
June 15, 2010
Forty-seventh Biennial Convention
of the Minnesota District
President's Report

“For Christ’s love compels us ..” 2 Cor 5:14 (NIV)

I never cease to be amazed at the power of the gospel to motivate God’s people to do great things. I watched my congregation raise more than a half million dollars to support gospel ministry in their own congregation and beyond. I was privileged to see eager young men and women at Martin Luther College and at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary ready to go out into the world and bring the gospel to as many people as they can. I watched our congregation in Des Moines, IA, open its arms to the Sudanese immigrants and begin a whole new ministry that will pay back little more than the precious souls that are gathered into the kingdom. I see pastors in our district doing Bible studies with Chinese Christians on Skype, and I am in awe at how God uses technology to put people together at great distances to study God’s Word.

We would like to say, “Slow down!” - but we can’t! We would like to say, “We’ve already done our share!” – but we can’t. We would like to say that it is time for someone else to shoulder the burden – but we can’t. Because Christ’s love compels us. I cannot imagine that there has ever been such an exciting time to be a Christian than right now.

I am thank that God has permitted me to “stay in the game.” Two months after I was elected president of the district, God showed me how fragile life can be. A serious heart attack nearly took my life. After six months of rehab, diet and exercise, my doctor says that my heart is almost back to normal. I am thankful that my wife didn’t have to buy an electric blanket to keep her warm in the winter. I am thankful that my grandchildren will get to know me and not just hear stories about me. I am thankful for every opportunity that God gives me to preach his Word and to reach out to the lost with the gospel. As long as God gives me strength and breath, I know that there is something I can do to bring the gospel to another person. It is not in the nature of our new man to quit, for Christ’s love compels us.

CHANGES IN OUR DISTRICT AND SYNOD STRUCTURE

One of the items of business in our convention this summer will be the restructuring of our circuits and conferences. Our plan is to add more circuit pastors so that they can be more effective in counseling pastors and congregations. There will be a day and a half workshop in November for the circuit pastors to review the duties and responsibilities of their calling.

One of the changes that took place in our synod was a restructuring of our Board for Parish Services (now called the Congregation Ministry Support Group – CMSG). Most of the functions are still there –

Worship, Evangelism, Lutheran Schools, Youth Discipleship, Adult Discipleship, Special Ministries, etc. However, some positions are vacant and will not be filled until funding is available.

The one area that has changed significantly is Parish Assistance. Previously, this board put together consulting teams for congregations that wanted to plan and refocus their ministry. A study committee was put together to see how this branch of the CMSG could better serve all of our congregations. The goal is to provide people in each district who can “coach” congregations in congregational planning.

I believe that this is an area of congregational life that we ought to address. When was the last time your congregation did a self study or went through a process to develop a long range plan? How much of the ministry in your congregation happens because that’s the way it was always done before? Pastors, have you set goals for your ministry and for your personal and professional growth? Teachers, what are you doing to learn more about becoming a better teacher?

OUR SYNODICAL LONG RANGE PLAN

Hopefully, you have seen the document from our Synod leadership before today and had time to think about it. This is the opportunity for our district to give our voice to the Synodical Council and the Conference of Presidents. The opening paragraphs set the tone for this long range plan. It is really a stewardship issue, a question of how we plan to use the resources that God has given us to carry out his work. Do we agree with what we have before us? Would we like to see some changes? Now is the time for us as a district to speak.

CHRIST’S LOVE – OUR CALLING

I encourage you to make use of our four year stewardship emphasis, Christ’s Love, Our Calling. During our convention we will receive some more details, but note for now that we have decided to re-launch Year 1 of this program. Since Christ’s Love, Our Calling received limited usage this past year, the Conference of Presidents has authorized that we restart the program at our respective district conventions. A four-pastor committee consisting of Aaron Christie, Joel Heckendorf, David Kolander and Ray Schumacher has reorganized the effort and has made materials available for easy use on Connect, the synod Intranet.

CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR CALLED WORKERS

The pursuit of continuing education for called workers has been in the works in the WELS for over twenty years. In the fall of 2007, the Conference of Presidents (COP) proposed a renewed effort in this important area of synodical ministry. Following a “Think Tank” report in August of 2008, the Ad Hoc Commission’s recommendation to the 2009 convention, and funding for the seminary’s continuing education chair through a grant, the COP appointed a new Committee for Continuing Education for Called Workers. It consists of **Paul Prange** (Administrator of the Board for Ministerial Education), **Bryan Gerlach** (Coordinator for Congregation & Ministry Support Group), **Greg Schmill** (Director of the Commission on Lutheran Schools), **Richard Gurgel** (Director of continuing education at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary), **David Bauer** (Director of continuing education at Martin Luther College), **Peter Kruschel** (Mission Counselor), **John Meyer**, advisory (Director of graduate studies at Martin Luther College), **James Huebner**, chairman (WELS 1st vice president).

The CECW has developed a document entitled, “Guiding Principles for Continuing Education for Called Workers in WELS,” which will be reviewed by the COP and which will serve as the basis for further plans and details. It is envisioned that the seminary will develop programs for pastors and that a partnership of MLC and the Commission on Lutheran Schools will develop programs for teachers and staff ministers. Congregational support, both spiritually and financially, will be critically important for the plans of CECW to unfold in the years to come.

2010 ASSIGNMENTS

This is always one of the most exciting times of the year for a district president. We were predicting a large number of candidates not receiving calls. As it turned out, we ended up with less this year than last. On assignment day at Martin Luther College, there were nineteen teacher candidates who did not receive calls. Some of them have pursued work offered by various members of our synod, who plan to use their gifts in their local congregation. Others will receive calls as vacancies open up.

Four seminary graduates did not receive calls. I am confident that they can be assigned before the end of summer. We placed one candidate, Timothy Wahl, in Shepherd of the Lakes in Milford, IA, as an *alternative placement*. The congregation is able to offer health insurance, pension and housing, and opportunities for work. He will use his time in Milford to put a face on the ministry there. Our prayer is that it will grow into a permanent placement for him.

The following were assigned to our district:

VICARS

Patrick Freese	St. John – Hastings, MN
Jeffrey Sonntag	Christ – Zumbrota, MN

PASTORS

*Abram Degner	Tutor – Martin Luther College
*Nicolas Scmoller	Admission Counselor – Martin Luther College
*Timothy Wahl	Shepherd of the Lakes – Milford, IA

TEACHERS

Danielle East	Christ – North St. Paul, MN	Kindergarten
Joshua Gorske	St. Croix LHS – West St. Paul, MN	Dorm Supervisor, Social Studies
*Justin Hansen	St. John – Red Wing, MN	Grades 3-5
Rachel Kionka	West LHS – Plymouth, MN	Algebra, Physical Science, Coach
*Justin Krause	Salem – Stillwater, MN	Grades 7-8, Youth Director
Sarah Sauer	St. Croix LHS – West St. Paul, MN	Dorm supervisor, Spanish
*Alexander Vandenberg	Immanuel – Hutchinson, MN	Grades 4-8, Principal Apprentice

CATEGORY 4 PLACEMENTS – CALLED TO A CERTAIN AREA

Stephanie Buegge	Immanuel – Hutchinson, MN	ECE
Emily Roberts	St. Croix LHS – West St. Paul, MN	Dorm Supervisor, English

*accepted into membership at this convention

STATISTICS: The following are statistics gleaned from my records and from the synod's computer database. I urge every called worker to make sure to report to me changes in ministry, to get authorization for any installations or ordinations, and to apply for transfers out of the district if you should take a call into another district. I will leave a copy of the report on the front table so that you can make changes.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Charles F. Degner