

HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS

Did you know that –

- Pastor Bill Jones, affectionately known as “Jonesie,” a self-described “country boy from Arkansas,” was responsible for beginning seven congregations in our District, including St. Paul’s-Jacksonville, Our Savior and Atonement-Orlando, and Peace in Decatur.
- The Cubans who fled Castro and came to Miami were served by Pastors Eugene Gruell and Herman Glienke, who had been serving Lutheran congregations in Cuba.
- The Florida District Walther League was constituted in 1934 with 13 societies from 13 congregations, and the first president was W. H. R. Hecht of St. Matthews, Miami.
- Pastor Dave Wesche of Blairsville, Georgia, is the grandson of Pastor Walt Wesche of St. Paul-Lakeland, a charter officer of the Florida-Georgia District, 1948.
- During the presidency of Dr. August Bernthal (Grace-Winter Haven) from 1963-1973 , the District grew from 87 to 151 congregations.
- The Southern District once stretched from El Paso, Texas, to Key West, Florida.
- The Florida-Georgia District separated from the Southern District of the LCMS in 1948, with the blessing of the Synod and said Southern District.
- The last two presidents of the District (Pastors Tom Zehnder and Gerhard Michael) were both missionaries to Japan.
- The campus ministries at the University of Florida, University of Georgia, and Florida State University have produced numerous clergy, lately including Pastor Graham Glover, recently commissioned into the U. S. Army chaplaincy.
- Pastor Jim Guelzow (Messiah-Tampa), the former 1st Vice-president and now Chairman of the Board of Directors, is the son of Pastor Roy Guelzow, also a 1st Vice-president of the District.
- Pastors R. A. Hingst (Rusty), F. W. Lorberg (Freddy), A. H. D. Besalski (Bob), and Elmer Kieninger (Skinny), were all St. Johns College ('27), Concordia Seminary-St. Louis ('31) classmates and significant contributors to the formation of the Florida-Georgia District. Rest in peace!
- Pastor William vonSpreckelson (Spreck) was the District’s first fulltime Mission Executive (1955), and when you see a church on an original site it is likely that Spreck played a role in securing it.

- Rich Neubauer, LCEF-honored Vice-president, began his service to the District as a volunteer lay member of the District's Mission Board.
- In the Florida-Georgia District, Zion-Gotha, Zion-Tampa, and Trinity-Delray Beach are the oldest congregations in Florida, and Grace-Atlanta is the oldest in Georgia.
- The sainted Pastor Ed Fisher of Zion-Gotha began a web of congregations in North Florida. He started First-Gainesville (then St. Matthew's). First-Gainesville begat St. John-Ocala, Epiphany-Tallahassee, etc. St. John-Ocala begat Inverness, Dunnellon, etc.
- Pastor Ted Arndt, Grace-Atlanta, came in 1930, began work in Columbus, Athens, Macon, Rome, Marietta, East Point, Decatur, and Doraville. He became known as the "patriarch of Georgia."
- The first District budget (1948) was \$27,700.
- In the early years of the District, District Conventions were held every year.
- In 1884, the Southern District sent a missionary to Gotha, Florida, "a four-hour ox cart ride from Orlando."
- Lutheran Women's Missionary League (LWML) was organized in 1945. Lutheran Layman's League (LLL) was formed at Trinity-Orlando, in 1949.
- When early mission congregations were not allowed air-conditioning, a layman offered to buy a fan for each. Georgia congregations were allowed to have heaters!