africa or the Lutheran Theological Seminary. Our Savior could put together a "trip kit" for anyone interested in doing their own trip to Middelburg. It would list the contacts that need to be made, transportation, housing, food options, and estimated costs for everything.

The Michigan Advisory Board for COFA continues the momentum to inform and involve Michigan LCMS churches in the ongoing mission work carried out by our ministry partners. www.africaoutreach.org.

Churches in Michigan could "adopt" a satellite church / preaching station, as each of them could use some capital investment. They are in impoverished areas that cannot provide much financial support, but they bring spiritual capital and an evangelistic spirit. Capital investments could include a church building, a well, an early childhood center called a "creche," or community center.

Special Acknowledgements

The team received financial donations and support from several sources, including the students at OSL, donations from family, friends, and the congregation, a Thrivent Action Grant (\$250), a CEF grant (\$6,000), and a Michigan District Igniter Grant (\$10,000). To learn more about Michigan District grants and apply for one, go to michigandistrict.org/grants. ■

Rev. William R. Wangelin serves as pastor of Our Savior, Lansing.



Photo courtesy of Our Savior, Lansing

Correction (2025 Fall Issue): We apologize for the incorrect spelling of Doug (Brown) Braun, 2025 Michigan District High School Teacher of the Year.

Disciple-Making Christian Journeys

A Journey in Tribute to Dr. Paul Maier

Paul's Journey Cruise

*with Dr. Karl Baughman &
Dr. Gerald Kieschnick*

7 Nights aboard Oceania Sirena

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November 4 - 13, 2026



Paul's Journey Cruise

with Pastor Tim Niekerk

10 Nights aboard Celebrity Infinity

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Philippi & More

October 22 - November 3, 2026



Canada & New England Cruise

with The Rev. Tim Runtsch

7 Nights aboard Norwegian Breakaway

Boston, Bar Harbor, St. John, Halifax & More

September 27 - October 4, 2026



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Michigan In Touch Winter 2026 Issue

Congregational Ministry Summit
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January 31, 2026

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1 Peter 3:15-16

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Calendar of Events

JANUARY 2026

- 1–2 District Office Closed
- 3 Rev. Dr. Robert Kasper Retirement Luncheon
- 12–13 Board of Directors Retreat
Hyatt Place Flint/Grand Blanc
- 30 Ministry Leaders Network
SEMCA, Sterling Heights
- 24 Pre-retirement Conference
Holy Cross, Flushing
- 31 Congregational Ministry Summit
St. Lorenz Worship & Event Center, Frankenmuth

FEBRUARY 2026

- 1 Lutheran Hour Rally
St. Lorenz Worship & Event Center, Frankenmuth
- 5–6 Snow Tire Conference
Bavarian Inn Lodge, Frankenmuth
- 28 State Basketball Tournament
Lutheran High Westland

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

MARCH 2026

- 1 State Basketball Tournament
Lutheran High Westland
- 17 Board of Directors
St. Luke, Haslett

APRIL 2026

- 2 Maundy Thursday
- 3 Good Friday
- 5 Easter
- 17–19 The Katie
DoubleTree by Hilton, Bay City
- 22 Administrative Professionals Day
- 26–28 Office Personnel Conference
Bavarian Inn Lodge, Frankenmuth
- 29 Call Day
Concordia Seminary St. Louis
- 30 Call Day
Concordia Theological Seminary Ft. Wayne
- 30 Admissions Counselor Workshop
Location TBD

Roster updates can be found at
www.michigandistrict.org/callsandvacancies