

L U T H E R A N S

# engage

Fall 2021

ST. PAUL  
LUTHERAN CHURCH  
THE LUTHERAN CHURCH - Missouri

HOURS OF WORSHIP

SUNDAY

10:30 A

SUNDAY SCHOOL  
BIBLE CLASS

9

— PASTOR —

## Fall 2021

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### Cover image

The exterior sign at St. Paul Lutheran Church in the Marigny area of New Orleans.

PHOTO: LCMS COMMUNICATIONS/  
ERIK M. LUNSFORD



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L U T H E R A N S

# engage the world



## Drawn to the Tree

*"And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way" (LUKE 19:3-4).*

Chief tax collector Zacchaeus was the Jericho crowd's vertically challenged outcast, a despised sellout. Wanting only a glimpse of the One, curious Zacchaeus did something that looked ridiculous. He climbed a tree. Smirks all around: "Hey, get a load of 'shorty' up there, will ya?" It was a social gaffe. In the ancient Near East, dignified men did not climb trees.

But a surprise awaited the sellout sinner: "This Jesus knows me. Who, me?" Divine grace is poured out; faith starts working through love. Repentance leads straightaway to confession of sin and absolution without limit. Forgiveness in a declaration of perfect righteousness fuels good works in mercy toward the neighbor. It's all right there in Luke 19: "The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (v. 10). It isn't sinners who seek out Jesus. It is truly Jesus finding and grasping us lost sinners in divine grace. We are dead in our transgressions but made alive by His gift of faith. This is the only "why" and "way" in which anyone is saved.

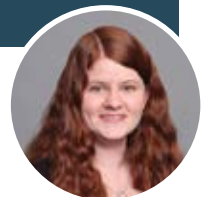
A faithless world laughs at this. You are ridiculed as confessing Lutheran Christians who would commend into God's hands the suffering you experience under a prevailing culture of dissension, skepticism and rejection. The world would prevent Jesus even from being seen, dismissing Him as an abomination, a spectacle of religious lore. Yet, the church persists in sending missionaries into the world to deliver the Word that seeks and saves the lost. We are thereby drawn more closely to another tree: a cross. As shamelessly as Zacchaeus climbed that sycamore, we confess and live in Christ crucified. In Him, we receive clear conscience and confidence. We have been sought out by Him, marked in a blessed baptismal flood — a death and resurrection — a bold witness for all the world to see.

In His hands,

**Rev. Kevin D. Robson**

*Chief Mission Officer, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*

## From the Editor



We're back! After a yearlong printing hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are so pleased to bring you this issue of *Lutherans Engage the World*. Even though the pandemic disrupted many things, it could not stop the Gospel from going forth. In the Fall 2021 issue, you'll read about how the work of the church continues around the world, in places as diverse as Alaska, Louisiana and Finland. Thanks for continuing to join us on the journey.

In Christ,

**Megan K. Mertz**

*Managing Editor, Lutherans Engage the World*





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From LCMS President Harrison

## Since becoming a deaconess in 2012, Tiffany Manor has served in a variety of ways,

including in disability ministry and as a volunteer counselor at a pregnancy resource center. One of her favorite things about being a deaconess is walking alongside people during difficult moments and pointing them to the hope found only in Christ. Now, she's using her skills to speak up and care for the most vulnerable as director of LCMS Life Ministry — a position she started in April 2020.



WITH  
**Deaconess  
Tiffany Manor,**  
DIRECTOR OF LCMS LIFE MINISTRY

BY MEGAN K. MERTZ



### 1 What led you to become a deaconess?

I was a parish administrator in Farmington Hills, Mich. One afternoon, I was in the church office by myself, while Pastor was out making visits. A man called and wanted desperately to talk to Pastor. His wife was in the middle of a miscarriage, and he was very upset. I couldn't get ahold of Pastor. I wanted to care for the man, but I felt helpless not knowing what to say or do. About that time, I became aware of the distance deaconess program, and I realized having some theological training would prepare me to better serve God's people.

### 2 Why is LCMS Life Ministry important?

We're often asked, "Why does the Synod need to have Life Ministry?" What makes us unique is that we're the church. There's important work being done by others, and we're better when we join our voices to advocate and work together in showing mercy. But as the church, we have unique gifts to share. We understand suffering and the theology of the cross. Christ suffered, bearing our sins so that we are reconciled to the Triune God, and He is present with us when we experience suffering in this world. In our sanctity-of-life efforts, we focus on Christ and the abundant life He came to

bring. We want people to live the number of days that God has ordered for them from conception to natural death, and we want all people to come to the knowledge that Jesus Christ is our Savior.

### 3 What's new in LCMS Life Ministry?

Involvement in the National March for Life has inspired more local involvement and advocacy in marches, life chains and prayer vigils. Also, we've got 70 Recognized Service Organizations that are engaged in life ministry.

We're also working collaboratively on mental health needs. The 2019 Synod convention gave us a resolution to encourage mental health training, and the pandemic has only heightened the need. In recent months, we've put out some resources on suicide prevention with authors like the Rev. Peter Preus. The Synod's newly formed mental health task force is examining what other resources are needed.

### 4 Abortion laws have been in the news a lot lately. What's exciting about that?

2021 has been a banner year for laws restricting abortion. Pro-life Americans are feeling very hopeful. It's not an end to

abortion, but anytime there's a restriction, it slows down the process. Abortion providers pressure women to make decisions quickly. Whenever we can come alongside a woman and help her, that's a blessing. Maybe the news can help us see that this is not an overwhelming tide; there are strides that can be made. The Holy Spirit is still working through His Word to transform hearts. "This light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17). We should be encouraged as we look to the things that are unseen and eternal.

### 5 How can someone get involved?

Visit our new volunteer portal: [lcms-onm.org](https://lcms-onm.org). You'll be able to find local opportunities for prayer vigils, trainings and more, as well as register for life marches being held around the country. We also want to hear about what resources are needed. Reach out via email at [lifeministry@lcms.org](mailto:lifeministry@lcms.org) and let us know how we can help.

Megan K. Mertz is managing editor of *Lutherans Engage the World* and chief copy editor for LCMS Communications.

### | LEARN MORE |

Find podcasts, suicide prevention resources and more: [lcms.org/lifeministry](https://lcms.org/lifeministry)

Sign up for volunteer opportunities: [lcms-onm.org](https://lcms-onm.org)






The Rev. Andrew Schlund (left) and the Rev. Daniel Conrad, LCMS missionaries to Mexico, take the subway in Mexico City on Jan. 13, 2017.

# FROM FIELD TO FIELD

*Whether in Mexico or New Orleans, the Rev. Andrew Schlund continues to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments to his flock.*

BY ERIK M. LUNSFORD

Schlund, who now serves as pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church, New Orleans, distributes the Sacrament on July 11, 2021.



Schlund preaches  
at St. Paul, New  
Orleans, on  
July 11, 2021.

## OUR LORD FIRST CALLED the Rev.

Andrew Schlund out of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, to serve as pastor of El Buen Pastor (Good Shepherd) Lutheran Church in Mexico City, to reach out to those in need of Christ, and to be a theological educator both in Mexico and in the Dominican Republic as a missionary of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). For five years, he faithfully served the saints in day-to-day parish work and assisted fellow missionary Rev. Daniel Conrad in preparing pastors as undershepherds of Christ's flock while reaching into the community surrounding the church.

The second time God called him in 2020, He needed him in New Orleans.

## *Serving in New Orleans*

St. Paul Lutheran Church in the Marigny area of New Orleans, situated just blocks from the French Quarter, is one of the oldest churches in the LCMS. Founded in 1840, it predates the Missouri Synod and has a remarkable back-story. The church burned several times. An arsonist was responsible for the complete destruction in one of those fires. It suffered tremendous damage from multiple hurricanes. The congregation weathered the Civil War and suffered from epidemics of yellow fever, smallpox and COVID-19. Despite the hardships, the congregation often

found the large sanctuary too small for the number of worshippers. St. Paul joined the Missouri Synod in 1874.

Almost 150 years later, the church still stands in a neighborhood of houses built in the signature architecture styles of New Orleans. "St. Paul Lutheran Church has kept its presence in a city that has the same challenges of any American metropolis," said congregational president Michael Riemer. "Our membership declined drastically after Hurricane Katrina, and attendance was further diminished with the COVID-19 pandemic and the pervasive societal trend that church attendance



Despite the varying nuances from mission field to mission field, Schlund said

the fundamental work is “preaching the Word and administering the Sacraments. **THAT IS THE ESSENTIAL WORK OF THE CHURCH.**”

isn’t as important as many once believed.” Despite the obstacles, there are people in the community who need to hear the Word of God and come to His house.

“Being a missionary has given me a different set of lenses through which to view the community here,” said Schlund. Yet despite the varying nuances from mission field to mission field, Schlund said the fundamental work is “preaching the Word and administering the Sacraments. That is the essential work of the church. And so, all of what we do is in service to that aspect of our mission. That is at the heart of it.”

Schlund isn’t the first missionary called by St. Paul. Fifty years ago, the congregation extended a call to the Rev. Richard Meyer, a missionary to Japan. “[He] accepted that call and served St. Paul from 1971 to 1978 before being elected president of the Southern District,” Riemer said.

### Reaching Out

The culture in New Orleans is different from Mexico City, but Schlund is ready to reach out to new neighbors as he

embarks on the work the Lord has called him to do. “I think being a small church in Mexico City really helped me to recognize the need of the congregation to actually go out there and reach out to the community, not just to really exist as a congregation,” said Schlund. “So that’s really giving me a good idea of looking at different ways to connect with the community, different possibilities of service that we have, different gifts that we possess that we can use to connect to the community and build relationships and bring people in, hopefully to the congregation.”

The congregation is examining ways to expand their outreach by offering hot meals, hosting a health fair and flea market, and beefing up its food pantry — in addition to purposefully reconnecting

with members who drifted away during the pandemic.

“What is preached to us in church isn’t just for us sitting there; we must carry it with us, and we must share it in word and in our actions all the other days of the week,” Riemer added.

Regardless of what form that outreach takes, Schlund continues to preach the Word of God and distribute the Sacraments to the saints, just as St. Paul’s pastor has done every Sunday of the church’s storied history. On other days, Schlund visits with his fellow brothers in the ministry, cares for the sick and dying, and leads Bible study.

There are some challenges to his new role in New Orleans. After speaking and thinking in Spanish for the last few years, Schlund sometimes momentarily has

trouble remembering the English translation of something. But the content — the Word of God — is still the same, even if the language is different. It will just take some time for him to acclimate.

The Lord may see fit to keep Schlund at St. Paul, or He may move him to another stateside parish or a different foreign mission field, just as He does for His called workers around the world. No matter where the workers labor, Schlund urges the brothers and sisters in Christ to pray often for them. In Christ, they are never alone.


Erik M. Lunsford is managing photojournalist for LCMS Communications.



Schlund prays with parishioners before a council meeting at El Buen Pastor Lutheran Church, Mexico City, on Jan. 14, 2017.



Congregation member Daisy Orth greets Schlund following worship on July 11, 2021, at St. Paul, New Orleans.



# TO LIVE IS CHRIST

BY KEVIN ARMBRUST



## MY PRAYER AND HOPE IS THAT


all our congregations are known for and preach the free Gospel of Christ, that they are faithful to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions,” said the Rev. Dr. Juhana Pohjola, the new bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Diocese of Finland (ELMDF). Immediately following his consecration, Pohjola said: “There’s a long tradition that at his consecration a bishop shares his motto. I have chosen my motto from Paul’s letter to the Philippians: ‘For me to live is Christ’ [1:21].”

Participating in the consecration were the Rev. Risto Soramies, bishop of the ELMDF since its inception in 2013; the Rev. Dr. Matti Väisänen, bishop from 2010 to 2013, when the ELMDF was a mission diocese; the

Rev. Hanss Jensions, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia; the Rev. Bengt Ådahl, bishop of the Mission Province in Sweden; the Rev. Thor Henrik With, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Diocese in Norway; and the Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison, president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). Clergy from the International Lutheran Council (ILC), the ELMDF and the LCMS — including the Rev. Dr. Jonathan Shaw, director of LCMS Church Relations; the Rev. James Krikava, associate executive director of the LCMS Office of International Mission and director of the LCMS Eurasia region; and the Rev. Dr. Timothy Quill, general secretary of the ILC — also processed in support of the new bishop.

“We Christians confess Jesus and His redemptive words and deeds as our life and salvation. Corrupt culture calls us to reject this ‘little Word’ in favor of flashy signs and woke wisdom. The consecration of the Rev. Dr. Pohjola as bishop of the ELMDF, the LCMS’ newest sister church, was a witness to that triumphant ‘little Word,’” said Shaw. “How heartening to join with the faithful who boldly confess Christ and His doctrine, despite the liberal Finnish state church having defrocked ELMDF clergy, seized church buildings and brought criminal charges against Bishop Pohjola for publishing a pamphlet on divinely ordered human sexuality. Other confessional Lutheran churches — small by the world’s standards — sent their bishops to participate.



A man with glasses, wearing a black clerical suit with a white collar and a gold cross necklace, is speaking at a wooden podium. He is gesturing with his right hand. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

## THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN MISSION DIOCESE OF FINLAND STANDS FIRM ON THE WORD OF GOD, **DESPITE OPPOSITION AND PERSECUTION.**

... As the Body of Christ, we together receive from the fullness of His grace.”

Gathered under the theme “The door to heaven is open,” the ELMDF held its Diocese Summer Festival on the campus of the Evangelical Folk High School in Loimaa, Finland, from July 30 to Aug. 1, 2021, to study the Scriptures, sing, spend time in fellowship and, most importantly, consecrate their newest bishop.

“This is a turning point for this little church body of ours. For one thing, this is our third bishop, and he is the first one who won’t be a retired pastor,” said the Rev. Harri Houvinen, pastor of Samuel Lutheran Church, Lahti, Finland. “Also, Dr. Pohjola has been the dean of this organization from the very start. He is the public face of it all. He’s one of us, and this is very exciting.”

The ELMDF traces its roots to the Luther Foundation, begun in 1999 to support confessional groups within the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, and it became an independent church body in 2013. Since then, it has grown from one congregation with one pastor to over 40 congregations, 61 pastors and more than 2,000 members. Yet the numbers are not its focus. According to its website, the ELMDF “supports congregations built on a truly Lutheran foundation of faith. In accordance with the mission given to the Church, it will assist in the formation of new congregations ... to invite people to the life-giving connection of Christ. ... Christ bestows Himself and His life in the Word and the Lord’s Supper. Alongside these gifts, a family community is created in which the pastor knows his flock.”



Pastors from Scandinavia and beyond traveled to Loimaa, Finland, for the Aug. 1 consecration of the Rev. Dr. Juhana Pohjola as bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Diocese of Finland. Here, the pastors gather around Pohjola as he prays and gives thanks following the service.

## Confessing During Persecution

The consecration of Pohjola took place amid threats and persecutions from the Finnish government. Pohjola has been charged with inciting hate speech, stemming from his endorsement of a 2004 booklet published by the Luther Foundation, *As Man and Woman He Created Them: Homosexuality and the Challenge to the Christian Concept of Man*, written by Dr. Päivi Räsänen M.P., a longstanding member of the Finnish parliament and a medical doctor.

Räsänen is also facing charges from the government. When asked how people can support her and Pohjola, Räsänen said,

“It is essential at this time to have a lot of people praying.”

The ELMDF’s history is tied to confessing the truth in the face of opposition. The national Lutheran church “had a major inner struggle about the authority of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions,” explained Pohjola. “Unfortunately, we couldn’t continue in the established church. I was defrocked from the ministry with several others.”

But Pohjola and others continued to preach and teach

Christ crucified in accord with the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions. Pohjola said that many people in Finland are looking for the truth and finding it in the ELMDF: “There’s a growing demand to hear the pure Gospel, and although there’s a lot of resistance also in the society, there’s also a need for this eternal work.”

“The national church body is divided at the moment. It has such difficulties that it is important in Finland to have this diocese that confesses the Bible and believes the

Bible,” commented Räsänen. “This church has an important role to confess Jesus and Christianity in Finnish society.”

The ELMDF, like the LCMS, is a member of the International Lutheran Council, a worldwide association of confessional Lutheran church bodies. On June 25, 2021, the Commemoration of the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession, the ILC, along with 48 signatories representing worldwide Lutheran churches, published, “A Protest and Call for Free Religious Speech in Finland: An International Lutheran Condemnation of the Unjust Criminal Prosecution of the Rev. Dr. Pohjola and Dr. Räsänen, and a Call for All

“This church has an important role to confess Jesus and Christianity in Finnish society.”

— Dr. Päivi Räsänen





People of Good Will to Support the Freedom of Religious Expression in Finland.”

“This isn’t just a document in legalese. ... Juhana is a real person, and he is going to stand before a real court. And I want him to know that I’m a real person who is standing with him. And so is [LCMS President Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison] ... and so are all the almost 50 church leaders, and they represent almost 7 million people. ... All of these signatures are real people and real prayers and real love for your church,” said Quill. “The Lord is giving him a chance to speak. And if I know him, they are going to hear the Law and the Gospel, which will save their souls.”

“Rome watches what we do very carefully. They know that we put out this statement. And there is a great deal of support among Roman Catholics — especially American Roman Catholics — and also a very broad and orthodox ecumenical community who is very aware of what we have done,” said Harrison regarding the ILC statement. “The church is broader than the Lutheran church. We are the church catholic gone right. The church is wherever Christ and His Word and Sacraments are.”

### **Forward in God’s Word**

In an address concerning the state of Christianity in Finland, Pohjola noted that the first firefighters who responded to the Chernobyl disaster walked into the situation without protection from the radiation because they were unaware of the danger. Pohjola said that Christians in Finland are in a similar situation and asked those assembled, “Are we going out without the proper gear for this warfare? ... We live in a time when everything is being

talked about as hate speech. This is silencing the truth of God’s Word.” Yet, the real danger is that this results in many not hearing God’s Word and trusting in Christ.

Pohjola encouraged the church to reflect Paul’s atti-

appreciate having a bishop who’s there ... for us,” said the Rev. Dr. Samuli Siikavirta, pastor of St. Mark’s Lutheran Church, Helsinki, Finland. “I personally know that I would not be able to bear the burden of the office and all of its chal-



#### **| WATCH |**

A video of Bishop Juhana Pohjola at [engage.lcms.org/finland-fall-2021](https://engage.lcms.org/finland-fall-2021)



tude expressed in Philippians: “Our calling is to speak the truth in love to proclaim Christ to all people. My attitude is the same as Paul in prison, who said that his imprisonments resulted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Pohjola is “a natural leader for us clergy. We all know him very well — he recruited many of us personally. He’s going to be a very good pastor to us pastors, which really is the bishop’s role. We really

longes if I didn’t have a bishop to turn to, when the going gets tough, who is on my side.”

The ELMDf continues to face challenges from the unique situation in Finland, which includes the national church and the influence of Pietism. One of the manifestations of Pietism in Finland was the denial of the importance of the local congregation and her pastor, as well as the need for the liturgy.

“You can have congregations

... where the pastor knows everyone in the congregation, everyone who comes. ... This is something we have learned and taught, and it is very beneficial,” observed the Rev. Risto Soramies, outgoing ELMDf bishop. “Through much of the history of Finnish Christianity, we thought very little of the liturgy, and we thought that we could live without it. But we cannot.”

Siikavirta explained that the bishop’s comment reflected the situation in the national church, which has large congregations whose members have no relationship with their pastor. To which Soramies replied, “Yes, but those huge numbers aren’t real — they are just on paper.” The ELMDf aims to retain the relationship of pastor to those under his care as they grow.

### **Fellowship in the Word**

The gathering was not focused on persecution or even standing firm on the truth; instead, Christ and His gift of salvation provided the focus of the weekend and consecration. The pastors of the ELMDf and the clergy who came from sister church bodies taught from the Scripture and the Confessions. The assembled group sang hymns and prayed Vespers and Matins. And outside of time in the Word in prayer, families enjoyed games and fellowship together. The fellowship continued through shared meals under a tent and seated around the campus.

The strength of the ELMDf was evident during the gathering. Law and Gospel preaching fed all spiritually, as the Word delivered Jesus Christ crucified and risen. The love for one another in this close-knit church body flowed in fellowship and companionship throughout the weekend. It reflected both the roots of this



**“It’s clear that the church here is growing. They are planting churches and ordaining new clergy. It’s an exciting time.”**

— REV. DR. MATTHEW HARRISON

Finnish diocese and its future, as the people of the ELMDF met under a tent, a gathering similar to the conventicles of their past. Yet, the content and the leadership eschewed pietistic errors and honored both the Office of the Holy Ministry and the biblical teaching of the Word and Sacraments as God’s chosen Means of Grace. Heartfelt singing of hymns surrounded biblical and confessional proclamation of the Word from those called into the ministry of that Word.

### **Full Fellowship**

“You are our newest partner church body in full fellowship,” said Harrison in his address to the members of the ELMDF, with whom the LCMS declared full altar and pulpit fellowship in 2019. “By comparison, the LCMS is large ... but we know that we are a little flock ... and that’s the way it is in the Bible. The flock is always small, but the Lord is always large.” Harrison then explained the certainties that we all have — those found in the Word of God.

Soramies echoed Harrison’s thoughts on being a small church body: “When you almost disappear because you are so small, it is a big challenge for the pastor to stick to the truth and to believe that Jesus actually calls people through His simple Word ... and through our liturgy.”

Since its early days, this diocese has joined the Diocese

of Norway and that of Sweden in the Nordic Communion of Lutheran Dioceses. “This is a great event for us because we love to see this diocese thrive and grow,” said Norwegian Bishop With. “To come in and to take part in this event gives inspiration for further working because we see that our brothers in this diocese are alive and carrying the work of Christ’s church in Scandinavia.”

Following the consecration service, Harrison discussed the relationship between the LCMS and the ELMDF: “It’s a crucial moment for them. ... It’s clear that the church here is growing. They are planting churches and ordaining new clergy. It’s an exciting time. ... We will be in this together. We will listen and learn and help in any way we can.”

In all of this, the ELMDF is not a political organization, but the church, the Body of Christ, sheep listening to the voice of the shepherd. Pohjola echoes the Good Shepherd’s voice, even as he leads this little flock. When asked about his priorities as bishop of the ELMDF, he said, “Preaching the Gospel of Christ and supporting our pastors in their calling and encouraging our congregations. ... This is a difficult time, but we believe it is an opportunity to proclaim the Gospel of Christ.”

Dr. Kevin Armbrust is director of Editorial for LCMS Communications.



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[lcms.org/partnerchurches](https://lcms.org/partnerchurches)





# Synod Launches Set Apart to Serve Initiative



**T**he LCMS has a robust system of church worker formation through our Lutheran schools, Concordia universities and seminaries. We rejoice in the 142,000-plus preschool to high school students currently enrolled in Lutheran schools across the country, the 978 students enrolled in church work programs at our Concordia universities, and the 443 ordination-track students studying at the Synod's two seminaries.

Yet, these numbers have been steadily declining. In the last 14 years, enrollment in M.Div. programs at the seminaries has decreased by 55%, and enrollment in Concordia university church work and pre-seminary programs has declined at similar rates. With an aging pastorate in the LCMS, if these rates held up, the number of LCMS pastors could decline from 6,000 to 3,000 in the next 15 years.

Confident in God's provision and knowing that God uses His church in every age to raise up church workers for the next generation, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod passed a resolution at its 2019 convention to undertake a comprehensive church worker recruitment initiative through the LCMS Office of Pastoral Education.

Pastoral Education has been hard at work on this initiative, now titled *Set Apart to Serve*,

ever since. Initial research surveyed both current church workers and youth about the state of church worker recruitment in the Synod, as well as the key motivations for entering church work. Resources are now being created by subject matter experts, divided into the categories of primary and secondary influencers for three key age groups: baptized infants through sixth grade, seventh and eighth grade, and ninth through 12th grade.

Among the resources developed will be a program to nurture young people on the path to church work; resources to help parents, pastors and other influencers to identify potential future church workers; a library of testimonies from church workers about their journeys to church work and the joys of their vocations; and curriculum resources that catechize about church work vocations. Once completed, these resources will be made available online, accessible by the whole Synod.

Through this initiative, with the partnership of stakeholders across the Synod, Pastoral Education hopes to encourage the formation of future church workers across the Synod, in every congregation, school and home, and the formation of faithful Christians along the way.

Stacey Egger is a staff writer and editor for LCMS Communications.



**Through this initiative,  
Pastoral Education hopes  
to encourage the formation  
of future church workers  
across the Synod, in every  
congregation, school  
and home.**

| LEARN MORE |  
[lcms.org/pastoral](https://lcms.org/pastoral)

BY STACEY EGGER

*From South Carolina to Alaska, deaconesses support their churches or organizations by caring for the physical and spiritual needs of others.*

# The ‘Constant Job’ of *Caring*

BY MEGAN K. MERTZ

“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies — in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ” (1 PETER 4:10–11).

**D**EACONESSES CARE for the physical and spiritual needs of others. This seemingly simple job description encompasses a huge number of tasks. Many deaconesses work in parishes, while others serve in nursing homes, institutions or Recognized Service Organizations. Their day-to-day tasks involve working with women, youth, older adults, those with disabilities or addictions, and many other groups.

“You have to choose because there are so many things you can do. It’s a constant job,” says Deaconess Ellee Mietzner, who serves as a parish deaconess at Zion Lutheran Church, Anchorage, Alaska. “It’s always changing with the people, with

the needs of the community, with the needs of the church, and I get to be there for it all.”

## *In South Carolina*

Some 3,500 miles away in Summerville, S.C., Deaconess Karen Suter also serves as a parish deaconess. One of her favorite parts of the job is visiting shut-ins and other members of Grace Lutheran Church, Summerville, who aren’t able to attend worship.

“When I walk through the door and I can share with them that Jesus is still thinking about them and we’re still thinking about them and we’re still praying for them, it’s a service to that person, but it’s also one of my greatest joys,”

she says. “I love to be able to point them to where Christ is in their different situations.”

Longtime member Earlene Stier, who now lives in an assisted living facility, loves Suter’s visits. “We have really good conversations that sometimes last almost two hours. We just talk about the church and about the Bible, and it’s just wonderful,” Stier says. One time when Stier needed help, she called Suter: “I knew that she would come, and that was a good feeling.”

Suter always knew she wanted to serve in the church, but she didn’t discover deaconess service until her freshman year in college. After doing research for a couple of weeks, she filled out the paperwork to transfer to

Concordia University Chicago, River Forest, Ill., and enrolled in its undergraduate deaconess program. “I knew right away that I had found a way to serve,” she recalls.

Suter has been serving at Grace Lutheran Church since 2017, and her duties are varied. In addition to visitation, she leads a women’s Bible study, organizes events for older adults, creates a weekly YouTube video about each Sunday’s Hymn of the Day, serves on many of the church’s committees, and cares for people’s physical and spiritual needs as opportunities arise.

There’s “a mountain of work” that pastors often do that’s not specific to the Office of the Holy Ministry, says the Rev. Richard Willsea, pastor





Deaconess Ellee Mietzner talks with congregation members following worship at Zion Lutheran Church, Anchorage, Alaska.

of the church. “So, having a deaconess on staff is super helpful because then she can help carry a lot of that load, which allows you to focus a little bit more on your Word and Sacrament ministry. She can help with calls, she can help with teaching, she helps with confirmation, she helps with just having an extra set of hands around. And she ends up getting drafted into a million little things.”

For instance, during the pandemic Suter became the church’s de facto technology department, since she was the youngest person on the staff. Willsea is grateful that she’s willing to take on the tasks like this that are needed to help the church run smoothly.

“Despite his best efforts, Pastor doesn’t have time to wear all of the hats,” Suter says. Instead, she loves her role in supporting both church

members and church staff and filling the unmet needs she encounters.

### *In Alaska*

Ellee Mietzner’s work in Alaska might seem worlds away from what Suter does in South Carolina, yet their service has a lot in common. Just like Suter, Mietzner loves the endless ways she can serve her congregation and her community through her work as a deaconess.

Life in the church is “exciting for the unpredictability of the people and the different jobs and the emergencies that come up or the celebrations.

We’re always here for that,” Ellee says of herself and her husband, the Rev. Kyle Mietzner.

The two of them serve together at Zion Lutheran Church, Anchorage — something they agreed never to do when they met and were married during their graduate studies at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. But working together “is not as scary as you would think,” Ellee now admits.

“The wonderful thing about having Ellee as the deaconess here is that there is a whole other dimension to the work of the ministry that she brings. It’s not that I’m incapable of being the pastor to women,

**“You have to choose because there are so many things you can do. It’s a constant job.”**

— Deaconess Ellee Mietzner



Deaconess Karen Suter and the Rev. Richard Willsea look over hymns together at Grace Lutheran Church, Summerville, S.C.



but ... it's just another dimension," says Kyle. "It does not take away from anything I do. Instead, it sort of multiplies the work here at Zion."

While Kyle focuses on Word and Sacrament ministry, Ellee looks for ways to help people in other areas, whether that's teaching Sunday school, helping to prepare meals for the homeless, assisting with Christian fellowship events the church holds at a local nursing home, collaborating with the local pregnancy resource center, or managing the church's outreach to families with small children. Sometimes she also serves as a substitute teacher

at nearby Anchor Lutheran School. As the mother of three children, ages 6, 9 and 11, Ellee knows that vocation comes first, which is why she currently works part time. But it also gives her a special love for working with children and families.

Ellee recently befriended Shine, a mother from the neighborhood who had just moved to Alaska from the Philippines. Shine visited the church over the summer with her young daughter and has regularly attended worship and Bible study ever since. She was grateful when Ellee invited her to take some of the baby items that church

members have been collecting to donate — especially as she adjusts to life in the United States and prepares to welcome her second child into the world in a few months.

Church member Jahna Pollock notes that Ellee has helped the congregation engage in meaningful opportunities to share Christ's mercy with their neighbors, while also enriching the church's Christian education programs for members of all ages. "I knew very little

about deaconesses before the Mietznrs were called to serve at Zion," she says. "Now I can't imagine NOT having a deaconess."

To women who are considering deaconess service, Ellee says, "People need you. The church needs you. A lot of people don't know what a deaconess is or what they do, but that doesn't mean that you aren't valuable. ... You'll always find some way to help and some way to gather everyone around the Word."



**WATCH** videos of Deaconess Karen Suter and Deaconess Ellee Mietzner at [engage.lcms.org/deaconess-fall-2021](https://engage.lcms.org/deaconess-fall-2021)

**LEARN MORE:** [lcms.org/deaconess](https://lcms.org/deaconess)

Mietzner (right) chats with a fellow mother as they sort through infant and toddler clothing in the fellowship hall at Zion Lutheran Church, Anchorage, Alaska.



The Rev. Kyle Mietzner distributes the Sacrament to his wife.



Suter prays with longtime member Earlene Stier.



Mietzner prepares the altar with the help of her children.





Participants talk together during a July 13 group discussion time at the National Lutheran Youth Workers Conference in Houston.

PHOTOS: LOMS COMMUNICATIONS/ERIK M. LINSFORD

BY KEVIN ARMBRUST



The Rev. Dr. Mark Kiessling, director of LCMS Youth Ministry, speaks at the National Lutheran Youth Workers Conference on July 12.

## Youth workers and youth gathered in Houston in July for a joint **National21** and **YouthLead** conference.

**“The main reason I came is to prepare for the Youth Gathering, since this will be my first one. ... In addition, the main sessions have been excellent, and I’ve learned a lot of helpful things about youth ministry. I’ve been very impressed with how this has been put together,” said the Rev. Mark Lund, associate pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, Algona, Iowa, about his experience at the National Lutheran Youth Workers Conference (National21) in Houston July 11–14. “It has helped me with the logistics and planning ... simply being here in Houston has been helpful ... there’s something about being at the place. ... That, plus everything they have been going over, has been helpful.”**

LCMS Youth Ministry hosts the National Lutheran Youth Workers Conference the year prior to each triennial Youth Gathering in the same city as the Gathering. It aims to educate and provide resources for those who work with youth in their congregation and to familiarize youth leaders with the setting for the Gathering.

“The Gathering is more than the five days of the event. It is a gathering

around God’s Word leading us up to the Gathering ... growing together in Christ. We celebrate the wonderful thing we have in Lutheran doctrine,” said the Rev. Dr. Mark Kiessling, director of LCMS Youth Ministry. “This is more than a youth gathering. It’s about being in the Word of God in the local congregation and in our districts.”

National21 attracted 425 participants — including 62 youth — who came together to learn how best to serve the youth in their care. This included both preparing for the Youth Gathering in 2022 and learning how better to understand and serve this current generation of youth.

### **‘In All Things’**

The Rev. Dr. Peter Nafzger, assistant professor of Practical Theology and director of Student Life at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, led the conference Bible study through video. Nafzger focused on the Youth Gathering theme “In All Things” from Colossians 1:15–20, expanded the study to the whole Book of Colossians, and encouraged everyone to consider the whole story of Scripture. He also highlighted the





importance of story in communication, pointing to God's use of narrative in the Scriptures and the importance of story as each Christian shares God's Word.

Nafzger concluded by noting three important aspects involved with serving the youth in our congregations and those in each community: 1. know His story — the story of everything, the story of God in Christ found in the Scriptures; 2. listen to their story; and 3. proclaim the story of Jesus.

The theme of listening to youth permeated much of the discussion and many of the presentations during the conference. Experts explained the tendencies of Gen Z, a generation marked by their desire to treat all people with dignity, noted for their focus on technology, a generation who both seeks God and eschews religion.

"I honestly don't feel like [Gen Z] is really that different than any generation. ... We don't want to hate. We're not trying to promote hate or judge other people for their sins," observed Kylie Autulio, a member of Trinity Lutheran Church, Burr Ridge, Ill., who was in Houston as part of the YouthLead track. "Even though you do need to tell people that what they're doing is wrong, there's no reason to ridicule someone just because they're sinning. You need to know it's a sin and to understand why it's wrong, but the current generation just doesn't feel the need to put down and like get rid of those people."



## YouthLead

Concurrent with the National Youth Workers Conference, YouthLead (formerly known as Lutheran Youth Fellowship) met for their annual retreat. Sixty-two youth met to grow in their ability to lead other youth and to learn how to live as Lutherans in this world. The executive committee of YouthLead — five youth who were elected and serve a three-year term — arrived early and prepared the event for the other youth. This executive team served as the primary leaders for the four-day event.

"YouthLead is to encourage youth who have been identified by a youth worker or other adult, to come together with other youth to learn about Jesus and God's Word and to take that back to their churches and into their lives," said Isaiah Duport, a member of the YouthLead executive team who attends Peace Lutheran Church in Tustin, Calif. "YouthLead is a community



National21 had tracks for both youth workers and YouthLead participants, who met for their annual retreat in Houston in conjunction with the conference.

that sticks with you, especially when you don't always feel like you have a community at home like this. ... The [adult] leaders who come pour into every kid like they are their own [child]. ... That's really helpful and powerful when you go back home, to know they support you and care for you."

Normally, YouthLead holds its annual retreat in St. Louis in the early spring. Yet, as with nearly everything, COVID-19 necessitated adjustments and flexibility. Since restrictions made their St. Louis meeting impossible, LCMS Youth Ministry moved the retreat to Houston in conjunction with National21.

"There are 60 people in this room who believe what I do," observed Jackson Smith, a member of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Montgomery, Ala., and a YouthLead executive team member. "I come from a small church. There aren't even 60 people there." Smith led a discussion in which he challenged his peers to live out their faith: "How does your walk influence how people see you? What happens if they don't see the fruit of the Spirit in you?"

"YouthLead has offered training for young people in the church for more than 40 years, and it's a great blessing to bring it alongside the National Lutheran Youth Workers Conference. This training helps equip teens to be servant leaders in their congregation and to grow their identity in Christ," said DCE Julianna Shults, program manager for LCMS Youth Ministry. "One of the things that continues to make YouthLead special is that teens are led primarily by other teens. It's always a joy to see God working through young people to reach out with the Gospel to their peers both at the conference and afterwards."





## Healthy congregations also help young people:

5. Deeply understand their baptismal faith;
6. Discover a resilient identity in Christ; and
7. Live out their unique vocation.

“It’s a wonderful opportunity for multiple levels to be involved in the National Youth Workers Conference,” said Randy Bickel, director of family life and youth ministry at St. Martin Lutheran Church, Birch Run, Mich., who is also serving as the district co-ordinator for the Gathering for the LCMS Michigan District. “It was great to get information and also develop relationships with those around you that are sharing the same struggles, the same joys and the same interests; and [also to] be able to brainstorm and share those things to help and support each other and especially with our young people through the church.”

More than the shared information and learned familiarity, National21 showed the church’s deep interest in and love for her youth.



“It was a blessing to be able to be in the same space with youth and adults from across the country. These last months have put major restriction on networking and learning opportunities, and the conference provided help and support for congregations’ ministry. The event was not only a great time to start preparing for the LCMS Youth Gathering in 2022, [but] it also provided time to discuss opportunities, challenges and concerns around ministry to young people and families with what is happening in our communities,” said Kiessling. “God’s Word, reminders of His faithfulness, and God’s gift of faith and hope on display in the lives of the young people who attended brought great refreshment and focus on God’s continued blessings through these difficult past months.”

**CONNECT** with LCMS Youth Ministry at [lcms.org/youth](https://lcms.org/youth) or on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram (@lcmseyouth).

The next **LCMS Youth Gathering will take place July 9–13, 2022, in Houston.** To learn more and download resources, visit the Gathering website, [lcmsgathering.com](https://lcmsgathering.com), or connect on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram (@lcmsgathering).

The next YouthLead training will take place March 17–20, 2022, in St. Louis. **Learn more** about this leadership training for high school students at [lcms.org/youthlead](https://lcms.org/youthlead).

## Helping Congregations Serve Their Youth

Throughout National21, LCMS Youth Ministry emphasized its “7 Practices of Healthy Youth Ministry.” Based on over five years of listening, reading data, conducting research and digging into Scripture, Youth Ministry developed seven keys for healthy congregational youth ministry. **Healthy congregations have:**

1. Warmth, challenge and grace;
2. Supportive adults;
3. Engaged parents; and
4. Opportunities to serve and lead.

# A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT

## FROM THE LCMS PRESIDENT

**H**ERE'S SOME ENCOURAGEMENT from The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's fifth president, Friedrich Pfotenhauer, back when he was president of the Minnesota-Dakota District. It was directed at lonely pastors and teachers in the district's 360 congregations. In those days, pastors averaged three congregations. They traveled great distances by horse and buggy. Today, our pastors and commissioned workers are tempted by a loneliness induced by an antagonistic culture, which lures the minds of their people. There is so much to discourage. These encouraging words from 125 years ago are as fresh today as then. Pastors and commissioned workers, we love you. More importantly, our Lord loves you and your blessed work. God's people, take care of your pastors, teachers and workers.

IN CHRIST,

Pastor Matthew C. Harrison

PRESIDENT, THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD





Now he who is a faithful steward has rich consolation, also under the greatest difficulties. He can be certain that his God is pleased, and that is truly sweeter and more precious than all the glory of this world. God does not regard the glorious gifts and great results of His workers. He only and solely has regard for their faithfulness. He regards faithful preachers and teachers as everything. Christ Himself calls out: “How great a thing it is to be a faithful and wise steward!” [see MATTHEW 24:45]. He allows nothing to happen to them aside from His tenderness and forbearing. If you make a mistake out of weakness, He does not break His staff over you, as indeed brothers in the office here and there do. He consoles you, stands you up, and turns all things for good. While God in the Holy Scriptures speaks terrible words and curses against foolish and unfaithful servants, there is no harsh word spoken against His true servants, even though they have fallen into error.

When Elijah in weakness of faith wanted to set aside the office because he thought that he had accomplished nothing with his year-long preaching, God did not address him with harsh words. He came to him in a “still small voice,” 1 Kings 19:12. He revealed to him for consolation that 7,000 souls still remained in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Faithful stewards may also be consoled that God’s eyes shine down upon them in a friendly and caring way. Precisely our dear traveling preachers, when they have been cast out into the wilderness, should not think that they are lost and forgotten. God keeps track of you. To Him you can also present your need with complete confidence when you think that you are about to succumb to loneliness and physical hardships. The Lord will help according to His wisdom and in a way that appears most appropriate to Him. He says to His faithful steward the same thing he said to Israel [Jacob]: “I have taken your journey to heart,” Deuteronomy 2:7; and He moves him to another place in the vineyard. Or the Lord says to His steward what He once said to Moses when the prophet would happily have gone into the Promised Land: “Enough from you; do not speak to me of this matter again,” Deuteronomy 3:26. But then the Lord either sustained His tired servant or gave him new power, that he mount up as on wings of an eagle, that he rise up and not grow faint, that he walk and not grow weary [ISAIAH 40:31].

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