



DISTRICT NEWS

IOWA WEST

The tree of life

The tree of life with ev'ry good in Eden's holy orchard stood. LSB 561:1

We know what happened there, don't we!

The stillness of that sacred grove was broken, as the serpent strove with tempting voice Eve to beguile and Adam too by sin defile. (2)

“No! Not that tree, Adam and Eve!” No, not that sin, dear child of God! The soul that sins shall die. From dust you are. To dust you shall return. Ash Wednesday and Lent loom. We slow down and ponder the reality that God the Son goes to that tree of death, His cross, to pay for sins. My sins. Your sins. He dies. *Stricken, smitten and afflicted, see Him dying on the tree.* God has Peter tell us: Jesus Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by His wounds we are healed (1 Peter 2:24). Or from the hymn: *For on a tree uplifted high His only Son for sin would die. (3)*

Wait! Here's this cross! *Now from that tree of Jesus' shame flows life eternal in His Name. (4)*

Here's twelve of God's dear sons and daughters during middle school years (some years ago) enjoying rest and shade from this tree. Our destination is Council Bluffs School for the Deaf. St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Council Bluffs, has rented the facilities for a middle school retreat. Housing arranged for us. Food prepared for us. God's words spoken to us. Jesus Who dies on the tree (cross) for us meeting with us and giving us personal gifts.

Along the way the tree holds and shelters us as we anticipate our destination. God bring us to Ash Wednesday and into the Lenten season reminding us that as we repent, we find in Jesus' tree (cross) fruit, every good. *And of this fruit so pure and sweet the Lord invites the world to eat, to find within this*



Rev. Paul Egger
District President



cross of wood the tree of life with ev'ry good. (4)

**Treasuring the One crucified for us,
Pastor Paul Egger**



Living generously

The importance of teaching stewardship for spiritual growth

STEWARDSHIP is often thought of as just managing money, but its true meaning goes much further than that. Teaching stewardship is about discipleship and shaping how believers see everything they have — time, talents and treasure — as gifts entrusted by God to fulfill His purposes in His church. This understanding changes hearts, encourages mission, promotes generosity and deepens spiritual growth.

Understanding why teaching stewardship matters helps congregations and communities nurture disciples who live generously and missionally. This article explores the key reasons stewardship teaching is essential for spiritual formation and advancing your congregation's witness and mission.

Teaching stewardship nurtures spiritual growth and mission

Shaping hearts, not just habits

Stewardship teaching moves people from a mindset of ownership to one of trust. When believers understand that everything belongs to God, their attitude toward giving and managing resources changes. Instead of giving out of obligation or guilt, generosity flows naturally from a place of gratitude.

For example, a congregation that teaches stewardship regularly might see members giving joyfully because they recognize their resources as tools for God's work. This shift in heart creates lasting habits rooted in faith, not just routine.

Teaching stewardship helps believers:

- ▶ Recognize God's ownership of all things;
- ▶ Develop trust in God's divine provision;
- ▶ Give generously as an act of worship; and
- ▶ Manage time and talents with thoughtful intent.

This heart transformation is the foundation for all other benefits of stewardship.

Fueling mission locally and globally

Faithful management of resources enables the church to advance its mission effectively. When believers steward their gifts well, the church can support ministries, outreach programs and global missions that impact lives and their local community.

Consider a congregation that encourages stewardship as part of discipleship. Members who give consistently and wisely provide steady funding for com-

munity services, missionary support and church-membership initiatives. This sustainability allows ministries to plan long-term and expand their reach.

Stewardship also encourages believers to invest their talents and time — not just money — in local mission opportunities within their congregation. Volunteering, mentoring and serving become integral parts of faithful stewardship that support the church's overall mission efforts.

Building a culture of generosity

When stewardship is clearly and consistently preached and taught, it fosters a community where generosity is both joyful and sacrificial. This culture mirrors God's character and invites others to partake in the fellowship of Word and Sacrament at church.

A culture of generosity means:

- ▶ Giving is celebrated, not pressured;
- ▶ Members encourage one another to serve and give;

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- ▶ Resources are shared to meet needs within and outside the church; and
- ▶ Generosity becomes a defining trait of the community.

For example, a congregation that highlights stories of generous giving and service inspires others to follow suit. This creates momentum that strengthens the entire body of believers.

Deepening spiritual growth

Jesus spoke often about money because it reveals where our hearts truly are. Teaching stewardship helps believers examine their priorities and grow in faith and dependence on God.

Stewardship challenges believers to:

- ▶ Trust God with their resources;
- ▶ Let go of materialism and selfishness;
- ▶ Practice contentment and gratitude; and
- ▶ Align their lives with God’s kingdom values.

This spiritual growth is essential for discipleship. It shapes character and prepares believers to live missionally in every area of life.

Practical ways to teach stewardship effectively

Congregations and leaders can

use several practical methods to teach stewardship well:

Biblical teaching — Use Scripture to explain God’s ownership and our role as stewards.

Faith stories — Share real stories of how stewardship impacts lives and ministries.

Workshops and classes — Offer practical training on managing time, talents and money.

Regular reminders — Include stewardship messages in sermons, bulletins, and small groups.

Encourage accountability — Create opportunities for members to set stewardship goals and support one another.

These approaches help believers understand stewardship as a lifestyle, not just a financial task.

The bottom line

Teaching stewardship is not a fundraising strategy. It is a spiritual formation strategy that equips disciples to live generously and missionally. When churches invest in stewardship teaching, they nurture hearts that trust God, fuel mission efforts, build generous communities and deepen spiritual growth.



Stewardship workshops

There are many great stewardship resources available to congregations, but face-to-face workshops for pastors and lay leaders have been found to be the most successful in creating joyful partners in the Gospel. LCMS Stewardship Ministry conducts several in-person circuit Philippians Workshops each year to provide instruction and care for interested congregations. The only costs for a circuit to host a workshop are travel expenses for the presenter and other on-site options, such as food and drinks.

If your congregation would like to host a workshop for your circuit, email stewardship@lcms.org.

For more information, visit lcms.org/stewardship and look for the “Philippians Workshop” link under “Square One Resources.” The Synod stewardship website also has links to newsletters, podcasts and many other resources to help congregations grow in their understanding and implementation of a life of stewardship.

March for life

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod speaks up for life, cares for people in body and soul, and teaches about the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death.

The LCMS Life Ministry network is composed of thousands who are engaged in pro-life efforts, both in their church and the culture at large. We speak for human life by witnessing to our Lord’s creation of life and by advocating for the God-given value of all human life in the public square.

Join LCMS Life Ministry and fellow Lutherans as we stand together at life marches across the United States. For more information, visit lcms.org/life.





Preschools MAKE AN IMPACT

Photos: LCMS/Erik M. Lunsford

One of the joys in my position as an executive assistant to the district president is visiting our schools throughout the district. I can't help but smile from ear to ear as I watch the students' faces light up when they learn, interact with one another, sing songs about Jesus and have their Jesus time. They are excited to learn, and that child-like faith is incredible to witness. I also smile because I witness the dedication our teachers have as they serve the children and families in our early childhood centers. I often state that the children's ministry that happens through our centers is underrated.

Early childhood education is one of the most formative experiences in a child's life, and Iowa District West is blessed to have 35 preschool programs that play a vital role in shaping not only young learners, but entire families. In those programs, there are 1,200 students who hear about Jesus' love for them. Preschools provide more than letters, numbers and social skills. They nurture hearts and minds in Christ. By integrating biblical truths into daily learning, children begin to understand God's love and grace from an early age. This foundation strengthens them and will guide them throughout life.

There are several children attending our preschools who may not have a church home. Think of the impact this may make on the family. One congregation in our district has made connections with five families that ended up joining the Lutheran church. These connections resulted in 25 new members over a five-year period.

Another benefit of our schools is that parents often find themselves forming lasting friendships through school events, worship opportunities and volunteer activities. These relationships create a supportive network that extends beyond the classroom, helping families feel rooted in a caring Christian community.

Iowa District West preschools are committed to excellence in education. Teachers are trained to provide appropriate-age instruction that prepares children for kindergarten and beyond. Through play, hands-on activities and individualized attention, students develop critical thinking, problem-solving and social skills. This holistic approach ensures that children are not only ready for school, but equipped for life.

Please join me in thanking God for the congregations that invest in these ministries, and join me in giving thanks for the teachers that invest their time, energy and expertise in teaching God's precious little children.



LCMS/Erik M. Lunsford

Rhonda is pictured with other LCMS church and school leaders who gathered in Washington, D.C., on Nov. 17, 2025, to discuss new tax credits that could positively impact funding for Lutheran schools. The credits were created by the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, passed in July 2025, and will potentially give more families opportunities to enroll their children in Lutheran schools. Read more at reporter.lcms.org/2026/leaders-discuss-tax-credit-potential.

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The accompaniment of heaven

There are a couple of praise songs that often come to mind when I think of what it will be like in heaven. Singing them reminds me of the verse that was used as our district convention focus this past June, and continues to be our guide for the next triennium:

One generation shall commend your works to another; and shall declare your mighty acts. **PSALM 145:4**

I encourage you to read this wonderful psalm in its entirety.

Here are the key verses from the praise songs I often think about:

Surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us run the race, not only for the prize

But as those who've gone before us, let us leave to those behind us the heritage of faithfulness passed on through godly lives

"Find Us Faithful" by Steve Green

And on that day, we join the resurrection

And stand beside the heroes of the faith

With one voice, a thousand generations

Sing, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain"

"Forever He shall reign"

So let it be today we shout the hymn of Heaven

With angels and the saints, we raise a mighty roar

Glory to our God who gave us life beyond the grave

Holy, holy is the Lord

"Hymn of Heaven" by Phil Wickham

When I sing these words, I think of two groups of people — my own family members who have passed, including my parents, grandparents, and many aunts and uncles; and the those big names we know from our Bible readings and teachings. (Give a quick prayer of thanks to your Lutheran day school and Sunday school teachers.) When my day of resurrection comes, not only will I glorify God with my mom and aunts — Marlene, Betty, Luella and Myrt, but also with Esther, Naomi, Lydia, and Joanna. I will stand in God's presence next to my dad and uncles — Ronnie, Mickey, LeVerne and Maynard, right next to Abednego (Azariah), Moses, Peter and Zechariah. Wow! When I think about it with my earthly wisdom, it is truly awe-inspiring.

Now think about and picture those who sit around you in worship, confessing their faith along with you — they'll be there. Remember those men and women who scouted land, built the sanctuary and had the dream for your congregation — they'll be there. Include those in your community who also proclaim their faith in the one true Savior — they'll be there. It's going to be magnificent.

I encourage you, in a very genuine way, to keep telling of God's mighty acts to the next generation in your family, your congregation and your community.

What perfect love to get us all there — God sending His only son, Jesus Christ, into this world full of sinful darkness to take on the payment of death for all of us. Then defeating the devil and rising again with the Good News that we will be in eternity! Now folks, that is a love story for your February.

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Let's discover your financial path together.

Meet your LCEF representative

Your LCEF District Vice President (DVP) is

Josh Remington

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Learn more about how we can work together at lcef.org/iowa.



I am here to help **start, sustain and strengthen** LCMS ministries through financial and strategic partnerships.



"Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him." -PROVERBS 30:5



Nov. 22: What a blessing to welcome Rev. Matthew Wood and his dear family, who are serving the world in Indonesia. We were also blessed by the presence of pastors of area congregations. Pastor Wood is pictured making a presentation on his ministry, which also includes work in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Australia.



Nov. 13: Rev. Dr. Ron and Mary Anne Ball, who have been serving in the jungles of Papua New Guinea since 1973, visited Mission Central. Pastor Ball, who is from Creston, teaches theology at Timothy Lutheran Seminary in Birip.



Nov. 18: Here at Mission Central we send out one mailing a year (at Thanksgiving) to let people know how much we love them and appreciate their prayers and support for our missionaries. This is a monumental task, and we could not do it without the Lord sending special people to help.

This year, we had 20 volunteers who gathered from seven congregations in the Des Moines area. They pitched in and stamped, stuffed and mailed nearly 7,000 envelopes — nearly 143 hours of dedicated service.

We thank and praise God for these wonderful volunteers (all but one are pictured).



MISSION CENTRAL STAFF



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Nov. 6: Rev. Greg and Peg Volzke visited Mission Central. Rev. Volzke serves as pastor of Trinity, Campbell, Neb.



Nov. 17: Kris Boyles and her son, Hunter, visited from Newhall for a full tour of the campus.



Nov. 14: What a special blessing to welcome our Monona County home-school students and parents.



LCMS/Erik M. Ljungstord

GOD'S MISSION EVERYWHERE

In the Winter 2026 issue of *Lutherans Engage the World*, you'll read about many amazing things that God is doing around the world: engaging youth in the faith, caring for refugees, forming deaconesses for service to the church, sharing the Gospel with people in far-flung places. But the mission of the church is not something that "they" are doing "out there." It's work that all Christians are involved in — whether in their own neighborhood or by partnering with others across the globe.



In an article on the recent FORO in Germany, Eurasia Regional Director Rev. Dr. David Preus says he hopes the FORO participants will return home and tell others, "We have a mission in Germany, and this is what we are doing." In the same way, we hope you will be encouraged by these examples of how your church is sharing the love and mercy of Jesus Christ all around the globe — all to the glory of God.

Read or subscribe (for free) at engage.lcms.org.

CAMP OKOBOJI 2026

Discipleship Programs

May 29-31	Kid's Kamp
June 4-7	Joy Camp 1
June 14-18	Cub Week 1
June 28-July 3	July 4 th Family Retreat
July 5-11	Jr High Week
July 9-12	Joy Camp 2
July 12-18	Cub Week 2
July 19-25	Youth Week
July 26-31	Family Retreat #1
August 2-7	Family Retreat #2

Other Events

January 23-25...Family Ice Fishing Retreat
 May 1-2...Spring Volunteer Work Weekend
 June 10-13...Iowa West District LWML Convention
 June 20...Camp Okoboji Auxiliary Quilt Auction
 June 21-27...Minneboji Lutheran Camp
 May 24-September 6...Sunday Worship
 1st Sundays of the Month (May-October)...Brunch
 October 9-10...Fall Volunteer Work Weekend

For more information and to register, visit campokoboji.org



REGISTER BY MARCH 1 FOR \$20 OFF

Health

MINDFULNESS

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Mindfulness is a type of meditation in which you focus on being intensely aware of what you're sensing and feeling in the moment, without interpretation or judgment. Practicing mindfulness involves breathing methods, guided imagery, and other methods to relax the body and mind.

Spending too much time planning, problem-solving, day-dreaming, or thinking negative or random thoughts can be draining. Practicing mindfulness exercises can help direct your attention away from this kind of thinking and engage with the world around you.

Meditation has been studied in many clinical trials. The overall evidence supports the effectiveness of meditation for various conditions, including stress, anxiety, pain, depression, insomnia, high blood pressure, asthma and fibromyalgia.

Meditation can help you experience thoughts and emotions with greater balance and acceptance. It has also been shown to improve attention, sleep and diabetes control, and decrease job burnout.

There are many ways to practice mindfulness. Some examples include:



- **Paying attention**
It's hard to slow down and notice things in a busy world. Try to take the time to experience God's creation with all of your senses — touch, sound, sight, smell and taste. When eating a favorite food, take the time to smell, taste and truly enjoy it.
- **Living in the moment**
Try to intentionally bring an open and insightful attention to everything you do. Find joy in simple pleasures.
- **Focusing on breathing**
Take a deep breath and close your eyes. Focus on your breath as it moves in and out of your body. Sitting and breathing for even a minute can help.
- **Body-scan meditation**
Lie on your back with legs extended and arms at your sides, palms facing up. Focus your attention slowly and

deliberately on each part of your body in order. Be aware of any sensations, emotions or thoughts associated with each part of the body.

- **Sitting meditation**
Sit comfortably with your back straight, feet flat on the floor, and hands in your lap. Breathe through your nose and focus on your breath moving in and out of your body.
- **Walking meditation**
Find a quiet place 10 to 20 feet in length and begin to walk slowly. Focus on the experience of walking, being aware of the sensations of standing and the subtle movements that keep your balance. When you reach the end, turn and continue walking, maintaining awareness of your sensations.

Mindfulness exercises can be practiced anywhere and anytime. Research indicates that engaging your senses outdoors is especially beneficial. Over time, you may find that mindfulness becomes effortless. Think of it as a commitment to reconnecting with and nurturing yourself. May God bless your endeavors to connect with His world through your God-given senses.

(Information is referenced from Mayo Clinic website.)

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