

## Biography

The Reverend J. Michael Mills (he/him/his), CTICS(SS/IW), USN, Ret., is of Grand Ledge, Michigan. When preparing for transition out of high school, J. had few to no college aspirations due to lack of financial support for college. Not wanting to work minimum-wage jobs any longer, he enlisted in the Navy in 1998. Upon graduation from basic training in Great Lakes, IL he reported to Russian Language Training at the Defense Language Institute, focusing on Humanities with an emphasis on both the Russian Culture and Language. It was in the Monterey Bay Area, at St. Philip's Lutheran Church that he experienced the call to public ministry, bolstered by attending a discernment weekend at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley California and mentorship from, the late, Pastor Roy Blumhorst.

His initial fleet assignment, after completion of Technical School in San Angelo, Texas was the Naval Security Group Activity (NSGA) Kunia, Hawaii. Continuing a focus on ministry, he wrote and presented the prayers of intercession at the Barber's Point Naval Chapel. Transferring in October 2003 to, then, NSGA Fort Meade, Maryland Pastor J. led mission development and management efforts, working with leaders across Navy departments and National Security Agency offices to increase efforts securing national interests and safety of military personnel abroad. In 2006, Pastor J. moved to Taneytown, Maryland to escape the hustle and bustle of the D.C. Metro area. By chance, he bought a home right next door to Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, subsequently transferring his membership there, officially. Jumping into the life of the Congregation immediately, he was elected to the Congregation Council in 2007 and served as the President from 2007 to 2009 (and again in 2013-2015, overseeing the pastoral call process both times). Pastor J. volunteered for a National Intelligence Support Team deployment to Iraq in 2009, supporting CSG Baghdad, the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry and 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Divisions in Kirkuk, Iraq. He returned to Navy Information Operations Command, Maryland in 2010, supporting submarine deployments world-wide, and deployed 12 additional missions aboard 11 submarines in both SIXTH and SEVENTH Fleets for the remainder of his career; a total of 615 days deployed. Pastor J. served as a Direct Support Leading Chief Petty Officer-at-Sea and Mission Supervisor for teams of up to 20 Sailors and Officers from as many as three Navy Commands, supporting special operations in potentially hazardous regions. He qualified in SUBMARINES in 2010, and Enlisted Information Warfare Specialist in 2013. Prior to retirement, after 21 years of service, the-Senior Chief Mills led the Direct Support Department, with 180 deployable Sailors under his charge, and working diligently to stand up a new Navy Command structure for 400 Sailors, writing Navy instructions and ensuring the diligent command support for Sexual Assault Prevention and Casualty Assistance programs.

Active with Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church throughout all of the assignment changes since 2009, serving on multiple committees and teams in addition to Council, he was a primary Assisting Minister and heavily engaged in leadership guidance through a period of congregational conflict, ever focused on answering the Call in every capacity possible while awaiting the "right" time to begin the entrancing process for Word and Sacrament Ministry. Moving through the ELCA Candidacy Process in the fall of 2017 and being granted a positive "Entrance" decision from the Delaware-Maryland Synod, he opted to postpone retirement for one year and begin part-time studies at the Gettysburg Campus of United Lutheran Seminary. Having completed all residential requirements during the Spring Semester of 2020, he relocated to Texas, reuniting with his daughter and completing online studies, graduating with a Master of Divinity, and being Ordained as a Word and Sacrament Rostered Leader in August of 2022.

Called to congregations in transition and having a deep understanding the positive role that death and resurrection offers to our lives of faith, Pastor J. is building a Synodical Call for Holy Fork in the Road Ministries, borne out of the legacy of Lord of Life Lutheran Church, Austin, planning for cessation of ministry in March of 2023. Pastor J. is a trained youth crisis counselor serving an international youth crisis hotline operated by the Trevor Project, focused on justice and equity for LGBTQIA2S+ youth. He is also a trained End-of-life Doula through the International End-of-Life Doula Association (INELDA), specializing in accompanying communities experiencing death and dying. Pastor J. asks questions as an active part of ministry development and believes in the agency of congregations to be experts in their ministry contexts. He has a deep love for the radical love available in the gospel for all people, everywhere, and holds the resurrection as a pivot moment for how that radical love can be life changing for us all.

Pastor J. has one daughter, Ava Morgan, age 16, who resides in Brenham, Texas.