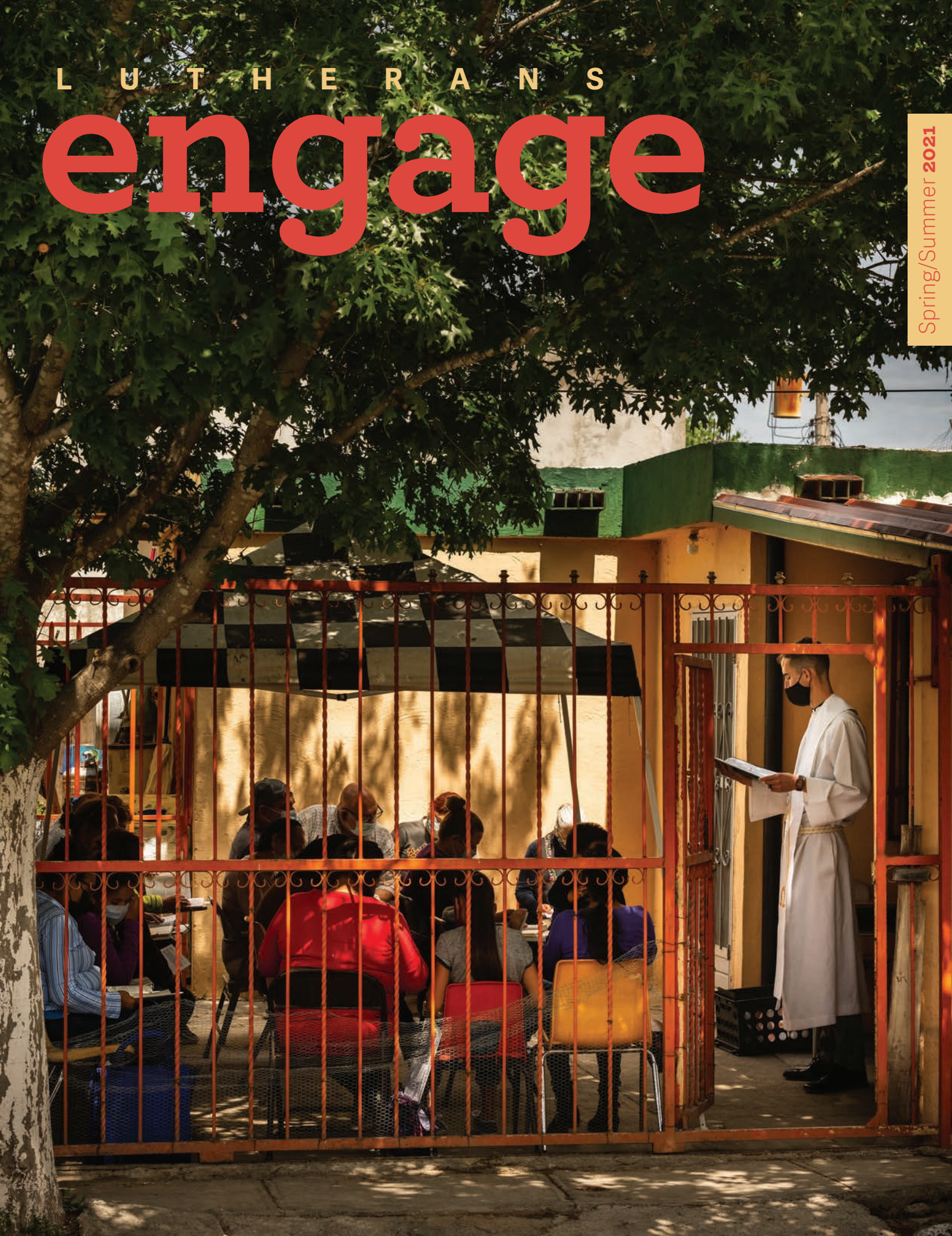


L U T H E R A N S

engage

Spring/Summer 2021



Spring/Summer 2021

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Cover image

The Rev. Daniel Fickenscher, pastor of Iglesia Luterana Cristo El Salvador, Del Rio, Texas, leads worship on April 17 in the courtyard of a congregation member's home in Acuña, Mexico.

PHOTO: LCMS COMMUNICATIONS/
ERIK M. LUNSFORD



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L U T H E R A N S

engage the world



Waiting for the End

“The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers” (1 PETER 4:7).

While we may be hoping for the “end” of a world-upending pandemic, the apostle Peter diverts our gaze toward the “end of all things.” Sounds rather disruptive to daily living, doesn't it? He says, “The end of all things is at hand.” All the things to which we endear ourselves now are squeezed, downward pressed under the gravity of an enduring reality to be revealed. The Gospel is preached to the nations; the end comes. It is just that powerfully simple. The end, the goal, the consummation of the world's existence and history, the divinely foreseen and ordained completion of *everything* is at hand.

Oh, how we struggle with that! That the finish line would approach, that God would be glorified through Christ into eternity — what ought to be, above everything else, the cause of our great rejoicing — gives way to fearful thoughts and fitful anxieties. It seems that life itself is ebbing away all too soon — opportunities lost, the end imminent. We anesthetize ourselves against such unease in our busy-ness, our diversions, our addictions. Merely wearily “living it out” may be a symptom that we've lost a love for genuine life, the only true and eternal life as it derives from the Word of God in Christ.

On the other hand, born of this Word, the self-control and sober-mindedness of the baptized faithful give rise to a joyful freedom — now on vivid display in unfettered, impactful vocations accompanied by fervent prayer in the name of Jesus. Consider the amazing breadth of activities undertaken by your determined fellow saints here and around the world, even as described so briefly, with all glory and thanks to God, in this issue of *Lutherans Engage the World*. Our beloved co-workers have St. Peter's “end” firmly in mind!

In His hands,

Rev. Kevin D. Robson

Chief Mission Officer, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

From the Editor



The church is on the move — crossing borders and moving forward with Christ. This issue of *Lutherans Engage the World* will take you far and wide to meet a chaplain serving deployed soldiers, theological educators teaching eager students on different continents, a mercy effort in the urban core and a new pastor crossing into Mexico to care for his flock — each one bringing Christ and His Word in unique and wondrous ways!

In Christ,

Pamela J. Nielsen

Associate Executive Director, LCMS Communications

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Kevin Armbrust

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Erik M. Lunsford

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The Bombaro family, including Sophia, Melinda and Marie, set up the altar before worship in a church sanctuary used by Blessed Sacrament Lutheran Church in Hayden, Idaho.

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BY MEGAN K. MERTZ

Q&A

WITH
the Rev. Scot Kerns,
MONTANA STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Pastor, Air Force chaplain and now member of the Montana House of Representatives.

The Rev. Scot Kerns has worn many hats since graduating from Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, in 2013. Despite his busy schedule, Kerns continues to make time to serve as intentional interim pastor for St. John Lutheran Church, Fairfield, Mont., and Zion Lutheran Church, Power, Mont., while also pursuing a Master of Business Administration from the University of Montana.



1 What does a typical week look like for you?

While the Legislature is in session, I typically work Monday through Friday and some Saturdays, usually starting at 7 or 8 a.m. and going frequently late into the night. Once the week's over, I head back to Great Falls and get ready for church services on Sunday. I do church services both at 9 a.m. and at 11 a.m., with a half-hour drive in between the churches. After church, I usually take a pastor's nap and get back on the road to Helena, and then I get ready for the week to start all over again. Not to mention doing pastoral visitations and working on college homework in my spare time.

2 How do you juggle two demanding roles?

I don't know if "juggling" is the right word, because both roles are kind of an extension of me. I definitely have to make time, especially to make sure members are visited and to respond if we have any emergencies with the church. Thankfully, my congregation has been very gracious and

understanding. They realize that this is an opportunity for me to speak on their behalf, for me to shape the community that we live in.

3 How do you view your vocations in the right-hand kingdom (the church) and the left-hand kingdom (the world)?

They ultimately are informed by God. God is the one who is in control of both of them, and I serve Him in both. We pray for both our church leaders and our government leaders. I'm thankful that I receive prayers on both accords, because I definitely need it. I invite you to pray for me as well!

4 What role do the Scriptures play in your decisions as a government official?

A lot. I am unequivocally Lutheran. You can look at my voting record. I strive to be in line with what our church teaches, believes and confesses, as this is also what I believe. The Holy Scriptures absolutely inform what I see and how I think and the way that I go through the world.

5 Have you had any opportunities for Christian witness in this role?

Life doesn't stop when you are serving in public office or in service to public office. We have a number of staff members who have had some tragedies and big struggles, and we've had legislators who've had the same. I've had some amazing opportunities to talk to them and work through some of the tough stuff that they're going through. Really, when you think about it, it's very similar to the idea of being a part of the military. When I was an Air Force chaplain, you are with a group of people, you're embedded with them, you're going through the same stuff that they're going through. You almost can't help but have a witness. It's hard to not be engaged with people around you. People reach out to you. It is my fervent prayer that my witness points them to the ultimate comfort that we have in Christ alone.

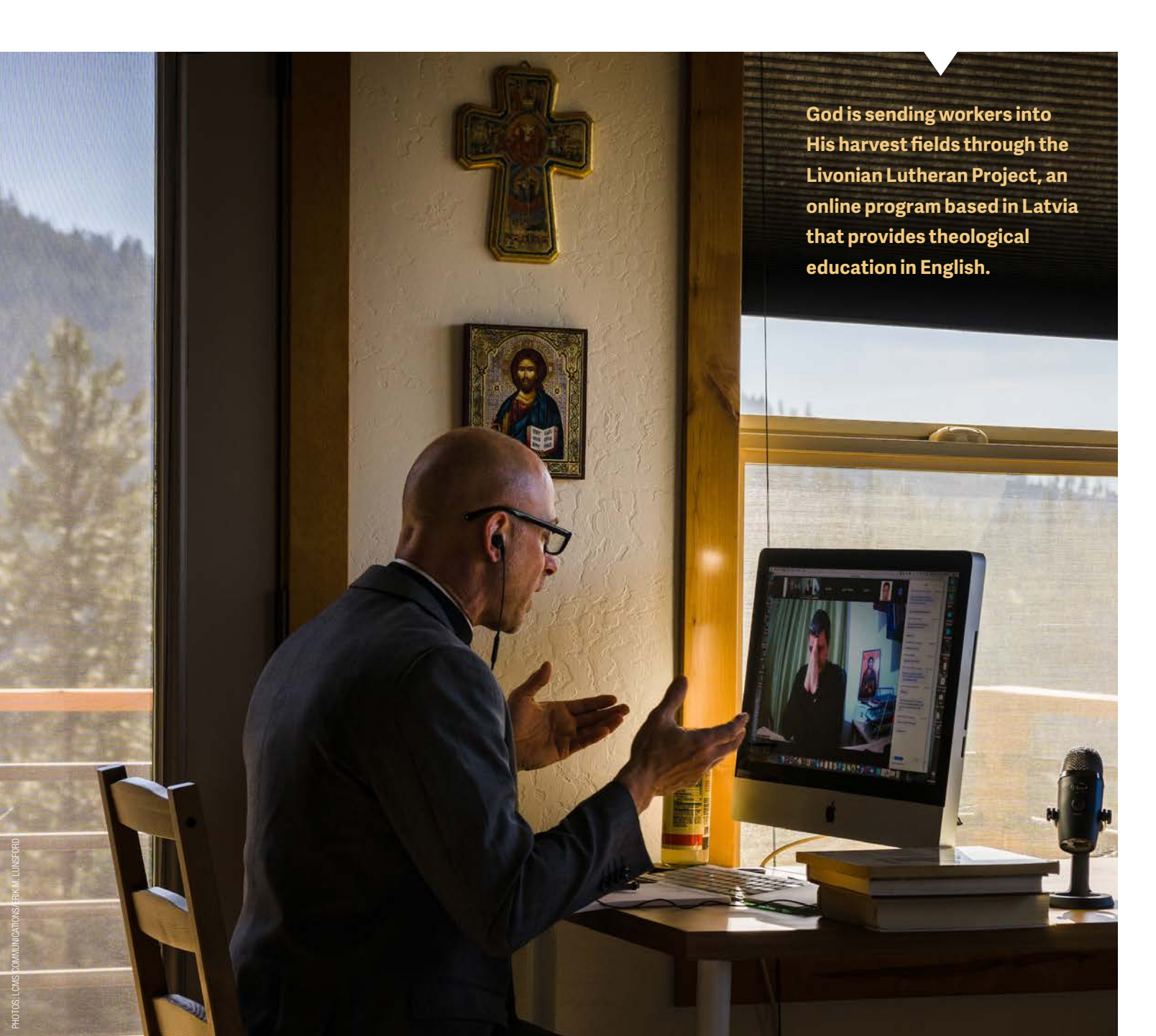
6 Is there anything tough about being a clergyman in the state Legislature?

No, and that's the really amazing part. We hear this refrain of "separation of church and state." But that's not what the U.S. Constitution was written to address, nor what us citizens or church members should be concerned with today. [The First Amendment] is all about protections from Congress interfering with the church. It doesn't go the other way around. That is where we can have a voice in this. We have the opportunity to freely exercise our religious beliefs. The free exercise clause allows us to do that. We are free by the Constitution to practice our Christian beliefs, and we should be passionate about speaking up for the great freedoms we have and steadfastly protecting those liberties going forward.

.....
Megan K. Mertz is managing editor of *Lutherans Engage the World* and chief copy editor for LCMS Communications.

Find resources on religious liberty: lcms.org/free-to-be-faithful





God is sending workers into His harvest fields through the Livonian Lutheran Project, an online program based in Latvia that provides theological education in English.

WHENEVER / AND / WHEREVER

BY KEVIN ARMBRUST



The Rev. Dr. John Bombaro teaches over video conferencing at his home in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

“**T**he Lord did not suspend His missionary endeavors because a pandemic had broken out,” noted the Rev. Dr. John Bombaro, missionary to Latvia and assistant to the regional director of the LCMS Office of International Mission’s Eurasia region. “We needed to adjust on the fly so that men and women could be trained for church work and pastors could be trained for church planting and service in existing churches.”

“Europe has become so secularized that our students are considered more-than-just-strange for their desire to study biblical theology for the purpose of becoming pastors,” the Rev. Dr. Charles Cortright, missionary and theological educator in Riga, Latvia, wrote in a recent newsletter. “The misconceptions about Christ and Christianity they hear are mind-boggling.”

The need is real, the opportunities abound, and God is sending workers into His harvest field, whenever and wherever He directs.

Men and women from Pakistan, Italy, Romania, the

Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Ukraine join those in Latvia as students of the Luther Academy in Riga, even though travel to Riga is impossible. These class-

professors in the same room. Bombaro and Cortright were called to serve as theological educators for the LCMS Office of International Mission. They both



Europe has become so secularized that our students are considered more-than-just-strange for their desire to study biblical theology for the purpose of becoming pastors.”

— Rev. Dr. Charles Cortright

mates watch online sessions from their separate locales, taught by professors living on two continents. Time zones and internet access now play a prominent role in accessing their classes.

None of this was planned a year ago. The Luther Academy, the seminary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia (LELB), a partner church of the LCMS, was set to open with students and

moved to Riga in early 2020, eager to teach at the seminary and train men and women for service in the church. But, as with everything in 2020, those plans changed quickly.

A Few Things Remained, Everything Else Changed

In-person classes were soon canceled, since travel to Riga

was out of the question and gatherings were prohibited. Bombaro and Cortright immediately worked to figure out how to move forward with their plan to provide theological education. Online classes appeared to be the most obvious and feasible solution. Bombaro and his family moved back to the U.S. to coordinate the necessary work with partners in the U.S., while Cortright and his wife, Connie, stayed in Latvia to work with the people there and continue the LCMS presence in Riga.

Latvia has deep roots in Lutheranism. As early as 1523, Latvians read Luther’s writings, sent by Johannes Bugenhagen, and embraced the Reformation Gospel. Now, many desire to return to their Christian roots, and the LCMS is working with the LELB to provide theological education by LCMS missionaries who have the academic credentials to teach at the seminary level.

Bombaro and Cortright originally went to Latvia as an answer to the Luther Academy’s request to the LCMS to obtain accreditation

as a professional Bachelor of Theology program for pastoral students. This was a change from the Luther Academy's current accreditation under the European Union from a strictly academic degree to a professional degree. Along with this change, a professional B.Th. in English would be offered under the same accreditation, due to the increase of English as a desired and useful language in Latvia and throughout Eurasia. This new effort, called the Livonian Lutheran Project, now operates in conjunction with the Luther Academy.

No one wanted to abandon the project, even though physical gathering now proved impossible. The most obvious solution lay online and in English. This combination allowed people to take classes who could not otherwise receive this robust theological education. Yet, no one knew

how online theological education would be received.

Cortright recalled, "I suggested we offer an online, not-for-credit, no-obligation Introduction to Theology course in the fall of 2020 to serve the men we had heard from in the Czech Republic, Italy and Romania. But when the LELB advertised it via their database, we heard from many more people." Among those was a group of Pakistani Christians who were interested in beginning an authentic Lutheran ministry in Pakistan. When the class launched in September, students attended from 14 different time zones and in various countries, including Latvia, Ireland, Russia and Pakistan.

This introductory class served as a trial to judge the interest in the program and to learn how best to teach online. Cortright and Bombaro decided that one would teach the

course, and the other would be active in the chat, interacting with students and helping the professor keep abreast of the students' needs and questions. This arrangement allowed both professors to get to know the students and to utilize their unique gifts for the benefit of the students.

"Our students come from a wide variety of different places. We didn't have an established marketing system with which to conscript students, but what we did have was years and years of faithful missionaries in the field who had contacts," explained Bombaro. "Those personal contacts yielded a lot more fruit than we had anticipated. ... We would have deemed it a success if we could have netted four students last fall. Through our contacts we had 47, which was an absolute boon, and it communicated to us that there was a fantastic opportunity to be exploited here as students come from a whole host of different places."

This initial positive reaction strengthened Bombaro

and Cortright's desire to offer a full curriculum online for the Livonian Lutheran Project. Bombaro worked with Concordia University Irvine, Irvine, Calif., to draw up a Memorandum of Understanding to use their existing curriculum. Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, graciously provides IT support, especially through the Rev. William Johnson, and the LCMS International Center provides access to Zoom accounts for the professors.

"To accomplish missions in the 21st century, we have to be as flexible and as cunning as the Lord will demand given the circumstances," said Bombaro. "We had to break out of old paradigms to seize the opportunity. There is now an inherent flexibility that needs to be part of mission opportunities."

The online program not only allows students to attend who could not otherwise join the classes in Riga, but it also provides opportunity to support ongoing mission efforts

When the class launched in September, students attended from 14 different time zones and in various countries, including Latvia, Ireland, Russia and Pakistan.



Although Bombaro is called to provide online theological education in Eurasia, he also finds time to serve Blessed Sacrament Lutheran Church, Hayden, Idaho, near his home in Coeur d'Alene.



in other nations. Along with a number of Latvian students, students have joined from Italy, where LCMS missionaries are working and where preaching stations exist but do not have pastors. The need and desire for strong and doctrinally pure pastoral formation is great.

“None of this would be happening apart from the online format,” explained Cortright. “Our students in the EU mostly work and would not be able to attend anything like a residential program, even if it was for short, intensive periods (e.g., two weeks). Costs would exceed their ability in most cases as well,

but COVID makes all that moot as travel is not permitted. Our Pakistanis would be even less able to participate.”

Sacrifice and Martyrdom

“A number of our students are poised to replace pastors who have been literally killed for serving Christ,” said Bombaro. Sixteen of the students are from Pakistan — 15 of whom are training to be pastors, along with one deaconess student. Their training prepares them for the work of planting churches or to assist congregations who have lost

their pastor, sometimes due to violent persecution.

“We have less fear of Muslims than false teaching churches in Pakistan,” noted a Pakistani student. Due to the time difference, some of the classes start around 10 or 11 p.m. in Pakistan, which means the students are up until 2 or 3 a.m. The men training for ministry there face many hardships and challenges, even though they greet them willingly. Some drive to a remote parking lot and watch class on a phone, taking notes as best they can. Others gather around one laptop in a crowded room. Some take a train to get to a

location where access to the online class is possible. And as they seek to serve, they ask for the church’s prayers: “Keep Pakistani students in your prayers, especially as they all are working; they come home late and, in some cases, they are the only breadwinners in the family.”

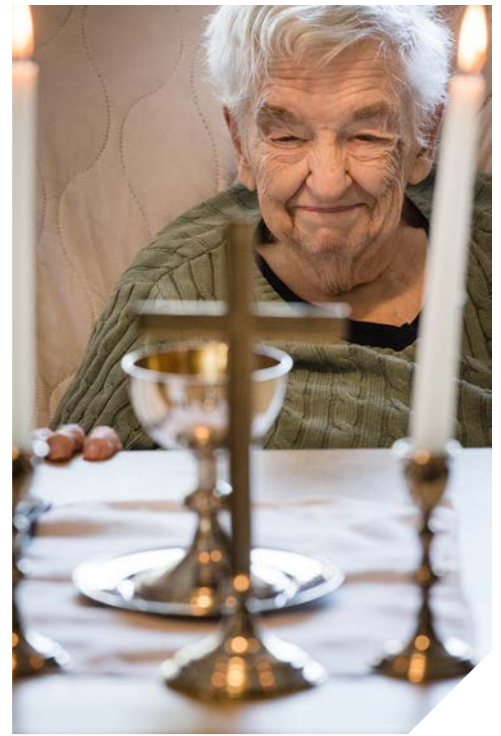
The students’ dedication and sacrifices motivate their professors. “Christ wants His Gospel to get out and there are people who have said, ‘Here I am, Lord, send me,’ and they’re willing to be sent in tough situations,” said Bombaro. “Charles and I would dare say for all of our missionaries that we’re willing to redouble our efforts for those who are willing to make those kinds of sacrifices to serve the church [and] to serve Christ in His kingdom.”

This online model of teaching is so successful that the mission diocese in Finland has asked to supplement their teaching with the biblical and confessional content offered.



“I think that wherever an LCMS missionary finds oneself, there’s an opportunity to plant the church and share the Gospel.”

— Rev. Dr. John Bombaro



The Lutheran Church of Australia has also inquired about the feasibility of working in conjunction with their faculty at the seminary in Adelaide. Bombaro said students from other countries have looked into joining the program, including “prospective students in places like Cambodia who have no means to travel and no means to spend four years in seminary.”

Serving in North Idaho

Although Bombaro is called to provide theological education in Latvia and throughout the Eurasia region, he now lives and works in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho. His online teaching keeps him busy, but God continues to give him opportunities to serve his new Idaho community as well. “I think that wherever an LCMS missionary finds oneself, there’s an opportunity to plant the

church and share the Gospel,” he said.

“I’m so glad you’re here. I know God brought you here,” said Anthony, who was eating in a restaurant in Spokane, Wash., when Bombaro stopped in on the way to bring the Lord’s Supper to a shut-in. Anthony saw Bombaro dressed in his clergy collar and asked to have lunch with him. This impromptu opportunity for ministry exemplifies much of Bombaro’s work in North Idaho. Wherever and whenever God presents an opportunity, the Word works.

In addition to his full-time job as a missionary, Bombaro is privileged to serve as a military chaplain. Many in the military need spiritual guidance and counseling, and Bombaro is able to bring the Word of God to these soldiers in North Idaho.

Bombaro also serves as vacancy pastor for Blessed Sacrament Lutheran Church in Hayden, Idaho, a small but

growing congregation that started in the Bombaros’ house, moved to a garage and now rents a church on Sunday afternoons. Bombaro focuses on teaching the faith to the families that attend Blessed Sacrament, including through first Holy Communion classes.

“He’s an outstanding pastor,” said David Sousa, a member of Blessed Sacrament who attends with his wife, Heather, and their four children. “My kids noted how much time he spends with them.”

Blessed Sacrament has borne fruit. Since Bombaro was asked to provide pastoral ministry, he has performed seven Baptisms and 11 first Holy Communion classes, with five more taking Holy Communion classes. The congregation is

now an official congregation of the LCMS English District.

“God has blessed us immeasurably here in North Idaho,” said Nathaniel Macpherson, president of Blessed Sacrament. “We’ve had several Baptisms of entire families ... and some of those families have also received their first Holy Communion. It just shows the need for missions everywhere, even here in North Idaho.”

Whether in Idaho, Latvia or wherever the Lord calls next, LCMS missionaries teach and preach the truth of God’s Word. And whether in person or online, the church returns again to the Lord who is her head.

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Dr. Kevin Armbrust is director of Editorial for LCMS Communications.



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engage.lcms.org/latvia-spring-2021

BY ERIK M. LUNSFORD

In The Good Shepherd's Fold

At The Shepherd's Hand Community Outreach Center in Fort Wayne, Ind., Lutherans reaches out to the community with human care and the Gospel.

God, the Good Shepherd, holds us in the palm of His hand. In His love, He forgives our sins and provides for our needs. The Shepherd's Hand in Fort Wayne, Ind., seeks to reflect God's love by serving those in the community, providing for physical needs and witnessing to the love of God in Christ.

On a Saturday in late February, Deaconess Rachel Jaseph, founding executive director of The Shepherd's

Hand Community Outreach Center, stepped out into the finger-tingling cold and crunched through the packed snow holding a large, hand-written sign that read "free diapers."

A motorist passing by saw Jaseph and pulled over. After talking with her for a moment, he backed up and parked at the outreach center, situated southeast of downtown Fort Wayne and across the street



from Shepherd of the City Lutheran Church.

On this day, The Shepherd's Hand was hosting its third Family Health Fair and Diaper Giveaway. Inside the center, donated diapers formed a pile several feet tall, and yellow smiley face balloons bounced

Deaconess Rachel Jaseph, founding executive director of The Shepherd's Hand Community Outreach Center in Fort Wayne, Ind., directs people to the center's Family Health Fair and Diaper Giveaway on Feb. 20.

on strings at the tables of community partners who have come alongside the ministry to promote secular health resources in the city. Masked volunteers were on hand to usher recipients through the center as they picked up diapers and different resources set out on socially distanced tables.

The Shepherd's Hand ministry points people to Jesus Christ in this often-overlooked

Deaconess Tiffany Manor (right), director of LCMS Life Ministry, assists Nicole White (center) and Mackenzie during the Feb. 20 Family Health Fair and Diaper Giveaway at The Shepherd's Hand.



Jaseph opens the doors for The Shepherd’s Hand Family Health Fair and Diaper Giveaway.



Sisters Ruth (left) and Eloise Hartmann stack donated diapers before the start of the event.



Deaconess Kimberly Trombley, executive director, visits with an attendee.



Darryl Parks picks up resources from a table.

urban neighborhood of Fort Wayne. Shepherd in the City Lutheran Church started laying the groundwork for the ministry in 2011 with assistance from donors, The Lutheran Foundation serving northeast Indiana, the Lutheran Women’s Missionary League and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). Other LCMS congregations now walk together by providing volunteers and financial assistance. It is a model of ministry that corrals resources to bring people to Word and Sacrament ministries at Shepherd of the City and surrounding LCMS congregations.

“The work here directly connects people to the



They have maintained a great example of how human care helps to empower communities, while still holding firm to their Lutheran identity, through our theology of the cross and sanctity for human life.”

— Rev. Dr. Steven D. Schave, director of LCMS Urban & Inner-City Mission and Church Planting

Gospel because at all of our events we definitely begin and end with prayer, but we also invite people to join us for worship at Shepherd of the City or at any other of

our partner congregations as well,” Jaseph said.

It wasn’t long before the Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Pulse, Shepherd of the City vacancy pastor and Concordia Theological

Seminary, Fort Wayne, professor, dropped in with Vicar Jason Zoske to help with the event. They came ready to talk and offer prayer, if desired, with recipients working their way through the health fair.

The Rev. Dr. Steven D. Schave, director of Urban & Inner-City Mission and Church Planting for the LCMS Office of National Mission, has been involved and seen the work of The Shepherd’s Hand since its beginning. “What a joy it has been to see this harmony of God’s mercy along with a strong Christian witness. They have maintained a great example of how human care helps to empower communities, while still holding firm to their Lutheran

identity, through our theology of the cross and sanctity for human life,” he said. “We have been proud to come alongside them to help support their work in reaching out to the least of these and welcoming them into the life of the church.”

Before lunch, attendee Adriana Aguilera took a seat for the upcoming choking prevention workshop led by Deaconess Tiffany Manor, director of LCMS Life Ministry. Aguilera watched as Manor used two firm fingers on a mannequin to demonstrate how to clear the airway of an infant. Manor shared with participants that God’s creation and design of the body allows people to care for one another because He loves and cares for all humankind. Christ-centered education like this on health and other topics is a collaborative effort to increase knowledge and skills to better support the needs of families in the Fort Wayne community.

“LCMS Life Ministry is really encouraged to work with partners and our Recognized Service Organizations like The Shepherd’s Hand to holistically care for people in body and soul throughout their lives, from conception to natural death,” Manor said. “Our Lord Jesus Christ cared for people in both body and soul during His earthly ministry with love and compassion, and so we care for one another because we’re Christ’s people.”

The Shepherd’s Hand is a new LCMS Recognized Service Organization (RSO), which is a ministry that walks in harmony with the doctrine and practice of the LCMS.

Manor leads a workshop on choking prevention during the event.



Jaseph does an interview with local media during the event.



A street view of The Shepherd's Hand Community Outreach Center.

“We see the benefit of being aligned with the LCMS so that we can share the Gospel of Christ with others who also believe in Word and Sacrament ministry as well as being able to work together for the good of the kingdom,” said Deaconess Kimberly Trombley, the organization’s new executive director. “We know that we have more strength when we’re working together. ... As an RSO, we have been blessed and fortunate to not only be networked with other RSOs, but also it helps us to say, this is who we are, this is our confession, and this informs our partnerships, informs the way we walk, and informs the ministry that we do every day.”

Throughout the course of the event, nearly 4,500 diapers were distributed to the 70 or so people who came through the outreach center, one of whom was Roshawn. She isn’t a newcomer to The Shepherd’s Hand. She previously visited for a Trunk or Treat event and at Thanksgiving.

“This place is really helpful to me,” Roshawn said. She helps care for family members and relies on the ministry in her efforts to assist others who aren’t able to visit on their own.

Repeat contacts like this are what Trombley has in mind for connecting people to the Gospel: “When we are connecting with someone, we’re sharing the love of Christ with them with a ‘hello,’ and that is a door opener to bring them into this space, but then beyond that, it is that relationship that develops that is our hope and prayer that will lead to Word and Sacrament.”

Erik M. Lunsford is managing photojournalist for LCMS Communications.



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shepherdshandfw.org

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engage.lcms.org/fort-wayne-spring-2021

PANDEMICS DON'T STOP DISASTERS — OR THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE

BY STACEY EGGER

Natural disasters were not slowed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and neither was the work of LCMS World Relief and Human Care Disaster Response. Throughout 2020 and into 2021, Disaster Response continued to partner with LCMS districts and Recognized Service Organizations (RSOs) to bring mercy, aid and the message of hope found in Christ to those devastated by disaster.

“Even as the entire world was distracted and overwhelmed by COVID, our response in time of natural disasters never ceased,” said the Rev. Michael Meyer, director of disaster training for the LCMS. “We continued to be good stewards of what the Lord has given ... through the many and various donations to Disaster Response in the past. We were able to engage in a significant response without asking the church at-large for additional assistance during a time of great uncertainty for so many in our church body.”

2020 saw four major hurricanes across five southern states — Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida — as well as deadly tornadoes in Tennessee, flooding in Michigan that led to the evacuation of thousands, and a huge derecho storm that tore through Iowa with hurricane-force winds.

Two hurricanes struck the LCMS Southern District in a matter of weeks — Laura on Aug. 29 and Sally on Sept. 16. After these storms, Disaster Response was able to help in two ways: by providing grants to cover certain repairs and insurance deductibles for LCMS congregations and pastors, and by supporting the work of a network of Lutherans across the country trained and prepared to provide hands-on assistance after disasters.

By partnering with other organizations, Disaster Response was able to make their existing funds stretch much further through the work of thousands of dedicated volunteers.

For example, a grant of \$58,000 was given to Shepherd's Heart Disaster Response Ministry, an RSO in Gardendale, Ala., for coordinating and overseeing multiple volunteer chainsaw camps involved in hurricane recovery work. Thanks in part to this grant, work was done on eight LCMS churches and 248 homes, including 10 LCMS pastors' homes. In total, 945 trees were cleared, saving the churches and homeowners an estimated total of \$1.5 million in clearing and repair costs.

“All of the work that we do with LCMS Disaster Response and volunteers is done in the name of Christ and of the local congregation, letting people know that in the midst of tragedy, there are people in the faith that care about them, love them and serve them in the name of Christ,” said Disaster Response Director Rev. Dr. Ross Johnson.

Stacey Egger is a staff writer and editor for LCMS Communications.

AFTER THE HURRICANES
IN 2020, DISASTER
RESPONSE PROVIDED:

\$252,686

TO HELP COVER
15 LCMS congregations'
and schools' insurance
deductibles

\$42,900

TO ASSIST 17 LCMS
pastors with deductibles
or repair costs

\$137,500

TO SUPPORT the work of
local disaster response

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Called Up to Serve

In a Wisconsin congregation, a pastor and his people prepare for a year of separation due to a military deployment.

BY MEGAN K. MERTZ

The Rev. Chad Czischke straddles two vastly different worlds. Most of his time is spent at Family of Christ Lutheran Church in Houlton, Wis., where he prepares sermons, teaches Bible classes, attends church council meetings, visits members and does all the things that take up a typical parish pastor's time. But one weekend per month, and at various other times throughout the year, Major Czischke dons fatigues and serves alongside an armored battalion of the Minnesota Army National Guard as a military chaplain.

Despite the differences between these two contexts, "God is there through all of them, no matter what," Czischke says. "I say, 'God, please allow me to be Your instrument of peace during this time and to be in the right place at the right time to share that love, that mercy of what You've given us with those who are in desperate need.'"

In early March, Czischke said goodbye to his family and to the members of Family of Christ and left for training and a nearly yearlong deployment to Kuwait. During this time, he and his chaplain's assistant will care

for the spiritual needs of more than 700 soldiers.

This is his second long-term deployment, but it's a first in many ways. His two daughters, ages 7 and 11, are now old enough to realize that he's gone and won't be coming back for some time. It's also the first time he'll return from a deployment to pastor a congregation after a long absence.

"The toughest conversation is how do we come back together and then move forward, and what is that going to look like? There's a lot going on in my head right now, a lot going on in my heart. And I know it's the same with the church," he says. "That's why I emphasized to move forward in Christ, and Christ will guide and lead us."

Although it's unusual for a congregation to have to plan for its pastor to be gone this long, "this is part of our congregation's mission," says congregational president Becky Volovsek. "It's a way that we can help ensure that the men and women of our armed forces have spiritual support and are hearing about the love of Jesus."

Filling both roles is no easy task. It's hard to juggle work, home and military obligations, and it's



"It's the opportunity to serve people that probably would never step foot in a church."

— Rev. Chad Czischke, pastor of Family of Christ Lutheran Church, Houlton, Wis., pictured above visiting with a fellow soldier in 2015 at Camp Buehring in Kuwait.



PHOTOS: LCMS COMMUNICATIONS/VERIK M. LUNSFORD

Czischke sits with daughter Alexis while Chaplain Craig G. Muehler, director of LCMS Ministry to the Armed Forces, serves as guest preacher on Sunday, Feb. 14, 2021, at Family of Christ Lutheran Church.

especially difficult to leave his congregation and family for an extended period of time. Yet, Czischke also has been able to speak of the hope he has in Christ to soldiers who are going through things that are painful or difficult. “It’s the opportunity to serve people that probably would never step foot in a church,” he says.

Congregational leaders had nearly a year to figure out how to handle Czischke’s absence. They talked with representatives from their LCMS district and LCMS Ministry to the Armed Forces, as well as with the Rev. Chad Boggs, a military chaplain who also serves a congregation in Nebraska.

“It was helpful to hear both from the Synod and then from Pastor Boggs,” Volovsek says. “Other churches do this, and it ends up being fine.”

The LCMS Minnesota South District, where Family of Christ is located, helped the congregation look at the options and ultimately find an intentional interim pastor. As the deployment drew closer, members of Family of Christ also began thinking about ways to support Czischke’s wife and daughters while he is away.

“One thing I’ve learned about military families is they are proud, they are independent,” Czischke says. “It’s very

hard for a military family to reach out and say, ‘Hey, I need help with this.’ ... A congregation can easily come into that situation, but it takes, I would say, a lot of thought and a lot of care. As a congregation, you need to reach out to them.”

So far, a few individuals have already offered to provide rides and babysitting when needed, and the elders are making plans to help out with things like snow removal, yard work and house repairs. The hope is that these small gestures can help lighten the

load that both the military chaplain and his family must carry during a deployment.

“Whenever you have your pastor leave for any extended period of time, there’s some turmoil,” says Family of Christ founding member Jerry Schouten. “But it’s a big deal, in my opinion, to think that somebody is there for those in the military who really need him. It’s an honor to be able to share Pastor Czischke. We’ve got to feel proud that we’ve got somebody who’s willing to do both.”



LEARN MORE: lcms.org/armedforces

WATCH A VIDEO: engage.lcms.org/chaplain-spring-2021

CHRIST'S GIFTS *Freely*



PHOTOS: LCMS COMMUNICATIONS/ERIK M. LUNSFORD

GIVEN

BY ERIK M. LUNSFORD



The Rev. Daniel Fickenscher, pastor at Iglesia Luterana Cristo El Salvador, Del Rio, Texas, leads worship on Saturday, April 17, 2021, in the courtyard of a congregation member's home in Acuña, Mexico.

A TEXAS CONGREGATION CONTINUES TO MINISTER TO MEMBERS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER.

“Forever, O Lord, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens”
(PSALM 119:89).

HECTOR AND VICTORIA Burciaga lovingly welcomed their pastor, the Rev. Daniel Fickenscher of Iglesia Luterana Cristo El Salvador, Del Rio, Texas, to their home in Acuña, Mexico, on a Saturday in April. They ushered Fickenscher through the small store in the front of their house, where their eclectic wares hang from the ceiling like suspended raindrops, and into the dining area.

Hector pulled out a notebook with pages of notes taken from his studies of the Bible. Fickenscher took a moment to admire his zeal before starting the Bible reading and devotion. On the walls of their home are crosses, crucifixes and a depiction of Jesus Christ instituting the Lord's Supper. They are delighted to have their pastor visit during the pandemic when they're unable to travel to the congregation across the border in Del Rio.

‘I Go Out and I Share the Word’

Cristo El Salvador — or Christ the Savior — is an LCMS mission congregation situated just a short driving distance from the United States and Mexico border. It serves primarily Spanish-speaking congregation members, who live in both Del Rio and the neighboring border city, Ciudad Acuña.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the ability of those saints of the congregation living in Mexico to cross the border, so Fickenscher and his wife, Deaconess Taylor Brown-Fickenscher (both called to the church as district missionaries in 2020), cross the border and go to them. Each week, congregation members open their homes to host worship and send worshipers back to their own homes with takeaway containers of food.

“I go out and I share the Word with people ... I tell them they are forgiven for Christ's sake. I give them Christ's body and blood,” said Fickenscher.

That same day, congregation member Patricia Perez gathered about half a dozen neighborhood children on her outdoor covered patio for a Bible story time — something she's been doing for over a decade. As she taught Revelation 22:20 to the children, a dog slept lazily nearby. Perez watches the livestreamed worship from Del Rio but misses worshiping in person and receiving the Sacrament alongside her fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

Fickenscher packs his car following worship on April 17 outside a congregation member's home in Acuña, Mexico.



A worshiper follows along during the Scripture reading.



"I go out and I share the Word with people ... I TELL THEM THEY ARE FORGIVEN FOR CHRIST'S SAKE. I GIVE THEM CHRIST'S BODY AND BLOOD." — Rev. Daniel Fickenscher



Jose and Mariza Gomez read *Portals of Prayer* following worship.

After crossing the border by car, Fickenscher parked on the street outside Perez's house and visited the group. He prayed with the children before driving to the Burciagas' house for the visitation and then across the city to another member's home where that afternoon's Divine Service would be held. In the cargo hold of his small car were all the necessities for worship, including a large wooden cross, vestments and altar paraments.

At the Divine Service, Cristo El Salvador members gathered together under a checkerboard tent in an outdoor courtyard

of the home and received Communion. Children sat in school desks near the makeshift altar. Fickenscher prepared a sermon on Luke 24:36-49. He preached that Christ has purchased peace between God and man through His necessary suffering, death and resurrection, and that His work of salvation is ongoing now in that repentance and that the forgiveness of sins is now preached through His church. At the conclusion of the service, members took Spanish-language copies of *Portals of Prayer* and Bibles. A member

appeared from the kitchen with plates of rice and chicken in ancho chili sauce.

Visitors Jose and Mariza Gomez were among the small crowd of worshipers that day. Jose is from Del Rio and speaks English. His wife, Mariza, speaks Spanish and is unable to cross the border right now. He is thankful that services are being held after another church closed nearby. "Being here [at worship] has been a blessing to us, and it's keeping us in the Word. Being able to stay in the Word is the best thing," said Jose.

"It's been an exciting time," Fickenscher said, "and God has certainly given me the encouragement of seeing His wonderful work being done here in Del Rio and in Acuña. There is an excitement and real desire to receive His gifts."

Ministry Along the Border

In Del Rio, Taylor Brown-Fickenscher teaches Sunday school, leads the midweek children's Bible class and handles material donations to the church. She focuses on helping the poor and assisting the

Vicar Luis Morales distributes the Sacrament to Fickenscher at Iglesia Luterana Cristo El Salvador, Del Rio, Texas, on Sunday, April 18, 2021.



"BEING ABLE TO STAY IN THE WORD IS THE best thing." — Jose Gomez



Vicar Luis Morales teaches guitar after worship.

Deaconess Taylor Brown-Fickenscher and the Rev. Daniel Fickenscher greet congregation members after worship in Del Rio, Texas.

able to provide for their own families. When her husband recently visited members in Acuña, she stayed behind and tended to the church.

Vicar Luis Morales was also there, preparing his sermon for Sunday's worship service. Morales is a son of the congregation — he came to Cristo El Salvador as a teenager. His family loved the preaching and the teaching of the Lutheran church. At 14, Morales was baptized into Christ, and within a few years he realized he wanted to pursue the ministry. He was mentored by the Rev. Richard Schlak from

the LCMS Recognized Service Organization Lutheran Hispanic Missionary Institute before enrolling in the Cross-Cultural Ministry Center at Concordia University Irvine, Irvine, Calif., where he now studies to become a pastor while continuing his vicarage at his home congregation.

"The people of Acuña and Del Rio are like brothers and sisters," Morales said. "It's a whole culture to live on the border ... we grew together. We are the same people. It's not like we're Americans and Mexicans." While he preaches now in Spanish — the primary

language for many people living along the border — he reaches out to young adults and children with English, which he said is the primary language for the younger generation.

"I know the people. I know their culture. I know who they are," Morales said. "It's a joy to serve the people I'm growing with." In between his studies, Morales leads guitar classes at the church as an outreach.

Morales is temporarily unable to cross the border due to visa restrictions. Because of the pandemic, he also hasn't been able to visit his parents in Acuña for months. He longs

to visit his family and see his brothers and sisters in Christ again, but he knows it's all in God's time.

On Sunday, Morales preached and Fickenscher led the Divine Service at Cristo El Salvador in Del Rio. Those who could gathered together in person. And while the saints from both cities wait for the border to open both ways — and it may soon — Christ crucified is preached and His gifts are freely given. "It's not a mystery for us as the Lutheran church," said Fickenscher. "Christ has given us these tools."



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