

**Special
COVID-19
Issue**

The

Central Illinois District

GatePost

"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved" -John 10:9

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

www.cidlcms.org

March 2020



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**Making
Disciples
for Life** 

LOOK UP

So, has coronavirus gotten your attention?

How could you *not* take a look? One news story after another, one statistic after another . . . one person after another. None of us is as strong or "in control" as we like to think.

Where is this whole health catastrophe going from here? How will it affect not only my health, but also my job and my future? How much worse will things get, for the world, the nation, my city, my family, me?

Things are looking down. All sorts of things lie outside the realm of our control. Simply put, we are not God.

Worse, we are at the mercy of the God we have tried to put aside. To have our way about lots of stuff, we would have killed Him. If we could.

Really, though, that's what we did. It's the message of Lent.

Peter spoke to a crowd in Jerusalem of "this Jesus, whom you crucified." These people had not all been present about two months earlier, when Jesus died. None of them had given Pilate's execution order. Yet they all stood guilty. It was for them that Jesus went to the cross. All of us have the same reason to hang our heads too.

Nevertheless, look up! God raised Him from the dead. He has now made this Jesus both Lord and Christ, Peter said (Acts 2:36). God the Father brought again from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep (Hebrews 13:20).

Jesus, our Savior and Friend, answered for our sins. Your sins. All of them. Jesus was "delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Romans 4:25). So look up.

You have given God no reason to love you or care about you. Yet in Christ He did, and He does. "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life" (Romans 5:8-10). Look up.

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This issue of *The GatePost* contains encouragement and resources. All are to help you look up. Please share this widely with your fellow church members, friends, family, acquaintances and anyone else you know.

From the President's Desk

COVID-19, Coronavirus Pandemic

March 17, 2020

Dear beloved in Christ,

As of this last Friday [March 13, 2020], I was greatly concerned that too much hype was being generated by the media about this illness and was quite skeptical about some of the seemingly contradictory recommendations that were being offered by many venues.

Over this weekend, my thinking changed, even from Sunday morning to Sunday evening [Sunday, March 16, 2020]. I became concerned as I looked at statistics that explained that in 2 weeks the confirmed cases in the United States had gone from 100 to 3300 on Sunday and as of today [3/17] there were close to 4200 cases (CDC count).

We continue in prayer for the pastors, people, parishes, parochial schools and teachers of the Central Illinois District, and in the long run, we are reminded that "All things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose." Our loving God assures us, "I will never leave you nor forsake you!"

Although about 99% of those who catch the virus will survive it, we should not overlook the suggestions that are being made to forestall further spread of COVID-19 where we can.

I am convinced that while trusting in the Lord who can do far greater in stemming this virus than even the finest and greatest professionals, it is also not good to put the

Lord to the test by asking Him to do what we are unwilling to do ourselves. *"God is our Fortress and our Strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble."* (Psalm 46:1) Even in the case of certain highly contagious diseases in the Bible divine mandate stated that contact should be avoided. God had His own recommendations for quarantine or "Social Distancing."

Some will have to trust the Lord for divine protection more than others when their vocation puts them on the front line of service to their neighbor, such as medical personnel, first responders, and pastors. Most will take common-sense precautions to avoid exposure as they receive recommendations of appropriate behavior. The latest information includes avoiding gatherings of more than 10 people, discretionary travel, and going to bars and restaurants. A number of other public venues such as theaters and cinemas, and public and private schools have been asked to close by government authorities.

I have been in consultation with our leadership in the Church at large and locally, and I am recommending that we follow some basic precautions.

Be concerned for those in high risk categories: 1) Those above age 65. 2) Those with serious preexisting health conditions that weaken their immunities (heart and lung disease, diabetes). 3) Those already displaying symptoms.

Use common-sense and good hygiene practices and avoid physical contact.

Some of our larger congregations are not holding public worship services for the next two weeks but are providing on-line devotions, Facebook contacts, or live-streamed services in their stead. Most of these congregations will reevaluate what they will do after April 1st based on the best information and public health



Rev. Mark A. Miller, President

recommendations available at that time. Pastors and congregational leadership should be in regular communication at this time to determine what each congregation is going to do and how they will keep the membership informed. Pastors should be in contact with each other in order to know what local congregations are doing. Perhaps Circuit Visitors can contact hospitals in their area so that Pastors are kept aware of what visitation practices are allowed or curtailed.

The economic impact at this time is going to require that people maintain regular support of their congregation when and where they can.

I have received many phone calls and emails from Pastors and congregational leadership, and I make myself available for any consultation at any time.

We continue in prayer for the pastors, people, parishes, parochial schools and teachers of the Central Illinois District, and in the long run, we are reminded that "All things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose." Our loving God assures us, "I will never leave you nor forsake you!" We commend ourselves into His gracious care and keeping.

In His service,
Rev. Mark A. Miller

Coronavirus:

Nothing New about Disease . . . or the Need for the Gospel

by the Rev. Dr. Mark Wood, Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Office of National Mission

There's really nothing new about the new coronavirus (also called COVID-19). Human history is filled with instances of epidemics, plagues, and pandemics. The Bible speaks about plagues and widespread diseases in accounts of the past and in accounts of our future.

Deadly disease is nothing new. Neither is the greater threat to mankind.

In Revelation 9 we read about the horrible destruction that will one day ravage the earth.

The figurative language of this chapter has caused many people to speculate about the exact nature of the three plagues discussed here. Whatever they may be (and it's very unlikely that they are coronaviruses), verses 20 and 21 make it clear that mankind faces a far greater problem than these plagues: "The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts" (Rev. 9:20–21).

While the world around us is fixated on COVID-19, how to respond to it, and the fears of contracting it, there is something that is a far greater threat to them than they realize.

Many people in our neighborhoods, workplaces, schools, and even our families are more concerned about a disease with a 1-2% mortality rate than a condition with a 100% mortality rate — a condition that every one of them has already contracted.

We know that this greater problem is sin. We also know that handwashing, antiseptic wipes, microbe-trapping face masks, and isolation cannot spare any of us from the deadly consequences of sin.

Only the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ can save us.

People's concern over COVID-19 is an opportunity for us to engage them in conversations about our mortality and the certainty of death. It is an opening for us to speak God's Word into a situation that can only be answered by God's Word. In the face of the COVID-19 threat, with all its fears and uncertainties, we can shine as people who have certain hope and faith. Our response to COVID-19 should show the people around us that we live in faith, not fear, and that we are filled with hope.

Our hope is not in science, technology, or medicine. Our hope is in the One who has given us these good gifts and the greater gifts of life and salvation through the forgiveness of our sins.

Your response to the COVID-19 threat should include making good use of the "reason and senses" and all that God has given us "for this body and life" (*Luther's Small Catechism*). By all means, follow the sound advice of medical professionals and public health officials to protect yourself and your loved ones from this virus.

But do not fear. You are God's own child washed in the waters of Holy Baptism, cleansed by the blood of Jesus, and filled with hope.

As you prepare to deal with the challenges of a widespread disease, remember to also prepare to share Good News with "anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15). Through your faithful witness during a public health crisis, it is possible that people in your life will repent and receive the healing that only Jesus can provide.

It's true: There's nothing new about the new coronavirus. But, in COVID-19, there is a new opportunity for us to bring Good News to our dying world.

God our Refuge



“For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence,
for my hope is in him.
He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress;
I shall not be shaken.
On God rests my salvation and my glory;
my mighty rock, my refuge is God.
Trust in him at all times, O people;
pour out your heart before him;
God is a refuge for us” (Psalm 62:5-8).

LOOK UP

continued from Page 1

You have been joined with Christ in His death and resurrection through your baptism. Your life is hidden with Christ in God, so you can set your mind on the things that are above. “When Christ who is your life appears, then you will also appear with him in glory” (Colossians 3:1-4).

Jesus spoke about what have been called signs of the times, circumstances and events that lie beyond our control and that remind us of our utter dependence upon Him and His mercy. “Now when these things begin to take place,” said the Lord, “straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” (Luke 21:28). Look up, with faith and hope in the returning Lord Jesus Christ!

Prayers When Sending in Your Offering

By consistently giving offerings, you can show love for the Lord and your neighbor. These gifts enable the church and its members to continue extending the love of Christ in word and deed.

If you are not able to give your offering at a church service, here are prayers you can pray as you make a contribution:

We give Thee but Thine own, whate’er the gift may be;
All that we have is Thine alone, a trust, O Lord, from Thee.
May we Thy bounties thus as stewards true receive
And gladly, as Thou blessest us, to Thee our firstfruits give (LSB 781:1, 2)

Lord of glory, You have bought us with Your life. blood as the price,
Never grudging for the lost ones that tremendous sacrifice.
Give us faith to trust you boldly, hope to stay our souls on You;
But, oh, best of all Your graces, with Your love our love renew (LSB 851:4).

O Lord, You were rich but on account of me You became poor, and now by Your poverty You have made me rich. Right now, in the midst of my own needs, give me an abundance of joy in You and Your love. Cause it to overflow in singleness of heart. Since You have cared for me in Creation and Redemption, now give me the gift of being eager to share in the work of your church. Use this offering, I pray, to extend compassion to the needy and to bring the Good News of salvation to poor sinners like me. In Your Name, O Christ, I pray. (Based on 2 Corinthians 8:1-9)

O Lord, You are good and Your steadfast love endures forever. Lead me to serve You with gladness and come before You with singing. For You, Lord, are God. You have made us, and we are Yours. In the crucified and risen Christ, You have made me and all Your church to be Your people, the sheep of Your pasture. Make this offering a “joyful noise” to You, as I give You thanks and bless Your Name. Lead me to keep serving You with the gladness that only You can give, in Jesus’ Name. (Based on Psalm 100)

Our Father, Who art in heaven, Thy kingdom come . . . give us first Your Word, so that the Gospel may be preached properly throughout the world. Second, may the Gospel be received in faith and work and live in us, so that through the Word and the Holy Spirit’s power, Your kingdom may triumph among us. And we pray that the devil’s kingdom be put down, so that he may have no right or power over us, until at last his power may be utterly destroyed. So sin, death, and hell shall be exterminated. Then we may live forever in perfect righteousness and blessedness (*Large Catechism III 54*). Make use of this offering, I pray. Thy kingdom come. Amen.



Martin Luther and the Plague

In the late summer of 1527, the plague came to Wittenberg

This constituted a public health crisis of enormous proportions. The populace knew all about the plague. It had ravaged Europe nearly two centuries earlier, but that was far from the end. Thereafter, the plague would flare up now and again, here and there. This time, it struck Martin Luther's hometown.

Life changed greatly, for Luther and everyone else. University classes were suspended in Wittenberg. Alternative arrangements were made to continue instruction elsewhere. Students and many faculty members left the city. Others left, too. A sad joke at the time said that physicians were the first to get out of town in a plague outbreak, for they could spot the signs of the disease. Luther's prince, John the Steadfast, wanted him to leave too.

Luther proved steadfast himself. He refused to go. As a member of the pastoral staff at the City Church, he had a responsibility to stay. There were no students and classes, but in his calling he was to serve others in love. He had a duty. So did government officials, he wrote later that year in a short book published while the plague was still raging all around him – to say nothing of medical personnel!

It was a natural enough thought -- indeed, a God-given one – to try to get away from danger, Luther acknowledged. Yet he could

do no other than to stay and provide care to people who sorely needed it. In a way, it was another "Here I stand" moment for Luther, no less frightening than when he faced the Emperor and the estates at Worms some six and a half years earlier. He and his little family were, he wrote in a letter later in 1527, "suspended in the midst of all sorts of fears."

Luther suggested that parish churches establish homes for the sick, so individuals would not have to turn their own homes into hospitals. But that was exactly what Luther had done. He and Katie took in so many sick people that, even after the plague ended in Wittenberg, their house continued to be quarantined for a while. People in Wittenberg died with Luther at their side, telling them of Jesus.

All these things took their toll on Luther, mentally and spiritually as well as physically. He wrote in a letter, "I spent more than a week in death and in hell. My entire body was in pain, and I still tremble. Completely abandoned by Christ, I labored under the vascillations and storms of desperation and blasphemy against God. But through the prayers of the saints God began to have mercy on me and pulled my soul away from the inferno below." Luther did not contract the plague itself, but seemingly another illness. Still, it was no picnic for him. His faith was shaken. His letter continued, "You . . . must not give up praying for me, just as I pray for you."

Yet . . . yet . . . it may have been during this very time that Luther wrote his best-known hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is our God."

Though devils all the world should fill,
All eager to devour us,
We tremble not, we fear no ill;
They shall not overpower us.
This world's prince may still
Scowl fierce as he will,
He can harm us none.
He's judged; the deed is done.
One little word can fell him.

The Word they still shall let remain
Nor any thanks have for it;
He's by our side upon the plain
With His good gifts and Spirit.
And take they our life,
Goods, fame, child, and wife,
Though these all be gone,
Our vict'ry has been won.
The Kingdom ours remaineth.

Luther had victory in Christ even when everything around him was shaking, and while he himself was quaking. He had based his hymn on Psalm 46: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." He kept clinging to the promise: "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress."

(Based on James M. Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer* [Augsburg, 1986], pp. 210-212.)

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. . . . For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead" (2 Corinthians 1:3-5, 8-9).

Comfort



Worship and Bible Study Resources for Days of Social Distancing

How to keep hearing the Word of God during a time when church services and Bible classes may not be held? Some congregations will find themselves in a position to provide online materials for members and non-members, but this may prove a challenge for other churches.

In any case, many resources can be found online. Here are a few, with handy links:

Message from LCMS President Matthew C. Harrison (6 minutes)

<https://blogs.lcms.org/2020/resource-helps-congregations-plan-for-widespread-illnesses/>

Worship

- Sermons from Daily Chapel Services at LCMS International Center <https://www.kfuo.org/category/daily-chapel/>
- Daily Chapel Services from Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne <https://www.ctsfw.edu/daily-chapel/>
Also see the seminary's Facebook page.
- Worship Anew (formerly Worship for Shut-Ins): short (30 minute) televised service. . . <https://worshipanew.org/programs>

Preparing for Each Sunday

- Studies of the Propers for each Sunday – Three-Year Lectionary <https://issuesetc.org/tag/3-year-lectionary/>
- Studies of the Propers for each Sunday – One-Year Lectionary <https://issuesetc.org/tag/1-year-lectionary/>

Bible Study

- Quarter-hour daily audio Bible study <https://thewordendures.org/>
- Two Adult Bible Study Courses – audio sessions about one hour each <http://www.cidlcm.org/coursecompanionaudio.html>

General

- *Issues, etc.* audio archives (searchable) <https://issuesetc.org/archive/>
- KFuo (Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod radio station in St. Louis, 850 AM) www.kfuo.org

Living Sacrifices



"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not

be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. . . . Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all" (Romans 12:1-2, 9-18).

Classic Lutheran Hour Sermons

These were preached decades ago, when no one had heard of the Coronavirus. But since the Word of the Lord endures forever, each of them speaks to us today. You can share these sermons with your friends by sending one or more of the links below. Don't forget the unchurched! (*The sermons are archived on the Concordia Theological Seminary website.*)

A Kind Word	http://media.ctsfw.edu/Audio/ViewDetails/9835
A Season To	http://media.ctsfw.edu/Audio/ViewDetails/9415
The Church at its Best	http://media.ctsfw.edu/Audio/ViewDetails/9877
Comfort	http://media.ctsfw.edu/Audio/ViewDetails/9542
Courage to Care	http://media.ctsfw.edu/Audio/ViewDetails/10061
Dying is Gain.	http://media.ctsfw.edu/Audio/ViewDetails/9345
Fear, Faith, and the Future	http://media.ctsfw.edu/Audio/ViewDetails/9956
Fear of God	http://media.ctsfw.edu/Audio/ViewDetails/9537
For the Birds	http://media.ctsfw.edu/Audio/ViewDetails/9982
God, our Dwelling Place	http://media.ctsfw.edu/Audio/ViewDetails/9647
God is our Strength	http://media.ctsfw.edu/Audio/ViewDetails/9749
How to Pray	http://media.ctsfw.edu/Audio/ViewDetails/9687
Just Plain Crazy.	http://media.ctsfw.edu/Audio/ViewDetails/9783
Marathon	http://media.ctsfw.edu/Audio/ViewDetails/9610
One Day at a Time	http://media.ctsfw.edu/Audio/ViewDetails/10147
Pass the Bread	http://media.ctsfw.edu/Audio/ViewDetails/9894
Pray Like This	http://media.ctsfw.edu/Audio/ViewDetails/9819
Promises! Promises!	http://media.ctsfw.edu/Audio/ViewDetails/9696
Satan Is	http://media.ctsfw.edu/Audio/ViewDetails/9399
Survival Plus	http://media.ctsfw.edu/Audio/ViewDetails/9436
Telling God Where to Go	http://media.ctsfw.edu/Audio/ViewDetails/9406
The Last Word	http://media.ctsfw.edu/Audio/ViewDetails/9591
The Lord Will Provide	http://media.ctsfw.edu/Audio/ViewDetails/9508
The Untouchables	http://media.ctsfw.edu/Audio/ViewDetails/9359
When Bad Things Happen.	http://media.ctsfw.edu/Audio/ViewDetails/10148
When You're Up Against It.	http://media.ctsfw.edu/Audio/ViewDetails/9791
Who Wants to Live Forever?	http://media.ctsfw.edu/Audio/ViewDetails/9973



Our Central Illinois District “neighborhood” has a Mr. Rodgers. He is Mr. Trip Rodgers, who works out of the District office in the areas of Education and Congregational Life.

Mr. Rodgers has a bit of a problem, with schools being closed for the moment. He’s a little bored. The rest of us in the office are trying to give him some of our work to do, but that only makes him sad!

Here’s a way to put a smile on Mr. Rodgers’ face: tell him a Bible story.

Submit a video in which you tell Mr. Rodgers a Bible story. Tell a story of your choosing from the Bible. Tell it straight and true, and be as inventive as you can be in the way you tell it.

Kids in every CID church can do this project, family by family. Preschoolers can do it, as can those in kindergarten, early grades (1-2), higher grades (3-5), middle school (6-8), even high school! Get your parents to help, if you want and they are willing.

Wouldn’t it be great if Mr. Rodgers receives so many Bible story videos that it will be hard for him to watch them all? But he will watch them, and he will post the best ones so everyone can see them too. Just think: maybe a video that YOU do! Check the CID website, www.cidlcms.org.

Send your Bible story video to Mr. Rodgers at trodders@cidlcms.org.

CHURCH EXTENSION FUND, INC.**CENTRAL ILLINOIS DISTRICT-LCMS**

1850 North Grand Avenue West

Springfield, IL 62702-1626



Dear Congregations and Schools of the Central Illinois District and Investors:

Our prayers go out to you for your continued health and safety during this COVID-19 health crisis and period of uncertainty.

First, please remember that all is in God's hands. He will see us through whatever crisis faces us. We have that certainty. At times like these, I hearken back to my confirmation verse - Joshua 1:9. The King James Version especially speaks to me: *"Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest"*.

Second, let me assure you that your Central Illinois District Church Extension Fund is a stabilizing presence in such times of financial concern. God has been gracious to us over our history - we are financially solid, with a very strong financial-capital position. Your deposits with us are secure and will not decrease in value with the market fluctuations we are hearing about on what seems like a minute-by-minute basis.

We understand that churches and schools have an elevated level of concern because the cancelation of church services will likely result in a decrease in offerings to support the church. To the extent possible, we will support you through this temporary trial you are facing. If your church or school has a mortgage with us and you are experiencing financial concerns during this health crisis, please reach out to us to discuss what we may be able to arrange to offer temporary relief to your circumstances.

On a practical level, both the Church Extension Fund and the Central Illinois District offices will have staff on site, but with irregular hours. This will allow us to continue to process your transactions and answer any questions you may have for us. We ask you to conduct business remotely rather than stopping by the office. We are available via email, phone, and mail – our contact information is at the top and bottom of this letterhead. If we are not available to answer your calls, please leave a message, and we will get back to you as soon as possible. If your transaction does require personal contact, we will arrange an appointment time for you to stop by the office.

We will also continue to be faithful stewards of the investments you have entrusted with us and of the mission God has given to us to support "Church Extension" in the Central Illinois District.

God's Peace to you during these times of worldly challenges. I pray we set our sights on His more perfect vision.

Blessings,

Christine Anderson
Executive Director
Church Extension Fund - CID



2020 ILLINOIS Essay Contest

Sponsored by the Council of Federation Presidents, Lutherans For Life

Due Date has been Updated to May 1st, 2020

For students in Grades 6 through 12

Any Lutheran student or student in a Lutheran school is eligible.

*Lutheran students may also enter through a home school, congregation
e.g. confirmation class, youth group when validated by the pastor or teacher.*

Contest Guidelines

Students will write a life-affirming essay based on the 2020 Conference theme: “**From Invisible to Indispensable...**” and Conference bible verse: “***On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable***”. (1 Corinthians 12:22)

1. Not incorporating the conference verse in the essay will disqualify the entry.
2. Examples of topics the essay could deal with are, but not limited to: abortion, the handicapped, adoption or foster care, infanticide, cloning, stem cell research, physician assisted suicide or euthanasia etc.
3. Essays should include student's name, grade (Identify school or church) and email address. All entries submitted by a teacher or pastor, should include their name and email address. This information should be submitted on the rubric page used in grading the essay.
4. All sources for references, statistics and quotes should be incorporated within the essay and then included in a bibliography at the end.

Grades 6 - 8 should submit essays up to 400 words

Grades 9 - 12 should submit essays up to 750 words

Entries should be submitted digitally using Microsoft Word via email to

cathy.benning.os@gmail.com by March 15, 2020. **Updated to May 1st, 2020**

5. There will be a \$100 first place award and \$50 second place award for each of the two categories for students. The two first place winners will advance to the national contest. Email cathy.benning.os@gmail.com or call 217-793-8765 with any questions.
6. Grand Prize for the national winning entry at each level: \$250 plus free conference registration to a 2020 Regional Conference and one night stay at the conference hotel.
7. All entries become the property of Lutherans For Life.
8. For questions or resources on the sanctity of life, see: lutheransforlife.org



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