

The EVANGEL

Convention Edition





From the Editor

Greetings! This month we bring you a look at this year's convention, providing some updates from across our church body.

Perhaps it's easy to think: oh, convention is just business meetings—how does it impact me or my congregation?

Well, let me put it this way: convention is another way God does the work of the church through His people. This is not just a gathering of humans to accomplish some tasks; no, the very foundation of the gathering is based on something beyond mere human ideas.

The theme of this year's convention "Reconciled Through Christ" (2 Cor 5:17-20) is the basis of any gathering of believers. "Now all things are of God, Who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:18).

So where was God in this convention? Here are just a few glimpses:

- Our seminary is bursting at the seams: God is calling men into the ministry—praise Him!
- Churches are being planted in other countries, and conversations are starting: "How can we do this here in the U.S.?"
- AALC leadership remains determined to be faithful to God's Word and to guide congregations—existing and interested—into Scriptural truth vs. false teaching
- Lay people and clergy had fellowship together throughout the week, sharing in both the business at hand and the informal times of meals and conversation.
- Ordinary people doing ordinary things (one of my personal favorites!). What comes so naturally to people: finances, technology, rules of order, meals, organization, music, preaching, and more—all this is God at work through their "vocations:" ordinary tasks for the sake of the building up of the Body of Christ.
- And yes, those business meetings, which may not be the most exciting thing any of us have experienced, but the purpose of it all is to make sure The AALC continues to function well, so that each of our churches can do the work where we are.

So if you're in need of some good news, may these pages be a reminder of how God is still "reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Cor 5:19), even through an event like The AALC's General Convention.

Peace be with you,

Gretchen Baker

Gretchen Baker
The Editor

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Editor: Gretchen Baker
Layout & Design: Karen Young

Cover: Present at the 29th General Convention were AALC Presiding Pastors, prior and current: Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins, Rev. Dr. Thomas Aadland, Rev. Dr. Duane Lindberg, Rev. Dr. Cary Larson (current). Photo credit: Gretchen Baker.

To Continue to Follow Christ Jesus into the World

By Rev. Dr. Cary G. Larson



I shared this vision with the General Convention as part of my Presiding Pastor's report, and I now desire to share this with the whole body of The AALC through *The Evangel*.

Following the resurrected Christ Jesus as the unfaltering center of our Faith, The AALC was founded on two simple truths, and everything comes forth from this: the inerrant and infallible Word of God and the *quia* subscription to the Lutheran Confessions because they are an accurate exhibition of Holy Scriptures. Therefore, all the errors and false teachings of contemporary Christianity can be traced to rejecting these two fundamental truths. Hundreds of thousands of people thirst and seek these truths, but don't know where to find them. I believe the Holy Spirit is driving people to The AALC to hear the lifesaving Gospel of Christ Jesus, to be made into a new creation through the waters of Holy Baptism, and fed and nourished through the Lord's Supper.

I see four groups of people to focus our efforts on at all levels of our work in the name of Christ Jesus:

1. Individuals who have never heard the Gospel – as mandated by Scripture and The AALC Constitution.
2. Individuals who have become de-churched or consider themselves as having no religious preference, which is the fastest growing body of “religious” people in the USA.
3. Evangelical or other Christians thirsting for what can only be found in Confessional Lutheranism.
4. Lutherans from non-confessional bodies (ELCA, LCMC, NALC) seeking to return home to Confessional Lutheranism.

However, we must be aware of specific barriers that may make this a challenge.

First, Confessional Lutheranism Barriers: The first barrier is the absolute authority of God's Holy Word. We need to appreciate that there are those who do not hold Holy Scripture in this position of authority in matters of life and faith. All the other barriers are connected to this significant barrier.

Second, Lutheran Cultural Barriers: Like me, if you have been a Lutheran all your life, you may not see these barriers. This is where we need to rely on our seminarians, pastors, and congregational members who have come to us from non-Lutheran places.

Third, TAALC Cultural Barriers: Our polity (how we do church) is not like the other Lutheran bodies. We are not heavily handed with ecclesiastical authority, and we are not entirely congregational. Even though we honor the authority of the congregation, as an association of Lutheran churches, we are not autonomous congregations.

Finally, Other Barriers: Satan and his demons will impede anyone's movement toward Christ Jesus, His life-saving Gospel and Sacraments.

All of us must acknowledge two significant challenges to address these barriers and reach the four groups of people who need us:

First, there needs to be appropriate caution and concern for the sake of the inerrancy of Scripture and doctrinal integrity. We don't want to fall into doctrinalism (where doctrine displaces Christ Jesus as the agent of justification), but we must remember that we are confessional Lutherans. It is a false dichotomy to ask, “Are you missional or confessional?” Adhering to God's Word is to be both, as they are inseparable. Therefore, we will open our arms and proclaim the love of God through Christ Jesus to all people, both in our communities and throughout the world, without compromising Christian doctrine.

Second, we need to appreciate the lack of knowledge about the distinctives of Confessional Lutheranism. We must admit this is an ongoing challenge within our Association. We need to be intentional about teaching the Christian faith. We can't just assume, even if a person has been a life-long member of the congregation, that they understand what it means to be a Christian and hold fast to the Lutheran Confessions.

In the latter part of my term as your Presiding Pastor, The AALC will focus on developing effective strategies and programs to overcome existing barriers and welcome those who seek the true Christ Jesus. We aim to reach out to those burdened with self-justification, hurt by the Church, or disillusioned with non-confessional church bodies. Through God's grace, we hope to guide these seeking souls to the freedom of the authentic Gospel of Christ Jesus.

I believe the future is extremely bright for The American Association of Lutheran Churches. We must follow our Christ Jesus into the world, which desperately needs what He has equipped us to offer. In the holy name of Jesus. Amen! †

The Rev. Dr. Cary G. Larson serves The AALC as Presiding Pastor.

Top right: The Rev. Dr. Cary G. Larson addresses the assembly at convention (Photo Credit: Rev. Chris Rosebrough).



AALC Convention

The clergy procession at the start of the Divine Service on the first evening of the General Convention on Tuesday, June 25 (Photo Credit: Lisa Cooper).

AALC holds 29th Biennial Convention

By Rev. Dave Spotts

The 29th General Convention of The American Association of Lutheran Churches (AALC) met from June 25–28, 2024, at the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary campus. More than one hundred pastors, seminarians, delegates from congregations, and other interested people gathered to explore the theme of being reconciled through Christ, drawn from 2 Corinthians 5:17–20.

This reconciliation we have in Christ makes us a new creation, and also places us in the position to be God's instruments of reconciliation, urging others to be reconciled to God. In Christ, all Christians are part of an extended household. Our life in community is central to the work of Christ's kingdom.

During the course of the week, we gathered for four different services – two traditional Divine Services, one worship service more contemporary in nature, and a service of prayer and preaching which included recognition of recent seminary graduates and the installation of the Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins as the new president of the American Lutheran Theological Seminary. We gladly received God's gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation as we heard preaching by our Presiding Pastor Rev. Dr. Cary Larson, as well as Rev. John Linch, Rev. Tony Voltattorni, and Rev. Dr. Jordan Cooper.

Keynote speakers, Rev. Heath Curtis and Rev. Nathan Meador, both from the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LC-MS), presented biblical points of view of good stewardship and the blessing it can be to the local congregation and to the church as a whole. They shared numerous resources which have been published by the LC-MS and which are available free of charge on the LC-MS website.

Among the business conducted at the General Convention was passing of a budget both for the church body and for the seminary; and the election of our new seminary president, our new assistant presiding pastor, and numerous members of the different boards and commissions which carry on the day-to-day work of The AALC. The church body also affirmed our stance on marriage as being between one man and one woman.

The convention welcomed and received greetings from representatives of the LC-MS as well as the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC) and The Lutheran Church in Norway/Iceland. Bishop Torkild Masvie thanked The AALC for being the first church body to have joined with his church body

in pulpit and altar fellowship. Their work of equipping and mobilizing pastors in the strongly post-Christian world of Norway and Iceland is thriving. They are growing, currently approaching 30 congregations. Not only are they active in Norway and Iceland, but they have begun significant mission work in Israel as well.

When asked his observations about the convention, Bishop Masvie said he was impressed by the way The AALC, as a small, geographically widespread, and diverse church body was able to work together as a family. He was thankful for our willingness to reach out and care for missions in our own country and around the world, as well as for the grace and charity which normally prevails in our discussions and deliberations. Bishop Masvie also urged us to visit the church body website: lkn.no/information-in-english/ or simply lkn.no.

Rev. Dr. Duane Lindberg, who has almost certainly attended more conventions of The AALC than anybody else, expressed his thanks to God in Christ, Who has not only assembled a body of church congregations, but Who has raised up new generations of leaders. Dr. Lindberg sees himself very much as a father figure in The AALC. Looking at the crop of seminary graduates and the new seminary leadership gives him great hope for the future of our church body.

A new member of our clergy roster, at his first ever general convention, told me he was thankful for the sense of family and camaraderie which he saw within The AALC. He is glad not only to be moving from a different theological orientation to confessional Lutheranism, but also to be moving from an independent congregation into a church body where there is broad agreement and cooperation.

Truly the Lord is making His people in The AALC ambassadors of reconciliation. With our business conducted, our staffing arranged for the next several years, and our understanding of the great possibilities that lie within our mission, we are eager to see what will develop in the months and years to come. Psalm 127 speaks to the work of God, building the house, guarding the city, increasing the family, and bringing influence to other nations through Jesus Christ our Lord. †

The Rev. Dave Spotts serves as the missionary chaplain of The AALC through Wittenberg Door Campus Ministry in Columbia, MO. He is also the chaplain for the Mid-Missouri Lutheran Hospital Ministry.



Top row left to right: Seminarian Gage Garlinghouse assisted with questions from delegates (Photo Credit: Rev. Chris Rosebrough). Rev. Heath Curtis was one of two keynote speakers, who presented on stewardship (PC: Rosebrough). Clergy gathered prior to the Tuesday evening Divine Service: Rev. Steve Klawonn, Rev. Ryan Dexter, and Rev. John Linch (PC: Rev. Dean Stoner). Second row: Dr. Dan Kruger presented the proposed budget to the delegates (PC: Rosebrough). Bishop Torikild Masvie shared greetings from The Lutheran Church in Norway/Iceland (PC: Rosebrough). Third row: Rev. Roger Twito gave his Assistant Presiding Pastor's report to the delegates (PC: Rosebrough). Clergy prepare for the procession into the Tuesday evening Divine Service (PC: Lisa Cooper). Bottom row: Delegates from across The AALC filled the cafeteria on campus at The Free Lutheran Bible College & Seminary in preparation of the business meetings (PC: Rosebrough). Rev. Alexander McNally shared devotions each morning as Convention Chaplain (PC: Rosebrough). Rev. Jon Holst gives the benediction at the close of the opening service of the General Convention (PC: Cooper)





Seminary Announces Global Initiative

By Rev. Dr. Curtis E. Leins

A Wonderful Opportunity

Today, the American Lutheran Theological Seminary (ALTS) has been given a strategic place of importance and opportunity for theological education and global outreach. How so? ALTS has two qualifications that, when joined together, create an unmatched possibility for Lutheran theological education.

First, ALTS is a confessional Lutheran seminary. We believe, teach, and confess that the Holy Bible is infallible, inerrant, and inspired, and we subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions because they are the correct exposition of Holy Scripture. Such adherence to God's Word and the Lutheran Confessions is both extraordinary and precious today!

Second, ALTS has a well-developed and successful Master of Divinity degree program, with all 30 academic courses taught by Lutheran scholars and available online. When these two factors are joined together, confessional teaching and global accessibility, ALTS has a rare privilege and a wonderful opportunity to carry the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world!



(Facing page on left) The Rev. Dr. Duane Lindberg stands as the assembly gave a round of applause in appreciation for his many contributions to the Seminary and The AALC. (Photo Credit: Rosebrough).

(Facing page on top right) Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins addressed the assembly prior to being elected as the President of the Seminary (Photo Credit: Rosebrough).

(Facing page on lower right) Rev. Dr. Jordan Cooper provided updates on the many activities going on at the Seminary (Photo Credit: Rosebrough). (This page at left) Seminarians and faculty gathered after the graduation and installation service at the General Convention: (first row) Seminarians: Aaron Miner, Jacob Schaeffer, Alexander Lancaster, John Austin, Joshua Swigart, and Brian Ruuska; (second row) Seminarian Gage Garlinghouse; Faculty and staff: Rev. Dr. Cary Larson, Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins, Rev. Jon Holst, Rev. Dave Spotts; and recent seminary graduate Rev. John Linch, (third row) Faculty: Rev. Dr. Jordan Cooper and Rev. Dr. Chris Caughey (Photo Credit: Lisa Cooper).

This moment of opportunity is not the result of a purposeful design or master plan on our part. We cannot take credit for what has happened or what may soon take place. Instead, it is clear that our Heavenly Father has brought us to this moment and has given us this calling. In the last few years, our student body has grown precipitously, both in domestic and international students. Applicants to our seminary include students from Lutheran congregations, as well as other denominational and non-denominational congregations. All of them desire to receive faithful and confessional Lutheran theological education. Also, because our degree program is accessible around the world and has gained some significant global recognition, students are inquiring and making application to ALTS from South America, Africa, China, Japan, Canada, and Russia.

It is no wild speculation to say that American Lutheran Theological Seminary may become *the premiere confessional Lutheran seminary, accessible to the world!* Truth be told, I believe that this is exactly what God is calling us to be.

From Their Own Kitchen Tables

It was not long ago that it was difficult if not impossible to provide theological education for potential pastors in the global south or remote places in the extreme north. The potential pastor had to gain sufficient financial support to carry him to the U.S. and support him for four years of theological education. The other option was for a professor to travel to a remote location like the African bush and remain there teaching a small group of potential pastors. Today's advanced technology makes global broadband available almost anywhere in the world. Now, potential pastors and interested laity in remote locations can receive online, live, and interactive, Lutheran theological education from their own kitchen tables. In fact, ALTS can reach and teach students from Kangaroo Island, Australia, to the Galápagos Island of Ecuador, from Moscow, Russia, to Manila, the Philippines, all at the same time! We can teach them all, just like we teach students in the U.S.

You Can Be a Part

ALTS is already hard at work, building a seminary leadership team in order to advance the ALTS Global Initiative. We will be redesigning our website, developing media promotions, and advancing our targeted marketing campaign. At the same time, we are moving forward, filling empty professor slots and increasing the digital library.

You can be a part of this wonderful opportunity for ALTS and for the advancement of the Gospel of Christ around the globe.

The first and most important thing that we ask is that you would pray for our seminary. Please pray for our students, our professors and staff, and for those students who are considering making application to ALTS.

Next, please consider joining the SOLA 500. Please make a donation of \$25 per month or \$300 per year. This contribution provides critical support for our day-to-day operations.

Finally, please pray about making a larger financial gift to ensure the sustainability of our seminary.

Will ALTS be *the premiere, confessional, Lutheran Seminary accessible to the world?* Where will we be in three to five years? What influence will we have upon the World for Jesus Christ? By the grace of God, we will not only continue to provide caring and faithful pastors for the congregations of The AALC, but we will also provide confessional Lutheran pastors for God's people across the globe.

Our Lord Jesus is building a mighty seminary for the future of The AALC! Thank you for being a part of God's work today! †

The Rev. Dr. Curtis E. Leins was elected as President of ALTS at The AALC General Convention in June 2024.



Women of L.I.F.E. Meet at Convention

By Katherine Hofinga



Many women of The AALC met during The AALC's Convention for the Women of L.I.F.E. (WOL) luncheon and business meeting on Wednesday, June 26, 2024. We enjoyed a wonderful catered lunch and fellowship time and then were led in a short devotional by Karen Holst. We took an offering for our WOL benevolences and made everyone in attendance aware of two things:

1) The AALC Women of L.I.F.E. has a Facebook page that all women of The AALC are encouraged to join. If you are on Facebook, please send me (Katherine Hofinga) a message with a request to be added to the group.

2) Our 2025 Bible Study will be "Ruth: A Love Story to Us from God's Heart" written by Cathy Twito. Order information will be available later in the year.

A few highlights from our business meeting include:

1) The Treasurer's Report was given by Treasurer, Donnette Taylor. Each of our ten benevolences received \$1017.80 from the National WOL totaling \$10,178.00 in donations over the past two years.

2) The Women of L.I.F.E. voted to support the following benevolences (with percentages of total donations):

- a. 35% to The AALC World Missions Commission
- b. 35% to The AALC Commission on American Missions
- c. 10% to The AALC Youth
- d. 10% to The AALC Seminary (ALTS)
- e. 10% to Lutherans For Life

3) Karen Holst was appointed to fill the vacant 2022-2026 Co-Chair position.

4) Elections were held for Co-Chair, Treasurer, and Materials Resource Coordinator. Thankfully, each of the women currently holding these positions were eligible for re-election and were willing to serve again, so a unanimous ballot was cast for Katherine Hofinga as Co-Chair, Donnette Taylor as Treasurer, and Laurie O'Brien as Materials Resource Coordinator.

The women also gathered early Thursday morning for a time of prayer, focusing on topics and people groups inspired by the convention theme of "Reconciled to Christ."†

Katherine Hofinga serves as Women of L.I.F.E. Co-Chair.

Captions: Pam Virkus, Sheryl Leonard, Bonnie Ohlrich, Carol Lorthoir, and Carolyn Badenhop were among the women gathered for the WOL luncheon and business meeting on Wednesday during The AALC Convention. Co-Chair Katherine Hofinga led the luncheon and meeting, and newly elected Co-Chair Karen Holst shared devotions. The tables were decorated with bookmarks crafted by Karen Holst and treat boxes provided by Traci McNally (Photo Credit: Lisa Cooper and Karen Holst).



Pastors' Wives Enjoy Fellowship at Convention

By Katherine Hofinga

Most of the pastors' wives (PW) who attended the General Convention met together over dinner on Wednesday evening. We had over 329 years of experience as pastors' wives at our table, with our longest serving PW at 56 years and our newest PW at 7 months!

We were able to begin discussion on a few topics related to being a pastor's wife but recognized that we didn't have enough time to delve deeper into the many areas that need attention as a PW. What to do? We are hoping to use technology (most likely the app GroupMe) to enable us to help each other as we have questions and concerns that come up. We also would like to pair up PWs with more experience with newer PWs to foster relationships and prayers and to enable wisdom to be passed along.

Many of us expressed interest in having a Pastors' Wives' retreat or conference. Unfortunately, it is impossible to find a time and location that works for everyone. We discussed meeting during the pastors' conference in October, meeting in January or February in St. Louis, or meeting somewhere next June. We would like to get input from PWs who were not at convention. Those who were at convention agreed that getting together on the Monday and Tuesday before our next convention would be an excellent opportunity for us. I will be discussing this possibility with the national office.

All pastors' wives: please be on the lookout for emails or texts to try to get you connected to other pastors' wives! †

Katherine Hofinga serves as Women of L.I.F.E. Co-Chair.



AALC pastors' wives met during the convention and continue to find ways to develop relationships and support each other.



(Top photo, left to right) Beth Brokenshire, NoEl Hoffeld, Shannon McNally, Pam Virkus, Gretchen Baker, Connie Larson, Debbie Leins, (hidden) Sandra Hall, Lisa Cooper, Karen Holst, Anji Storrs, Carol Lorthoir (Photo Credit: Rev. Dean Stoner).



Convention



Rev. Dr. Jordan Cooper reflected on Rev. John Linch's time in seminary at the graduation portion of the closing service at Convention (Photo Credit: Lisa Cooper).

A Call To Action

By Doug Taylor

This is an exciting time in The AALC. We are in the best financial condition in years, the seminary is booming with thirty-four students currently working toward a Master of Divinity degree, and we are in discussion with churches about joining us. In short, we are becoming better known in the Lutheran community.

However, there are several areas that can use more financial support. The first area I'll note is the General Fund. Our budget covers a two-year period. Usually, after the Convention our income increases but falls off over time leaving us at a deficit by the next Convention. I am asking each of our member churches to increase their giving as they are able. If you increase one percent per year for the next few years, we will be positioned for the future.

Another area to spotlight is the American Lutheran Theological Seminary (ALTS). We are having unprecedented growth which looks to continue. After many years of struggling financially, the last two years have been near breakeven due in large part to the SOLA 500 fundraising effort, which Dr. Leins presented at the 2022 Convention. The goal was to have five hundred people pledge twenty-five dollars a month to support ALTS. While the campaign has been successful, we have not come close to the goal of five hundred participants. I am asking that you renew your pledge or if you haven't participated that you join the campaign.

The seminary is the future of our association. As the seminary goes, so goes our Church.

The final area to discuss is The AALC Foundation. It was established in 2005 but is not widely known. The Foundation is similar to others you may be familiar with. We take permanent gifts and invest so that income is available to fund future needs. The primary focus is in three accounts:

- (1) Pioneer New Congregations
- (2) Support Revitalization of Existing Congregations
- (3) Capital Improvements and New Ministry Opportunities

Under the guidance of Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins, a new account titled "Rev. Dr. Duane R. Lindberg Professor of Biblical Studies" is proposed. The goal is to raise one million dollars to permanently endow a fulltime professorship to teach Biblical Studies.

I urge everyone reading this to seriously consider participating in one or more of these opportunities. I can assist or provide additional information to those interested. †

Mr. Doug Taylor serves as Chairman of The AALC Board of Trustees and as the Chairman of The AALC Foundation.



Guests and AALC clergy present at the opening service of The AALC General Convention were: (front row) Rev. Scott Strohkirch, Rev. Dr. Chris Caughey, Rev. John Linch, Rev. Dr. Cary Larson, Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins, Rev. Dr. Thomas Aadland, Rev. Dr. Duane Lindberg, Rev. Dr. Jordan Cooper, Rev. Dr. Tom Stover, Rev. Dan Dapelo, Rev. Scott Bieker, Rev. Eric Ishimaru, Rev. John Anderson, Rev. Matthew Fenn, Bishop Torkild Masvie (The Lutheran Church in Norway/Iceland), Rev. Neil Cadle, Rev. Andrew Virkus, (second row) Rev. Joe Dapelo, Rev. Phillip Hofinga, Rev. Benjamin Baker, Rev. Abraham McNally, Rev. Alex McNally, Rev. Jay Eberth, Rev. Ray Lorthioir, Rev. Chris Rosebrough, Rev. Joseph Adama, Rev. Ryan Dexter, Rev. Dave Spotts, Rev. Anthony Voltattorni, (back row) Rev. Gary Koutsopoulos, Rev. Jerry Storrs, Rev. Roger Twito, Rev. Steve Klawonn, Rev. Jamie Strickler, Rev. Greg Stenzel, Rev. Joseph Marsh, Rev. James Krikava (LC-MS), Rev. Dr. Nathan Meador (LC-MS), Rev. Antonio Romano, Rev. Tylan Dalrymple, Rev. Jon Holst, and Rev. Dean Johansen (Photo Credit: Lisa Cooper).

An Update from the Commission on Doctrine and Church Relations

By Rev. Jon Holst

There's been a lot happening with the Commission on Doctrine and Church Relations (CDCR) of The AALC recently.

One of the CDCR's major undertakings is nearing completion: a comprehensive report on the theology and practice of the Lord's Supper. Additionally, in response to a request from the Clergy Commission, the CDCR has begun discussions for a report concerning divorce and remarriage.

At our recent TAALC General Convention, Presiding Pastor Rev. Dr. Cary Larson noted the informal talks he has had with Rev. Pres. Teuscher of the Lutheran Church-Canada. Looking forward, then, the CDCR may soon be called upon to engage in more formal dialogues between our two church bodies. This marks an important step toward fostering greater unity among Confessional Lutherans in North America.

The members of the CDCR would like to express our gratitude to Rev. Ben Baker for his dedicated leadership as chairman of the

CDCR during the previous term, laying a strong foundation for the commission's ongoing work.

Recent changes to the CDCR include the election of Rev. Dr. Jordan Cooper and the re-election of Mr. Ed Kleiner to the CDCR at the General Convention, alongside the welcome of Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins to the commission as the newly elected President of ALTS.

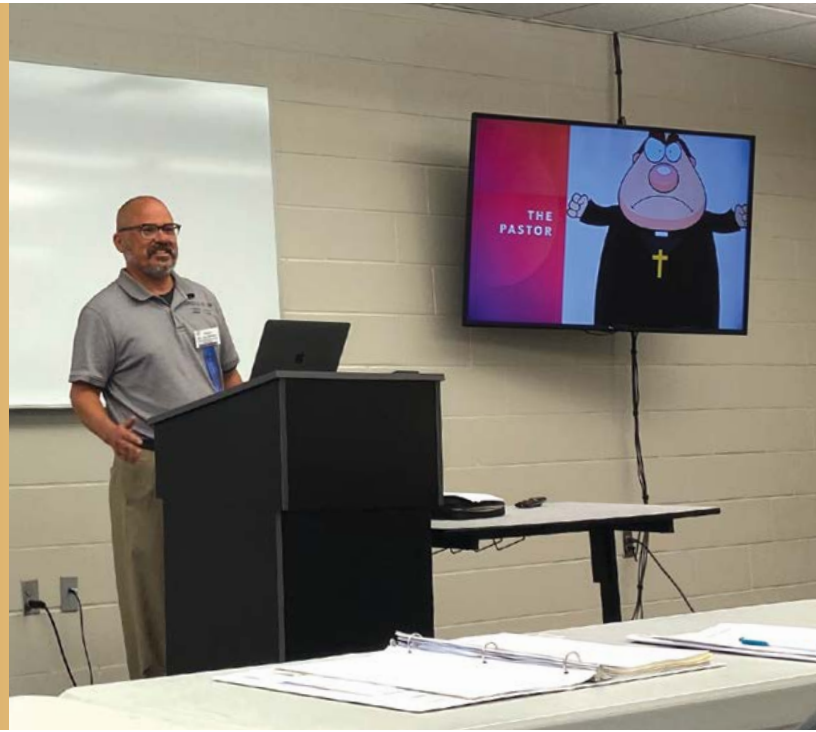
Continuing their service on the CDCR are our Presiding Pastor Rev. Dr. Cary Larson, Rev. Phillip Hofinga, Rev. Jon Holst, and Mr. Remy Sheppard.

Please remember the CDCR in your prayers as they strive to faithfully carry out the tasks they've been given! †

The Rev. Jon Holst serves St. Luke the Evangelist Lutheran Church, Jurupa Valley, CA.



Commission on American Missions (CAM)



Rev. Joe Christina presented a workshop on church planting at the convention (PC: Lisa Cooper).

National Home Mission Developer Happenings

By Rev. Joe Christina

The past couple of years has presented challenges as well as opportunities for home missions in The AALC. God has proven His faithfulness as we seek to use the resources He provides to carry out the work of supporting outreach and missions here in the states.

CONGREGATIONAL SUPPORT

Up until about a year ago, the Commission on American Missions (CAM) had been providing financial support to Barn Again Lutheran Church in New Mexico. This assistance was used to help with operating costs. Unfortunately, this assistance was withdrawn as Barn Again made the decision to close its doors.

CAM, along with a handful of our sister congregations, was also able to fund a two-thirds temporary vacancy pastor position for Abiding Grace Lutheran Church in Gillette, WY. This position was filled for about six months and provided a much-needed stability to Word and Sacrament ministry to God's people there.

Christ Lutheran Church in Germantown, MD, is also being supported during its vacancy. The national office has been put into contact with an area LCMS pastor who has since connected with congregational leaders to assist with especially the consecration of the elements of Holy Communion. Sermons and other resources are provided from afar as well.

CAM also provided needed financial assistance to Sonland Lutheran Church in Casa Grande, AZ, as they awaited the sale of property. Sonland, in turn, "paid it forward" by providing assistance to another church in our association.

CAM also released funding to Christ the Ray of Hope in Albuquerque, NM, to update their website.

Finally CAM has provided financial assistance to Mountain View Lutheran Church to facilitate the relocation of Pastor Edwin Mendivelso from Colombia to Colorado to serve them as pastor and evangelist. We are grateful to God and excited for his ministry there.

OTHER ENDEAVORS

CAM also continues to give quarterly support to the Wittenberg Door Campus Ministry. Rev. Dave Spotts uses this campus outreach to share the good news of Jesus with many students including international students. This lends a potential for global impact.

In 2022, I hosted an online evangelism seminar at my church in Fayetteville, NC, which was archived into video format and is available online. The seminar focused heavily on relational ministry and who our respective mission fields are.

Going forward, CAM will focus heavily on mission plant opportunities and how we can be of support in this regard. These are challenging times in the valley of the shadow of death but we trust in and seek to share the Good Shepherd who leads us through it. We ask for your continued prayers as we seek to do His work. †

The Rev. Joe Christina serves Christus Victor Ev. Lutheran Church, Fayetteville, NC, and as National Home Missions Developer for The AALC.

WORLD MISSIONS UPDATE

By Rev. Jamie Strickler

On behalf of The AALC's World Mission Commission (WMC), I greet you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The only name in which salvation is wrought.

As I stated in my report to the General Convention, we finally have a quorum on our board and are active once again. Over the last year and a half, there have only been two members on the board, and it takes three to make a quorum. We are currently missing, and are desperately desiring, the remaining two vacant positions to be filled. If you or someone you know from the Western or North Plains Regions, lay or clergy, male or female, have a heart for world missions, please encourage them to have their Regional Pastor appoint them to the board.

In our Spring 2024 meeting, we voted to send support to The Lutheran Church in Norway and Iceland. The AALC's WMC was the first to fund the church plant in Iceland. This is a joint venture between The AALC, LC-MS, and The Lutheran Church in Norway. We also sent support to the Lutheran Church of South Sudan to help their large congregations in refugee camps in Ethiopia, due to civil war, and their Trinity Lutheran Seminary. Both are confessional Lutheran bodies.

In reflection of the past several years serving as the chairman for the WMC, I thought perhaps I could share with our congregations the life lessons this experience has taught me. I am very heavy hearted to say that world missions are tainted with corruption. False ministries requesting funds, false professions of faith to illicit funds, and corrupt banks in foreign countries seizing funds when they are wired.

One of the major functions of the WMC is to research and verify the legitimacy of all requests for support. This is one of the reasons that we created an application that must be filled out

with each request. Yes, each request, no exceptions. This allows us to verify that each ministry we fund is currently operating and still legitimate. The WMC desires to be good stewards of the funds that are allotted for its distribution.

I share this with you as a caution. Like us, I'm sure that the congregations of The AALC are flooded with requests, re-requests, and re-re-requests from foreign missions with truly heart-wrenching stories of need. To be good stewards, the WMC understands that we must realistically consider our limited role in the missions of our ministry partners. I have had to learn that we cannot fulfill every request nor every amount.

In spite of the negative parts of world missions, the Lord Jesus shines His light in the darkness. Over the past several years the WMC has been able to fund various missionaries, church plants, and growing confessional Lutheran church bodies. I would like to specifically mention the very quick and generous response of our congregations to come to the aid of our own missionary Rev. Scott Yount in Ukraine. An overwhelming response from you folks centralized through the WMC for efficiency was very spiritually edifying. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Rev. Yount was very effective in helping displaced and shell-shocked Ukrainians relocate.

We look to the future with excitement and anticipation of the leading of our Lord in the years to come.†

The Rev. Jamie Strickler serves as Chairman of the World Mission Commission and as pastor of St. Timothy Lutheran Church, Charleston, WV.



AALC Youth Conference: A Gift to Our Youth



By *Bethany Hironaka*

By the time this article reaches you, we will be a little less than a year away from our 2025 AALC National Youth Conference in Estes Park, Colorado! As a Commission and Planning Team, we are currently deciding our theme, looking over our expenses, communicating with those who will be a part of our program, and seeking discernment from God on the direction He wants us to go in for our time together. Speaking for myself, it all seems a little overwhelming while in the midst of the planning process. However, there is comfort in knowing God is guiding us. Better yet, He already knows everyone who is going to be there and how He is going to move in their lives during this conference. That alone gives me His peace, thanks be to God.

The 2025 Youth Conference will mark my fifth time attending our association's youth gathering (I know... there are people who have several years, if not decades, on me... but I'm slowly catching up!). I experienced two as a youth and two as a sponsor and serving on the Commission for Youth Activities. When I was in youth group, I was extremely passionate about encouraging my peers to attend this amazing trip. When I became an adult and was asked to serve on the Youth Commission in 2020, I didn't think my passion for this conference could grow any stronger. Man, was I wrong.

Our youth in today's society are going through hardships emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually. They are

dealing with anxiety, eating disorders, depression, sexual immorality, suicidal tendencies, addictions of all kinds, spiritual warfare and the list goes on. They are living in a world that is strongly rebelling against God and His truth. They are lonely, isolated, defeated, and hurting. They are in your churches and homes, whether we realize it or not.

However, this conference is a time where they can lay down all of their burdens at the foot of the cross (Ps 68:19-20 and Mat 11:28) and cast all of their anxieties on Him because He loves and cares for them (1 Pet 5:7). It's where they repent and receive the forgiveness of sins because of the sacrifice made on the cross 2,000 years ago. They hear that there is nothing they cannot do that separates that from the love of Christ (Rom 8:38-39). They are able to heal from their brokenness, experience the freedom that Christ gives, and truly believe that God loves them more than they can imagine.

God moves through this conference in many ways: one-on-one time with God through His Word and prayer, fun songs with Swen and Dean, long food lines waiting to get into the cafeteria, hikes to Bible Point, silly time with Rev. Scott Yount, workshops from amazing pastors and sponsors, worshipping as one, listening to our keynote speaker Rev. Gabe Kasper, playing football or volleyball, doing arts and crafts, having nightly devotions, praying with and for one another, laughing with

friends, crying on someone's shoulder, serving those who serve us at the YMCA, receiving the body and blood of our Lord, and receiving the forgiveness of sins. It's a lot, but it's amazing and incredibly worth it.

They need this week to experience all of these things and to hear God's truth, love, and promises. It is an incredible gift we are blessed to give these kids as a church body.

This week that we will embark on isn't possible without you. We covet your prayers as we continue to plan for this conference in order for God to do exactly what He wants to do in the lives of our youth. We are simply His vessel that He uses to bring our kids closer to Him, and it is such a blessing and privilege.

As we all know, things are getting a little bit more expensive these days, including the expenses that are needed to make this conference possible. In order to keep costs as low as we can for our youth, the Youth Commission and Planning Team are seeking to fundraise from our churches in The AALC.

Soon your church will be receiving bulletin inserts that have a flier for the 2025 Youth Conference; on the back will be a pledge

card. We ask that you prayerfully consider giving towards the Youth Conference. On the pledge card will be different items that you can give towards; for example, \$25 will help pay for a meal. Or you may fill in whatever amount you are feeling led to give.

All offerings for the Youth Conference can be mailed to the National Office. If you are giving by check, please write it to The AALC and put "Youth Conference 2025" in the memo line. If you have any questions, you may always reach out to me via email or any other members of the Commission.

On behalf of the Commission for Youth Activities, the Conference Planning Team, and the youth of the 2025 Youth Conference: thank you for supporting us through your prayers and giving. We are excited to see the incredible ways God is going to move during this conference, and we pray that you join us. To God be the glory! †

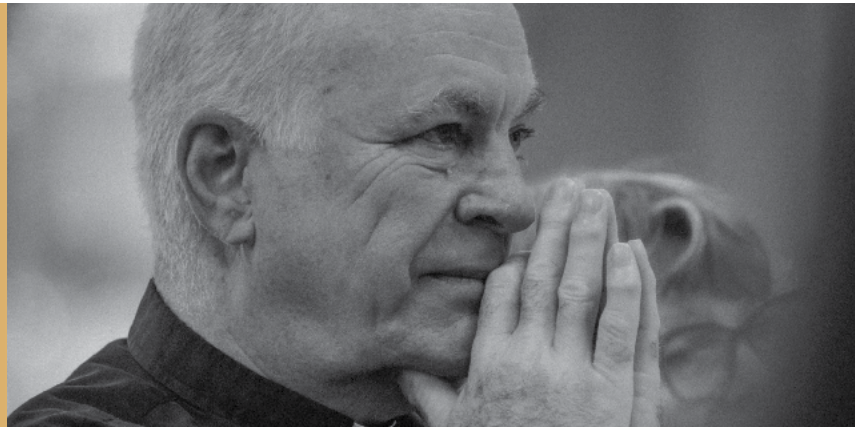
Bethany Hironaka serves on The AALC's Commission for Youth Activities.



Youth enjoying various activities during the 2021 and 2023 conferences held at the YMCA of the Rockies, Estes Park, CO, including speakers, service projects, workshops, and skits (Photo Credit: Bethany Hironaka and Scott Strosahl).



AALC Convention



Rev. Ray Lorthioir listens during the business meetings at The AALC General Convention (Photo Credit: Rev. Chris Rosebrough).

Reflections on Convention

By Karen Holst

Over one hundred delegates, guests, and clergy participated in the 29th General Convention of The American Association of Lutheran Churches (AALC), held June 25-28, 2024.

Many delegates and guests came from across the nation to support The AALC. Making the journey in solidarity from the Western Region included representatives from Sonland Lutheran Church in Arizona (1,689 miles away), St. Luke the Evangelist Lutheran Church in Southern California (1,870 miles away), St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Northern California (1,900 miles), and Emmanuel Lutheran Church in upper Washington (1,695 traveled miles).

The theme "Reconciled Through Christ" for the convention was based on 2 Corinthians 5:17-20: "Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation."

In the theme of reconciliation, this year's guest speakers Rev. Heath R. Curtis and Rev. Dr. Nathan Meador emphasized the importance of reconciling the various ways stewardship affects the church and her servants. Time, talents, and treasure in all of their diverse forms from all of us benefit the spread of the Gospel to those here at home and in the world.

Additionally, special guest speaker Bishop Torkild Masvie of the Lutheran Church in Norway and Iceland graced our convention with news from abroad- the Lutheran church is finding receptive listeners to our Lord's voice in the wilderness, calling and gathering the lost sheep into His fold! Bishop Masvie held our utmost attention, as he described the struggles and joys he has experienced.

On Wednesday, Women of Lutherans In Fellowship & Evangelism (WOL) gathered for a tastefully elegant luncheon and business meeting organized and led by our lovely and capable Co-Chair,

Katherine Hofinga. The Women of L.I.F.E. officers and the Commission for Women regional representatives were recognized for their service these last two years, plus we welcomed the addition of Bonnie Ohlrich as our new Eastern Regional Representative; Traci McNally continues her representation for the Greater Heartland Region; and Donnette Taylor for the North Plains Region. I was appointed to fill the WOL Co-Chair vacancy for the next two years, and I also serve as the Women's Representative for the Western Region.

On Wednesday evening, the pastors' wives met around a communal table filled with good food, good friends and good memories. A little bit of the background that was divulged by those ladies included, "How long have you been a pastor's wife? Who has been a good inspiration for you?" This led to future avenues of consideration, such as "What needs do you see that could be better addressed for women in your congregation?" "How can we reach more women by expanding various communication outlets?" As we exchanged contact information, so many great ideas began pouring into the conversations, creating a truly uplifting bond between everyone there.

Thursday afternoon offered choices of workshops available for pastors, voting delegates, guests, and visitors. Intriguing subjects included, "Inside Prison Ministry- a Chaplain's Perspective" by Rev. Tom Jahr and Rev. John Hallock; "Church Planting: Some Factors to Consider" by Rev. Joe Christina; "The Necessity of Lutheran Classical Education in The AALC" by Joshua Swigart; and "Invitation to the 2024 Mission Conference at Ascension, Ames, IA" by Dr. Phil Gassman.

After many heart-felt good-byes on Friday, the campus was steadily vacated with delegates departing back to their respective origins, traveling many miles and in some cases, even other countries, to continue to serve one another as Christians through our various vocations. My closing thought for all of you is this: "May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus" (Rom 15:5). †

Karen Holst is the newly appointed Co-Chair of Women of L.I.F.E. This article is excerpts from her update to the Western Region of The AALC.



Lindbergs Celebrate 70th Wedding Anniversary

September 2024

PRAYER BOOKMARK



Rev. Dr. Duane and Mardell Lindberg greeted guests at their open house celebrating 70 years of married life (Submitted photos).

Rev. Dr. Duane and Mardell Lindberg of Waterloo, IA, celebrated their 70th wedding anniversary on June 6, 2024. Their family hosted an open house at their home church Ascension Lutheran Church in Waterloo, IA, on Sunday, May 26, 2024.

Their five children were all in attendance: Erik and Betty Lindberg of Pine Island, MN, Karen and Kevin Kelle of Byron, MN, Karl and Lori Lindberg of Clive, IA, Martha and Doug Stone of Cedar Falls, IA, and Kris Lindberg of Waterloo, IA. Pr. Duane and Mardell's eleven grandchildren and nine great grandchildren were also in attendance.

Duane and Mardell would like to thank all those who came to celebrate with them! They also thank the Lord for His love and care for them these past 70 years! †

1. Western Region
2. Faith Lutheran Church, Columbus, ND
3. Rev. Richard Day
4. Newly Ordained Pastors
5. Our Presiding Pastor Rev. Dr. Cary Larson
6. For all Seminary Students
7. Rev. Ryan Dexter
8. For our schools
9. Peace Lutheran Church, Defiance, OH
10. Commissioned church workers
11. Rev. Paul Hueter
12. Protection for our military
13. World Mission Commission
14. Dss. Kathy Awtrey
15. Sunday School Teachers
16. First English Lutheran Church, Gibsonburg, OH
17. New Seminary President
Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins
18. Rev. Steven Klawonn
19. Sunday School Kids
20. Rev. Dr. Richard Shields
21. For Call Committees
22. Commission for Commissioned Church Workers
23. Rev. Ray Lorthioir
24. Lake Madison Lutheran Church, Nunda, SD
25. For churches without pastors
26. For parents and children
27. Rev. Robert Salge
28. For prospective Seminary Students
29. For the Regional Conferences
30. Newly Elected Leadership



October 2024

PRAYER BOOKMARK

1. Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Evansdale, IA
2. For the youth to balance home, church, and school activities
3. Rev. Scott Strohkirch
4. Future Needs of ALTS
5. Rev. Loyd Ginn
6. For all Pastors
7. Rev. Dr. Thomas Stover
8. International Lutheran Council
9. St. John's Lutheran Church, Pocahontas, MO
10. All would believe in infallibility & inerrancy of Scripture
11. Nominating Committee
12. Rev. Dave Spotts
13. Mountain View Lutheran Church, Thornton, CO
14. Rev. Eric Ishimaru
15. For pastors considering a call
16. Publications Commission
17. St. Paul Lutheran Church, Otis, CO
18. All would believe in Sola Scriptura/ Scripture Alone
19. Rev. Edwin Mendivelso
20. Local Community
21. Pastors Conference
22. St. Timothy Lutheran Church, Charleston, WV
23. Our Nation's Leaders
24. Rev. Abraham McNally
25. National & Local Governments
26. Remember our Baptism and what it means
27. Trinity Lutheran Church, Galata, MT
28. Rev. David M. Johnson
29. TAALC Foundation
30. Remembering Pastors who have passed away
31. Rev. Rich Eddy

Our Redeemer's Quilting Group Gives to Graduates



The high school graduation recognition at Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church, Williston, ND, where the graduates received quilts lovingly made by the quilters' group.

Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church in Williston, ND, had twelve high school graduates for 2024. On May 19, the quilting ladies gave each senior a quilt designed and made by the group; the quilts were made with a cross in the middle of each one. We hope as they go out into the world that they enjoy using their quilt and remember their church family here at Our Redeemer's.

We meet every Tuesday morning from September through May to work on quilts, enjoy fellowship with each other, and have coffee. We also make quilts for mission projects, such as our local fire department, a homeless shelter in Fargo, ND, and the God's Child Project in Bismarck, ND. The quilts that go to God's Child are used on a Native American Indian reservation in North Dakota, and some are sent to Guatemala. We also make some lap quilts for our local nursing home.

We sew pieces at home for our quilts and then put them together at the church. Some quilts are tied and some are machine quilted. We plan to take a break for summer and then continue to work on all of our quilt projects in the fall.

Our Redeemer's Quilting Group has several members: Barb Bohannon, Carolyn Nenow, Melody Edenloff, Donnette Taylor, Darlene Benth, Cheryl Bauer, Dalis Tannler, Betty Lund, Karen Schmidt and Sandra Weiss. †

A TEACHER'S FAITH

By *Martha Stone*

Today is the opening day of the “Back-to-School” sales for the 2024-25 school year, a reminder that summer is almost over. For a high school teacher, this day elicits both excitement and anxiety. The excitement comes from the anticipation of meeting and getting to know a new batch of students. The anxiety follows closely behind with the realization that the extra time to finish projects and catch up on reading is almost over.

Today is the opening day of the “Back-to-School” sales for the 2024-25 school year, a reminder that summer is almost over. For a high school teacher, this day elicits both excitement and anxiety. The excitement comes from the anticipation of meeting and getting to know a new batch of students. The anxiety follows closely behind with the realization that the extra time to finish projects and catch up on reading is almost over.

My name is Martha Stone and I am a high school teacher at Valley Lutheran School in Cedar Falls, Iowa. I teach Biology, Chemistry, Anatomy & Physiology, Earth & Space, and Computer Science. I have taught for 15 years at Valley Lutheran School and became an AALC-Commissioned Church Worker when I was installed on August 18, 2019. I am writing this article in hopes of giving a little glimpse into how my faith influences my teaching and to encourage parents and grandparents in their God-given role as teachers of their children.

At the beginning of the school year in each class, I spend the first several days conveying my top three “teacher’s priorities” to the students. I have found it helps to start the classroom culture on a steady path for the year. My first priority is to honor God in all that happens in the classroom and for God to be my leader as a teacher. Our students see so many examples of the power of leadership being abused. Leaders try to control others for selfish ends. Leaders use their power to spread mistruths and lies that hurt their followers, the list goes on and on. When students see God’s leadership they grow in their love and trust in Him. His leadership is always just, always merciful, always loving, and always respectful to everyone, not showing favoritism. The times I fail and do not follow God’s lead also become a powerful platform to teach and practice forgiveness, grace, and mercy. When I make mistakes and need to ask for forgiveness, the students see the power of forgiveness in my relationship with the Lord. This sets a tone that God is in charge of the classroom.

The second priority is to help my students see themselves as individuals created uniquely by God. I want to get to know them as people, discern what their individual learning needs

are, and pray for them. This brings God’s power into their life helping them turn their challenges, both inside and outside the scholastic arena, over to Jesus.

Finally, my third priority as a teacher is to teach my students science, showing them how science fits with God’s plan for His world. In the words of the great scientist, Johann Kepler, a German astronomer, and mathematician, “Science is thinking God’s thoughts after Him.”

I want to end with a thought on teaching found in Jesus’ great commission to all Christians, found in Matthew 28:18-20 which reads, “And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’”

From these verses, you can see that teaching is important to God. Teaching is one of two things Jesus directs us to do when making disciples of all nations. God is not only talking about the formal job of teaching in a classroom, but is also talking about the teaching that happens when parents, grandparents, family, and friends pass on God’s Word to the next generation. If you find this commission of God overwhelming, let me give you a little tip I have picked up from my years of teaching. On days I am doing my job of teaching in my strength, I become overwhelmed by the task. How can I get this lesson done to God’s standards? It is impossible. That is when I read these verses again and focus on Christ at the beginning with all the power of the universe at his beck and call, and I see Christ at the end of these verses with His promise to be with me always. With Christ in the equation, I can relax knowing God is taking care of me and each of my students. I know that it is by faith in Christ that I am empowered to teach His children. †

Mrs. Martha Stone is a Commissioned Church Worker, serving as a teacher at Valley Lutheran School in Cedar Falls, IA.

The American Association of Lutheran Churches

921 East Dupont Road, #920

Fort Wayne, IN 46825-1551

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(260) 755-9401
theaalc@taalc.org



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UPCOMING EDITIONS...

Please be in prayer for and consider contributing to these upcoming editions.

2024 Overarching theme: What Does It Mean To Be a Lutheran in The 21st Century?

Nov/Dec: The Lutheran Home (*deadline Sept. 1*)

Church News:

The Evangel welcomes submissions of what's happening in your congregation. To submit content, **email the editor** Gretchen Baker: theevangel@taalc.org

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