



News & Notes

LIFE, HEALTH & FAMILY

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Synod Pledges \$1 Million for Beginning-of-Life Care



BY CHERYL MAGNESS

LCMS President Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison

recently announced the launch of the 1 John 3 Initiative Million Dollar Life Match, a new grant program that will provide up to \$1 million in matching funds to LCMS congregations involved in upholding the sanctity of life in their local communities.

The program is specifically aimed at providing care for those facing beginning-of-life challenges. The amount of an individual grant will depend on the amount pledged by the congregation. More details about the application process can be found on lcms.org/serve/grants/life-grant.

Deaconess Tiffany Manor, director of LCMS Life Ministry, said, “The purpose of the Million Dollar Life Match is to build and expand the network of LCMS congregations and individuals who are working to support those who uphold life in their immediate vicinity — for example, a Recognized Service Organization (RSO) that cares for needy families or a mercy organization that supports single parents or unwed mothers.

“The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod wants to help congregations support RSOs and other groups that are doing the hands-on work of defending life at the local level. And ultimately, we want to point people toward what is most needful: the life-giving nourishment of Word and Sacrament ministry.”

The theme for the Million Dollar Life Match comes from 1 John 3: “Christ laid down His life for us. We love in deed and truth.” The theme reflects the initiative’s commitment to helping LCMS individuals and congregations have a greater impact on the cause of life as they walk with, strengthen and support local families.

Harrison recently interviewed Manor for the Synod’s “Life Together” News Digest, which is released monthly by the LCMS president’s office. In the interview, Manor emphasized LCMS Life Ministry’s ongoing commitment to facilitating greater collaboration

1 JOHN 3
 Christ laid down
His life for us.
 We love in deed and truth.

GRANT APPLICATION TUTORIAL

Learn the specifics about applying for the Million Dollar Life Match at youtube.com/watch?v=bioFDhu3Eno

and mutual learning between those in the Synod who want to support the sanctity of life.

“We have thousands of people in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod who are passionate about and engaged in life ministry,” Manor said, highlighting the LCMS Office of National Mission’s (ONM) new volunteer website. Life Ministry is one of several ONM ministries that are using the new website to help volunteers stay informed about opportunities to serve. “We’re going to continue to help connect people to one another,” Manor said.

Harrison noted that the LCMS — along with other churches and organizations that advocate for life — is often accused of caring for life only in the womb and not beyond. “That’s just false, isn’t it?” Harrison asked.

“The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod wants to help congregations support RSOs and other groups that are doing the hands-on work of *defending life at the local level.*”

“It is,” Manor said. “The church, throughout the ages, has cared for women, their children [and] families. ... We are continually walking with people who are facing difficult family situations, with women who have life occurrences while they’re pregnant that cause them to be frightened. We’re here to walk with them as they’re pregnant, when the babies are born and afterwards.”

Watch Harrison’s announcement, download a bulletin insert and learn more about the Million Dollar Life Match at lcms.org/serve/grants/life-grant.

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Cheryl Magness is the managing editor of Reporter, the official newspaper of the LCMS.

Love in Deed and Truth

BY ANDREA SCHMELING

Illinois generally, and the Chicago metropolitan area specifically, is often referred to as the abortion capital of the Midwest. Abortion on demand is prevalent throughout the state, and in 2019 abortions there jumped 10% — to more than 46,500 — over the prior year, according to an article from the *Chicago Tribune*.¹

Yet, the battlefield where we appear weakest is precisely where Christ is strong. Many congregations across The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s (LCMS) Northern Illinois District (NID) sponsor or support pro-life programs, such as crisis pregnancy centers. The district’s pro-life Recognized Service Organizations (RSOs) include Bethesda Lutheran Communities,

which serves people with developmental disabilities; multiple senior residential volunteer and chaplain services; Lutherans For Life; and an expansion of Redeeming Life Outreach Ministries’ maternity home ministry, which originated in Sanford, Fla. In addition, the NID’s Life Task Force offers resources and education, and local LCMS congregations and families run such programs as Breakfast with Baby, foster care through Safe Families (not Lutheran itself, but which has connected local LCMS families to vulnerable children), and two Swaddling Clothes branches.

Trusting in the Lord’s Promises

These opportunities are a blessing to the church, especially in the era of COVID-19. Instead of remaining mired in helpless frustration, the church focuses on what the Lord has promised. “We don’t know what the Holy Spirit will do,” said the Rev. Dr. Allan Buss, president of the NID. “We lament for the state of the world — we need to stand for the truth, repudiate evil — but as the psalmist says: Trust the Lord and do good. Every person we serve is a person Christ died for.

“It’s a great time to be the church,” he continued. “We have a clear focus on Jesus crucified and risen. We’re not afraid of the challenges — we don’t fight *for* victory but *from* victory.”

Through these efforts, the church has unique opportunities to plant the Word. To help make that vital connection of mercy work to Word, the district supplied 3,000 Arch Books (a series of Bible storybooks from Concordia Publishing House) in both English and Spanish to multiple ministries last Giving Tuesday.

“Any pagan can hand out food,” said Buss. “We have something more.”

In her role as Stewardship, Administration and Human Care liaison for the NID, Deaconess Lori Trinche works with the RSOs in the district. Their newest project is the expansion of Redeeming Life Outreach Ministries into Illinois. The area is ripe for a maternity home ministry, which not only offers a home for pregnant, unwed mothers and teaches them life skills but, most importantly, is connected to a sponsoring LCMS congregation. Residents are expected to attend weekly worship where they learn about Christ. That they’re valuable — loved beyond price — is a concept foreign to these young mothers.

¹ chicagotribune.com/news/breaking/ct-illinois-abortion-numbers-increase-20210528-s5ddpbvcw5dk3ckwx5p5xv2d5m-story.html

Coming Together to Support Life

Mercy work, undergirded by the Word, blesses the church in turn. Excited by the project, congregations that shut down in-person activities due to tight pandemic restrictions are beginning to reconnect with one another and the district, in both conversation and generosity.

“That communion of the saints coming together, it brings people out of their shells, it’s helping bring people back to the church,” explained Trinche. And in a polarized climate, a maternity home brings people around what they’re for, rather than what they’re against.



Caroline changes her baby Maxwell at Redeeming Life Maternity Home on Thursday, Feb. 12, 2015, in Sanford, Fla. Redeeming Life has now expanded to the Northern Illinois District.

“Very often, if you do not address the topics sensitively enough, you can come across as very anti-this or anti-that,” she continued. “What we always want to stress is what we’re for: We’re for life, we’re for family, we’re for grace and helping people. Meeting people where they are. That’s what Jesus does for us. If we can model that ... shower them with love and grace, it breaks down those walls, those polarizing things that [tear] us apart.”

Along with nine other Northern Illinois churches, Calvary Lutheran Church in Elgin, Ill., volunteered as a potential partner for the maternity home project. Though Redeeming Life’s expansion is ultimately going to Immanuel Lutheran Church in East Dundee, Calvary is excited that the sponsoring congregation is only an

11-minute drive away. They plan to connect the maternity home’s mothers (and babies) with their own life ministry project: Swaddling Clothes.

Providing First Article Gifts

Sunday morning services of 160, with 90 in Bible study and Sunday school, bring a lot of foot traffic past a small room — almost a large closet — in the church’s basement, where clothes hang neatly on racks, labeled by size. The largest available are size 5T.

Swaddling Clothes of Elgin, Ill., is one of 20 sites located across 11 states; Calvary, in the Chicago area, is the second site in Illinois. It offers free clothes and diapers

one Saturday a month. What began as a mission driven by a single, passionate couple now runs through the work of 16 volunteers.

Swaddling Clothes is important to both the community and the church. “Little children,” 1 John 3:18 reminds us, “let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.” Though this ministry cannot — and should not — be measured in numerical success in the pews, as the Rev. Mark Bestul of Calvary reminded his congregation before the project began, it is an important outreach of First Article gifts.

“First Article realities [have] been lost in this generation and society,” Bestul explained. “Salvation is our eternal hope, but that doesn’t mean our body isn’t important. ... Having this closet [is] a visual aid — that

this is what it means to confess the First Article, that the daily life needs of individuals are important. ... Faith is for the whole man: not just the spirit, but the body.” That they will now have the opportunity to clothe the children of the residents of the soon-to-be neighboring maternity home is a blessing Calvary looks forward to both giving and receiving.

Sharing the Word of God

“Ministries build on each other,” Trinche said. Another life project, called Breakfast with Baby, was started through the joint effort of two congregations. Moms in need come to the breakfast and are connected with a church family. Because so many of these moms are from the Hispanic community, St. Paul Lutheran Church in Mount Prospect now has a Spanish-speaking vicar and a house church of 120 members.

The church also received an award from their community for the project. “Church in general is considered to be something that’s almost a private club,” Trinche said of the way that society too often does not look kindly on the church. “This is something that shows the church has love and care for people regardless of whether they’re members. ... [It’s a] great opportunity to invite people in to share the love of Christ, [to] connect them to that Word and Sacrament.”

President Buss added how the maternity home project has already blessed the district. “We’re having the conversations, seeing the congregations connect with us. ... People have been enormously generous in amazing ways, both individuals and congregations.” Buss noted that there have been many challenges, “both with the pandemic and the life issues that weigh heavily on us.” But as the church, “we do good in the name of Jesus ... we get to share the Word of life, we get to share Jesus, Law and Gospel; that’s what makes the church the church.”

Through the 1 John 3 Initiative Million Dollar Life Match, the LCMS will offer \$1 million in matching grants to LCMS congregations involved in beginning-of-life mercy work in their communities. Learn more by visiting lcms.org/life-grant or by emailing LifeMinistry@lcms.org.

Andrea Schmeling is an LCMS member. Her husband serves as the pastor of Peace Lutheran Church in Barney, and Trinity Lutheran Church in Great Bend, N.D.

Beloved Children of God

BY ANDREA SCHMELING

The converted duplex across the street from the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Sanford, Fla., is neatly kept, clean and warm, and filled with pictures of babies. There are nearly 30 different children pictured on the entryway wall, representing the 37 women who have successfully transitioned through this maternity home. The wall is a work in progress, with more beloved children to be added.

Redeeming Life Outreach Ministries (RLOM), a Recognized Service Organization of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), provides a safe and stable home where unwed, pregnant women learn the self-discipline to provide a better temporal life for themselves and their families (whether they ultimately choose adoption or raise the child themselves). Most importantly, the women learn that they, too, are beloved children of God, saved by the blood of Jesus.

Gaining Momentum

The idea first took root in the minds of the Rev. Edward and Sheryl DeWitt in 1992, when they attended a Lutherans For Life event during Edward DeWitt's

time in seminary. They imagined a place where single, pregnant women would find forgiveness in Christ. The seed of the idea waited quietly in the ground for almost two decades, when in 2009 their unwed daughter confessed to her parents that she was pregnant. She then made the decision to tell the church.

"She was sitting right over there," Edward DeWitt explained, pointing to the back corner of the sanctuary. When, at the end of the service, he asked the congregation if anyone would like to speak, his daughter stood up and made her announcement. "I'm not asking for forgiveness — because Jesus forgives me," she told her church family, "but I am asking for your support."

"There wasn't a dry eye in the place, including me and her mom," Edward DeWitt continued. "That's when we knew this little congregation ... had enough love in its collective heart to care for people like our daughter. It doesn't matter how big you are — these women just need people to love them."

The Lutheran Church of the Redeemer has just over 100 on its rolls and worships 45–50 on a Sunday morning. Though the church serves as the maternity home's

//// Life Profile ////



Deaconess

Kimberly Trombley:

daring to be the Shepherd's Hand

Who: Wife, mom of five, friend, daughter and deaconess, Kimberly is walking with people and speaking life-giving words of Christ's life, death and resurrection.

What: Trombley is the executive director of a new LCMS Recognized Service Organization (RSO), The Shepherd's Hand Community Outreach Center in Fort Wayne, Ind. Shepherd's Hand has the mission statement "reaching out in the city by caring for the Shepherd's people, daring to be the Shepherd's hands, and sharing the Shepherd's love." They do that through caring for moms and babies with birth classes, diapers, and promoting health and wellness in soul, body and mind. Shepherd's Hand provides after school activities for students, life skills and volunteering programs for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and community volunteer activities, classes and gatherings.

Why: "I do this because I believe everyone has the right to be treated with dignity and respect, and that through walking alongside someone a person's life can be affirmed and encouraged as they walk through hard things. I do this important work because we all need people to walk alongside us in this life to point us towards Christ. I have been blessed with pastors, deaconesses, and friends who have pointed me towards Christ, and I am fortunate to be able to walk alongside others. I do this work because the Lord has seen fit to call me to this young RSO to serve Him and His people."

How: Learn more about Trombley's work at shepherdshandfw.org.





The Rev. Edward DeWitt inspects Lillian's (right, pointing) new carseat at Redeeming Life Maternity Home in 2015, in Sanford, Fla.

“Every day we pray that these women will be touched by God’s grace, that they will see they are loved, that even in discipline they are loved.

They are real children of God, and He loves them.”

sponsor, it is neither legally tied to nor financially responsible for the maternity home. It couldn’t be; the maternity home’s yearly budget is significantly larger than that of the church.

A lot of moving parts — and a lot of people moving those parts — came together to bring the maternity home into existence. For the first few years, from early talks in 2011 to the formation of the Steering Committee in 2012 to working through the logistics of a maternity home, the project was run by volunteers. The LCMS Florida-Georgia District office suggested the names of people who could help. Lutheran Church Extension Fund provided a loan to buy the house across the street. An attorney worked pro bono to get it off the ground, while a board member did the real estate work. Two generous donors — one from the church and the other from a local family foundation — offered the first significant donations.

“Money started coming to us,” Sheryl DeWitt explained, even though neither of them knew how to fundraise. “And that was another indication that we were doing what God intended us to do.” After a significant renovation, the maternity home received its first resident in 2013.

Centered on Christ

As in most organizations, the ministry’s greatest asset is also its greatest expense: personnel. RLOM employs three full-time staff members: Executive Director Sheryl DeWitt; a house mother to supervise up to six residents; and Deaconess Elizabeth Borth, director of Program Ministries. Borth first came into the picture at a 2010

district pastors’ conference, when Edward DeWitt stopped by her foot-washing station and asked if a deaconess could run a maternity home. “Absolutely!” she answered, not knowing that she would be that deaconess in the not-too-distant future.

When asked about her primary duties, Borth laughed. “That’s a good question. My duties are primarily for the women. They need a lot of nurturing and caring and compassion — that’s natural for a deaconess to exude. We also address their spiritual needs. Everything else flows from that.”

Along with daily devotions, weekly church attendance, house cleaning, employment (or work on their educational goals) and turns cooking the evening meal, the residents are expected to complete weekly assignments. These lessons teach self-esteem, time management, finances, parenting and home care. “But Christ is also in there,” Borth added. “Scripture is entwined into everything we teach.”

The ministry’s attachment to a congregation keeps it pointedly Christ-centered and Lutheran, without the limits that come with government aid. As such, it is neither a social-service agency nor a handout program.

“A lot of our moms don’t get that,” Borth explained. Many of the women feel entitled. Instead, they’re expected to follow rules for self-discipline in the home. “[The program] does require change, and that’s very, very hard.”

‘Not Ashamed of the Gospel’

Like St. Paul, the people that serve RLOM are “not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who

believes” (Rom. 1:16). These mothers move in by choice and stay voluntarily, knowing the ministry’s emphasis on the Word of God and the salvation of Christ. “We focus on making sure the girls hear the Word of God on Day 1,” Sheryl DeWitt explained. “It’s so central to what we do. Christ is at the center of everything.”

Edward DeWitt takes the maternity home residents through a 12- to 14-week instruction class. “So often they claim Christian faith, but they don’t know Christ,” he said. To these women, Christianity is a list of do’s and don’ts. “They don’t know grace — that’s not the world they come from. They come from a world where you do and you get. Sometimes what they have to do is not all that wonderful.”

Borth and the DeWitts have the same overarching purpose: If nothing else, the residents will have heard Christ. “The women are going to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the fact that we’re saved by grace alone,” said Edward DeWitt. “It takes so long for them to understand that — that there’s nothing they do. ... It’s a religion of freedom. We are not slaves to the law. It’s all through Jesus.”

The maternity home doesn’t wink at sin; it doesn’t need to. “They come to us having been judged,” Borth said. But neither does it glorify single motherhood. One resident admitted that she came to the maternity home because she knew it was the only place where no one would make fun of her. “Every day we pray that these women will be touched by God’s grace, that they will see they are loved, that even in discipline they are loved,” Borth said. “They are real children of God, and He loves them.”



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Christ's Love Prevails

Staff and volunteers also have to learn not to take any insults personally, because the women often seek to hurt others because they are hurting. "This is not for the faint of heart," Sheryl DeWitt said. "They're tough, they're injured, they're mean."

In the end, patience and love in Christ pays out. After a year, one resident was able to tell the deaconess: "I'm so glad I don't live in darkness anymore."

"We talk a lot about the world being a dark place, and how God will give you the light," Borth explained. "When we see what we have taught coming from their lips and their actions, that gives you the goose-bumps and keeps you moving every day."

And what of the impact on the church? "I would never tell someone it will pack the pews. Because it won't," Edward DeWitt said frankly. It has, however, made a huge difference in the lives of the congregation and the volunteers who minister to these women and their children. "[The maternity home] has shown them that they have a reason beyond just worship on a Sunday morning. We're here to build up and strengthen the Body of Christ. ... It's just wonderful to stand up here and see one of the babies over here in the arms of one of the members, and mom's back over on another side of the church. They take these babies and mommies in their arms and love them. I have seen a change over the years in their desire, not only to serve the women in the maternity home, but to serve the community as a whole."

The women also are expected to volunteer at the church, often as choir or hand chime members. "They serve in the congregation," explained Marge Freeman, who volunteers as director of worship and music. "They've blessed us too."

Many of the women and children are baptized at the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer. Some become confirmed

members, and others reach out years later with joyous updates: stable employment, weddings, more children with a husband in a safe and happy home. And yet the lost remain. "Spread seeds," Borth said. "That's all we can do."

Opportunities Everywhere

Sheryl DeWitt believes that all congregations should be involved in life ministry, which is not just an opportunity to save babies. In the church, these discarded women learn they are dearly loved and deeply valuable. "They see the love of the world, which isn't love. We bathe them in Christ's love in everything we do. If we didn't do that, we would simply be a social-service agency," she said.

There is opportunity to support life ministry work everywhere across the nation. While the work continues in Sanford, Fla., the wider vision for this ministry is now a Redeeming Life maternity home in every district. "I know we'll find like-minded people across the Synod," Sheryl DeWitt said. Plans are currently progressing for the establishment of a home in the LCMS Northern Illinois District.

Lutherans are blessed with a clear picture of the work that God has prepared for His people: to serve the needs of the neighbor not only in body but in soul, attaching mercy care to Word and Sacrament ministry. "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:16-18).

Through the 1 John 3 Initiative Million Dollar Life Match, the LCMS will offer \$1 million in matching grants to LCMS congregations involved in beginning-of-life mercy work in their communities. Learn more by visiting lcms.org/life-grant or by emailing LifeMinistry@lcms.org.



Confess Life All Year Long

Marches for Life continue throughout the year. The next is March 19 in St. Louis. Visit lcms-onm.org to register.

New LCMS Life store

Purchase LCMS Life apparel and gear here. Group coordinators can find signs and materials here.