

BY THE WORD

WINTER 2025

FINDING FUTURE LEADERS

A new series on leadership
development and vocational ministry

YEAR IN REVIEW

Looking back on all we've
accomplished in 2025

365 DAYS OF PRAYER

A new resource for LCMC congregations



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





EDITOR'S LETTER

Welcome to the Winter 2025 issue of *By the Word*! When I first sat down with the rest of the communications team to plan out this issue, I had one goal in mind: to create something that would help bring people together.

Earlier this year, I attended our annual leadership meeting and had the opportunity to sit down with our district and fellowship leaders, the members of both boards, and my fellow staff members to discuss the many joys and challenges that LCMC congregations are facing today. Throughout our time together, one thing that became clear to me was that in our association, we often have a need for clearer communication regarding our goals and initiatives. Thus, this “year in review” special of *By the Word* began to take shape.

Throughout these pages, you'll have a chance to learn about several new resources available for your congregation to use throughout the holiday season and into the new year, gain a better understanding of our values and goals as an association, get an overview of our statistics and finances, and read about the many projects our leadership teams have been working on in 2025.

This issue also kicks off a new series of feature articles that we will be sharing in the coming months, both in this publication, and in our e-newsletters. At our 25th Annual Gathering & Convention in October, the theme of the event was “Our Help and Hope”. In light of that concept, we will begin taking a closer look at how ministry helps shape hope for the future. We will delve into what it means to raise up the next generation of church leaders, highlight the diverse ministry settings found across LCMC, and consider how today's leaders can make a lasting impact.

As you explore these pages, I hope they encourage you and remind you that we walk this journey of ministry—and hope—together.

Kristy Thomas

NEW & NOTEWORTHY



New Online Resources for LCMC Congregations

Several new resources are now available on our website to share with your congregation:

- **Advent Devotional** - A PDF resource (print and digital versions available) for use during the season of Advent.
- **Prayer Calendar** - Our first monthly prayer calendar will be available online and via e-newsletter before the end of the year.
- **TableCast** - Listen to episodes of our new podcast online, in the LCMC app, or wherever you normally get your podcasts.
- **25th Anniversary Slideshow** - Available to stream and share on our website and in the LCMC app.
- **Pray 937 Card** - Check out our “Annual Gathering Recap” and “Taking it Home” blog posts to download the PDF.

We will make an announcement via e-newsletter when speaker videos from this year’s Annual Gathering & Convention are available. Thank you for your patience as we work to edit and catalog these videos.

Changes to the LCMC 403(b) Retirement Plan

Currently, the LCMC Retirement Plan uses OneAmerica as its recordkeeper. This will change in April 2026, when the plan will move to the Voya recordkeeping platform. Voya has acquired OneAmerica’s full-service retirement plan business. The transition will occur over a weekend, so your account assets will not be out of the market during the transfer, and will remain invested in your investment allocation at the time of the transfer. To learn more about Voya and the transition, go to voya.com/oneamerica-individuals. You will receive correspondence from Voya starting 90 days prior to the transition. Be on the lookout for this, and please read the information!



One Year, One Voice: Our 2026 Prayer Calendar

BY JULIE SMITH, LCMC SERVICE COORDINATOR

For many years, LCMC has marked Three Days of Prayer early in the year. Congregations have observed this prayer vigil in a variety of ways, and for those who participate, it has been a unifying and uplifting event. When God's people pray together, not only do we make our requests and gratitude known to God, we are also reminded of the bonds we have with one another.

In the coming year, we are going to expand our Three Days of Prayer to a year-round call to prayer. Each month there will be a prayer calendar attached to the LCMC e-newsletter. Monday through Saturday, it will include a prayer concern, inviting your prayers for our congregations, our mission and ministry partners, events happening in our association, global concerns, and other matters that arise. On Sundays, we will include a prayer petition that congregations are invited to use in worship.

The first of our monthly prayer calen-

dars will be for January 2026 and will be attached to the December e-newsletter. It will include instructions for how you can submit prayer requests. While we welcome

do so in the confidence that the Lord listens to his children praying. This one who has called us together as his people invites us, commands us, and teaches us to pray. He

“Our Father who art in heaven. What does this mean? Here God encourages us to believe that he is truly our Father and we are his children. We therefore are to pray to him with complete confidence just as children speak to their loving father.”

– From Luther's Small Catechism. (Augsburg Fortress 1979.)

every prayer request, we will not be able to include every request on the calendar. Prayers for individuals will not include specific names, but we will include invitations to pray for a wide range of circumstances and situations.

As we make room in our daily habits to pray for one another and for our world, we

gladly receives the prayers we offer, and so we are bold to speak to him as our loving father. ■

Not already on our mailing list? Go to www.lcmc.net/enewsletter to sign up for our monthly emails and receive a copy of each month's prayer calendar.

8
Dec

2025 Photo Contest Deadline

Learn more and enter at www.lcmc.net/blog/enter-our-2025-photo-contest/a1106.

31
Dec

Seminary Debt Relief Grant Deadline

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



Speakers Julie Smith, Danny Housholder, Anna Tucker, Mark Vander Tuig, and Barry Anderson engage in a panel discussion at the 25th Annual Gathering & Convention.

Help, Hope, and Freedom in Christ

BY STEVE TURNBULL, LCMC BOARD OF TRUSTEES CHAIR

I'm genuinely terrible at looking backward. When people ask me on a Monday, "How was your weekend?" I actually struggle to remember. It's like a dead spot in my brain.

I have similar problems in faithful leadership. My eyes are so trained on the future that I forget the past.

The Bible says I'm wrong about this. It's one of the many sins for which I need regular forgiveness.

Plenty of passages in the Bible celebrate the past faithfulness of God to form the present faith of the people of God – and

command us to remember and tell it! In fact, a lot of the Bible is actually just that: a story of the past faithfulness of God to strengthen the faith and mission of the present and future people of God in the power of the Spirit.

At our recent annual gathering, we did some looking backward. We remembered and celebrated the faithfulness of God to our congregations and our association in years past. We also named some of the ways we've gotten it wrong and need to learn new things now. That's part of looking back too!

Then we also looked ahead. The theme was "Our Help and Hope". God has been our help in ages past, and God is our hope for years to come. If we "succeed" in building neighborly relationships among congregations, if we succeed in bearing Gospel witness to the world, if we have any hope at all to thrive together as the people of God in the mission of God, it will be because of the mercy of God. He forgives us; he raises us from the dead; and he gives us the Holy Spirit to transform our selfish lukewarm lives into a Pentecost-fire of Christian mission.

Next year's gathering will be about the freedom that Jesus Christ gives us to live together in that mission. Freedom from sin and death, freedom from guilt and condemnation, freedom to follow the Holy Spirit where the Spirit leads us to serve God and love our neighbors with the life-saving love of Jesus.

We need that freedom. And the dying world around us needs us to live in it. I'm praying now that the Spirit will use next year's gathering to break our various chains and fling us forward in mission. ■

What Does the Ministry Board Do?

BY WENDY POCH, LCMC MINISTRY BOARD CHAIR

On more than one occasion, I have been asked, "What does the Ministry Board do?" It's a great question! Both the Board of Trustees and the Ministry Board

serve the congregations that are members of LCMC, though they do so in different ways. The Ministry Board consists of 7-12 members (presently, we have 8), including both pastors and

laypeople, who are appointed by the Board of Trustees. The Ministry Board carries out tasks outlined in LCMC's Constitution and By-Laws, as well as other responsibilities assigned to

us by the Board of Trustees.

What are the primary responsibilities of the Ministry Board? I'm so glad you asked! Here's a brief list.

The Ministry Board:

1. Maintains a list (or roster) of pastors who serve association members. For clarification, congregations, not pastors or individuals, are the members of LCMC!
2. Maintains the ministry standards set forth by our association.
3. Encourages the creation and availability of resources and opportunities that support the ongoing personal, professional, and spiritual development of pastors, aiding them in living out LCMC's ministry standards.
4. Provides recommendations to the Board of Trustees regarding the standards for certifying pastors who serve members of the association. You can find our current certification standards here: www.lcmc.net/certification.
5. Establishes the procedures and processes for pastoral certification and training.
6. Affirms pastoral candidates for certification in LCMC.
7. Establishes the standards and processes for specialized ministry (as it relates to pastors serving LCMC congregations).
8. Receives, manages, and conducts inquiry processes for reports of pastoral misconduct, including certified pastors and pastors serving in a contract call, and makes appropriate recommendations.
9. Establishes relationships with seminarians, supporting them on their journey into ministry, and assisting them in creating collegial connections within LCMC.
10. Establishes and maintains relationships with seminars and ministry training schools.
11. Assists member congregations with calling a pastor by suggesting healthy processes, encouraging call committee best practices, and providing resources, such as LCMC's call packet (www.lcmc.net/call-packet). This help is offered with respect for the congregation's authority to move forward as they see fit.
12. Completes other tasks assigned by the Board of Trustees.

You may have noticed that LCMC is growing! There are

now over 1,300 pastors on our list and more than 1,000 member congregations in our association, which means the Ministry Board is never...well, bored! In 2025, we held four in-person meetings (we will meet five times in 2026). We also meet online once a month during the months we don't meet in person. We do this to better serve and support our congregations, the pastors serving those congregations, and our seminarians in a timely and healthy way. If you want to learn more about us, or wish to contact a member of the Ministry Board, you may do so here: www.lcmc.net/boards. As a board, we thank you for the honor and the privilege of supporting your congregation as you carry the light of Christ into the world! ■

Trustees Approve New Congregations, Expand Global Partnerships

BY ANNA TUCKER, LCMC BOARD OF TRUSTEES SECRETARY

May 2025

The Board of Trustees met on Zoom May 19, 2025 and approved two US congregations for membership.

July 2025

The Board of Trustees met July 9-11, 2025 in Bloomington, MN. This meeting consisted of regular board business, an executive session, meeting with the Ministry Board, meeting with the LCMC staff, and meeting with district and fellowship leaders.

During the meeting, the Board voted to affirm the membership of 13 U.S. congregations and 1 congregation in Burundi. They also voted to receive the Northern Plains District as a district and the Concordia

Fellowship as a fellowship of LCMC.

The Board reviewed and approved the financial reports, finalized the budget to present at the Annual Gathering, and approved merit raises for staff members.

The Board discussed international travel and agreed that Julie and a Trustee will travel to Madagascar in 2026.

The Trustees voted to add an eighth member to the Ministry Board with that number to be reviewed annually, and appointed Sue Gunderson, Andrea Taphorn, and Joel Kelly as the Ministry Board's new members. In meeting with the Ministry Board, the Board of Trustees received an update on their work, hearing about inquiries,

certification, collaboration with district leaders, and a review of the not under LCMC call list.

The Board discussed the next several Annual Gatherings, both alone and with district and fellowship leaders. These will focus on LCMC's core values.

The Board also received updates from all of the district and fellowship leaders on their work.

October 2025

The Board of Trustees also met twice during the Annual Gathering in Lakeville, MN, once on October 5 and once on October 8.

On the 5th, they voted to affirm the membership of 4 U.S. congregations and 1 congregation in Brazil. They also voted to award two church planting

grants, and to save the next four years of Annual Gathering offering to bring international partners to the Gathering in five years.

They reviewed the elections to be held, and the process for that.

On the 8th, they welcomed Rev. Dave Wollan as a newly elected trustee from Area 3 and elected officers. Steve Turnbull will be chair, Renae Behrends will be vice chair, and Anna Tucker will be secretary.

The Board also scheduled meetings for the next year, and heard about a project of the Global Mission Fellowship to translate the Small Catechism. ■



Fun, Faith, and Creativity

BY CINDY GLESSNER, LCMC BOARD OF TRUSTEES TREASURER

It was great to see so many of you at the Annual Gathering! I enjoyed bringing you the Treasurer's Report in, what I hope, was a fun and creative way. That's the kind of God we serve: fun and creative! Have you ever thought of God as being fun and creative? Who else could think up a giraffe? Or an armadillo? Or a white water river (for rafting)? Or a butterfly? I bet you can think of dozens of fun and creative things God has loved on us with!

How about you? Where do you get to be fun and creative? Hobbies? Home renovations? Holiday gift giving? Cooking? Family travels and games? CHURCH? Wait, what? Fun and creative at church? You don't have to be on the audio visual team, Sunday school staff or Youth Ministry to apply your creativity and willingness to have fun.

I don't know what it would take to infuse more fun and creativity into the work of your congregation, but you do. This exercise might help:

1. Identify what you do that's fun and creative in your broader life.

2. Identify what makes it fun and creative to you. (Who you're with? How you feel doing it? How others are impacted positively? Having a new learning or experience? Feeling relaxed? Laughing a lot?)
3. Identify which of these experiences you'd like to transfer to what you do at church. Be bold!
4. Be willing to disregard "the rules" (we never do that/we always do this).
5. Enlist a partner to help you enroll others in applying "fun and creative" elements into your ministry activities.

What does all this have to do with budgets, ministry funding, resource management, etc.? Nothing. And everything. The more fun and creative you can become as a congregation, the less trouble you will have with the financial aspects of ministry.

Next time you see me, tell me what you're doing to have fun and employ creativity!

Thank you for your faithfulness and generosity! ■

Upcoming Events:

LEADERCARE RETREATS

LeaderCare Pastor's Day

December 15 • First Lutheran Church • Plymouth, OH

December 16 • St. Michael Lutheran Church • Ottawa Lake, MI

Contact: christian@lcmc.net or brodie@lcmc.net

Texas LeaderCare Retreat

February 1-3 • February 4-6 • Concan, TX

Info + Registration: www.lcmctexas.org/winter-retreat

Contact: info@lcmctexas.org

Iowa LeaderCare Retreat

May 3-6 • Riverside Bible Camp • Story City, IA

Contact: grillmaster89@gmail.com

YOUTH EVENTS

Augustana District Confirmation Retreat

February 27-March 1 • Inspiration Pointe • Vining, MN

Contact: erica@thetableministry.org

SPRING GATHERINGS

SoCal District Annual Gathering & Leader Training

February 27-28 • Ascension Lutheran Church • Thousand Oaks, CA

Contact: shawkins@alcrpv.org

ONLINE EVENTS

Church Planting Conversation

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

Contact: erica@thetableministry.org or bjorn@thewhychurch.org

Support Group for Church Staff

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

Contact: office@augustanadistrict.org

Intentional Interim Zoom

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

Contact: PastorDawnSpies@gmail.com

Districts & Fellowship Leaders Zoom

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

Contact: julie@lcmc.net

LCMC EVENTS

26th Annual Gathering & Convention

October 4-7 • Lutheran Church of Hope • West Des Moines, IA

Contact: cathy@lcmc.net

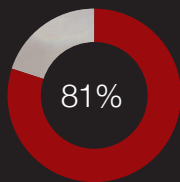
BY THE NUMBERS

1036
Congregations

19
Countries

39
U.S. States & Territories

780
Annual Gathering Attendees



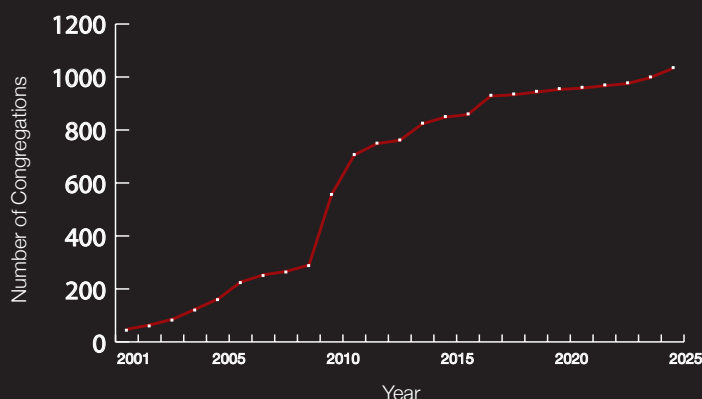
Our Reach

LCMC has congregations in 19 different countries around the world. Approximately 81% of LCMC congregations are located within the U.S. and its territories.



Our Growth

LCMC CONGREGATIONS (OCTOBER 2021 - OCTOBER 2025)



Our Network

10

Districts available to encourage collaboration and strengthen our network of LCMC congregations.

14

Fellowships available to connect people with shared interests, areas of expertise, or geographical locations.

1

Lutheran Disaster Assistance Fund available to provide relief to congregations impacted by natural disasters.

2025 IN REVIEW

How LCMC leaders are working together to strengthen and equip congregations across our association for years to come.

By Kristy Thomas and Julie Smith.

This year marks a truly special milestone—our 25th anniversary. Over the past quarter of a century, we have grown in membership, learned many important lessons about what it takes to support an association of congregations in a meaningful way, and leaned into the core values that continue to shape who we are today.

As we reflect on the past year, we are proud to present our first ever year in review, highlighting the achievements, challenges, and milestones we've experienced in 2025.

In the pages that follow, you will find an overview of our vision going forward, and the meaningful progress we have made toward our goals to date. This report also outlines important changes in leadership and staffing over the past year, provides a brief financial review, extends a heartfelt welcome to our new pastors and congregations, and highlights key moments and initiatives from throughout the year. Together, these elements tell the story of a year marked by dedication, collaboration, and God's guiding presence.

As we look back on 2025, we are reminded that our story is shaped not only by milestones and accomplishments, but by the shared commitment of every member, pastor, and congregation who makes our community vibrant and resilient. This year in review is more than a record of events—it is a celebration of the connections, faith, and dedication that define us as LCMC. We invite you to explore these pages and join us in honoring the past, embracing the present, and looking to the future with hope and purpose.

Core Values

Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC) is an association of congregations who are free in Christ, accountable to one another, rooted in the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, and all working together to fulfill Christ's Great Commission to go and make disciples of all nations.

Leadership

After the 2024 Annual Gathering & Convention, Mike Bradley announced that he would be retiring from his position as the service coordinator of LCMC in October 2025. In May of 2025, after reviewing many applications and conducting interviews, the LCMC Board of Trustees selected Julie Smith to serve as the association's new service coordinator. In October 2025, Brodie Taphorn joined the LCMC staff, taking on an associate service coordinator position. In total, LCMC has a small staff of six people to carry out the day-to-day operations of the association, and one part-time volunteer military endorser position.

- **Service Coordinator** - Julie Smith oversees the day-to-day operations of LCMC, communicates the vision and values of the association, equips congregations and districts, and represents LCMC to external organizations.
- **Director of Operations** - Sharon MacFadyen oversees the day-to-day operations of LCMC, administers the 403(b) plan, payroll, and accounts payable/receivable, manages data, and coordinates events.
- **Associate Service Coordinators** - Christian Huntley supports the ongoing professional and relational development of LCMC leaders, leads the LCMC certification process, and supports congregations during pastoral transitions. Brodie Taphorn serves as a resource to fellowships, church councils, and ministry partners.
- **Communications** - Kristy Thomas creates and edits LCMC's print and digital publications, conference materials, videos, digital resources, and graphics.
- **Administrative Coordinator** - Cathy Nichol provides administrative support for LCMC, responds to general inquiries from pastors and congregations, and manages the congregational and pastoral directories on the LCMC website.
- **Military Endorser** - Charles Hunsaker endorses military chaplains from LCMC to each military branch, and serves as a liaison between LCMC and the Chaplain Service of each military branch.

Contact information and a short job description for each staff member can be found on the LCMC website.

With a simple, horizontal structure, the association is governed by two boards. The **Board of Trustees** exists to be the guardians of our DNA, respond strategically to pressing needs, and provide oversight of our resources. The **Ministry Board** is an association-wide group whose task is to oversee the certification process, maintain the list of LCMC pastors, address issues of pastoral discipline, relate with seminaries, and oversees the call process.

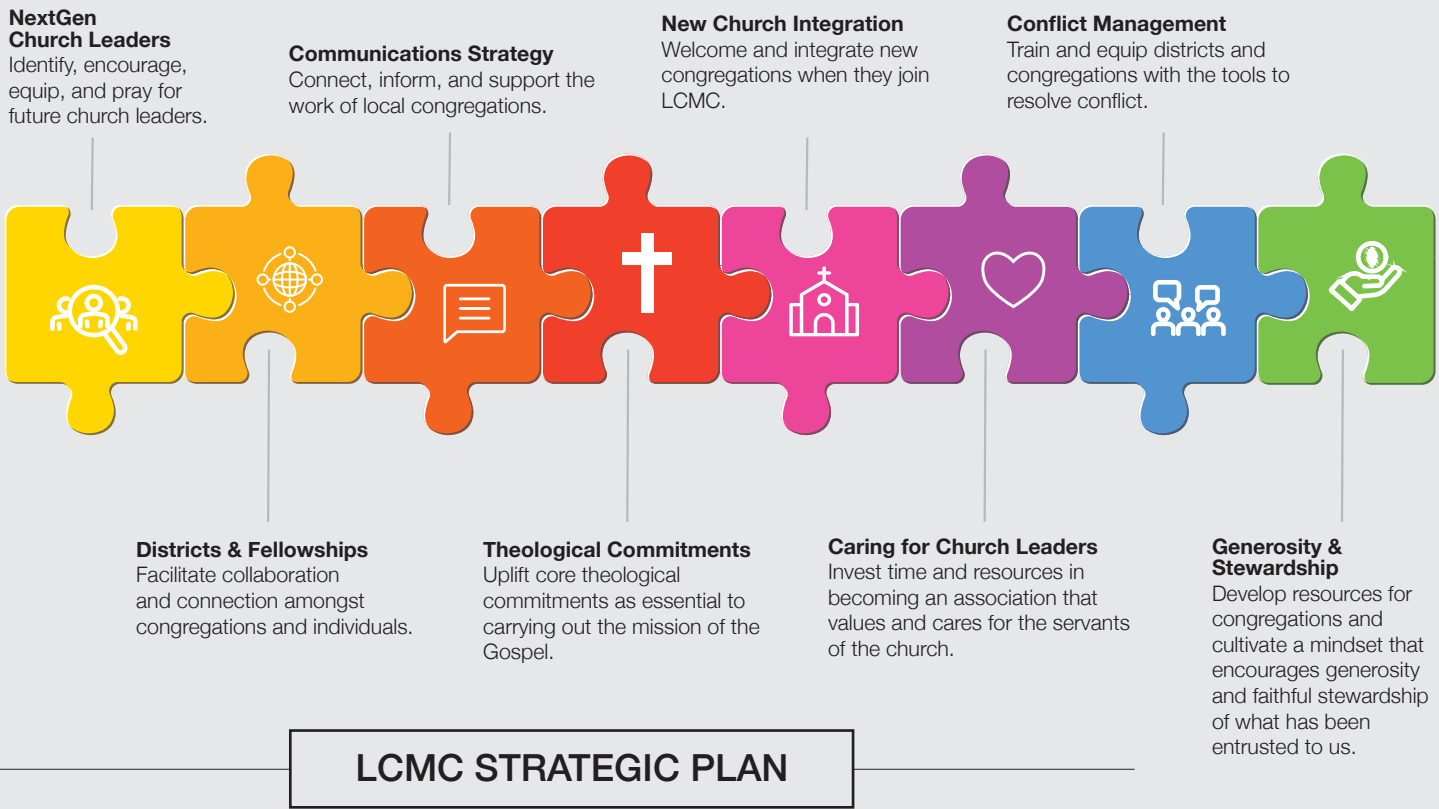
Where We Are Today

Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC) is a growing association of 1,037 congregations and counting, spanning thirty-nine U.S. states and territories and nineteen different countries. As the organization continues to grow, so does the number of needs that often have to be met to help congregations thrive.

Several years ago, the LCMC Board of Trustees sat down with other key leaders in the association to develop a strategic plan that would help the association offer better care, education, training, and connection for congregations. Action Initiative Profile (AIP) teams were formed for each of the eight goals set forth by the board that were identified as areas for improvement. In 2025, significant steps were made towards achieving the goals set forth by the association’s AIP teams.

Our Vision

In LCMC, we believe that the local church is where the action happens. Through preaching the gospel, building communities, and serving others, our congregations make a difference every day. Our strategic plan (outlined below) is designed to support the work of congregations and to help address many of the challenges congregations are facing today through offering resources, education, connection, and accountability rather than by building a bureaucracy.



New Congregations

At every board meeting, our trustees review applications from churches seeking to join LCMC. Their decision is what technically makes a congregation part of LCMC, but developing a sense of belonging is a much longer process. Over the years, we have worked to become more intentional about how we welcome new congregations. Through conversations with staff, district and fellowship leaders, and other local LCMC members, new congregations have an opportunity to ask questions and hear more about their new association. The welcome packet provides information about how LCMC works and where to look for assistance. We also seek to make connections with other nearby congregations, so that our new churches can begin, right away, to have a sense of the value we place on being good neighbors to one another. The churches listed on this page are those that have joined us in the past year, as of November 1, 2025. If you see one that is in your neighborhood, please reach out to them and offer a word of welcome. Their contact information is on the website.

- The Anchor Lutheran Church, Greeley, CO
- Living Hope Lutheran Church, St Augustine, FL
- Wellspring Church, DeLand, FL
- Elvira Zion Lutheran Church, Clinton, IA
- St Paul Lutheran Church, Renwick, IA
- Washington Lutheran Church, Duncombe, IA
- Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, Atalissa, IA
- Salem Lutheran Church, Saint Francis, KS
- St John Lutheran Church, Bird City, KS
- Trinity Lutheran Church, Abilene, KS
- Augsburg Evangelical Lutheran Church, Baltimore, MD
- Christ Church, Mequon, MN
- Jasper Evangelical Lutheran Church, Jasper, MN
- Leaf Mountain Lutheran Church, Clitherall, MN
- St John's Lutheran Church, Jordan, MT
- Word of Life Lutheran Church, Vale, NC
- Garden Lutheran Church, Watford City, ND
- Trinity Church, Papillion, NE
- Zion Lutheran Church, Benkelman, NE
- Grace Chinese Lutheran Church, Elmhurst, NY
- Immanuel Lutheran Church, Iroquois, SD
- Resurrection Lutheran Church, Pierre, SD
- River of Life Lutheran Church, Pierre, SD
- Trinity Lutheran Church, Carthage, SD
- New Sweden Evangelical Lutheran Church, Manor, TX
- St Paul Lutheran Church, Crawford, TX
- Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church, Kirkland, WA
- Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Glenwood City, WI
- Peace Lutheran Church, Tigerton, WI
- St Pauls Lutheran Church Sugar Island, Watertown, WI
- Zion Lutheran Church, Caroline, WI
- Comunidade Encontro, Brazil
- Grace Community Church, Burundi
- Little Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, South Sudan
- St John Evangelical Lutheran Church, South Sudan
- St Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, South Sudan
- Divine Word Lutheran Church, Uganda
- Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Uganda
- Zion Lutheran Church, Uganda



New Pastors

An AIP team focused on raising and developing future church leaders has been working to help make vocational ministry more accessible. A “Pray 937” card was released earlier this year, and new resources and article series are currently in development to help assist those discerning a call to ministry.

Meanwhile, over thirty new pastors were added to LCMC's certified list in 2025:

- Ann Auten
- Jeremy Baty
- Mahlon Bekedam
- Renee Bennett
- Kathryn (Katie) Borden
- Daniel Braaten
- Philip Bromhal
- Derek Broten
- Varinia Cuello
- Allen Dayal
- Timothy Dunham
- Jeffrey (Scott) Elliott
- Sarah Floyd
- Quentin Genke
- Larry Juergensen
- Terry Kearns
- Maureen (Molly) King
- Pamela Lewis
- Hans Lillejord
- Warren Lundblad
- Barson Mahafaly
- PJ Malin
- Matthew Pearson
- Timothy Rake
- Michael Skunes
- Andrew Suhr
- Christian Thao
- Erica Varcoe
- James VerBout
- Steve Walswick
- JoyAnn Wanberg
- Kelly Westlund



LCMC Service Coordinator Julie Smith is joined on stage by past service coordinators Mark Vander Tuig, Bill Sullivan, and Mike Bradley during her installation ceremony at the 2025 Annual Gathering & Convention.

Communications

The communications team began meeting regularly in 2024 to discern how to better serve congregations and church leaders across the association through the use of print and digital communications. A plan was developed for planning and scheduling content throughout the year, and for developing new resources for pastors, church leaders, and congregations.

In January, production for *By the Word* was brought in-house, allowing for a new format, a refreshed design, and planned features and specials throughout the year. A photo contest was added to the spring edition in an effort to help share the work happening in congregations across the association.

Additionally, e-newsletters were redesigned to incorporate more resources than ever before. At the end of 2024, an end of year video was created as a way to help share highlights from throughout the year with congregations. Devotionals for the Lent and Advent seasons were written and designed by LCMC staff to be shared in congregations. The team also plans to add a monthly prayer calendar beginning in 2026.

Finally, a new podcast was created as a way to engage pastors, leaders, and congregations in conversation on issues and events in LCMC. You can stream episodes of the Table-Cast podcast in the LCMC app, or through your favorite podcast service.

Leadership Events

Events served as a time for celebration, connection, learning, and planning for LCMC leaders throughout 2025.

780 people attended our 25th Annual Gathering & Convention October 5-8 at Hosanna Church in Lakeville, MN. Through speakers, worship, Bible study, breakouts, and a silver anniversary celebration, participants explored how God has been “our help and hope” over the past twenty-five years, a theme that will carry LCMC into 2026. The event was also a time of transition, as Mike Bradley gave his farewell address and Julie Smith was installed as the new service coordinator.

Throughout the year, districts and fellowships stepped up in a

big way, hosting a variety of targeted events including retreats for pastors, church leaders, and retired clergy, youth programs, and various online support and discussion groups.

2025 also served as a time for connection and planning amongst LCMC leadership. Over the summer, LCMC staff, board members, district leaders, and fellowship leaders met in Minneapolis to plan future Annual Gatherings, discuss how the different branches of leadership can best collaborate with one another, and share updates. Meanwhile, AIP teams met throughout the year to discern how best to achieve the goals outlined in the association’s strategic plan and create plans for taking action.

Districts & Fellowships

Districts and fellowships remain an essential part of LCMC's strategic plan, serving as a way to connect and support congregations and individuals across the association.

In 2025, our network of districts and fellowships continued to expand. The Northern Plains District was established to connect and support congregations across North Dakota, South Dakota, western Minnesota, eastern Montana, Wyoming, and central Canada. We also launched the Concordia Fellowship, a group of pastors dedicated to upholding the Lutheran Confessions, promoting Word-and-Sacrament ministry as the core mission of the local church, and fostering a shared commitment to liturgical worship.

Throughout the year, many of our existing districts and fellowships have made a significant impact. From equipping leaders and supporting congregations, to advancing global ministry and nurturing church planting efforts, each group has contributed to strengthening LCMC's collective ministry. Through gatherings, training programs, scholarships, and innovative resources, these groups have not only responded to immediate needs, but also laid the groundwork for continued service, fellowship, and collaboration going forward.

For this issue of *By the Word*, we caught up with several of our district and fellowship leaders across the association to learn more about how they are making a difference.

Texas District

It has been a year of continued growth and development for the LCMC Texas District. Throughout the year, they continued to equip leaders, strengthen congregations, and inspire mission through programs like Harvest Workers, their annual gathering and youth gathering, and LeaderCare retreats. They also helped to raise over \$115,000 in relief for the central Texas floods. The district continues to welcome new congregations and to provide an important point of connection to assist when needs arise. This work has strengthened the district's mission and positioned it for even greater impact in the year ahead.

Augustana District

The Augustana District continues to strengthen its theological, congregational, and missional impact through events, training, and scholarship programs. Throughout the year, they held seven events designed to engage and equip LCMC youth, pastors, and lay leaders to serve their local communities. Through the development of interactive curricula, they have served as a resource to congregations in need of call committee training and, conflict response tools, and hosted church council retreats. In an effort to help make education accessible to pastors, the district awarded four seminary scholarships of \$2,000 each. Together, these efforts demonstrate the district's ongoing commitment to equipping leaders, supporting congregations, and strengthening its ministry across communities.

Heartland District

The Heartland District proudly serves more than sixty congregations across Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, and South Dakota, providing vital resources such as call coaches and conflict-resolution teams to guide congregations through the call process. This year, the district has strengthened its support and connections by refreshing its website, social media presence, and newsletter. More than thirty congregational leaders and clergy gathered at their annual gathering for fellowship and learning under the timely theme, "Doing Ministry on the Frontier of a Clergy Shortage." The district is now seeking candidates for two key roles: District Ministry Coordinator and Connections Coordinator. Through these initiatives, the Heartland District continues to nurture relationships, equip leaders, and respond to the evolving needs of its congregations.

Global Missions Fellowship

The Global Mission Fellowship (GMF) has helped strengthen LCMC's global family this year by guiding and supporting the formation of districts in India, Africa, and South America, and building relationships toward future districts in Southeast Asia and Europe/Eurasia. The group also continues connecting mission partners and global ministries to work together in advancing the Gospel worldwide.

Church Planting Fellowship

The Church Planting Fellowship has gained momentum in the past year. In addition to meeting each month with current and interested planters, supporting

churches, and curious clergy and lay leaders, the fellowship has been hard at work beginning the task of creating association-wide church planting resources. At LCMC's 25th Annual Gathering & Convention, the fellowship hosted a meet and greet to connect the church planting community. They have also been learning alongside other district and fellowship leaders in LCMC. The Church Planting Fellowship has witnessed community and growth on many levels and looks forward to another year with hope and excitement for continuing creative ministry across the globe.

Intentional Interim Fellowship

The Intentional Interim Fellowship works to encourage, equip, and support pastors who are helping congregations navigate leadership transitions. Throughout the year, they have worked to educate and assist leaders and congregations through the creation of videos and sample documents, meeting with church councils needing help with the call process, hosting monthly Zoom meetings, and offering continuing education opportunities through online classes and in-person at district gatherings. They also collaborated with the LCMC Ministry Board to establish new standards for intentional interim pastors. The fellowship continues to work to strengthen congregations during seasons of transition by ensuring leaders are well-prepared, well-supported, and aligned with shared standards.

More information about districts and fellowships, as well as a calendar of upcoming events, can be found on the LCMC website.

Encouraging, Guiding, and Equipping Pastors

BY WENDY POCH, MINISTRY BOARD CHAIR

Grace and peace to you in Jesus' name! As I reflect on the Ministry Board's activities in 2025, the first thing that comes to mind is how grateful the members of this board are for our association and how much we love serving and supporting the congregations in LCMC.

This year, our service included hosting three "Seminarian Connections", which provided seminarians with opportunities to connect, meet experienced pastors, and learn more about LCMC, the certification process, and best practices for healthy first calls. We met with several seminaries and ministry training schools that have a relationship with LCMC, and reviewed requests from seminaries interested in partnering with LCMC.

We collaborated with LCMC's Intentional Interim Fellowship to create guidelines for intentional interim ministry.

We also held meetings with LCMC's district and fellowship leaders to discuss how we can best support them. Throughout the year, the Ministry Board contacted every pastor on our list who is not currently serving an LCMC congregation to learn about their lives and ministry goals.

We worked closely with Christian Huntley, LCMC's Associate Service Coordinator, on pastoral certifications, pastoral inquiries, and updates to the call packet. (The new call packet is accessible here: www.lcmc.net/call-packet).

In 2026 and beyond, we will continue to explore how the Ministry Board can support congregations in raising up new pastors and encourage ongoing education and healthy spiritual formation for seminarians, pastors, and those who serve the people of God in LCMC congregations.

A Season of Transition, A Future of Hope

BY ANNA TUCKER, BOARD OF TRUSTEES SECRETARY

The Board of Trustees gets to joyfully serve you, the congregations of LCMC, stepping into our second quarter century of ministry together, clinging tightly to who we are, our core values, and, most importantly, our Lord and Savior whom we serve!

Facilitating the service coordinator transition occupied the bulk of the Board of Trustees' time for much of the year as we said goodbye to Mike Bradley and welcomed Julie Smith as the fourth Service Coordinator in LCMC's history. Throughout the process, the search committee was blessed to hear from many different people about needs they see in the association and hear their hopes and ideas for the future, thoughts that will help inform our future work.

Regular work also continued despite the transition. Since October 2024,

"The search committee was blessed to hear from many different people about needs they see in the association and hear their hopes and ideas for the future."

LCMC welcomed 37 new congregations from around the world, a new district, and a new fellowship. The Board attended to our fiduciary responsibilities and the strategic plan for the association. We planned our 25th Annual Gathering & Convention and looked ahead to upcoming gatherings, which will focus on each of our core values. We also collaborated with the staff, the Ministry Board, and district and fellowship leaders, supporting them in their care for the association.

The LCMC staff, boards, district leaders, and fellowship leaders gather together to share information, discuss the challenges facing congregations, and collaborate on future projects.



2025 FINANCIAL REVIEW

\$5,000

Raised for seminary debt relief to help support the education of future pastors.

\$35,000

Raised for church planting grants to help new congregations launch.

\$79,350

Raised for LCMC congregations affected by natural disasters.

Last year, the total giving we received from LCMC congregations was more than enough to help us meet our budget for the year ahead. Additionally, funds were raised to help offset the cost of education for seminarians, offer grants for church plants, and provide aid for congregations impacted by natural disasters. Thank you for your generous support, your giving matters!

By The Numbers:

\$1.45M

The total amount LCMC received in giving last year.

\$1.26M

The total amount of expenses LCMC incurred last year.

339

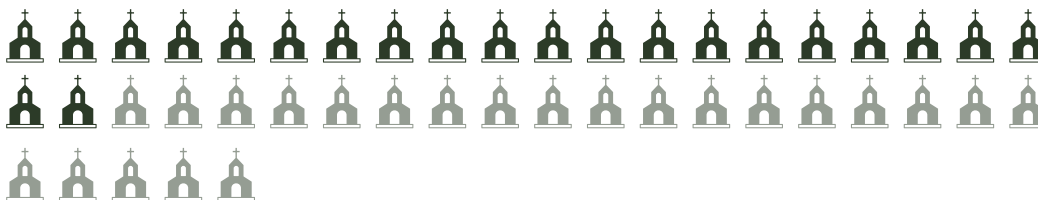
The number of LCMC congregations we would love to add giving.

48.5%

The percentage of LCMC congregations who financially support the association.

WHERE OUR FINANCIAL SUPPORT COMES FROM

The everyday functions of the association are covered entirely by donations. Currently, **502** of our **1,036** congregations make financial contributions to LCMC.



OUR BUDGET

Staff (67%)

Salaries, benefits, and travel reimbursement for our small staff to carry out the day-to-day operations of the association.

Board Meetings (13%)

Travel reimbursement for our volunteer board members to attend meetings, so travel costs will not be prohibitive to serving on a board.

Professional Fees (2%)

Legal, audit, payroll, and website development.

Administrative (5%)

Insurance, printing, postage, office supplies, phone bills, banking, and internet fees.



Annual Events (10%)

Events, such as our Annual Gathering & Convention, offer opportunities for learning, fellowship, and networking.

WHERE DOES THE MONEY GO?

Behind every mile traveled, every message shared, and every connection strengthened is your faithful support of LCMC's everyday ministry. By Julie Smith.

Two questions I am often asked when I visit congregations are where our budget comes from and how we use it.

The first answer is simple. Our budget comes from congregations and individuals who donate to LCMC. Currently about 500 congregations support the budget of LCMC, with donations ranging from \$50 to more than \$55,000. An additional 114 individuals have given to LCMC in the past year. These gifts make it possible to carry out the work we have been given to do and we are very grateful for this generous support.

The second question is less simple to answer. It feels a little awkward to explain that ours is an operating budget. The funds we receive are used to cover the operational costs of LCMC. Travel, insurance, meeting expenses, salaries, phone bills, printing costs – these are not the most exciting things in the world to talk about.

In most of our congregations, talk about stewardship does not focus on lightbulbs and water bills. It's much more fun to focus on mission and programs, the kinds of things people find inspiring and want to support.

But in LCMC, for the most part, the missions and programs are happening in our congregations. The financial support given to the association is not

distributed to mission partners or used to develop association-wide initiatives. There is not a building somewhere we can point to and say, "this is what your dollars support."

Most of our budget is spent on things less tangible than that, but that does not mean they are less valuable or less important. Here are some of the ways your support is used.

Staffing

Like many of our congregations, the single biggest expense for LCMC is the staff. Our six full time staff members each have defined areas of responsibility, with very little overlap.

Two values inform how we shape our staff. First, we want to be good stewards of the resources entrusted to us, and having the right number of staff people doing the right kinds of work is a critical aspect of that stewardship. Second, we want to make certain that the work assigned to our staff aligns with the core values of LCMC. Specifically, we want to guard against the constant temptation to bring into the staff work that rightly belongs in congregations. Our staff seeks to be as responsive as we can be to the churches of LCMC, while keeping the focus on equipping and strengthening those congregations in their work.

Travel Expenses

A significant portion of our annual budget is dedicated to travel. This includes staff travel expenses, as well as the costs associated with gathering the Board of Trustees and the Ministry Board. Some congregations are able to cover the costs of visits from LCMC staff, and those congregations are welcome to reimburse LCMC for travel costs accrued by staff members. But designating significant budget resources to travel costs ensures that any congregation in the association can invite a member of the staff to visit and any individual can serve on a board even if they cannot absorb the associated costs.

Communications

We strive to keep the members of LCMC well informed of the happenings around the association and the focus of the staff and boards. This includes maintaining a comprehensive website and regular e-newsletters. It also

includes a print newsletter three times per year. These pieces are vital to strengthening the ties between the congregations of LCMC and are an important investment of our resources.

Retirement and Benefit Plans

Administering the retirement and health care plans offered by LCMC is another service we provide to congregations. A significant amount of staff time is dedicated to tending to these plans so that all those who participate in the plans are well-served.

This is just one snapshot of the kinds of things your donations to the LCMC budget support. They are not flashy. In fact, if we are doing our work well, most of these are hardly noticed. But they are vital to the ongoing work of LCMC. We hope you find value in these things, and that value will be reflected in your support of our annual budget. ■

How to Donate:

To make a donation online using a credit card, go to www.lcmc.net/donate-lcmc. Donations can also be made by mailing a check to the LCMC office. If you would like to designate a specific fund or category, please indicate so on the online form or on the memo line of your check. We appreciate your support!

A NEW MISSION

LCMC Pastor Brodie Taphorn opens up about his new role on the LCMC staff, his heart for serving military families, and life in the Midwest. By Kristy Thomas.

Tell me a little bit about yourself. **Where are you from, and what are your interests?** I grew up in North Central Ohio and just moved back there in February. Birthrights for North Central Ohioans include: lake affect snowfall, utter despair rooting for Cleveland teams, total joy being an Ohio State Buckeye, tornadoes, farm country, and always watching for deer while driving. I love sports, especially The Ohio State Buckeyes and Cleveland teams, and I would play golf every day if I could get away with it. I love time with family and traveling.

What is your role on the LCMC staff? As an associate service coordinator of LCMC, I will help implement the strategic plan with emphasis on fellowships, ministry partners, and church council resources.

What other ministry roles have you had, or are you currently in? I have been an LCMC pastor/church worker for 20+ years. I got started in youth ministry and then moved on to college ministry at The Ohio State University.

How did you get started in the Navy Reserve? I was in the Army Reserve right out of high school. While in the Army, I was a truck driver (88M) that never drove a truck, a petroleum supply specialist (77F) that never pumped gas, and a cargo handler (88H) who never loaded anything. I hoped for a more exciting military experience and went to inactive reserve after about 3 years. I tried to go back into the military as a chaplain about 15 years ago, but the timing did not work for our family. I found out last year that the need for chaplains in the Navy was so great that they were giving age waivers up to 58 years old. Just when I thought

I was past my prime, I'm back in! I started the process while serving a church in San Diego and was sworn in as a Navy officer in March in Ohio. I love working with sailors and Marines and am grateful for the opportunity to serve my country and the church as a Navy Chaplain.

What kind of work do you do as a chaplain? Military chaplains are champions of First Amendment rights for soldiers and sailors. We attend to the spiritual needs of military members, and their families.

What are your favorite things about being a chaplain, and what are the most challenging parts? I am still getting started in my Navy service. In the next year, I will attend Officer Development School (ODS), Chaplains school, and get assigned to a unit/ship in the Marine Corps or Navy.

What is the process for becoming a chaplain like? In the Navy (and most branches of the military), you must have an MDiv and at least a couple years of parish experience. There are medical and physical standards that need to be met. Working with my recruiter was a great experience and there are lots of great benefits associated with military service, particularly with the chaplain corps.

What is your best chaplain story? Last year, my wife, Andrea, was serving as a hospital chaplain in San Diego. She visited a patient in the hospital who was a veteran. They were so excited to have a visit from a chaplain and proceeded to tell Andrea that their military chaplain had "saved their life" when they were on active duty. They went on to explain that several years earlier they were struggling with PTSD and were

seriously considering self-harm. They went to their command to ask for permission to see a mental health professional and were denied. As a last-ditch effort they mentioned the problem to their military chaplain and the chaplain went to the command and asked to see this particular soldier on a weekly basis, the commanding officer said, "Yes" to the chaplain request and this chaplain picked up the soldier each week for their "appointment", drove them to the mental health professional, and waited in the parking lot. After the appointment was over, they drove the soldier back to their unit and checked them back in. This soldier told Andrea if the chaplain had not creatively helped them get the assistance they needed, they don't know if they would have made it through that "dark night of the soul".

What advice do you have for someone who might be interested in becoming a chaplain? Reach out to the current LCMC chaplains for guidance; they are generous with their counsel and helpful throughout the process. If you are married/have children, make sure that the family is on board because deployments are a real possibility and there are real risks with military service. Each person needs to confirm their call and weigh the benefits and liabilities of military service.

I've heard there is a chaplains fellowship in the works. Tell me more about that.

We are in the early stages of forming a fellowship. Our main intent is to start with a database so that we can reach out to one another to ask questions, share best practices, and be a resource for people considering a call to chaplain ministry. We are gathering contact information of people serving as a chaplains in: prisons, law enforcement, the military, hospitals, hospice, and any other place that chaplains serve. If you would like to be in our database or desire access to it, email me at brodie@lcmc.net. In the future we hope to serve the association by offering resources, breakout sessions, etc. for people who are interested in serving in chaplain roles. ■



Brodie Taphorn serves as Associate Service Coordinator for LCMC and as a military chaplain for the U.S. Navy. If you are interested in connecting with other chaplains in LCMC, you can reach out to him at brodie@lcmc.net.



FROM PEWS TO THE PULPIT: FINDING FUTURE LEADERS

As pastor shortage looms, identifying, encouraging, and praying for the next generation of church leaders remains important. By Dave Wollan.

***“The harvest is plentiful,
but the laborers are few.”***
– Matthew 9:37

That was a recurring theme I heard at the Annual Gathering in October. People are coming to church, but who is going to be their pastor? And an already dire situation forecasts to get even worse, as a surge of pastoral retirements is right around the corner. There’s a shortage of laborers—a shortage of pastors. What are we going to do?

But, here’s the good news: Jesus wasn’t worried about it. And if Jesus wasn’t worried about it, we needn’t worry either. Instead, Jesus invites us to pray. “Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

At the LCMC Annual Gathering this year, we handed out a card with a little

prayer prompt called “pray937.” It is based on this verse from Matthew 9:37 and calls on pastors and congregations to pray for 9 people that you can imagine serving in vocational ministry.

Now, for some of you, that’s an ambitious number! Nine people!? But my hope is that it forces you to reconsider what qualities make for good leaders. Contrary to what we might stereotypically think, a good potential leader does not have to be charismatic. It doesn’t matter if they didn’t ace confirmation. They don’t have to be polished and confident speakers.

So, find 9 people. People who love Jesus. People who find comfort, life, and joy in the church. Find 9 people that display an attitude of service and a love for learning. Do they like helping people? Are they good listeners? Are they regular in worship? Do they enjoy digging into their Bible? Maybe you’ve seen God work through them reading scripture, or teaching a class, or sharing what God is up to in their lives. It

doesn’t matter if they are confirmation age, college age, or middle age. It doesn’t matter if they’ve been going to church all their life or for just a couple years. It’s okay if they are nervous about public speaking and unfamiliar with the Augsburg Confession—that stuff can be taught! And then pray for them.

“I could never do what you do!” That’s the response I often hear when I try to plant some vocational ministry seeds in people. Of course, that was also my response when those same seeds were planted in me years ago! So I keep on planting those seeds. I keep on identifying gifts in potential leaders. I encourage them to serve at Bible camps or take a year to do a Greenhouse Collective program.

I believe, and have seen, that not only is the harvest of souls plentiful, but that there is also a plentiful harvest of leaders! Our churches are full of potential pastors, worship leaders, youth ministers, children’s ministers, and more. Pray that the Lord of the harvest opens our eyes to see! ■



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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