

DISTRICT NEWS

January 2025

STATE OF THE DISTRICT

Working together, in *joy* and *harmony*

As we enter a new calendar year, I want to give you something of a State of the District report. This comes from excerpts from my district convention report, found in the *Convention Workbook*. The convention, as you probably know, is right around the corner: Feb. 16-18 at the Sioux Falls Convention Center.



Rev. Dr. Scott Sailer
District President

served for a time by an interim VP for LCEF, Kai Larson of the Minnesota South District. Very recently, that changed when LCEF hired a full-time vice-president, Kurt Primuth, to be shared with the North Dakota District. Kurt began his work on Dec. 1.

I believe that the Holy Spirit is guiding the development of these approaches so that we can be more effective in our Kingdom work. I am so grateful for the work of the Mission and Ministry Council, Pastor Winckler, Mr. Geidel and Mr. Primuth.

Second, thank the Lord for the many ministry partnerships among us! The South Dakota District is known for our many multi-congregation parishes. Two, three or even four congregations put together a parish agreement to be served by a pastor together and, most of all, to continue to let their Gospel lights shine in their respective communities. Did you know we have 24 dual parishes, seven tri-point parishes, and even one quad-parish? When you do the math, you will find that 73 of our 105 LCMS congregations in South Dakota are in such Word and Sacrament ministry partnerships.

Our congregations partner in other ways, too. The congregations send in offerings for ministry in our district and

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First, have you noticed some of the new approaches to how the district is serving our church workers, congregations, schools and other ministries?

- We used to have Services Areas. We now have the Mission and Ministry Council.
- We used to have one executive assistant to the district president, an executive secretary. We now have an assistant to the president, Rev. Paul Winckler, and a part-time education executive, Dave Geidel.
- Randy Gayken served as our part-time Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) vice-president through October 2023, after 5½ years of service in this position. After Randy retired, we were



In October, Rev. Mick Wolfram was the guest preacher for LFS Sunday at Grace, Deadwood. Following service, Pastor Wolfram shared with the congregation information about the many services provided by Lutheran Family Service. He is pictured at left greeting Grace members. Also pictured is Rev. Robert Hinckley, Grace pastor. The South Dakota District has been supporting LFS' work among our pastors and laity.

Pastor Nour retires after 30 years in ministry

Rev. Nabil S. Nour retired from full-time service in the pastoral ministry on Oct. 27. To celebrate the occasion, an afternoon service was held that day at Trinity, rural Hartford, where Pastor Nour has served since 2016.

The nave at Trinity overflowed with an estimated 225 people in attendance. Rev. Dr. Don Fondow, Minnesota North District president emeritus, served as the preacher. Rev. Dr. Nathan Meador, South Wisconsin District mission executive, served as the MC of the program that followed the service.

Pastor Nour is a Palestinian Christian who grew up in Nazareth. A 1994 graduate of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, he served his entire 30-year ministry in the South Dakota District in two congregations, Trinity and Redeemer, Armour (1994–2015). He will continue serving as LCMS fourth vice-president.

We wish Nabil and his wife, Jean, every blessing in Christ as they enter this new and exciting time of life and of continuing service to our Lord.



▲ Pastor Fondow preaches during the service.

▶ Pastor Nour is pictured with his wife, Jean.



Faith offers mental health support

How can we best support the people in our congregation and widen our community outreach?

That is the question that, in a round-about way, led to a new mental health ministry at Faith, Sioux Falls. Fresh Hope for Mental Health, based in Omaha, Neb., now has a presence in Sioux Falls with a Bible-based curriculum specially designed for peer-to-peer support groups. The curriculum, led by trained volunteers, aims to help people with mental health challenges live full and enriched lives with the hope they receive through Jesus Christ.

Four members of Faith completed training to lead the mental health support group, and the group started meeting regularly in fall 2024.

The group meetings give attendees “the opportunity to share struggles, but also to build hope that we don’t have to go it alone,” said Shelly Hoefs, a Faith member and certified health and wellness coach.

The mental health focus didn’t come right away. Initially, the focus on

outreach was broader, with church members pondering how they could offer health and wellness support to those inside and outside of the congregation. Certified fitness instructors led exercise classes twice a week, and volunteers made meals to store in the church freezer — meals available for any church or community member in need of extra help.

It wasn’t until later that church leaders and volunteers identified a need for mental health support within the community.

“That one was not quite as easy to say, ‘Yes, let’s do this,’ because many people do not feel qualified (to help those with mental health challenges),” Hoefs said.

Congregation members prayed about the opportunity, concentrating on the question, “How do we bring hope to people with mental health when mental health tends to not get talked about in church?”

And that’s when they turned to Fresh Hope for Mental Health, which focuses on helping people “find real hope whether you have a mental health



challenge or love someone who does.” The founder is Rev. Brad Hoefs, retired pastor (and Shelly’s cousin), who was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and worked with his psychologist to found the organization.

Research shows that support groups like Fresh Hope helps reduce hospitalizations due to mental health. According to the Fresh Hope website, freshhope.us, one out of every five people in the United States has a diagnosable mental illness, and about half of the U.S. population are touched in some way by a mental health challenge.

“We started small in our church because someone came with a need,” Pastor Hoefs said.

Navigating the need and the growth of the program is an ongoing effort that continues to be supported in prayer.

CALL INFORMATION

Rev. Michael Kumm, Holy Cross, Dakota Dunes, declined a call as interim pastor to Grace, Little Rock, Ark., Nov. 25.

Rev. Thomas Brown, St. Paul's, Spearfish, declined a call as pastor to Redeemer, Atwood, Kan., Nov. 16.

Rev. Dan Grimmer, Zion, Mitchell, declined a call to Christ, Topeka, Kan., Dec. 1.

Rev. Jeffrey Pautz, Our Savior, Muscatine, Iowa, declined a call to Zion, Canistota, and St. John, Montrose, Dec. 5.

Rev. Aaron Koch, Mount Zion, Greenfield, Wis., declined a call to Zion, Canistota, and St. John, Montrose; and to Zion, Chamberlain, Nov. 10.

VACANCIES

Sole pastor

- Zion Canistota/ St. John, Montrose
- Concordia Cresbard/Immanuel, Wecota
- St. Paul, Freeman
- St. Paul, Plankinton/Trinity, White Lake
- Risen Savior, Tea
- St. John, Wagner/Trinity, Fairfax
- Our Redeemer, Sioux Falls
- Zion, Chamberlain • St. Peter, Wentworth

Share your news with us!

Send articles/photos to Kate Meadows:

- kate@katemeadows.com
- 420 E. Liberty Street; Rapid City, SD 57701



PASSing it on

Saints from across the district gathered at Zion Lutheran Church, School and Preschool, Rapid City, and Sioux Falls Lutheran School for the second PASS It On! workshops, held Nov. 2–3.

This year's theme, "Navigating the Intersections of Faith and Culture," was highlighted in presentations from Rev. Dr. Greg Seltz, executive director of the Lutheran Center for Religious Liberty in Washington D.C.; Dr. Brad Alles, associate professor of education at Concordia University Wisconsin; and Rev. Tom Eckstein, pastor of Trinity, Adrian, N.D., and Concordia, Jamestown, N.D., and author of numerous books and studies.

Dr. Seltz focused on our "Two Kingdoms" doctrine, with a special focus on the implications for 21st century Americans. Dr. Alles invited listeners to



Pictured presenting are (top) Dr. Brad Alles and (left) Rev. Dr. Greg Seltz.

consider the impact of modern culture on truth, identity and purpose, along with apologetics to answer the challenges.

Pastor Eckstein focused on the biblical response to LGBTQ issues and how to faithfully minister to those struggling with those lifestyles.

These events, sponsored by the district Mission and Ministry Council, included time for panel questions and answers as well as opportunities for fellowship. The Council thanks all who attended and helped to make the events a success.

For more information on upcoming district events, visit sdtlclms.org/news-events.

The race was on!

Competition benefits food pantry

Every year since 2017, the dual parish of Emmanuel, Creighton, and First, Wall, holds an annual food drive as a community service project to benefit Country Cupboard Food Pantry.

The eighth food drive was held through October, with the congregations squaring off in their yearly "friendly competition" to see which can bring in the most food. Emmanuel, Creighton, squeaked out a win this year, with 1,397 items donated. First was not far behind with 1,342 items donated.

The real winner is Country Cupboard, where shelves are now well stocked for the winter with the help of the congregations.



Lillian Helms, secretary at First, Wall, and Emmanuel, Creighton, is pictured with some of the donations for County Cupboard Food Pantry.

Moments with Mary Jo

Candidates announced

Philippians 4:6 tells us:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

I need to remind myself of that every day.

Women of the LWML across the country were asked to submit names to the Nominating Committee for various positions to be filled. I am excited to share with you here the slate of candidates for election at our national LWML Convention, to be held June 26–29 in Omaha, Neb.



Mary Jo Stier
LWML District President

Pastoral Counselor

Rev. Tim Jenks — Canoga Park, Calif.
Rev. Michael Schmidt — Manhattan, Kan.

Vice-President of Christian Life

Shari Miller — Helena, Mont.
Mary Smith — Goldendale, Wash.

Vice-President of Communication

Kelly Bernhardt — Amarillo, Texas
Linda Guterres — Medford, N.Y.

Vice-President of Gospel Outreach

Anne Hartman — Eau Claire, Wis.
Sharon von Qualen — Carroll, Iowa

Recording Secretary

Dianna Just — Vinita, Okla.
Lois Teinert — Austin, Texas

Nominating Committee

Nicole Dowdell — Cincinnati, Ohio
Karen Drury — Oak Ridge, Mo.
Katy Gifford — Wheaton, Minn.
Sharon McGuan — Kenmore, N.Y.
Dr. Patricia Peters — Sioux Falls
Nila Rodriguez — Burbank, Calif.
Deaconess Raquel Rojas — The Bronx, N.Y.
Sherri Rose — Shawnee, Kan.
Ginger Starrett — Belvidere, N.J.

We are thankful for the Holy Spirit's guidance in raising up these faithful leaders for the 2025 slate of candidates.

Reports are due!

It is time to collect information to update the LWML South Dakota District directory. Please help by completing the relevant forms found at the district website and report your zone and group officer and membership information. Visit sdlwml.org/officer-report-forms.

Group presidents and secretaries — please send your completed officer Report form to your zone secretary by Jan. 15.

Zone presidents and secretaries — please complete both the group officer compilation report form and the zone officer report form. Send them to me by Feb. 1.

Receiving this information in a timely manner is a big help! Contact me



at luannzuercher@gmail.com or 605-222-0769 if you have questions.

I look forward to hearing from you! Thank you.

Luann Zuercher
LWML South Dakota District Secretary

YANKTON ZONE UPDATE

More than 60 people attended the Yankton Zone's Christian Life Retreat, held Oct. 12 at St. John's, Yankton. Many were first-time retreat attendees.

Rev. Steve Weispfennig, St. John's senior pastor and our former district counselor, opened the retreat with a devotion. Rev. Dr. Jacob Bobby, St. John's associate pastor, gave a

message titled "Understanding Mass Media from a Christian Perspective." It was a great message for all ages!

Over \$1,400 for mites was collected through a silent auction and the offering. A Fall Zone Rally was also held over the lunch break, with Sandy Brandt, St. John's LWML president, presiding. Our LWML sisters prepared food for the event, and everyone enjoyed the day's food and fellowship.



Rev. Dr. Jacob Bobby, associate pastor of St. John's, Yankton, presents at the Christian Life Retreat at St. John's on Oct. 12.

COUNSELOR'S CORNER

A light has shone

This always seems like the bleakest time of the year. When we think of January, we think cold, dark, snowy, dreary.

There's no celebrations to look forward to this month. Christmas has passed and Easter is still so far away. Kids are in school without much of a break in sight. There does not seem to be much to do but stay warm, go to work or school, and wait for the snow to clear and the weather to warm to finally be able to open the windows again for that fresh spring air!

But in the church, we are still celebrating. This is the season of Epiphany. It lasts from Jan. 6 until Ash Wednesday. On Epiphany Day, we learn that the Messiah promised to the house and line of David is also the King of the nations! This particular King, who was promised to a particular people, will be Lord of all! The coming of the Magi from the East, who knelt down



Rev. Christopher McCarthy

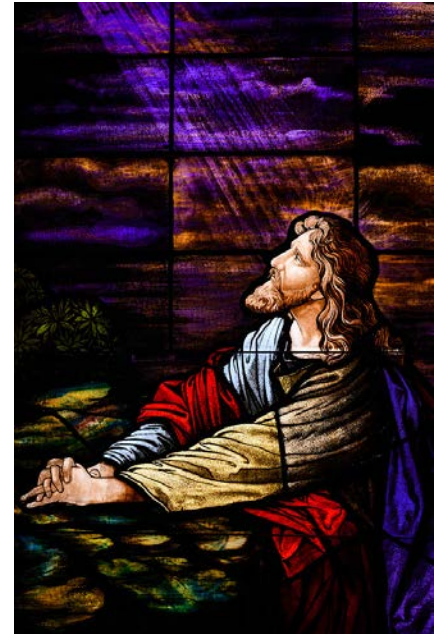
and offered gifts to the Christ child, foreshadowed the Gospel that would go forth from Jerusalem to all nations by the mouths of the apostles in the power of the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus commanded at His Ascension:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:19-20

Within the season of Epiphany is one particular festival that gives great comfort in these gray and latter days. It is the festival of the confession of St. Peter on Jan. 18. Here we celebrate the gift of the Father, not only to Peter, but also to us who are blessed to hear this confession from the mouth of the apostle. That confession is: “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!”

And that is the particular light that has shined on those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death. This Jesus, whose birth we celebrated just a few days ago, is the Christ — the “Anointed One,” the Son of the Living God. He



is Emmanuel — the God who is with us, who has come to fulfill all that the prophets have spoken, namely, to establish a new covenant in His blood. It is a covenant in which God will “remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.”

This is the work of the Christ, to cover your sins with His blood and establish a new covenant, a new testament, the forgiveness of your sins in the crucified Jesus, the Son of the Living God.

During Epiphany, we learn through the Scriptures that this Jesus of Nazareth, who was born of the Virgin Mary in

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MILBANK ZONE UPDATE

The LWML of Emanuel, Sisseton, hosted the Milbank Zone Fall Rally on Oct. 19. Rev. Thomas Mueller, Emanuel pastor, led a Bible study titled, “Ready to Serve.” The ladies brought multiple items for Hygiene Kits as an ingathering for Orphan Grain Train. The ladies were able to put together 55 kits.

Jeanette Gravidahl
Milbank Zone President



LUTHERANS FOR LIFE



The seven riders who participated in the Bike 4 Life 61-mile ride are, from left, Nate Moe, Rev. Matthew Wurm, Zach Moe, Kylie Moe, Jeremiah Ackermann, Eric Olson and Paul Hanusa.

Biking for life

Cyclists cover 61 miles to raise funds for pregnancy centers

Bike 4 Life South Dakota held its annual fundraising ride on Sept. 28 to support eastern South Dakota pregnancy resource centers, including the Alpha Center and Option 1. The ride, which was originally scheduled for June but was rescheduled due to inclement weather, began with prayer at Option 1 in Brookings. Five riders and a support vehicle left Brookings at 7 a.m.

Roughly 10 miles out of town, the group made a quick stop and were joined by two more riders. The ride continued with much fellowship and a few more stops with longer breaks in Colman and Crooks.

Of the seven riders, four had previously participated, while three participated for the first time. The group rode a total of 61 miles, ending the ride shortly after 1 p.m. at the Alpha Center in Sioux Falls, where a wonderful meal was waiting for them. Alpha Center Director Erica Miller shared with the riders what is happening at the center and gave a tour.

LIFE SUNDAY IS JAN. 19

"Life Shines In Darkness" is Lutherans For Life's (LFL) theme for Sanctity of Human Life Sunday, which is set for Jan. 19. Your congregation can observe Sanctity of Human Life Sunday on that date or at any time during the year.

The Life Sunday 2025 theme is based on John 1:4-5: "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

You are welcome to use LFL's Life Sunday resources to help unpack this theme and what it means for the For Life movement, both nationally and in your congregation and community. LFL's prayer is that these materials will provide valuable information and encouragement to you and your community, and the life-affirming work you are engaged in.

Available are bulletin inserts, a Bible study, a children's message, a worship service, sermons and Spanish resources.

Visit lutheransforlife.org/store-life-sunday-2025 or scan the QR code.



MESSAGE

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

beyond, in addition to what they are already doing in their own ministries. The fruit borne through such generosity is the ability of 105 congregations to provide salaries for various kinds of mission work, including overseas mission work, campus ministry, Native American missions and deaf ministry. Not one of our congregations could do this alone! But 105 congregations working together can, and they are.

I want to make special mention of the newest ministry the Lord is carrying out and multiplying in South Dakota, thanks to our collective prayer and financial support: Lutheran Family Service (LFS). What a blessing their individual and family counselors have been to many of our church workers and lay people! What a blessed adoption resource they are to Christian couples! What a blessed resource LFS is as their experts offer presentations on marriage, caring for caregivers, the danger of pornography and much more!

Your ongoing financial support for LFS is crucial as they maintain offices in Sioux Falls and Deadwood, and extend their reach into Rapid City by way of the Deadwood office. The LFS resolution we'll consider during our convention in February will be critical in extending the ministry agreement currently in force between our district and Lutheran Family Service.

Thank you, thank you, thank you for your generous support of the many partnerships in the Gospel the Lord is carrying out in our district!

There are a number of obvious realities we will face as we head into the future, making partnerships a continuing necessity:

- Many of our congregations are gradually getting smaller and are finding it increasingly more difficult to go it on their own.
- Fewer pastors and other church workers are available to serve our congregations, schools and other ministries.
- There are myriad opportunities to reach the people around us with the **Good News of Jesus Christ**, which is the most important reality.

The Gospel is the key to effective partnerships. For God uses the glorious Gospel to save sinners and to gather them together in congregations. And by that same Gospel, we saint-sinners are empowered to work together with joy-filled unity and harmony.

Your servant in Christ • Pastor Sailer

"Not ashamed of the Gospel" (Rom. 1:16; 16:25-27)



LCMS/Erik M. Linsford

GATHERING REGISTRATION IS OPEN

Registration is now open for the 2025 LCMS Youth Gathering.

The Youth Gathering, held every three years, is the largest event organized by the LCMS and brings together thousands of Lutheran youth and adults. The 2025 event will take place July 19-23, 2025, in New Orleans. This year's theme, **ENDURE**, will focus on the endurance of faith in Christ, grounded in Hebrews 12:1-3.

All LCMS congregations were mailed information about the Gathering and are encouraged to attend the event for the opportunity to come together as a community of God's people. For five days, participants will learn about Jesus Christ, the Christian faith and their Lutheran identity as they spend time together in God's Word, worship, service and fellowship.

Gathering Operations Manager Becky Kammeier said:

"These are exciting days here in the Gathering office as we are preparing for the Gathering. It is amazing to see so many wonderful people coming together ... planning, preparing and praying for the Gathering and all the young people who will be with us in New Orleans. ... We are looking forward to celebrating together the One who endured for us."

The Gathering registration fee (\$425/person until March 4, 2025, when it will then increase to \$475/person) covers all Gathering program and administrative costs, participant items, post-Gathering resources, and secondary insurance for all participants. The registration fee does not include meals or lodging.

Registrants may submit either the full amount or a non-refundable deposit of \$150 per person to secure their registration.

Key dates to remember:

- **Team Flex Volunteer applications accepted: Jan. 15-April 30**
- **Gathering registration fee increase (\$475): March 4**
- **Gathering registration closes: May 29**
- **2025 LCMS Youth Gathering: July 19-23**

Registration remains open online until May 29, 2025, at lcmsgathering.com/registration.

More information about Gathering registration, including the registration book, necessary worksheets and important deadlines is available at lcmsgathering.com.

Along with written resources, monthly Zoom meetings are also available to help prepare congregations that are taking a group to the Gathering.



Retreat participants are gathered outside for reflection and discussion. Rev. Jeffrey Hemmer is pictured on the left side (in dark T-shirt).

Retreat centers on biblical masculinity

More than 40 men gathered for the second Mission and Ministry Council Men's Retreat, held at the Campfire Cabins in the Black Hills. A special guest was Rev. Jeffrey Hemmer, who serves as pastor of Bethany, Fairview Heights, Ill., and assistant to the LCMS president. He is author of *Man Up! The Quest for Masculinity*, published by Concordia Publishing House.

The men's retreat was a wonderful time of bonding and learning. The event started with an ATV tour of the Hills led by Rev. Al Sutton, who serves as a district missionary to the Pineridge Reservation. The group even found the American flag at the top of one of the peaks!

The first night of the retreat featured the meat and potatoes, with Rev. Paul Winckler cooking the group meal at the cabins. A group discussion led by Pastor Hemmer around the campfire followed. Hemmer talked about procreation and the biblical perspective on the family.

The next day, the group gathered in Silver City, where Pastor Hemmer continued his presentation on biblical masculinity. After the presentation, the men split into groups to complete a few servant projects, including fixing two sets of stairs and painting some community spaces.

During his final presentation, Pastor Hemmer encouraged the men to live out biblical masculinity after they returned home. The group then all returned to the cabins for another meal and s'mores.

One of the service projects was at a former Catholic church that is now used as a community church. This is where the group gathered together for worship and communion on Sunday morning before returning home.

The retreat was a fantastic time for those who attended, and a lot of great feedback was received. More events like this are in the works, so please stay tuned!

LIGHT

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5)



a barn, under the care of a common laborer, from a small town called Nazareth with "no place to rest His head," is none other than the Almighty God Himself, come to establish a new covenant in His own blood, which cannot be annulled by any creature. It is a divine promise that your sins are forgiven in Christ, your death is destroyed by Christ, your devilish accuser is silenced by Christ the crucified.

This is the particularly bright message for you in these bleak January days, far better than "spring is coming." Believe Christ when He says, "It is finished."