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## **Assistant to the President's Report**

Reverend Paul Winckler, Assistant to the President

The 63<sup>rd</sup> Convention of the South Dakota District of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod gathers under the banner of Romans 1:16-17. The heart of this passage, indeed the heart of all scripture, is Jesus and the assurance and confidence given to all who believe in Him.

In October 2022 I accepted the call as Assistant to the District President, moving into this new position not entirely certain of all that the future may hold, but moving forward in the hope of that assurance and confidence of Jesus, knowing that He who begins all things will bring all things to completion according to His good will.

Having been a life-long South Dakotan, I knew quite a bit about our state but I knew that there would be much more to learn. I have been blessed, over these last two years, to have you all, pastors and people, teach me more about your ministries and your communities. It is a privilege to have so many of you invite me to come to your congregations on Sundays to preach and lead studies. I have had the opportunity to fill the pulpits of 43 of our congregations (some multiple times!), providing opportunities for pastors to take time away to be with family or recover from illness or attend to the many responsibilities of the office, as well as giving some of our vacancy pastors an occasional respite.

The beautiful thing about our LCMS fellowship is that we are not a “top-down” organization. As President Sailer often says, in our Synod the “congregation is queen” and we in District or Synod have the honor of advising, not directing, the queen. It is a joy to fill this role of advisor in many capacities.

Over the last two years I have had the opportunity to facilitate connection with our District and the services of the Synod to support the good work being done by our congregations. We have hosted Rev. Dr. Mark Wood from the Office of National Mission twice to discuss tools and services in the areas of strategic planning, congregational ReVitality, witness and outreach, as well as church planting. Tools such as these have proven invaluable for congregations for effective planning.

God has blessed our District with many gifts, chief among these are God's people. A people who are certainly not ashamed of the Gospel but boldly answer the call to serve, share, and support. The gift of dedicated volunteers who desire to grow in faith, serve the congregation, and support the pastor through studying in the Lay Leadership Institute. The gift of revenue from farmland owned by the District has helped me and dozens of sons and daughters of our District attend colleges and seminaries to study for full-time church work vocations.

The Mission and Ministry Council has been a special blessing to our District, pulling together dedicated lay-leaders and church workers from across South Dakota and pulling in resources from across the Synod to examine and address needs and opportunities to work together boldly in the mission of the Gospel. There is certainly more to say and more reasons to celebrate, especially those highlights found in reports from Missionaries, Native American Ministry, Deaf Ministry, and Campus Ministry.

We look back with joy, giving thanks to God for his many blessings and we look ahead with hope and confidence in the blessings of God our Father who gives great gifts, God the Son who has redeemed us, and God the Holy Spirit who calls us and equips us to be bold in faith, love, service and witness.

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## Mission and Ministry Council

Krista Erickson, Chairman

Established by the 2021 Convention, the Mission & Ministry Council has been joyfully centered on the saving power of the Gospel while working to provide support and resources to church workers, congregations, schools, and other ministries in our District. The Council is currently comprised of ten representatives from all eight circuits—a combination of pastors, commissioned workers, and lay members—as well as four advisory members: our District President, First Vice President, Assistant to the President, and Education Executive.

As a new council, we first examined the purpose of the Mission & Ministry Council as stated in the Convention resolution and learned about previous structures for providing resources and support within our District. We participated in a presentation on the church's mission and explored the needs of our neighbors and of our church workers, congregations, schools, and other ministries, being mindful of the wonderful work already being done in these areas. This set the tone for the group to further study, prioritize, and address both needs and opportunities. Reports at each meeting from national youth leaders, mental and physical health professionals, our missionaries to Native Americans, church worker development leaders, rural and small town ministry workers, and more provide us the opportunity to gather and process information, generate ideas, and prayerfully plan as a body.

The Council has identified five Ministry Areas which encompass current ministries and projects: Mission; Youth & Young Adult; Mercy & Human Care; Education & Discipleship; and Congregational Vitality & Support. The Mission & Ministry Council serves to support these areas and to encourage and assist with collaboration. We have held focus groups in each of these areas, inviting various ministry leaders to share their experience and ideas, and hope to expand this to create a larger network for engaging and partnering in ministry. Furthermore, God has generously provided a wealth of wonderful resources, and we have tasked ourselves with both providing an accessible, easy-to-use list of those resources and facilitating the means of delivery.

P.A.S.S. It On! is one such way in which the Mission & Ministry Council is delivering ideas and inspiration for mission and ministry. This annual workshop is designed to supply our church workers and lay members with the knowledge and tools for serving the Lord and our neighbors while proclaiming the salvation power of the Gospel. Rev. Dr. Michael Zeigler of the Lutheran Hour was the plenary speaker for the 2023 inaugural event, and breakout sessions included the topics of evangelism, youth ministry, finance, church leadership, mental wellness, caring for church workers, and stewardship. The 2024 event focused on the intersection of faith and culture, with Rev. Dr. Greg Seltz from the Lutheran Center for Religious Liberty delivering the keynote address. Other presentations centered on truth, identity, and purpose; defending the faith; and a Biblical response to LGBTQ, followed by a panel discussion and Q&A. It is an incredible blessing to provide these events at no cost to attendees, and the turnout and feedback have been overwhelmingly positive.

The development of Men's Ministry is another exciting way in which the Council is working. In 2023 Peace Lutheran in Brookings hosted a men's retreat, with retired SDSU football coach John Stiegelmeier encouraging men to live their faith boldly. The 2024 "Man Up!" retreat took place at Campfire Cabins in the Black Hills, with fellowship activities, a servant event, and inspiration for men to lead as faithful followers of Christ. Look for more to come!

We are truly inspired by and grateful for the many faithful servants with whom God has so graciously blessed our District and look forward to continuing His Kingdom work with you!

