

BY THE WORD

SPRING 2025

PHOTO CONTEST

LCMC congregations share how
they are making a difference

2025 EVENTS

Online and in person opportunities
for learning, fellowship, and support

WHO WE ARE

Exploring our theology and working
towards long-term sustainability



Photo Contest – **Cover Photo:** A group of students from Faith Lutheran Church (Hutchinson, MN) gather together for worship on the beach during a summer mission trip to Bayou La Batre, Alabama. **Above:** Last year's VBS program at Upper Arlington Lutheran Church (Columbus, OH) reached nearly 600 youth.

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By the Word:

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Kristy Thomas. **COPY EDITORS:** Cathy Nichol and Julie Smith. **ART DIRECTOR:** Kristy Thomas. **LCMC STAFF:** Mike Bradley, Christian Huntley, Sharon MacFadyen, Cathy Nichol, Julie Smith, and Kristy Thomas. **BOARD OF TRUSTEES:** Renae Behrends (Vice Chair), Randy Freund, Cindy Glessner (Treasurer), Kurt Hoover, Rob Horne, Paul Owens, Anna Tucker (Secretary), and Steve Turnbull (Chair).



EDITOR'S NOTE

There has been a lot going on behind the scenes in LCMC over the past year, and I am excited to share some of that with you today in this issue of *By the Word*. Throughout these pages, you'll read about some of the projects that our staff, board members, and other leaders have been working on to help address many of the challenges that pastors and congregations face today. In case you were wondering, this new format for *By the Word* is part of that.

Last year, at the direction of the Board of Trustees and our service coordinator, we decided to re-evaluate our communications plan and identify some ways in which we could better support our association. As part of this process, I teamed up with two of my fellow staff members, Sharon MacFadyen and Christian Huntley, and we began setting aside regular time to sit down together (via Zoom) and simply talk about communications.

During our time together, we came up with a few goals. First, we wanted to make sure we were being intentional about how we schedule and plan out the content you receive throughout the year, both in *By the Word* and in our e-newsletters. Second, we wanted to make sure that the focus stays on YOU. We believe that a good first step to living out the "all working together" aspect of our core values is sharing the work, talents, creativity, and wisdom of the people in the local church. We also recognize that our role as a staff is to support the work of our congregations and church leaders, and the way we communicate with the broader association should reflect that. Finally,

we also wanted to improve the way our staff communicates and manages projects together. As most of you know, LCMC has six staff members to serve our over 1,000 congregations, so good communication and organization is imperative!

After much discussion, the Board of Trustees agreed that taking production for *By the Word* in-house would be the best way to help us meet these goals. Starting in 2025, I will be stepping in to serve as editor for *By the Word*. This is actually a very exciting change for me. Designing layouts, writing, and getting to see some of the creative things LCMC congregations are doing is my favorite part of my job. I have an educational background in communications, journalism, and graphic design, so editing a printed publication is right up my alley!

With that said, I would like to extend a HUGE thank you to Joy Minion, who has served as editor-in-chief of *By the Word* for well over a decade. In fact, if you check the "Newsletters" page of our website, every issue available is one that she has put together! I have worked together with Joy since I first joined the LCMC staff back in 2011, and over the years, she has done a phenomenal job at getting every issue of *By the Word* put together and into production on schedule.

Going forward, we will be implementing a few changes to *By the Word* as we begin a new chapter:

- **Submitting Articles:** If you have an idea for a story or an article that you would like to share with the LCMC community, we now have a

form on our website for handling those inquiries. When you submit a query through our website at www.lcmc.net/write-for-our-newsletter, it will automatically be sent to our communications team for review in our next meeting. If we feel that the article would be a good fit for one of our publications, a member of our team will reach out to you with any specifics, such as word count and deadlines. Please use this form to contact us, as this will ensure that the communications team will see your message in a timely manner!

- **Length:** In an effort to help bring more stories and more information to you, we've added additional pages to each issue.
- **Schedule:** We will be reducing the number of issues of *By the Word* from quarterly to three times per year. While this is in part to help offset the rising costs of printing and postage, it will also help us to plan and coordinate themes for each issue throughout the year.

As you explore this edition of *By the Word*, I hope you find it informative, helpful, and representative of who we are.

Kristy Thomas

Kristy Thomas, Editor
kristy@lcmc.net

2025 EVENTS CALENDAR

Find upcoming opportunities for learning, support, and connection with the LCMC community.

Throughout the year, LCMC offers online and in person events to help facilitate fellowship and support the work of our congregations and leaders. Some are organized by the LCMC board and staff members, some by districts or fellowships, and others by pastors and leaders in the LCMC community. For more information and the most up to date listing of upcoming events, check out our online calendar at www.lcmc.net/calendar. New events are being added regularly!

LCMC Annual Meetings

Annual Meeting for District & Fellowship Leaders

July 9-11 • Embassy Suites • Bloomington, MN
Leaders of LCMC districts and fellowships, as well as potential districts and fellowships, will gather at the Embassy Suites in Bloomington, MN for conversation, resource sharing, and planning in conjunction with the meeting of the Board of Trustees and Ministry Board. This provides an excellent opportunity for direct communication between regional leaders and the LCMC boards. **Contact:** If you represent a district or fellowship and would like to attend, please contact julie@lcmc.net.

25th Annual Gathering & Convention

October 5-8 • Hosanna Church • Lakeville, MN
Join us at Hosanna Church in Lakeville, Minnesota October 5-8 as we celebrate our quarter centennial. Our Annual Gathering & Convention offers keynote speakers, breakout sessions, worship and Bible study, and opportunities for fellowship and networking with other people in the LCMC community. Registration opens at the end of April. For more information, go to www.lcmc.net/annual-gathering. **Contact:** cathy@lcmc.net.



Retreats

Pre-Retirement Retreat

April 28-May 1 • IOLBC • Milford, IA
Connect with other LCMC pastors and spouses at Ingham Okoboji Lutheran Bible Camp and explore topics such as financial planning, housing allowance, social security and medicare, identity, purpose, relationships, faith, life out of the pulpit, and transitioning into retirement. The retreat includes downtime, devotions, and conversations. Cost is \$220 for pastors and \$100 for spouses and includes meals and lodging. Learn more at www.lcmc.net/calendar/event/948. **Contact:** To register, contact Sue Gunderson at (920) 421-1944 or sue.gunderson61@gmail.com. For questions or financial aid, contact John Nelson at (630) 650-0905 or pastorjpn@gmail.com.

First Call Retreat

May 1-2 • Mt. Carmel Ministries • Alexandria, MN
A retreat for pastors in their first call, seminarians and those discerning ministry hosted by the Augustana District. Learn more and register at augustanadistrict.org/events/1st-call-retreat. **Contact:** aaron.lee.deutsch@gmail.com or (605) 742-4469.

Retreat for Retired LCMC Pastors and Spouses

August 25-28 • IOLBC • Milford, IA
Come together at Ingham Okoboji Lutheran Bible Camp to get caught up with old friends, make new ones, take time to hear stories from your peers, devotions, Bible studies, sing-alongs, and yes, time for relaxation and conversations. Cost is \$220 for pastors and \$100 for spouses and includes meals and lodging. Learn more at www.lcmc.net/calendar/event/949. **Contact:** To register, contact Sue Gunderson at (920) 421-1944 or sue.gunderson61@gmail.com. For questions or financial aid, contact John Nelson at (630) 650-0905 or pastorjpn@gmail.com.



Fellowship & Support

Church Planting Conversation

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

A conversation with church plant pastors, congregational leaders, and partner churches. Join church planters, as well as others with a passion for supporting church plants, for a time of networking, sharing resources, and prayer. **Contact:** erica@thetableministry.org or bjorn@thewhychurch.org.

Support Group for Church Staff

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

The Augustana District has an online support group for church administrators, secretaries, HR, finance coordinators, etc. This group shares struggles, asks questions, advises, encourages, and prays for one another. All are welcome. Learn more at www.lcmc.net/calendar/event/917. **Contact:** office@augustanadistrict.org.

Intentional Interim Zoom

Third Wednesdays ● 1:00 P.M. CT ● Online

Get together on Zoom to connect, share skills, and learn new things. If you're interested in serving as an interim or intentional interim pastor, you are invited to join in! **Contact:** PastorDawnSpies@gmail.com.

Districts & Fellowship Leaders Zoom

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

Each month, the leaders of the LCMC districts and fellowships, as well as those who are exploring creating new districts or fellowships, gather via Zoom to share resources, ideas and support. This meeting is open to staff/coordinators of districts and fellowships as well as elected board members of districts and fellowships. Our hope is that every district and fellowship would regularly be represented by either a staff person or a board member at this meeting. **Contact:** julie@lcmc.net.

Ministry Training

Intro to Intentional Interim Ministry

May 5-8 ● 9:00 A.M. CT ● Online

Introductory (basic) training for those interested in intentional interim ministry hosted by the Intentional Interim Fellowship. This training will be entirely on Zoom. This basic course is intended to be the first introductory step in a continuous learning process. For more information and to register, visit: lcmciif.org. **Contact:** pastordawnspies@gmail.com or (760) 208-0986.

Seminarian Connection

May 27 ● August 26 ● November 25 ● 7:30 P.M. CT

The Seminarian Connection is a series of interactive Zoom calls that are hosted by the LCMC Ministry Board and designed to connect our seminarians with one another and to the broader association. **Contact:** prbecky@faithfellowshipodessa.org or andrew.potratz123@gmail.com.

Regional Gatherings

- **Augustana District Convention:** May 3 @ Mt. Carmel Ministries (Alexandria, MN). Contact (605) 742-4469 or aaron.lee.deutsch@gmail.com.
- **Northern Plains District Constituting Convention:** May 10 @ Charity Lutheran Church (Bismarck, ND). Contact (701) 254-5395 to RSVP.
- **Illinois Fellowship Spring Gathering:** May 20 @ Hosanna! Lutheran Church (St. Charles, IL). Contact pastorjpn@gmail.com or (630) 650-0905.
- **Heartland District Gathering:** July 25-26 @ Grace Lutheran Church (Walton, NE). Contact (712) 579-2098 or peacephillip@gmail.com.





PHOTO CONTEST

LCMC congregations share how they are making a difference in the lives of others.

BY KRISTY THOMAS

If you visit the LCMC website and explore the congregations listed in the directory, you'll find a hodgepodge of different ministry settings. From century old buildings tucked away in rural farming communities that families have called their "church home" for generations, to large contemporary churches in bustling suburbs, to newly established church plants that congregate in unconventional places like sports bars and recreation facilities, to groups of people who meet in tiny villages on the other side of the world, one could say that LCMC has more varieties of churches than Baskin' Robbins has ice cream flavors.

At the end of last year, every congregation in LCMC was invited to share their photos and ministry stories as part of a photo contest to celebrate the work being done throughout the LCMC community. When all was said and done, we received dozens of entries from congregations large and small, rural and urban, young and old, new and long-established. In reading these stories, one thing became clear: in spite of the differences that make

each congregation unique, every LCMC congregation shares the same purpose.

In this issue of *By the Word*, we'll take a look at some of the creative ways in which LCMC congregations have been "in mission for Christ" over the past year, building relationships and impacting the lives of others through service work, mission trips, community events, and more.



Above: Trinity Lutheran Church (Great Bend, KS) teams up with other congregations to provide backpacks filled with school supplies to help families who are struggling financially in their local community.

Left: Women from Victory Lutheran Church (Mesa, AZ) spend time playing, practicing the alphabet, and singing songs with children while on a mission trip to South Africa.

Top Left: A team from Redeemer United Church (Marion, TX) stands in front of a community building while on a mission trip to Guatemala. While there, they spent a week doing outreach ministry with children and also built a school. “When we first arrived, village pastors and people gathered and said, ‘Let’s first pray before we begin work.’ They shared with us how they had prayed for a school for many years and even when the missionary told them we were coming, they didn’t believe,” said Jennifer Gold, the pastor of Redeemer United Church. “Until that day, we were all amazed that God could use a little church in Texas to answer the prayers of a small village in Guatemala!”

Top Right: Trinity Lutheran Church (San Pedro, CA) has a working relationship with their neighbors at Seventh Street Elementary School. Last spring, the congregation provided a grant to sponsor a luncheon for the teachers and refreshments for the school’s fifth grade graduation ceremony. In September, students from the school organized a food drive to help support the congregation’s food pantry ministry. In the fall, church members volunteered at the school’s fall harvest party.

Bottom Left: Pastor Todd Mathison of Victory Lutheran Church (Mesa, AZ) walks with Pastor Joseph while on a mission trip in South Africa. After returning from their travels, Eileen Hernandez, who serves on the congregation’s mission team, was inspired to share about her experience with a loved one who is incarcerated. After seeing the videos and hearing her stories, he was deeply moved and began sharing them with others within the prison complex. “I was struck with awe at such selfless demonstrations of kindness and service,” he wrote.



Bottom Center: A group of volunteers from Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church (Victoria, TX) prepare boxes of food for people in need in their local community. “We distribute almost 200 boxes of food in our community twice a month,” said Diana Pimentel-Moreno, the congregation’s digital communications leader.



Bottom Right: Pastors and staff members from the Twin Cities area gather together at Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park for a time of connection, encouragement, prayer, and good food. The get-together was coordinated by The WHY Church (Elk River, MN) last summer as a way to help connect people who are all intentionally planting churches in their local YMCA.





Next Photo Contest: Our 2025 photo contest will open in July and run through **December 8**. We will make an announcement on the blog and in our e-newsletter when entry forms are available. Stay tuned!

Top Left: A woman gets baptized in the St. Croix River during a community event hosted by Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church (Afton, MN).

Bottom Left: Members of the local community enjoy free ice cream at Mill Run Fall Fest. "Fall Fest is an outreach event with all kinds of free food, games, and inflatables that brings our diverse neighborhood together," said Kirsten Svendsen of Upper Arlington Lutheran Church (Columbus, OH).

Bottom Center: Children and their families splash in a "sea foam" pit during a deep sea themed family event at Lutheran Church of the Cross (Altoona, IA). "It was a HUGE hit – even with the adults," said Laurel Swanson. "We do three nights of "traditional" VBS, and the last night is a family event. The kids share their songs and memory verses in a mini-worship service, and then the families are invited to a carnival-type event."

Bottom Right: A child enjoys the opportunity to cool off in the community pool on a hot summer day thanks to the dedication and creative thinking of one LCMC congregation. "Opening our local city pool was not without its challenges and controversy this past summer, and [it] included a lot of work in the form of phone calls to city council members and spearheading a community awareness campaign by one of church members," said Sara Heutinck, the pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church (Swea City, IA). "Once it did finally open in late June, our council voted to sponsor an open swim evening in mid-July and serve hot dogs, chips, and water free of charge for those interested. We had about 40 hot dogs on hand, thinking that would be more than enough in our small town of just over 500 people. They were gone within 15 minutes and the pool was filled with kids for the next two hours while parents and grandparents gathered around and enjoyed relaxed mid-summer connection they didn't know they were missing." ■



Behind the SCENES

What are AIPs and how can they help strengthen our association?

BY STEVE TURNBULL

Several years ago, the LCMC Board of Trustees worked through a strategic planning process, together with Mike Bradley and other key leaders. It included all the elements that a good planning process always does, such as an assessment of our history, a SWOT analysis, a range of goals and objectives, etc.

A key term in our particular planning vocabulary is “Action Initiative Profile,” or AIP for short. An AIP will be created and developed for any area that needs focus for a particular season. It’s not wise to have too many AIPs at a time, of course. You can’t focus on everything at once! But a small handful of AIPs allows a team to make intentional progress where it is needed most.

In the last few years, for example, the Board and staff have developed AIPs for our communication processes, for leadership development, for the revitalization of districts and fellowships, and for theological growth and unity. Each area “profile” will identify a leader and a team, a set of objectives, and a timeline for progress.

In this and later issues of *By the Word*, we’ll be sharing more information with you about these specific areas of work and growth. Thank you, as always, for your partnership in the ministry of the Gospel.

BUILDING OUR NETWORK

How better connection can lead to new possibilities.

BY JULIE SMITH

Last year we saw the creation of one new district in LCMC – Southern California. A team of committed leaders produced the necessary documents and called together interested congregations, and after months of hard work, the district was officially constituted in July. Just six months later, this newly formed network within the larger network of LCMC experienced the gift of being connected with one another when fires tore through the Los Angeles area. The district became an important hub of information about the status of congregations in the path of the fire and ways that people could lend their support.

Of course, a district isn’t required for that kind of connection to exist, but having joined together to form a district, the congregations had consciously invested in one another’s well-being. This is one picture, among many, of what districts can mean for

our association. We are excited about work already underway to develop districts in the northern plains, the northeast, and the Great Lakes area, with more to come.

In a similar vein, we continue to see the possibilities and creativity of our association through the formation of fellowships. Networking together in areas of shared interest comes naturally in LCMC. With fellowships, we bring a bit more formality to that natural networking. In this way, we resist the temptation to build a bureaucracy. Instead, we call upon the gifts and expertise of members of our association to be shared. The possibilities for fellowships are only limited by the creativity of our members.

If you have an idea for a fellowship, or are in an area that does not have a district and would like to form one, please contact Julie Smith (julie@lcmc.net).



YOU KNOW YOUR NEXT PASTOR

BY NATHAN HOFF

“I am not leaving,” I told the Trinity leaders. Also, “I am 75% sure [totally made up] that you already know your next pastor. I believe they are already among us or they will be soon. I believe they are already living in our town and will not need moving expenses when they are called to serve this amazing church.

Why do I think your next pastor will come from your own church?

1. Candidates are not ‘out there.’ At least not enough of them. The old clergy factories are faltering and the pipelines are broken. The few candidates who are out there will be hesitant to move to costly California or really remote rural areas. Their concerns include cost of living (especially housing), chemistry with an established congregation, cultural fit to an unfamiliar atmosphere, School/Seminary debt which is prohibitive to living on the financial edge.
2. Candidates are in your own church. There are people in your church who love the scriptures, who others go to for soul-care, and who have commitments and character consistent with a pastoral

vocation (see the Pastoral Epistles). There are numerous schools to help them get trained right where they are at! Today it is easier to fill in the theological formation piece than the character/commitment piece.

Why do I think this is a great thing?

1. Cost. In the olden days, the costs related to pastoral succession used to be expensive. Now they are REALLY expensive! It is actually CHEAPER to ‘make’ a pastor than to find and move one that someone else ‘made’. Seriously, you can pay ALL of the seminary expenses for a local candidate, throw in some living expenses, and it will still be cheaper than moving an existing pastor to your church!
2. Missio-Cultural understanding. A home-grown pastor knows your city already because it is their city! They stay. They cheer. Their kids go to the same schools and play on the same teams. And they cry when they pray for their neighbors and their kid’s classmates. And they know who to call. There is nothing cheap or inauthentic about their neighboring. They are you.
3. Known character of the candidate.

You don’t wonder if they are who they appear to be on a resume or profile sheet. You know them! Good, bad, and ugly. Every pastor has good, bad, and ugly. Better known than unknown.

So, what can you do?

- Ask God to give you eyes to see who, among everyone you know, would be a great pastor. Forget age or current vocation. Forget your preconceived profile of what a pastor looks like. Let God give you imagination in this consideration.
- Talk to everyone God brings to your mind. It is simple, fun, and usually received well: “I was thinking about you the other day, and thought...wow they would make a great pastor. Have you ever considered something like that?”
- Have conversations with other leaders in your church. How do we find future pastors in our midst? How do we help them get the training they need to make them great pastors? Ask about investing in seminary now for a few of your own people, because I think you might already know your next pastor. ■

Nathan Hoff is the pastor of Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church in San Pedro, California, the director of Trinity Greenhouse, and the Host of Low In The Water Podcast. This is a portion of a longer article that can be found at nathanhoff.substack.com/p/your-next-pastor-is-probably-going.

HOW IS THE BIBLE AUTHORITATIVE?

BY KYLE FEVER

“I myself am a man under authority.”

So says the Roman centurion to Jesus in Matthew 8:9. The centurion understood from where his own position and authority derived, and what his limits were. Christians often speak of the authority of Scripture. But how often do we just assume what that means, without really unpacking what it means and how it relates to us? In 1,000 words or less, it is unrealistic to unpack the complex issue of Scripture’s authority, but perhaps one can offer a few trail markers in the forest.

Interestingly, Scripture itself contains few explicit statements about its authority. Famously, the apostle Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (NIV). Let’s use this as a starting point (not the final word as many assume) for considering the authority of Scripture.



The authority of Scripture comes from the authority of the triune God whom it reveals.

Paul writes that Scripture is “God-breathed.” Some might translate it as “inspired,” or better, “in-Spirited by God.” While we can get caught up in what this means, the vital point here is that apart from the God who enlivens, the words of Scripture are dead old words on a page. The Roman centurion’s orders are useless apart from the superior behind them. This suggests that authority lies not in the text itself, whether a certain canon or translation, but in the Triune God who gives the Scriptures.

When we call Scripture the “word of God,” it’s important to remember that in Scripture the “word of God” refers not to text, but to God’s spoken word (such as at creation or to Abraham or the prophets) and to the message of the good news (euangelion) of God, proclaimed throughout Scripture in story and instruction. The ultimate “Word of God,” according to Scripture, is Jesus Christ himself.

Scripture’s authority pertains to God’s people.

For whom is Scripture authoritative? Paul specifies “the servant of God.” Often overlooked is the fact that

all of Scripture was written by God’s people for God’s people. While the Triune God has authority over all creation, God speaks particularly in Scripture. My non-Christian neighbor is not under the authority of Scripture; the audience is “insider.” The audience is not only “insider” but also corporate. While individuals reading of Scripture is good and helpful, Scripture’s authority must not be divorced from the community in Christ, where the Holy Spirit is active to guide us in all understanding (John 16:12-15).

Scripture’s authority pertains to its purposes as pedagogue.

Paul specifies that Scripture is useful for “teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” Scripture’s authority has a purpose beyond knowledge of Scripture. Its authority is not that of a book of proof texts to support claims or agendas, or to defend certain modern historical or scientific claims. It is not the authority of a rule book, answer book on all matters, or a compendium of doctrine. Its authority, rather, is like that of a pedagogue, to shape the body of Christ according to the main subject and story: Jesus Christ, the climax of the story of the Triune God’s reconciliation of all things. As such, Scripture plays a mediating

role; it is the wardrobe that brings us into the Narnia of God’s enlivening grace, or the compass that leads into deeper knowledge of and participation in the fellowship with the Triune God, forgiven through Christ and enlivened by the Spirit.

Scripture’s authority works through a contextual witness.

It is important to recognize that the human writers of Scripture speak contextually as witnesses to the Triune God. They bear witness in history to who God is, who we are, and the ongoing narrative of redemption. In the words of Scot McKnight, “Moses spoke in Moses’ ways in Moses’ days; David spoke in David’s ways in David’s days; Paul spoke in Paul’s ways in Paul’s days.”

While these contextual words are the words through which the Spirit speaks, the authority of Scripture does not preclude the problem of interpretive pluralism. It is good to recognize not only that there are a diversity of writers who may share different perspectives, but also that our interpretations obtained in good faith are likewise contextual and diverse. The authority of Scripture must not therefore be misused to coerce into the “right” interpretation. Rather its authority allows for a similarly contextually appropriate and embodied witness to the Triune God. We hold to our interpretations in humility,

always in service of the Spirit’s transformation of our lives to Christlikeness (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; 1 John 3:2; Gal. 2:20).

Because Scripture’s words come to us contextually, the tools of historical criticism, etc. are useful, not so that we might set ourselves in a position above Scripture, but rather to better understand these contextual words. Used rightly, the tools and methods of exegesis do not place understanding in the hands of human intellect, but serve to draw us more deeply into the riches of the gospel which are beyond full understanding (Eph. 3:18-21).

Ultimately, the authority of Scripture means that Scripture comes to us always as an “other.” It is a text whose words, enlivened by the activity of the Spirit, “read” us. It is, as the written revelation of the Triune God, authoritative because its words, enlivened by the Spirit, draw us to the Lord Jesus Christ, under whose authority we live and breathe. Through its words, we are oriented to the ongoing call of God upon the church to proclaim and witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ for the life of the world. ■

Kyle Fever is the pastor of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Adair, Iowa. When he can, Kyle spends his time reading and writing about Scripture and spiritual theology. He holds a PhD in New Testament and Early Christian Origins from Loyola University in Chicago.

BOARD REPORT

SEARCHING FOR OUR NEXT SERVICE COORDINATOR

BY STEVE TURNBULL, CHAIR

Thank you to everyone who has been praying for our LCMC association and for the Board's work to search for a new service coordinator to serve our congregations, our staff, and the Great Commission of Jesus Christ. Here's a quick update and some more specific invitation to shared prayer.

We have received applications from many faithful and talented individuals who sensed that God's gifts in them might be suited to serve in this role, and they joined together with us in a journey of mutual, prayerful discernment. We are in that journey now, asking questions, weighing many different considerations, and praying for

God's providence for LCMC.

Perhaps you saw the four areas of responsibility for LCMC's service coordinator in the posted job description. Please join us in praying with these responsibilities in mind.

First, the service coordinator communicates the vision and values of LCMC to the association. Why? We all need to be reminded! Other visions and values get crammed into our ears and attention spans all the time. But, we know that we are free in Christ, accountable to one another, rooted in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, and committed to pursue Christ's Great Commission. Please pray that God would stir passion for and create

fruitfulness in these values in our next service coordinator.

Second, the service coordinator will create and lead systems to equip congregations. The Holy Spirit gathers people around Word and Sacrament and creates congregations of Christ-followers. In LCMC, congregations support one another's work, and our staff and leaders work hard to support and enable that mutual collaboration of congregations. Please pray for our next service coordinator, for wise and skillful leadership that maximizes the health and fruitfulness of our many partner congregations.

Third, the service coordinator leads and manages LCMC staff. We have a very lean central staff

for over 1,000 congregations.

Our gratitude for their work is expressed partly by the labors of a service coordinator who leads them to flourishing work together. Please pray for the next service coordinator's skill as a staff leader and manager.

Fourth, the service coordinator represents LCMC in relationship with other external organizations. We are an unusual organization, and we are not always easy for others to understand. Please pray for the next service coordinator's passionate love for our association and their effective representation of God's unique call and work among us.

ACCOUNTABLE TO ONE ANOTHER

BY WENDY POCH, MINISTRY BOARD CHAIR

"The truth is, we need each other. God designed us to need each other."

Grace and peace to you in Jesus' name! A phrase you may hear a lot about in LCMC, which is a key part of our association's DNA, is that we are "accountable to one another." It sounds great! Hey, it even sounds important! But what does it mean?

The truth is, we need each other. God designed us to need each other. God's word

to us in 1 Corinthians 12:27 is this: "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." And just like our physical bodies, everything we do is connected to and impacts the other parts. This is true within each local congregation, congregations in relationships with other congregations, and our worldwide association.

Within a local congregation, God's children pray for, encourage, and love one another. People support their neighbors by sharing their burdens and challenges so that no one ever walks alone. God did not design us to walk alone. In the sharing, in both the giving and the receiving, we are strengthened. God uses both parts to grow,

stretch, and mold us more and more into his likeness. When we allow ourselves to be honest, vulnerable, and charitable to one another, God can do his best work in us.

As this happens in the local congregation, congregations are called to expand this by praying for, encouraging, and loving other congregations. We

FINANCIAL REPORT

BY CINDY GLESSNER, TREASURER

Due to the financial participation of many of you, LCMC achieved significant outcomes in 2024:

1. Giving exceeded the amount budgeted by about \$8,000
2. Over \$300,000 came into LCMC for Disaster Assistance with maintenance of the fund being transferred to us in 2024. Over \$58,000 helped congregations managing a disaster
3. The Seminary Debt Relief program helped pastors retire \$10,000 in student loan debt
4. The Mission Church Planting Fund disbursed \$35,000 to several church plants

As we look forward to implementing “3.0” initiatives, your giving will be an important component. While fully supporting our congregational structure and avoiding unnecessary hierarchy, we are still aware that congregations need our support for managing pastoral calls and conflict management. These critically needed services will require funding. As our association continues to grow and new congregations are added, questions about what to give to the association recur. We encourage you to consider contributing a percentage of your total benevolence giving to LCMC. If your congregation chooses to become members in a district in order to build peer-to-peer relationships with other congregations, we encourage you to contribute a portion of your benevolence giving to the LCMC association budget and a portion to your district’s budget. As more congregations include giving to their district and to the association as a whole, more support to all congregations in need will be possible.

Thank you for your faithfulness and generosity!

BUSINESS REPORT

BY ANNA TUCKER, SECRETARY

The LCMC Board of Trustees met November 20-22, 2024 in Minneapolis, MN.

- The board reviewed and approved the treasurer’s report
- The board received and discussed a report from Mike Bradley including updates from the AIP teams Mike leads
- The board received a report from Julie Smith about the happenings of districts and fellowships
- The board reviewed the Standing Rules and agreed to make some needed updates
- The board received a report from the Ministry Board on their work on interim ministry, presented by Michael Faust and Christian Huntley
- The board approved the membership of two congregations
- The board discussed an update from Mike Bradley regarding conversations with the NALC
- The board did some work on planning for the 2025 Annual Gathering
- The board held an executive session
- The board adjourned the meeting and closed in prayer

are stronger together! We can learn from one another. When things are tough, congregations can walk alongside one another. When one part of the family of God goes out of their way to love another part of the family, the body of Christ is strengthened, and God is glorified.

The same is true for pastors throughout our association. Some of our pastors are isolated from others geographically or by the nature of the ministry

to which they have been called. And yet, their need to be attached to the body of Christ is just as real. Part of being accountable to one another means that every pastor is called to be in a close relationship with a congregation and with other colleagues. Pastors need the people of God to pray for them and for their ministries as much as they desire to be the ones praying for others. Pastors need help from the people of God as much as they

desire to be helpers. And pastors need to experience the love, support, and encouragement that God provides through the consolation of the saints because none of us should be separated from the others who are in Christ’s body.

If you have not yet joined an LCMC congregation, I encourage you to do so in order that God may bless you through the Body of Christ. If your congregation has not yet entered a relationship with a sister

congregation, consider reaching out to one and praying about serving God’s kingdom together. And if you are a pastor, I pray you will allow yourself to be blessed by the people of God so that you can be strengthened for the ministry to which God has called you. To be accountable to one another is to encourage and to be encouraged, to build up and be built up. Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up... (1 Thessalonians 5:11a).



REMEMBERING WHO WE ARE

BY MIKE BRADLEY

Emotional, relational, and spiritual health, and long-term sustainability. This is my hope and prayer for our association as I move toward retirement from my position as LCMC's service coordinator. That may not seem to be something that needs to be stated, but just look around. Long-term health and sustainability for associations and denominations cannot be assumed, nor taken for granted. How many once healthy and mission-minded associations have found themselves in now unhealthy and unsustainable positions?

"We are not a team of teams, but one team."

In the years ahead, three keys for LCMC's health and long-term sustainability will be: 1) remembering who we are, 2) remembering what we're called to, and 3) remembering where we're going. My focus in this article is on remembering who we are.

First, we must remember

that we are a team. We are not a team of teams, but one team, a kingdom of God team! It's been said that LCMC is a big tent that welcomes different expressions or nuances of what it means to be Lutheran, and this is true. However, like any great team, we acknowledge and incorporate the different strengths and gifts that each player (or groups of players) bring to the team. A good team is a coming together of different strengths, gifts, and points of view to accomplish a common mission. And a good team can always accomplish more than any gifted individual. A key to LCMC's health and long-term sustainability will be honoring, encouraging, and learning from one another, and functioning as one team: a kingdom of God team.

Remembering who we are will also mean remembering our name and what it says about us. We are **LUTHERAN** Congregations in Mission for Christ. It is important that we remember this and not only safeguard our Lutheran theological distinctives, but seek to intentionally teach and

proclaim them in such a way that they are understood and embraced by members and leaders in our congregations. Our Lutheran theological distinctives are not some dusty old dogma, but rather, are essential keys for effective ministry and mission in the world today.

We are Lutheran **CONGREGATIONS** in Mission for Christ. We are an association of congregations. The impetus, authority, and responsibility for ministry and mission lies with the congregations of LCMC, not with a hierarchical office at a national level. As our mission statement declares, we exist to connect and encourage Lutheran congregations in the mission of the Gospel and to develop healthy leaders for that mission. Let us continue to be intentional in living out this essential aspect of who we are in the years ahead.

We are Lutheran Congregations **IN MISSION** for Christ. We are an association of congregations that says we are committed to the Great Commission in the spirit of

the Great Commandment. However, if we are not careful, we, like other associations and denominations before us, will fall prey to settling for this being an aspirational, rather than an actual value. Let us continue to encourage one another in living out the mission that God has given us in all the creative and diverse ways represented by our congregations, districts, and fellowships.

We are Lutheran Congregations in Mission **FOR CHRIST**. It's all about Jesus! It's all about God and His glory, not ours. Together, as a team, we serve the Risen Savior and His purposes and His agenda in the world today.

Remembering who we are will be essential if we are to experience God's ongoing work of increasing our capacity for health and maturity as individuals and congregations. And it will be an essential key to a long-term sustainability.

My next article will reflect on the second essential: remembering what we are called to do. God bless you all! ■

NEW & NOTEWORTHY

Latest announcements and upcoming deadlines to remember.

31
Aug

Church Planting Grant Deadline

Learn more and download an application at www.lcmc.net/church-planting-grant.

31
Dec

Seminary Debt Relief Grant Deadline

Learn more and download an application at www.lcmc.net/seminary-debt-relief.

CALIFORNIA WILDFIRE RELIEF

BY LCMC SOCAL DISTRICT
Below are some organizations that have been mobilized to help provide resources and shelter to those who have lost homes in the Palisades and Eaton fires. There are many other organizations providing support and relief. All organizations should be vetted before making donations to avoid being scammed. The ones listed below are reputable organizations that are actively assisting in the relief work. **Learn More:** Check out the links below or go to www.lcmc.net/relief-funds/summaries.

LENT DEVOTIONAL

BY JULIE SMITH
Our 2025 Lent devotional is now available at our website as a resource to share with your congregation. Digital and

printer friendly versions can be found at www.lcmc.net/blog/2025-lent-devotional/a1084.

HOW TO SUPPORT LCMC MISSION CONGREGATIONS

BY CHUCK HUNSAKER
Why Lutheran Men? What do we do? These are two good questions that I often hear.

Have you ever been a part of a small mission congregation? Money is almost always the biggest challenge. Whether it's starting up the congregation, maintaining it, or trying to find the funds to purchase needed equipment, finding funding is the primary hurdle.

Lutheran Men has a Mission Support Fund to help small mission congregations with exactly these type of needs. The fund is kept solvent by contributions to the Buck A

Month Club or the Committee of 100.

Can you afford \$12.00? Sure you can! That is all it takes to be part of the Buck A Month Club. The campaign month is March. Bulletin inserts are available on the LCMC website.

We can also help you establish a men's group or help with programs. Just reach out. Contact Chuck Hunsaker at pacific6@bellsouth.net or (706) 464-1142.

WHY YOU NEED A BENEFICIARY FOR YOUR RETIREMENT ACCOUNT

BY ANNETTE LAPLANTE
Start saving for your retirement now through the LCMC 403(b) Retirement Plan!

If you have an LCMC retirement account, make sure you have designated your beneficiary and it is up to date.

Remember, a will does not cover retirement plan accounts. You may designate your beneficiary online or via paper form.

For more information, go to www.lcmc403b.com and click on "Benefits Site". This will take you directly to the Retirement Plan Information page on the LCMC website. You will find instructions, forms, and contact information.

2025 BY THE WORD SCHEDULE

BY KRISTY THOMAS
In light of the new format for *By the Word*, our communications team has made some changes to our process for how we receive and publish articles. For more detailed information and a link to submit a query, please see page 2. The deadlines for 2025 are as follows:

- **Summer Issue:** May 1
- **Winter Issue:** November 3

ORGANIZATIONS PROVIDING WILDFIRE RELIEF AID:

- ➔ **California Fire Foundation Wildfire & Disaster Relief Fund** - www.cafirefoundation.org
- ➔ **World Central Kitchen** - wck.org
- ➔ **American Red Cross** - www.redcross.org
- ➔ **Salvation Army** - give-sc.salvationarmy.org
- ➔ **YMCA** - www.ymcala.org/community-response

- ➔ **Westside Food Bank** - www.wsfb.org
- ➔ **Baby2Baby** - baby2baby.org
- ➔ **Lutheran World Relief** - lwr.org
- ➔ **N.O.A.H's Foundation, INC.** - www.noahsfoundationla.org





7000 North Sheldon Road
Canton, MI 48187

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.

Contact Us:

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Write for Our Newsletter: www.lcmc.net/write-for-our-newsletter