
June 12, 2012
Forty-seventh Biennial Convention
of the Minnesota District
President's Report

“We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.” 1 Thessalonians 1: 2-5 (NIV – 1984)

You will notice that I used the NIV 1984 translation. I suppose I will always have a love for the two translations that I have used most in my life – the King James and the NIV 1984. When I read other translations, it doesn't sound quite right. It is not that those translations are more or less faithful. It is just that my ear has become used to those two translations that I have studied extensively and from which I have memorized all the passages I have in my memory bank.

I suppose it is like throwing out those old shoes from my closet. I don't care how ugly or out of date they are as long as they fit comfortably. Can I get used to a new translation like a new pair of shoes? Of course I can – only let the translation we choose be faithful in conveying the truths given down to us through the original manuscripts.

Like Paul, I thank God for all of you in my prayers, because the Gospel has come to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. We would not be having this discussion about translations if we did not hold deep convictions about the importance of God's Word. We don't teach without God's Word. We don't discuss doctrine without God's Word. We honor the Lutheran Confessions, but the Word always comes first. When Dr. Brug gave his paper at the free conference on this campus last fall, it was so evident that God's Word guided his every thought and writing. Presenters from other Lutheran Church bodies had interesting words, but those words lacked the power that comes when someone is just clearly expounding on God's Word.

I thank God for all of you in my prayers because of your faithfulness to God's Word. One of the tasks I have as district president is to make out call lists. I do this with great diligence because it is one of the most important tasks that you have entrusted to me. I may have questions about one man's abilities over another. *But I have never doubted the doctrinal integrity or the faithfulness to the Word of any man or woman that I have used on call lists.* Do you know how amazing this is? It is more than amazing. It is nothing less than miraculous and I thank God for all of you!

From time to time we have earnest discussions on various issues. In my ministry we have discussed the roles of men and women, the applications of the doctrine of church fellowship and the various aspects of

church and ministry. We have discussed various approaches to worship which have divided some church bodies. Yet in all these God has united us in faith and given us the kind of fellowship that Psalm 133 describes in these words: *“Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.” Psalm 133 - ESV*

It is all about the Word of God. That is why I do not fear this discussion on Bible translations. We will grow in our discussing it not because we hold on to God’s Word, but because God’s Word holds on to us. And for this and for all of you, I give thanks to the Lord.

CALLED WORKERS AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

Two consecutive synod conventions have spoken clearly. The ongoing spiritual and professional growth of our called workers is critical to the gospel ministry of our synod’s congregations.

As authorized by resolutions adopted at those synod conventions, work continues to develop a comprehensive yet flexible program of continuing education for our called workers. Many such resources are already in place. More are being developed.

My goal for the Minnesota district is to develop resources for coaching pastors and teachers over the next two years. In the course of the last year, I have engaged two different coaches for myself in an effort to focus my ministry, to find better ways to lead the district and to shepherd my congregation. By engaging someone to coach me, I find that I don’t put personal growth and professional development on the back burner.

For the lay leaders here today, please consider how you can support such continued growth for your congregation’s workers. Giving workers sufficient time to devote to spiritual and professional growth, and providing them with adequate financial resources for attending courses, workshops and retreats, are essential to assisting those workers to continue to grow spiritually and professionally. As a synod we invest millions each biennium to train the next generation of workers. Congregations are wise to continue that effort by investing in the continued growth of the current generation of workers.

I encourage each lay leader here to do two things. First, when you return home, check the congregational budget to see what is being set aside to help called workers to grow. If you find little or nothing, talk with the other lay leaders about what could be done to make needed changes. Investing \$1,000 per worker per year could be an initial step in investing in your workers.

Second, be an advocate for your pastors, teachers and staff ministers. Seek to ensure that the demands of congregational ministry don’t squeeze called workers’ schedules so tightly that time for spiritual and professional growth is almost impossible to find. The spiritual health and professional competency of our called leaders are critical components of our gospel ministry. Such training doesn’t end when our called workers receive their first call. In a very real way, it is just beginning in earnest.

If you are looking for further ideas to promote the cause of spiritual and professional growth for your called workers, you will find in your convention materials a reprint of a four page *Forward in Christ* insert. Feel free to make copies for other lay leaders in your congregation.

For the called workers here today, let me urge you to make use of the expanding resources available to assist you in pursuing spiritual and professional growth.

Why not set aside some time during these summer months to develop or improve your plan for spiritual and professional growth? Seek the input of trusted ministry peers and spiritually mature lay leaders.

Consider the gifts God has given you and consider the unique needs of your calling body. Put together a plan for growth confident that God will bless such efforts. Such growth in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus - as well as growth in developing ministry skills he has given each of you - can renew us in the zeal we had when we received our first call into the public ministry.

During our convention we will hear a presentation from those helping to plan spiritual and professional growth opportunities in our synod. As you listen, consider how making use of those opportunities can provide a blessing to your congregation or to your ministry.

CONGREGATIONAL PLANNING

Your presidium has developed a planning tool for congregations to use in planning the mission of the congregation. This tool was developed by your presidium and by Dennis Walters and Scott Gostchalk (from Grace in Action). We have hosted seminars for lay leaders in eighteen of our twenty-three circuits.

Such planning is an exercise in good stewardship. God has unlimited resources but we do not. We can only use the human resources and the physical resources that he has given us. It is up to us to use these gifts to work for the kingdom.

Congregational planning helps us focus on what is most important to congregational life. How do we reach the lost? How do we use God's Word more often in different contexts to reach more people? How do we engage our lay people in works of ministry so that more people are sharing God's Word with friends, family and neighbors?

If you want to host such a seminar – even for just the leadership of your congregation – call me and we will set up a time.

ASSIGNMENTS

This year was a first in many years. We were able to assign all of the available teachers from Martin Luther College and all of the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary graduates. In fact, some positions in congregations which requested a graduate were not filled. No vicars were assigned to the Minnesota District this year as a result of a very small class at the seminary. Only 23 vicars were assigned.

PASTORS

*Jason Enderle	Tutor – Martin Luther College
*Michael Koepke	Admission Counselor – Martin Luther College
*Daniel Westendorf	Tutor – Martin Luther College (2 nd year)
*Joel McKenney	St. John – Lake Benton, MN and Good Shepherd, Pipestone, MN
*Brian Roloff	Ascension – Plymouth, MN (Associate)
*Nathaniel Timmerman	Salem – Stillwater (Associate)
Timothy Wahl	Shepherd of the Lakes, Milford, IA (Assignment made permanent)

TEACHERS

Emma Curtis	Precious Pebbles Lutheran Preschool, Rochester, MN
Kirsten Duin	Cross of Christ Lutheran School, Coon Rapids, MN
*Matthew Evans	Crown of Life Lutheran School, West St. Paul, MN (Reassigned permanently)

Sarah Free	Mt. Olive Lutheran School, Delano, MN
Emily Friend	St. Croix Lutheran High School, West St. Paul, MN (Reassigned 2 nd year)
*Daniel Gawrisch	Martin Luther College – Admissions Counselor (Reassigned 2 nd year)
Hannah Grayckowski	St. Croix Lutheran High School (One year assignment)
Katelyn Hauf	St. John Lutheran School, Redwood Falls, MN
Sarah Sauer	St. Croix Lutheran High School, West St. Paul, MN (Reassigned permanently)
Ginny Stuedemann	St. John Lutheran School, Lake City, MN

*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