



# The Beacon Online

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

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## President Vinovskis Travels to Luther Classical College

President Vinovskis met with faculty and staff at Luther Classical College in Casper, Wyoming as part of the team from Concordia University System. The first school year began in August of this year.

**The Mission Statement** of the College is *Luther Classical College educates Lutherans in the classical, Lutheran tradition and prepares them for godly vocations within family, church, and society, fostering Christian culture through study of the best of our Western heritage.* **The Vision Statement** is *Luther Classical College offers both B.A. and A.A. programs in which students learn the truth of the Christian faith as professed in the Lutheran Confessions; are encouraged in genuine Lutheran culture; and are prepared for life in the home, the church, and the community—cherishing the Western corpus of literature, philosophy, music, art, scientific discovery, and Christian theology, and preserving the use of classical languages.*



Pictured below from left to right are: Rev. Dr. Douglas Spittel, Vice-president, CUS; Rev. Mark Braden, Chair CUS Board of Directors; Micah Christensen, Chair Board of Regents, Luther Classical College; Rev. Waldemar Vinovskis, SELC District President; Rev. Joshua Hayes, Interim President, Luther Classical College/Dean of Chapel; Rev. John Hill, Wyoming District President; Rev. Dr. Paul Philp, Exec. Dir. CUNE; Rev. Dr. Jameson Hardy, President, Concordia University System (CUS)



### **The Way Hosts Their 3rd Annual Community Christmas Event Columbia, Illinois**



The Way Church hosted their third annual Community Christmas event on Wednesday, December 3rd, bringing together families and friends to celebrate the birth of Jesus and engage in heartwarming fellowship and service.

The evening was filled with festive activities that underscored the true spirit of Christmas. Guests gathered around crackling fire pits to enjoy s'mores, sipped on warm hot cocoa and apple cider, and filled the air with the sounds of beloved Christmas carols.



A significant focus of the event was on outreach and giving. Attendees created beautiful Christmas cards to bring a gospel message of Christmas hope to residents of a local nursing home. Participants also decorated Christmas ornaments, bearing the name of Jesus our Wonderful Counselor. Every year participants can collect a new ornament with a different name of Jesus. A non-perishable food drive was also held, to collect items to support a local food pantry.





## Spiritual Care and Mental Health Resource

If you are a pastor, do you sometimes wonder why you're the last to know when a church member or family is in crisis? If you're not a pastor, have you ever wondered why it seems that some pastors are more approachable than others? Whether or not you're a pastor, have you ever wondered whether pastors get depressed and need mental health care, just like everyone else? **The latest issue of the *Concordia Journal* from Concordia Seminary, St Louis, addresses these questions and more as it focuses on spiritual care and mental health.** You can read a review of this issue by SELC District Ministerial Care Coordinator Rev. Chris Cahill [HERE>>](#).



## Advent, Living Faith, and Our Personal Mission Field

Rev. Dr. Renato Hoerlle  
Pastor and Re-Planting Pastor at Peace Lutheran Church,  
Galloway, NJ

The service was beginning, and the second Advent candle was lit, the candle of John the Baptist. As the liturgy unfolded, the congregation sang the hymn "*On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry*":

**On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry  
Announces that the Lord is nigh;  
Awake and hearken, for he brings  
Glad tidings of the King of kings!**

The words of the hymn echoed the Gospel reading of the day and prepared the congregation for the message that would follow:

**Then cleansed be every life from sin;  
Make straight the way for God within,  
And let us all our hearts prepare  
For Christ to come and enter there.**

Whoever desires the Savior to enter and dwell in the heart is someone in whom Christ has already entered and made His home. The fruit of faith, faith once created by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:14), expresses itself in the growing desire to know the Savior more deeply (Ephesians 3:17–20; Philippians 3:9, 10). This faith created by God (*fides directa*) does not initially need to be conscious of its content, as we see in the baptism of infants. Yet, it must grow in understanding (*fides reflexa*)—not so that the person might be saved, for they already are, but so that they may recognize Christ's presence and fight against sin, which has the power to destroy faith (Romans 8:13; Hebrews 3:12–13).

John the Baptist's cry still resounds: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." The kingdom of God is incompatible with sin; therefore, the Christian engages in a daily struggle against it, embracing the new life received in Baptism (Romans 6:4). Repentance and faith form the Christian's continual rhythm of breathing. Luther fought a fierce battle against the Antinomians, those who desired forgiveness but rejected a changed life. He insisted that Christ, on the cross, won not only the forgiveness of sins but also the gift of the Holy Spirit, so that with forgiveness we might also receive power to overcome sin.

This struggle reaches the root: the selfish heart. Original sin is, at its core, the breaking of the First Commandment, the attempt to take God's place and make everything orbit around ourselves, even God Himself. To repent is to take up Christ's cross, die to self (Luke 14:27,33), and recognize that Jesus is the center of life (*fides reflexa*). After the sermon, the congregation sang, reinforcing the call to repentance:

**Fling wide the portals of your heart;  
Make it a temple set apart  
From earthly use for heav'n's employ,  
Adorned with prayer and love and joy.**

**Redeemer, come and open wide  
My heart to Thee; here, Lord, abide!  
O enter with Thy saving grace;  
Show me Thy kindness, Lord, Thy face.**

This daily repentance and strengthened faith, an ongoing work of the Spirit through the Gospel, result not only in a growing love for Christ but also in unconditional love for our neighbor.

Luther repeatedly affirmed that **faith results in love**. Reflecting on the Lord's Supper, even before addressing the sacramental controversies, he wrote that the Holy Supper is both **gift** and **calling**. We receive Christ's body and blood, which strengthen our faith; and strengthened faith moves us toward fervent love for our neighbor. Faith works through love (Galatians 5:6). And the disciples of Jesus are known precisely by this love (John 13:35).

So, we love our neighbor, and here we consider two groups:

**the saved**, our brothers and sisters in the faith, and  
**the lost**, who urgently need to hear the Gospel.

We are called to encourage our brothers in their walk with Christ (Hebrews 3:13) and also to impact, for eternity, those who do not yet know Him. A good starting point is to reflect on our relationships and identify people who do not yet walk with Christ or who have drifted from the church.

That service, then, brought **two callings**:

- 1. The daily call to repentance and faith—living out the meaning of Baptism.**
- 2. The call to channel the love that faith produces toward both the saved and the lost.**

The congregation was invited to establish what we call "**My Personal Mission Field**": to look at the people with whom we already have relationships and create a list of those who do not yet know Jesus or who have distanced themselves from the life of the church. It is to ask: "**Who are the people I know—people with whom I interact—who still do not know the Savior Jesus?**"

To help, we suggested a few natural areas of life:

- **Neighborhood:** not only those who live next door, but the mechanic, the bank manager, the hairdresser...
- **Local congregation:** people with whom we have relationships, but who no longer attend worship.
- **Family:** relatives who do not know Jesus or who have withdrawn from Christian fellowship.

Members were invited to three simple actions:

### 1. List the names.

Write down the actual names of those with whom you have a relationship and who do not know Jesus or have drifted from the church.

### 2. Pray for them daily.

Intercession is already a profound act of love. Prayer changes our posture toward the person, and, above all, God delights in answering such prayers.

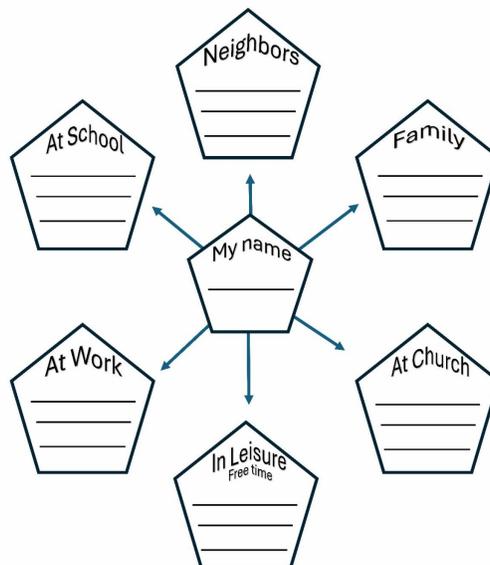
### 3. Show love.

Go beyond prayer: be present, listen, help, serve without expecting anything in return. At some point, that person may ask why you show such love, allowing you to share the hope that is Christ.

In this way, love paves the path for King Jesus to enter the heart. Now imagine, even in a very small congregation, if only 20 members each listed 6 names and prayed weekly for the people on their lists, 120 individuals would be brought before God, asking that they be saved. How many of these people might one day become part of the church? The answer comes from the Lord. Yet there is a strong possibility that the connecting link will be each member who intercedes for the people they know.

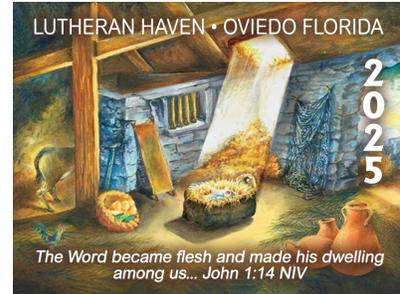
The Second Sunday of Advent service came to its close. The members left renewed: the Gospel proclaimed and made visible in the Supper strengthened them once again. Many expressed that they could now see more clearly how to channel Christ's love to those in need—becoming, in the lives of others, a kind of "John the Baptist," preparing the way for the King to come continually into their hearts.

## "My Personal Mission Field"





## Lutheran Haven Annual Seals Appeal to Benefit the Benevolent Care Fund



The 79th Annual Seals Campaign has begun! This campaign supports the Benevolent Care Fund at Lutheran Haven. This campaign supports the mission and ministry of Lutheran Haven:

***To provide a quality, Christ-centered haven of care for older adults.***

Our Benevolent Care Fund is critical in assisting retired Lutheran pastors, rostered church workers, retired Lutherans and others in need of our healthcare services. We also assist with things like Advanced Fees and Monthly Maintenance Fees along with assisting residents with emergency needs such as temporary healthcare assistance or even meals. It is only through the generosity of people like you who support the Haven that we can continue to come alongside these faithful servants.

The Word became flesh and  
made his dwelling among us...

— John 1:14 NIV

**T**o call someone kind, well-meaning, or charitable is to call them benevolent. The dictionary defines benevolence as a disposition to do good. Scripture describes many of God's attributes, including His benevolence toward us.

In 1 Timothy 6:17: "He richly provides us with everything to enjoy." He satisfies "the desire of every living thing." Our Father not only provides for our earthly needs, but He also exemplifies the greatest benevolence of all time in the sacrifice of His Son.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus demonstrated benevolence through His actions. He healed the sick, the lame, and the blind, to name just a few. He gave up the perfect glory of heaven to come as a helpless infant to die on a cross out of His great love for us. He healed not only the body but also the heart and soul of sinful people who could not help themselves. He still does so today. His example has been our reason for being.

His was the guiding principle of our founder, Andrew Duda Sr. and remains our mission today: ***"To provide a quality, Christ-centered haven of care for older adults."***

It is your benevolence that has helped sustain Lutheran Haven for nearly eight decades! What began 79 years ago with our first Christmas Seal outreach is now a vital source of support for many in need through our Benevolent Care Fund. Saying "thank you" seems insufficient for all you've done, but please know that your prayers and gifts have made a monumental difference in the lives of our seniors. It is a blessing for us to *show* how benevolence is lived out in the lives of our precious residents, thanks to you:



*"Lutheran Haven's benevolent care fund has meant the world to me. My family is always telling me not to worry about the future and this program helps me to do just that. I talk to the Lord about things all the time and He helps me. I thank Him for bringing me here and providing me with the help I needed. Many years ago, God led me to Lutheran Haven and I'm so happy He did!" - A grateful resident*

Out of thanks to God for His many blessings, I/we enclose a gift to  
The Lutheran Haven Foundation for:

Benevolent Care  General

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Home Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

Church Affiliation \_\_\_\_\_

Payment:  My check payable to LHF is enclosed

Please return this card with your gift in the enclosed envelope.

Credit card donations can be made directly through our website by  
visiting [lutheranhaven.org](http://lutheranhaven.org). Just click on the Faithful giving tab on the  
menu bar. You can also scan our QR Code and it will take you directly to  
Faithful Giving.



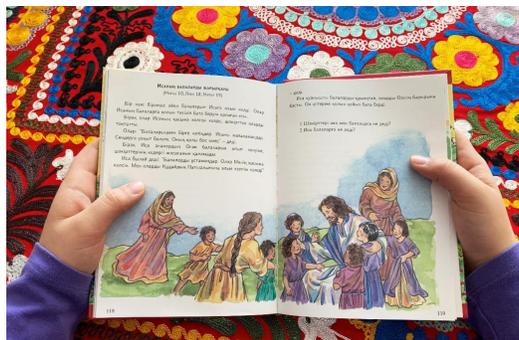
You can mail your gift to the Benevolent Care Fund to the address below.

Lutheran Haven Foundation  
2041 West State Road 426  
Oviedo, FL 32765



## Free Lutheran Resources

Do you have a friend, neighbor or family member who doesn't speak English as a first language? This Christmas, give them a book that explains the real "reason for the season" that's written in their own language. The Lutheran Heritage Foundation ([www.LHFmissions.org/publications](http://www.LHFmissions.org/publications)), a recognized service organization of the LCMS, has translated and published books like Luther's Small Catechism, A Child's Garden of Bible Stories, God's Word For You, and more into nearly 190 languages like Spanish, Hmong, Swahili and Chinese. Best of all, these books are FREE to any church or individual who needs them. Simply visit the LHF website ([www.LHFmissions.org/publications](http://www.LHFmissions.org/publications)) to search by language and send an email with your request.





## Two Job Opportunities at Redeeming Life Outreach Ministries

Redeeming Life Outreach Ministries is a Registered Service Organization of the LCMS that provides a home, help, and hope for women in crisis pregnancy situations. We are currently searching for two Lutherans with a passion for life-affirming ministry to join our team, based out of Sanford, FL. Please check out the job listings for Program Manager and Director of Development and contact us through the information on our website ([rlom.org/careers](http://rlom.org/careers)) if you have interest in discussing these opportunities further.



## Vicarage Applications due February 13, 2026

Vicarage applications are due to the SELC District office no later than February 13, 2026. If you are interested in applying for a Vicar, please contact the District Office at [selc.lcms@gmail.com](mailto:selc.lcms@gmail.com) or 610-965-3265, press 6.



## Preaching Retreat on Lent Scheduled Deadline to Register is December 19th

Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary in St. Catharines will be hosting a Preaching Retreat on the topic of Lent on January 19-20, 2026. We will delve into the why of midweek Lenten services, crafting sermon outlines, why Lutherans preach differently, and putting what you have learned into practice.

Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary is located on the campus of Brock University near Niagara Falls, Ontario.

Registration Fee: \$225 CAD (deadline January 12, 2026)

Early Bird Registration Fee: \$200 CAD (**deadline December 19, 2025**)

For more info or to register: <https://concordia-seminary.ca/2025/11/10/lenten-preaching-retreat-coming-in-january/>



## Did Your Church Receive the Official Nomination Ballot for Synod Elections?

Each congregation should have received notice from the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod regarding that it is time for **Your Congregation** to make nominations for the Synod President, First Vice President, and Regional Vice President.

Each congregation should have received a mailing sent via USPS labeled **LCMS OFFICIAL NOMINATION BALLOT**. This mailing includes the information you need to nominate for the Synod President, First Vice President, and Regional Vice President. Your ballot must be submitted by Wednesday, **February 18, 2026**.

If you did not receive this information by November 4, 2025, please contact the LCMS Office of the Secretary at [lcmssecretary@lcms.org](mailto:lcmssecretary@lcms.org) or call the office at 314-996-1417.



## Reformation in Germany: In the Footsteps of Martin Luther with Pastors Dan Lepley and Andy Currao | June 2, 2026

Follow the liturgy as we explore the land of the Reformation next June with Pastor Dan Lepley! This unique Lutheran heritage tour comes with a liturgical twist. We will begin considering the effects of pride and prejudice at Ravensbrück concentration camp. From there, we will be built up in our appreciation of our Lutheran forebearers as we visit many key sites of the Reformation. See all tour information and register [here](#).



## 2025 Musical Advent Calendar

Since the nineteenth century, households and congregations have marked the days before Christmastide with many kinds of Advent calendars. The season of waiting and longing for the “already-but-not-yet” incarnation of Jesus unfolds amidst waning daylight in the Northern Hemisphere, a time of yearning for hope, joy, and peace.

Experience the anticipation and hope of the Advent season with Lutheran Summer Music's fifth-annual **Musical Advent Calendar**.

Join us each day from November 30 to December 24 for a musical meditation—inviting you to pause, listen, and find stillness amid the season. Selections will be shared on LSM's **Facebook**, **Instagram**, and **YouTube** pages and archived on our **website**.

Sign up below to enjoy each day's Advent video delivered to your inbox.

**Daily Email Sign-Up**



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a church raise over \$500,000  
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## Family Bible Journey Podcast

Did you know that the Psalms follow the life of faith from birth through death, and end with everlasting songs of praise? Learn how the psalms end with heavenly praises by listening to the Family Bible Journey podcast.

Listen on your favorite podcast player or at [familybiblejourney.com](http://familybiblejourney.com).



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 LCEF is a nonprofit religious organization; therefore, LCEF Investments are not FDIC insured, are not a federally insured savings or deposit account or insured by any state or federal agency. This is not an offer to sell investments, nor a solicitation to buy. LCEF will offer and sell its securities only in states where authorized. The offer is made solely by LCEF's Offering Circular. Investors should carefully read the Offering Circular, which more fully describes associated risks. StewardAccount products are not available to investors in South Carolina. StewardAccount access features are offered through UMB Bank n.a. All Access Account is known as "StewardAccount" for investors in Washington.





## 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 for their health challenges.

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

**Rev. Kevin Duff**, Hilton Head, SC, who is rehabbing from surgery. Please keep him and his family in your prayers as they prepare the next steps in his treatment.

**Rev. Edward Kucera**, and his wife Irene, St. Louis, MO.

**Bev Cahill**, wife of Rev. Chris Cahill. Lodi, OH, continues her recovery. The Cahills are grateful for all the prayers for Bev. 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 in physical therapy and will return to work in October.

**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.

**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, praising God for a year of scans clear of tumors, we ask for strength during immunotherapy maintenance; may the Lord complete His healing, adding joy and thanks to each of Nita's days.

**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.

**Milly Kwiatkowski**, Parma, OH, who had surgery. Please pray for Milly as she continues her recovery from surgery.

*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** **Advent/Christmas 2025** (A *Teachable Moment* for a Father and a Son) Rev. Ken Ballas, EM

Among our understandably never-ending attempts accurately to teach all ages the greatest of all mysteries (cf. Latin **magnum mysterium** or **the incarnation of God's and Mary's Son come down to earth where we live and often hurt in human flesh**) are variations of the following allegedly equally true and admittedly at times seemingly Spiritually surreal story.

Out for an early Saturday morning walk together following a brief but welcome pre-dawn thunderstorm, a father and remarkably mature pre-adolescent age son's venture was abruptly interrupted by a totally unexpected discovery. The jagged end of a sizable freshly wind-blown tree limb had imbedded itself squarely into the center of a large (by North American standards) intricately structured group home **ant-hill** containing not only an extremely successful, well-organized active living colony of amazingly social flightless insects as well as *nesting area* for the next generation of ants!

Apparently among the first hikers (or bikers) that day several years ago on a seldom used trail in a fairly heavily wooded area, this father and son suddenly had ample reason for finding themselves temporarily transfixed.

Instead of standing speechless and motionless by what one might be privileged to experience in God's Great Outdoors, today some folks in a hurry might at least still pause long enough to snap a few photos on their ever present smartphone before moving on their way. Not so our intrepid family hikers who found reason to spend several minutes reflecting on what had occurred but a few hours earlier.

Rather than even remotely consider attempting to do a rough *body count* of dead or still barely moving injured ants, such senseless thinking was far from their minds as the chaotic crisis facing scores of survivor ants remained paramount to both observers' compassionate instincts as ants seemed to be everywhere – dead ants, still moving injured ants and scores of scurrying survivors some of whom actually seemed to know what each was to do in the most dire of circumstances.

Though the son eventually began to edge his way forward with the intent of removing the still protruding offending branch, the father taking his boy by the shoulder the father gently but successfully dissuaded him from such questionable action saying, "Son, I know how much we both would like to help these obviously confused but amazingly resilient and intelligent creatures; but by moving the tree limb even slightly just now we may only be making matters worse by causing any additional existing *undamaged tunnels* to collapse."

"I hear you, Dad," the boy tearfully answered, "but I still wish there might be *something* we could do beside continuing to pray that might help them in their present deeply complicated predicament."

Thinking for a few moments, the father wisely yet somewhat enigmatically realistically replied, "Without wanting to sound silly, I suppose the only way we could help these ants in any lasting sort of way is to be able *for us* to speak their language and somehow become ants!"

"Dad" the son replied, "that's not silly! That's what our pastors, Sunday School teachers, confirmation instructors and you and Mom plus grandparents, godparents and many others have taught me to believe that there was a very real sense that is what happened that very First Christmas and years following not only in Bethlehem but on a cross-covered hill called Calvary and in an empty borrowed tomb in Joseph of Arimathea's garden.

**"Right you are, son," said the father giving his son a hug. "Would that the Holy Spirit powerfully convince all struggling people including the Virgin Mary, Joseph and many others initially or even later what many find difficult to believe. Amen."**

As both father and son were getting hungry, on the drive home both of them decided to make sure they would invite Mom to join them on their next hike, that, unlike most sheep, ants (and bees!) were not stupid (see Exodus 3:8 and Proverbs 6:6; 30:25) and that finally, upon arrival in the family kitchen, Mom's always super breakfasts never tasted so good!



## **SELC District - A District Without Borders**

***Showing Everyone Life in Christ, by Showing Everyone Love in Christ***

### **SELC District of LCMS**

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Macungie, PA 18062  
610-965-3265

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