



# The Beacon Online

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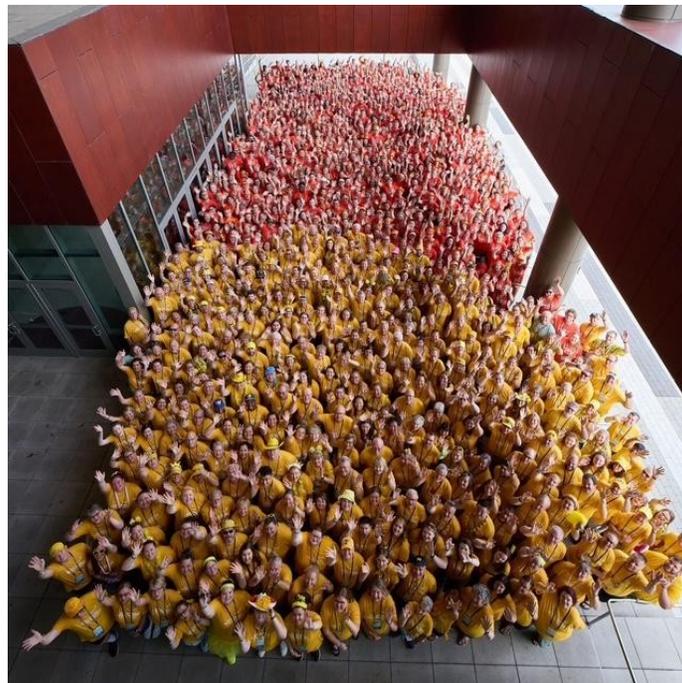
## The Beacon Online is the communication source for the SELC District.

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## 2025 National Youth Gathering

The 2025 National Youth Gathering was held in New Orleans, LA from July 19 - 23, 2025. The SELC District had over 110 participants. There were more than 14,000 youth participants! The picture below shows the adult volunteers (average age 50) in the yellow shirts and young adult volunteers (post high school and college students) in the orange shirts. The Youth Gathering couldn't be held without these amazing volunteers!



Pictured below on the left are students participating in a Bible study. Pictured on the right is the Opening Ceremony of the Youth Gathering.

Look for more in next week's Beacon from the Youth Gathering.



## Missionary Trip to Latvia

The two teams of missionaries from the SELC District have arrived and are completing their first week of camp in Latvia. There was work to be done at the Church ahead of time to prepare for the camp. They cleaned, set up tents, and got organized for the camp to begin on July 21st. Each child was tested to determine their level of English comprehension, so that they are grouped together to facilitate learning and interaction as they spread the word of God to the campers.

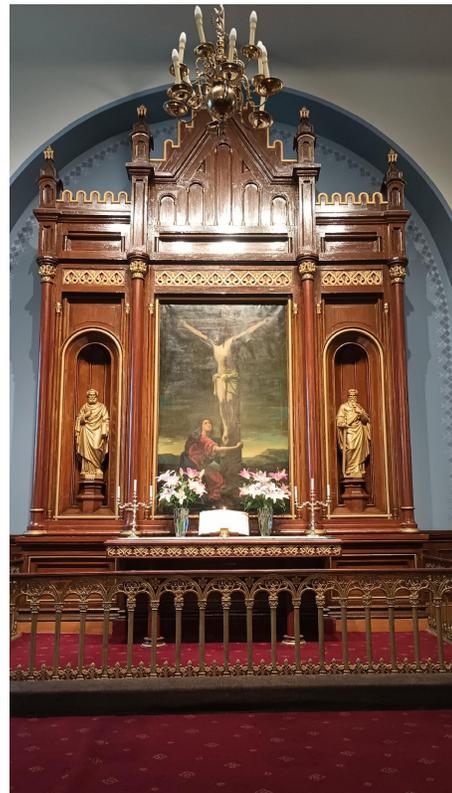




Pictured above is the group of missionaries who traveled to Latvia. There are two teams from the SELC, one from Concordia in Macungie, PA and one from St. Luke's in Oviedo, Florida.



The photo on the right is of the Sloka Church.



Pictured below are the readers in the Sunday service where the readings were done in both Latvian and English.



## **New Church Plant in Naples, Florida**

We are pleased to announce that by God's grace and with the blessing of our district, work is officially beginning on a new church plant in Naples, Florida, named All Saints Lutheran Church.

As in all our churches, this endeavor will be rooted in the Scriptural and confessional teachings of our faith. All Saints plans use liturgical worship and has planned the first service for November 16, 2025.

The leadership of All Saints has completed the first two phases of a six-phased process that provides structure to the church planting effort and will be eligible for a grant from the Synod. All Saints is also actively working on developing an aggressive digital and traditional marketing plan.

They also plan to establish a Lutheran Classical School. It is their hope to share what they learn with other LCMS Churches to establish more schools Synod-wide. We invite your prayers and partnership as we move forward in laying a solid foundation for this new congregation. Contact Rev. Dr. Mark Larson, District Mission Executive, with any questions. Or feel free to contact Rev. Jim Kress (941) 979-2976 and/or Mike Bonnough (419)261-8307 of All Saints Lutheran Church for more information.



## **Innovations in Memory Care at Lutheran Haven All GEMS shine at the Haven!**

When someone is dealing with dementia, who is affected? Everyone who has contact with them! At Lutheran Haven our goal is to promote a positive approach to care at all levels. Our Life Enrichment Director, Deborah McMichael emphasizes, "It's better to focus on what the person CAN do, not what they cannot. As care partners we work together with the person who is undergoing brain changes along with their family. Deborah's experience in long-term care has been instrumental in shaping several positive aspects such as the power of music and familiar activities to bring joy to our residents. "A root beer float can bring back happy memories of a simpler time, and extra calories become unimportant! A song or a familiar prayer can bring comfort during a confusing time. It's amazing when a non-verbal resident recites some of the Lord's prayer or hums along with "Amazing Grace" or Frank Sinatra. Our goal is to always meet the residents where they are."

"More than anything, kindness always goes a long way." Deborah recounts one such kindness for a couple who have been married for 60 years. "She is predominantly non-verbal, but her faithful husband visits every day. For their anniversary, multiple departments helped with a special lunch, complete with flowers, music, photos, and a special pureed steak meal for her. We discovered that she responded to the song, 'Let me call you Sweetheart' so we played it especially for them as they sang to one another. It was a truly heartwarming moment."

Music is a part of everyday life for our residents in Memory Care whether it's used with physical exercise or a sing-along. "Music has the power to unlock memories and get the brain firing. Even if the reaction doesn't last, it helps create joy in a moment of time."

Deborah conducts monthly workshops on how to approach a person with brain changes which includes the GEMS staging model which helps increase awareness of what is happening in the brain during dementia and the effect on a person's abilities. This staging model lays out specific changes in skills when someone has dementia. All the Lodge residents (Memory Care) have been staged, and the personalized information is put in a binder for the staff to use when working with a particular individual. Activities are then based on what a resident can do and what they enjoy. "Our goal is to always have a positive approach rather than focus on the loss of skills." Traditional dementia care is typically labeled as beginning, middle and late stage, however in GEMS staging, it's an expanded tool and a more detailed assessment for each milestone and unique to each person.

As a PAC (Positive Approach to Care) Certified Trainer, Deborah plans the activities calendars for not only the Lodge but also the Harbor, which is our Assisted Living facility. They are based on residents' requests along with the consideration of their cognitive and physical abilities. "It's constant adaptation, but it's always resident-centered care. Our goal is to provide meaningful engagement in group activities and on a one-on-one basis. It's encouraging to see the change in how people think about dementia as we continually increase our effectiveness in care both for our residents and their families."

Another innovative program was developed by our Health Concierge Team who hosts the "Memory Maker Café" which provides engaging games and activities. This is a social support group for our residents who have mild to moderate cognitive decline along with their spouse/caregiver. It is fun and engaging and a place where they can learn new things and find a place to belong without fear of judgement. Our prayer is always for the participants to make strong connections and build a network of support with each other in a safe environment. This is especially helpful when participants may feel reluctant to belong to other groups due to cognitive changes.

We at Lutheran Haven are SO PROUD and SO THANKFUL to our staff for all that they do to make what is often a difficult season into so many blessings, both large and small!



## LWML-SELC Events

The monthly Bible study, available in person at Christ the King in Lodi, Ohio or via zoom at the link below, will be held on August 21st at 10:30 AM Eastern time.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84746607019?pwd=V2t5a1BPQjFnUzJGRzRiS1ZVVVJsQT09>

Save the date for the LWML SELC **Eastern Zone** fall rally on Saturday September 27, at Redeemer Lutheran Church, Manchester, NJ. Details to follow.

Save the date for the LWML SELC **Central Zone** fall rally at Christ the King Lutheran Church in Lodi, Ohio on September 27th. More details will follow.



## Lutheran Women in Mission Seek Executive Director

Eden Keefe, President of Lutheran Women in Mission, announced that the organization is seeking a full-time Executive Director. The position does require full time work in the LWML office in St. Louis (on the CSL seminary campus) so it could require someone to move to/live in St. Louis.

Here is a link to the job posting on the LCMS.org website. <https://www.lcms.org/serve/careers/job-postings> For more information or a copy of the job description please contact the SELC District Office or the national office at [lwml@lwml.org](mailto:lwml@lwml.org) or **(800) 252-5965**.



## Do You have a Church Member who is Preparing for Full-time Churchwork? Deadline is August 15th

The Student Financial Aid Committee was organized by the SELC District to assist young men and women preparing for full-time professional ministry or church work within the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. This includes deaconess, lay ministry programs, as well as clergy preparation. Professional church workers who are working toward advanced degrees are not eligible for aid from the SELC District Student Aid Committee.

Please see the SELC website for an application and more information -  
<https://selc.lcms.org/mdocs-posts/financial-aid-form/>



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## Prayer Requests

**Rev. Brian Roberts**, Orlando, FL. Please pray for him as he is gaining weight and strength.

**Rev. John Telloni**, St. John in Massillon, OH as he is working and continuing to regain his strength as he has returned to work.

**Rev. Tom Soltis**, Parma, OH for God's loving care.

**Rev. and Mrs. Kenneth Ballas**, Parma, OH. Please keep the Ballas' in your prayers

**Rev. Alan Mercer** in Galloway, NJ for his ongoing health struggles.

**Rev. Kevin Duff**, Hilton Head, SC, who has returned to work at Island Lutheran Church part time. He plans to return to full time in August. Praise the Lord for His care and healing!

**Rev. Edward Kucera**, and his wife Irene, who have moved to St. Louis, MO.

**Bev Cahill**, wife of Rev. Chris Cahill. Lodi, OH, as she continues chemotherapy following cancer surgery. The Cahills are posting updates on "Caring Bridge" at <https://tinyurl.com/Bridge4Bev>.

**Anna Bocklage**, Bel Air, MD, wife of Rev. Steve Bocklage, who had her second knee replacement this week.

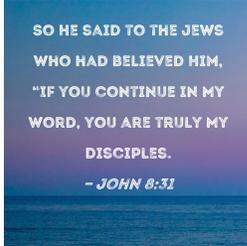
**Megan Skelton** in Oviedo, FL Please continue to pray for her and her doctors to find pain relief solutions for her jaw pain and severe headaches following her surgery.

**Laura Bergmann**, Munster, IN, please pray for her to continue to build strength in her injured knee.

**Nita Huffines**, St. Louis, MO, wife of Rev. Warren Huffines, let's praise God for bringing stage four cancer under control; then ask for more grace during a maintenance phase of treatments, that the Lord complete the healing while increasing Nita's energy and joy for each day.

**Daniel McLean**, Oviedo, FL, who has stage 4 cancer and is receiving treatment. Please keep him, his wife Emily, Deaconess at St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Oviedo, and their children in your prayers.

*If you have people you would like to be included in the prayer list, please send the information to [selc.lcms@gmail.com](mailto:selc.lcms@gmail.com) or call the District Office at 610-965-3265 and press 6.*



## Closing Thoughts Wait Expectantly for God's Surprising Endings!

Rev. Ken Ballas, EM

Scripture speaks to us in a variety of ways but primarily in terms of **Law** and **Gospel**. God's needed good and holy **Law** may *not* initially appeal to humankind's naturally inborn self-centered instincts. Being led by the Holy Spirit to an awakened awareness of the much sweeter **Gospel** message, however, empowers us to think and, yes, *act* in a manner that more than *counterbalances* any and all previous misguided opinions regarding our actual relationship with our Heavenly Father – a message that sustains baptized believers in their newfound **liberating freedom** of knowing **Jesus Christ** as living and loving Lord of our lives. Note the Savior's words in John 8:31ff.:

Jesus said to the Jews who had believed Him, *"If you abide in My Word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a **slave to sin**. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the Son remains forever. So if the **Son** sets you free, you will be **free indeed!**"*

As further evidence of the Holy Spirit's *"tipping the balance in our favor*, our ascended Lord's apostle Paul writes, "I consider [or *weigh mentally* as the Greek verb **logidzomai** has it] that the sufferings of this present time are not worth *comparing* with the glory that shall be revealed to us." (Romans 8:18; Daniel 5:27 LXX)

Likely recalling the hours immediately preceding His self-giving sacrificial death on Calvary's cross and our Brother-Savior's sleepless anguish of body and soul in Gethsemane's Garden where God's incarnate Son sweat great drops of blood while praying, "Not My will but Yours be done," St. Paul had ample reason for exulting, "We are **more than conquerors** through Him who loved us!" (Romans 8:37; 1 Corinthians 2:9; note also perhaps Hebrews 5:7)

With apologies to our living Lord's apostle Paul all of whose letters are well worth prayerfully reading time and time again, especially recommended for self-help family or personal Bible study are Paul's captivity letters to the Philippians conceivably in rotation with three "packed" 5-chapter literary gems: James, **1 Peter** and 1 John. Lesser known perhaps is the fact that our beloved SELC District has long been blessed with multi-talented laity, teachers, pastors and vicars including in recent years in addition to sainted celebrated hymn writer and translator, sainted Pastor Jaroslav Vajda, we are blessed by the likes of Montreal missionary Charles St-Onge (whose timely midweek devotions are briefly on temporary hiatus) and faithful district secretary, hymn writer and published author, Pastor John Telloni for his very helpful paperback book, *The Best Way to Live: Meditations for a Christ-Centered Life*. Also worthy of acknowledgment are literary contributions of seminary professors Drs. Joel Elowsky on the Early Church patristic fathers, as well as William Utech's recently published study (which I have yet to acquire and read) based on the Book of Acts - *Acts to Action*.



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