

# 2026

"ON THE ROAD"

# YEARBOOK



ABIDING PRESENCE  
LUTHERAN CHURCH



# Thank You!



**Rev. Meredith Lovell Keseley**  
Senior Pastor

**Rev. Kelsey Kresse**  
Pastor for Youth  
& College-Age Ministry



WOW! What a summer! Thank you for your partnership. Together, we proclaimed good news across the Metro-DC Synod that there is space for you – whoever you may be – both in God’s universe and in our local churches. Under the theme “Space to Belong,” we spent the summer teaching kids, teens, and college-age young adults about God’s abiding love for them and everyone else, too.



The pages of this book tell the story of what we believe it looks like to be church together. It’s not about one congregation or one program. Instead, it is about all of our churches showing up in the corners of the synod where God has planted us to make Christ known in tangible ways.



Our vision at Abiding Presence is to support the building of vibrant congregations across the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). We are doing this by removing the stumbling blocks of having to create a program, recruit volunteers, and fund the vision. Once those stumbling blocks are gone, congregations can reach out into their communities in a low-risk, high reward way. As they do, they are seeing the possibilities of what God can do in their community in and through their congregation.

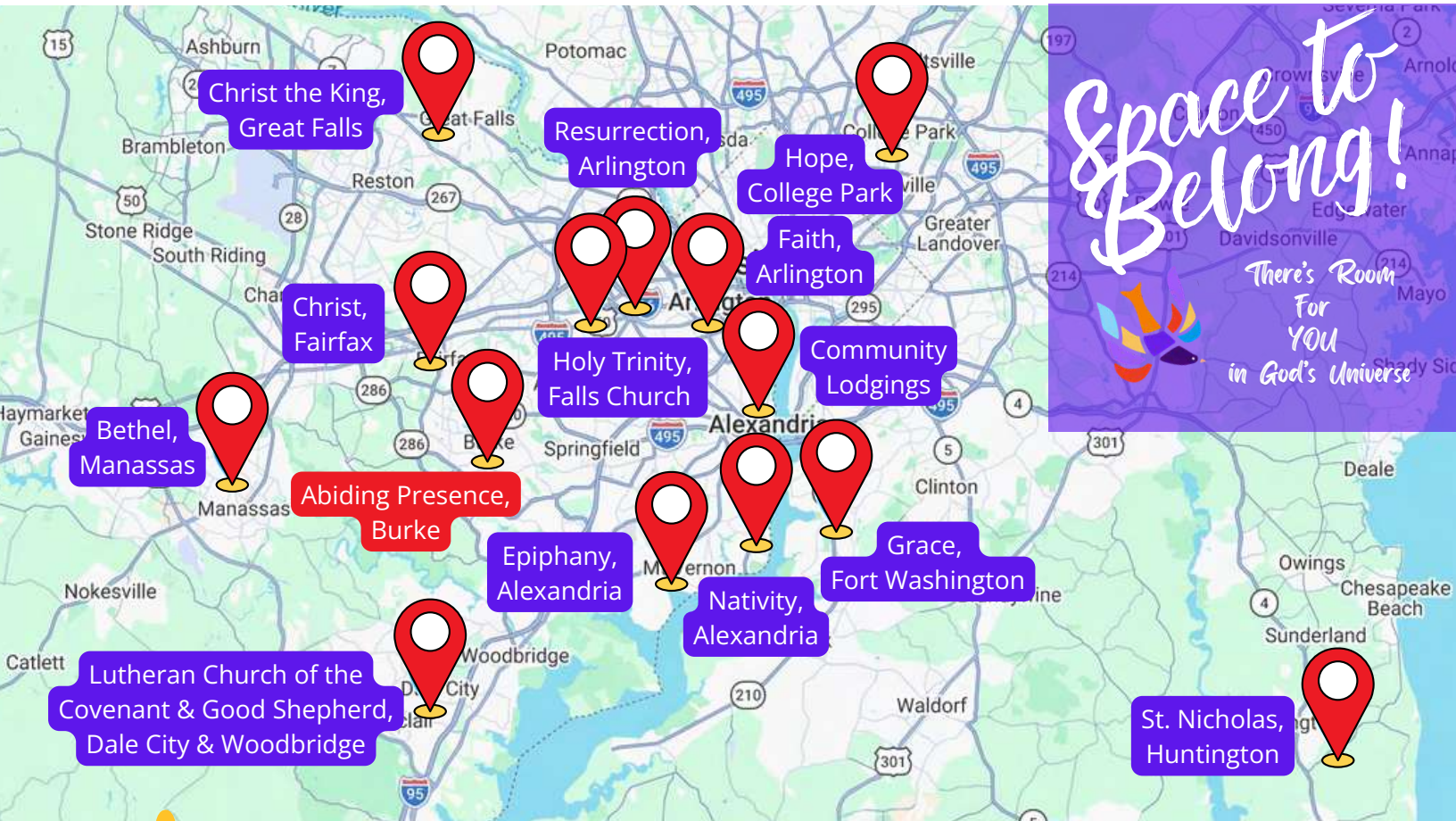
The stakes are high. We Lutherans have good news about God’s love that the world needs to hear. We are grateful to be Abiding Together with you, your congregation, and the Metro-DC Synod. We cannot wait to see what God does next through our partnerships.





# "ON THE ROAD"

## ACROSS THE METRO-DC SYNOD

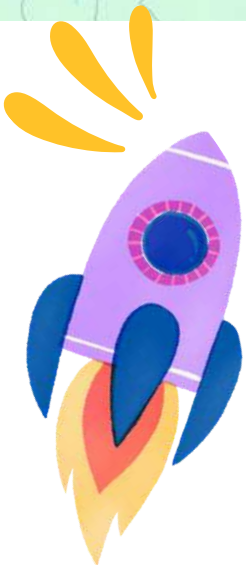


"Space to Belong" is a week-long Vacation Bible School (VBS) created by Abiding Presence Lutheran Church and shared with congregations across the Metro-DC Synod.

This "turnkey style" program brought curriculum, supplies, and staff from Abiding Presence to partner churches.

Partner churches were asked to open their doors, advertise in their community, have their pastor present and invite 7<sup>th</sup> grade through college-age young adults to join the team.

The result was a week of outreach to the partner church's community, under their church's name with their pastor as the face of the ministry.



# 6 BY THE NUMBERS

"On the Road" VBS



5

WEEKS OF "ON THE ROAD" VBS

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13

"ON THE ROAD" PARTNER LOCATIONS

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273

ELEMENTARY & PRESCHOOL  
CAMPERS AT CONGREGATIONS

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40

COMMUNITY LODGING CAMPERS

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31

ABIDING PRESENCE HIGH SCHOOL &  
COLLEGE-AGE INTERNS SENT "ON  
THE ROAD"

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24

MIDDLE, HIGH SCHOOL & COLLEGE-  
AGE YOUNG ADULT VOLUNTEERS  
FROM PARTNER CONGREGATIONS

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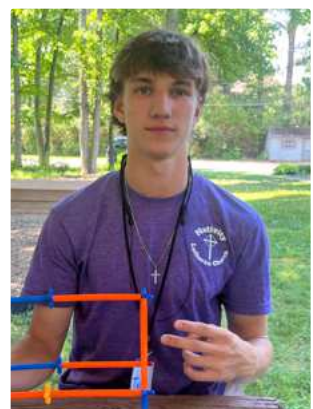
# Disciples Aren't Made By Accident

By Rev. Meredith Lovell Keseley

Reading the gospels and looking to Jesus, we can quickly see that disciples aren't made by accident. It is true that people encountered Jesus by accident all the time. What happened next, however, was always intentional. Jesus preached, cast out demons, healed the sick, raised the dead and called disciples. Through both words and actions, Jesus brought the kingdom of God near. He made people want to be part of that kingdom. The encounter may have been accidental, but the forming of faith is intentional. Each of Jesus's disciples made a choice to follow him.

In the time of Jesus, making the choice to become a disciple was not easy. Jesus called his disciples to leave their jobs, families, and personal possessions behind in favor of spreading the good news. While the choice to follow Jesus is far more mainstream today, it still is not easy. Following Jesus today still means turning the expectations of the world upside down, rethinking what has value and doing unpopular things. It isn't intuitive.

Since disciples aren't made by accident, Jesus is active – not passive – when it comes to doing it. The gospels tell the stories of how he intentionally forms faith. Jesus preaches and teaches, he shows and tells, he answers questions and asks even more. In other words, he engages with his disciples – constantly. He doesn't leave it up to them to figure out what God is doing, what their next steps should be, or what the things they are





witnessing mean. Jesus engages. He teaches them how to pray, and how to live in community. He teaches them what being his follower looks like and doesn't hesitate to let them know when they are heading off course. Before sending them off into the world to do God's work, Jesus thoroughly prepares his disciples.



For many years – or centuries, even – the church has taken a more passive approach to discipleship. Faith has been passed down from generation to generation through modeling. The next generation has gone to church because that is what the generations before them have done and everyone else around them is doing. Children learn to pray, not because they are taught, but because they have watched their grownups. In some ways, this model is effective; however, it does not explain the reasoning behind these actions. For generations in the church, being a follower of Jesus was expected, and people leaned into those expectations.



Today, following Jesus is more the exception than the norm, especially in circles of youth and young adults. These young people have grown up without strong models of church attendance, prayer, Bible reading or discipleship. In many cases, the church has been traumatizing or harmful to young people. Being a disciple of Jesus is no longer intuitive or something you learn by looking around you; instead, it is something from which youth often turn away from.



When we went back to Scripture to study Jesus' disciple-making model, we realized how far off the church's passive approach to discipling had become. So, at Abiding Presence, we went back to Jesus' model. We got back on track living out Jesus' Great Commission to "make disciples." While discipleship making is something we do year round, summer presents an extended time for us to invest in our young people, giving them the time, space, teaching, mentoring and opportunities to focus on what it means for them in their unique situation to be a disciple of Jesus.







# "ON THE ROAD" TO NATIVITY LUTHERAN CHURCH



Week 1

Alexandria, VA



I wanted to take a quick minute of your time to acknowledge the exceptional work of your young church members. Our grandchildren are attending the Vacation Bible School this week at Nativity Lutheran Church. We have been completely in awe with the experience from your camp counselors. Carter is amazing and most courteous with everyone. He informs us of the daily activities and shows sincerity in his interest to engage the kids. I can't say enough about how much we've appreciated his enthusiasm and care with these children's activities. Also, [the counselors] are all incredible with the children and our children come home raving about how much fun they've had each day. I could go on and on about the excitement they've generated this week. These wonderful memories will last a lifetime! Again, thank you for molding such amazing young adults and blessing our family so generously.

- Email from a VBS Family





# "ON THE ROAD" TO SAINT NICHOLAS LUTHERAN CHURCH



Week 1

Huntingtown, MD

∞

I think this idea is a brilliant model for jump-starting youth programs at churches. Also, I believe that this synod-wide model helps our congregations have a sense of 'togetherness'. Also this is a great way for young students to gain leadership experience and I wondered how many of these might consider ministry in the future, or at the very least, become involved laity in the parish.

- Brother Ken Taylor, Pastor



Our Saint Nicholas team spent the week in an Airbnb and got some fun in the off hours.





# "ON THE ROAD" TO CHRIST EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

Week 1

Fairfax, VA



We had camp last week and it certainly was out of this world! [The kids] loved the activities and the life-size games. They enjoyed storytime during snack and during Bible, they really seemed to take things in. But the music was, I think, a favorite. We had five of our 12 campers worship with us on Sunday and they absolutely LOVED singing for everyone.

-Pastor Krista Vingelis







# "ON THE ROAD" TO BETHEL LUTHERAN CHURCH

Week 2

Manassas, VA

∞ And I'll have more to say here later, but for now, PLEASE KNOW how IMPRESSED the adults at Bethel are with the AP counselors. The level of maturity, welcome, and easy confidence that we're seeing is remarkable.

-Pastor Katie Pocalyko after the first day of VBS





*Lutheran Church  
of the Covenant*  
GATHER • GROW • GIVE • GO

"ON THE ROAD" TO

# LUTHERAN CHURCH OF THE COVENANT

In Partnership with  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

Week 2

Dale City, VA



This year, Lutheran Church of the Covenant (LCOC) and Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Woodbridge, VA held Vacation Bible School together with Abiding Presence's help. The structure, leadership, compassion, energy, and passion for Jesus that the Abiding Presence counselors brought to camp "On the Road" at LCOC was transformative for all those who participated, including students from both our congregations and the wider community. One LCOC student, after experiencing the fun-filled joy of the week, exclaimed "I love this church!" Abiding Presence has helped us provide engaging, God-filled experiences for our students that connect them to each other, our congregation, and their faith. Thank you, thank you, thank you to the Abiding Presence pastors, staff, and congregation for this amazing support!

– Pastor Grace Casola, LCOC







# "ON THE ROAD" TO GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

Week 2

Fort Washington, MD

∞ The week-long VBS program with Abiding wasn't just a church camp; it was a living example of what happens when congregations unite their gifts. We saw stronger relationships and a deeper sense of mission, and of course had lots of fun! This collaboration has opened the door for future opportunities to grow, serve, and build even more spaces where children can experience faith, friendship, and belonging.

-A Member of Grace Lutheran Church





# "ON THE ROAD" TO EPIPHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH

Week 3

Mount Vernon, VA

It was amazing seeing the 25 kids who came to VBS at Epiphany this summer be so enthusiastic about participating in the program and being together. And even more amazing was watching their grown-ups be amazed at the enthusiasm with which they sang their songs and shouted out the Big Idea of the day at the closing each day! The Abiding Presence staff is awesome (and it was good to see so many of them return for a second year of VBS here) -- I can't say enough about how impressive they are and how much our kids appreciated them. Such a blessing for our congregation to host this ministry again this year!

-Pastor David Yocis





"ON THE ROAD" TO

# RESURRECTION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

Week 3

Arlington, VA



We had a GREAT week. There were so many lovely God-moments, I lost count. Thank you for stepping into our community. It was great not only for the kids but also for the congregation of Resurrection Lutheran Church. Yes, we were all tired, but it was a powerful tired, and I thank God for every second of it.

-Vicar Lisa Wackler, Intern





# "ON THE ROAD" TO COMMUNITY LODGINGS



Weeks 3 & 4

Alexandria, VA

∞

I SIMPLY CANNOT EXPRESS HOW AWESOME the last two weeks were!! All of the counselors were so wonderful with the kids, and they loved working with them! Because of them, we were able to do smaller group reading, which is wonderful because it means that each child got more focused attention and help than we can give them on other weeks. They all really need the help, so we are very grateful for that. That said, the highlight was definitely the activities! The kids had SO much fun! The activities were different, exciting, and engaging. I'm so impressed that you came up with all of those ideas, many of which I haven't seen done before. Honestly, this was the best two weeks we've had in years because of all the reading support and especially the activities!

-Kate, Director of Residence Services







# "ON THE ROAD" TO HOLY TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH



Week 4

Falls Church, VA



Thank you for helping us welcome the youth of our community into our building this past week. Your leadership, encouragement, and genuine care created a place where children felt safe, valued, and excited to learn and grow. We are deeply grateful for the energy and heart you brought to Vacation Bible School. Thank you for creating a welcoming community where everyone belongs.

-Pastor Mike Gutzler





# "ON THE ROAD" TO CHRIST THE KING LUTHERAN CHURCH



Week 5

Great Falls, VA

∞ The quality of leadership in the college students who came as counselors was excellent. They were well prepared and very attentive to the children. They made it fun while at the same time making sure the theme of the day was presented in ways that the children could understand. Before each day, the staff and volunteers and I spent time in prayer, lifting up our unique praises to God and sharing what we hoped God would give us throughout the day. We read the story that the children would hear that day and reflected on it. Of the 31 young people who came to be part of this experience, almost all of them were not members. We were certainly a community church this past week, for which I am grateful. Our doors were wide open, and it would be awesome to find other ways to make this a trend.

-Pastor Sandy Kessinger







"ON THE ROAD" TO

# FAITH LUTHERAN CHURCH



Week 5

Arlington, VA



Thank you for the partnership. Yesterday was magical.

-Pastor CJ Valenti after the first day of VBS





# Hope Lutheran Church

"ON THE ROAD" TO

## HOPE LUTHERAN CHURCH

Week 5

College Park, MD



This team is really doing a good job! They're attentive to the kids. It's the end of the summer and I'm sure they're tired. But they're really present and doing the job well! They know they're here to have fun. And they know the fun is about Jesus. Really remarkable!

-Pastor Julie Bringman







# Financial Report

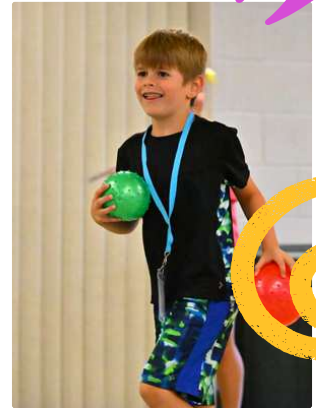
As with all ministry, our “On the Road” program had a cost associated with it. The next page includes a spreadsheet with the cost to Abiding Presence for each partner congregation’s program. Those costs include:

- Abiding Presence College-Age and High School Staff
- Supplies for each participant
- Staff mileage
- Volunteer T-shirts

The per partner cost varies based on the number of VBS participants and how many staff/volunteers the church provided. Some partner churches followed the Abiding Presence model of paying teens and/or college-age young adults as staff. Those staffing costs are not included. Also not included are Abiding Presence’s cost associated with curriculum development, payroll, workers comp and oversight from the Abiding Presence clergy and full-time staff.

The Metro-DC Synod provided a grant of \$35,000 to support the cost of the “On the Road” program. We are grateful for that support. Thank you! The rest of the cost is being funded by Abiding Presence’s operating budget.

The “On the Road” program is in addition to the on-site program Abiding Presence hosts. The on-site program costs are funded out of Abiding Presence’s operating budget and Bright Future campaign.





# SUMMER PARTNERSHIPS

ACTUAL COST BASED ON LOCATION

| <i><b>Location</b></i>                                          | <b>Total</b>    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Nativity Lutheran Church                                        | <b>\$3,116</b>  |
| Saint Nicholas Lutheran Church                                  | <b>\$3,814</b>  |
| Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church                              | <b>\$2,777</b>  |
| Bethel Lutheran Church                                          | <b>\$5,113</b>  |
| Grace Lutheran Church                                           | <b>\$2,970</b>  |
| Resurrection Evangelical Lutheran Church                        | <b>\$5,318</b>  |
| Lutheran Church of the Covenant & Good Shepherd Lutheran Church | <b>\$3,817</b>  |
| Community Lodgings                                              | <b>\$7,813</b>  |
| Epiphany Lutheran Church                                        | <b>\$4,690</b>  |
| Holy Trinity Lutheran Church                                    | <b>\$8,492</b>  |
| Christ the King Lutheran Church                                 | <b>\$3,994</b>  |
| Faith Lutheran Church                                           | <b>\$3,263</b>  |
| Hope Lutheran Church                                            | <b>\$6,013</b>  |
| <b>Grand Total</b>                                              | <b>\$61,190</b> |







# Abiding Presence

Lutheran Church

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*Connecting people to Christ through Community*

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