



The Happenings – May 2026

The Official Publication of the
Northwest District of LCMC

From the Chairman's Desk

So, what did I learn at the Gathering?

I learned a lot! The challenge is where to start.

Let me begin with Molly Wilmington's keynote address. There is a great debate that is going on all round us relating to "identity" at every level. North American culture increasingly declares that our sexual identity, who we are attracted to, how we feel about ourselves and how we express ourselves are determined by each one of us. These three variables can shift over our lives. Each one of us is master and commander of his/her own ship. It is an increasingly loud and ideologically driven debate. It is frequently decided in a court room. What are we going to do? Molly gave us a compelling answer.

"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse." (Romans 1:20). Molly's presentation embodied Apostle Paul's declaration. Molly's plea to us: "Point to the human body that God created." Consider the anatomy of the human body, the hormones we produce, our reproductive cycles and how each of the body's systems drive feelings, emotions and thinking. Consider how wonderfully we are made. Her thesis is that: the sooner young people come to understand that the human body is made for a monogamous lifelong intimate relationship between a man and a woman whose end is to bring new life in the world, the greater the likelihood that they will not fall into the "identity trap" and even reach out to the one who created them. She shared a curriculum she uses to educate young people.

Keynote addresses on reproductive cycles at church conventions are not usual. However, the church has been drawn into this culture war. We have largely responded with the law; mostly because we know it so well, it's an easy response and it ends the discussion. To lift up the crowning glory of creation, the man and the woman, created in God's image makes total sense. The challenge is for each of us to become experts in human sexuality as God intended with the goal of sharing what we know with anyone who God places before us and needs to know.

Duan Walker's presentation was such a breath of fresh air. He answered the question: "So, what if someone is cut to the heart and wants to change their identity; to whom do they go?" Mid-Valley Fellowship is a safe harbor for them.

Mid-Valley Fellowship is a non-profit, interdenominational ministry, serving the Central Willamette Valley of Oregon. They help individuals obtain sexual and relational wholeness in the midst of a broken and confused world. The counseling they provide includes personal testimonies, trained lay counseling, Biblical instruction, and Christ-centered accountability groups. Attention is focused off self and onto Jesus. God uses the lives and experiences of Mid-Valley's counselors to "comfort others ... with the comfort [we] have received from God" (II Corinthians 1:4b).

Duan's presentation prompted me to examine myself and my attitudes towards people struggling with identity issues. It was this quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer that Duan shared that convicted me: "Judging others makes us blind, whereas love is illuminating. By judging others we blind ourselves to our own evil and to the grace which others are just as entitled to as we are." (Cost of Discipleship). He laid bare my propensity to see those questioning their sexual identity as "those people." My thoughts focused on their sin and their punishment, thereby taking the focus from my own sins, including, the log wedged in my own eye. He called me to see past the sin to their suffering and their desire for relief. We know that there is just one source for true and lasting relief from suffering, Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Duan outlined four key concepts: building bridges by finding common ground, allowing love to compel action, balancing grace and truth, and understanding that loving others costs something but is worthwhile.

LCMC Service coordinator Julie Smith led a Bible study on 1 Peter, focusing on the theme verse 1 Peter 3:15-16 and the context of early Christians in Asia Minor who were on the radar of the Roman Empire. She discussed how Peter's letter encouraged Christians to get prepared for potential suffering by enduring it rather than seeking to avoid or defend against it, as their witness through suffering would impact their neighbors. She highlighted a challenging aspect of the text in 1 Peter 2, where it appears to instruct Christians to accept authority and not provoke Romans by fitting in, which he noted seems contrary to modern understandings of Christian witness and activism.

Julie discussed the challenge of balancing faith with cultural engagement, drawing parallels between the Roman Empire and modern society. He emphasized that Christians should not simply stand against culture or engage in activism, but rather live in hope through Christ, which sets them apart from the world. She warned against focusing on criticizing others or speaking as if God's victory is uncertain, instead encouraging a message of hope and confidence in Christ's redeeming work and God's certain victory in the end.

I left our gathering inspired by Molly to learn more about how fearfully and wonderfully we are made, by Duan to build bridges and try to find common ground with those whom I differ, and by Julie to embrace the hope I have in Christ rather than doubt and uncertainty in the future.

Thank you for the trust you have placed in me as your leader—it is something I do not take lightly, and I am genuinely humbled by it. I am grateful for each of you and the opportunity to serve together. As we look ahead to the coming year, I am filled with anticipation for what we will accomplish side by side, and I am confident that our shared commitment and unity will make it a meaningful and fruitful journey.

In Christ

Pastor Ed Skutshek



Northwest District Council News

District Council met on Thursday April 23rd and Saturday April 25th. Highlights of the meetings follow.

Meeting Thursday April 23, 2026

District Finances: Treasurer Karla Kaleva presented 1st quarter financials 2026, noting a net gain of \$22,700.87 (income of \$26,577.78 less expenses of \$3,876.91) and an ending balance of \$65,532.11 She noted that income from Gathering registrations and Gathering expenses were minimal).

Approval of Initiatives. The District Council affirmed their approval of the following initiatives at a special meeting of the Council on March 18, 2026.

- A budget for our District for 2026 was approved.
- An abuse prevention policy was adopted. The policy was reproduced in the 2026 Gathering Booklet and will be made available on our website soon.
- A schematic vision for our District was approved that would add a new Board of Congregational relations and a single District Coordinator. Both these initiatives are discussed below.

Resignation Accepted: Pastor Robert Sinclair resigned as Secretary and member of our NW District Council for personal reasons. With regret, the District Council accepted his resignation.

Nominations: The Council asked the delegates to the 2026 District Annual Gathering to fill three positions on the District Council (including filling the vacancy in Pastor Carol Ann Buelow's 2nd term), which would bring Council membership to eleven (11), its maximum size, with Pastor Sinclair's resignation, a candidate to fill the two year balance of his term would also be sought.

Meeting on Saturday April 25, 2026

Executive Elected:

- **Chair:** Pastor Ed Skutshek, Grace Lutheran Church, West Kelowna, BC, Canada.
- **Vice Chair:** Shelly Hauge, Christ Lutheran Church, Odessa, WA
- **Secretary:** Pastor Alsen Wenzel, Faith Lutheran Church, Great Falls, Montana
- **Treasurer:** Karla Kaleva, Prairie Peace Lutheran Church, Cut Bank, MT

Banking Resolutions: To remove Pastor Robert Sinclair and add Pastor Alsen Wenzel as a signatory of the District's checking account. To open an money market account for the District with the signatories for the checking account as signatories for this account.

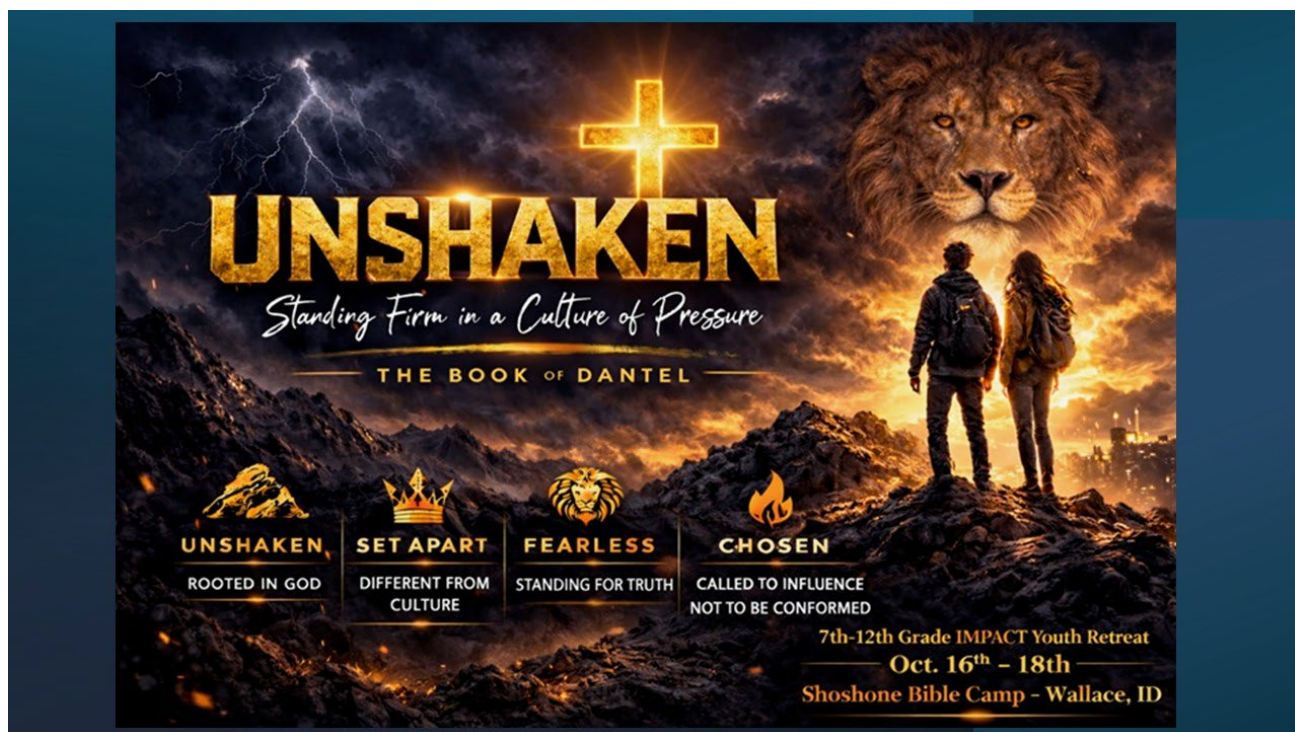
Committees: District Council members on the committees (two minimum)

- **Gathering:** Shelly Hauge, Karla Kaleva, Pr. Fred Westerhold, and Pr. Ed Skutshek
- **Youth Impact:** Jonathan Davis, Karla Kaleva and Pr. Eric Lundberg
- **Communications:** Pr. Ed Skutshek and Pr. Alsen Wenzel
- **Continuing Resolutions:** Pr. Greg Wightman, Pr. Ed Skutshek and Pr. Alsen Wenzel

Impact Youth Committee Report: See below.

2027 Gathering: The following dates were put forward subject to the availability of the proposed venue. April 22 to 25 or April 29 to May 2. We are hoping that one of member congregations will agree to host the District Gathering. We will be reaching out soon.

Impact Youth Committee Report



Dates: Friday Evening, October 16th – Sunday Early Afternoon, October 18th

Location: Shoshone Bible Camp: 29216 Coeur d'Alene River Road, Wallace, ID 83873

Purpose: Many students raised in church are not prepared for the intellectual and cultural challenges they will face after leaving home. Increasingly, Christian beliefs are questioned, misunderstood and openly opposed and mocked in schools, media and society.

Our goal is not simply to teach students what Christians believe, but why those beliefs are true and how to live them confidently.

The Book of Daniel provides a powerful model. Daniel lived faithfully in Babylon...a culture that did not share his beliefs and regularly pressured him to compromise (with a life of ease and fine food or with physical harm). Yet he remained faithful. In God's good and faithful purpose and time, he became influential. Daniel shows students how to live with conviction in a challenging culture with a pressure to conform.

Teaching Themes:

1. **Friday Evening: Unshaken / Set Apart**

Living in Babylon: Daniel 1: Faith in a culture that pressures compromise with identity.

Set Apart: Who shapes your identity—God or culture?

2. **Saturday Morning: Fearless**

Courage Under Pressure: Daniel 3: Standing firm when following God costs something, with a Faith That Prays: Daniel 6: Daniel's prayer life and spiritual discipline.

3 (Saturday Evening): Chosen – called to influence the world without conforming to it

Renewing Your Mind: Romans 12:2: How Scripture shapes our worldview...how God changes, transforms and strengthens our hearts.

Build Faith Habits Before the Crisis: Faith rarely survives cultural pressure if it has not been intentionally developed beforehand.

1. **Scripture Engagement:** Students need practical tools to read and understand Scripture for themselves.

2. **Christian Community:** Students should learn to intentionally seek Christian community after leaving home. They need relationships that strengthen, edify and encourage their faith.

3. **Prayer:** Prayer is the foundation of a real relationship with God. Students should learn: what prayer is and why it is important... how to pray consistently and how to pray with Scripture.

Watch for updates and online Registration in future editions of the Happenings and the e-connector



Annual Gathering Registration Report

A total of 49 delegates, presenters and vendors participated in our NW District Annual Gathering from April 23-26 at Camp Lutherhaven near Coeur D'Alene, Idaho. A total of 40 registered as voting delegates, 3 registered as non-voting delegates (individual associate members), 3 registered as presenters and 3 as vendors. Delegates represented a total of 21 Northwest District congregations (1/3 of our membership). Congregations represented by state: 3 from Idaho; 7 from Montana; 2 from Oregon; 8 from Washington; and 1 from Canada. Detailed registration statistics are found below.

CONGREGATIONS and INDIVIDUALS	CITY	STATE	NO.
1. Grace Lutheran	West Kelowna, BC	CAN	2
2. Peace Lutheran	Post Falls,	ID	3
3. Trinity Lutheran	Lewiston	ID	1
4. Zion Lutheran	Dreary	ID	2
5. American Lutheran	Winnifred	MT	1
6. Bethany Lutheran Church	Bigfork	MT	1
7. Calvary Lutheran	Kalispel	MT	1
8. Faith Lutheran	Great Falls	MT	1
9. Joy Lutheran	Billings	MT	1
10. Peace Lutheran	Belgrade	MT	2
11. Prairie Peace/Vallier Lutheran	Cut Bank	MT	2
12. Christ Community Lutheran	Lebanon	OR	2
13. Grace Community Lutheran	LeGrande	OR	3
14. Central Lutheran	Morton	WA	1
15. Christ Lutheran	Odessa	WA	2
16. Christ the Servant King Lutheran	Lacy	WA	1
17. Emmanuel Lutheran	Walla Walla	WA	1
18. Holy Trinity Lutheran Church	Spokane Valley	WA	5
19. Living Word	Graham	WA	1
20. Richland Lutheran	Richland	WA	2
21. St. Mark's Lutheran	Rochester	WA	5
Independent Associate Members	Nampa	ID	2
Independent Associate Member	Warren	OR	1
Presenters			3
Vendors			3
Total Participants			49

NW District Elections

The minimum size of the District Council is five (5) members and the maximum size is eleven (11) members. Council members are elected to three year terms and can serve a maximum of two consecutive three year terms. Only one position on the council expires at this year's District Gathering, the one held by Carol Ann Buelow. She has served two consecutive terms with distinction and cannot run for council position at this gathering.

District Council asked delegates to the 2026 District Gathering to fill three positions (the vacant position held by Carol Ann Buelow and two more positions on the District Council), thereby bringing council membership to the maximum of eleven. Resignation of Pastor Robert Sinclair increased the requested slate to four, with one position filling out Pastor Sinclair's remaining two year term.

One candidate filled out a form expressing interest in serving on the District Council, Pastor Alsen Wenzel, Faith Lutheran Church, Great Falls, Montana. A call for nominations from the floor was made at the Business Meeting on Friday April 24, 2026 and Saturday April 25, 2026. No nominations came from the floor. Pastor Wenzel was elected to a three year term by acclamation. The delegates authorized the enlargement of the District Council to the maximum of 11 and authorized District Council to appoint nominees to fill these positions. The appointees who would stand for election at the 2027 District Gathering.

There are eight incumbent members of District Council of the Northwest District as of April 25, 2026.

Council Member	Term Expires	1st or 2nd Term
Pastor Ed Skutshek	2027	1 st
Shelly Hauge	2027	1 st
Karla Kaleva	2027	1 st
Vacant unexpired term	2028	1st
Pastor Alsen Wenzel	2029	1 st
Jonathan Davis	2027	2 nd
Pastor Fred Westerhold	2028	2 nd
Pastor Greg Wightman	2028	2 nd
Pastor Eric Lundberg	2028	1 st

Do you possess the needed skills and gifts? Is God calling you to something new? Do you know someone else who has these skills and gifts? Please make them aware of the District's needs! **Interest Form:** If you are interested in letting your name stand for appointment to a position on District Council, please fill out an Interest Form. To access this form [click here](#).

NW District Financial Statement 2025

Year ending December 31, 2025

Beginning Balance		\$28,690.58
Donations	37,523.22	
Passthrough Donation	1,389.00	
Registrations	22,225.36	
Total Income		\$61,137.58
Administration	5,425.14	
Dist. Coordinator	2,211.95	
Dist. Gathering	23,090.00	
National Gathering	2,650.82	
Impact Youth	12,230.01	
Passthrough Donation	1,389.00	
Total Expenses		\$46,996.92
Ending Balance		\$42,831.24

NW District Budget 2026

Expense	Budget 2025	Actual	Difference (\$)	Proposed 2026
Insurance	\$1,972.20	\$1,972.20	\$0.00	\$2,062.36
Web Site Support	\$1,800.00	\$2,800.00	-\$1,000.00	\$2,200.00
Newsletter/Postage	\$600.00	\$380.06	\$219.94	\$150.00
Archival of Data	\$280.00	\$210.00	\$70.00	\$280.00
District Coordinator	\$10,000.00	\$2,211.95	\$7,788.05	\$10,000.00
Travel District Coordinator	-	-	-	\$2,000.00
Quarterly Meeting	-	-	-	-
Travel \$250/Board member	\$1,250.00	\$0.00	\$1,250.00	\$1,250.00
Meals	\$300.00	\$0.00	\$300.00	\$300.00
State of WA annual Registration Fee	\$20.00	\$20.00	\$0.00	\$20.00
Annual District Gathering	\$10,000.00	\$7,194.22	\$2,805.78	\$10,000.00
Scholarships for Pastors/Lay Members				\$500.00
National Gathering	-	-	-	-
Scholarships for Pastors/Lay Members (\$500/person) *	\$2,500.00	\$1,000.00	\$1,500.00	\$2,500.00
Scholarships for Board Members (\$1000/person) *	\$5,000.00	\$1,000.00	\$4,000.00	\$5,000.00
Hospitality Room (Food/Bev:\$309.42 Room: \$341.40)	\$750.00	\$650.82	\$99.18	\$750.00
Benevolence for NW Member Congregations	\$4,500.00	\$0.00	\$4,500.00	\$4,500.00
Youth *	\$5,500.00	\$4,991.43	\$508.57	\$7,500.00
Youth Scholarships	\$750.00	\$600.00	\$150.00	\$750.00
Seminary Scholarship Fund	-	-	-	\$5,000.00
Total expenses	\$45,222.20	\$23,030.68	\$22,191.52	\$54,762.36



District Coordinator

Serving and equipping the congregations of the NW District

The needs of and available resources of the NW District support the call of one District Coordinator on a part-time basis. The Following terms were approved by the delegates to the 2026 Gathering:

Term: One year term, renewable for a year and may be terminated by either party on a month's notice.

Annual Compensation: \$10,000.00, plus reimbursement of necessary expenses.

Oversight: Reports to and is overseen by the District Council.

Point of contact. The District Coordinator ("DC") is the point of contact for the District. All inquiries are directed to DC. The DC will assess the inquiry and either act or make the appropriate referral. The DC will be the face of the District.

The District's vision is for the District Coordinator to be known by our congregations. To this end one of the first tasks would be for the DC to contact the pastors of all our member congregations by telephone, email and/or online to establish a connection. The DC would concurrently contact the leaders of all our congregations without a pastor, and congregations with postings on LCMC's "Open Positions" page for purpose of offering assistance in the call process and/or strategies for the continuation of Word and Sacrament ministry. Every reasonable effort will be made for the District Coordinator's contact with congregations to be made by telephone or online. The District would assist in this process by making the District Coordinator's presence and mission known on our website, all other District social media accounts and all District publications.

Liaison with LCMC. Attend meetings and other events convened by LCMC for District Coordinators. Update District on LCMC events and initiates. Facilitate updates on LCMC directories District members are listed on.

Call Coaching. To coach and assist congregations in transition (in the call of pastors and lay leaders in pastoral roles).

Enrichment. To work with the District Council and the Board of Congregational Relations in identifying and developing workshops and programs that help move our congregations towards their mission.

Conflict. To be the point of contact with congregations in conflict. To assess the situation and make the appropriate referrals.

Committee Membership District Coordinator is an ex officio member of the Board of Congregational Relations.

Meetings. Attend meetings of the District Council, the Gathering Committee and other committees as required.

Reports. Prepare reports for District Council meetings and the Annual Convention.

Assistance. Assist the District Council in implementing resolutions of the General Convention and the District Council when necessary and appropriate. To apply for the position go to our website.



The governing documents of the Northwest District of LCMC (NW District) envision a partnership between our district and its members in these three areas: (1) the call, training, certification, endorsement, mentorship and discipline of our pastors; (2) the fulfillment of each congregation's call to make disciples; and (3) conflict resolution.

Per our bylaws, the NW District has encouraged member congregations to rely upon the resources of LCMC for most of these resources. LCMC is encouraging their districts to assume greater responsibility in these crucial areas of congregational and district life.

In response to LCMC's encouragement, our District's vision involves the establishment of a new board tasked with providing guidance and resources in connection with the call and roster of pastors, and the enrichment of congregations. This board would work with and support the work of the District Coordinator.

The new Board of Congregational Relations would provide referrals to resources that will provide practical help for congregations in their day-to-day operations and move congregations toward discipleship and mission.

Size. Minimum of three (3) to a maximum of five (5) members appointed by the District (at least one member must be from the District Council). The District Coordinator would be an ex officio member of this Board.

Term. Staggered three-year terms. Members may serve a maximum of two consecutive 3-year terms.

Executive. The members of the board choose a chair and secretary from among their number.

Meetings. The board meets at least annually and as often as is necessary.

Mandate:

Maintaining a roster of clergy for the District.

When tasked by the District Council, establishing a committee which plans an annual pastors' study retreat.

Providing advice and counsel in the call or hiring process of pastoral staff and other staff through the District Coordinator.

Developing and maintaining a recommended but voluntary set of salary guidelines, materials and policies for the call or hiring process of pastoral staff and other staff.

Identifying resources for theological and practical education for church leaders, confirmation programs and Christian education.

Developing a roster of mentors and consultants to assist congregations in the revitalization and enrichment.

Developing resources for conflict resolution (including a roster of providers).

Thank you for your service!

Carol
Ann
Buelow



Pastor Carol Ann Buelow, MDiv, has served on the Northwest District Council with distinction for two terms (three years each). She is a member of and on staff at Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Walla Walla, WA. Her familiarity with technology has made a mark on their weekly worship services in the form of calls to worship and other audio-visual features. She is on the congregation's preaching roster. She has experience in the corporate world (worked with Boeing corporation). She has served on the Board of Directors of other Christian Charities in her community. Carol Ann is an accomplished musician and vocalist. She has always been front and center and supported the mass choir who offered special music at our conventions.

In 2023, Carol Ann established a partnership with Global Archives in Big Fork, MT to create an on-line document library for our LCMC NW District records. This ensured the security and preservation of all district records while enabling all board members to easily access, search and share them from their home computers and laptops. Permanent records and photographs continue being identified, labeled, scanned and uploaded. Dusty crates and boxes in the secretary's closet will be eliminated and this will enable seamless transitions whenever board members change. She is also a parttime chaplain in a local hospital.

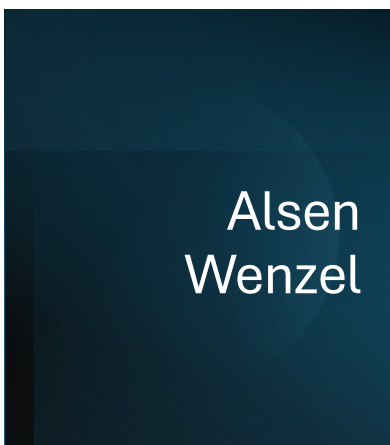
We will miss her extensive experience in the corporate and ecclesial circles, her wisdom and insights. Together with our new secretary, we will endeavor to keep her legacy intact. May God continue to bless Carol Ann and her family as she continues to minister in her community and beyond.

Robert
"boB"
Sinclair



Rev. Robert “boB” Sinclair, is a retired LCMC pastor. He and his wife Debra recently moved to Nampa, Idaho following his retirement as pastor at St. John’s Lutheran Church in Athol, Kansas. While serving there, he was actively involved with the Heartland District before joining the NW District September 2024. While he is retired from full-time ministry, he is eager to continue serving the Lord. He has provided supply preaching. His strengths include good listening and organizational skills. He has served as secretary of the District Council this past year. He has resigned as secretary and a member of the District Council due to personal reasons. We will miss his wisdom, calm demeanor, probing questions, sharp wit, keen mind and pastoral heart. Our prayer is that God guide Bob and Debra as they continue their journey, confident that their Good Shepherd goes before, behind and beside them.

Welcome on Board!



Hi, everyone. My name is Rev. Alsen Wenzel, Senior Pastor of Faith Lutheran Church in Great Falls, MT since January 1, 2025. I would like to say thank you for electing me to serve on the Northwest District Council. I was asked to write a bio so that you can get to know me. I was born in Houston, TX on November 15, 1968, therefore I am fifty-seven years old. I am married to Susan, my wife of 14 years, soon to be 15 years on November 12, and I am a father of three: Elisabeth (28), who is married to Lane Gibbs who are parents to our soon-to-be 5 year old grandson Otto and live in Cleburne, TX; Matthew (26) who lives in Stratford, TX, and Zachary (19) who lives in Sand Lake, MI. My hobbies include singing, reading, softball, golf, collecting die-cast metal airplanes (airlines to be exact) and enjoying the outdoors in general. I graduated from Keene High School in Keene, NH in 1987. I then attended and graduated from the University of New Haven in West Haven, CT with a BS degree in Air Transportation Management in 1991.

The reason I chose the ministry is a somewhat a long story in and of itself, but I will just say that I like to help people and comfort them with the Word of God. I have always been willing to be there to lend a hand or a shoulder to cry on when someone was in need, no matter what age. My family grew up Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. Therefore, I graduated from Concordia Seminary in 1998. I served two congregations in MI before resigning from the LCMS. I joined LCMC in November 2020 and then served two congregations in Texas. While serving these congregations I was elected and served on the Texas District Board for 10 years. While serving the Board I was a Vice-Chairman for 1 year, Secretary for several years and then Chairman for six months. I am looking forward to serving the Northwest District and getting to know the people of the Northwest. God bless as we serve our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ together.

Rev. Alsen Wenzel

Joining the Gathering by ZOOM



Our District's annual gathering is convened to conducting business, including admitting new members, electing District Council members, affirming rosters, adopting and amending ministry standards and passing a budget. However, our annual gathering is much more. We worship, we study, we hear keynote speakers and we fellowship. After many a session, members of the District Council often lament: "I wish more of our people could have experienced this sermon or session." For this reason District Council has taken the step of inviting folks to join us remotely. We will convene a ZOOM call for each business meeting, keynote address, Bible study and worship service. This year Pastor Judy Manweiler participated by ZOOM. Our set up was very primitive. Next year we hope to have external cameras in place and a better connection to audio.

You might wonder whether those online can participate in business meetings by voting? Section 24.03A.390(5) of Title 24 RCW Corporations and Associations (Nonprofit) permits remote participation in an annual and other membership meetings of a nonprofit corporation if it is allowed in the constitution and the bylaws of said corporation. The District's constitution and bylaws are silent on the issue of remote participation. However, the bylaws permit voice to visitors attending our meetings. Online participants would be deemed visitors. The remote participation at this and perhaps other District annual gatherings could prompt a change to our bylaws to allow hybrid meetings, with some participants in person and some online.

LCMC Annual Gathering



LCMC 26th Annual Gathering & Convention

October 4-7, 2026 | Lutheran Church of Hope (West Des Moines, IA)

For more information go to <https://www.lcmc.net/annual-gathering>



The Happenings is the official publication of the Northwest District of LCMC.

District Communications Committee: Pastor Ed Skutshek and Pastor Alsen Wenzel.

If you have any questions, or information to share, please contact Pastor Ed Skutshek at: nwdistrictlcmc@gmail.com.