



2026 Lay Leadership Summit
Walther Christian Academy
900 Chicago Ave.
Melrose Park, IL 60160

August 22, 2026

Sectional I Workshops 10:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

Church Boards That Work

Dr. Jim Galvin
President, Galvin and Associates

There are five types of governance models currently in use in LCMS congregations across the country. No matter which type you currently operate under, there are practical steps your leadership can take to improve congregational governance. Participants will determine if they should change their current governance model or keep what they have, learn best practices for their type of governance, eliminate bad practices, and identify leverage points for healthy change.

Evangelism That Works

Rev. Dr. Heath Trampe
Director of Discipleship, LCMS Office of National Mission

Does the thought of sharing your faith give you anxiety? Do you worry that you won't know what to say when the time comes? Do you feel like your congregation could be doing more to reach your community? Finally, do you wish you could share some best practices with your church leaders?

Join Rev. Dr. Heath Trampe, LCMS Director of Discipleship Ministry, as he shares the LASSIE approach for evangelism, the difference between witness and outreach, and real application stories from his many years as a parish pastor, serving three growing congregations in three different districts around the country. Come get some practical information!

Finances for Your Ministry

LeeAnn Acosta and CJ Motisi
NID Staff, Business Manager; Member of NID's Administrative Services Committee

Delve into the world of church finances. We will share best practices and sound accounting principles to help manage the resources that God has entrusted to the church's care.



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(Sectional 1 Workshops, cont'd)

Finishing Well – When a Church’s Ministry is Fulfilled

Rev. Joel Hess and Helen Aavik

Pastor, St. James, Chicago; Former Chair, First Bethlehem, Chicago

It is hard to face a congregation’s ministry coming to an end. There are a myriad of details to address, often by the few remaining members, and all too often, a church closure can feel like a defeat. However, that need not be the case. First Bethlehem’s Helen Aavik, and St. James’, Rev. Joel Hess, tell the story of finishing well for First Bethlehem. It is a story of challenge, but also of grace, good stewardship, and Gospel outreach. For those wondering about the viability of a congregation’s ministry, this presentation brings hope in the midst of difficult considerations.

How 1 of 168 Can Make a Difference

Professor Gary Midkin

Professor at Harper College, Member at St. Matthew, Hawthorn Woods

Building stewardship momentum should begin with Time. First steps must be simple and small to overcome inertia and lack of self-confidence among church members. Creating these first steps and building on them will be the focus of this workshop.

Parables and Possessions

Rev. Dr. Reed Lessing

Director, Center for Biblical Studies, Concordia University, St. Paul

This workshop provides sermons, orders of worship, Bible studies, and devotions—everything you need—to grow financial generosity and grow your church.

Synodical Forecasting – What’s Coming Over the Next Five Years?

Rev. Dr. Nathan Meador

President, LCMS South Wisconsin District

We rightly trust that our future is in the hands of our gracious Lord. As good stewards, it is proper for us to see where ministry is today so that we might best serve our Lord for what seems ahead. Join South Wisconsin District President, the Rev. Dr. Nathan Meado, as he leads participants in considering possible challenges and opportunities that lay ahead for our synod and how they both impact local ministry.



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Three Affordable and Easy Technologies That Changed My Church

Rev. Matt Hoffmann

Sr. Pastor, St. Andrew's, Park Ridge

Do you have 12 different subscriptions and logins for your church? Do you spend hours on communication, only to find it doesn't really work well? Pastor Matt Hoffmann will share three technologies which have helped his church consolidate subscriptions, communicate out to the community, communicate with people individually, and listen well to the congregation and school families.

Urban Ministry: The Story of a Turnaround

Rev. Mark Jeske

Pastor, St. Marcus Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, WI

Come hear Pastor Mark Jeske's story of St. Marcus, an inner-city Milwaukee Lutheran church that had been declining for 50 years, but now draws 640 people in worship each week. Its parish elementary school at one time was near death, but now it may be the largest Lutheran elementary school in the United States with over 1,200 students.

[Youth Ministry] Building Your Volunteer Ministry Leader Team: Recruit, Train, Support

Rev. Dr. Mark Kiessling

Director of Youth Ministry, LCMS

"We need help!" This familiar refrain is heard in many congregations striving to minister faithfully with and among young people. Attendance patterns have changed, adults and children are often overscheduled, and the desire, or confidence, to serve can be difficult to cultivate. In some cases, congregational structures and governance models provide clarity and support; in others, they unintentionally create barriers to participation.

This workshop invites participants into a practical conversation about how congregations can recruit, train, and support volunteers in meaningful and sustainable ways. While examples will draw heavily from ministry with youth, the principles, questions, and strategies explored apply broadly across congregational life.



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Sectional II Workshops 12:50 p.m. – 1:50 p.m.

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Church Records: What to Keep, What to Destroy

**Rev. David Totsky
Secretary, LCMS Northern Illinois District**

From Baptism and Wedding ledgers to offering statements, churches of all sizes have a tremendous number of records. Join District Secretary, Rev. David Totsky, as he coaches your ministry on how best to manage your records; what to save long term, what to destroy, and which should be permanently-kept documents.

Discipleship Today

**Rev. Dr. Heath Trampe
Director of Discipleship, LCMS Office of National Mission**

At the end of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus commissions His church to make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching – gathering the scattered and shepherding the gathered. It sounds simple, but real life can be so complicated. We wish more people would worship each week. We want our Bible studies to be better attended. And we want to make a bigger impact on our community!

Join Rev. Dr. Heath Trampe, LCMS Director of Discipleship Ministry, for a discussion about discipleship. Trampe draws from well over a decade of implementation in the parish, as well as best practices from around the nation, to facilitate the topic in a practical and applicable format.



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Seamless Ministry

Rev. Noah Kegly and Principal Donna Laughlin

Pastor and Principal, Immanuel Lutheran Church and School, Batavia

Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! (Psalm 133:1) A church and school working hand-in-hand in ministry with a unified mission is pleasing to God. This session will touch on ways that staff members from the church and school, along with members of the congregation, can work together to help each other grow in faith and flourish as a Christ-centered community.

Shepherding with Understanding: The Truth About Alcoholism/Addiction and Its Impact

Dr. Brenda Fann Katula, M.D.

Join Brenda Fann Katula, M.D. for a conversation about what addiction really is, why it grips so tightly, and practical steps for church ministry for shepherding the addicted and their loved ones. You'll hear from a physician who knows the science of addictions and who has also experienced its impact firsthand after losing her spouse to severe alcoholism. She offers a rare perspective that combines clinical knowledge with the spiritual needs of families affected by addiction.

Someday May Never Come... Start Today!

**Rev. David Ficken
Director, LINC Chicago**

The perfect moment to start the thing God has put on your heart will never come, which means now could be the right time. Join the team from LINC Chicago to imagine how you can take any kind of idea and start small, build deep, and stay long. P.S. – it doesn't have to be as intimidating as you might think!



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Together in Faith, Intercultural Ministry

Rev. Bo Graham and Rev. Andres Valencia

Pastors, Saint Paul Lutheran Church and School, Mt. Prospect, IL

It is a joy when our Lord brings people of various backgrounds together as a community of faith around His Word and Sacraments. Pastors Bo Grahams and Adres Valencia share the story of Saint Paul, Mt. Prospect, and its intercultural approach to ministry. Participants will discuss challenges, practical “how tos,” and the blessing of becoming an intercultural congregation.

Wellness for Veterans and First Responders in your Congregation

Robert Dorn

Sr. Vice Commander, American Legion Post 171

The lives of veterans and first responders are ones of service and sacrifice that often come at the price of their wellbeing. Participants will learn how to develop relationships with veterans and first responders to assist them and their families in their struggles with wellness-related issues with the mercy and healing of Christ.

What We Say vs. What We Do: Aligning Ministry Priorities

Rev. Chris Singer

CEO, Lutheran Church Charities

Every church has values it names and a mission it believes in—but do our daily decisions, time, and resources truly reflect those priorities? In this interactive workshop, we will explore the often-unseen gap between what we say and what our ministry actually demonstrates. Through guided reflection, conversation, and practical exercises, participants will examine their own leadership context and identify areas of alignment and misalignment. This is not a lecture on theory, but a space for honest dialogue and meaningful discovery. Whether you serve as a pastor, church worker, or lay leader, you will leave with greater clarity—and one or two concrete next steps—to help align your ministry more faithfully with the mission Christ has given His Church.



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[Youth Ministry] Stronger Together: Partnering with Neighboring Church in Youth Ministry

Mark Kiesslering
Director of Youth Ministry, LCMS

As Lutherans, we share a common theology and confession centered on God's saving work in Jesus Christ and the call to nurture baptized children and youth as disciples for a lifetime. While that shared foundation unites us, ministry with young people can easily become isolated, limited by congregational boundaries, staffing realities, or available resources

This workshop explores how neighboring churches can partner intentionally in youth ministry for the good of young people, leaders, and congregations. We will reflect on practical and faithful ways to share resources, support leaders, and collaborate in programming without losing congregational identity. Participants will consider how working together can strengthen relationships, expand opportunities for youth, and deepen young people's understanding of their Lutheran identity as part of the one Body of Christ.

Sectional III Workshops 2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

8 Keys for Strengthening Urban Churches

John Glover and Tom Eggebrecht
Ministry Clarity Consultants, Lutheran Church Extension Fund

This workshop will provide practical steps for strengthening ministry in the city, developing leaders, creating and communicating a master plan, and caring for finances and property.

Creating Engaging Fellowship Events

Rev. David Gaddini and Bill Tranchita
Pastor and Director of Hospitality, Fellowship of Faith, McHenry

Wouldn't it be great to have fellowship events that intentionally build relationships, are well-attended, and that are truly enjoyable? Join Fellowship of Faith's pastor, David Gaddini, and Hospitality Director, Bill Tranchita, as they help you plan and host fellowship events that are meaningful to ministry and engaging for your community.



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Design a Wellness Plan that Works FOR YOU!

Brandy McCoid

Wellness Officer, LCMS Northern Illinois District

Imaging the impact on your life if you could develop a personalized wellness plan! That's exactly what you'll do in this workshop; participants will zero in on a specific area(s) of wellness, develop actionable "do-goals," and discuss next steps in small groups. We'll also explore the "secret sauce" that makes success foolproof. Get ready to dive into your wellness and discover how you can make sustainable change that matters.

Evangelism That Works

Rev. Dr. Heath Trampe

Director of Discipleship, LCMS Office of National Mission

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Partnership Models for Ministry

Rev. Kris Whitby

Assistant to the President – Mission and Ministry, LCMS Northern Illinois District

As congregations continue to face limited and even shrinking resources, how can they effectively carry out the mission and ministry of their church? One way to address this concern is through partnering with neighboring LCMS ministries. Rev. Whitby will lead participants through a discussion of the advantages and challenges of various partnership models for effective ministry.



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Right-Sizing Your Constitution

**Rev. David Totsky
Secretary, LCMS Northern Illinois District**

Church constitutions are helpful documents defining a congregation, its ministry content, and its administrative boundaries. Yet, when ministry changes and the constitution does not, the same document can now become a challenge. In this workshop, District Secretary, Rev. David Totsky, will lead participants into practical ways of revising a church constitution to fit current ministry needs.

Safe Schools, Sunday Schools, and Youth Groups

**Trip Rodgers
Educational Executive, Congregational Life, LCMS Central Illinois District**

This workshop will cover standard practices to protect the youth of your congregation and include the development of policies and practices that help guide your congregation to protect the youth. Topics will include Standards of Care, policies for individuals working with youth, background checks, interaction with youth, fundraising guidelines, protection during VBS, and other relevant topics.

Shepherding with Understanding: The Truth About Alcoholism/Addiction and Its Impact

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Websites, Communication & Technology for Today's Church

Craig Mattes

President, Craig Mattes Services

Technology can feel overwhelming for churches—but it doesn't have to be. In this practical breakout session, we'll explore simple ways churches can use websites and digital tools to better connect with members, reach guests, communicate events, and support ministry throughout the week. We'll cover what every church website should include, common communication mistakes churches make online, and easy tech ideas that can make a big impact without requiring a large staff or budget. Whether your church is large or small, this session will offer practical, real-world ideas you can begin using right way.

[Youth Ministry] Warmth, Challenge, and Grace: Talking Confidently with Children and Youth About Hard Questions

Mark Kiessling

Director of Youth Ministry, LCMS

It is not a matter of *if*, but *when* children and youth (and even us!) will ask hard questions about the Christian faith and its intersection with everyday life. Some questions arise from a genuine desire to understand Scripture, Lutheran theology and truth more deeply. Others emerge from moments of crisis, doubt, suffering, or direct challenges to faith. Pastors, church workers, parents, and caring adults play an important role in being a listening ear and wise sounding board in these moments. This workshop lifts up *warmth*, *challenge*, and *grace* as a Christ-centered foundation for faithful conversation, even when you think you don't have all the answers.