



NEWSLETTER

timeline

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REV. DR. ROOSEVELT GRAY, JR.

“ I first went to Buena Vista on August 20, 1916 having been invited there by a man who wanted a Lutheran mission established there . . . After making a second trip, I organized a Lutheran Sunday School and called it St. James. ”

~ Dr. Rosa J. Young



The Rev. Dr. Roosevelt Gray, Jr. speaks to guests at the Rosebud Memorial Service at Christ Lutheran Church in September.

100 YEARS DEEPLY ROOTED IN ALABAMA SOIL

As we conclude our 100th anniversary of the Lutheran church in Alabama, I reflect on my own faith journey, because Dr. Rosa J. Young’s work brought me into the LCMS.

Just four months after she was confirmed by the Rev. Nils Bakke at Christ Lutheran Church, Rosebud, on Easter Sunday in 1916, Young traveled about 30 miles to the small community of Buena Vista that was begging for a church. She wrote:

“I first went to Buena Vista on August 20, 1916 having been invited there by a man who wanted a Lutheran mission established there . . . After making a second trip, I organized a Lutheran Sunday School and called it St. James.”

This is where my Lutheran journey took root, many years later, when I met a cute Lutheran clarinet player in the Alabama A&M marching band, where I played tuba. I had grown up in Baptist and African Methodist Episcopal traditions, but Otelia Vanessa Stallworth, the clarinet player, was a third-generation Lutheran. Her father, Rodger Stallworth, and her grandfather, Skinner Stallworth, had both attended a one-room Lutheran church-school: St. James Lutheran Church, Buena Vista.

Otelia and I were married at her home church, Faith, Mobile, by her pastor, the Rev. James P. Marshall, who also grew up at St. James, Buena Vista. Faith was founded in 1920 by the Rev. R.O.L. Lynn, who had earlier served as pastor at St. James. Two years later, in 1922, Lynn became the first president of Alabama Lutheran Academy in Selma, now Concordia College.

I prayerfully chose to attend Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind., where one of my classmates was Stephen Wiggins Sr. — who grew up at St. James, Buena Vista.

In fact, St. James produced 12 Lutheran pastors, many still serving today, which shows how deeply fertile the Alabama soil was! Those pastors include James Wiggins Jr., St. Paul, Jacksonville, Fla.; Stephen Wiggins Sr., Christ, East Point, Ga.; Willie Stallworth, Unity, East St. Louis; Ben Stallworth, Concordia, Montrose, and Ebenezer, Atmore, Ala.; Jimmy McCants, Mount Calvary, Mobile, Ala.; Elder McCants, Holy Cross, San Antonio; Reholma McCants, Unity Community, Pittsburgh; Frazier Odom, retired; Coleman Montgomery, deceased; Ulmer Marshall, Trinity, Mobile, Ala.; Frank T. Marshall, LCMS Florida-Georgia District fifth vice-president; and James B. Marshall, retired.

Today, Young’s ministry is still celebrated in a worship service held every September at the original Christ Lutheran Church in Rosebud. The Rosebud Memorial Committee — headed by the Rev. James Wiggins Sr., Young’s last pastor — has repaired the original church-school, painted it, put on a new roof and more. It’s been my great pleasure to join with the saints for this annual service. Around 200 people gather from across the country to remember that God can use one person to reach a multitude with the Good News of Jesus Christ.



Christ Lutheran Church, Rosebud, the mother church of the Alabama field, was founded in 1916 by the LCMS along with Dr. Rosa J. Young. A committee of LCMS pastors repaired the building for use during the anniversary service each year.

CELEBRATING SIX GENERATIONS OF LUTHERANS IN 100 YEARS

They celebrate six generations of Lutherans in Lutheran schools since the family matriarch rode an oxcart with teacher and evangelist Rosa J. Young to start a new school in rural Alabama.



St. James Lutheran School, Buena Vista, circa 1917

It's a long road from a tiny one-room schoolhouse in Buena Vista, Ala. to an urban school in east St. Louis, but one family has made the journey over the past 100 years. They celebrate six generations of Lutherans in Lutheran schools since the family matriarch rode an oxcart with teacher and evangelist Rosa J. Young to start a new school in rural Alabama.

Mrs. Luella McCants, great grandmother to LCMS pastors Willie and Ben Stallworth, was among the first families to come to faith through the ministry of the LCMS at Christ Lutheran, founded in 1916, the first Lutheran Church in rural Alabama. When Luella moved to Buena Vista, she urged Rosa to help start a mission there. Rosa wrote:

“ I first went to Buena Vista on August 20, 1916, having been invited to establish a Lutheran mission there. I rode in an oxcart with Sister Luella McCants who had moved from Sedan near Vredenburgh to Buena Vista. The following evening, I spoke to a large crowd ... Quite a number expressed the desire to have a mission. After making a second trip, I organized Lutheran Sunday School and called it St. James. ”

- LIGHT IN THE DARK BELT

Officially organized eight months later, St. James Lutheran School and Church produced 12 Lutheran pastors in its decades of service, many still serving today, among them Willie and Ben Stallworth. Willie remembers his great first grade teacher, Mr. Ratcliff (whose brother Kermit, has a doctorate in ministry and taught at Concordia

University Wisconsin, Mequon, Wis. until retirement). St. James was consolidated in the 1960s with other rural churches into Immanuel Lutheran, still in service in Vredenburgh, Ala.

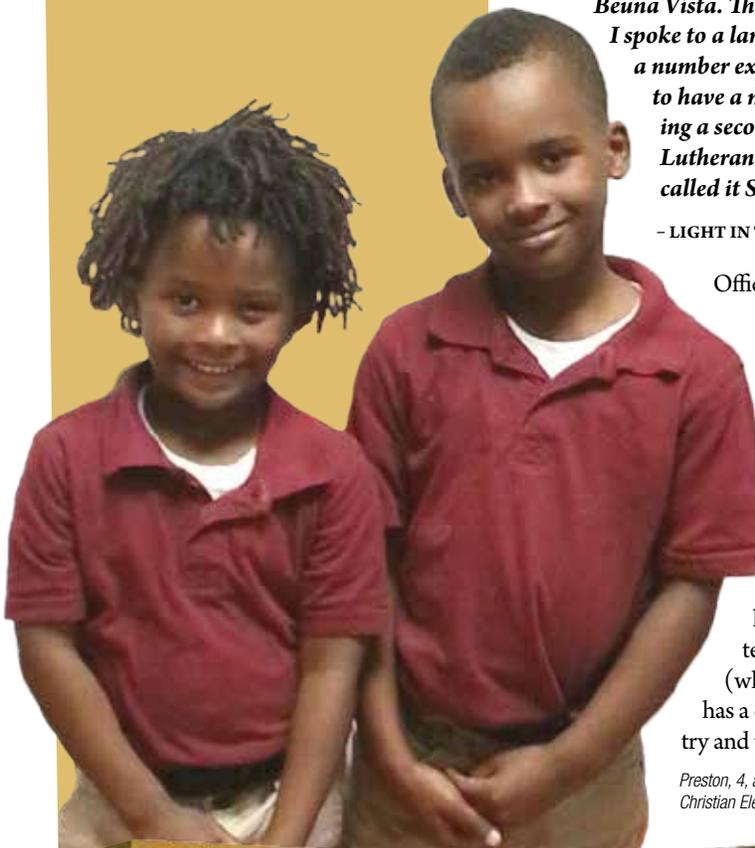
Rev. Ben Stallworth, who graduated from Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind. serves two parishes near the family homestead in Alabama: Concordia Lutheran, Montrose and Ebenezer Lutheran, Atmore.

Willie, who taught Lutheran schools for decades, earned his ministerial degree through the Concordia Seminary, St. Louis DELTO program and received an honorary Doctor of Letters degree from Concordia University, Nebraska, Seward. He serves as pastor at Unity Lutheran Church in east St. Louis. In 2003, the church launched a school, Unity Lutheran Christian Elementary School. A project of the LCMS Southern Illinois District, it is the first LCMS elementary school intentionally established in an urban setting with the goal of doing mission work — reaching the community of East St. Louis with the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ and teaching the children the wonders of God's love.

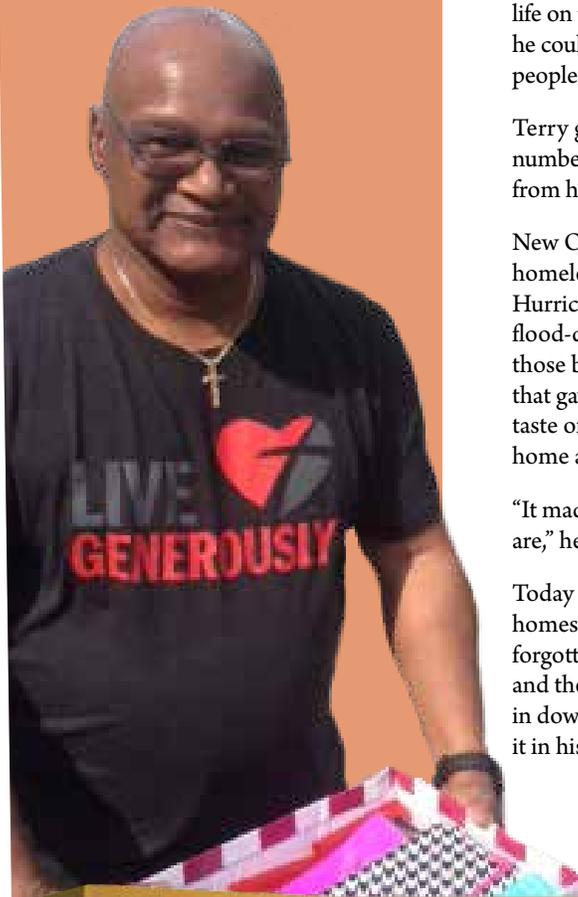
No oxcart was involved in its founding, but Unity's mission reflects the deep rooted faith and tireless tenacity of Dr. Young who shared the Gospel with her people through the Lutheran Church in rural Alabama. In time, they established 30 schools, 35 congregations and a college in rural Alabama, educating hundreds of children and raising up pastors, teachers and devoted lay people who have taken the Lutheran church to cities all over the country.

Today Preston, 4, and Zijohn, 5, Rev. Willie Stallworth's grandchildren attend Unity Lutheran Christian Elementary School, the sixth generation of the family of Lutherans, thanks to the faith of their Forebear Luella McCants, one of the first generation of black Lutherans confirmed in Alabama's Black Belt.

Preston, 4, and Zijohn, 5, Stallworth, sixth generation of Lutherans from the Alabama field, attend Unity Lutheran Christian Elementary School in east St. Louis where their grandfather, Rev. Dr. Willie Stallworth, is pastor.



“Sometimes the problem seems too big to tackle, but we found that if we do what we can when we can, we can make a difference. . . . We pray as we pack our boxes for those who will receive them, and we hope they will come to our church.”



LOOKING INTO THE FACE OF HOMELESSNESS

Rev. Jerome Terry, pastor of Bethel Lutheran Church in New Orleans, will never forget the day he came face-to-face with the heartbreak of homelessness. Sadly, he didn't recognize the face.

While he was walking to the store, a bedraggled and dirty man called out his name. When he turned to look, he realized it was an old classmate from Booker T. Washington High School in New Orleans. They played in the band together.

“I didn't know who he was at first, he had changed so much,” Terry said. “I gave him all the cash I had on hand, and prayed for him.”

Later, he saw another high school classmate — one he had grown up with — panhandling downtown. Terry took him to lunch, prayed and listened to him talk about life on the street, staying in shelters when he could afford it and with other homeless people under the bridge other times.

Terry gave him money and his phone number and told him to call. “I never heard from him again.”

New Orleans has the third highest rate of homelessness in the nation, accelerated by Hurricane Katrina 11 years ago, and the flood-damaged homes that were lost and those bought by investors. It was Katrina that gave Terry and his family a personal taste of homelessness, as they lost their home and the church they served.

“It made me realize just how helpless you are,” he said.

Today Rev. Terry and his church both have homes (both relocated). But he has never forgotten the vulnerability of homelessness, and the reminders he sees on most corners in downtown New Orleans every day keep it in his mind — and his heart.

Rev. Jerome Terry shows how he always has a box handy for the homeless.

So Terry decided to do something about it. He began filling shoeboxes with vital items — toiletries, socks, energy snacks, a small Bible, an invitation to worship — for homeless men and women. He always has one in his car, so he can jump out of the car at a moment's notice and hand one to someone in need.



When his church members found out, they wanted to get involved, too. The result was packing dozens of Love Boxes every month with items members donate to help someone on the street. They also pack zip lock bags with key items they can take to areas where large numbers of homeless people congregate.

“Sometimes the problem seems too big to tackle, but we found that if we do what we can when we can, we can make a difference,” Terry said. “We pray as we pack our boxes for those who will receive them, and we hope they will come to our church. We have all been through so many struggles here in New Orleans. Now we can reach out, as Paul writes: ‘Blessed be the 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’” (2 COR. 1:3-4).



PASTOR REACHES POOR IN CHICAGO AND IN LIBERIA

Rev. Kenety Gee has a big heart for mission: to the urban neighborhood his church serves and to the poor in his native Liberia. He has seen first-hand the profound effect the lack of resources has on the poor in inner city Chicago and in Liberia.

As the pastor of Chatham Fields Lutheran Church on the South Side of Chicago, Gee rallies his church to help neighborhood children excel academically, because he believes a good education is the way out of poverty.

His church offers an Academic Support Center including a computer lab, youth activities and summer enrichment, to help the youth of his community excel academically and graduate from high school with good grades and high scores on standardized tests to increase their chances for post-secondary education.

“Many of our parents don’t have the background to help with their children’s schoolwork, especially when they get to high school,” he said. “Many single moms are working two jobs and don’t have time. As students struggle in school, they get discouraged and give up. We want to help them experience success in school.”

The Center also helps students and families navigate financial aid and scholarships needed for college, to help prepare them for the job market.

Gee came to the U.S. 21 years ago as an international student at Concordia University, St. Paul, St. Paul, Minn. in the pre-seminary program. He completed his ministerial

studies at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis then earned a Masters in Global Health at Northwestern University in Chicago. Helping improve health — physically, spiritually, emotionally — is a key factor in his ministry.



Pastor Kenety Gee meets with Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Executive Mansion, Liberia

“We preach Christ in our church and community, and we live our faith in our ministry here and overseas.”

This ministry expanded to address medical concerns he had for the poor in his neighborhood and in his home country. “Chicago has a lot of high rated hospitals but the poor have no access to them,” he said. “For the poor, there are two issues: accessibility and availability. In our poor neighborhood, good health care is often not accessible; in Liberia, it is not available. We work to overcome those issues,” he said.

Gee is the founding president/CEO of Chicago Global Health Alliance which brings top medical professionals to poor urban communities of Chicago — and to Liberia.

Through his organization he brings doctors to the Chatham Fields community for twice-yearly health fairs, offering regular checkups, flu shots and referrals to specialists. A community educator addresses issues of diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity.

In Liberia, Global provides free surgeries and second generation medical equipment to regional medical centers. Staff train health care workers and through a Biomedical Technician Training Center are training technicians to service, maintain and recalibrate medical devices to ensure precise diagnostics and treatments.

“A lot of medical services are needed due to the impact of Ebola outbreak on the country’s health care system, which needs thorough rebuilding,” said Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. “I am hopeful that your presence will help fill the important gaps that currently exist and I want to thank you for the great services being offered to the people of Liberia.”

Read more about Rev. Gee’s overseas health initiative at:

emansion.gov.lr/2press.php?news_id=3628&related=7&pg=sp
bushchicken.com/us-based-medical-professionals-to-establish-biomedical-training-facility-at-bwi/

Quarterly youth gatherings with sleep over, Bible quizzes, talent show, food, lip singing and more. Sponsored in part by Thrivent.



REMEMBERING THE POWER OF GOD'S WORD

Rushing home after my conference in Diredawa, I boarded a train to head to Adidas Ababa. It was time to celebrate the Ethiopian New Year. The year was 1997.

I was sitting with Mennonite sisters as they headed toward the Ethiopian capital. Suddenly, a thief ran by and stole my suitcases just as the train reached the city of Nazareth. I asked the Mennonite women to look after my remaining items and I took off running after the thief.

But I was too late and I lost him in the crowd.

When I arrived at the city gate, I asked some Christians if they might know where I could find my stolen luggage. They told me to look in the area where black market items were sold.

As soon as I got there, I saw a man holding up my personal Bible, selling it for the highest bid. He was hawking my Bible because it had a nice cover. So, I grabbed him and told him, "How dare you steal my property!" But the man said he hadn't stolen anything; he was merely selling items others had given to him.

He wrenched free from my hands and took off. I ran after him and caught him again. When the police saw that I had a hold of this man, they asked me if I had proof he had my luggage. But they all spoke a local language and I could not understand them. Because I couldn't answer, the police told me they would not process the case.

Just then, I got a message from the Holy Spirit to pray for the man. I asked him if I could pray for him and he said yes. The police laughed. After I prayed, I gave him a New Testament and took his address and phone number to collect my luggage later.

But it was not to be that easy.

When I got to Addis Ababa, I called the number the man had given to me and the people who answered said they didn't know him. I was upset because my luggage had my camera, Bible tracts I was planning to hand out and other personal items.



Top photo: Rev. Eddie Mekasha preaching.

Bottom photo: Sample of Amheric New Testament from the worldwide web.

I went back to Nazareth to arrest the thief. When I arrived at the black market, I saw him and asked him why he gave me the wrong number. He said he didn't, but that the people who answered didn't know about the luggage.

So I got tough with him and told him to give me bail or I was going to call the police. In Ethiopia, bail is not money. Bail is to ask some respected person to be your guarantor until you have the money.

Then a miracle happened. He reached into his pocket and took out the New Testament I had given to him and held it up.

"This is my bail," he said.

I looked at that Bible and saw how sweaty and worn it was — in just two weeks — because of his diligent reading. He told me he loved reading about Jesus.

I left the city very encouraged that a soul was touched by Christ's spirit. Two weeks later, I got my remaining stolen property and my friend — the thief — joined an evangelical church.

Rev. Eddie Mekasha is chaplain pastor at Tyson Foods in Council Bluffs, Iowa, and serves in mission work and outreach to immigrants at Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church near Omaha, Neb. He came to the U.S. in 2002 and received his M.Div. from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis in 2007. He had earned a theology degree from Mekane Yesus Seminary in Addis Ababa in 1999.





ALL FOR JESUS

- 2017 -

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MINISTRY FAMILY CONVOCATION

JULY 12-16

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Phil. 3:7-11

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START YOUR NEW YEAR WITH FELLOW CLERGY: PLAN NOW TO ATTEND LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE; CLERGY MEETING

Learning from and leaning on one another, the LCMS Black Clergy Caucus will hold its annual meeting Jan. 18-20 at St. Paul Lutheran Church, Dallas. The meeting will be followed by a two-day leadership conference featuring our own Christ-centered, mission-focused clergy.

The meeting and conference will focus on the importance of working together in proclaiming and living the Gospel. Pastors and lay leaders will learn from one another in areas of ministry to immigrants, seniors, the homeless, youth, outreach, evangelism and new members. Speakers bring a wide background of experiences and expertise. The caucus meeting and the conference have a minimal cost of \$30 registration. For more information, visit the church website (where you can register online) at splcdallas.org.



REVEREND BYRON WILLIAMS, SR.

is host pastor of the Black Clergy Caucus meeting and the annual leadership conference January 18-21 at St. Paul Lutheran Church, Dallas. It might seem surprising to some that it took a hurricane to get Rev. Williams Sr., a native Texan, to return to his home state. Rev. Williams served at Trinity Lutheran Church in the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans for 10 years. When Hurricane Katrina devastated the Ninth Ward in 2005, Pastor Williams returned reluctantly to Houston, where he was born and raised. God showed that the body of Christ and the Gospel are not bound by physical or political boundaries when he allowed Rev. Williams to become the pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Dallas, where several of Trinity's members had already been worshipping for months. Rev. Williams served in the United States Army both at home and abroad in Germany. He worked as a lay minister at Holy Cross and Calvary Lutheran churches while serving as the head elder in his home congregation at Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church. In 1996, he completed his studies at Concordia

Seminary, St. Louis and accepted a call as the full-time pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church. Rev. Williams has served in multiple roles in the LCMS and in a radio ministry with Grace, Mercy and Peace which broadcast over four states. He is a graduate of the Pastoral Leadership Institute, and serves as zone counselor to the LWML Metropolitan Dallas, Ministerial Advisory Board member for the Dallas Health and Wellness Institute and Chairman of the Black Clergy Caucus of the LCMS.

"The meeting and conference will focus on the importance of working together in proclaiming and living the Gospel."



REV. DR. ROOSEVELT GRAY, JR.

serves as Director of Black Ministry in the Office of National Mission of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Rev. Gray served for 12 years as assistant to the president of Missions/Evangelism, LCMS Michigan District, which included planting new congregations, working with urban churches, RSOs, mission societies, ethnic, campus, deaf, blind and cross cultural ministries; outreach and evangelism; world mission and international missionaries. Rev. Gray is a 1988 graduate of Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, Ind. His pastoral ministry has been at Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church, Houston, and Outer Drive Faith Lutheran Church, Detroit. Rev. Gray also served as director of Admissions, Recruitment and Vicarage Assignment at Concordia, Ft. Wayne. Rev. Gray's District and Synodical services included: Board for Evangelism Services, LCMS Texas District; LWML Zone Counselor; LCMS Servant Event Committee, Board for Youth Services; LCMS Board of Directors; LCMS Board

of Black Ministry Services; LCMS Specific Ministry Pastor Certification Program and Board of Directors for Projection Compassion Ministries, Inc.



REV. BYRON R. WILLIAMS JR.

grew up in the Lutheran Church and was a featured speaker at the LCMS Youth Gathering in New Orleans. He is a preacher, teacher and spoken word poet who loves to challenge and encourage people of all ages. He earned his M.Div. Degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. After a semester studying in villages, savannahs and cities of Tanzania, East Africa, Byron attended Xavier University in New Orleans to tackle a new major and a new commitment to educating kids and encouraging young people in their faith. While pursuing a history degree at Xavier, Byron taught Bible study at Trinity Lutheran Church in New Orleans' Ninth Ward. After graduating, he served with Teach for America, non-profit organization that recruits top college graduates to teach for two years in low income schools and was assigned to Burbank Middle School in Houston. He now is a youth pastor.



REV. DR. RODNEY J. EMILIEN SR.

is a 20-year veteran in education. He serves in administration at KIPP Liberation College Preparatory Middle School, Houston, where he has served for eight years. He has served in several academic positions and was pastor at Grace Lutheran Church, Montgomery and Bethlehem Lutheran Prattville. Rev. Emilien earned his associate's degree from Concordia College Alabama, Selma, Ala. and bachelor's from Concordia University, Nebraska, Seward, Neb. He has a master's in sacred theology and a doctorate of ministry from Logos University, Jacksonville. He graduated from Concordia, St. Louis, and was ordained in 1994.

Black Ministry

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Please send your articles to Rev. Dr. Roosevelt Gray, Jr. at roosevelt.gray@lcms.org by the end of the month prior to the respective quarter (i.e., Dec. 31 for the 1st quarter newsletter) so that we can share your news in our next edition.

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REV. GREG MANNING serves as mission developer and pastor of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in New Orleans. Pastor Manning also serves as an interna-

tional speaker sharing God's plan for our lives in our struggles as far north as Norway and as far south as Australia. He was a keynote speaker at the Gathering in New Orleans. Pastor Manning has a heart for inner city ministry and ministry to at risk youth. He served for 10 years at Grace Lutheran Church in Kansas City, before moving to New Orleans. He graduated from Wabash College in Indiana where he majored in Theater and Religion. After obtaining his Bachelor of Arts Degree, Pastor Manning went on to attend Concordia, Fort Wayne, his hometown. Pastor Manning considers himself a living witness, that as written in Phil. 4:13, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me." Pastor Manning believes that everyone's life has a story that we are to use to glorify God, in spite of what we have gone through to come by those stories, as God's children we must share them. He received a Stand With Your Community Grant from the LCMS to start a day shelter for the homeless at his church.



REV. DR. YOHANNES A. MENGSTEAB has served as parish pastor in Holland, Mich., missionary at-large in the Washington, D.C. area, counselor for African

Immigrant Ministry, director of Urban and Specialty Ministries and as the director of New Mission Fields Development for North American Missions of the LCMS. He worked with the Lutheran Foundation from June 2011-October 2015 as director of Ministry Programs. He serves as the primary liaison between the Foundation and its 95 member congregations. Yohannes' key responsibilities included working with the congregations to design ministry strategy for community engagement and congregational health. He was called by the LCMS Texas District to serve as the mission and ministry facilitator in August

2015 working with the congregations and ministries of northeast Texas to encourage ministry health and new church plants. A native of Eritrea, Yohannes is founder of the Eritrean Mission Society and of the African Immigrant Lutheran Mission Society International. His journey includes the refugee camps in Sudan and resettlement in the U.S. in 1983. From 2001-2010, he served as national director of the New Mission Fields Development for LCMS World Mission. Yohannes has an undergraduate degree from Concordia College — New York, Bronxville, N.Y., and graduate degrees from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis and a Ph.D. in Missiology from Concordia, Fort Wayne, and a MBA from Ball State University, Muncie, Ind.



REV. DWIGHT E. DICKINSON, SR.

has always had a strong Lutheran connection as the son of pastor and author Rev. Dr. Richard C. Dickinson. After 25 years

of managerial service with AT&T and 25 years as an elder at Transfiguration Lutheran Church, St. Louis, Rev. Dickinson was called to ministry in 2005. Rev. Dickinson is co-founder and senior pastor of Great Commission Lutheran Church in St. Louis, a mission to save souls, one soul at a time, as well as to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (MAT 28:19). Rev. Dickinson is a graduate of Concordia, St. Louis. He holds a bachelor's degree from Jackson State University and is an alumnus of Lutheran High School South, Chicago. He serves as advisor at Lutheran Geriatric Care where he is director of Operations. LGC has a Senior Citizen Day Care as well as a Consumer Directed Services department. Combined these two businesses are responsible for over 120 employees. Working in conjunction with LGC, it is the Vision of GCLC to resurrect Turner Middle School to include Senior Citizen living, Day Care, CDS services, a full service health facility and much more.