

# SWD PASSIONATE BELIEVERS CONFERENCE

Saturday, January 27, 2018

---

## ***-Presenter Presentation Descriptions-***

**Rev. Jonah Burakowski:** Rev. Burakowski was called in June 2017 to serve the South Wisconsin District. Arriving in August and starting in September, He was worked to learn a new position while continuing our rich history and tradition of active mission and human care. Rev. Burakowski was born in Southfield, Michigan. He attended Central Michigan University, where he received his BS in Family Science. After receiving his MS in Higher Education Administration and Counseling Education at Emporia State University, Rev. Burakowski furthered his education at Concordia Seminary St. Louis, where he received a MDiv. Rev. Burakowski served his Vicarage at a Church Plant Start – Christ Lutheran Church, Ruther Glen, VA (Redeemer Lutheran Church, Fredericksburg, VA). Before coming to the South Wisconsin District office, Rev. Burakowski served at Good Shepherd Lutheran, Marshall, MN, St. John Lutheran Church and School, Beloit, WI and Living Hope Lutheran Church and Child Development Center, Staffor, VA. Jonah and his wife Elizabeth, and three girls, Theresa, Kaijala, and Olivia live in Hartford, Wisconsin where they are members at Divine Savior Lutheran Church, Hartford, WI.

➤ **Breakout Session 2: Understanding the Biblical Principles of Strategic Planning**

Luke records Jesus teaching, *“For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?”* (14:28, ESV). We can, and should, develop our understanding of the Biblical principles of strategic planning and their application to the mission and ministry of our church. During the planning process people are provided with a structured place to explore what is important for the future of a congregation and then how to apply those plans/objectives. Utilizing the book *“Holy Conversations; Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations”* we will explore the importance of Biblical principals in strategic planning. This introduction to the basics of planning will also include resources available for congregations to use in their own planning.

---

**Thomas Freeman:** Security Consultant, AIR Technology Services. Thomas has twenty five years experience in managing IT departments. He is a leader in development and security management. Thomas has taught extensively in Bible college classrooms and churches throughout the mid-west, and south-east.

➤ **Breakout Session 1: Foundations of Cybersecurity**

Do you have online practices in place to protect ministry, church and congregation? This session will provide practical steps that form a platform of best practices. Protect your network and your communication channels. Develop a plan for data recovery and breach response. These will establish a foundation for a solid protection plan.

**Kurt Fuhr:** Regional Vice President – Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF). Kurt currently serves as the Regional Vice President for the newly formed Central Region of the LCEF. This position provides oversight, consultation, and supervision to ten (10) LCEF District Programs including; North and South Dakota, Minnesota North and South, Wisconsin North and South, Iowa East and West, Missouri, and Nebraska. Kurt was responsible for launching the new Region in December 2016, to allow LCEF to work smarter and more efficiently from a regional office closer to these District programs and their respective LCEF District Vice Presidents.

Kurt served the LCEF as District Vice President for the Minnesota South District for 18 years, from 1998 to 2016. His responsibilities included loan consultations and approvals with congregations and schools; demographics analysis and presentations; knowledge and promotion of LCEF investments and services; and ministry partner relationships with district staff, congregations, and schools.

Kurt's previous work experience included 15+ years in banking and mortgage banking related positions in the Twin Cities. Kurt and wife Liz are both graduates of UW – River Falls. Kurt completed a Master of Arts degree in 2014 from Bethel University, St. Paul in Organizational Leadership. Kurt and Liz live in Eden Prairie and are members at Living Christ, Chanhassen. They have two grown and married daughters, Sarah (and Mike), and Kristen (and Kyle), who all live in the Twin Cities metro area and are all serving in non-profit workplace settings.

➤ **Breakout Session 1: What is a Demographic Study? Why do a Demographic Study?**

Demographics are simply information about your community, including but not limited to; ages and ethnicities, income levels and population projections, education levels and occupations, and family structures and religious preferences.

Your community is a mission field. Demographics will certainly not provide all the answers, but will equip your ministry with information that will help paint a more complete backdrop of your community. This demographic data will help connect the dots between the people in the community and possible ministry needs that could be served.

---

**Rev. Amos Gray IV:** Amos was called into the ministry of Jesus Christ in 1999. Since then he has served as Youth Pastor for churches in Nebraska and Arkansas. He has served at Community of Grace, Beautiful Savior Lutheran, Mosaic Church of Central Arkansas, and First Lutheran Church, Hot Springs where he is currently the Associate and Youth Pastor. He was ordained as a Pastor in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod in January 2014.

Amos is actively involved in community outreach. He has partnered with Hot Springs School District in Hot Springs, Arkansas. This includes working with students, implementing and teaching a character education program at the junior and senior high schools, and working closely with teachers to support and train them to work with students on every level.

Amos started an after school program at the church which involves over 70 students each week and another program in the low income neighborhood of Hot Springs ministering to about 15 students and their families. He began a "Boys to Men" series during the summer with several young men in the city and continues to mentor them throughout the year.

Amos is the father of five children, Ashley, Alexis, Amos V, Joshua and Joel. He has one granddaughter, Ariana. He and his wife, Carol, live in Hot Springs, Arkansas where they enjoy raising their family and seeking to impact the next generation for a lifetime.

➤ **Breakout Session 1: Bridging the Gap Between Church and Community**

What is it in your community that is lacking? Jesus taught us to pray, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” In this workshop Pastor Amos Gray will share and teach on how the church become kingdom workers in their community and how the church can create a thumbprint in the community that will minister and reach the hurting and the lost for Jesus Christ.

➤ **Breakout Session 2: Building a Healthy Student Led Ministry**

Jesus said, “Let the children come to me.” In this workshop Pastor Amos Gray will share with you that we are not only to take our children to Jesus Christ through the waters of Baptism, confirmation and confession but we also must train them up to be impact leaders in the church and their generation, that they may take the Gospel to the ends of the world. These tried and tested principles and methods of developing student leaders will surely be a blessing for the body of Christ.

---

**Karen Hunter:** Karen Hunter taught in the public and private school settings for 13 years before landing what she considers her dream job as a stay at home mom. She still spends a lot of time in school as a parent volunteer, leads Ladies Bible studies at her church, and teaches creative classes in person and online. Karen loves to inspire others to bring their faith and creativity together and she’s designed and taught many faith-based creative classes and workshops. Most of her current classes focus on Bible journaling, which Karen passionately shares on multiple social media platforms. Her work has been featured on various blogs and in print and she helps design products for the Bible journaling community. She and her husband live with their daughter in Harpers Ferry, WV and attend Our Savior Lutheran Church in Winchester, VA.

➤ **Breakout Session 1 & 2: Bible Journaling and Visual Faith Practices**

In this session, Karen will introduce you to Bible journaling as a way to engage with scripture in a creative, visual, and hands-on way. She’ll walk you through various approaches to visual faith and discuss how Bible journaling can revitalize your faith, help to deepen your knowledge and understanding of scripture as you linger longer in the Word, strengthen your prayer life, and be a bolder witness to Christ’s love and salvation for His people.

---

**Rev. Todd Kollbaum:** Pastor Todd Kollbaum serves as Director of LCMS Rural & Small Town Mission. Prior to that, he served as Senior Pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Cole Camp, MO since August of 2004. He has been happily married to his wife Angela for 26 years. He enjoys helping Angela who currently serves St. Paul’s Lutheran Church in Concordia, MO as their Youth Leader. They are blessed with five pretty awesome youth of their own.

➤ **Breakout Session 1: Creating a Welcoming Congregational Culture**

In this session we will look at ways we can develop a culture within our congregations where we welcome the newcomer and assist in their assimilation.

➤ **Breakout Session 2: Congregational Leadership Strategies**

In this session we will look at practical ways our congregational leaders can plan and direct their ministries for maximizing servant leadership and community engagement.

---

**Doug LeClair:** Regional Representative, CIC – Church Mutual Insurance Company

➤ **Breakout Session 1: How safe is Your Congregation?**

Developing a Risk Management Program for insured and non-insured risks.

---

**Rev. Dr. John Oberdeck:** Dr. Oberdeck was a parish pastor in Southern Illinois for ten years, and served on the faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis in the Practical Department for thirteen years before coming to CUW in 2002, most recently serving as the Director of Lay Ministry. He retired in June 2017. He and his wife, Ginny, have three grown children and seven growing grandchildren.

➤ **Breakout Session 1: The Lutheran Room**

Are you a volunteer adult youth leader in a smaller congregation? Are you a full time staff member doing youth ministry with adult volunteers? If so, you know the challenges that exist for youth ministry and the need for mutual support. Learn about a new website designed to support, link, coordinate, inform, and encourage you in your vital ministry for the next generation. This session will be presented by, Professor John Oberdeck (Emeritus, CUW), DCE Andrew Cordy (Peace, New Berlin), and Director of Youth Ministry, and Nathan Ballard (Brookfield Lutheran). Supported by Chris Schmidt Stewardship Ministries.

---

**Dr. James Pingel, Ph. D.:** Dr. James Pingel currently serves as the Director of Graduate Education and Adjunct Professor of History Concordia University Wisconsin. He recently published two articles, “Christian School Leaders and the MIT (Most Important Thing)” and “Tip of the Spear: Turning the Mission On for Off-Campus Employees” in *The Pedagogy of Faith: Essays on Lutheran Education* (2016). In 2014, he published his first book entitled *Confidence and Character: The Religious Life of George Washington*.

Pingel previously served as Executive Director of Sheboygan Area Lutheran High School, Sheboygan, Wisconsin (2004-2013) and as a teacher, coach, Dean of Students, and Executive Director at Mayer Lutheran High School, Mayer, MN (1994-2004).

Pingel earned his PhD in Educational Leadership from Cardinal Stritch University, Milwaukee (2008), a MS in Educational Administration from Concordia University Wisconsin (2001), and a MA in Early American History from Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin (1994).

He and his wife, Michelle, are blessed with two children, Joshua and Josie. In his leisure time, Pingel enjoys reading, traveling, and watching his kids participate in high school athletics, theatre, and band.

➤ **Breakout Session 2: Inspiration for the Christian Coach**

Sports play such a significant role in our culture today. Some might say it even plays too significant a role. Perhaps, however, we can go where our people are and use the platform of sports to share and teach the Christian faith. Whether you are a sports fan, coach, parent, grandparent, or someone who loves our young people and know they are the future of the church, this sectional will provide inspiration and ways you can use the platform of sports to share and teach the faith and glorify God. Based on personal experience and research in his new book, *“One Team One Spirit: Inspiration for the Christian Coach,”* Dr. Pingel will challenge us all to fight the good fight, finish the race, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, keep the faith (2 Timothy 4:7).

---

**Diana Raasch:** Diana has served as the District Vice President for Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) and as the District Stewardship Executive since March 2013. Before coming to the District Office, Diana served 19 years at Concordia University Wisconsin in various roles. Diana has also worked as a technical recruiter.

Diana earned her MBA and BA degrees from Concordia, she also has a certificate from the LCMS Foundation as a Christian Gift Planner. She truly enjoys assisting individuals, couples, and families as they plan for their future.

Diana’s husband is Rev. Randolph Raasch; he has served at First Immanuel Lutheran Church, in Cedarburg since January 1989 and as an adjunct professor at Concordia since the early 1990. They have two daughters, Elizabeth and Sarah, sons-in-law Daniel and Patrick. They also have been blessed with three beautiful granddaughters, Madelyn, Ann and Emily.

➤ **Breakout Session 2: Building a Stewardship Culture**

How effective is your congregation in communicating stewardship to the people of God? Not everyone in the pew grew up in a church, hence the need to regularly teach biblical parables and Bible verses and then apply them. Among the myriad of worthy charitable organizations how can we lift up the mission of the Church? Diana will facilitate a discussion on stewardship best practices.

---

**Rev. Dr. Steven Schave:** The Rev. Dr. Steven Schave is director of LCMS Urban & Inner-City Mission (UICM) and Director of LCMS Church Planting for the Office of National Mission. In his work with UICM, Schave oversees efforts to boost revitalization in city ministries that reach out across cultures with the Gospel. He also oversees a national initiative to plant distinctly Lutheran churches, and in those places in the margins, he works to place network supported missionaries.

➤ **Breakout Session 1: The New Frontier for Global Missions – The United States**

This workshop will explore how the United States is fast becoming one of the greatest mission fields on Earth. Find out more about the *Mission Field: USA* initiative to reach new people in new places by starting new churches right here in our own backyards.

➤ **Breakout Session 2: Global U.S. Cities as Urban Mission Fields**

This workshop will explore urban missions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, both the challenges and the joys. While it may be a difficult context, it is a rewarding one that can be transformative for an entire community.

**Brenda Skelton:** Brenda has served as President & CEO of Siebert Lutheran Foundation, a private independent foundation based in Milwaukee, since August 2013.

Her career in the private sector prior to joining the Foundation includes serving as Senior Vice President, Marketing at Midwest Express Airlines over a 13-year period of sustained revenue growth; serving as Vice President of Communications at Northwestern Mutual, which leadership responsibility for the Northwestern Mutual Foundation; and managing a successful consulting practice, focusing on assisting nonprofit organizations in improving performance, increasing stakeholder engagement, and building stronger internal teams.

➤ **Breakout Session 1: Come Learn Whether Siebert's Priorities Fit with Your Ministry Plan!**

Siebert Lutheran Foundation President & CEO Brenda Skelton will provide an overview of the foundation's new strategic plan, funding priorities, geographic footprint and grant processes, all in support of growing the Kingdom, Sharing the Gospel while educating, and serving as the hands and feet of Christ. This \$100 million Pan-Lutheran foundation has granted over \$125 million since 1976 in the state of Wisconsin, particularly southeastern and annually funds \$4 million to Lutheran-affiliated ministries, schools and human care agencies. Come learn whether Siebert's priorities fit with your ministry plan!

---

**Ross Stroh:** Executive Director of LCMS Accounting and Financial Services since December 2013. He oversees the accounting department that prepares and maintains (on behalf of the LCMS Chief Financial Officer) all budgetary, accounting and financial records for corporate Synod.

Stroh has been with the Synod since 1992, overseeing budgeting and related financial matters for the LCMS mission department and some 64 foreign-mission fields. In the years 1990-92, he was a Business Officer in Panama City, Panama. Also prior to joining the Synod staff, Stroh worked in corporate accounting in the automotive and transportation industries.

He holds a Bachelor's degree in accounting from Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana, and a Master's degree in international business from Webster University, Webster Groves, Missouri.

➤ **Breakout Session 1: Overview of the LCMS Treasurers Manual**

During this session, Ross will cover the basics of the Treasurers manual.

➤ **Breakout Session 2: LCMS Treasurers Manual Q&A**

During this session, Ross will provide a more in depth understanding of Workers Compensation, Sales Tax, Tax exempt status, Business expenses and loans to staff.

---

**Paige Weslaski:** Paige is a marketing executive at Image Management, LLC, an advertising agency servicing the Midwest. Paige has a leadership degree from Pepperdine University in Los Angeles, manages a blossoming Christian online magazine entitled, *MilkNHoneyMagazine.com*, writes for Milwaukee Magazine, and manages websites/social media for hundreds of companies.

**Matt Sievert:** Matt is a social media and website marketing executive at Image Management, LLC. Matt manages social media and Google ranking for many companies in the Midwest and graduated from BYU with a degree in website marketing. Matt and his wife Tori just had their first child, Wesley!

➤ **Breakout Session 2: Fruitful Social Media/Online Presence for Your Church**

Your web presence tells a story. Learn how your website and social media can both attract young families and please existing members. Your website and social media should be three things: informative, encouraging and fun! Learn the do's and don'ts!

---

**Rev. Dr. John C. Wille:** Rev. John C. Wille has served as the president of the South Wisconsin District LCMS since 2006. As part of the Council of Presidents, he presently serves as the chairman of the Clergy Call and Roster Committee, on the Board of Regents at Concordia University Wisconsin, and on the Regents for Concordia Seminary St. Louis.

Rev. Wille has served congregations in Ohio, Central Illinois and South Wisconsin. Immediately prior to being elected President of the South Wisconsin District, he served as the church planter and founding pastor of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Tomah, Wisconsin, where he served for 16 years. He has served the church as a parish pastor, circuit counselor, District Vice-President, trained synod reconciler, as a church planter, and as a part of the Critical Incident Stress Management Team from South Wisconsin that was deployed to Alabama and Mississippi following Hurricane Katrina.

As the president of the South Wisconsin District he is responsible for ecclesiastical oversight of 214 congregations, multiple schools, high schools, Concordia University Wisconsin, along with the ordained and commissioned church workers that reside in South Wisconsin. As SWD president, Rev. Wille is also part of a unique partnership that is working to establish a new Lutheran Church body in the Dominican Republic.

In regards to continuing education, President Wille has completed Pastoral Leadership Institute plus two additional years of governance training, and he has participated in DOXOLOGY. He has also been trained in various methods of conflict resolution; those include LCMS training for reconcilers, Peter Steinke's 'Bridge Builders', as well as Ambassadors of Reconciliation.

Rev. Wille has been married to his wife, Lynette, for 38 years. They are blessed with three daughters; two of whom are married, one in Minnesota and one in California; the youngest now working in Washington D.C. They are blessed with six grandchildren. Rev. Wille's hobbies include: reading Lutheran theology, golf, canoeing in the BWCA, fishing, and yard work.

➤ **Breakout Session 2: Built on the Rock**

People do not come to church to fight. The devil rejoices when he is able to kindle a conflict in a local parish. The ability to understand and deal with a conflicted situation is vital in a congregation. There is a difference between conflict resolution and reconciliation. In the book Built on the Rock, Ted Kober provides pastors and laity alike the tools for conflict prevention and reconciliation. President Wille will provide a brief overview of what spiritual health and Christ-centered reconciliation look like.

**Rev. Dr. Mark A. Wood:** Rev. Dr. Mark A. Wood serves in the LCMS Office of National Mission as the director of the Witness & Outreach Ministry and the director of the LCMS Revitalization Initiative. He is the creator of the LCMS's *Every One His Witness* evangelism program and *re:Vitality* revitalization program. A second-career pastor with six years of active duty in the US Airforce and fourteen years of project management systems experience, he is an advocate of the Priesthood of All Believers and the use of the First Article gives (e.g.; best practices from business) to spread the Gospel. He is married to Mary Ellen with whom he shares five adult children and, much more importantly, six beautiful grandchildren and, to their astonishment, one great-granddaughter.

➤ **Plenary Session: Sharing the Simple Gospel in a Complex World**

The Gospel is simple, but the world is complex. How do we go about sharing God's Word with people who have values, world views, and even religious convictions that are contrary to Christianity? How do we respond to the indifference about and toward the Gospel that is increasing in our culture? As residents of the world's third-largest mission field, we face many challenges -- but we have tremendous opportunities. This look at Witness and Outreach explores ways to address these challenges and encourages us to joyfully respond to the opportunities we have to share the simple Gospel in our complex world.

➤ **Breakout Session 1: *re:Vitality: Lutheran Revitalization. What Does This Mean?***

With nearly 80% of our congregations in some stage of decline, revitalization is a hot topic among us. Everyone agrees that there is a great need for congregations to improve their well-being, but there are many different ideas about what revitalization should involve and include. The Synod's revitalization program, *re:Vitality*, approaches revitalization from a Lutheran perspective. It focuses on what we should do as a Church, not as a church in decline. Learn about the key concepts of *re:Vitality* and the low-cost resources that are being made available to LCMS congregations through the program.

➤ **Breakout Session 2: *Every One His Witness. Evangelism as Jesus Meant It to Be***

The topic of evangelism generates a lot of fear, angst, and guilt for many people. For a variety of reasons, they've come to see evangelism from a law-oriented point of view. They view evangelism as a burdensome task that demands obedience...and measurable success. Sadly, sharing the Good News of Jesus has become bad news for them. But that's not what Jesus meant evangelism to be. Learn how *Every One His Witness* approaches evangelism as a privilege in which Jesus invites us to share in His joy and that being a joy-filled witness of Jesus is God's purpose for us in our everyday lives.