



DISTRICT NEWS

SOUTH DAKOTA

Passing the baton at LCEF

By Rev. Dr. Scott Sailer
District President

Not many servants in the church serve for as long as Randy Gayken has. On Oct. 31, Randy retired from his work as the South Dakota District's Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) vice-president. His retirement marks the end of a 43-year career in the district: 37½ years as district business manager and manager of the district's Church Extension Fund; and the last 5½ years as LCEF vice-president.

Over the 43 years, Randy has worked with five district presidents and five executive secretaries/assistants to the president.

Julie Pike, our current office administrative assistant, worked alongside Randy for 35 years, while Chad Zinnel, our business manager, worked with Randy for 18 years. I was blessed to work in the office with him for eight years, besides having leaned on his expertise during my years as a parish pastor.

All of us can attest to the diligence, faithfulness, integrity and joy of Randy as he served the Lord by serving the workers, congregations and schools of the South Dakota District.

A key role he played in the latter part of his ministry was to assist the district in consolidating our own Church Extension Fund into and becoming a member district of LCEF in 2017. This move has opened up greater loan oppor-



Pictured are, from left, Randy Gayken, Kai Larson, Rev. Dr. Scott Sailer and Vanda Toner, (LCEF senior vice-president, District Solutions).

tunities for our churches and schools. It also increased the number of investment options for individuals and ministries.

Even though Randy is retiring, LCEF will continue to provide expert care for us in South Dakota. They will do so on an interim basis through Kai Larson, who serves as LCEF vice-president for the Minnesota South District.

And so, for the time being, Randy passes the LCEF baton on to Kai. You may contact Kai at the LCMS Minnesota South District office at 952-223-2163 or kai.larson@lcef.org. Or, you may contact us at the South Dakota District office and we'll put Kai in touch with you.

Learn more about Lutheran Church Extension Fund at lcef.org.

The baton will eventually be passed to a full-time LCEF servant who will serve our district and, possibly, another district.

We thank God for His servant, Randy Gayken, and for Randy's 43 years of service in the beloved South Dakota District! May God bless and keep him and his wife, Sherree.

**Your servant in Christ,
Pastor Sailer**

"Not ashamed of the Gospel"
Rom. 1:16; 16:25-27

P.A.S.S. It On! event is Nov. 11 and 12



Rev. Dr. Michael Zeigler will be the plenary speaker at the P.A.S.S. It On! events in Black Hawk and Sioux Falls.



Join Rev. Dr. Michael Zeigler, speaker of “The Lutheran Hour” and an array of presenters on topics ranging from stewardship to youth ministry and more at P.A.S.S. It On! Ideas and Inspiration for Mission and Ministry. The event will be held on Nov. 11 at Divine Shepherd, Black Hawk, and Nov. 12 at Sioux Falls Lutheran School, Sioux Falls.

Along with workers in our South Dakota District (from our churches, schools and the district office), presenters come from Lutheran Hour Ministries, Lutheran Church Extension Fund, Concordia Plan Services and Lutheran Family Service. To register and for the schedule, visit sddlcms.org, click the “News & Events” tab and find the event on the right side of the page.

P.A.S.S. stands for Proclaim, Affirm, Supply and Serve.

Breakout sessions include “Evangelism to Exiles,” “Spiritual Conversations,” “Building a Spiritually Vibrant Home,” “Youth Ministry Leadership,” “Creating Collaborative Youth Ministry,” “Teaching Youth the Faith,” “The Important Role of the Elder,” “Caring for Church Workers,” “Caring for God’s Hurting People,” “Stewardship,” “Everything You Want/Need to Know About Concordia Plan Services,” and “Church Finance Best Practices.” The schedules are:

Saturday, Nov. 11 Divine Shepherd Black Hawk

- 9:15-9:45 a.m.....Registration
- 9:45-10 a.m.... Opening devotion/
prayer
- 10-11 a.m.... Plenary speaker: Rev.
Dr. Michael Zeigler
- 11 a.m.... Breakout sessions
-3:30 p.m.
- 3:30-3:45 p.m.... Closing devotion/
prayer

A brown-bag lunch will be provided at noon.

Sunday, Nov. 12 Sioux Falls Lutheran School Sioux Falls

- 1:45-2:15 p.m.....Registration
- 2:15-2:30 p.m.... Opening devotion/
prayer
- 2:30-3:30 p.m.... Plenary speaker: Rev.
Dr. Michael Zeigler
- 3:30-6:30 p.m.... Breakout sessions
- 6:30-6:45 p.m.... Closing devotion/
prayer

A boxed dinner will be provided at the event’s conclusion. Attendees are welcome to stay and eat or take them home.

Call Information

Rev. Brad Birtell, St. John, Columbus, Neb., is prayerfully considering a call to Mount Olive, Watertown, Sept. 10; and to St. John’s, Yankton, Sept. 26.

Rev. Clint Thorson, Our Savior, Madison, and St. John’s, Howard, has accepted the call as pastor to Eternal Savior, Lafayette, Colo., Oct. 8.

Rev. Roger Sedlmayr, Immanuel, Twin Falls, Idaho, has declined the call as pastor to Grace, Deadwood, and Blessed Emmanuel, Sturgis, Oct. 8.

Rev. Adam Welton, St. Peter, Wentworth, has declined the call as pastor to Immanuel, Lakefield, Colo., Oct. 12.

Rev. Jordon Andreasen, Our Savior/ St. John, Aberdeen, Columbia, declined a call to Immanuel, Lakefield, Minn., Sept. 24. He is prayerfully considering call as LCMS missionary to Romania, Sept. 14.

Rev. Jonathan Conner, Zion, Manning, Iowa, declined a call to St. Paul, Aberdeen, and St. Paul, Leola, Sept. 8.

Rev. Kevin Koester, Mount Calvary, Huron, declined a call to Trinity, Medford, Minn., Sept. 3.

Josh Schmitt, DCE, St. John’s, Yankton, is prayerfully considering a call to Faith, Pleasant Hill, Calif., Oct. 8.

Rev. Gary Schulte, candidate, is prayerfully considering a call as associate pastor to Zion, Rapid City, Oct. 1.

VACANCIES

Senior pastor

- Mount Calvary, Huron • St. Paul, Aberdeen

Sole pastor

- St. John, Britton/St. Paul, Ferney
- Grace, Deadwood/Blessed Emmanuel, Sturgis
- St. Paul, Plankinton/Trinity, White Lake
- Mount Olive, Watertown • Faith, Parkston
- Concordia, Cresbard/Immanuel, Wecota
- Our Savior, St. John’s/Madison, Howard

Associate pastor

- Zion, Rapid City • St. John’s, Yankton

SHARE YOUR NEWS WITH US!

Send articles and photos to
Kate Meadows:

- kate@katemeadows.com
- 420 E. Liberty Street
Rapid City, SD 57701

Call for congregational vote

By direction of the South Dakota District's Board of Directors in their September 2023 meeting, I am calling for a vote by district congregations on two important matters that have arisen between our district conventions:



- ▶ Whether to include additional missionaries from South Dakota as recipients of Together in Mission (TIM) funding from our congregations. We currently support missionaries Rev. Dr. Daniel Jastram and Rev. Dr. Cory Rajek, per 2021 District Convention Resolution 2-02. But Rev. Samuel Bobby recently began his service in Riga, Latvia.
- ▶ Whether to rescind the 1976 District Convention Resolution 3-03, requiring each of our congregations to provide a subscription of the *Lutheran Witness* for all members. This matter is coming up due to the significant increase in the cost of each subscription.

Detailed information about this call for congregational vote was mailed to each congregation in late September. Congregations have until the end of this calendar year to submit their votes to Rev. Dr. Thomas Brown, district secretary.

The information sent to district congregations includes the rationale for this process, found in the Constitution and Bylaws of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

— Rev. Dr. Scott Sailer, South Dakota District President

'Do good to everyone'

In Galatians 6:10, St. Paul says, "Do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith." The Fall 2023 issue of *Lutherans Engage the World* shows how Lutherans are doing just that — for residents of retirement communities, for children in Kenya, for homeowners in need of a little extra help, and in many other ways.

The issue also includes a feature story about St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Federal Way, Wash., and Camp Concordia in Gowen, Mich. The two were part of the Synod's *Set Apart to Serve* pilot program, which included the development of resources designed to help LCMS congregations, schools and other organizations raise up future workers for the church.

"This is the church saying, 'We should pray to the Lord of the harvest to send laborers.' And we are not just being passive about that," said the Rev. Dan Weber, lead pastor of St. Luke's. "God



could call through a burning bush if He wanted, but it's more likely He's going to speak to that kid through an adult. [With] *Set Apart to Serve* ... there's intentionality to say, 'What can we do?' And there are a bunch of resources that help answer that question."

Visit engage.lcms.org/ subscribe to sign up for a free subscription. Both individual and bulk subscriptions (for congregations) are available.

Youth gathering is Nov. 17-19

High school students (grades 9-12) and their adult leaders are invited to join other LCMS youth at the 2023 LCMS District Youth Gathering, to be held Nov. 17-19 at the Younes Conference Center in Kearney, Neb. Friends of youth group members are invited and encouraged to attend, too!

As we scroll through Instagram and Snapchat, we are bombarded with images and videos of extraordinary people doing extraordinary things. People are living superb lives and it makes us second-guess our own.

The truth is that most of us live pretty

ordinary lives. We wake up. We go to school. We do homework. We hang with friends. We spend way too much time on our phones. We've got "extra" in our ordinary lives, but it's stuff that makes us anxious or sad, things that worry us, scare us and confuse us. There are extra questions stirring within us and extra pressures all around us.

Amidst these pressures and questions of life there is an amazing truth: God loves ordinary people. "[extra]

ordinary" will lead students through encounters with Jesus, who answers questions and calms fears. Students will discover that the love of Jesus is the "extra" that their ordinary needs.

The gathering will include an off-site servant event, giving all participants the opportunity to honor God through service to others in the Kearney community.

Registration information was mailed to all congregations in August. To register, contact your congregation's youth leader or visit the gathering website at ndlcms.org/dyg.



PATTY'S PONDERINGS

Inexpressible
Joy +
Matchless
Savior
1 Peter 1:8-9

“Inexpressible Joy + Matchless Savior” is the theme of the LWML South Dakota District’s 2024 Convention, which will be held June 7-8, 2024, at the Best Western Ramkota Hotel and Convention Center in Aberdeen.



Patty Peters
LWML South Dakota District President

The theme verse is 1 Peter 1:8-9:

Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

The logo nicely expresses our theme. Rev. Clint Thorson, our senior pastoral counselor, shared these words about the meaning of the logo:

Light of the world (Jesus) bursting forth in glorious victory over death. The once-black cross becomes white, a symbol of death now pointing to eternal life.

Now is the time to plan to attend the convention. Please bring your friends from your congregation! What a wonderful time to share the love of Jesus and invite others to take part in the servant events, bring your Gifts from the Heart, and hear about how our mites fund the mission grants.

With the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, St. Peter wrote such beautiful words to show the joy we have because of the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Ponder these verses and rejoice, because God so loved us that He sent His Son for you and me. There is no one mightier or more caring than our Heavenly Father. Live daily in the confidence of eternal life in heaven because of your faith in what Jesus did for you.



Puppet Place celebrates 51st year



Despite extremely hot weather, we had a good turnout at the Puppet Place at the South Dakota State Fair, held Aug. 31-Sept. 4 in Huron. Revs. Andrew Utecht and Peter Utecht work together to write scripts and select music for the play, which this year was “David and Goliath.” Besides making several new puppets, Pastor Andrew also wrote a Bible study for the adults to take with them as they exited. Children could each take with them a hand puppet and a copy of *My Devotions* or *Happy Times* magazine (from Concordia Publishing House).

A big thank you to everyone who helped make puppets, donated devotional materials or worked at the Puppet Place. It takes many hands to create this opportunity to spread the Gospel each year! A huge thank you to the Utecht family, including Donna, for giving so generously of their time and talent to this ministry.

Each of the zones were well represented this year. We had 24 volunteers representing the Pierre, Sioux Falls, Yankton, Aberdeen and Black Hills zones. The volunteers handed

Pictured are Rev. Andrew Utecht (above) and, from left, Heather Miller, Patty Peters, Sandy Brandt, Sandy Williams and Andra Gates.

out 304 puppets, 157 Bible studies, 77 devotions and 96 pocket crosses. Over the five days, Puppet Place had nearly 900 visitors.

The final two signs were added to the outside of the building this year. The offering from the last district convention was used to pay for the signs, which cost \$356. This leaves a balance of \$985 from the offering to be used for Puppet Place. The building will soon need a new air-conditioning unit, and the outside of the building may need a few touch-ups before next year’s fair.

The ladies of the Wolsey group from the Huron Zone cleaned the building the week prior to the fair. Ann Cruse helped with the final clean up, and she cleans the carpets each year. Bev Johnson was responsible for contacting and coordinating work times for each zone.

Jan Larson
Vice-President of Gospel Outreach

COUNSELOR'S CORNER

His mercy endures forever

On His way to Jerusalem, where He was going to die and rise for the life of the world, Jesus was met by 10 lepers who stood at a distance and called out to Him (Luke 17:11-19). The lepers didn't cry out, "Unclean, unclean!" as they were supposed to, but they called out, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"



Rev. Brian Mosemann
LWML District Counselor

They sought mercy.

Jesus doesn't touch them but simply speaks His Word: "Go and show yourselves to the priests." As they went, they were cleansed. One of them turned around and went back to Jesus. This time, he didn't stand at a distance but came right up and fell on his face at Jesus' feet and gave thanks. He worshiped Jesus. Not only had he been a leper; he was also a Samaritan. This

made him a double outcast in the eyes of any Israelite.

But no one is too downtrodden, no one too lowly, no one so outcast that Jesus' mercy is not for them.

Nine out of the 10 lepers left and never came back. They were healed. They got what they wanted from Jesus, and so off they went. They wanted less than all that Jesus gave for them.

By contrast, the Samaritan knew whom to trust, not only with his disease but also with his death. And he knew at whose feet his salvation rested. When Jesus addresses the Samaritan leper, He doesn't say, "Your faith has made you well." He says, "Your faith has saved you." Jesus spoke a word of healing to all 10 lepers and all 10 were made well. But when he speaks to the grateful Samaritan alone, His is a word of salvation.

A surprising thing is *not* that only one leper came back to say thank you, but that Jesus would heal all 10 *knowing* that only one would come back and say thank you. All 10 lepers are cleansed; the lack of gratitude on the part of



nine did not negate their healing. Jesus didn't give their leprosy back to them when they neglected to thank Him. He showed mercy to all 10, even though the difference between the nine who did not thank Him and the one who did is stark. Nine trusted Jesus for their healing. The one trusted Jesus with his life.

It is good news that our lives depend on God's love for us rather than on our love for Him! After all, it is His steadfast love that endures forever, not ours. God doesn't love you because you are good. God loves you because He is good, and His mercy endures forever.

BLACK HILLS ZONE REPORT

Our pre-Lenten prayer service was held on Feb. 11 at Peace, Lutheran Church, Rapid City, and included a brief overview of upcoming events in the zone and district. The theme of the prayer service was "My Soul Rejoices," written by Rev. Mitchel Schuessler, pastor of St. John, Clarinda, Iowa. Rev. David Lindenberg, Peace pastor, led the service with 21 in attendance.

The Black Hills Zone hosted its Spring Rally at Bethlehem, Lutheran Church, Rapid City, on April 29. The theme was "... Perfect Love Casts Out Fear ..." based on 1 John 4:18. Rev. Josh Jones, Bethlehem pastor, led us in an excellent Bible study.

In the afternoon, a panel spoke about their lives as caregivers and helping people with disabilities. Pastor Jones' daughter was born with many difficulties and his personal experiences caring for her were informative. We also heard a presentation from Black Hills Works, an agency that provides homes, employ-

ment, recreational opportunities and social outlets for adults with disabilities.

The Black Hills Zone fall retreat was on Sept. 16 at Peace, Rapid City. The theme was "The Impact of Original Sin." Josh Schmitt, DCE of St. John's, Yankton, was the presenter.

The Christian Life Workshop was held on Sept. 30 at St. Paul Lutheran Church, Spearfish. The theme was from Ps. 121:1-2: "I lift up my eyes unto the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth." Rev. Dr. Thomas Brown, St. Paul pastor, led opening and closing devotions. A Bible study was led by Rev. Christopher McCarthy, pastor of First, Wall, and Emmanuel, Creighton. Our afternoon speaker was Kate Meadows, who offered a presentation on "Telling Our Life Stories." Entertainment was provided by the Spearfish Senior Choir. The ingathering went to the Zion, Rapid City, Christ's Way school-expansion campaign.

Casey Harvard • Black Hills Zone President

Supporting global missions

Following are the 31 Mission Grants for the 2023-2025 biennium, as selected by delegates to the LWML 40th Biennial Convention in June.

1. Orphan Grain Train Servant Center — Orphan Grain Train, \$100,000
2. A Healing Space for At-Risk Children — Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch, N.D., \$100,000
3. Serving God's Children with Special Needs — Journeys Lutheran School, Milwaukee, \$100,000
4. Fortifying Faith in Those with Vision Impairment — Lutheran Workers, \$100,000
5. Disaster Response Team — Trinity Lutheran Church, Tyler, Texas, \$50,000
6. Mobile Kitchen — Forged by Fire Services, Gulf Coast Region, \$85,000
7. Upheld by God's Hand, Mental Health Outreach — LCMS Life Ministry, \$96,500
8. Expanding Gospel Proclamation Worldwide — Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, \$100,000
9. Equipping Young Leaders — LCMS Youth Ministry, \$50,000
10. Set Apart To Serve — LCMS Office of Pastoral Education, \$100,000
11. Lutheran Women in Mission Finish the Job — Ministry in Mission, Haiti, \$85,000
12. Sharing Christ Crucified with High School Youth — Lutheran High School of Greater New Orleans, \$35,000
13. Water and the Word — Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya, \$80,000
14. Enhancement of Deaf Ministry and Outreach — Ephphatha Lutheran Mission Society, \$47,000
15. Feeding Haitian Children Through Gospel and Meals — Trinity HOPE, \$58,082
16. Care for Street Children of Western Kenya — Capstone Ministries, \$50,000
17. Nurturing Faith for the Aging — Lutheran Ministries Media (Worship Anew), \$100,000
18. Zoe's Home Support — Zoe's Home, Trinity Lutheran Church, Clinton, Mo., \$75,000
19. Tanzania Children's Homes — Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania, Africa, \$74,500
20. Sharing Christ with Women and Children in Kazakhstan — Lutheran Hour Ministries, \$100,000
21. Healthy Together: Healthy Workers, Healthy Church — Lutheran Family Services, \$106,000



Two of the 31 Mission Grants selected are to support (above) training young leaders and giving them opportunities for service (No. 9); and (below) special needs children at Journeys Lutheran School, Milwaukee (No. 3).



22. Expanding Gospel Outreach to Hispanics in U.S. — Lutheran Hour Ministries, \$100,000
23. A Legacy of Love for Special Needs Children — Lutheran Special Education Ministries, \$100,000
24. God's Word for Central and South American Missions — Lutheran Heritage Foundation, \$100,000
25. Bringing God's Word to India — India Bible Translation Project, \$100,000
26. Life Connection Events and Kits — Lutherans For Life, \$70,000
27. Siouxland Lutheran Hispanic Ministry — Hope Lutheran, South Sioux City, Neb., \$50,000
28. Growing Our Place: Care for Special Needs Students — Our Place After School Care, Inc., Neb., \$20,000
29. Repairs for St. Paul's Lutheran School — St. Paul's Lutheran School, Cullman, Ala., \$50,000
30. Showering Love on the Least of These — Mercy Holistic Ministry, California, \$100,000
31. Breaking Generational Poverty in Detroit (partial) — Camp Restore, Detroit, \$58,989

2023–2025 LWML Mission Goal: \$2.35 million

Having the end-of-life conversation



By Rev. Timothy Rynearson
South Dakota District
Second Vice-President



In last month's issue, I addressed the importance of having conversations about end-of-life issues.

This conversation is not only important for our senior citizens; it is a critical conversation for all of us because none of us knows how long we'll live. This month, I want to dive deeper into some of the main points that an end-of-life conversation should address.

The first question when talking about end-of-life is what does the person in question want? In a hospital's emergency department or intensive care unit, the physician asks, "What would your loved one want done in this situation?" It used to be that the doctor made the big decisions about a patient's life, as the "expert" in charge. But today as a society, we believe in autonomy — the idea that people get to decide what they want for themselves.

Even in an autonomous society, facing end-of-life issues works best when there is a collaboration between the health care professionals and the individual or family. The health care professionals lay out all options. The family and the patient then make choices based on the patient's beliefs and attitudes.

Yet there is a problem with autonomy, which is not a Christian idea. To be sure, we make all kinds of decisions on a daily basis, such as what we should eat or what we should wear. But decisions should not be made independently as if we were masters of our own fate or the captain of our own soul (read William Ernest Henley's *Invictus*). The apostle Paul is clear:

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So, glorify God in your body. **1 CORINTHIANS 6:19-20**

The original sin of Adam and Eve could be described as autonomy. They sought to "be like God, knowing good and evil" (**GENESIS 3:5**). They were tempted to do things their own way. Satan was leading them to choose their own will over God's. They already had experienced the goodness of God's creation, which God Himself had declared to be good. Of their own choosing, they opted for evil by disobeying God.

Autonomy can simply be another word for sin. Autonomy is not God's plan for His people. We are called to be dependent on Him. We are part of a community with one Lord and one faith (**EPHESIANS 4:5**). He has joined us together as one, just as we were joined to Christ in water and Word.

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus

were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

ROMANS 6:3-4

We were never meant to walk the road of life alone. God wants us to walk together. The pronouns of the church are never "me," "myself" or "I" but instead "we," "ourselves" or "our." (Our Father ... Give us this day our daily bread.) Being in community and caring for each other is God's plan for us and for our salvation. So in our end-of-life conversations, it's best to talk about what we believe as God's people.

An End-of-Life Statement of Faith (Creed)

Throughout my life and especially at the hour of my death I want my family to know that I believe the following:

1. We are not our own. We belong to Christ (**1 CORINTHIANS 6**).
2. We've been through death and resurrection once before in Baptism (**Romans 6**).
3. We are never alone. God is always with us (**Matthew 1:23, 28:20**).
4. He is greater than all things. His Son has destroyed the power of darkness (**John 1**).
5. In Him we have life because He died for us (**1 John 5**).
6. Nothing can separate us from God — not even death (**Romans 8**).
7. And finally:
"Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (**1 CORINTHIANS 15:54B-57**)

Rev. Timothy Rynearson serves as senior pastor of Peace, Brookings; Redeemer, Flandreau; and Zion, White.

Million Dollar Life Match ADDS ANOTHER MILLION

“Christ laid down His life for us. We love in deed and truth.”

Under this theme, in 2022, the LCMS Office of National Mission (ONM) announced the Million Dollar Life Match. The program made \$1 million in matching fund grants available to support LCMS congregations in providing beginning-of-life care for their local communities.

Now, the ONM has made an additional \$1 million available, to be distributed over the coming triennium in grants ranging from \$1,000 to \$10,000. The expansion was first announced at the 68th Regular Convention of the LCMS in July.

“Congregations of all sizes are making a tremendous difference in their local communities with the help of Million Dollar Life Match grants,” said Deaconess Dr. Tiffany Manor, managing director of Human Care and Ministerial Support for the ONM. “Lutherans are showing with our words and deeds that we love because Christ first loved us. This expansion is an opportunity for creativity and the development of new efforts that teach, speak up for life and care for our neighbors in body and soul.”

Reflecting on the genesis of the program, LCMS President Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison said, “Knowing *Roe v. Wade* was about to fall, I knew the critics would be screaming: ‘You only care for babies when they’re in the womb.’

“Having been part of the pro-life community in the LCMS and beyond, I know this is false. The LCMS alone has provided hundreds of millions of dollars in assistance, and much of that for children and mothers.”

Expanded eligibility

Eligibility for the grants is expanding in two key ways. Previously, applications were only open to LCMS congregations, with an emphasis on beginning-of-life care for women, children and families.

Now, in addition to congregations, LCMS districts may apply. Furthermore, in addition to beginning-of-life care, advocacy and education projects are now eligible for matching-fund grants.

Education projects focus on teaching people of all ages about the sanctity of all human life, beginning at conception. For example, a congregation or school that uses the LCMS *Looking at Life* curriculum and resources would be eligible to apply for a grant to help continue these efforts.

Congregations and districts can also get involved with advocacy projects that speak up for the value of all human life. Such projects often support events like local marches for life or “Lutheran Days” at state capitols, where people can meet with their elected representatives and advocate for life.

Application deadlines

The Million Dollar Life Match grant process will operate on an annual cycle, with a new round of grants awarded each year of the triennium. The online application will open for congregations and districts each year on Jan. 1, with applications due by Feb. 15. Awards will be announced in May, with reports on the projects due Oct. 1.

“Generous saints from across our church body have supported this grant program with financial gifts that make it possible for congregations to expand their local efforts in human care, advocacy for the sanctity of human life, and teaching about God’s creation and the value of all human life. We give thanks to God for this partnership in the Gospel,” said Manor.

There are many ways to use a grant. Congregations and districts can get directly involved with their neighbors through outreach efforts like Breakfast with Baby events, which offer breakfast, fellowship and free baby items to pregnant women and families with young children.

Congregations and districts may also partner with LCMS Recognized Service Organizations (RSOs) or local pregnancy centers by sending volunteers, donating baby items and giving financial support.

Applications for grants in 2024 will open Jan. 1, 2024. To apply, visit lcms.org/serve/grants/life-grant.

Four phases complete

Since the Life Match began in 2022, LCMS congregations have dedicated \$1,577,133, matched by \$1 million from the ONM, to projects that support and promote the sanctity of life. These projects have served over a half-million people, with more than 7,000 congregation members serving as volunteers. Over 140 grants were awarded in the first four phases of the Life Match.

“Lutherans are volunteering, active and engaged in sharing God’s Word so that others come to know that our Lord values every single life that He creates and that Jesus redeemed,” said Manor.

Throughout the first four phases of the Life Match, congregations carried out projects that directly cared for families experiencing challenges at the beginning of life, supported foster care and adoption in collaboration with local agencies, partnered with RSOs, and supported pregnancy resource centers.

For example, Benediction Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, partnered with the RSO A Place of Refuge, a maternity home, to carry out renovations on the upper level of the home. Redeeming Life Ministries, another RSO and maternity home located in Florida, is partnering with Immanuel, East Dundee, Ill., to open a second maternity home in East Dundee, with the help of a Life Match grant.

“Notice in the Gospels that when Jesus is confronted by people in need of help and mercy — even if He seems at first to put them off — He always acts,” said Harrison. “His greatest act of mercy is the cross. As people who receive Christ’s mercy, we cannot but be merciful to others. The Life Match is just another tool to make that happen.”

This article was written by Sarah Reinsel and first appeared in LCMS Reporter.