

# Concordia Through the Ages



A Commemorative Booklet of Concordia's Life

1894 – 2026



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## **Introduction**

One hundred and thirty two years ago, a small group of dedicated Lutherans trusted God to guide them to grow into a community dedicated to liturgical worship, music, education, outreach, stewardship, and fellowship. Over the years, members of Concordia have spent time articulating and applying their mission, vision, and purpose.

### **Concordia's Mission Statement (developed in 1993):**

In response to the Resurrection of Christ and God's gift of the Spirit in Baptism, Concordia Lutheran Church strives to be a living priesthood of believers which provides:

- a place for worship and spiritual nourishment through the preaching of the Word and the celebration of the Sacraments
- a focus for service, education, and outreach to the local and global community
- opportunities for fellowship and involvement in mutual joys and concerns, witnessing to one another and to all others.

### **Concordia's Vision Statement (developed in 1994):**

God has called us together to be His servant in an increasingly indifferent and unloving world. In faithfulness to that call, we commit ourselves to:

- continue to nurture our present ministries;
- reach beyond these ministries to offer hospitality to populations in need of experiencing God's love, especially children, youth, and families;
- subject all our goals and objectives to the discipline of God's word;
- involve all our members in the decision-making and implementation of our shared call.

### **Concordia's new mission statement (adopted in 2011):**

As Lutheran Christians, Concordia understands that God is calling us to be:

- A Christian Community with responsibility to support each other, our neighborhood, and the larger community.
- A Gathered Assembly marked by practices of prayer, study, reflection, and worship.
- Selfless Disciples who communicate and practice the faith through acts of faithful stewardship, service and forgiveness.

### **Concordia's WHY/Purpose Statement:**

To be a welcoming and inviting community empowered by the Word of God;  
So that we may work for social justice and exhibit compassion for all

## History of Concordia Lutheran Church 1894-2026

Representatives from twenty-four families officially organized the “German Evangelical Lutheran Concordia Congregation” on March 5, 1894.

The charter members were: Alfred Kirschsieper, Fred Montie, Fred Kashbohm, Henry Schuetz, Jr., Thomas Hahn, Carl Schuetz, Martin Koppisch, William Priess, Fritz Hoepfer, John Lautenbach, John Zerver, Fred Bieber, William Kashbohm, Carl F. Schuetz, Fred Zerver, B. C. Apel, William Schmidke, Conrad Wehr, Charles Staye, Otto Mannel, Henry Custer, Louis Schmidt, Emil Hohls, and Theodore Hoeffner.

Many pastors served throughout the 132 years.

1894-1896	The Rev. Hugo Erdmann	1973-1986	The Rev. Burton D. Strand
1896	The Rev. Hartwig	1974-1977	The Rev. David W. Rinas
1896-1898	The Rev. Paul Lemke	1977-1981	The Rev. David B. Stacy
1899-1906	The Rev. Lothar Bronke	1983-1996	The Rev. Arnold Wangerin
1906-1908	The Rev. G. A. Von Nicelli	1986-1995	The Rev. Dr. Kim Eric Williams
1908-1909	The Rev. Gustav Gille	1995-1997	The Rev. Rebecca Bourret
1909-1914	The Rev. Otto Rappolt	1998	The Rev. Thadius Platt
1914-1924	The Rev. Hermann Stippich	1998-2000	The Rev. Dr. Martha Klein Larsen
1924-1933	The Rev. Herman Weber	2001-2005	The Rev. Jonathan Vogel
1933-1950	The Rev. Karl Richter	2005-2014	The Rev. JoAnn Post
1950-1958	The Rev. Erich O. Brandt	2014-2015	The Rev. Dr. Rolf Hedberg
1959-1965	The Rev. Paul C. Kaiser	2015-2020	The Rev. Douglas Barclay
1966-1972	The Rev. Joseph E. Bourret	2020-2021	The Rev. John Marschhausen
1967-1970	The Rev. Louis E. Bauer, Jr.	2021-2025	The Rev. Dr. Rolf Hedberg

Pastor Hugo Erdmann of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Hartford was called as the first pastor. Services were held twice a month.

In 1896, Pastor Paul Lemke succeeded Pastor Erdmann and served for the next two years. The congregation grew to 32 voting members. Incorporation papers were filed in 1897.

In 1898, Pastor Lothar Brunke was called as the third pastor. The congregation had 81 communing members. Work on a building that would seat 160 began and a cornerstone was laid on August 13, 1899.

The church, on the corner of Winter and Garden Streets in Manchester, was dedicated on the Festival of the Annunciation, March 25, 1900.



In 1906, Pastor G. A. von Nicelli became Concordia's first resident pastor. During his ministry, the building debt was eliminated.

Pastor Gustave Gille became the fifth pastor and the congregation experienced slow and steady growth.

Pastor Otto Rapport was called as the sixth pastor in 1909.



A large parsonage was constructed next to the church of 108 voting members.





Pastor Hermann Stippich was called as the seventh pastor in 1914.

He introduced the “Common Service Book” as the Sunday Liturgy, which remained the worship resource for the congregation from 1915 through 1959. Also in 1917, championed by organist Ivan Beckwith, a two manual pipe organ was dedicated. Pastor Stippich was a promoter of quality music. He encouraged Frederic Werner to be a musician and Fred’s distinguished service as organist began Concordia’s tradition of excellence in music.

On June 2, 1918, the silver anniversary, the steeple bell was dedicated. The congregation had grown by 400% since its organization.

Pastor Herman O. Weber was called in 1924. During this time the first English services were held. Prior to this Concordia worshipped in German.



During the 1930s Concordia sponsored a town league baseball team.



In 1933, Pastor Karl Richter became the ninth pastor of Concordia, remaining in the position longer than any other pastor during the first century of the congregation. He was the first American-born pastor.

In 1945, the congregation honored Fred Werner for 25 years of service as organist.

Women received the right to vote at congregational meetings in 1945 and have gradually assumed more and more leadership roles in the congregation. Women have served as council presidents and made up a majority of council members in later years.

A cradle roll was kept documenting the congregation's children.



In 1950, Pastor Erich O. Brandt was called.

As the tenth shepherd of Concordia, he went to work uniting the congregation and bringing it into the modern age. Altar Guild, Luther League, Summer Vacation Church School, a couple's club (We Two) were all started. In 1952, the first issue of the monthly newsletter, the "Chimes", was published. Pastor Brandt had a strong interest in Education and chaired the synod's Christian Education Committee.

A parsonage was purchased on Parker Street in 1953. The old parsonage was converted to a parish house with 9 classrooms, a church office, and a nursery. In 1955, the first “every Member Visit” took place.

In June of 1956, the roll of members was 658 baptized and 511 confirmed. After a unanimous vote of the congregation on June 24, 1957, following the recommendation of the Future Needs Committee, the 5.5 acre Pitkin farm was purchased.

The first enlargement of the staff occurred when Elsie Werner became Parish Secretary, a position she fulfilled with distinction and very little salary until 1988, having trained Nancy Gutreich to take her place.

Pastor Brandt is remembered as a teacher and a kind and gentle man whose humor was infectious. He brought Concordia to new life and made it a vital part of the synod and whole church.

In 1959, the eleventh shepherd, Pastor Paul Kaiser, was called. He brought energy and enthusiasm and was uniquely gifted as a fundraiser, visitor, and theologian.



Soon after his arrival, the Fastnacht tradition was introduced, bringing together all ages for a pre-Lenten dinner with entertainment. There were 455 communicants and 193 enrolled in Sunday School.

Pastor Paul was a talented liturgist. He introduced the red “Service Book and Hymnal” and increased the frequency of celebrating the complete communion liturgy with vestments of alb, chasuble, and stole. Through this Concordia became one of the first New England Lutheran churches to restore the ancient ecumenical usage by the church. The Fisherman group was formed in 1960, providing monthly contact with prospective and lapsed members.

In July 1958, after purchasing the Pitkin farm, the “Ventures in Faith” building campaign began as a way to accommodate the growth of Concordia and the town itself. Local architect Arnold Lawrence developed plans, and the ground breaking took place on November 24, 1960. The Pitkin Street church was built and dedicated on October 8, 1961. The move to the new building was an important step in becoming a church dedicated to ministering to people in Manchester and stepping away from the “German Church” identity of the past. The cornerstone from the

old church was moved to the education wing of the new church. The 20 rank Austin Organ was dedicated on December 17, 1961, revealing the exquisite acoustics of the building.



Barbara Baker became our first parish worker in 1961. She served as Concordia's Parish Worker for thirty-five years, from 1961 to 1996. Barbara was involved in just about all aspects of the life of Concordia, including but not limited to: Christian Education, Youth, Stewardship, Evangelism, Social Ministry, Fellowship, and, Worship and Music. She was the first one in the building and the last one out at night nearly every day. Short of presiding and preaching at worship, she did everything and was everywhere.



During those thirty-five years, she worked in partnership with nine different pastors to

ensure that Concordia's programming was solid. She was actively involved in all programs of Manchester Area Conference of Churches (MACC), leading Concordia to be one of MACC's founding congregations. In this regard, she taught Concordians to "reach beyond" Concordia into the community.

Lena Schubert was the sexton for the new building and was responsible for coordinating the Altar Guild for more than 30 years.



Concordia began a tradition of maintaining a wonderful facility and sharing it with other faith communities and non-profit organizations including New Horizon Baptist, Ministerio Nueva Creación, Indian Christian Church, AA groups, Scouts (Boys & Girls), Manchester Board of Education, Time out for Parents, Manchester Memorial Hospital Auxiliary, and many more.

On November 6, 1963, David Almond, the son of a former South Methodist Church minister, became the organist/choirmaster. David was attracted to the Lutheran Church because of its musical traditions and built a tradition of excellence in music that continued throughout Concordia's life. An Abendmusik series featured the very best in choral repertoire. David served as organist for more than 25 years and was known for his skill in playing and composing and for starting a children's choir.

Pastor Kaiser resigned in 1965, having transformed the congregation. His enthusiasm for the Gospel and its power to change people remains a legacy in the congregation.

The twelfth pastor to serve Concordia was Joseph E. Bourret. He was a fine preacher, thinker, and stewardship advocate. He valued the worship and built on the traditions introduced by Pastor Kaiser. Lay deacons were introduced in 1970. First Communion was separated from Confirmation and was now offered in fifth grade or earlier.

The congregation paid off the mortgage in 12 years. Pastor Bourret helped Concordia understand that we are the church, responsible for our mission in the community and world.



The first assistant pastor, Louis E. Bauer, Jr., was called in 1967 and ordained at Concordia. Pastor Bauer was an intellectual, a political liberal, and worked well with youth, providing support, fellowship, and encouragement. The Concordia Public Affairs Series attracted large numbers of people, and provided a space in which racial, social and drug problems were

openly discussed. After three years, Pastor Bauer accepted a call in Gloucester, MA.



A cooperative babysitting arrangement was implemented in 1968, eventually becoming the Concordia Nursery School and existing until closing in 2026.



The thirteenth pastor of Concordia, Burton D. Strand, was installed on May 20, 1973, after Pastor Bourret's resignation. Since membership was 858 baptized and 435 communing, David W. Rinas was called to Co-Pastor with Pastor Strand in November of 1974.

Pastor Rinas was known for his gentleness, kindness, and work with youth. He was the first pastor to be married at Concordia. He helped cut through red tape during Concordia's work in refuge support. The basketball hoop was installed in the hall and window protection added, giving Concordia's basketball team a place to practice and many years of fun. Pastor

Rinas resigned August 14, 1977 with a call to a parish in St Croix.





Associate Pastor David B. Stacy was ordained and installed at Concordia on

September 25, 1977. Pastor Stacy was known for his work in social ministry and helping Concordia minister to several Indo-Chinese refugees in Manchester. The congregation became unable to support two pastors and Pastor Stacy resigned in December of 1981, having accepted a call at Gloria Dei in Providence, RI.

The thirteen years of Pastor Strand's ministry were years of consolidation. The Eucharist was celebrated at both services on Sundays. The music and education programs were strengthened. The Lutheran Book of Worship was introduced in 1978.

Beginning in 1973, the Willet Company of Philadelphia was engaged to install a series of faceted glass windows. These are not stained glass, but rather consist of large chunks of glass placed in epoxy resin to form a mosaic-like pattern.



In 1983, Pastor Arnold T. Wangerin, Jr., a retired pastor, became Assistant Pastor with a focus on ministering to the elderly.



During Pastor Strand's ministry, the work of the wider church became a top priority, starting a tradition of honoring our commitment to Synod contributions. A spirit of generosity was encouraged. He is remembered fondly for his sermons with movie illustrations, work with the Synod and national church and his love for antique cars and the Boston Red Sox. In 1986, Pastor Strand accepted a call to St. Peter's Church in Harwich, MA.

In January 25, 1987, Pastor Kim-Eric Williams began his ministry in Manchester as Concordia's fourteenth shepherd. In June of 1987, the tradition of celebrating the third Sunday in June as Concordia's Name Day began. A "Concordian(s) of the Year" tradition recognized people for their service each Name Day. In September of 1987, a new venture in music education was launched: the Ecumenical Choir School.



In June of 1988, Elsie Werner retired. On Reformation Sunday of the same year, a free-standing altar crafted by Barbara Reifschneider was dedicated. Then on Thanksgiving Eve, the congregation recognized David Almond for 25 years as Minister of Music.



Art Hube designed a church logo for Concordia that remained in use until closing. It showed a central cross that is superimposed on three hearts. Pastor Williams designed a unique town-wide Good Friday observance, the "Way of the Cross". Hundreds gathered to walk through Manchester, visiting 10 stations while following a life-size cross.

In August of 1990, David Almond resigned. Allan Conway, an ELCA Associate in Ministry, became the new organist and choir director at the end of that year.

In Concordia's Centennial year, a celebratory event was held each month. Concordia counted 794 baptized and 414 communing members, and continued to be known throughout New England for its concern for others and leadership in worship and music.





In 1995, Pastor Rebecca Bourret returned to the church of her childhood as our Interim Pastor. Over the course of just a couple of years, Concordia attended to the particular tasks of intentional interim ministry--examining and making sense of Concordia's history, discerning a new identity both connected to

In 1997, Pastor Martha Klein Larsen was called to serve Concordia. She worked with Concordia to find a path forward in a difficult time. Her lovely voice, cheerful disposition and dedication to the liturgy is remembered as are her children's sermons with their visual aids, enjoyed by young and old alike.

and distinct from the past, navigating shifts in leadership and strengthening the relationships with the synodical and churchwide expressions of the ELCA. Pastor Bourret gently moved Concordia into the future with excellence in preaching and teaching. Pastor Bourret had a kind but firm way of shepherding, always with a commitment to the Gospel. During those two short years, the Worship and Memorial Garden came into being and the LOGOS program for families took place.



Pastor Jonathan Vogel served Concordia from 2001-2005. He brought a new approach to worship and ministry. A

contemporary service with instrumentalists and singers was provided on Sunday mornings. Concordia continued its association with MACC. There was a very active youth program and Thursday morning Bible Study was a popular place to discuss God's word. The Mutual Ministry Committee was started during this time, shifting from a business-like personnel committee to one with a dual purpose in support of staff.

Pastor JoAnn Post came to Concordia in 2005, serving until 2014. She continued our traditions of excellent worship and music, strong lay leadership, education, and preaching. A Catechetics mentoring program was established, as was a greater connection with the Nursery School. Pastor Post recognized it was time to update our facility, and the “Open the Doors” campaign kicked off. This renovation made the building facilities more usable, with a new office area, a garden room, updated

restrooms, a renovated education wing, and much-needed accessibility improvements such as an elevator and level entrances to the building.



In 2015, Concordia called its last full-time shepherd, Pastor Douglas D. Barclay, who stayed with Concordia into 2020. He shared with Concordia his love of liturgy and music. Pastor Barclay continued our traditions of excellence in preaching and education and brought new ideas. He also encouraged renovations such as solar panels on the new roof, carpeting, and air conditioning. He fostered a strong relationship with St Mary’s Episcopal Church, including them in our shared worship, education, and fellowship. His kindness, caring, and sense of humor were an asset to Concordia in all aspects of its life. He pointed out that the aging population was a cause for concern and encouraged Concordia to build relationships with groups using the building.

He developed a Relationship with Pastor Persida Rivera-Méndez, a United Church of Christ pastor, and helped bring her worshipping community, Ministerio Nueva Creación (MNC), to the New England Synod as a Synodically Authorized Worshipping Community, housed at Concordia. Joint catechetics instruction with MNC was held. Concordia members attended MNC Bible Study. Pastor Barclay also was instrumental in the formation of the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance (GHIAA), an arm of the Center for Leadership and Justice that works for social justice in the Hartford Area.

On October 29, 2017, Concordia hosted the 500th commemoration of the Reformation for the Connecticut New England Synod congregations. The Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Hartford, The Most Reverend Leonard Blair and the Bishop of the New England Synod, The Reverend James Hazelwood presided.

In 2020, Retired Pastor John Marshhausen joined Concordia as transition pastor with the challenging ministry of pandemic pastoral care and a congregation facing an uncertain future. Worship was held in the Worship and Memorial Garden when the weather permitted, and by Zoom when not. He kept Concordia going when we couldn't meet from September of 2020 through

August 2021, reaching out with phone calls and prayer during our discernment process.



Pastor Rolf Hedberg

served as transition pastor for Concordia on two separate occasions. The first was 2014-2015, after Pastor Post and prior to Pastor Barclay. He helped us through the process of calling a new pastor.

His second time with Concordia as transition pastor was from 2021 through Christmas 2025, probably longer than Pastor thought it would last. He kept Concordia going with honesty, intelligence, and his sense of humor. He stayed with Concordia through the process of discernment about the future. During this time Pastor Persida retired and Bea Luciano-Santiago became MNC's lay minister. The combined MNC and Concordia Bible Study continued. Bea later entered seminary to become a Lutheran pastor.

Although our future was uncertain, the Concordia Pop-Up Shop was established. It offered clothing and household goods to families of students from Highland Park and Bowers Elementary Schools, and continued Concordia's mission to serve.

Following Pastor Hedberg's departure at Christmas of 2025, Concordia was lovingly cared for by Pastors Rebecca Bourret and Ann Lovejoy Johnson, who led worship and provided pastoral care for which the congregation is extremely grateful.

Associate to the Bishop Pastor Maria Hammons served as the contact for meetings of the Congregation Council and the congregation. Concordia is grateful for Pastors Sara Anderson and Maria Hammons who skillfully and caringly facilitated many of Concordia's difficult decision-making meetings about the future. They helped Concordia through the process of discernment about the future. It was a long, complicated, prayerful, painful, emotional process with extensive investigation, surveys, meetings, discussions and votes. Leadership spent many hours in prayer and discussion of options, approaches, and in communication with the congregation. The vote to close Concordia was a painful one.

## Other People of Concordia

### Administrative Staff

#### Parish Secretaries/Parish Administrators



In 1958, Elsie Werner became the first Parish Secretary. She served in this role for 30 years, until her retirement in 1988. She was a wealth of knowledge about the Concordia community and supported the many pastors, council and committee leaders during her years of service. She also trained and shared her knowledge with her successor – Nancy Gutreich.

Nancy began to help out in the office well before Elsie retired and enjoyed assisting Concordia leaders with the variety of tasks they were in charge of for the church. She was also there as a listening ear and as someone to lean on when members faced times of loss and grief. She worked well with other staff members and enjoyed the camaraderie that came along with being at the hub of the church. She continued to serve through 2005.



Several Parish Administrators were hired in succession to assist Concordia's pastors and lay leaders, including Kate Bozzo, Jane Geason, Lucy Taveras, and Margie Gallagher. Each one had a special talent for assisting members in their times of need and made life easier for the pastors and lay leaders serving to fulfill Concordia's mission.



## Parish Worker

None of the above staff should be confused with our long-term Parish Worker, Barbara Baker. Barbara began her work at Concordia in 1961 and was a loving, welcoming presence to all throughout the years until 1996. Her communication skills and connection to others brought people to fuller participation in the life of the congregation throughout her decades of service.



She'd place calls to members to personally invite them to activities. She'd catch an eye as she returned to the choir loft from communion, giving a small smile that simply spoke from her heart: "Peace to you". She spoke quietly about her understanding of scripture and how our daily actions and decisions were important as people following in Christ's footsteps. It's been said she was the soul of Concordia. Her retirement left a loss that was felt by all.

## Organists/Ministers of Music

Frederic Werner was the first Organist who served Concordia for 25 years from 1920 through 1945. He had been encouraged by one of the early pastors of the congregation and began the tradition of excellence that persisted throughout the life of Concordia.



Another long-term Organist for the church was David Almond.

He became the Organist/Choirmaster in late 1963 and continued to serve with distinction until shifting to a congregation in West Hartford in 1990. Late in his term of service, an Ecumenical Choir School was launched using a curriculum from the Royal School of Church Music in England.



In December of 1990, Allan Conway became the new Organist and Choir

Director. He composed the tune to Concordia's hymn, "O Life That Flames Forth", and was another Organist know for musical excellence.

Along came Richard Hicks, Minister of Music extraordinaire! His passion and energy for the music of the church was appreciated by all members and attendees of services. During his time at Concordia, he hosted several recitals, welcoming the community to hear the wonderful music of not only the church but the wider world as well. He retired as Minister of Music in 2015.



Shortly thereafter, we asked John Anderson to play for us. He ended up "filling in" for the vast majority of Sundays throughout the next 10 years! His delightful playing is also at the highest level, and the church has hosted more recitals featuring his playing so that all may enjoy the music.

Linda Hilliard also played at this time and directed the choir during festivals.



Over the course of Concordia's history, several of its members became Lutheran pastors, including: Gunther J. Stippich, Ernest Ralph Walek, Rebecca Bourret, Timothy Stevens, Richard Burgess, and Barbara Reifschneider.

### **Council**

The leadership of the church was elected by members of Concordia to make decisions regarding the direction of worship, programming, community service, and outreach. Council's 8-12 members were installed during a church service each year to bring their gifts of time and talent to the congregation. The business of the church was conducted on a monthly basis with prayer and conversation, often with an

annual retreat to refocus and refresh leaders as they worked to carry out the mission and vision of Concordia.



### **Executive Board**

Member volunteers who have served as officers of Council truly have dedicated tremendous amounts of time and energy to the business and mission of the congregation. Numerous Council Presidents are to be thanked, but it would be remiss to not speak about those who led Concordian through its final stages, particularly David Smith and Mark Winzler. Both gave countless hours over many years. Their love for the church and its members is strong and true.

In addition, Concordia's final Treasurer, Carol Stoneman, served for more than 10 years! Prior to her tenure, Concordia had the good fortune to be served by Treasurers Steve Perkins, John Corl, Ernie and Millie Scott, and Norman Litke.



Many other volunteers, such as Deacons, Acolytes, Ushers, and Greeters, enhanced the worship experience. Volunteers also cared for young children during worship, provided luncheons after funerals, and otherwise kept Concordia going.

### Committees and Ministries

Some of the first committees and groups which formed in the early years of Concordia's existence include Ladies Aid (100 members), Youth Group (50 members), Reformation Organization (25 members), and Sunday School (90 children).

In 1950, Ladies Aid began an Altar Guild to attend to worship space preparation and decoration as well as communion preparation and clean-up.



Concordia's Luther League was also formed in 1950, and flourished for many years. This later grew into our very active Youth Group (more below). In 1952, a married couple's group, the "We Two Group", was established and was very active with social and community activities.

In the 1950s, the Christian Education Committee began so that Sunday School teachers and other lay leaders could be more intentional about deepening their skills and understanding of the scriptures.

#### Sunday School



## Catechetics



In the summer of 1951, Vacation Bible School was held with Emanuel Lutheran Church for the first time. This continued as an annual tradition into the early 2000s as Vacation Church School, giving young children a chance to learn about God.



Other educational opportunities included: Bible Studies and Symposiums on Drugs, Race, and Death & Dying



As early as the 1950s, youth of Concordia regularly attended the National Youth Conventions held around the country. They were still doing so in the 1990s and early 2000s. This contributed to a very active Youth Group throughout much of the church's existence.



An Evangelism Committee was active for years, which made visits to every member of the congregation.

With many years of resounding success, the Concordia Nursery School was led by highly committed teachers and childcare providers, including directors: Julia Shrider, Beverly Strand, Patti Herdic, Kathy Gavin, Heather Adams, Laura Hart, and Ashley Salerno. A Nursery school Board supported this important ministry.



In the early 1970s, the Worship & Music Committee was established to continue the tradition of planning and providing beautifully uplifting music at every service. Because Concordia had such musical talent, many concerts were held over the years for the enjoyment of the wider community.

Concordia Choir



Ecumenical Choir School



Around 1977, the Social Ministry Committee was established. Its initial purpose was to provide assistance to refugee families and it then expanded to include service to the greater community. Concordia was instrumental in the development of a homeless shelter in town, and many from Concordia served on the committees that led to the creation of the shelter that was eventually set up through MACC.

In the early 1980s, the Stewardship Committee was active, particularly during the Heart-to-Heart campaign, in which each member was visited by a team of two Council members. This Committee continued to meet and communicate with members about the importance of giving of their time, talents, and funds to the congregation and community. Numerous cottage meetings gave people the opportunity to share in small groups.

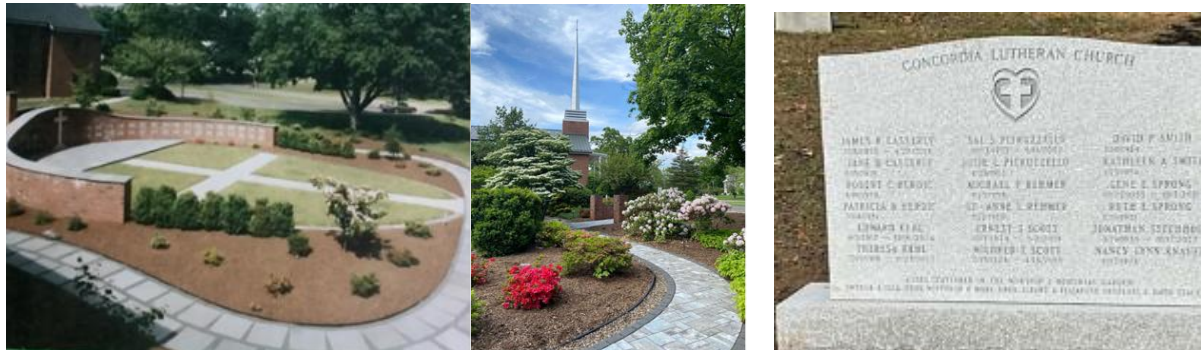


The Outreach Committee was also re-invigorated in the 1980s. It came together on a regular basis to provide items such as necessities bags for cancer patients, quilts for infants and families, and support for families of Highland Park School experiencing particular need. The latter included the Pop-Up Shop, which gathered donated clothing and household goods, allowing families to “shop” from these items.



In the 1990s, the Legacy Board was created to oversee the use of funds received from current and past members or their families.

The Worship & Memorial Garden was developed during 1995, as was the Garden Board, to provide an outside worship space and interment location. Ashes of many of those who had been interred in the Garden were moved to East Cemetery upon closing.



The Fellowship Committee was active on and off throughout the years, hosting events such as coffee hour, game nights, movie nights, and lunches out after worship.



In 2001, the Mutual Ministry Committee was developed to be a confidential sounding board for the pastor and to assist in resolving any concerns of either the pastor or Congregation.



The Member Care Committee arranged activities such as visits to home-bound members, and senior luncheons.



Another long-standing committee was the Property Committee, members of which worked quietly to maintain both the inside and outside of the church property.



Concordia was one of the founding members of the Manchester Area Conference of Churches (MACC), supporting them not only financially but also with seasonal sharing, year-round food donations, clothing donations, and by volunteering at the shelter. We also participated in many activities such as "Faith in Action" and "God's Work our Hands".



Concordia was a founding member of the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance (GHIAA), an arm of the Center for Leadership and Justice that works for social justice in the Greater Hartford community.



Community organizing event at Asylum Hill Hartford



### Events and Activities

In 1959, an annual tradition of celebrating Fastnacht began. This pre-Lenten dinner and entertainment attracted Concordians of all ages. Entertainment included an oompah band and a hilariously written play penned by Barbara Baker and a few co-conspirators for various members to act in or a talent show. Later, Oktoberfest was added.



Some of the favorite Youth Group activities included camping with beach days at Cape Cod, Burlingame, and Hammonasset as well as trips to the Big-E, fishing, movie nights, sleepovers, and Dairy Queen visits. There was also a youth basketball team.



In 1961, there was a festive procession to the newly built church at 40 Pitkin Street.



In the late 1980s, Pastor Wangerin set up a regular schedule for seniors to meet. There was a mid-week service after which a luncheon was offered to our senior members. This continued on and off through the last years of our congregation.



In 1987, Concordia began a tradition of Name Day for which one or more members were named "Concordian of the Year" for their efforts throughout not only the preceding year but over many years, or, in some cases, entire lifetimes of service.



In 1988, Pastor Kim Eric Williams inaugurated a unique Good Friday tradition entitled “The Way of the Cross”, which brought together worshippers from several local congregations. Participants processed between “stations”, beginning and ending at Center Congregational Church, following a large life size cross to re-live Jesus’ Via Dolorosa on the streets of Manchester.



In 1989, a series of Koinonia groups were formed for fellowship and study in members’ homes.

Women’s and Men’s groups existed throughout most of Concordia’s life. In 1992, a Women’s Spirituality Group, led by Patricia Herdic, and a Women’s Breakfast provided once-a-month opportunities for sharing and growth. A men’s breakfast also began meeting monthly at a local restaurant for fellowship and spiritual growth.



Throughout the years, the congregation supported and participated in many Nursery School activities.



Girl Scout Troop 10642 and several scouting cub packs and troops met in the building for many years and assisted with yard and building cleanup.

Pack 47



Troop 123 Eagle Scout Project



Pack 144 Webelos Cememony



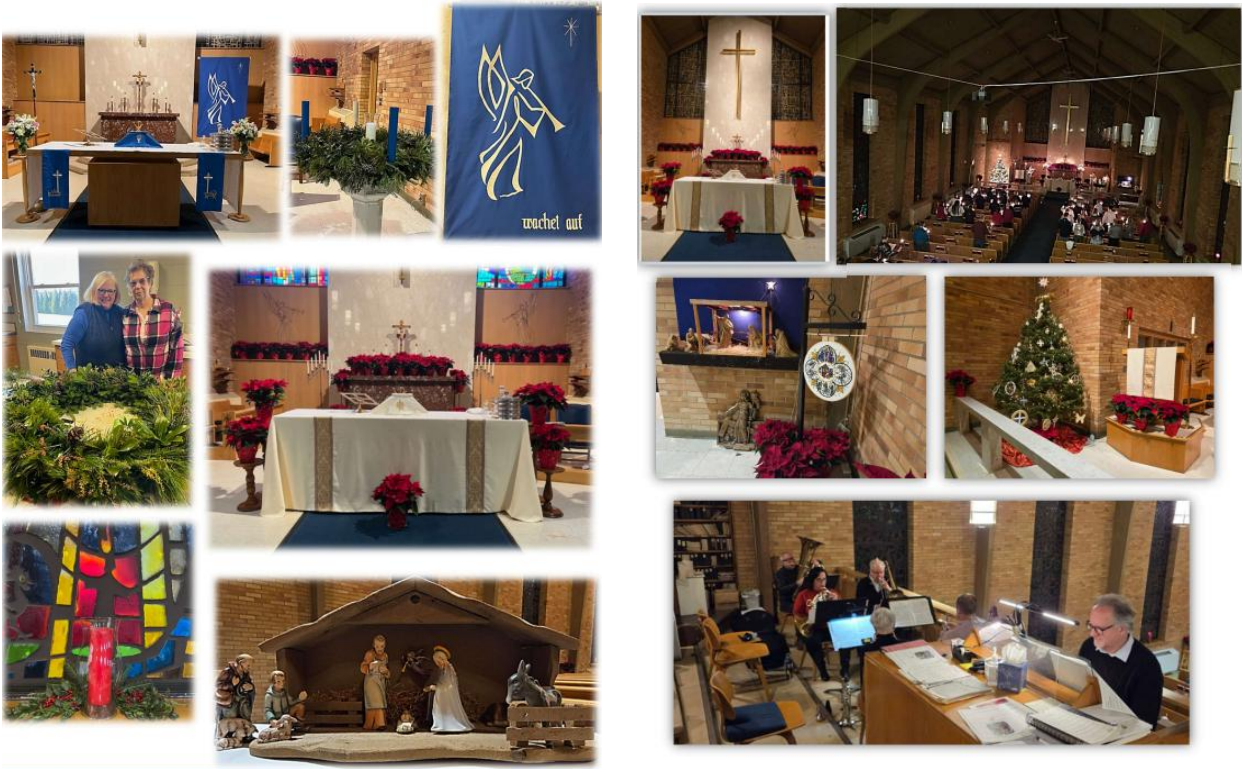
GS Troop 10642



Each year, congregation members would gather to set up the church's Christmas tree.



Advent and Christmas Eve service



Many pitched in on Good Friday for pre-Easter cleaning and polishing efforts.

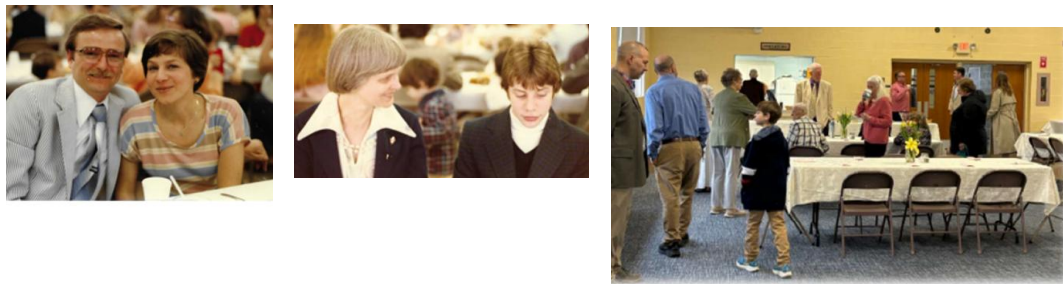


Our Annual Easter Egg Hunt was an event attended by many community families.





Early Easter Sunday Breakfast was enjoyed by all participants,



followed by a beautiful Easter service at Concordia



And all ready for Pentecost



All Saints



Weekday and Saturday worship opportunities included Advent Vespers, Lent Vespers, Healing Services, Ecumenical Thanksgiving, and a Blessing of the Animals.

Ecumenical services honoring milestones included:

Cardinal Cushing and Bishop Olander celebrated with us on August 3, 1969.



On January 23, 1994 Archbishop Cronin and Bishop Isaksen visited.

In 2017, the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation was celebrated with Hartford Archbishop Leonard Blair and Bishop Hazelwood, as well as Episcopal Bishop Andrew Smith.



In 2022, Bishop James Hazelwood visited and preached to the congregation.



A variety of other activities and events may be remembered by many:

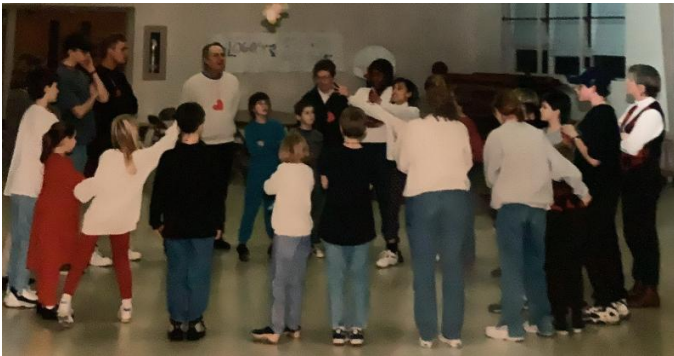
Church picnic with a softball game



For many years, we gathered in August at Mark Winzler's house for a Picnic and Pool Party.



During 1996, Concordia developed and implemented a mid-week ministry for children and youth called LOGOS, incorporating worship, fellowship, teaching, and a family-style supper.

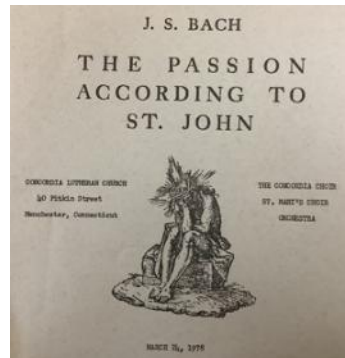


At times we enjoyed the exuberance of a Live Nativity.



Numerous concerts were held throughout Concordia's history

### St. John's Passion



### Organ concert



### Quercus String Quartet



In the 132 years of Concordia's existence, there have been many celebrations and challenges. The constant through history has been a faith-driven dedication to liturgical worship, music, education, outreach, stewardship, and fellowship.

Concordia's legacy of community service continues with the sale of the building to the Town of Manchester in the expectation that it will become a new Senior Center.

Former Concordia Pastors and MNC leaders provided memories and reflections from their time at Concordia.

Pastor memories and reflections follow

## Concordia Memories

### Pastor David W. Rinas (1974-1977)

By far, the most vivid memory I have of my time at Concordia as Co-Pastor with Burt Strand from November 1, 1974 to June 30, 1977 (if I remember those dates correctly) was our wedding when I married Doreen Jabs on June 26, 1976. My friend Greg Tennerman was the Best Man, and my Brothers, Mark and Jim, and Doreen's brother, Randy, were the ushers. To make sure everything went well, my dear friend, Mark Winzler, was the Head Usher. He had to do so much more than just show up and look nice! We had a large reception for everyone with cake and coffee immediately after the service, and then the congregation put on a beautiful reception in Kaiser Hall for invited guests, including many members of Concordia. In gratitude, Doreen and I bought an industrial dish washer for the kitchen, supervised by the amazing Eddie Kehl.

The most significant mission outreach was our sponsorship of the Lo family, from the Hmong tribe of people from Vietnam. There was a delay in their arrival and I called L.I.R.S in New York to ask them to do something to spur the US State Department to act. The response was, "We have 5 voters in this office and you have hundreds of voters in your congregation, Why don't YOU do something." We did, and it was my first, and very successful attempt at political advocacy. The family arrived, and soon after, other congregations in Manchester sponsored relatives of our family, and our city became a hub for Hmong refugees.

A Christmas tradition at Concordia was the Midnight Mass. The choir, led by David Almond, was supposed to start at 10:45, but they were delayed and began singing at 11:00. By 11:45 PM I was climbing into the pulpit, dead tired, and preached the sermon. I had this almost out-of-body experience of watching myself preach what I thought was a good sermon that was not being received very well. Then I glanced down to the first row in front of me and I saw my fiancé, Doreen, falling asleep.

Barbara Baker was our very capable Parish Worker. Reaching out to the local Catholic community as relations between Lutherans and Catholics were beginning to improve, she reported a conversation in which her Catholic colleague had said that God's grace was central to Catholic teaching. "Wait! That's

what Lutherans believe!" observed Barbara. It was a new insight for all of us at the time.

My favorite memory of a church council meeting was the typical monthly review of our finances, which was always accompanied by handwringing over how bad things were, even though it inevitably turned out well by the end of the year. Pastor Burt Stand and I often said that our financial problems were not because of too much spending by the staff, but rather because of not enough generous giving on the part of lay leaders, including the church council. Pastor Strand conducted a survey and announced at a council meeting that the staff as a group were giving over 10% of their income as a tithe to the church, and the council members were giving only 2% of their income. He finished his remarks with the challenge, "What are we going to do about that?!" George Beauregard quietly answered, "Hire more staff."

Kaiser Hall was a great place to hold a variety of big and small events. We had decided that we would enhance our youth ministry by adding a basketball hoop to the kitchen end of the room. However, the big windows along the sides would be in danger of being broken by the inevitable wayward throw of the ball. We solved this problem by inventing wooden frames laced with parachute cord to cover the inside of the windows. This gave us more flexibility in the

use of the space without incurring an extraordinary expense.

Elsie Werner was the church secretary for many years. I always remember her kindness, patience, and solid competence in all circumstances.

Concordia was a wonderful place for me to begin my ordained pastoral ministry. So much felt like a big

faithful family. We continued to learn to follow our Lord Jesus, in worship, service, and fellowship. We especially enjoyed the annual Fastnacht, the German version of Fat Tuesday. Sometimes it felt like everyone was related to everyone else, except for me. However, after a few months I found that I was distantly related to the Kleinschmidt family.

I am ever thankful for the profound joys and challenges that were a part of being a part of the Concordia family of faith.

**The Rev. Dr. Kim-Eric Williams (1986-1995)**

22 March 2026, Lent V/Judica. 2026

Dear Concordia Saints,

At this time of year, I always think of the Way of the Cross that the Manchester churches sponsored every Good Friday. What a moving experience to join our fellow pilgrims to Calvary and worship in each other's sanctuaries.

One of the joys of serving Concordia was its strong ecumenical commitments from joint service with St. Barts in Lent to supporting community housing and food needs. Since I became the Ecumenical Officer of the Synod and Co-Chair with the Hartford Roman Catholic bishop of Faith and Order for Chriscon, this was a natural fit.

Some members felt that the building was too large. I disagreed. So many congregations are limited in their ministry by tawdry and poorly-designed buildings. But Concordia had built for the whole community, and not just themselves. The difficulty was always finding the hundreds of functionally unchurched people in the area and inviting them into the community.

One scary moment for me was when Barbara Baker had me dress in a tutu and fly across the Kaiser Hall stage on a high wire for a Fastnacht production. It was, of course, hilarious but I was only able to relax when I could drink a stein of beer and eat Eddie Kehl's excellent kraut.

Concordia was blessed with many strong leaders. To make sure that they were thanked, I suggested a "Concordian of the Year" award- a secret designation that was only revealed on the Sunday of Concordia's Name Day (June 25). On that Sunday we read a portion of the Book of Concord and

honored the person publicly. Another sign of the vitality of the parish was that two seminarians, Dick Burges and Barbara Reifschneider were ordained and served in the Synod.

Music and worship were always done with thoughtfulness, style, and for the integrity of the western tradition.

Mark Winzler was always there to make sure that all went as planned, since Concordia was always one of the foremost leaders in dynamic and faithful worship in New England. With almost perfect acoustics it was a joy to sing with a powerful pipe organ and trained musicians. Yet one time the whole congregation was corrected. When we sang, "Lift Every Voice" like a standard hymn, our visiting AME preacher said we had to do it again, "the right way", very slowly. We did as he suggested.

Unforgettable was always the early Christmas Eve liturgy when families filled the church. Or the later service with "Stille Nacht" sometimes even with guitar. The Zipser ancestors, no doubt sang along.

The monthly Centennial celebrations in 1993-1994 were indeed memorable and the planning of the outdoor Worship Garden and Columbarium increased possibilities for even more ministry.

While we all must confess our sins at the closing of a distinguished ministry, we may also trust in God's constant promise and hope for a time when "every tear will be wiped away," when we are called to the Church Triumphant, and justice reigns throughout the earth.

The Rev. Dr. Kim-Eric Williams

Exton, PA

## Commemorative Reflection

### Pastor Rebecca Bourret (1950-1997)

"Every time I think of you I thank my God."

My tenure as Interim Pastor of Concordia was brief, just twenty seven or twenty eight months; but if the years were short, they were blessedly rich and full. (1995-1997)

I cannot overstate what a tender gift and privilege it was to return to the community of faith that had formed me as a person and a Christian, and to work alongside many of the people who had such important roles in shaping me, instilling in me the great narratives and poetry and history of Scripture, teaching me Luther's Small Catechism, and the fundamentals of Lutheran theology--my catechetical instruction prepared me well for seminary theology classes!--and both recognizing and nurturing my gifts for ministry in Christ's Church.

I returned to Concordia as a still-relatively young pastor, and the bishop's office expressed some concern that it might be difficult for folks who had heard Becky Bourret crackling candy wrappers in the pew, singing in the junior choir, and attending Sunday School and Vacation Church School to receive me as their pastor; but those concerns did not materialize. I am grateful today, as I was then, for the trust you put in me, as well as for the ways you continued to contribute to my formation as a pastor and servant-leader. You honored me with high expectations, treated my shortcomings with forbearance, and

brought levity to our shared work with your kindness and good humor.

Over the course of just a couple of years, we attended to the particular tasks of intentional interim ministry--examining and making sense of Concordia's history, discerning a new identity both connected to and distinct from the past, navigating shifts in leadership, strengthening the relationships with the synodical and church wide expressions of the ELCA, and looking to the future. That was the assignment!

But in that time this Congregation also developed the Worship and Memorial Garden, fulfilling in a fresh way the long-ago hope of a church cemetery; and in that garden we gathered for Compline on summer evenings, and occasional Sunday celebrations of the Sacraments; and, inspired by one youngster's expressed desire for combining Bible and basketball, began LOGOS, a mid-week ministry for children and youth incorporating worship, fellowship, teaching, and family-style supper, and drawing leadership only the Holy Spirit could have summoned.

For the abiding blessing that Concordia Lutheran Church has been, I am profoundly grateful. "Every time I think of you I [continue to] thank God."

*Pastor Rebecca Bourret*

## Commemorative Reflection

### Pastor Martha Klein Larsen (1998-2000)

Concordia Lutheran Church  
Manchester, CT

The closing of a beloved parish may remind us of any experience of death and a reflection on the life we knew together. As with any passing we have choices to make...choices about how we will view the past history and the legacy of this body of Christ. As a community of human beings who are both saint and sinner, as Martin Luther phrased it, we are a conglomeration of both joy and sorrow, woundedness and healing, the ability to love and the ability to cause pain. What will we choose to remember when Concordia comes to mind?

Although my ministry was a short two years, it was one that impacted my life greatly. And that impact was primarily related to the amazing members who struggled to find grace and healing during a difficult time in everyone's life. I remember Pastor Joe Bourret's part time ministry at that time...a comforting presence from former times, with us to help guide us through the times ahead. Then there were the many, many lay leaders and members who stepped forward with courage, hope and especially a spirit of love and forgiveness.

I particularly remember Barbara Baker. If she were here today (if I might be so bold) she would look us in the eye and gently and lovingly speak the words,

"Peace be with you." Barbara's many years as a parish worker here at Concordia left a legacy that will continue to live on whether Concordia is a concrete building or simply a memory that we cherish in our hearts. Even now the memory of Barbara's loving, non-judgmental grace, and exemplary faith continues the Spirit's work of comfort, inspiration and hope.

As with Barb's example so it goes with the witness of all of us gathered here. However we have loved, however we have forgiven and been forgiven, however we have encouraged and cheered one another on, those acts of grace will live on and never be forgotten. That is God's promise to us...

'There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, not anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.' (Romans 8)

Soli Deo Gloria,  
Pastor Martha Klein Larsen

## Concordia Reflections

### Reverend Jonathan Vogel (2001-2005)

April 20, 2026

I began the call process with Concordia in the spring of 2001. My wife, Rebecca, sons Christopher & Justin, and I rented an apartment in Manchester that summer as we continued house hunting. I officially began my time as Concordia's pastor on September 1, 2001, preaching for the first time (not counting the call sermon) on September 2.

The World Trade towers came down nine days later. I remember Nancy Gutreich and I sitting in the fellowship hall much of that day watching updates, desperately trying to imagine this was some mistake. That this couldn't possibly be happening.

Concordia was no stranger to challenging times and this was yet one more. While the congregation had not lost any members in the towers almost all knew someone who had been killed. All of us were struggling with what this meant for our nation and world. All of us found ourselves trying to find some kind of balance between celebrating new beginnings and new ministries . . . and grieving the violence which had wounded our country.

My memories of the years which followed are of solid, faithful, service & ministry. From support of the community through the Manchester Area Community of Churches, to very active youth ministries (usually led by the Gabbey's), to the Thursday morning Bible Study & discussion sessions (ALWAYS lively!), to the amazing meals served via the Kehl Kitchen, and, of course, the rich worship life of the congregation with outstanding music.

I am thankful for my time with Concordia Lutheran Church and the ministry we were able to accomplish during that time through God's grace. I count as gifts from God connecting with the women, men and children of the congregation and community during those years.

God's peace and comfort be with you in this latest transition of Concordia.

Reverend Jonathan Vogel

## Concordia Remembrance

### JoAnn A. Post (2005-2014)

When, in the summer of 2005, the bishop invited me to interview at Concordia, she pushed the congregation's file across the table to me and said, "I don't KNOW if we would be calling you there to close the congregation or open the doors wide." Since I am not a New Englander by birth, I was unaccustomed to that level of deeply loving yet shameless honesty. Because of that honesty, and because of the people I met when I interviewed at Concordia, I gratefully accepted the call.

Concordia had, in fact, known its share of sorrows. Unexpected pastoral and staff transitions. Disagreements among members. Apocalyptic building issues. Relentless cultural shifts that affect all congregations. But the leaders I met did not define themselves by difficulties behind them, but by opportunities before them.

It was my privilege to serve as Concordia's pastor for nine years, from 2005 – 2014. I left the parish only because my husband accepted a call in the Midwest, and I would, of course, move with him.

In the nine years we were in ministry together, we expanded and improved the facility to make it more useable and accessible. We staffed for the future. We encouraged the Nursery School. We welcomed new members into the community and new leaders into leadership. We pursued faithful ways to provide education, fellowship and service opportunities for our young people. We strengthened relationships with our ministry partners, both ecumenical and interfaith. We continued Concordia's long-standing passion for community ministry. We danced and ate and drank with unbridled joy. We welcomed the world into our building, providing space for other worshipping communities, scout troops, and community and synod events.

Concordia's doors have always opened both ways—opening out to send us into the world for ministry and opening in to welcome a world in need.

Worship has always been the center of Concordia's life. Concordia is committed to strong lay leadership, beautiful music, creative use of the worship space, intentional welcome for guests, passion for both grand liturgies and simple prayer services, and the expectation that preaching would be both faithful to scripture and relevant to our lives. It is that central commitment that has carried Concordia through the joys and sorrows of its 100+ years of ministry. Whether the sanctuary overflowed with hundreds of people on a festival, or comforted a small family during a funeral, Concordia is at its best and most faithful in worship—giving glory to God and courage to God's people.

But the attribute for which I am most grateful is that, when, for a time, I could not serve as pastor, caring for the congregation, Concordia cared for me.

In the fall of my seventh year at Concordia, I was diagnosed with a cancer that required immediate, aggressive treatment. Our wise and compassionate leaders, knowing it would be best for both the congregation and me, granted me nine months of medical disability leave. Concordia's leaders quickly secured interim pastoral leadership, carrying on with ministry in my absence. More than that, Concordia's members turned their deep

compassion toward me and my family. Members fed me and my family, provided transportation for my younger daughter when I could not drive, held me in daily prayer, sat with me during chemotherapy treatments, and loved me back to

health. And then, after a nine months' absence, Concordia welcomed me back with open arms. The depth of Concordia's kindness still brings grateful tears to my eyes.

But now Concordia must engage ministry differently—sharing its vast wisdom and rich resources with other ministries. Concordia is ending well, demonstrating its characteristic deeply loving yet shameless honesty. This beautiful building will be put to important purpose. Our elders have been honored, as their remains rest respectfully in a new place. Concordia's financial assets, always well-stewarded, will support other ministries. Our members will find other church homes, in which they will both give and receive care. And the passion and purpose, the honesty and kindness that have always characterized this congregation will be scattered in the world through those who are sent.

**The Rev. Douglas D. Barclay (2015-2020)**

Dear Concordians,

I send you greetings of grace and peace as the baptismal journey of the congregation of Concordia Lutheran Church comes to its completion. In many ways, we greet this difficult and painful death as we would for any baptized person who, at their death, is brought into the eternal embrace of the divine that was inaugurated through the Holy Bath, sustained by the Holy Meal, and brought to completion through the grace and love of God through Christ.

The ancient antiphon from the Eastern Church goes like this: “all of us go down to the dust, but, even at the grave we make our song: Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.” This scrappy faith statement resonates as well when we come to the end of the faith journey of a congregation. There is no doubt that this is a true death. It is a death which might make us eager to join in faithful tears with our Lord as he too wept at the grave of his good friend Lazarus. Our Christ gives us permission to weep too, for all that has been, for all that could have been, and for all that shouldn’t have been.

In as much as there is legitimate cause for weeping, there is also cause for rejoicing here.

The work of the past century-plus has not been for naught. No, each child baptized, each sermon, each ordination, each bag of canned goods, each Eucharist, each child in the nursery school, each worshipper, each choir member, each deacon, each deviled-egg preparer bears witness to the resurrection.

To refine the point, even in the midst of death, Concordia has continued to be diligent and dedicated to “doing the right thing.” You have risked the hard conversations, you have said the painful things, you have knocked on every door, and you have, as God’s people together in prayer, made a painful but resolute decision. Rather than a slow and grueling death, you have chosen to use

the remaining energy and resources to “die well” and, at that, to make a generous final act of love toward your neighbors and the broader community.

In my new home in Los Angeles, we have a species of Agave that is often found in landscaping and even along the beautiful strand that lines the Pacific Ocean about a mile from the parsonage. Those plants are massive, and, when they reach maturity, sometimes after 40-50 plus years of growth, they send up one flower stalk. That stalk grows and grows until it reaches the heavens, sometimes 10, 15, 20 feet high, like a giant stalk of asparagus. After months and months, it flowers in remarkable splendor and it is glorious sight to behold. Then, as the seeds are dispersed and the birds and insects and pollinators all have their fill, the flower fades and the whole plant dies. Unexpectedly, hidden from sight, are soon discovered the “pups” of the mother plant that have been slowly emerging from the base all along. While the mother plant will gradually decline, brown, wither and die, the pups begin their future even in the wake of death.

In one final and courageous act, Concordia’s congregation has given fully of itself in self-emptying love. What remains is so much scattered seed, some of which will fall on rich soil, other rocky, and other on the trodden path. What is sure is that at least some of the seeds that have been

distributed outward will, in due time, also grow, flourish, fade, die, and provide a future again to a new generation.

This is my prayer for you, God's dear people at Concordia: that God will give you the gift of grief to mend your broken hearts. I also pray that God will restore to you the joy of salvation that you might know that no good work is done in vain that is rooted in Christ.

Indeed, perhaps the story, which seems like it is at its end, is just the middle chapter of a bigger epic story of a rough and tumble German-speaking people that came from the Zips Mountains in Hungary to work at factories in Manchester, Connecticut in the 19th century. They brought with

them their culture, their work ethic, and their tried and true faith. The congregation they built ended up expanding beyond their wildest imagination and ended up embracing peoples and cultures and ways of life that would have seemed quite strange and unlikely to the charter members.

Out of a narrow ethnic enclosure emerged a cosmopolitan congregation that welcomed many, formed children from all cultures, helped others, gave generously, centered itself on intentional and deep worship and music, worked for justice and peace, and did its level best to remain faithful to the gospel. Indeed, the spirit and seed of Concordia has been planted in my heart as well, and I am committed to bringing forth the best of what I learned and experienced there.

I can only image the chapters that will follow. May we be found faithful to the story. May we not lose heart. May God wipe every tear from our eyes that we may see clearly the path and promise before us.

*The Rev. Douglas D. Barclay*

## A REFLECTION ON SHARED MINISTRY

### **Pastor John J. Marschhausen (2020-2021)**

March 15, 2026

Dear people of Concordia Lutheran Church, Manchester, Connecticut:

It was my privilege and joy to serve with you as your transition pastor from September of 2020 through August of 2021.

It was the time when the COVID pandemic with its quarantines and closures was coming to an end ... a time when most worship was still via Zoom, with late afternoon worship outside in the Memorial Garden during the warmer months ... a time for experimenting with many ideas to find what was helpful for Concordia during an unusual and difficult transition time. Concordia was not new to the transition process, but my time with you was somewhat different from previous transitions in that for the first time you were seriously challenging yourselves to begin asking questions about the congregation's future. You had been sharing many ministries with St. Mary's Episcopal Church for many years, including significant shared worship. For several years your leaders and the leaders of St. Mary's had been discussing a combined ministry for your futures. As much as you and the people of St. Mary's were close and of common spirit, institutional restrictions and old denominational loyalties made formal conversation and progress toward combining the congregations difficult. This introduced a new dynamic to the conversation:

was a long-term future for Concordia as a separate congregation a responsible, viable, mission-focused reality, and if so, what might that look like? You also honestly began to consider what might be realistic options for calling a pastor to Concordia, full-time or part-time. As your transition pastor for that year, I thank our Lord and God, and I thank you, for the loving, caring, responsible and faithful ways you engaged these very challenging questions for you and your congregation. I asked you to stick with the synod's processes for discernment, and with prayer, faith and determination you were willing to take on the challenge ... even when you did not enjoy the questions that needed to be asked and when the progress was painfully slow and inconsistent. I left you in the middle of that process, but I will always remember and appreciate your cooperation, your support, and your commitment to a genuine discernment of what was best for the Lord's ministry at Concordia. Praise be to God and thanks be to you for this ministry of which I was privileged to be a part for one year.

And praise and thanksgiving to God and to all the saints of Concordia Lutheran Church for your 132 years of faithful ministry in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Pastor John J. Marschhausen*

## Commemorative Reflections

### Pastor Rolf Hedberg (2014-2015 & 2021-2025)

Dear Friends in Christ,

It was a pleasure and joy for me to serve the Lord and the people of Concordia Lutheran Church on two separate occasions. I retired from St. Paul Lutheran Church in East Longmeadow, Massachusetts in January 2014. In late spring of that year, I received a call asking me if I would be interested in doing a transitional ministry at Concordia beginning in September, and this would be contingent on an interview with the Church Council.

That brings me to my first point (which I will mention again), and that is “Lutheran Geography,” which is about Lutheran relationships. I met with the church council. Members introduced themselves, and two of them I recognized—Steve Graefe and Jan Salvatore. I had met Steve’s mother and father on a trip to the Holy Land in 1981. So, naturally, I inquired how his mother, Ellie, was doing. As for Jan Salvatore, it turns out that her maiden name was Wallen. Her parents and my parents knew each other quite well from Emmanuel Lutheran in Norwood, Massachusetts. Better yet, her mother was the office manager at that church, and I affectionately called her my first “boss” when I filled in for the pastor, Ray Kask, when he went on a European holiday. A long way to say that I received the vote to serve as transitional pastor, and I am convinced it was in no small part due to “Lutheran Geography.”

To first impressions of Concordia, and I begin with the worship space. For me, it is unparalleled in New England. It is beautiful. The stained-glass windows and the faith stories they tell are magnificent. The altar area is stately in its simplicity. And then there is the nave in its totality—it is large, and yet it retains a sense of intimacy. It has a number of places that draw one’s attention, and yet the central place is held by the cross. I can understand why this place and space are going to be missed beyond the memories it holds for you.

Second, there is the matter of liturgy and music. Looking back on my first transitional time at Concordia, I was impressed by the careful attention to detail in each Sunday’s observance. Hymns, choir, preludes and postludes—each contributed to theme and appointed lessons for the day. At my first transitional, Richard Hicks was the minister of music, and he frequently did an improvisation on the closing hymn—what a gift. Then, returning to the space itself, the sanctuary has the most incredible acoustics.

Third, a comment on the congregation. I left the congregation in May 2015. At that point, there was what I would call a critical mass (no pun intended) at worship; committees were staffed and functioning, and the congregation was getting ready to extend a call. Here a point of personal privilege. Lois and I left in May in anticipation of Lois’s open-heart surgery. Although we knew that Concordia had a prayer shawl ministry, it became very personal when Lois was given a prayer shawl. They prayed over her, they wrapped her in it and enveloped her in love. From our perspective, it was Concordia at her best—a combination of faith, love, and heart.

In the years that followed, I served four other congregations as a transitional pastor. In that time frame, I occasionally came back to Concordia to worship. One of the most

incredible worship experiences was the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. What a worship experience!

Then in September 2021, a year after Pastor Barclay's accepting a new call, I accepted another transitional covenant with Concordia. But this time, it was going to be different. It was going to be a time of discernment. What would be the future of the congregation? The process was long, complicated, prayerful, and, at many junctures, emotional, and understandably so. This period of time was punctuated by meetings, surveys, charts, votes, a field trip to a Lutheran Latine congregation in Providence, Rhode Island, and zoom classes led by faculty members of Wartburg Seminary in Iowa. These last two activities were to help discern what we might be doing to increase our awareness of and sensitivity to a possible Latine ministry at Concordia to expand and augment the Ministerio Nueva Creación led by Bea Santiago that was hosted at Concordia. At this point, I need to thank all those who accepted roles of leadership in this discernment process, but, as you might surmise, this is dangerous because I am bound to leave out names. I am going to mention one person, and that is Mark Winzler. I thank him not only for his leadership in terms of what I call regular duties as president of the church council but also for his attention to details in the whole discernment process and for now bringing it to a conclusion. Mark is a church person of rare quality—exemplary leadership skills to go along with a deep and abiding faith. Well done, Mark! I also want to thank Pastor Sara Anderson and Pastor Maria Hammons for their Synodical leadership in this process. Since my last worship on Christmas Eve 2025, Pastor Ann Lovejoy Johnson and Pastor Rebecca Bouret have assumed pastoral care and preaching responsibilities. My thanks to you both. You

continue the great tradition of the Lutheran church, a church formed by Word and Sacrament. I know you wonderful pastors feed the people of Concordia in these difficult days.

And more for me to give thanks for: the memorable 50th anniversary of my ordination, my final service as transitional pastor on Christmas Eve, the farewell luncheon on the preceding Fourth Sunday in Advent, and the Reformation Evening Prayer Service put together by Mark Winzler and John Anderson. That last leads me back to Lutheran Geography. I first met John in 1984. He was the organist at a Lutheran church in Jamestown, New York. Lois and I were returning from the Lutheran Church in America convention in Toronto, Canada, where I had served as a delegate from the New England Synod, and we stopped by to see a seminary classmate who was the pastor of this church in Jamestown New York. He took us to see his church, and who was there playing the organ? John Anderson! Many years later, I walk into my church in East Longmeadow, and who is there playing the organ as a substitute for St. Paul's organist? John Anderson. And still more years later, as transitional pastor for the second time at Concordia, I walk into the church, and who is playing the organ? John! I am not sure who is following whom, but I am sure of this: John is one of the best; I have not only appreciated his musical knowledge and skills but also loved it when you, the congregation, listened to the Postlude and showed your appreciation with applause that was well deserved.

I know there is more to say, and there is much more to be thankful for. There are the memories—baptisms, confirmations, weddings, and funerals. There are friendships cultivated and friendships lost, but the memories of which are still treasured. There is the strong sense of purposeful mission with commitments to the

local community and the greater church—pop-up store and MACC, New England Synod of the ELCA, and scholarships to seminarians, to name a few. Much to be thankful for and much to

celebrate. For all of these missions and endeavors of Concordia, we can hear the words of Jesus in Matthew 25:23: “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

Now this congregation comes to a close, but you, as individual people of God, will continue your walks of faith and mission. I close with Isaiah 40:8: “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.”

God bless you all,  
Pastor Rolf Hedberg

Ministerio Nueva Creación (MNC) Reflections follow

Words by Pastora Pérsida Rivera-Méndez  
Founding Pastor of Ministerio Nueva Creación (MNC)

My siblings in Christ,

Thankful for your Partnership

First, I want to express my deep gratitude to Concordia Lutheran and the congregation for opening your hearts, sharing your love and space with me as I started my journey as the founding pastor of Ministerio Nueva Creación, in 2015.

Vision for MNC

I started this vision given by God for Ministerio Nueva Creación (MNC) with a couple of families gathering for weekly bible study in the beginning of January 2015. We met in their homes for weekly bible study, after about six month our bible study group grew substantially. We reached a turning point where the group was longing for a time of worship and praise in a church setting.

I approached both the UCC Conference of CT and the NE Synod of the ELCA to have conversations about a Hispanic/Latino ministry partnership. I received support from the NE Synod and UCC in prayer but funding for the ministry didn't come right away. Then I started searching for a worship space and met with several churches in the Manchester area UCC and ELCA.

I met Rev. Douglas Barclay of Concordia at a gathering of pastors in Hartford where we had a brief conversation where I told him about Ministerio Nueva Creación and our vision to reach the Hispanic/Latino community with the good news of the gospel and Jesus' extravagant welcome of all people. We wanted a church that was open to all God's people no matter who they are. We wanted to ensure that the Latine community that was LGBTQ were welcome into our church.

I scheduled a meeting to discuss this vision further with Pastor Barclay and members of Concordia to engage in an opportunity to partner

in ministry together. We gathered, we dialogued and began forming a partnership that has continued. We launched our first worship on December 15, 2015 where a group of 30 people gathered for worship. We had a glorious time worshipping God in Spanish.

This partnership was a blessing both to MNC and Concordia as we learned to appreciate each other's styles of worship, we learned that God loves all of us, that God receives all our varied worship styles and rejoices with us when we share each other's gifts. We have grown in our understanding of each other. We have shared bible study times, we shared women's gatherings, have had joint worship and we have learned that God's Kingdom needs all people to flourish and be the God's hands and feet and heart in our community together. We learn that together we are one in Christ. We together were the community of faith that God was helping us to be.

Partnerships are both rewarding and challenging, and I am grateful that we were able to see the rewards and able to handle the challenges that came along the way as we learned together with grace and openness to learning and being the beloved community God was calling us to be. We learn to forgive when we made errors, or assumption about each other. Most of all I am grateful for this partnership and the friendships that we made here at Concordia Lutheran and with Ministerio Nueva Creación.

### Closing Words...

I continued to pray for Concordia Lutheran and MNC after I retired in 2020. I kept up with your newsletters reading all the things that were happening in both Concordia and Ministerio Nueva Creación. I followed your journey of discernment to decide what was next for Concordia Lutheran. Merging with another congregation, or several congregations or Holy Closure.

I know that it was a very difficult decision to finally decide to close Concordia Lutheran, a church with so much history in serving the community of Manchester. Also, I know how much you all loved your church and how invested you were in this congregation. This decision is bittersweet, in one hand this Holy Closure brings sadness to some of us who have been part of Concordia's journey and loved being part of this congregation and engaged in the social work that has been the hallmark of its history. Caring for the congregants and this beloved community of Manchester.

The other important part of this Holy Closure is that it's going to make room for new ministries to emerge and multiple ministries will benefit from the funds that will enable God's word to be proclaimed in new and exciting ways.

Also, you are leaving a legacy that will continue to impact generations to come. You have been good and faithful stewards of your gifts and God knows your hearts and your intent for the funds to continue to minister to all God's amazing people.

I am honored to have been part of your journey and history. I wish all of Concordia Lutheran members the best in your journey to find a place of worship that will bring you joy and lift your hearts as you continue to find ways to honor God and your community in faithful and meaningful ways. God's blessings my friends.

With gratitude, admiration and love for all your kindness, generosity and love shared in our time together.

With the love of Jesus,

Pastora Persida Rivera-Mendez, MDIV

Founding Pastor of MNC

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To My Concordia Lutheran Church Family,

As I reflect on my journey toward parish ministry and the winding, grace filled path that brought me here, my heart keeps returning to you—this congregation that became a home I never expected to find again. I want to offer my deepest gratitude for all that you have done for me, for my faith, and for my calling.

## Pastor Bea Santiago

When I first arrived at Concordia, I carried with me the weight of past hurt from the church. I wasn't sure if I would ever feel safe in a congregation again, or if I could trust a community with my story, my gifts, or my heart. But you welcomed me with a generosity of spirit that still humbles me. You gave me a place to breathe, to heal, and to grow. You gave me a loving church home at a time when I genuinely believed such a thing might no longer be possible for me.

Thank you for supporting my education and formation, not only through your generosity, but through your encouragement, your prayers, and your belief in me. Thank you for allowing me to lead and teach Bible study, for trusting me with your questions, your insights, and your faith. Every conversation, every shared moment around Scripture, helped shape me into the pastor I am becoming.

I am especially grateful for the way you surrounded me with love when my father passed. In one of the hardest seasons of my life, you held me with compassion and

tenderness. Your cards, your prayers, your presence, and your quiet acts of care reminded me that God's love is most clearly seen in community. I will never forget the outpouring of support I received from you. It carried me through.

Thank you for being a place where I could grow in my faith—not just academically or professionally, but spiritually, personally, and deeply. I have learned from each of you: from your stories, your resilience, your humor, your devotion, and your willingness to show up for one another.

I also want to thank you for the way you have supported our ministry, Ministerio Nueva Creación from the very beginning. Your openness, your encouragement, and your willingness to embrace a ministry that reflects the beautiful diversity of God's people has meant more than I can express. You helped create space for a community that is growing, thriving, and finding its own voice in the body of Christ. Your support has been a blessing not

only to me, but to every person who has found belonging through this ministry.

alongside you in this tender season of holy closure. Your sorrow is not separate from my own; it is woven into the same love, the same memories, and the same hope that shaped us as a community. Even in this difficult moment,

And as I hold all this gratitude, I also hold the grief we now share. I mourn with you. I walk

I see the faithfulness, courage, and compassion that have always defined Concordia. It is an honor to stand with you in both the joy and the ache.

Concordia, you have been a gift. You have been a place of healing, of learning, of laughter, of tears, of transformation. You have been a living witness to God's grace in my life. And as I continue walking this path toward ordained ministry, I carry you with me—with gratitude, with affection, and with deep respect.

Thank you for loving me. Thank you for believing in me. Thank you for helping me become who God is calling me to be.

With all my heart, Bea





Concordia Lutheran Church 1894-2026