



ANNUAL GATHERING 2020



The 2020 National Lutheran Secretariat Annual Gathering will definitely be remembered for years to come. For the first time since 1981 we were unable to gather together in person. Of course, we missed the comradery of being together. We missed the long chats over lunch and evening social hours. We missed the worship services and vespers together. We missed the palanca and especially the

abrazos. We missed seeing old friends and making new ones.

But even without those things, we still saw Jesus! We were able to love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind. We heard from some fantastic speakers about how to love God and how to take His love out into the world and love others.

It may have been unconventional, but God is still in control. He will get us through these tough times and the best is yet to come!

****All the blue lettering are links to videos and reports we encourage you to view at any time.****

IN THIS ISSUE

Annual Gathering Page 1

Worship Services Page 2

Keynote Page 2

Forums & Webinar Page 3

Board Reports Page 4

2021 Annual Gathering Page 5

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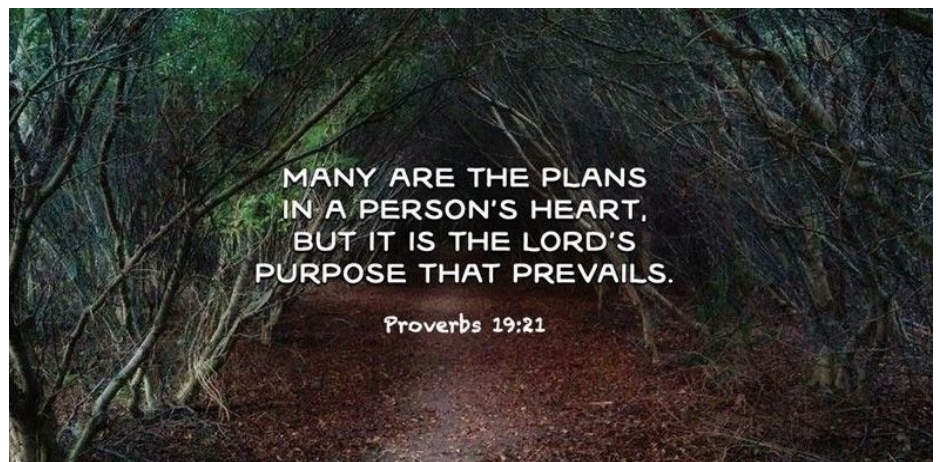
www.viadecristo.org



Our Mission Statement:

By grace, with the Holy Spirit,
we challenge leaders to
discover and achieve their
personal calling, assisting
them to influence their
environments with the
Gospel.

*Honored to be working
with you and serving
our Lord another year.
-Wendy Showalter*



WORSHIP SERVICES

Both Services were conducted by the National Lutheran Secretariat Spiritual Director, Pastor Sue Beall and assisted by Pastor Elaine Gomulka both of Texas Gulf Coast VdC.

The [Opening Worship](#) focused on this year's bible verse Matthew 22:34-40. A lawyer was trying to trip Jesus up but Jesus went on to teach us all what the greatest commandment is to love God and love others.

Sue went on to tell us *how* we are able to do this with no vengeance, no grudges, and no slander. Love is more than obeying the law, having the right ethics, voting a certain way, or volunteering. Love is more than warm feelings or being nice and friendly. Love is a *verb*! It is an action that requires prayer and listening to God so we know what action needs to be done.

In the [Closing Worship](#) Pastor Sue preached on Matthew 28: 16-20, which is often called the Great Commission, where Jesus sends all of us disciples out into the world. Through a powerful story, she shows how every life matters and can make a difference in the world. She referenced the One life that changed the world: Jesus!

She urged us to take the message of hope to all the world reminding us "we've been baptized and taught by Jesus Christ." We are created as one of a kind to change our environment and carry our Cross to family, church, Secretariat and world, especially in this time of Covid 19 virus.



Pastor Sue used a "butterfly" image in her message urging us "to break open our cocoon and fly with wings of grace to the world!" She describes the butterfly effect as "small changes in seemingly unrelated things or initial condition can affect large complex systems." This means the smallest influence on one part of a system can have a huge effect on another

part of the system. We are called, by Jesus, to be this change.

The Hymn of the Day was "Pass It On" and the refrain tied into the message "That's how it is with God's love... you want to pass it on!"

The Prayers were beautifully led by Pastor Elaine including the Lord's Prayer. Pastor Beall gave the Blessing and Benediction. Thanks and praise to both Pastors, the musicians, and all who worked behind the scenes to create beautiful and inspiring services.



KEYNOTE

The keynote address, [God is the Center](#), was given by Pastor Mark Marxhausen of Lutheran VdC of Minnesota while standing in a casket he built for himself about eight years ago. Why?

Because he said he has learned that death does not hurt and, like Paul, he wants to know the power of resurrection. God is the center and if we take Him out of the center, we just have another institution or organization gathered together at a meeting.

Via de Cristo is so much more than that because God is the center. We are chosen, called by Him, to go out into the world and make a difference. If we truly love our neighbor, we would want to reach out to them and invite them to a weekend.

Mark asked the question "Where is God taking us?" He believes that even though there have been some very powerful times in VdC, the best is yet to come and stresses that it is time once again for us all to say, "I'm in this!" It is time for us to rise up, to stay strong, to get out of that grave and and learn the power of resurrection.

FORUMS AND WEBINAR

Jeanne Gaston presented [God as the Center](#), the first of three forums. She gracefully shared with the listener heartfelt stories from her life of how the Lord led her to love with all her heart, soul, and mind and how those three work together to keep God the center of our lives. When God is your center, you are eager to share with others what God has given you. This way, they too can discover what God has to give them. Via de Cristo is a great way for us to share His love with others.

She posed the hard question, “How many of you hide what’s in your heart so others can’t see what you’re feeling, even though your mind says you should?” She reminded us that God being the center of our lives doesn’t guarantee things will be easy, but if we love Him with all our heart, mind and soul, He will help us deal with whatever comes our way. It’s about being in the presence of God and *knowing* He is in our presence.

[Fourth Day Journey](#) was given by Dave Reedstrom of Ignite VdC. He started by quoting some famous lines about love. Some include: “Love doesn’t make the world go round, love is what makes the ride worthwhile” - Elizabeth Browning; “Love is the irresistible desire to be irresistibly desired” - Mark Twain; “We love because He first loved us” - 1 John 4:19.

He told us that Jesus didn’t mean for us to use part of our heart, or some of our soul, or a piece of our mind. Scripture says ALL for a reason. Our whole person, our whole being should love this way, not just a part. If you find it impossible to love your neighbor, it becomes possible through loving God first. God not only tells us to love our neighbor, but He reshapes our hearts to make it possible. We can’t fully love our neighbor unless we first love God. Also, we can’t fully demonstrate our love of God unless we love our neighbor.

In [What Do We Do with All That?](#) Shelli Shwind of Wisconsin Sunrise VdC presented her message of finding and living in God’s peace. She tenderly invited each listener to look within and identify the people in our own lives that have brought us to places of hurt, hate, mistrust, anger, fear and other places of unrest in our own lives. She led us to identify those that we have deemed “unworthy” of our love.

Through the true story of Solomon Northrup, *12 Years a Slave*, Shelli asked questions that drew us into our own soul-searching. Who in this story was deserving of love? Surely Solomon and his family who had been so deeply wronged. What about the slave owner who mistreated Solomon and so many other slaves? What about the captors who chose to earn a living capturing people and selling them for profit? She reminded us that God loved them all. As children of God, we are called to do the same and to love one another AS HE LOVED US.

How can we love radically? Two words – Forgiveness and Grace. Shelli asked us to reach deep inside our souls to commit ourselves to loving others as God loves us. We are called to forgive those who have trespassed against us, those we have declared unworthy of our love, those we have turned away from or cut out of our lives or denied to receive our love. Each of us may be surprised by what happens when we show forgiveness, grace, and the same radical love God has shown us over and over. God will see us through this and move mountains to make it possible. He will walk with us every step of the way. If we take up this challenge, we may find the peace we’ve been longing for – The peace of God which transcends all understanding and will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus.

[“Logos” How to Attract the Younger Generation](#) was presented by Donna Blalock of Texas Lutheran VdC. She gave a wonderful informational talk about teenage weekends modeled after the VdC weekends that we are all so familiar with. These weekends, which can include an outreach local service project, are put on largely by teens and supported by adults. They run from Friday evening through Sunday and are hosted by local churches. The LOGOS organization has a central theme based upon 1 Timothy 4:12, 15-16 as well as a mission statement. There are defined weekend roles such as Rector, OP (Next Weekend Rector), Big Room Mom & Dad, Group Leaders, Music Team, Gofer (they keep their supplies in the Gofer hole!) Kitchen, 4th Day and of course Spiritual Directors.

Participants are ages 14-18 (9th-12th grade) and the weekends are led mostly by teens who have previously participated. There are adults present in important roles but as support, not “control” or running the weekend. There are usually 2 team building sessions before the weekend and a lock-in the night before to prepare. Local 4th Day Community participation is encouraged to help throughout the weekend as well as dropping off ‘Palanca’ or as they call it ‘Carnitas’.

If you are interested in starting a teen weekend program in your area, Donna will be happy to share program material with you. Please contact her at blalock9@swbell.net or phone: 830-660-8286

NLS BOARD REPORTS

****Click on each name to view their Annual Report.****

On behalf of the NLS Executive Committee and the entire Via de Cristo Community,
we send out thanks to three members for their service to the VdC ministry --

Regional Coordinator Kim Brownlow

Regional Coordinator Chris Rasmussen

Database Coordinator Dave Lambert

Their contributions will long be remembered.

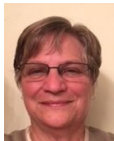
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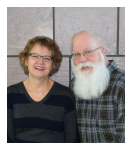


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2021 ANNUAL GATHERING



The 2021 National Lutheran Secretariat Annual Gathering will be held July 22-25, 2021 at Texas Lutheran University in Seguin, TX. Seguin is located approximately 45 miles east of San Antonio and 55 minutes south of Austin. You can fly into either airport and we will provide transportation both to and from either airport to TLU! If you want to make a family vacation out of your trip, there are so many great things to do in the surrounding cities.

Just 20 minutes away is Schlitterbahn, the world's greatest water park. It is very family friendly and allows you to bring in your own food and drinks (no alcohol or glass bottles) and claim your own shaded picnic table for the day! It is nestled on the Guadalupe River which is a favorite

among the locals to float the river for the day! San Antonio is close by which features the Alamo and the downtown Riverwalk where you can ride the riverboats, eat and shop. Austin, our state's capital and home of the University of Texas Longhorns, is close by and features the famous library of President Lyndon Baines Johnson. His family ranch is also close by! Houston is about two and half hours away, Galveston is about three and a half hours away, and Dallas is about four hours away. There is so much to do in these cities as well as along the roads as you travel near and far.

We are planning to offer a pre-conference motorcoach trip on Wednesday afternoon/evening to the downtown Riverwalk in San Antonio for those who arrive early! The banquet on Saturday night will be an event you don't want to miss.

So plan your trip to Texas next summer ya'll! It will be a week to remember and a special time to see one another again as we celebrate the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ!



CONEXIONES is an official publication of the National Lutheran Secretariat (NLS), which is a national organization of affiliated Via de Cristo (VdC) secretariats across the United States. VdC, or Way of Christ, is the Lutheran expression of the Cursillo® renewal movement developed within the Roman Catholic Church in the late 1940's. The Lutheran VdC ministry began in Florida and Iowa in 1972.

The **CONEXIONES** is a quarterly publication to inform affiliated secretariats and their members, Lutheran Bishops, along with District Presidents about VdC / NLS events and activities.

CONEXIONES subscriptions are free to affiliated secretariats. If you know of an affiliated secretariat not receiving this publication, please contact a member of the Executive Committee found on page 4. Subscriptions to the public are \$6.00 annually and can be purchased by contacting NLS Treasurer, Jim Ryan at treasurer@viadecristo.org.

To submit content for the CONEXIONES (news, photos, articles, or inspirational bits) email the **CONEXIONES** Editor at newsletter@viadecristo.org.

Newsletter Deadlines:

Winter Edition: January 10th

Spring Edition: April 10th

Summer Edition: July 30th

Fall Edition: October 10th

Special thanks to those that graciously helped write articles for this newsletter:

Pastor Doug Givan - INKY

Jill Norell - Ignite

Shelli Shwind - Wisconsin Sunrise

Susanne Bathe - Texas Gulf Coast