



# CROSSINGS Connection

WHERE THE GOSPEL MEETS OUR DAILY LIVES

ADVENT 2019 | Vol. 136 | From the Crossings Community, Inc

## What Will Inspire Lori Cornell's Conference Presentation? Pottery Shards and Japanese Art!

The Rev. Lori Cornell will be among those making presentations at the 2020 International Crossings Conference, January 26–29, in Belleville, Illinois. Her title is “Faith Enough for the Broken Places.” When asked what approach she will take toward the conference theme of “The Broken Life,” Lori cites three images. The first is from 2 Corinthians 4:7, “[W]e have this treasure in clay jars.” The second image is the site of thousands of those clay jars she witnessed in archeological sites in Greece. They were common, a part of daily life, and dispensed with when cracked or broken. She describes a subway station in an old part of Athens where a transparent wall reveals layers of civilization teeming with the remains of clay vessels.

The third image is from the Japanese art of kintsukuroi, the art of precious scars. Artists mend cracked ceramics using a lacquer mixed with gold, silver, or platinum. The practice honors the history of the object, and the repairs are incorporated into a new piece rather than trying to disguise them.

While preparing for her conference presentation, Lori will hold these images at the forefront. “Brokenness is pervasive in our lives,” she said. “We are clay vessels, easily cracked and broken. But in Christ we are not worthless throwaways. We have even greater value as the light of Christ shines through those cracks.”

Lori graduated from Pacific Lutheran University and was working at *The Christian Century* in Chicago. She took a night class at Lutheran School of Theology — Chicago (LSTC), taught by Crossings co-founder Dr. Robert Bertram. In Bob’s class, she met her call to ministry. She graduated from LSTC in 1993 and has spent her ministry in the Pacific Northwest. She is in her 18th year as pastor of Calvary Lutheran Church in Federal Way, Washington. For 19 years, Lori has been the expert editor of Sabbathology, Crossings weekly text study, and she has taken on her second term on the Crossings board of directors.



Lori Cornell will speak at the  
2020 Crossings Conference

“Brokenness is  
pervasive in our lives.  
But ... the light of  
Christ shines through  
those cracks.”

— Lori Cornell

---

## Co-Executive Directors' Corner

I received an early Christmas gift this year, in time to prepare for Advent: two file boxes filled with sermons and lecture notes from Crossings co-founder Edward Schroeder. Ed categorized these files by year, spanning the 1950s and 1960s. The sermons are especially precious, as they share good Law/Gospel well before Ed was talking about the “Crossings Matrix.”



**Candice Wassell**  
Co-Director

Knowing the value these writings would have for generations of co-crossers, we set to work to preserve the handwritten and typed pages, carefully scanning and cataloguing them. But as we have been doing this work, I've snuck one file at a time and read to my heart's great content. And I have something to share!

Of interest to us this time of year is a sermon Ed wrote in 1954 for Christmas Eve worship at St. John Lutheran Church, Mayfair, in Chicago, Illinois, where he served his vicarage. The question Ed asks on this holy night 65 years ago is, “Where is Bethlehem?” He asks this because it's to Bethlehem we must go to receive the infant Christ, without whom there is no Christmas, no gift of salvation received from our Savior's birth. Bethlehem is not simply located on a map near Palestine. If it were, those folks sitting in the pews of St. John in Chicago would be too far away to receive the infant Christ.

Throughout his sermon, Ed pondered this question, mentioning all the places we might search to find Bethlehem. It's a question we can still ask today as we prepare our homes, churches, and work spaces for this Advent season. Are any of these places our Bethlehem — where we will find the infant Christ, where we can receive him into the manger of our hearts?

Yes, they very well might be, according to Ed. For wherever people receive the infant Christ like the shepherds did, by listening, there is Bethlehem. Wherever people receive the infant Christ like the Wise Men did, by worshipping, there is Bethlehem. And wherever people receive the infant Christ like Mary did, by pondering these things in her heart, there is Bethlehem.

So this Advent, let us travel to Bethlehem too, wherever it is that we listen, worship, and ponder Christ crucified. Let us travel there to meet the infant Christ, to see this great thing, to receive the gift of mercy in the places where we work, play, and live together. Thank you, dear Ed, for pointing us the way to Bethlehem.

Peace & Joy,  
Candice Wassell

## David Zahl Returns for 2020 Conference

# Speaking Grace in a World of #GettingReal

David Zahl's keynote address at the 2018 Crossings conference was enthusiastically received. Now he returns for the 2020 Crossings conference, January 26–29, in Belleville, Illinois (near St. Louis).

David's latest book is *Seculosity*. He coined the word to describe how career, parenting, technology, food, politics, and romance became our new religion. David diagnoses what ails us. For a prognosis, he offers a Christ-centered faith that heralds at full volume Christ's death and resurrection for us, the good news that nothing needs to be done that hasn't already been done.

The conference theme is "The Broken Life." David titles his address "Speaking Grace in a World of #GettingReal." Type in that hashtag on Instagram and a multitude of posts pops up, with images of people going about their everyday lives. But the photos are, in fact, carefully curated. The term "curation" has migrated from the museum to describe how we order and display our lives.

"Performative brokenness" is the term David uses for this curated fashion. It is the latest model

for justifying ourselves. We tell ourselves, "I'm a mess, but you see how minor the mess is and improvement is at hand with a little effort." David counters that there is no answer for what we are to do when the brokenness persists. The world's form of performative brokenness cannot account for the cyclical nature of our trouble, what we would call our bondage to sin.

David serves as a licensed lay minister responsible for adult education and campus ministry of Christ Episcopal Church in Charlottesville, Virginia. He is founder of Mockingbird Ministry, an online forum at [mbird.com](http://mbird.com) (where you'll find a lot about Luther and law-gospel theology). When asked about the name of the website, Zahl said the mockingbird gets its name because it repeats the song it hears. Likewise, we are charged with repeating the gospel of grace we hear. David is married to Cate, an artist he met at church camp. They have three boys, 9, 6, and 3 years old.



David Zahl

## James Brooks Brings the Gospel To Bear on Chicago's Southside

The Rev. James Brooks is one of four keynote speakers at the Crossings Conference, January 26–29, 2020, at Our Lady of the Snows in Belleville, Illinois (near St. Louis). His address is titled "The Three Rs: Relocation, Reconciliation, Redistribution."

James is the senior pastor of Harmony Community Church, known in the Lawndale neighborhood of Chicago for a food pantry serving 300 households weekly and for Harmony Kidz, which provides tutoring, fine arts instruction, and an evening meal two nights a week. James is also the vice president of mission and community

engagement at Lawndale Christian Health Center in Chicago with 60,000 patients.

He was a star at St. Joseph High School in Westchester, Illinois, and received a college basketball scholarship. After his older brother, who had been his mentor, died from a drug overdose, James put his goal of becoming an Illinois State Trooper on the shelf and took a job as a corrections officer at the Illinois Youth Center in St. Charles. Every week he met youth from the North Lawndale neighborhood of Chicago, who were sent to the

*See page 4*



James Brooks

# Generosity Born of Devotion

By Stephen Hitchcock

The Rev. Dr. Larry Neeb, a friend and mentor to many of us involved in Crossings died on October 20, just a few weeks after a festive celebration of his 80th birthday. He died in his sleep at his home in Ballwin, Missouri.

Neeb was director of communications at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, when the controversy in Missouri Synod in the early 1970s led to the formation of Seminex, Evangelical Lutherans in Mission, and Partners in Mission. Larry's organizational skill, his expertise in communications, and his indefatigable goodwill played a central role in the success — and lasting impact — of those endeavors.

After I graduated from Seminex, I had the good fortune to work with Larry at ELIM and Seminex. What a marvelous education I received! One of the many of Larry's admonitions and aphorisms that has stayed is "Always err on the side of generosity."

Generosity was truly a hallmark of Larry's life. He was an extraordinary philanthropist, providing financial support to Crossings and many other endeavors that supported education and human care. But as his longtime friend and colleague, the Rev. Richard Mueller puts, "It was his generosity

of spirit that made Larry so remarkable. He never said anything malicious about anyone. He had so many friendships."

Larry's friendships included Crossings' founders Bob Bertram and Ed Schroeder. I was lucky enough to listen in on several of the lively conversations between Ed and Larry.

Mueller traces Larry's gift for friendship and generosity to his rigorous devotional life. "Every morning, he began with reading and prayer."

That passion for a rich devotional life was, according to Mueller, part of the inspiration for Creative Communications for the Parish. Founded and managed by Larry for over 25 years, "Creative," as it was known, provided worship and study resources to more than 40,000 churches. At its height, the daily devotional book, *Living Faith*, was used by more than 700,000 individuals. It became a mainstay of Catholic prison ministry.

Larry's creativity, financial acumen, and organizational wisdom benefitted many boards of non-profit organizations, including long service on the board of regents of Pacific Lutheran University and the board of the Lutheran Family and Children's Services Foundation. His legacy of leadership and involvement in Christ Lutheran Church, Webster Groves, is evident in the parish's rich worship and educational life.



Larry Neeb

---

## James Brooks Brings the Gospel to Bear on Chicago's Southside

*From page 3*

center by the juvenile court.

James said his heart got heavy seeing youth from his community coming into the criminal justice system. He resigned his position at the corrections center and took a job with the West

Side Community Association (WACA). There he worked to keep the youth in North Lawndale out of the criminal justice system.

**Please read the full article at**  
<https://crossings.org/jamesbrooksarticle>



**CROSSINGS**  
Connection

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

**ADVENT 2019**

Writer/Editor: Bruce Modahl  
Executive Secretary: Cathy Lessmann

Co-Executive Director: Candice Wassell  
Co-Executive Director: Sherman Lee

© December 2019