



The Beacon Online

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

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Pentecost, Racine WI at the LCMS Youth Gathering – New Orleans 2025

by Jenna King



Thursday, July 17th started very early for the Pentecost Youth Group. 10 travelers (Jenna, Sheryl, Laura, Crystal, Shyann, Gavin, Liam, Madelyn, Dylan, and Lenox) arrived at Pentecost in the early hours of the morning, all ready to travel to O'Hare Airport. Pastor Brady Retzlaff had a wonderful send-off message prepared for the group, being the first to dive in on our theme verse – Hebrews 12:1-3. After Pastor Brady's message, communion together, and a prayer – the group was headed towards the airport. Without any delays, the group boarded for New Orleans. After 2 hours the group made their landing, and their chariot (Jonathan Lisowski's 12 passenger van) awaited outside baggage claim.

Conveniently, the Lisowski family drove to Louisiana for a family vacation. Once the airport group made it to the hotel, the 3 Lisowskis (Cullen, Izzy, and Quinten) arrived and made the group whole. That night was spent on the Creole Queen Dinner Cruise (photo below left on the next page). The ship sailed up and down the Mississippi River all while the group enjoyed a buffet of all Creole style food – YUM! The next morning was early for some. More than half of the group enjoyed a Swamp Airboat tour, while the others explored the World War II Museum (photo below right on the next page).



Later that Friday afternoon, the group was whole again and they set out for the French quarter to find the location of their cemetery tour. The group arrived just in time to refill their water bottles – as it is 10 – 20 degrees HOTTER inside the cemetery! The group’s tour was led by Buddy, a very knowledgeable New Orleans native. He described centuries worth of history, explaining how all of New Orleans’ cemeteries are above ground due to being at sea-level. The group saw many beautiful, and also run-down tombs where generations of families are buried together. The group was allowed to sleep in on Saturday! This was great news for the 14-year-old boys (and chaperones). Saturday officially kicked off the Gathering. Sheryl and Jenna ventured to the Convention Center to get the group all registered, and to pick up the bags and other goodies. Each participant was provided with a clear string bag with the Gathering logo on it, a t-shirt, a Bible, Gathering guidebook, bracelets, and a wristband. After getting back to the hotel and dispersing all the “goodies”, - the group was OFFICIALLY ready to take on the gathering.



Madelyn, Shyann, and Izzy helped decorate our "battle stand" in preparation for going to the Mass Event later that evening. The "battle stand" was a tall plastic pole decorated with a Chik-Fil-A birthday cow, streamers, and hanging poofy flowers. After all the preparing, the group departed from the hotel and made their way to the Convention Center to find the Prince of Peace/St. John's Youth Group to find dinner together. The group dispersed and found all sorts of things to eat in the Riverwalk Mall next to the Convention Center. The Opening Night Mass Event was the last adventure that the group had to take on for the day! The first mass event really did a wonderful job of giving a lot of foreshadowing as to what the week had in store for the group. They learned more about the "Endure" theme, they sang, they prayed, they walked some more, then they slept. Sunday and Tuesday were identical days schedule-wise for the group. They left for the Convention Center early in the morning to make it on time for 10:00AM sessions. They had Bible Study at noon on these days, as well. Most of the whole group divided into smaller groups for sessions and exploring the Convention Center, some finding friends (and MAKING friends!). When they were not in sessions, everyone explored the Interactive Center during the day. The Gathering had all sorts of things set up in this area – college booths, district booths, games, on-site servant events, comfort dogs, relaxation areas, YOU NAME IT! Some people even got to meet LCMS President Harrison there. Monday, the group endured through a heat advisory while serving on their offsite servant event. The group was on 1 of the 8 buses that the Gathering had prepared to drive about 15 minutes away to a neighborhood just on the other side of the French Quarter.

The offsite servant event was planned as a group project, serving with our district, the SELC District, while partnering with the English District. Once the instructions and rules were explained, the group departed from the bus, taking on several different projects. Most of the people working that day were painting a very long retaining wall, preparing it for a mural. While others picked up trash, and others removed graffiti from street signs. The entire group was rewarded with snow cones – a very nice treat on a VERY hot day! After lunch along the Mississippi River, the group departed back to the Convention Center – where they then had to endure the walk back to the hotel to get cleaned up, decompress, and get ready for the next adventure. Each night the Gathering closed with a Mass Event at the Superdome. The Gathering House Band put on an amazing concert each night. Everyone learned a new song called "Endure" that is based on Hebrews 12:1-3 (you can find it on YouTube and Spotify!). The Gathering planning crew picked out 3 incredible hosts – Rev. Brady Finnern, Tanner Olson, and DCE Shelly Schwalm – these hosts guided everyone (all 20,000 people) through each mass event flawlessly. Each night had a different speaker as well – Deaconess Danelle Putnam Schumann, Rev. Michael Ziegler, Marcus Gray (FLAME), and Bethany Hamilton.

The group also had the opportunity to see Rend Collective after one of the Mass Events, participating in what was called Mass Event Plus. The group blinked and it was Wednesday morning. They set out for the Superdome one last time for the closing Worship Service. The group was able to sit on the floor for the Worship Service! This was an exciting change, as they sat in the stadium seats the rest of the week. There were many Pastors involved in the Worship service. Pastor Brady Finnern and President Harrison led most of the service, while the Gathering Choir and Wind Symphony performed all of the music. After singing the "Endure" song one last time, the Gathering came to a close, and all of the groups were departing for their homes. The Pentecost Youth Group stayed one more night, relaxing and seeing the things that they did not have time for during the week. The next morning, the group departed for the airport, only having to wait about an extra hour for takeoff due to thunderstorms in the area.



Photo on the left is the group at dinner, on the right is the group at Jackson Square.



The next Youth Gathering is July 3 - 7, 2028 in San Antonio, Texas



**Do You have a Church Member who is Preparing
for Full-time Churchwork?
Deadline is Today, 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/>



Vicar and Deaconess Intern Installed

Vicar Grant Burnham and Deaconess Intern Rachel Burnham were installed at St. Luke's Lutheran Church and School in Oviedo, Florida on July 20th. We welcome the Burnhams to the SELC! Pictured on the right are the Burnhams with Senior Pastor Rev. Dr. Tige Culbertson who installed them.



Hazleton and Wilkes Barre Joint VBS



The congregations of St. Matthew's, St. Peter's and St. John's once again join forces to put on an epic Vacation Bible School this year. 'Superheroes and the Golden Rule' was the theme, with an in-depth look into the lives of Ruth, David, and Jesus! It turns out not only is Jesus the greatest superhero, He's also every believer's superpower! What a great time we all had sharing the good news of Jesus with our family, friends, and brothers and sisters in Christ from neighboring towns! From lessons to crafts, special songs, snacks, and the best thing of all; good Christian fellowship.



May we all be given super-hearing to pay attention to what the Lord has to say through His Word, super hearts to follow His life of compassion for us, and super-feet to walk in His ways, as He lights our path!





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

Save the date for the LWML SELC **Eastern Zone** fall rally on Saturday September 27, at Redeemer Lutheran Church, Manchester, NJ. See the flyer on the right for more information.

LWML SELC Eastern Zone Rally

Saturday September 27th at
Redeemer Lutheran Church
 2309 Route 70, Manchester, NJ 08759

10am – 2.30pm

\$5 pp

Register Today: 

Karenannkow@hotmail.com
 570-582-6046

Bible Study led by Deaconess Helen DeMario on "Women of the Bible"

This Rally's Charity is 'Phils Friends':
In-gathering items to bring & donate as part of our Service Project for the day:
 Blankets (\$4 at Walmart), fuzzy socks, puzzle books, deck of cards (no casino), and small size lotion (fragrance free).



Concordia Seminary St. Louis Invites You Join the Opening Service 10:30 a.m. CDT Friday, Aug. 22

Join us in the Chapel of St. Timothy and St. Titus for the Opening Service of the Seminary's 187th academic year. This special service is a time of reflection, dedication and blessing as we begin the year under the theme, "Christ the Living Stone ... Building Us Together" (1 Peter 2:4-5 ESV).

The public is warmly invited to attend. If you can't join us in person, watch the livestream at csl.edu/live.





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Council of Nicaea Commemoration Service

Rev. Brett Witmer

On July 12th, 2025, Holy Cross Lutheran Church held a commemoration of the Council of Nicaea, in honor of the 1700th anniversary of the council this year. It was a joint effort between the congregations of Holy Cross Lutheran in Johnstown, Saints Peter and Paul Lutheran in Central City, and Trinity Lutheran of Glen Savage, PA, with Pittsburgh Area Lutheran Ministries (PALM) sponsoring the event and greater pastoral support around the region. The Rev. Dr. Daniel Hahn was guest preacher, and preached on the reason for the council and why defending the full divinity of Jesus Christ, True God and True Man, is so important. Pastor Brett Witmer served as liturgist, Pastor Kyle Mullins served as lector, and Pastor Justin Schmidt, of Peace Lutheran - McMurray, served as crucifer. Over 50 people were in attendance, many of whom were from the area LCMS congregations. A meal was enjoyed afterwards afterwards, and hosted by Holy Cross, with help from Saints Peter and Paul, who were thanked for hosting the event and their hospitality. Pastor Mullins, a PALM Mission Director, spoke about PALM and the work that PALM does for regional congregations. The afternoon was a wonderful confession of the Christian faith in worship, and fellowship and love between Christians.



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Prayer Requests

Please pray for all students and teachers as they begin the school year. For those who are traveling to college, please pray for their safety at college.

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 and is planning to return to full time this month. 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 is recovering from her second knee replacement and is preparing to begin physical therapy.

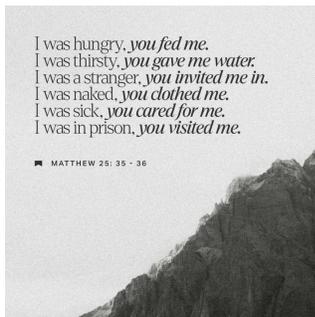
Megan Skelton in Oviedo, FL Please continue to pray for her and her doctors to find pain relief solutions for her jaw pain and severe headaches following her surgery.

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 or call the District Office at 610-965-3265 and press 6.



Closing Thoughts

Ceaseless Christ-like Servanthood

Rev. Ken Ballas, EM

Deliberately positioned during Holy Week in St. Matthew's carefully structured Gospel are these familiar words of our Brother-Savior Jesus Christ:

*I was hungry and you gave Me food.
I was thirsty and you gave Me drink.
I was a stranger and you welcomed Me.
I was naked and you clothed Me.
I was sick and you visited Me.
I was in prison and you came to Me. (Matthew 25:34-36)*

In addition perhaps to offering a *Christian smile* to long-time acquaintances or complete strangers alike (without waiting for them to be the first to give you a hand-shake or warm word of welcome), our blessed Lord explicitly mentions as *every believer's* responsibility that we intentionally make it a much needed God-pleasing, people-helping priority or goal to *focus* on every aspect of these well-known words as if we were actually inter-acting with Christ Himself!

Included among our sinless Brother-Savior's loving "Gospel imperatives" is unending spontaneous *visitation of the sick and infirm* as just hours before His voluntary

redemptive self-giving, vicariously excruciatingly pain-filled passion and crucifixion for our eternal salvation. He modeled for us as a *prime example of the manifold "fruit of the Spirit" both for Himself and each and every one of us also the gift of mutual joy!*

Scriptural basis for the foregoing thoughts also includes Psalm 103:1-3; Luke 6:36, 40; Galatians 5:22 and Hebrews 12:1-3 the last of which regarding our shamelessly crucified and ascended Lord Jesus remains particularly instructive, namely, the inspired words;

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race which is set before us, **looking to Jesus**, the Founder and Perfecter of our faith, who for the **joy** that was set **before Him** **endured the cross**, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider **Him** who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself, so that **you** may not grow weary or faint-hearted. (Hebrews 12:1-3)*



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