The narrative of the Ascension of Christ tells us a lot about what the disciples were thinking. “So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:6–8).

The men who were concerned about the kingdom of Israel are the same people who, with the preaching of the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit, turned the world upside down. “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also” (Acts 17:6).

From 1877 to 2019, 142 years, the power of the Gospel in the lives of God’s people has turned the world upside down among African-American Lutherans. We will never know the full extent of the impact on the lives of blacks and black communities the LCMS has impacted.

We see this in the lives of the individuals in this issue of Timeline.

➢ A young Lutheran pastor who saw firsthand the awful consequences of segregation at his first call to Holy Cross Lutheran in Camden, Ala., where a horn sounded every Saturday at dusk telling blacks to get out of town, went on to lead churches and schools in Montgomery and Chicago, teach in the seminary and universities and serve in civil rights movements to bring justice and freedom to African-Americans in his mercy works — and through His Word;

➢ A 15-year-old Lutheran student at Alabama Lutheran Academy in Selma, in 1965 marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and whose grandfather Walter Hill started Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church and School in Tait’s Place. Today her work is lauded in National Geographic while she serves and sings at Trinity Lutheran and is active with LWML;

➢ Young men and women today hearing the Good News of the Gospel and sharing their faith through High Impact Ministries in Hot Springs, Ark. and preparing to attend the LCMS National Youth Gathering this summer.

The full impact of our ministry is only known by God. What will the future hold for the LCMS in serving ethnic communities as we show Witness, Mercy, Life Together* in Christ for the Church and the world?

Only God knows, but we know that God calls us to carry out the work of the Gospel with witness, mercy and life together through the Church, Christ’s bride, you and me.
Just like the shape of his beloved drums, Harold Ray Brown’s life has come full circle. A professional musician, Brown has returned to his home — southern California — and his childhood church, First Lutheran, now called The Gathering, as music teacher, church musician and faith-sharing friend of a diverse community.

At 72, Brown, a founding member of the 1970s funk band WAR which won several gold and platinum awards, teaches drumming to local youth, plays music during worship and walks through the neighborhood of this Long Beach community, sharing his “good vibes” on faith.

“Harold is a gift to our church and our community,” said Pastor Kyle Blake, who was called to the 114-year-old Lutheran church in 2015 and is now planting a new Lutheran church, The Gathering, to better reach the multiethnic community. “His passion for Jesus and people is infectious. He is always encouraging the people around him; he’s even called me up in the middle of the day just to tell me he loves me, and he is always offering to pray for people.

“I’d say his ‘official’ title is Missionary to the City. Though it’s not on any business card, it certainly describes his life.”

Brown was a 10-year-old student at First Lutheran School when five minutes changed his life. Principal Alvin J. Hahn brought instruments into the school gym.
one morning. “The snare drum was sitting right in front of the stage,” Brown said. “He handed me the drumsticks and gave me a 5-minute lesson on how to hold the drumsticks and how to play a quarter note.

“Just five minutes,” he said, his voice choking. “Who knew it would lead to a band called WAR and playing with Jimi Hendrix, Bob Marley and Jim Morrison.” Formed in 1969, WAR was a musical crossover band which fused elements of rock, funk, jazz, Latin, rhythm and blues and reggae. Their album *The World is a Ghetto* was the bestselling album of 1973.

Brown left the band in the 1980s, got a college degree in computer science and landed in New Orleans, where he formed a new band, Low Rider, and gave tours of the city. He also worked with the Lutheran church through LINC, where he also taught youth, inspiring them to work hard toward realizing their dreams. “It is far greater to have your name written on young people’s hearts than to have it written in stone,” he said.

A few years after Katrina cut through the city, Brown felt a tug back home, to California and to family. One weekend while visiting the Lutheran church at Long Beach, the pastor came up to him after the service and handed him a book: *The 100th Anniversary of First Lutheran Church.*

“When I got to page 18, I see my parents’ names: Clyde R Brown Sr., wife Icelo Carter Brown and 5 boys and 1 girl. We were the first black family to join and attend First Lutheran Church in Long Beach [where Brown was baptized and confirmed]. All six of us attended Sunday school. I was the acolyte at the dedication of the new church building in 1959. It brought tears to my eyes.”

He felt the need to return, but housing is expensive and hard to come by. The first place he looked, an apartment on the 5th floor of a local building, was ready to rent. “Looking out the window, I saw the cross that stands over First Lutheran where I got that five minutes that set the course for me. And I thought: ‘Give God praise — I am HOME!’”

IN MY LIVING ROOM AS A CHILD, MY PARENTS HAD A PLAQUE ON THE WALL WHICH SAID, ‘ORA AND LABORA’ — PRAY AND WORK. THEY TRIED TO INSTILL IN ALL OF US CHILDREN THAT WE WERE TO WORK AS THOUGH EVERYTHING DEPENDED ON US AND TO PRAY AS THOUGH EVERYTHING DEPENDED ON GOD. THAT IS A WINNING COMBINATION.

THE ‘CURTAIN CALL,’ CIVIL RIGHTS FROM ALABAMA TO CHICAGO
A LUTHERAN PASTOR REFLECTS

When Rev. Dr. William Griffin and his family wanted new draperies for their home in Montgomery, Ala., where he served as pastor at Grace Lutheran Church, they called a highly recommended seamstress: Rosa Parks.

Not much later, they awoke to phone call: their quiet, efficient seamstress had refused to give up her seat to a white man and had been arrested. A local black pastor, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., was calling for a bus boycott, and local pastors were asked to announce the plan. Because Mrs. Parks knew he was a pastor from time spent at his home making curtains, Rev. Griffin got one of those history-making calls.

As Rev. Griffin celebrates his 90th birthday on March 24, the Church recognizes the faithful work of a third-generation pastor who was on the front lines of key events in the nation’s history, from segregation and sharecropping in the Deep South, through civil rights and seeking mercy for the poor in Montgomery and Chicago. Professor, theologian, community leader, father to four and pastor to hundreds, Dr. Griffin is one of our honored wise men of the Church.

Griffin’s family was there at the birth of Lutheran outreach to blacks in the 1870s. His grandmother Margaret Steward Crowell became a member of Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church in Kannapolis, N.C., in the 1890s. His parents, Willie and Bessie Griffin, also attended Mt. Calvary. Griffin was born in Kannapolis, N.C., the third of 14 children. There was no slacking in their household, and church was always attended.

“In my living room as a child, my parents had a plaque on the wall which said, “Ora and Labora” — pray and work. They tried to instill in all of us children that we were to work as though everything depended on us and to pray as though everything depended on God. That is a winning combination,” said the pastor who now lives in New Orleans.

Griffin attended Immanuel Lutheran College and Seminary in Greensboro, N.C., graduating in 1951. His first call was to the Deep South in rural Alabama, to churches begun through the ministry of Rosa J. Young: Holy Cross, Camden; Our Savior, Possum Bend and Redeemer, Longmile. He preached at all three churches every Sunday and, with Rev. Richard Dickerson, recorded sermons for a radio station in Monroeville.

Segregation and Jim Crow laws ruled the small town in the Deep South, where the whistle still blew on Saturday night before dark telling blacks who had come to town to shop to get out of town quick. One parishioner, who was a sharecropper cheated by the landowner on his cotton crop, had to leave town fearing for his life after challenging him.

His congregation, although not rich in money and not treated fairly by the segregated South, was deeply merciful and compassionate. “That’s where I learned how to be a pastor,” he said. Generous members kept their table and pantry filled with good food. He recalled a parishioner who had two hogs — one for his family and one for the church. “They didn’t have much, but whatever they had, they shared.”

In 1952 he took a call to Trinity, Selma, where Rosa Young was a member and became...
godmother to his son, Marvin. In 1954, the young family moved to Montgomery, where he started Grace Lutheran Church, located 2 blocks from Dexter Avenue Baptist Church … where a young preacher, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., filled the pulpit.

“I had a 1954 Chevrolet and gave workers rides during the bus boycott,” he said. (The Montgomery Bus Boycott lasted from December 5, 1955 to December 20, 1956.) “But I participated in the bus boycott with a guilty conscience. We had been taught at Immanuel the importance of the separation of church and state. Church is not to become involved in social issues, but to preach the Gospel. The “social Gospel” movement — we were to stay out of that,” he said.

When he got a call to Christ the King Lutheran Church, Chicago, in 1956, he was ready to leave the troubled South behind. But there were troubles up north as well: grinding poverty, damaging discrimination, slumlords and poor schools.

Awakening to the needs of his people and seeking to bring an end to second-citizen status, Pastor Griffin extended his ministry to work in the community, alongside Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rev. Jesse Jackson, Dr. Ralph Abernathy and Stokely Carmichael as organizing President of the Kenwood–Oakland Community Organization.

After Dr. King was murdered and riots broke out, Dr. Griffin and other black Lutheran pastors met to discuss ways to serve the black community and to help white brothers in the church better respond to the needs of their African-American neighbors. The result was what is now called the Black Clergy Caucus, which focuses on building up the church through the Gospel and outreach ministry in diverse communities. At the same time, he continued his education, getting a master’s from Concordia University Chicago, River Forest, Ill., and a doctorate from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. He taught on both faculties and served at two more Chicago churches on Chicago’s South Side before “retiring” in 1983.

But the curtain call didn’t last. Pastor Griffin continued serving in various capacities for another 15 years, with Lutheran churches, district offices and agencies: as a staff person for the LCMS Northern Illinois District as a Mission Facilitator and director of Anti-Racism project; as interim pastor for Our Savior Lutheran Church in Orlando, Fla.; as chaplain assistant to the dean and religion instructor at Luther High School South in Chicago; as area representative for Wheat Ridge Ministries and as Vacancy Pastor for Zion Lutheran Church in Chicago. In 2009, Rev. Griffin really retired to take care of his wife, Ella Mae, who died in February 2015.

Griffin’s children carry on the Lutheran tradition: his son Marvin is the pastor at St. Philip Lutheran, Detroit; his daughter, Marie, runs a nonprofit to help the poor in “Pensiontown” New Orleans and is married to Rev. Collis Parham, pastor of Epiphany Lutheran Church. His son Mark, who died of a brain tumor in 2010, had served as pastor of Berea Lutheran, Detroit.

Despite the struggles of the past and the questions about the future, Dr. Griffin stands strong and sure in his faith. “Our roots and our future are in Him, the Holy Triune God, who created us in His own image when we were lost; He redeemed us with His innocent suffering and death and by rising again on Easter morning,” he said. “And by His Holy Spirit, He sanctified us in Him; our past is blessed and our future is secure. In the words of the hymn, “O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come.”
VOTING RIGHTS IN ALABAMA, CIRCA 1867 AND 1965

In the summer of 1867, Battle Scott, 42, and Nathan Hill, 46, both African-Americans living in rural Alabama, did something they had never done before: They went to the county courthouse, took an oath of loyalty and registered to vote. Scott registered on June 28 in Wilcox County and Hill registered on July 22 in Marengo County.

Hill and Scott were fulfilling the mandate of the Reconstruction Act of 1867, which required all men age 21 and older to take a loyalty oath and register to vote to “provide for a more efficient government of the rebel states and to facilitate restoration.”

We don’t know who they voted for, but hopefully in 1869 they voted for President Ulysses S. Grant, who worked hard to keep Reconstruction alive. But it didn’t last. After Reconstruction ended in 1877, blacks were under pressure not to vote, and by 1901 the Alabama state legislature passed a new constitution that disfranchised over 97 percent of black voters.

Nearly 100 years later, in January 1965, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Civil Rights movement came to Selma, Ala., to seek the vote for African-Americans. Dozens of local Selma youth joined Dr. King in the march to restore voting rights. One of those teenagers was Dianne Howard Harris, Battle Scott and Nathan Hill’s great-great-granddaughter.

Harris, 15, was a student at Alabama Lutheran Academy when she and her brother, Isaac, walked from campus two miles to Brown Chapel AME singing “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around” to attend a mass meeting.

With their mother’s approval, they attended meetings and marched for voting rights, inspired by Dr. King’s Christ-centered message of the worth and value of every person, regardless of race. They were arrested twice, fingerprinted and photographed; after their first arrest, they were bused to “Camp Selma,” a state-run prison camp east of town, and after the second arrest, they spent a night at the Old National Guard Armory, where Harris was shocked with an electric cattle prod.

Harris is a third-generation Lutheran: her grandfather, Mr. Walter Hill, Sr. (Nathan Hill’s grandson) had been taught by Rosa Young and, with her help, started Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church and School in Tait’s Place (Wilcox County), which had been one of the largest plantations in the county.

Today, Harris, a member of Trinity Lutheran and the LWML in Selma, encourages young people to register to vote and recalls that her mother, Mollie Hill Howard, never missed an election, even when she could barely walk. Every March, Harris joins the foot soldiers of the movement to reminisce about the changes their hard work won. She also offers civil rights tours of Selma, and her work was profiled in the National Geographic Traveler, Feb.–March 2019.

Harris felt a sense of pride and joy when she learned that she comes from a family that knew the importance of the vote. “Seeing my great-great-grandfathers’ names on the voting roll of 1867 was a great joy and affirmation that voting rights is in my blood!”

Families with Alabama roots can see if their relatives registered to vote in 1867: archives.alabama.gov/voterreg/search.cfm
REV. AMOS GRAY has a heart for young people, especially those who might wear the label “at-risk.” With extensive experience in youth ministry, he has stepped out in faith to establish a new ministry to reach teens in schools and in churches fueled by Christ’s transforming love.

Rev. Gray established High Impact Ministries, H.I.M., last June to embrace, equip and empower teens living in cities across America, based on programs working in his urban community of Hot Springs, Ark. After serving for nine years as youth minister at First Lutheran, Hot Springs, Rev. Gray formed the non-profit faith-based organization to extend ministry to more people and places, providing a safe and caring environment and promoting personal, spiritual, academic and social growth for young men and women, ages 11 to 18. The ministry is designed to meet the needs of teens who have been identified at-risk by their school or community leaders.

H.I.M. also walks alongside urban churches, providing insight, inspiration and intentional ministry options for working with youth in church and in the community. Rev. Gray has led workshops in Detroit, Omaha and other cities, showing congregations how to develop an effective intentional 21st century youth ministry; understanding the needs and desires of today’s youth is the cornerstone of sustaining a strong and effective youth ministry in the church.

H.I.M. also offers school-based and after-school mentoring programs focusing on creating healthy environments for learning by partnering with schools to promote academic and life success for all students. Using Choosing the Best and Real Essentials curriculum, H.I.M. educates students on character development, making healthy choices and abstinence education. Programs also offer mentors to students in grades 5–12 to build academic, relationship and leadership skills.

“One of our young adult leaders, Krisstasha, said she feels like the ‘prodigal’ daughter,” Rev. Gray said. “Krisstasha grew up in a Christian home and went to church regularly. But she lost interest in church when one of her brothers was incarcerated. Now she has truly committed to growing in her faith and speaks often with her peers about her new walk with the Lord.”

“At the core of H.I.M. is the power of Jesus Christ to reach, connect, equip and empower young men and women to be the moral and spiritual leaders God intended them to be,” he said.

To learn more about H.I.M. go to: highimpactinc.org
Join sisters and brothers in Christ in praising the Lord and proclaiming Him among all nations by attending the 2019 LWML Convention in Mobile, Ala., June 20–23, 2019, with the theme, “In Praise to the Lord!”.

The 38th Biennial LWML Convention is hosted by LWML Gulf States, Florida-Georgia, Gulf States and Louisiana-Mississippi Districts under the Scripture verse: Sing to the Lord, all the earth! Tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations (1 CHRON. 16:23–24A).

Each convention attendee will:
- Sing and Rejoice in Celebration of His Word.
- Tell of His Salvation for All.
- Declare His Glory Among the Nations.
- Go Forth in His Joy!

Come early and stay afterwards to enjoy many exciting tours that have been planned just for LWML attendees, including a cruise post-convention from Mobile to Costa Maya and Cozumel.

Among the Featured Speakers Will Be:

- **Worship Leader**
  Rev. Dr. Ulmer Marshall
  Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church and Bethel Lutheran Church, Mobile, Ala.

- **Luncheon Speaker**
  Rev. Dr. Roosevelt Gray, Jr.
  Director, LCMS Black Ministry

- **Song Leader**
  Rev. Dr. Dien Ashley Taylor
  Redeemer Evangelical Lutheran Church, Bronx, N.Y.

- **Mites in Action Speaker**
  Rev. Gregory Manning
  Broadmoor Community Church, New Orleans
  Mission Developer

The convention will feature a unique “Mission in Motion” Pledge Walk Saturday at Cooper Riverside Park along the Mobile River led by the Excelsior Band of Mobile, a five-piece marching brass band that has been marching the streets of Mobile for over 100 years. A $12 fee includes a special Mission in Motion T-shirt, yellow-gold with purple imprint. It’s a great chance to exercise outdoors and experience wonderful music and fellowship while witnessing to the Mobile community and raising funds for LWML missions.

There will also be servant events, a blood drive and the opportunity to bring materials to support missions locally and worldwide.

**EARLY REGISTRATION (by March 14) is $175. Discounted convention registration began Feb. 1.**

**REGISTRATION after March 14 is $195. Late registration (after May 9 and onsite) is $220.**

To register for and learn more about this event, visit LWML.org.
It’s time to prepare to attend the LCMS Youth Gathering this summer, July 11–15, in Minneapolis under the banner "Real. Present. God." Held every three years since 1980, the Gathering provides thousands of youth and adults the opportunity to come together as a community of God’s people to learn more about Jesus Christ, the Christian faith and their Lutheran identity.

The Gathering, for youth ages 14 to 19 (older youth can apply to serve as volunteers), proclaims the Lordship of Jesus Christ and God’s saving grace to His people through Christ. In this setting, young people grow in their personal relationship with God and grow in their fellowship of Word and Sacrament in Christ’s Church.

Registration opened last fall at $365 per person. After March 1, participants will continue to be admitted to the Gathering on a space available basis for the late registration fee of $400.

To register for and learn more about this event, visit lcmsgathering.com.