

Interest Time

Sharing information about our Church Extension ministry

Freitag encourages LCMS leaders to 'keep the vision'

Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) President Merle Freitag gave an overview of the economy and areas of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) that are being impacted by the recession during the 2009 Fall Leadership Conference held Nov. 20–22, in Tampa, Fla. This prefaced his review of LCEF operations and initiatives, which included new programs LCEF has undertaken.

Freitag introduced the three concepts around which the conference focused: stewardship, mission planting, and transforming congregations. About 650 attendees heard guest speakers in these areas and broke into small groups for further discussion and education

throughout the conference.

Calling on a Higher Authority

Reviewing economic data, Freitag compared Christians' responses during past recessions. He underscored the fact that while general attendance to Lutheran churches has gone down in the last four years, giving per member has actually increased. "... It seems we have fewer people, giving more," Freitag said.

The question on many attendees' minds was whether this current recession is over, but, as Freitag pointed out, we need to wait for time to "give us the perspective" needed to know for sure. "Unemployment experts say



LCEF President Merle Freitag

they do not expect the rate to drop anytime soon," he said, adding that other indicators such as the strength of the U.S. dollar and "extraordinary" government spending are factors that will impact a turnaround as well.

"But Christians have a Higher Authority on whom they call," Freitag said, and there is still plenty of work to do in the church, even during financially difficult times. "Churches must keep the vision in front of them."

He highlighted some areas in which the LCMS and LCEF can assist congregations and schools with their work. They include:

- LCMS's Funding Academy, a training program for school administrators, business managers, and key staff.
- LCEF's School Marketing Resources, a service that helps schools develop a marketing plan and provides customized supporting materials.
- LCEF's Consecrated Stewards program, which will help support the

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Kieschnick, plenary speakers address stewardship, revitalization

In his opening remarks at the 2009 LCEF Fall Leadership Conference, LCMS President Dr. Gerald Kieschnick focused on the three critical targets of the Synod: planting new LCMS congregations, stewardship, and revitalizing congregations.

"These emphases come at a critical time in the life of the church and in the life of our country," Kieschnick said. "At the same time, the mission fields that lie before us have never been riper."



LCMS President Dr. Gerald Kieschnick

While the population of the United States has grown, Kieschnick cited a study by the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) done this past year that reported "the number of Americans who call themselves Christians has decreased more than 11 percent since ARIS conducted its first survey in 1990."

While these findings could be looked upon with pessimism, Kieschnick said that we must "use the

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Miss America 2009 Katie Stam, an LCMS member from Seymour, Ind., gave the keynote address during the LCMS President's Prayer Breakfast on Saturday of the Fall Leadership Conference. After the event, she spoke with attendees, signing autographs and having her photograph taken.

Miss America opens Saturday events with song, experiences

Ever since she was 3, Katie Stam wanted to be Miss America. She and her cousin played for hours, making crowns and sashes, practicing their walk, hosting pretend pageants, and dressing up.

On Jan. 24, in Las Vegas, Nev., her dream came true: she was crowned Miss America 2009. Stam is from Seymour Ind., about 40 miles northeast of Louisville, Ky.

She believes this is what God intended for her to do—a role He intended for her to play at this time in her life.

Stam sang "God Bless America" to open the LCMS President's Prayer Breakfast on Saturday of the Fall Leadership Conference. She then addressed the group, first talking about the Miss America pageant itself and its history.

Because of her busy travel schedule, she doesn't have time to attend her home church, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Seymour, so she has learned to nurture her faith in different ways. She said she does not hide her faith as she talks with people and makes appear-

ances, and when given the opportunity, shares how she stays connected to God.

"I encourage all of you to take a personal walk with God on your life's journey," she said. She suggested those present to "study your Bible, talk to God in your car as you travel and . . . to lift up your life and spirit to God."

FREITAG

(Continued from page 1)

Synod's "stewardship renaissance."

- NAILS, the Laborers For Christ program for college-aged students.
- *K.I.D.S. Count*, a stewardship curriculum resource for educators of kindergarten through eighth grade students.
- LCEF's Mission Planting Revolving Fund, introduced for new missions.

Retiring from this part of the 'vineyard'

Freitag thanked the LCEF Board of Directors, district and national staffs, and members for their support over the years and said he feels "privileged to

Delegates elect board members on Sunday

Three individuals were elected to the Board of Directors during the LCEF annual meeting. They were:

- Mark Braun, East Central region
- Randy Peterson, North Central region
- Jim Ingersoll, South region (replaces Rich Robertson, who will become LCEF president in January)

Elected members serve three-year terms. Also on the agenda was a motion to re-elect the serving members of the Nominating Committee, which passed. The Nominating Committee members are:

- Dan Gilbert, Northern Illinois District, representing district presidents
- Hans Tews, Florida-Georgia District, representing members-at-large
- Larry Jung, Indiana District, representing LCEF vice presidents
- Ron Smith, North Wisconsin District, representing district members
- Gene Gierke, Nebraska District, representing district members

have worked in this part of the vineyard." He retires Jan. 14, 2010.

Freitag said that when he served in the Army, commanders often referred to their replacements as "turtles," as they were always slow (in the commanders' minds) to come on board. He then introduced attendees to his "turtle," Richard C. Robertson of Peachtree City, Ga.

Robertson, an LCEF board member, was selected to be the next president. He introduced himself in a brief speech during Sunday evening's closing events.

(See related story on page 7.)

Lietz Awards given to mission, two volunteers for service

Carrying on a 20-year tradition, LCEF once again presented awards named in honor of Fred E. Lietz, the first Executive Secretary of Church Extension at the LCMS, and then the first president of LCEF when it was incorporated in 1978.

LCEF awards individuals and LCMS mission projects with Fred E. Lietz Ministry Awards during the Fall Leadership Conference. The Lietz Individual Ministry Award honors volunteers who put forth exceptional effort in promoting the ministry of Church Extension. The Lietz Mission Project Award recognizes outstanding efforts of an LCMS mission.

Mission Project Recipient

Building Hope in the City, a ministry of Trinity Lutheran Church, Cleveland, Ohio, was named the Lietz Mission Award recipient Friday night. "It is quite fitting that Building Hope for the City received this award," said LCEF President Merle Freitag. "It is meant to honor the dedication and mission heart of Mr. Fred Lietz, and Building Hope connects people from different generations and walks of life. To reach the lost is not just a 'motto' for

Building Hope, it is a true experience for those touched by this ministry."

Building Hope in the City seeks to strengthen urban ministries. The organization supports or conducts ministries such as:

- Hope Centers for Refugees and Immigrants (which offers resettlement assistance, English/literacy instruction, and employment assistance);
- Urban Family Centers (providing young people with tutoring, street evangelism for at-risk individuals, life skills, and employment training);
- Community service projects, including its CitySERVE event each spring that draws more than 300 area Christians for a day of serving Christ in the city; and
- Urban congregational renewal which includes church planting and pastor coaching.

During the Sunday morning worship service, Fall Conference attendees contributed \$8,721 during the offering, which LCEF matched and donated to Building Hope.

On hand to receive the award were Executive Director Rev. Jeff Johnson, his wife Terri, and Assistant Director Brian Upton and his wife Sarah.

Individual Volunteers Recognized

Two LCEF volunteers were presented with 2009 Fred E. Lietz Individual Ministry Awards Sunday night of the conference. The recipients were Edward L. Meise Jr., of the Southeastern District, and Rev.



LCEF volunteers Edward L. Meise Jr., of the Southeastern District, left, and Rev. Francis Roschke, of the Rocky Mountain District, congratulate each other after they each received a Lietz Individual Ministry Award.

Francis Roschke, of the Rocky Mountain District.

Meise was lauded for his work as a lay volunteer within his congregation, work outside of his congregation within the district, and as a member of the district's loan committee. He has been the congregational representative at Christ Lutheran Church, Norfolk, Va., for 11 years. Meise has raised the percentage of participating members in his congregation to 15 percent.

Roschke volunteered with LCEF for 10 years, working as a circuit representative in Colorado Springs, Colo. He is highly regarded by the other circuit representatives in the district, having trained and encouraged them in their service.

He has stepped in and served as circuit representative for other areas within his district if there was a vacancy. Even with this extra workload, Roschke maintained his "one-person-at-a-time" approach to his work and met with each representative one-on-one.

Both volunteers were praised for their willingness to travel their districts, which are quite large with congregations that are spread out over many miles.



Building Hope in the City, a ministry of Trinity Lutheran Church, Cleveland, Ohio, was named the Lietz Mission Award recipient Friday night of the Fall Leadership Conference. Pictured, from left: Ohio District Church Extension Executive Director David Bowers; Building Hope Assistant Director Brian Upton and his wife, Sarah; and Executive Director Rev. Jeff Johnson and his wife, Terri.

Congregations honored for reaching million-dollar milestone

Friday night 12 congregations were presented with plaques marking the milestone of having \$1 million in member investments, with at least 10 percent of its members participating as investors in Church Extension. The congregations were:

- **Ascension Lutheran, Beverly Hills, Mich.** (English District), accepted by member Sue Elsholz.
- **Bethel Lutheran, Fort Smith, Ark.** (Mid-South) and **Trinity, Mena, Ark.** (Mid-South), both accepted by District Vice President Paul Reaves.
- **Emmaus Lutheran, Denver, Colo.** (Rocky Mountain), accepted by Rev. Michael Meyers.
- **Faith Lutheran, Capistrano Beach, Calif.** (Pacific Southwest), accepted by members Dave and Arlene Gahl.

- **Lamb of God, Lake Havasu City, Ariz., and Shepherd of the Valley, Santa Ynez, Calif.** (Pacific Southwest), both accepted by District Vice President Gary Spencer.
- **Mountain View, Apache Junction, Ariz.** (Pacific Southwest), accepted by Rev. Mark Friedrich.
- **Redeemer, Jackson, Mich.** (Michigan), accepted by member George Williams.
- **St. John Lutheran, Stewartville, Minn.** (Minnesota South), accepted by District Vice President Kurt Fuhr.
- **St. Mark, Lake Jackson, Texas** (Texas), accepted by member Donna Hicks.
- **St. Paul, Weston, Fla.** (Florida-Georgia), accepted by member Warren Grafer.

Haake Award honoree named for service

The first LCEF vice president of the Northwest District, Jack Schulze, received the Arthur C. Haake Leadership Award.

Schulze was presented the award Sunday night of the conference in appreciation for serving during the district's transition as it moved from operating as an independent Church



Jack Schulze, center, received the 2009 Arthur C. Haake Leadership Award. At left is Rev. Dave Belasic, LCEF Board Chairman; at right, Merle Freitag, LCEF President.

Extension Fund to becoming a part of the national LCEF. He was named the vice president in 1992, and served in that capacity for eight years. After retiring from that position, he served as the district LCEF promotions director. He worked part-time as regional representative until retiring in June.

When nominating Jack for the position, Ryan McIvor, current Northwest District Vice President, wrote that Jack "encouraged open-door mentorship" and "advanced interaction with pastors and church workers through regular attendance at various circuit and district functions. Under Jack's leadership, investments doubled, setting a foundation for a strong future."

Schulze's former assistant, Loretta Brady, said that he was enthusiastic and "worked very hard to get the word out to potential investors . . . His energy and commitment were astounding. He was tireless . . . He was always joyful in



From left: Rev. Dave Belasic, LCEF Board Chairman; Dave Kuerschner, CFS Vice President; Linda and Rev. Dennis Thompson; Merle Freitag, LCEF President.

Matteson, Ill., church presented with the Antioch Reflection Award

Capital Funding Services (CFS) awarded its Antioch Reflection Award Sunday night to Zion Lutheran Church, Matteson, Ill., for its outstanding achievement while conducting a capital stewardship campaign.

Dave Kuerschner, CFS Vice President, presented the award to the pastor of Zion, Rev. Dennis Thompson and his wife, Linda.

Zion was chosen because of members' work to eliminate long-term debts and strengthen its financial base. The congregation's campaign was an intense one, completed in just seven months, which exceeded the pledge amount by 452%. This extraordinary figure was reached with the help of a matching gift, which helped inspire members to give generously.

Kuerschner said the congregation strives to help and reach out to the ethnically diverse community of Matteson and now should be better situated to do exactly that after such a successful campaign.

his approach to the many tasks he had in front of him."

LCEF began honoring individuals with the Arthur C. Haake Leadership Award in 1999. Along with the award, recipients of the Haake award become members of the LCEF advisory group, Silver Eagles.

Comments from LCEF Fall Conference attendees

"These are the best conferences that I've ever been at—I've been to seven of them over the years. The programs are always superior. Every time I come, there is something special in each program. This conference is always stimulating."



Rev. Francis Roschke, Rocky Mountain District, retired pastor from Colorado Springs
(Roschke was interviewed prior to being surprised with the 2009 Fred E. Lietz Individual Ministry Award Sunday night.)



"I have been coming to the Fall Leadership Conferences for 12 years now. My wife, Faith, and I look forward to coming. It's not only a time to relax, but it's also a time to learn something new."

Rev. Herbert Mueller Jr., president of the LCMS Southern Illinois District

"The people at this conference represent the very best leadership potential in the Missouri Synod today."

Paul Crumb, CFO of Concordia University, Irvine, Calif.

"I enjoy coming to the annual Fall Conferences. I'm able to see the church at work in different areas outside my parish."

Rev. Stephen Gillet, Central Illinois District, pastor of St. Paul, Wheeler, and St. John, Dieterich, Ill.



"I've been coming to the Fall Leadership Conferences since 1983. I enjoy the fellowship with fellow workers—that's important to me. But I also get all kinds of new ideas and hints on ways to lead people to become investors, or to reinvest their existing funds, in LCEF."

Rev. Harold Kamman, Oklahoma District, retired pastor from Oklahoma City, pictured above speaking with LCEF Silver Eagle Lou Eberhard and his wife, Bernice, of the Rocky Mountain District.

"It's a great place to connect and reconnect with laypeople and professional church workers; and to get new ideas. I'm here attending the Board for Communication Services meeting as well as the Fall Leadership Conference. I want to learn and absorb more information about stewardship."

Rev. John Bush, pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church, Trenton, Mich., and member of the LCMS Board for Communication Services

"I enjoy the fellowship and reconnecting with people around the LCMS. I also enjoy being able to put faces with names."

Syliva Knight, Pacific Southwest District

abundant gifts and resources the good Lord has placed in our hands and to use them to their fullest for the glory of God and the good of His people.” Jesus is the “only true hope for the world,” and our task is to share Jesus with the world.

“I believe we can do this boldly and mightily, pulling together and working together, using our gifts for the ‘common profit,’” Kieschnick said.

“The critical targets of revitalizing existing LCMS congregations, planting new LCMS mission congregations, and enhancing our Synod’s focus on stewardship of time, talent, and treasure have a greater goal. The goal is that people would know Jesus.”

Guests speak on conference topics

Throughout the conference, special keynote speakers addressed each of these areas in more detail.

Dr. Bob Roberts focused his comments on planting new churches. “Evangelism is exploding globally,” Roberts said. “Yet in the West it is slowly fading.”

In fact, China is the No. 1 location



Dr. Bob Roberts speaks about transforming congregations during a small-group discussion at the Fall Leadership Conference.

for the growth of Christianity. The United States is now the third largest unreached nation in the world, Roberts said.

Part of the problem is that residents of the United States believe they are at the center of world development. “We have defined the world in the likeness of the West,” he said.

“All religions are all places today,” Roberts said, “therefore reaching out is much more difficult.” In the past, we have focused on pastors and churches to plant churches, but every disciple is truly a church planter.

Roberts is a practitioner and writer on glocal—global and local—transformation of individuals, churches, communities, and global engagement. He is the founder and senior pastor of NorthWood Church, Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas, which has had 117 successful church plants.

Keith Ogorek addressed the subject of stewardship. He believes a true steward is one who can cause all under him or her to flourish and become all they can be.

In order to cause all things under one’s care to flourish, Ogorek suggests that stewardship is more than money. “Stewardship involves all things in your life.”

The real issue, he says, is not just talking about stewardship, but about answering the question: “How are you going to make everything in your care flourish?”

This stewardship of life, Ogorek said, is contagious and can spread to other people. Stewardship can be a collective event.

Ogorek writes and teaches on the topics of stewardship and Christian

worldview. He has been involved in developing discipling men for the past 15 years through his church, Zionsville Fellowship, Zionsville, Ind.

During **Dr. Paul Borden’s** plenary address, he said that he “often sees little hope” in congregations today. He believes that is because congregations have an “incomplete vision” of what they want to accomplish.

Even though Christianity is growing in Africa, China, and other locations around the world, Borden points out that Christianity is dying in three places today: Europe, North America, and Australia/New Zealand. On any given Sunday morning, less than 20 percent of the U.S. population is in church.

“Our competition is not another religion,” he said, “but the local Barnes and Noble, Target, or Wal-Mart.”

Borden pointed out that Christ did not build churches for worship, preaching or fellowship, although all those things are important. Christ builds churches to make more disciples for Christ.

In life, Borden commented, the sign of maturity is reproduction. Planting new churches is a sign of maturity, he said, and churches must visualize that growth in order to make it happen.

Borden serves as executive minister of Growing Healthy Churches, San Ramon, Calif., which serves 215 churches in northern California and northern Nevada. He has also served as a church growth consultant, served on the staffs of several seminaries and Bible colleges, and is an author.

Districts, volunteers commended for successes

Three districts were selected to receive recognition awards Sunday night, in honor of the work they are doing to encourage the ministry of Church Extension.

Rev. Jeff Miller, Vice President for District and National Relations, said that while many districts throughout the Synod are excelling at retaining LCEF investments and using Ministry

Services and loans to lift up and expand the LCMS, three had particular successes. They were:

- The New Jersey District was recognized in the category of districts with less than \$30 million in assets, and was accepted by Interim Vice President Rick Porter.
- The South Wisconsin District was

recognized in the category of districts with between \$30 million and \$75 million in assets, and was accepted by Vice President Tim Dittloff.

- The Northwest District was recognized in the category of districts with over \$75 million in assets, and was accepted by Vice President Ryan McIvor.

Robertson named LCEF president

LCEF Board Chairman Rev. Dave Belasic announced Nov. 10 that Richard C. Robertson of Peachtree City, Ga., was selected for and accepted the position of LCEF president. Robertson will begin his tenure Jan. 15, 2010, succeeding Merle Freitag, who announced his retirement in July.

“Rich is a churchman with a great heart for the work of both the LCEF and the LCMS. His personal commitment to the work of the Church and his experience and professional background are an excellent blend that will serve both ministries very well in the near term and for years to come,” Belasic said.

Robertson has led large business organizations, has church-related experience, and served on the LCEF Board of Directors. When he accepted the position, he was the managing partner of H&R Land Development Corp. in Peachtree City. Robertson previously

served in numerous senior executive positions in the consumer packaged goods industry, including as president and CEO of Wise Foods, executive vice president of The Kellogg Company, and vice president and general manager of

“His personal commitment to the work of the Church and his experience and professional background are an excellent blend.”

*Rev. Dave Belasic,
LCEF Board Chairman*

Keebler Foods. He is a graduate of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

In addition to his professional background, Robertson has served St. Paul Lutheran Church and School, Peachtree City, as president, elder, Strategy and Planning Committee chairman, and mission trip team leader. He has pro-

vided counsel to the Florida-Georgia District in a number of business-related opportunities. Robertson was elected to the national LCEF Board of Directors in 2006.

Robertson and his wife, Cindy, have been married for 24 years, and have three children: Nathan, Shauna, and Bradley.

“We are very grateful to Merle Freitag for his vision, outreach focus, leadership, and organizational development over the past decade, and are thankful that a servant-leader such as Rich has been provided as we look to the future,” Belasic said.



Rich Robertson

Newkirk shares stories of vineyard during Women’s Luncheon

During the Women’s Luncheon Sunday, Phyllis Freitag, wife of LCEF President Merle Freitag, and Joy Belasic, wife of LCEF Board Chairman Dave Belasic, introduced Cindy Newkirk as the keynote speaker.



Cindy Newkirk spoke during the annual women’s luncheon at the Fall Leadership Conference in Tampa, Fla.

Newkirk shared stories about her family’s vineyard in Paso Robles, Calif.—the Steinbeck Vineyards. She described the grapevines themselves, about how the vines are dormant in the winter, yet grow to life in the spring and summer. Many analogies to vineyards exist in the Bible, and Newkirk used a number of those verses during her presentation.

Newkirk’s roots in the wine grape farming run deep, as does her passion and enthusiasm for her relationship with Jesus.

“These verses are real,” Newkirk commented, referring to the verses she uses during her presentations, “and these verses are life.”

Newkirk graduated from Concordia University in Portland, Ore., with a degree in education and from Concordia University in Irvine, Calif., with

a master’s in reformation history and theology. She worked in youth ministry before moving back to Paso Robles. Today Cindy and her husband, Tim, operate Steinbeck Vineyards (started in 1982 by her father, Howie Steinbeck) on 350 acres that has been farmed by her family since 1870.

Newkirk brought a creative philanthropic opportunity to fruition in a program called “Vineyards Growing Veggies™.” The one-acre year-round garden is tended by volunteers and the produce is donated to the Food Bank. This past summer, the garden provided 8,000 pounds of produce for the charity.

She also serves on the Board of Regents for Concordia, Irvine, and writes a daily devotional blog. She also teaches weekly Bible study at her home congregation of Trinity Lutheran Church.



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St. Louis, MO 63122-9009

WINTER 2009

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2009 Fall Leadership Conference Edition

Ministry at heart of Church Extension

Church Extension is all about facilitating faith and reaching out to others with the Good News of Jesus Christ. The events and learning that happen in a community's Lutheran church, school, child-care center, or summer camp can have an everlasting impact on its residents.

Lutheran Church Extension Fund is providing nearly 2,350 Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) congregations, schools, and other entities with loans for construction, repairs, and operations. More than 1,200 residential and debt consolidation loans have been made to rostered church workers as well. Making that all possible are more than 60,000 investors and 471 contributors trusting us to be

faithful and conservative stewards of their assets. LCEF now has \$1.8 billion in assets at work for the LCMS and its members.

LCEF also works to bring more people to the saving grace of Jesus Christ through Ministry Services. This arm of the organization offers leadership support, ministry vision, and spiritually based stewardship and facility planning, with the goal of maintaining and enhancing the health of LCMS members and organizations.

The LCEF staff and volunteers are thankful for this partnership that brings together individuals, church leaders, and congregations, all in a shared ministry goal of building His Kingdom!

Interest Time is published
four times a year by the
Lutheran Church Extension Fund.
The national office is located at:

**10733 Sunset Office Drive
St. Louis, MO 63127-1020**



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