Stepping Forward

Pursuing Racial Justice in Our Walk with Jesus

Welcome!

We look forward to sharing this gathering time with you.

Please Note:
In the interest of good stewardship,
printed programs will NOT be available at the conference.
Please download this file to your device or print it at home. Thank you!

CONFERENCE PROGRAM - Click the links to find the following on subsequent pages:

- **Directional Maps (pp 2-3)** -a street view designating parking at Our Savior Lutheran Church and a facility map indicating primary spaces where we will be gathering during the conference.
- **Conference Information (pp 4-9)** - including the day's schedule (p 4), session descriptions (p 5-6) and speaker bios (p 7-9).
- **Resource Table Information (p 10)** – to offer guidance as you participate in the networking time from 2:00- 2:45 p.m.
- **Question Submission & Evaluation Link (p 11)** – how to submit questions for the speakers to discuss during the closing Panel Discussion: Next Steps to Fulfilling Our Mission at 2:45 p.m.; and an evaluation link to offer feedback on this event and suggestions to make future events successful and sustainable.

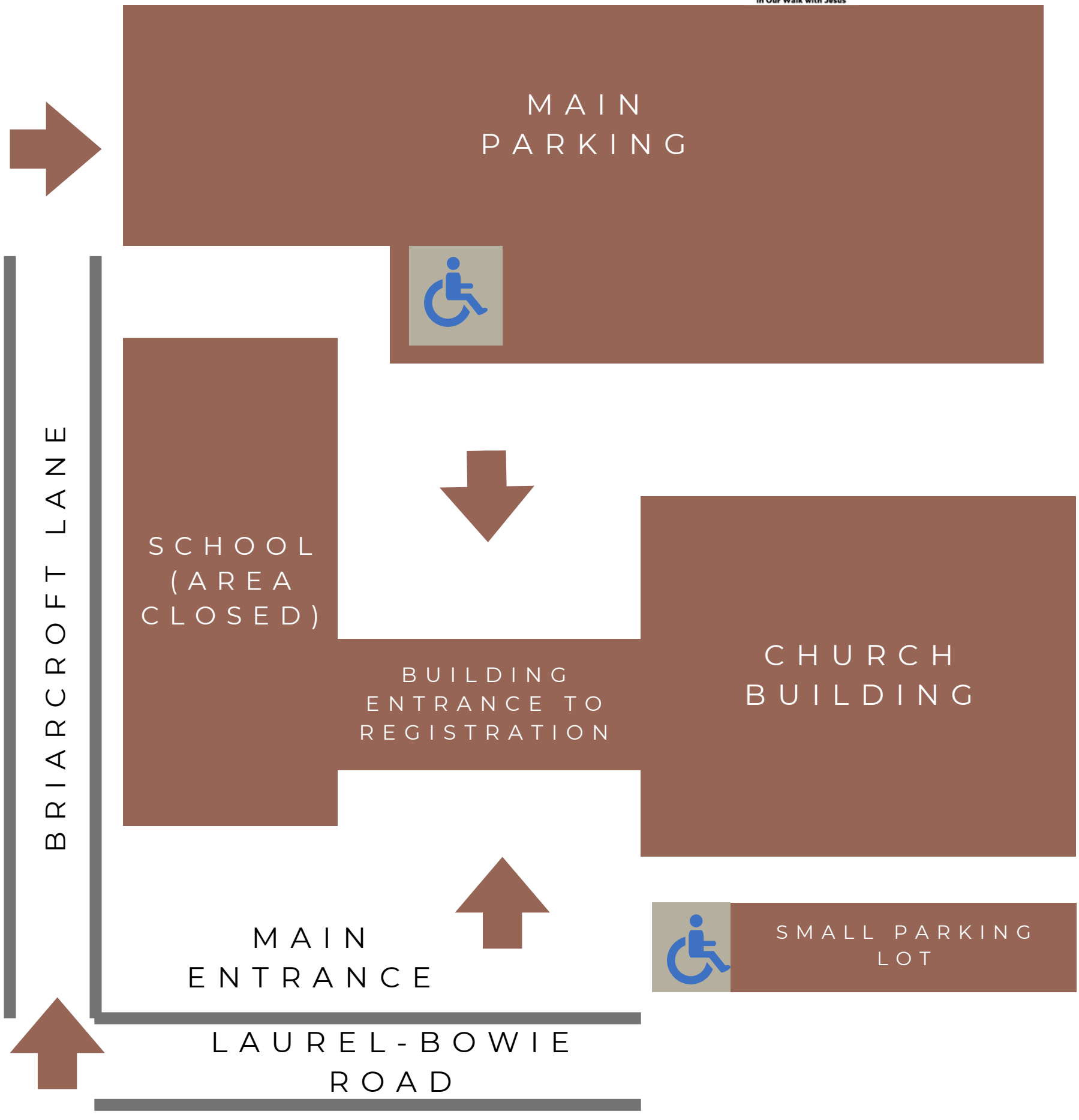
A Few More Notes to Ensure a Great Gathering:

- *Bring a reuseable water bottle with a closed lid.*
- *Arrive early if you would like coffee and a light breakfast snack, as you will not be permitted to bring food or open drink containers to the plenary session in the sanctuary.*
- *You will receive a handmade cloth napkin to use throughout the day and take home as a souvenir.*

Thank you!
We are grateful to you and our collaborators for participation in this conference.

OUR SAVIOR
LUTHERAN CHURCH
13611 LAUREL-BOWIE RD.
LAUREL, MD 20708

Stepping Forward
Pursuing Racial Justice in Our Walk with Jesus



PARKING

AREA CLOSED (EXCEPT RESTROOMS)

KITCHEN

FELLOWSHIP HALL

SMALL

SMALL

RECYCLE

COMPOST

MAIN

WATER

LIBRARY

RESOURCE TABLES

REGISTRATION

RESOURCE TABLES

AREA CLOSED

AREA CLOSED

GREEN ROOM

MUSIC ROOM

AREA CLOSED

MULTI-PURPOSE ROOM

SANCTUARY (NO FOOD OR DRINK)

PARKING

OUR SAVIOR LUTHERAN CHURCH

Stepping Forward

Pursuing Racial Justice in Our Walk with Jesus

Conference Day Program

Stepping Forward
Pursuing Racial Justice in Our Walk with Jesus

Saturday, May 31 – Conference Day

Stepping Forward: Pursuing Racial Justice in Our Walk with Jesus
Location: Our Savior Lutheran Church
13611 Laurel-Bowie Rd, Laurel, MD 20708

8:30 - 9:00 a.m.	**Registration/Coffee**
9:00 - 9:15 a.m.	**Welcome and Opening Prayer**
9:15 - 10:30 a.m.	**Keynote Speaker – Rev. Dr. Drew G. I. Hart** *Putting On Our Blue Jeans: Igniting Activism for God's Justice, Love, and Deliverance*
10:30 - 10:45 a.m.	**Coffee Break**
10:45 – 11:45 a.m.	**Breakout Session 1** • Walking Together: Hearts for Hope and Justice • Social Ministry: Connecting Churches to Our Communities • Let It Shine: Encouraging and Empowering People of Jesus to "Speak Up"
12:00 – 12:45 p.m.	**Lunch and Discussion Tables; Opportunities for Networking**
1:00 – 2:00 p.m.	**Breakout Session 2 - Sessions Repeated As Above**
2:00 – 2:45 p.m.	**Afternoon Break – Opportunity for Networking** Visit Resource Tables to connect with breakout session speakers and other organizations.
2:45-3:45 p.m.	**Panel Discussion – Next Steps to Fulfilling Our Mission** An informal dialogue moderated by Rev. Dr. Jon Diefenthaler with Rev. Dr. Matthew Borrasso, Rev. Dr. Yared Halche and Rev. Dr. Drew Hart.
3:45 – 4:00 p.m.	**Forward Together Celebration and Closing Prayer**

Financial support provided by
Mid-Atlantic Lutherans in Mission
MALIM | Moving God's Mission Forward

Bridge Builders

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Stepping Forward

Pursuing Racial Justice in Our Walk with Jesus

Session Descriptions

Keynote

Putting On Our Blue Jeans: Igniting Activism for God's Justice, Love, and Deliverance
Rev. Dr. Drew G. I. Hart

This talk will challenge and inspire us to embrace a discipleship that resists oppression, builds beloved community, and embodies the liberating way of Jesus in the public square. Drawing from Jesus' story, church history, my personal experiences, and broader insights rooted in theological ethics and social change theory, we will explore concrete ways to embody the good news for our most vulnerable neighbors. Together, we'll be challenged to engage in meaningful grassroots justice work and discover how our faith can ignite liberating action in the world. Our ultimate goal is to seek after God's dream of shalom—a world where everyone belongs, everyone matters, and everyone can thrive.

Breakout Sessions

All three topics will be offered in both breakout sessions, so participants can choose to attend two of three options.

I. Walking Together: Hearts for Hope and Justice

Why are you here? Where are you hoping to go? In this session, Rev. Dr. Matthew Borrasso mines the experience of the church's past, present, and future understandings and practices of racial justice and reconciliation. Join him to learn some history regarding social justice in the LCMS as well as to consider actions for the future and who, or what, might help us get there.

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II. Social Ministry: Connecting Churches to Our Communities

If the Church is the visible manifestation of Jesus' church on Earth, how does a church or individual best serve their larger community? What are the components of creating effective and equitable partnerships? Facilitator Tina Jasion, founder of Faithful Innovation and Chief Operating Officer of Faith and Work Enterprises in Baltimore, Maryland, will lead participants through a series of questions designed to help with discernment of needs and opportunities and provide starting points to build an action plan to support justice and mercy in their own communities.

III. Let It Shine: Encouraging and Empowering People of Jesus to "speak-up"

Co-founders Rev. Matthew Ryan González and Joshua Salzberg of Lutherans for Racial Justice (LRJ) will share strategies on how this grassroots coalition pursues racial justice within the decision-making processes and structure of church leadership (Synod), both locally and nationally. In this session, review tools and resources for individuals to make an impact -- fostering empathy and awareness of the experiences of multiethnic individuals in church; strengthening existing efforts around racial empathy, equality, and justice; and mobilizing the church.

Panel Discussion

Next Steps to Fulfilling Our Mission

Rev. Dr. Jon Diefenthaler, Moderator

During the day, participants may submit questions for a panel including Rev. Dr. Matthew Borrasso, Rev. Dr. Yared Halche and Rev. Dr. Drew Hart in informal dialogue with each other. Speakers will respond with ideas about being a Church that creates community through love and service and being a voice to build bridges in the broken places in the body of Jesus as we share the good news of the Gospel.

Lunch and breaks will include time for informal networking along with dedicated time for resource sharing among presenters, participants, and related organizations.

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Speaker Bios

Drew G. I. Hart, Keynote Speaker is an associate professor of theology at Messiah University where he currently directs the *Thriving Together: Congregations for Racial Justice* program in central PA. He co-hosts *Inverse Podcast* with Australian peace activist Jarrod McKenna and is the author of *Trouble I've Seen: Changing the Way the Church Views Racism* (2016), *Who Will Be A Witness?: Igniting Activism for God's Justice, Love, and Deliverance* (2020), and he most recently co-edited and contributed to *Reparations and the Theological Disciplines: Prophetic Voices for Remembrance, Reckoning, and Repair* (Nov. 2023). His forthcoming book, *Making It Plain: Why We Need Anabaptism and the Black Church*, releases in September 2025. Drew regularly speaks at colleges, conferences, churches, and community groups across the country. He is married to Renee and is the father of three sons.

Jon Diefenthaler is a President Emeritus of the Southeastern District--LCMS. During the course of his career, he has served as pastor of two SED congregations: Bethany-Trinity in Waynesboro (now Fishersville), VA, and Our Savior in Laurel, MD, and he has written and presented in video format a history of the district's first fifty years. He holds a Ph.D. in American Religious History, and he has taught classes at both LCMS seminaries. He has also worked as a Church-Relations Advisor for Lutheran World Relief. He currently lives in Annapolis, MD, and is married to Ethel Bilderback.

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Matthew Borrasso serves as pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Lexington Park, MD. He earned his PhD from the University of Birmingham (UK) where his research engaged Lutheran application of Law and Gospel to scriptural and cultural issues. In addition to his work as a pastor he serves as an adjunct professor at Concordia University St. Paul and Concordia University Texas. Additionally, he is the Associate Editor of the Forum Letter. He lives in St. Mary's county with his wife and four children.

Co-Founders of Lutherans for Racial Justice (LRJ), Matthew Ryan González & Joshua Salzberg. LRJ is a grassroots coalition committed to fostering multi-ethnic church and school cultures as we pursue racial equity, justice, and healing within the communities of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). www.LutheransForRacialJustice.com

Matthew Ryan González is an LCMS pastor of Puerto Rican descent, raised in the church in the NYC metro area. He has been serving in the Bronx, NY for over ten years, specifically serving the Black and Brown communities that make up the Bronx's neighborhoods and locale. Alongside his passion for pastoral ministry, Matt is a 'die-hard' New York Yankees fan and avid sports zealot. More importantly, he is doing his best to be a loving father and husband while serving faithfully in his calling as an under-shepherd of the Good Shepherd.

Joshua Salzberg is originally from St. Louis. He is currently a Los Angeles-based screenwriter, film editor, and producer. In addition to his volunteer work with LRJ, Josh serves as Executive Director of First Lutheran Church of Culver City & Palms, one of the most diverse and densely populated neighborhoods in Los Angeles. Josh spends his free time exploring the city with his wife, Sarah, and two children.

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Yared Halche was born and grew up in Ethiopia. He studied theology in Ethiopia, Norway and the United States. He earned his PhD in missiology from Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, IN, in 2009. Yared is married to Bethel and the Lord has blessed them with two children. Yared started serving in the Lutheran Church of Ethiopia as a youth leader during the difficult communist era. His professional career started as a seminary teacher in south Ethiopia and continued as a missionary and mission developer in the United States. He served as a regional director for African Immigrants Ministry in the West coast. He pastored a congregation in Indiana that has members from 17 different countries. He currently serves as Executive Director of Witness and Interethnic Ministries in the Southeastern District of the LCMS.

Tina Jasion is passionate about moving ministry ideas into fruitful action. She founded the Faithful Innovation coaching practice in 2014, helping individuals, teams, and congregations fulfill their unique God-given purpose. Tina came to the Christian faith in her mid-20's. While raising a family, she started and ran two small businesses; then God called. In 2006 she earned an M.A. in Christian Outreach from Concordia University in St. Paul, MN and transitioned into full-time ministry. Combining entrepreneurial experience with the ministry, she helped to develop the faith-based nonprofit Faith and Work Enterprises in Baltimore, MD. Tina worked with First Lutheran Church in Towson and Concordia Preparatory School who partnered in mission to establish New Thing Lutheran Church. For the last five years, she has been working with congregations and faith-based nonprofits throughout the U.S. to utilize their gifts in fresh ways to reach people in our rapidly changing culture.

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Resource Table Descriptions

Available from 2 :00 – 2 :45 p.m.

Bridge Builders of The Lutheran Church of St. Andrew (LCSA) – Lay Organization Example
Bridge Builders is a group of members and friends of St. Andrew who are deeply rooted in Christian faith, seeking to answer God's call to reconciliation, justice, and service for all. The group aspires to address racism and inequity through shared awareness, relationship, and commitment to action. Join members to learn about activities sponsored at church to build awareness and service opportunities in the community in partnership with LCSA Social Ministry team.

Health & Wellness Ministry of The Lutheran Church of St. Andrew -- Community Resource Example
Members of this Ministry team are serving as a **First Aid Station** during the conference. The volunteers can also speak about the varied services this ministry provides from health screenings to support for families welcoming a new baby or experiencing health or life crises to medical equipment loan and donations – and much more! It is a dedicated team of health professionals and trained volunteers led by St. Andrew's Faith Community Nurse, focusing on the important relationship between wellness of mind, body, and spirit.

Keynote Speaker – Discussion, Book Sales & Signing
Rev. Dr. Drew G. I. Hart will be available to discuss topics related to his keynote address, and will have books he has authored available for purchase and signing: *Trouble I've Seen: Changing the Way the Church Views Racism* (2016); and *Who Will Be A Witness? Igniting Activism for God's Justice, Love, and Deliverance* (2020).

Lutheran Hour Ministry – Community Outreach Resources
Yvette Moy, Capital LLL District President will share resources, including:
Better Together: **How Christians Can Be a Welcome Influence in Their Neighborhoods:** lhm.org/together/
The Hopeful Neighborhood Project: hopefulneighborhood.org/about/
Plus, get details about an upcoming seminar led by Charles Hunt of the Fuller Youth Institute at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Springfield, VA on October 18 about authentic conversations of belonging, identity and community and how 45-60-year-olds can share experiential knowledge of Jesus in faith formation.

Lutherans for Racial Justice – Advocacy
Lutherans for Racial Justice (LRJ) is a grassroots coalition committed to fostering multiethnic church and school cultures as we pursue racial equity, justice, and healing within the communities of The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS). Breakout Session leaders and Co-Founders, Rev. Matthew Ryan González and Joshua Salzberg will be at the resource table with LRJ stickers, buttons, and information cards. They, and others in the LRJ community, will be on hand to discuss how you can get involved to make positive change in the LCMS.

Witness and Interethnic Ministries – Resources and Book Sale/Signing
Southeast District of the Lutheran Church of Missouri Synod
Rev. Dr. Yared Halche, Executive Director, will be available to discuss strategies that answer the question, "What can I do? What can my congregation do? What support does SED provide?" to connect with Jesus and help others connect with Him. Interethnic outreach methods are built around leadership development, church multiplication and bridging outreach ministries among congregations. Pastor Halche will also have copies of his 2024 book for sale and signing: *Witness Beyond Borders: Emerging Missionaries and Collaborative Missional Engagement* available

Submit a Question

for the speakers during the closing Panel Discussion: Next Steps to Fulfilling Our Mission at 2:45 p.m.

Please scan the QR throughout the day (until 2:00 p.m.) to submit questions for the panel. Dr. Jon Diefenthaler, moderator, will review the submissions to include in the panel discussion. We would prefer that questions be submitted electronically and will have a laptop available at the Bridge Builders table if you need assistance.

Question Form: https://forms.gle/tVX9VKA6kvWQftGy6

Complete the post-conference survey, please!

Offer feedback and suggestions to help us evaluate this conference and plan future events. Thank you!

Evaluation Form:
https://form.jotform.com/bridgebuilderslcsa/conference-evaluation