

BY THE WORD

SUMMER/FALL 2026

LCMC IN INDIA

A growing movement of faith,
partnership, and opportunity

ANNUAL GATHERING

How we're working to strengthen our
network of church leaders

DISTRICTS & FELLOWSHIPS

How investing in one another is shaping
the future of our association

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By the Word:

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COVER PHOTO: A young girl waves hello from southern India, showing off the beautiful henna art drawn on her hand. Photo by Scott Licht.





EDITOR'S LETTER

There's something special about spending time outdoors with my dogs. Whether we're heading out on some kind of adventure in the woods, exploring a lake or river on my paddleboard, going for a run, or simply hanging out in the backyard, having fun outside together is something that I make time to do regularly.

But behind all the Instagram worthy moments and the treasured memories we share lies a hidden truth: enjoying freedom in a sustainable way takes effort. From regular socialization and obedience training sessions, to building endurance through workouts, to careful planning and preparation, there is a lot that goes into making sure each adventure is a safe and enjoyable experience for everyone. Taking the time to train together not only helps improve their confidence, it strengthens the bond we share, extends a courtesy to others (nobody wants a random 150-pound Great Pyrenees barreling down the trail at them), and ultimately, makes it possible to live life to the fullest. It takes work, but it is important

work that gives us the freedom to explore new places and create lasting memories.

As I reflected on this issue of *By the Word* and the theme of our upcoming Annual Gathering & Convention, *Unleashed*, I couldn't help but think about the look of pure happiness my dogs get when they are in their element. It is these moments of joy and freedom that I dream of whenever I'm walking through challenging times.

In this issue, you'll read about our upcoming Annual Gathering & Convention and the exciting opportunities it offers for renewed vision, leadership development, and building connections with the greater LCMC community. You'll learn about how districts and fellowships are working to help build a stronger network across the association, both in the U.S. and internationally, because none of us were meant to walk this journey alone. And finally, you'll learn about the importance of caring for church leaders and how it can help facilitate a healthier, more encouraging church community for everyone.



My hope is that this issue encourages you to keep walking in faith—unleashed—with courage, compassion, curiosity, and of course, a sense of adventure.

Kristy Thomas

Kristy Thomas
Editor-in-Chief

NEW & NOTEWORTHY



ICYMI- Mental Health Awareness Month

Struggling with a mental health condition can make even the simplest tasks feel overwhelming. Sometimes, when people reach out for help or to confide in a loved one about their struggles, their concerns are minimized or dismissed, or they are met with judgment or misunderstanding. It can be difficult to navigate our own mental health issues, and even more of a challenge to help someone else who might be dealing with something we don't understand.

So how can we, as the church, learn how to take better care of ourselves and others during times of suffering? In our May e-newsletter, we addressed the topic of mental health and stigma in the church and offered a list of resources for education, support, and treatment. If you or someone you know is in need of mental health support, this information is available on our blog at www.lcmc.net/blog/summaries.

31
Jul

Annual Gathering Early Bird Deadline
Learn more and register on our website at www.lcmc.net/annual-gathering.

31
Aug

Church Planting Grant Deadline
For more information and an application, go to www.lcmc.net/church-planting-grant.



Unleash Your Creativity: 2026 Photo Contest

Where is God's work being unleashed in your congregation and community? From worship, fellowship, and celebrations to service projects, education, and everyday moments of faith in action, we want to see how God's work is being unleashed in your congregation and throughout your community!

Our annual photo contest offers LCMC congregations a chance to share their work and ministry with churches and leaders throughout the association. Selected photos and stories will be featured in upcoming LCMC newsletters as a way to encourage and inspire others in their ministry and to showcase the life, work, and talents of the local church through a creative lens.

Churches are welcome to submit multiple entries that reflect different aspects of congregational life, ministry, service, and celebration. Photos should be clear, high quality, and accompanied by accurate information identifying the event or activity pictured. Detailed captions are an important part of each entry, helping readers understand the people, places, and stories behind each image.

The photo contest is online only and deadline to enter is Monday, November 2. Please visit our blog for more information and to download the entry form.

Annual Gathering Registration is Open

Registration is open for our 26th Annual Gathering & Convention, and now through July 31, participants can register for the event at a discounted rate.

This year's highlights include speakers, worship, breakout sessions, exhibitors, fellowship meet-ups, and a service project.

It all takes place October 4-7, 2026 at Lutheran Church of Hope in West Des Moines, IA, and the deadline to register is September 10. For more information and to register online, visit our website at www.lcmc.net/annual-gathering.

How to Activate Your Voya 403(b) Account

LCMC's 403(b) plan has moved from OneAmerica to Voya. To access your account, you must login and register your account with Voya at www.lcmc403b.com. Click on "Register Now", enter the information requested, then click "Continue". You will be sent a PIN to the cell phone number on file with your account. Create a User ID and Password.

If you have issues with the registration, please contact the Voya participant service center at 1-800-584-6001. The LCMC Plan number is 963003.

10
Sep

Annual Gathering Registration Deadline

Learn more and register on our website at www.lcmc.net/annual-gathering.

2
Nov

2026 Photo Contest Deadline

Learn more and enter at www.lcmc.net/photo-contest.



Why I Go Through the Hassle of Attending the LCMC Annual Gathering

BY STEVE TURNBULL, LCMC BOARD OF TRUSTEES CHAIR

I like when people tell me the truth up front. So here we go: I am writing this article for two kinds of people with two goals in mind. If you don't usually attend the LCMC Annual Gathering, I want to give you a reason to attend. If you're already sold on the value, I want to help you convince someone else to join you.

Here's the first reason I participate in the Annual Gathering: relationships. The people we spend time with shape who we are. *We shapes me.* They encourage and strengthen us. Maybe you want to come and (re)connect with friends you haven't talked to in a long time. But I also attend to meet new people. To start some new connections. New people teach me new things and encourage

me in new ways, and hopefully I can be a gift somehow to them too. Come to the Gathering and build the sinews that connect the Body and make us all stronger.

Here's the second reason: Equipping. Relevant learning. I want to pick up some ideas, insights, or skills and go back home to life and ministry a little better equipped than when I came. To that end, even though I LOVE our lineup of speakers this year, and I would attend just to listen and learn from them, I am going to focus here on our breakout sessions.

We worked really hard to develop an engaging lineup of breakout sessions, including some focused multi-session tracks. You don't have to stay on one track. You can choose

whatever interests you in every session. Here are some ideas:

- ▶ Have you ever worked with a church council, or think you might? There's a track of sessions led by clergy and lay people focused on healthy and fruitful work in council leadership.
- ▶ Does youth ministry interest you? Check out the track with sessions on youth pastoral care, digital discipleship, family ministry, volunteer development, and even the callings that begin in youth ministry and might point elsewhere.
- ▶ What about discerning a call to ministry?
- ▶ Or a theology of freedom that empowers the church?

- ▶ Or what about the ways that we worship together?

There are lots of questions we all ask in different seasons of ministry. And we've put together resources from across our association to help us ask well and explore wise answers together.

I think the LCMC Annual Gathering will give you an upgrade. I think it will connect you to others and equip you with relevant learning. And that matters. But even if that doesn't happen every year, I also attend because not everything is about me, or even about my congregation. I go because it's an act of commitment to the larger body, and I hope and pray for the opportunity to build up the body, as each part does its work in love. ■

Trustees Review LCMC 403(b) Plan, Adopt Fiscal Year Change for 2026

BY CINDY GLESSNER, LCMC BOARD OF TRUSTEES TREASURER

One of the benefits available to congregations in our association is a 403(b) plan offered through Voya and monitored by a member of our LCMC staff.

You might not realize it, but the LCMC plan “looks” like it is sponsored by a single employer, but it is, in fact, sponsored by as many congregations as participate. That means that instead of a single payroll making contributions each contribution period, there are LOTS of payrolls making contributions. Sharon MacFadyen has to post and manage each of these contributions, as well as the paperwork for joining the plan, adding a beneficiary, taking a loan (and

paying it back), retiring and receiving distributions, and answering all of your questions. It’s very labor intensive and we are proud to serve you in this way!

We do a review of the plan twice a year to make sure expenses are well controlled, investment options are appropriate and performing well, and that our plan is comparable to others of similar types. If investment options are performing poorly, we look for others and change the options to serve you better.

We had this review in February and, while the transition to Voya has had its ups and downs, the review was positive and the plan has good participation by

association member congregations.

We also had a big improvement in getting beneficiaries on all accounts. Remember, if you do not have a beneficiary listed in the system, getting the funds to your loved one(s) will not occur without a struggle. If you haven’t already done that, do it now!

The last item I want to remind you of when you evaluate the LCMC plan compared to other plans is the ability to continue the housing allowance tax break after you retire. If you move your funds to another dissimilar type of plan, you lose that benefit. Be sure to consult with Sharon before moving

money as suggested by an advisor who does not understand this benefit!

Finally, we have always run our financials on a calendar year. We now find it more workable to change to a fiscal year that more closely aligns with the Gathering and provides more timely information on the financial reports and budget. Starting in 2026, we have adopted a fiscal year beginning September 1 and running through August 31. Financial reports and budget will cover this period and will be a scant 30 days old when published at the Annual Gathering. The 2025 budget approved last year will run through August on a prorated basis. ■

Trustees Prepare for Annual Gathering, Review Strategic Plan Progress

BY ANNA TUCKER, LCMC BOARD OF TRUSTEES SECRETARY

The Board of Trustees met February 25-27, 2026 in Bloomington, MN. At this meeting the Board of Trustees welcomed seven churches and denied one group that does not yet meet the definition of a church. They also reviewed the interview process for incoming congregations and decided to train district and fellowship leaders to assist. This training will take place at the August

2026 meeting.

The Trustees received and reviewed the financial reports and voted to change the fiscal year from a calendar year to September 1 - August 31. Information about this change will be presented at the 2026 Annual Gathering.

The Board continued planning the 2026 Annual Gathering, deciding upon breakout sessions, speakers, meet and

greet, and the schedule. They also decided upon a location for the 2027 Annual Gathering and agreed to accept a matching gift towards bringing international churches to the Annual Gathering in 2029.

The Trustees reviewed the work happening in each of the focus areas of the strategic plan and in districts and fellowships. This included a discussion of the work the Global Mission Fel-

lowship is doing to assist in the formation of districts around the world and approving the inclusion of resources from the Church Planting Fellowship on the LCMC website.

The Board reappointed Wendy Poch as chair of the Ministry Board and Andrew Potratz as vice chair. The Trustees met with the Ministry Board and received updates on their work.

(Continued on Next Page)

The Board discussed record keeping and the various lists that are on the website. Julie reported on the continuing work on a vetting process for ministry partners.

The Board of Trustees also met May 5-8, 2026 in Bloomington, MN. During this meeting, the Trustees affirmed two new congregations in the United States and one in Cuba. They

also received the South America District as a district of LCMC. The Trustees reviewed the status of preparation for the 2026 Annual Gathering and worked on planning the 2027 Annual Gathering. They agreed on Romans 12:3-13 as the theme passage and the focus of a theme based on the core value of “accountable to one another.”

The Board received and

reviewed the financial reports. They also heard about the transition from One America to Voya as the administrator of the 403(b) and the challenges associated with that transition.

The Board reviewed the areas of the strategic plan, receiving reports from staff members overseeing those areas. They approved the financial expenditure for a video project for by

the team working on the clergy shortage.

The Board reappointed Ed Thomas to a second term on the Ministry Board. The Trustees met with the Ministry Board and received updates on their work. They affirmed the Ministry Board’s work on the inquiry process and in planning a national LeaderCare retreat. ■

How Did I Get Here?

BY ANDREW POTRATZ, LCMC MINISTRY BOARD VICE CHAIR

How did I get here? I ask myself that frequently in this now-24-year journey in ministry. I’ll attempt an answer.

My vocational ministry journey started at Riverside Lutheran Bible Camp. A few years prior, I spent a lot of time hanging out at church with some Christ-centered youth leaders. These relationships were timely for my life as I searched for purpose and meaning. I found encouragement, correction, and prayer in the offices of my youth leaders—and I am not exaggerating when I say that God used them to keep me out of far darker paths in life.

Through their example and planting of seeds in me, I made

my way to serving on multiple summer staffs at Riverside. Christ-centered peers and leaders left their impression on me as we lived almost every aspect of our lives together at 12-week intervals each summer. Some of my best friends today came from camp, and my ministry journey eventually led me back to full-time staff at Riverside.

After a few years, one of my camp supervisors saw some gifts in me that might benefit congregational life. Through his friendship and planting of seeds, God led me to apply for and begin the seminary journey. My enrollment process at The Master’s Institute was deep, relational, and valuable. For the first time in my life, I clearly heard

the “external call” articulated to me in a prayerful and encouraging manner. I cannot understate the value of hearing the words, “we believe God is calling you here.” It means so much when you know that others are intentionally and fervently praying for you.

Finally, a couple of years into seminary, through more intentional mentorship and encouragement, it became clear that God might be asking me to serve as a pastor. I took my first call in northern Kentucky as I finished school, and in 2018 was called back to Iowa—just two miles from the camp where Jesus began laying this foundation in me.

What is the common thread?

It’s simple, really. Relationships. People. Christ-following people who prayed with me, encouraged me, and saw gifts in me. And they said something!

As we’ve read and heard often before in LCMC circles, our next pastors, leaders, movers, and longsufferers are likely already with us. They are in our churches and at the Lord’s Table with us. And if they are not today, they will be soon.

Who is praying with them? Who is encouraging them? Who is noticing and calling out their gifts? As it has been since the first century, so it is for us today. Let us ask the Lord of the Harvest to grow in us the capacity to pray for, encourage, and develop gifts in others. ■



ANNUAL GATHERING OFFERINGS TO BRING LCMC TOGETHER FOR 2029 GATHERING

To help more congregations outside the U.S. have the ability to participate in the life and fellowship of LCMC, the offerings collected at our Annual Gatherings will be set aside in an effort to help bring as many of our international members as possible to the 2029 Annual Gathering & Convention. We’ve also received a \$10,000 matching pledge in support of this goal. If you are interested in contributing to this cause, but aren’t able to attend the event, you may still make a donation online or by mailing a check to the LCMC office. Be sure to indicate that your donation is for “Annual Gathering Offering” by selecting it from the dropdown list of designation options on our website, or by writing it on the memo line of your check.

YOUR PASTOR NEEDS YOU

October is Pastor Appreciation Month—here's why it matters, and what you can do to show your support.
By Christian Huntley.

Your pastor loves your church and wants what's best for it. She faithfully prepares messages, visits the sick, and teaches confirmation. She faithfully prays for you. She probably works more hours than you know, and, likely, did not use all the vacation or education time her benefits allotted.

My guess is that you hear the same things I do—pastors are stressed, burned out, and thinking about leaving ministry. Is that your pastor? I'm not sure, but I do know there is something you can do, right now, whether it is true of your pastor or not. You can begin creating a culture of care and appreciation today.

make a difference. As co-laborers in the leadership of your congregation, you are uniquely positioned to create a culture of appreciation and care for your pastor. In the face of news about burnout, low seminary rates, and pastoral misconduct, we have the tools available to change the narrative in our churches.

This isn't just a church idea. Ministries, non-profits, and the business world are seeing the benefits of healthy leaders too. ECFA (Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability) recently announced a requirement in its standards that "every organization's board and senior leader shall work together to de-

"My guess is that you hear the same things I do—pastors are stressed, burned out, and thinking about leaving ministry. Is that your pastor? I'm not sure, but I do know there is something you can do, right now, whether it is true of your pastor or not."

Barna, a church research group, recently reported, "Pastors who experience stronger relational support are significantly less likely to consider leaving ministry. Retention, in other words, is not simply about personal resilience. It is shaped by culture, systems, and shared responsibility within the church."

Did you catch that? You can

velop a care plan for the senior leader." To remain accredited, an organization must care for the leader's well-being along with their performance.

To that end, LCMC LeaderCare exists to connect, care for, and equip leaders so they are replenished, refreshed, and recharged for the work of the gospel God has entrusted to them.



Hopefully by now you have either already created a list in your head of steps to take. If not, here are a few ideas you can implement right now for the long-term health of your pastor and congregation.

Make Appreciation a Priority

Engage the congregation in Pastor Appreciation Month in October, and start planning now. Give a birthday gift or send the pastor and spouse to dinner for their anniversary. Look for reasons to give specific and meaningful encouragement.

Check in on Their Benefits

You spent time creating a generous compensation plan when you called him. Does he use it? Ask about vacation plans, study leave, continuing ed. Work with him to schedule pulpit supply

and worship leaders and encourage time away.

Ask About the Pastor's Spiritual Life

Pastors have a tendency to serve others to their own detriment. Is the pastor taking a sabbath? Spending time in prayer and scripture? Does the pastor have a pastor to confide in? If there are gaps, discuss ways the church can help. Is it time for a sabbatical or a LeaderCare retreat?

Appreciate and Care for the Family

Ask the pastor how life at home is. Would the spouse and kids agree? A pastor's first vocation is to her or his family. Find ways to appreciate the sacrifice pastoral spouses make and hold pastors accountable to time at home, not just time in the office.



INVESTING IN ONE ANOTHER

How the ongoing work of districts and fellowships exemplifies what it means to be the church together. By Julie Smith.



Above: South America District Leaders Miguel Nunez and Varinia Cuello (Uruguay), and Andre and Sharon Vogel (Brazil) meet with LCMC Service Coordinator Julie Smith.

Just over five years ago, I joined the staff of LCMC with the assignment of helping to strengthen our existing districts and fellowships and encourage the formation of

districts in places where we do not have one and fellowships for groups that might benefit from intentional collegiality.

Over these years there have been some adjustments in our

understandings of the roles districts and fellowships might play in LCMC. There have been some exciting developments and some frustrating challenges.

LCMC Districts

Vibrant districts have always been part of the vision of LCMC. The big challenge to this vision is that it requires an investment of time and resources from member congregations. Few people are looking for additional items to put on their calendar or additional lines to put in their budgets. If that is all a district is in our imaginations, it's not a very compelling vision. But when we remember that we are the body of Christ, we are reminded that we are connected to one another and that none of us are really on our own. Then the investment in a district begins to make sense.

All over our association, groups of congregations are making this investment in one another. This brings with it some remarkable and inspiring creativity.

The Heartland District, one of our oldest districts, has started a new project providing a sermon resource for congregations that are without a pastor or have a pastor who would like an occasional Sunday off.

The Northwest District, which is geographically HUGE, has a sense of community and collegiality that defies the miles between its churches.

The Augustana District has added a men's retreat to their annual offerings.

The Texas and Iowa Districts have embraced LeaderCare and are tending to the well-being of their pastors and lay leaders.

The Northern Plains and So-Cal Districts, two of our newest districts, are working to build relationships between their churches in order to discern together how the districts will serve them well.

The Intermountain West District continues to lead the way in showing us what it means to be the church together in a part of the United States where

Christianity is not the majority religion, lessons we may all learn in one way or another.

The Northeast District will be reconstituting itself in the coming year—after a period of some dormancy—ready to serve churches throughout the northeastern quadrant of the United States. They will build on the strong foundation laid by the original founders of the district. We are hopeful that the Great Lakes, Wisconsin and Epiphany Districts will follow a similar pattern.

The newest district approved by the Board of Trustees is the South America District. Our congregations in Brazil and Uruguay have taken the lead in forming this district and it looks

we are finding more and more value in the work of fellowships. These fellowships tend to form around a shared interest or ministry focus. They provide avenues for collegiality within the fellowship, while also helping to raise the profile of their particular ministry focus within the whole association.

Our current fellowships include: Church Planting, Concordia, Global Missions, Illinois, Intentional Interim Ministry, Arizona, Bi-Vocational Pastors, Latin America, Lutheran Men, Retired Pastors and Spouses, and Southeast US. Each of these fellowships draws together people with a particular interest and serves as a source of exper-

- Youth ministry
- Senior adult ministry
- Campus ministry
- Church musicians
- Church administrators
- Ministry with those with special needs
- Christian education
- Community service and charitable work
- Small churches
- Medium-sized churches
- Large churches

The collective wisdom that could be shared among those engaged in this kind of work, and all kinds of other ministries that I know nothing about, would be a gift to this association. If you have an idea for a fellowship you'd like to get started in LCMC, contact Brodie Taphorn (brodie@lcmc.net) and he will help you get the ball rolling. I cannot think of anything that captures the spirit of LCMC more than the grassroots nature of fellowships. These are simply groups of people sharing their work and learning from one another. That is LCMC at its best.

“Districts and fellowships may sound like just another way of organizing, just another form of governance, just another bureaucracy, and we are constantly in danger of turning them into that. But at their very best, at the heart of the matter, they are a reflection of what we think it means to be the church together. They are a glimpse of the reconciliation that makes us one people.”

like it is just the beginning of what is possible on the global scene.

The India District is finishing up their governing documents, and conversations are well underway for districts in eastern Africa, southeast Asia, and Latin America.

As we continue to add congregations to our association, these smaller networks within the big network will only become more valuable as points of contact and relationships in LCMC.

LCMC Fellowships

Alongside the work of districts,

tise to the whole association.

The sky's the limit when it comes to fellowships in LCMC. It's easy to imagine that we're the only ones interested in some specific area of ministry, or that we need to chase down resources all by ourselves. But as I travel around this association, I see so much exciting and interesting work being carried out for the sake of the gospel. I would love to see more fellowships develop around some of these specialized ministries. If I could snap my fingers and make fellowships appear, I can imagine the following areas of focus:

Why Bother?

I can really only think of one reason to form or be part of a district or fellowship in LCMC. That is to strengthen our witness in the world.

The tight grip of sin on our world shows no signs of loosening until the new kingdom comes. That means that the calling to bear witness to Christ is just as pressing as ever. We have a story to tell. It is the story of God reconciling the world to himself in Jesus Christ, and, through this same Christ, reconciling us to one another. The promise that we have been reconciled to God and to

one another is most effectively shared when we actually live as if we are reconciled to God and to one another.

When we are invested in one another's well-being, when we are driven by love for one another and for the world, when we know that we belong to the Body of Christ, when the word of forgiveness is constantly on our lips because it shapes our lives, when we don't imagine that we have to have all the answers ourselves because we belong to this communion of saints that freely shares the blessings Christ has bestowed upon us, that is the kind of witness that breaks through the grip of sin and death. That is the kind of witness the world needs. That is the kind of witness we are called to make.

God, who has been our help in ages past is the hope for our future and the future of the world. Sharing the hope that is in us is something we are only able to do because others share with us the hope that is in them.

Districts and fellowships may sound like just another way of organizing, just another form of governance, just another bureaucracy, and we are constantly in danger of turning them into that. But at their very best, at the heart of the matter, they are a reflection of what we think it means to be the church together. They are a glimpse of the reconciliation that makes us one people. ■

GETTING CONNECTED WITH A DISTRICT OR FELLOWSHIP

Districts and fellowships are a great way to build relationships with other congregations and individuals who share the same interests in ministry or are located in a similar geographical area. If you're looking to get connected with a district or fellowship, here are four different ways to get started.

- ▶ **Reach Out:** Check out the "Directories" section of our website for a list of current districts and fellowships and their contact information.
- ▶ **Attend the Annual Gathering:** Many districts and fellowships will be meeting during the lunch breaks at our upcoming Annual Gathering & Convention. This is a great opportunity to get connected with a group and ask any questions you may have.
- ▶ **Find an Event:** Districts and fellowships frequently submit upcoming in-person and online events for publication on our website. Check out our Calendar Page for the latest information on upcoming retreats, youth events, gatherings, and more.
- ▶ **Create One:** If you have an idea for a district or fellowship that might be of value to the LCMC community, contact Julie Smith (districts) at julie@lcmc.net or Brodie Taphorn (fellowships) at brodie@lcmc.net to learn more about getting started and to ask any questions you may have.

For more information on districts and fellowships, go to our website at www.lcmc.net/districts-fellowships.

Upcoming Events:

ONLINE MEETINGS:

Church Planting Conversation

First Thursdays • 10:00 A.M. CT • Online

Contact: erica@thetableministry.org

The Upper Room - Virtual Prayer Meeting

Second Tuesdays • 9:00 A.M. CT • Online

Contact: prayers@augustanadistrict.org

Global Mission Fellowship Monthly Check-in

Second Tuesdays • 12:00 P.M. ET • Online

Contact: mike@sonetwork.org

Support Group for Church Staff

Second Tuesdays • 12:00 P.M. CT • Online

Contact: office@augustanadistrict.org

Intentional Interim Zoom

Third Tuesdays • 2:00 P.M. CT • Online

Contact: marcus@revdrorange.com

Districts & Fellowship Leaders Zoom

Fourth Tuesdays • 3:00 P.M. CT • Online

Contact: julie@lcmc.net

IN-PERSON EVENTS:

Texas District Annual Gathering & Youth Gathering

July 24-25 • St. Paul Lutheran Church • New Braunfels, TX

Contact: bryce@lcmctexas.org

Northern Plains District Convention

July 31-Aug 1 • Charity Lutheran Church • Bismarck, ND

Contact: seanmicah@outlook.com

Pre-Retirement Retreat

August 18-21 • Okoboji Lutheran Bible Camp

Contact: sue.gunderson61@gmail.com or pastorjpn@gmail.com

Retired Pastors & Spouses Retreat

August 24-27 • Okoboji Lutheran Bible Camp

Contact: sue.gunderson61@gmail.com or pastorjpn@gmail.com

Augustana Women's Retreat

September 19 • Resurrection Lutheran Church • Mankato, MN

Contact: office@augustanadistrict.org

Northwest District Impact Youth Event

October 16-18 • Shoshone Mountain Retreat • Wallace, ID

Contact: karlakaleva12@gmail.com

Augustana District High School Retreat

October 16-18 • Ingham Lake Bible Camp • Wallingford, IA

Contact: office@augustanadistrict.org

LCMC IN INDIA

Working together with indigenous leaders to help equip pastors, plant churches, serve vulnerable communities, and share the Gospel. By Mike Wind.



(Above) LCMC Pastor Abdul Messiah preaches at a church in the Manjeri region of India.

In a small village in India, a woman named Suni once wondered how she would survive.

Married young, abandoned by her husband, and left to care for her children and aging mother with no income, her future seemed painfully limited. Then she heard about a program that would teach her to sew. What she found was far more than a skill - she found dignity, community, and the love of Jesus.

Today, Suni runs her own tailoring business from her home, providing for her family and living with a renewed sense of purpose and hope.

Her story is not an isolated one. It is part of a much larger story—one that is unfolding across India - and one that LCMC is being invited into in a meaningful and growing way.

Why India? Why Now?

India is the most populous nation on earth - a land of remarkable beauty, diversity, and contrast. It is also a place of profound spiritual need. While Christianity in India dates back to the time of

the Apostle Thomas, today only about 2% of the population identifies as Christian.

At the same time, the environment for Christians is becoming increasingly difficult. Political and cultural pressures rooted in a movement known as Hindutva are creating growing hostility toward Christianity. Believers face surveillance, restrictions, and,

in many cases, real persecution. Churches are threatened. Pastors are harassed. Outside support is closely monitored. And yet, God is at work, not just in spite of these challenges, but often through them.

“The question is not whether God is at work in India. The question is whether we will recognize it and join Him in it.”

A Growing Indigenous Movement: The LCMC India District

One of the most encouraging developments is the emergence of the LCMC India District - a growing network of indigenous pastors, congregations, and ministries working together to advance the Gospel.

This emerging district is made up of three primary regions:

- ▶ Gudipadu (led by Pastor Duggi)
- ▶ Tanuku (led by Pastor Swen)
- ▶ Manjeri (led by Pastor Abdul Messiah)

Together, these regions represent well over 125 congregations, each rooted in its local context but united by shared theology, mission, and vision.

This is not a Western-led effort. It is an indigenous movement led by Indian pastors who understand their culture, their communities, and the unique opportunities for the Gospel in their context.

In a country where outside evangelism is restricted—and often illegal—the future of the Church depends on local leaders who are equipped and empowered to lead.

And this movement is not abstract. It is visible in the lives of people, families, and communities every day.

Ministry in Action: Faith Lived Out Daily

Across these regions, ministry is not theoretical - it is deeply practical, relational, and often sacrificial.

In Gudipadu, an orphanage provides a home for dozens of children, many rescued from

extreme poverty or trafficking situations. These children receive not only food and shelter, but education, spiritual care, and the experience of Christian community.

In Tanuku, pastors regularly serve those living in extreme poverty—bringing food, blankets, and the Gospel to people on the margins of society.

In Manjeri, Pastor Abdul Messiah and his family lead ministries uniquely positioned to reach Muslim communities. His father, a former Muslim who came to faith in Christ at great personal cost, has spent decades sharing the Gospel and equipping others to do the same.

Through the Shaliach Bible College, students are trained to share Christ in Muslim contexts while also gaining practical skills to sustain themselves and serve their communities.

These are not isolated efforts. They are expressions of a church that is growing, adapting, and persevering.

(Top) People gather together at a house church in India.

(Bottom) Sponsorship programs through India Transformed offer care, education, and safety to children. Faces have been blurred to protect their privacy. **(Below)** The developing LCMC India District is made up of three main regions led by LCMC pastors.





Equipping Leaders: A Critical Need

One of the greatest challenges—and opportunities—in India is theological education.

Many pastors have little formal training. Historically, they have learned through apprenticeship, often with limited structure or resources.

In response, leaders in Gudipadu have launched the Lutheran School of Theology in India (LSTI), a two-year program designed to equip pastors with strong theological grounding rooted in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.

This program is already bearing fruit, preparing leaders to faithfully shepherd congregations across India. It reflects a simple but powerful truth: invest in leaders, and the Church multiplies.

Rooted in the Faith: The Small Catechism Project

As the church grows in India, an important question emerges: how do we ensure that this growth is deeply rooted in the truth of the Gospel?

One of the most strategic responses to that question is the Small Catechism project, led by Pastor Mark Ryman and the Global Mission Fellowship (GMF).

In many parts of India, access to clear, faithful, and contextualized theological resources is limited. Pastors are eager to teach, but often lack tools that are both theologically sound and accessible in their local context.

Through the translation and distribution of Luther's Small Catechism, this initiative is equipping pastors and congregations with a clear, biblical articulation of the Christian faith rooted in Scripture and

the Lutheran Confessions.

This is not just about producing a resource. It is about forming disciples—helping believers understand what they believe, why it matters, and how to live it out.

In a setting where formal theological training is limited, the Catechism becomes a powerful tool for teaching, unity, and multiplication.

Holistic Transformation: The Work of India Transformed

Alongside the work of the LCMC India District, organizations like India Transformed are addressing both the spiritual and physical realities of life in India. Their approach is holistic—combining Gospel witness with practical support in education, job training, and community development.

Through Community Transformation Centers, pastors are trained to plant self-sustaining churches.

Through the Women's ARISE! program, women gain vocational skills and a pathway out of poverty and vulnerability. Many come from situations of abuse or abandonment. Today, more than 1,600 women have been trained.

Through child sponsorship programs, thousands of children receive care, education, and a safe place to grow while learning of the love of Christ.

In total, this ministry has impacted millions of lives over the past three decades and continues to grow. This is transformation in its fullest sense—spiritual, physical, and generational.

The Power of Partnership: A Church-to-Church Story

One of the most compelling aspects of LCMC's work in





(Left) An LCMC congregation gathers for worship in the Tanuku region of India. **(Top Right)** LCMC pastors Duggi and Scott Licht preside over graduation at the Lutheran School of Theology in the Gudipadu region of India. **(Bottom Right)** Ryan Alexander, the pastor of Hosanna Church in Lakeville, MN, prays with people on a visit to India.

India is the role of relational partnerships.

Hosanna Church in Lakeville, MN offers a powerful example. Since 2008, Hosanna has developed deep partnerships with ministries in India—relationships built on trust, communication, prayer, and shared mission.

These partnerships are not transactional, they are relational. They are built on trust, mutual encouragement, and shared mission.

Through ongoing communication, financial support, and periodic visits, these connections have strengthened over time. The impact has been significant: disciples made, pastors trained, churches planted, and communities strengthened.

And just as importantly, these partnerships have transformed the sending church. Participants return with a broader vision of God's work and a deeper commitment to mission.

Challenges Are Real, But So Is The Opportunity

The challenges facing the church in India are real. Financial limitations, government restrictions, and increasing persecution all create significant obstacles, yet these challenges are not stopping the movement. If anything, they are refining it—deepening reliance on God, strengthening local leadership, and clarifying the importance of strategic partnerships.

Why This Matters for LCMC

This is more than a mission opportunity, it is an invitation. An invitation for LCMC to stand with brothers and sisters who are faithfully living out the Gospel in difficult circumstances, and to participate in a growing, indigenous movement of church planting and disciple-

ship.

Through initiatives like theological training and the Small Catechism project, LCMC is not only supporting growth in India - it is helping ensure that this growth is rooted, sustainable, and faithful to the Gospel.

How You Can Engage

So, how can you respond?

- **Pray:** Pray for protection, boldness, and open doors for the Gospel. Pray for indigenous leaders as they lead in difficult and often dangerous environments.
- **Connect:** Learn more about the LCMC India District, learn about trusted global mission organizations such as India Transformed and World Mission Prayer League, learn about the work Hosanna Church is doing, and celebrate what

God is doing through LCMC.

- **Engage:** Support leadership development, sponsor pastors, children, or vocational programs, and explore long-term partnership opportunities.

A Movement Worth Joining

The story of Suni—and thousands like her—is still being written. Across India, lives are being changed. Churches are being planted. Leaders are being raised up. And the Gospel is moving forward. The question is not whether God is at work in India. The question is whether we will recognize it and join Him in it. ■

For more information on ministries in India, contact Mike Wind at mike@sonetwork.org or (850) 598-0363.

UNLEASHING SOMETHING NEW

We're working to help ignite purpose, connection, and global impact at our upcoming Annual Gathering & Convention—here's how. By Kristy Thomas.



Get Unleashed: Our 26th Annual Gathering & Convention takes place October 4-7, 2026 at Lutheran Church of Hope in West Des Moines, IA. For more information and to register online, go to www.lcmc.net/annual-gathering.

If you're anything like me, you probably spent years dreaming of all the things you would do once you finally moved out and began building a life of your own. The prospect of one day having the freedom to make my own decisions gave me hope during challenging times, and made the future seem full of endless possibilities.

Freedom sounded exciting—until I

actually had it. It didn't take long to realize exactly how much I didn't know, and my search history quickly became filled with queries about everything from cooking to caulking to camping.

That's why this year's Annual Gathering & Convention is not only about exploring what it means to be free in Christ, but also empowering church leaders with skills and

relationships that can help them make a real difference in their congregations, their communities, and globally.

Over the past year, LCMC leadership has been working together to create an experience that inspires church leaders, offers practical tools for serving in ministry, inspires global vision, and fosters relationship building and community.

ANNUAL GATHERING PLANNING CHECKLIST

- ❑ **Communicate & Prepare.** Determine whether you will serve as a voting delegate in the business session for your congregation. If your congregation belongs to an area that will be holding Board of Trustees elections this year, begin thinking and praying about who might best serve in that role.
- ❑ **Register by September 10.** All participants must register by the September 10 deadline. There will be no late registration at the door. A discounted early bird rate is in effect now through July 31.
- ❑ **Book Your Accommodations.** The hotels listed on our website are offering a discounted rate for Annual Gathering participants. You must mention that you are a part of the LCMC group—or use the booking links provided—to receive the discounted rate. We suggest making your hotel arrangements as soon as you have registered for the event to guarantee your spot, as our hotel blocks often fill up early.
- ❑ **Plan Your Transportation.** Des Moines International Airport (DSM) is approximately 12 miles (21 minutes) away from Lutheran Church of Hope. The hotels listed on our website are located within two miles of the congregation. Shuttle service is not available. Free parking is available at the event and at the hotels listed on our website.

A New Leadership Development Experience

One of the most exciting additions to this year's program is the launch of breakout tracks—a new leadership development opportunity for attendees to pursue ministry training based on their individual passions, interests, and callings.

This year there are five different breakout tracks to choose from, each one offering a curated series of breakout sessions led by experienced ministry leaders from the LCMC community and geared towards different areas of service within the church.

The **Church Council** track offers practical skills for leaders serving in church governance positions. Sessions will focus on building skills that will help councils work together more effectively, develop a culture of generosity within the congregation, and support pastors in their work of serving the local community.

The **Youth Ministry** track will focus on engaging younger generations in faith formation and offer practical tools for navigating challenges like volunteer management, the use of digital media, and helping teens in crisis.

The **Vocational Discernment** track is designed for people who are interested in learning more about the vocation of ministry. Participants will explore various options for acquiring the education and experience needed to become a pastor and gain valuable insight on how churches can work together to help form healthy, effective, and spiritually mature leaders for the future.

The **Theology** track dives further in to the “Unleashed” theme of this year's gathering, offering an in-depth look at the concept of “Freedom in Christ” and how it relates to our Lutheran theology.

Finally, the **Worship** track will explore the importance of the liturgy and offer conversations and resources related to music in the local church. Sessions will offer practical tools for worship leaders to evaluate their goals and encourage musicians of all ages to participate in music ministry and congregational singing.

The change reflects a growing desire to help train and equip leaders in all areas of church life, encourage at the next generation of church leaders, and offer more opportunities for collaboration and relationship building in the association.

“We want the Annual Gathering to be

a source of learning and inspiration for people engaged in all kinds of work in the church,” said LCMC Service Coordinator Julie Smith. “We hope that a set of tracks for the breakout sessions will allow people to dive deeper into areas of ministry that are of particular interest to them.”

If you are planning on attending this year's Annual Gathering & Convention, and you know someone in your congregation who might benefit from leadership development training in one of these areas, consider bringing them along for the ride.

“If you don't see a track that matches your interests this year, let us know,” said Smith. “We're already working on plans for 2027!”

But if the leadership development tracks being offered this year aren't your thing, there are other options available as well. Sessions are also available on technology, women in ministry, small churches, navigating LCMC for newbies, and more.

Celebrating LCMC's Global Network

Our Monday night dinner will offer one of the most memorable experiences at this year's Annual Gathering & Convention.

Guests will enjoy a buffet featuring cuisine from countries around the globe where LCMC has congregations and mission partners present and hear firsthand stories from people in our association who are working faithfully to share the Gospel in exciting and challenging ways in places around the world.

Afterward, stick around for conversation and fellowship with members of LCMC's Global Mission Fellowship.

Tickets for this event are \$20 per person and can be purchased when you register for the event.

Building Connections

In an effort to help build a stronger, more collaborative network of congregations and church leaders, opportunities for fellowship and networking remain a priority in 2026.

Through meet and greets, church leaders can connect with others who are navigating the same challenges in ministry. Many of LCMC's districts and fellowships will host lunch meetings, and new members are always welcome. And finally, exhibitors from various mission and ministry organizations will be available on site to offer information and answer questions. ■



MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR TRIP TO THE ANNUAL GATHERING

Places in Des Moines to worship, explore, eat, and play. By Christian Huntley.

As you travel to Iowa for the LCMC Annual Gathering, consider turning the journey—and your evenings—into part of the experience. The Des Moines area offers a wonderful blend of natural beauty, culture, and hospitality, along with meaningful opportunities to worship, explore, and enjoy time together. Whether you arrive a day early or have a free evening during the event, there are plenty of ways to make lasting memories.

Worship Along the Way

For many, the drive to the gathering is a chance to slow down and reconnect. Why not begin your trip with worship and fellowship at a sister congregation?

- ▶ **Elk Horn, IA** – Join Pastor Webb for worship at Elk Horn Lutheran Church, followed by a stop at the iconic Danish Windmill or the Museum of Danish America to experience this charming community's heritage.
- ▶ **Fairfield, IA** – Say hello and worship with guitar-playing Pastor Christensen at Word of Life Lutheran.
- ▶ **Story City, IA** – Worship with the Potratzes at Immanuel Lutheran Church, then enjoy a visit to the nearby historic carousel.

- ▶ **79 Iowa Churches** – There are 79 Iowa congregations ready to worship with you!

These stops are a meaningful way to connect with others and set the tone for the days ahead.

Explore the Sights

The Des Moines area is rich with attractions and especially beautiful in the fall.

Take a short drive to Winterset to see the famous Bridges of Madison County or visit the John Wayne Birthplace Museum.

In Des Moines, stroll through the vibrant Pappajohn Sculpture Park, relax by Grey's Lake Park, or tour the stunning Iowa State Capitol Building—often called one of the most beautiful capitols in the country.

Don't miss the Des Moines Botanical Center, or, just south in Indianola, the National Balloon Museum celebrating hot air balloon history.

Shop, Dine, and Unwind

Looking for a relaxed evening or a little shopping? Head to the Historic Valley Junction for unique local finds and excellent dining, or explore the many options a little closer to the event at Jordan Creek Town Center.

No matter where your plans take you, great food is never far away. Downtown favorites like Zombie Burger and Fong's Pizza remain popular choices for creative and satisfying meals. If barbecue is calling your name, Jethro's BBQ offers several unique locations around the metro. For a quieter moment, invite a friend to coffee at Smokey Row, Barista's Bouquet, or Café Hope, part of Lutheran Church of Hope's West Des Moines campus—perfect spots to relax and reconnect.

Plan a Fun Group Evening

If you're hoping to gather a group for an evening activity or team-building experience, there are great options nearby:

- ▶ Topgolf for friendly competition
- ▶ West Grand Golf for classic putt-putt
- ▶ Smash Park, offering pickleball, darts, axe throwing, games, and food—indoors and out

Whether your plans include worship, sightseeing, shared laughter, or quiet reflection, Iowa offers space to do it all. We hope you'll take time to explore, connect, and enjoy all that the journey has to offer as we gather together this October. ■



7000 North Sheldon Road
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Who We Are: We are an association of congregations and individuals who are free in Christ, accountable to one another, rooted in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, and working to fulfill Christ's Great Commission and go make disciples of all nations.



Stay Connected

We offer monthly emails with upcoming events, current announcements, resources for congregations and church leaders, and more! To sign up, go to www.lcmc.net/enewsletter.



Download Our App

Stay up to date on blog posts and announcements, find quick access to our calendar and directories, and stream videos. To learn more and watch a demo video, visit www.lcmc.net/download-our-app.



Find a Church

Search for an LCMC congregation near you (or the place where you're headed) with our congregation finder tool, available in our mobile app and on our website at www.lcmc.net/congregation-finder.

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