



DISTRICT NEWS

IOWA WEST

Watch your step!

“Did it bite me?” Amanda hurried back up the steps — back up the canyon steps — back to our group.

We stared at the VERY LARGE rattlesnake as it slowly slithered off the step and away into the brush. Fort Collins, Colorado, 2016. A little hike in the canyon prior to our Higher Things event.

Two small holes in Amanda’s ankle. Blood dripping from each. Tourniquet. Leg elevated in the car. “Sip on this Gatorade.” We swerve around canyon corners rushing to get to cell phone reception.

911: “Don’t restrict blood flow. Don’t elevate her leg. Don’t give her anything to eat or drink.” Oops.

The first picture. Here’s her ankle a couple days later in the hospital. Swelling is down. Thank You, Jesus, for protecting Amanda. Thank You, Jesus, for everything. Teach us to watch our step.

Watching our step. A couple years ago our Galva congregation decided to print labels of God’s commandments teaching us to love Him and love each other — to print 10 commandment labels and affix them to the inside front cover of our hymnals for easy access. We begin each Divine Service reciting these commandments from God. Jesus teaches us that the Path to heaven is narrow and traveled by few. Blessed are the few! Jesus is the Path! And we walk this path loving God and loving people God sets around us! Watch your step!

This Lenten season we slow our step. We carefully watch. We consider God’s perfect commandments. We celebrate keeping them. We see Jesus bloody on the cross for times we haven’t. We see Jesus’ perfect walk of righteousness, perfect keeping of



Rev. Paul Egger
District President



God’s perfect commandments, perfect sacrifice for us.

Watch Jesus Christ’s steps. His steps to the cross. His mighty step in stomping the most horrible venomous snake, satan.

The second picture. A few years later. Traveling to Tacoma, Washington, for another church youth trip. Watch your step! Jesus is the Path of life!

As angels sing,
Pastor Paul Egger • President, Iowa District West



Rethinking outreach

Four fresh ways to connect with your community in 2026

Outreach looks different from what it did just a few years ago. Communities are more digitally connected, more diverse in their needs, and more interested in authenticity and real impact. Churches that flourish at outreach now require a blend of timeless relational ministry and forward-thinking strategies that meet people where they are — spiritually, emotionally and physically.

Following are four outreach ideas for 2026 that can help congregations build meaningful relationships and extend their mission into the community.

1. Community care hubs: meeting practical needs with purpose

Many congregations already operate food pantries or Swaddling Clothes ministries, but 2026 brings an opportunity to expand these into community care hubs — regular, predictable and well-publicized moments of service.

Ideas for care hubs:

- ▶ Free monthly oil changes or car care checks.

- ▶ A “Laundry Day” partnership with local laundromats.
- ▶ Mental health first-aid stations with licensed volunteers or in cooperation with Lutheran Family Service.
- ▶ A tech help desk for seniors needing assistance with phones, apps and online forms (like changes to their Medicaid enrollment).

Why it works: People often step into a relationship with the church through practical help rather than programs. Care hubs also create easy volunteer opportunities for members that lead to the end goal of engaging them in our local Word and Sacrament ministry.

2. Micro-gatherings in homes, parks, and public spaces

The rise of micro-communities — small, decentralized gatherings — continues to reshape outreach opportunities.

Examples of micro-gatherings:

- ▶ A neighborhood devotional meetup at a local park.

- ▶ A “faith and coffee” conversation held in someone’s home.
- ▶ Pop-up kids’ storytime or music sessions at playgrounds.
- ▶ Short Bible discussions or prayer walks in apartment complexes.

Why it works: Micro-gatherings remove barriers to entering a church building. Unfortunately, our church buildings are not drawing in the community. These smaller gatherings feel more personal, relational and safe for people exploring our faith community.

3. Skill sharing outreach — empowering people with what your church already has

Every congregation holds a wealth of skills and talents. Transforming those gifts into outreach opportunities can create a powerful community impact.

Potential skill-sharing options:

- ▶ Career coaching, resume workshops or job interview practice sessions.
- ▶ Creative classes in art, music, photography or writing.
- ▶ ESL classes led by bilingual members.
- ▶ Financial fitness sessions taught by professionals in your congregation.

Why it works: People may not immediately come to a worship service, but they will show up for help developing practical life skills. This often builds natural bridges to deeper relationships.

4. “Adopt-a-community” initiatives: long-term, hyper-local investment

Instead of broad, scattered outreach events, many churches are shifting

Continued on next page

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toward deep, ongoing investment in a single community, school or neighborhood.

Examples:

- ▶ Adopting a local elementary school with tutoring, staff support and supplies.
- ▶ Committing to a single neighborhood for long-term revitalization projects.
- ▶ Partnering consistently with one non-profit to expand their reach.
- ▶ Providing scholarships or micro-grants to families in a specific area.

Why it works: Long-term investment builds credibility. Instead of drive-by outreach, your church becomes a trusted, dependable partner in community transformation.

Outreach in 2026 is not about bigger events; it is about deeper connections and lasting impact. Churches that thrive in the coming years will be those that:

- **BUILD** relationships, not just programs.
- **LISTEN** for community needs.
- **EMBRACE** digital tools without losing personal connection or compromising our confessions.
- **EMPOWER** their members to serve with their unique gifts.
- **COMMIT** to long term presence, not onetime events.

By implementing even one or two of these ideas, your congregation can create meaningful connections and share the love of Christ in ways that feel relevant, authentic and deeply needed.



Scholarships available

Do you have students in your congregation prayerfully contemplating a future in church work? How about students thinking about attending one of our Concordia universities for training in other vocations? How about a young man considering enrolling at one of our two seminaries?

The fall semester may seem a long way off, but now is the time to start filling out financial aid paperwork. Iowa District West is blessed to offer substantial student aid to our church work students attending a Concordia school. We also offer grants to Concordia students pursuing other careers as funds permit.

To apply, students must be a member in good standing of an Iowa District West congregation and be enrolled at a Concordia university or seminary. Applications and a pastor’s letter of recommendation must be sent to Rev. Joe Pierson, district student aid director, by June 1. You can find the application at idwlcms.org. Go to the “Resources” tab and select “Forms and Links” from the drop-down menu. Send an email to revpierson@gmail.com if you have any questions.

A family in our district this year has established a new scholarship, which

is open to LCMS students preparing for church work at any Christian college or university. The **Gerald and Kathy Gehring Church Worker Scholarship** is a private scholarship distinct from the Iowa District West student aid fund. Applications for this scholarship are due **March 31**. For full details, including the application, send an email to gkgcws@gmail.com.

Please pray for our church work students, those contemplating church work, and those the Lord will lift up in generations to come. What our Lord says is true now as it always has been: “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few” (Matt. 9:37). Then as now, we are called to pray earnestly and trust boldly in His provision for His Kingdom.

In Christ • Rev. Joe Pierson

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‘In like a lion, out like a lamb’

I recently hosted some family for a birthday celebration. Hope, a middle-schooler, was part of a crew perusing my DVD collection. Yes, I still have one of those!

She was pulling out some classic films I hadn’t watched in a while: “Black Beauty,” “The Sandlot,” “Ratatouille,” but she had seen all of those. Then her eyes lit up at finding a treasure that she hadn’t known about. It was the film, based on the C.S. Lewis novel “The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe.” If you haven’t read or seen it, I would highly recommend doing that in the next few weeks.

“The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe” is a Christian allegory, with its central story mirroring Jesus Christ’s passion and resurrection, particularly the themes of sacrificial love, betrayal, death and new life. It’s much like Easter, in which Aslan’s sacrifice for Edmund parallels Jesus’ sacrifice for humanity, shattering the stone table (representing old law/death) and bringing redemption and spring (renewal) to Narnia.

Lewis, a devout Christian, structured the narrative to reflect biblical events, making it a powerful “Easter story about overcoming sin and death through love and sacrifice.” (Reprinted following a Google search of “The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe Compare to Easter.”)

It was interesting to chat with Hope throughout, pausing the movie to talk

about the accounts in the Bible that it parallels. She is not being raised in a Christian home, so it was impactful to be able to answer her questions and to think more deeply about my faith. Her curiosity reminded me that even though I was raised in a Christian home, I should always dig deeper into Scripture and the connections in my daily life.

The movie also reminded me of the phrase that we often use with spring, “in like a lion, out like a lamb.” The way this Lent season sits a bit earlier this year, in my head, going from Aslan (the lion) to the lamb who was slain (Jesus) seems like a smooth connection. The Gospels

are not allegories; they are truthful accounts of our salvation through the sacrifice of our Savior, His death smashing the Law of the Old Testament, and His resurrection breathing new life into us.

Read the book, watch the movie, and be thankful that we are living the real deal.



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Let’s discover your financial path together.

Meet your LCEF representative

Your LCEF District Vice President (DVP) is

Josh Remington

📞 515-417-9880

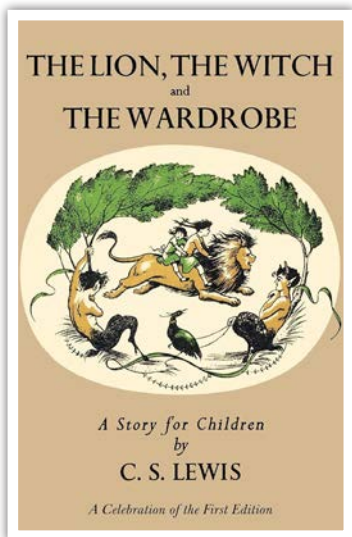
✉ josh.remington@lcef.org



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



Dec. 20: What a blessing to welcome Chelsea Irwin, who serves in the Czech Republic and is telling so, so many people about our dear Savior Jesus! Chelsea gave a wonderful report with pictures to show. A group of saints arrived from Sioux City; Wakefield, Neb.; and Kansas. They all have been praying for and supporting this wonderful young missionary, who has been working in the Eurasia region for about six years.

We look forward to seeing you!

Few people realize the number of missionaries that visit Mission Central. In 2025, we had 26 missionaries here providing updates on what they are doing all over the world. Visit our website — missioncentral.us — to see which missionaries will visit Mission Central in 2026. There is no better time to visit us than when we have a missionary here!

missioncentral.us



Dec. 10: Mike Mettenbrink, advancement officer at Concordia University, Nebraska (CUNE), visited to present a “Servant Leadership Award” to Old Missionary Gary, who was truly honored. Mike has served CUNE since 2006. In his position, he visits with CUNE friends and alums, helping them in their plan of stewardship for furthering the mission of the university.



Dec. 13: Here in the hills of Western Iowa, God calls His people to visit even in a winter storm. It snowed and snowed, but that didn't stop Jim and Pam Siebarth of Lakewood, Colo., from making the trip. We gave them a full tour.

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Strengthening faith IN THE HOME



LCMS Family Ministry has released several new resources for family devotions and Bible study. They include resources for parents instructing children of all ages in the faith as well as resources for older children and young adults digging deeper into God’s Word.

For parents teaching children, the Daily Devotions Guide for Families provides an outline for family devotions, including suggested hymns, catechism memory work and Bible verses for each week of the year. The resource also includes a guide for reading the Bible throughout the year, with suggested books to focus on based on content and ease of understanding.

The Catechism in the Home offers a brief guide for parents seeking to incorporate Luther’s Small Catechism into family life, devotion and study. It outlines how Luther intended the catechism to be used in the home, how it can help parents fulfill their calling to instruct their children in the Word, and how it can shape and strengthen people of all ages in their faith.

For older children and young adults, Digging Deeper provides a series of in-depth Bible studies intended for those nearing the age of confirmation study or above. Included are the “God’s Answers” study, which explores the Augsburg Confession and Christian worldview; “Important Words,” which defines words such as “faith,” “forgiveness,” “freedom” and “Gospel” in a Christian context; “Living Planted,” which covers vocation; and “Our Questions,” which discusses the Book of Job and suffering as a Christian.

Christian Character and Calling explores vocation and the Christian life through a series of Bible studies intended to be used by parents or youth leaders instructing teenagers. Each

**LCMS
FAMILY MINISTRY**
is dedicated to equipping families to pass on the faith, nurture the well-being of the family and proclaim Christ. The resources mentioned, and others, are available at lcms.org/family.

installment covers an area of Christian living and includes Scripture verses and discussion questions. Topics include “Meditate on God’s Word,” “Forgive as I Have Been Forgiven,” “Share the Faith” and “Encourage Other Believers.”

Parents and youth leaders can also use Short Studies on Tough Topics, a series of studies covering difficult questions for teenagers and young adults. Each study includes conversation starters, a short devotion and Scripture verses to provide biblical context for the topic. Families can use the resource as a starting point to discuss tough topics such as “Authority,” “Marriage,” “Isolation” and “Natural Disasters,” with God’s Word as their guide.

“We are excited to add these new resources,” said the Rev. Andy Becker, manager of family discipleship for the LCMS Office of National Mission. “These join other resources to help families develop faith practices in their homes. Faith habits will vary between households, and so we will continue to develop resources to support these healthy habits.”

CSP offering free tuition for church work students

Concordia University, St. Paul (CSP), Minn., is strengthening its commitment to the church through an expanded Church Work Tuition Guarantee, offering \$0 tuition for all students preparing for full-time church work vocations. This initiative affirms CSP’s long-standing mission to prepare workers for the

church wherever and however they are called to serve.

“This commitment reflects who we are and what we value — affordable tuition, outstanding faculty and a robust, confessionally Lutheran curriculum,” said Rev. Dr. Mark Koschmann, CSP chief mission officer. “Our prayerful hope is that this removes financial barriers so that more students can joyfully prepare for lives of service in the church, strengthened by the gifts God has entrusted to them.”

Through this commitment, CSP seeks to ensure that financial barriers do not prevent students from responding to God’s call into church work. “We pray that this commitment to ensuring an affordable, Christ-centered Lutheran education will bless countless students now and in the years to come,” said Rev. Dr. Brian Friedrich, CSP president. “We are grateful to CSP’s many friends and alumni who generously support our students through scholarships and endowments, which help us underwrite their educational costs.”

Health

Athlete's foot

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Athlete's foot, known medically as *tinea pedis*, is a skin infection caused by a type of fungus called dermatophytes.

The fungus can live on floors, bedding and shoes, and spreads easily to others. It thrives in warm, damp places such as sweaty socks and shoes and wet towels.



Common symptoms are scaly,

peeling, cracked skin; itchy skin; swollen skin; burning or stinging skin; and blisters. There is a higher risk of athlete's foot with sweating excessively; sharing clothing or towels with an infected person; or walking barefoot in public showers, pools or locker rooms.

Prevention includes letting the feet breathe; washing feet daily and drying them well, especially between the toes; using over-the-counter antifungal medication; changing socks at least daily; rotating pairs of shoes; wearing waterproof shoes in public pools and showers; and not sharing shoes or towels with others.

Treatment with OTC Lamisil, Lotrimin, or Tinactin can be highly effective. If it's not resolved within two weeks, contact your healthcare provider as both cream and oral antifungal medicine may need to be prescribed.

Diabetics may need to see their physician sooner if athlete's foot is suspected.

Complications include spread of the fungus to other parts of the body, development of a bacterial infection, or a serious skin infection called cellulitis.

Contact your healthcare provider if you have signs or symptoms of athlete's foot that don't improve with the mentioned recommendations.

(Information is referenced from the Mayo Clinic website.)

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Read *Book of Concord* online for free



Concordia Publishing House (CPH) recently announced the launch of an online version of the Book of Concord (BOC), available at no cost at bookofconcord.cph.org. The reaction across social media after the announcement was uniformly enthusiastic:

- “A beautiful gift for the church!”
- “Way to go, CPH! Thanks for another wonderful resource for life and ministry.”
- “This is awesome! Thank you, CPH!”

“What sets the *Book of Concord Online* apart is that it features the text of *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*,” said Jonathan D. Schultz, CPH president and CEO. “For over 20 years, this has been the most widely used and trusted version of our Confessions. We are thrilled to be making it freely available online.”

The new BOC website makes the historic documents of the *Book of Concord* — containing the foundational writings of the Lutheran confessors — available to all on a user-friendly, digital platform. The text provided on the website is from *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, second edition, by CPH. A press release from CPH describes it as “a revised and updated version of the translation originally prepared by William H. T. Dau and G. Friedrich

Bente for the *Concordia Triglotta* to ensure both theological fidelity and readability for today's readers.”

“The *Book of Concord's* faithfulness to the Holy Scriptures allows it to be central to the teaching and witness of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod,” said the Rev. Dr. Jacob Corzine, vice-president of publishing for CPH. “By making it available online, we hope to encourage faithful teaching and study, and bold confession of the Christian faith.”

Some key features of the new website include:

- ▶ The ability to easily copy and paste text with a single click. When pasted, the excerpt automatically includes a proper citation.
- ▶ A clear sidebar menu that allows users to quickly locate specific documents and sections, with simple toggles to move between previous and subsequent sections.
- ▶ The ability to search by word, phrase or article/paragraph number. Users can also filter results by individual confessional document for more precise study.
- ▶ Scripture passages, displayed in the English Standard Version (ESV), that appear directly on the page when the citation is hovered over, allowing readers to engage biblical references without leaving the text.

Send questions to publicity@cph.org.

Registration **NOW OPEN**

Camp Okoboji is a vital ministry of the church. We exist because congregations believe that forming faith in children, youth and families matters. When a camper steps onto our grounds, they are stepping into a wider community that has prayed for them and invested in them.

Registering for camp is more than signing up for summer plans. It's a decision to prioritize faith formation. It's a way families partner with the church and it's how we, together, ensure that our ministry remains strong and vibrant for the next generation.

Registration for 2026 sessions at Camp Okoboji is now open, and each registration helps make these life-shaping weeks possible — not only for each camper, but for the entire camp community. We invite families, congregations and supporters to be part of what God is already doing in this place.

Because we are reminded every summer: God can do a lot in a week.

Learn more and register at campokoboji.org.

Adam Hengeveld,
Executive Director
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SCHEDULE FOR 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 Family Retreat
- July 5–11.....Junior 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
- Aug. 2–7.....Family Retreat #2

Other Events

- May 1–2..... Spring Volunteer Work Weekend
- June 10–13..... LWML Iowa West District Convention
- June 20..... Camp Okoboji Auxiliary Quilt Auction
- June 21–27..... Minneboji Lutheran Camp
- May 24–Sept. 6 Sunday Worship
- Oct. 9–10..... Fall Volunteer Work Weekend

Brunch will be served the first Sundays from May through October

**FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO REGISTER,
VISIT CAMPOKOBOJI.ORG**