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## **District Archives**

Reverend Robert and Mrs. Kim Heckmann, Harrisburg, SD

God's Gospel, Salvation Power. That's what the work of your SD District LCMS archivists amounts to, year in and year out. We are empowered by the Lord to keep track of God's work in SD congregations whether it be installations of pastors, DCE's or deaconesses, coming to our district eager to bring that Good News of salvation in Jesus, or teachers who love to work with God's children, bringing that Good News of Jesus to their young charges every day in their classrooms.

Your archivists have been storing that information in District archives with the able assistance of President Sailer, Assistant to the President Winckler, Mr. Chad Zinnel, and Mrs. Julie Pike. Duties also include getting archival/historical information out to interested parties, in SD and all across the nation for that matter, when there are questions about past marriages, confirmations, baptisms and funerals. Feel free to contact us whenever you need any sort of records or information from the District. We'll do our best to dig it up.

We have also been organizing and updating records for our District congregations on an ongoing basis. Generally, congregations keep their own records but when a congregation closes its doors after ministering God's Word and Sacraments to their communities for many decades, records come to the archivists. Do contact us when you have questions about any historical documents we may have at the District office having to do with an active or "retired" congregation.

As your SD District LCMS archivists, we are here to serve you. Let us know when we can be of assistance to you as we work together to serve the Lord in His Kingdom, on our way to Glory!

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## **Sioux Falls Hospital Chaplaincy Program**

Reverend Matthew Nix, Sioux Falls, SD

What an honor it is to be able to share the love of Christ with people I may have never met before. As your hospital chaplain, I try to share the comfort and peace of God with those who may be feeling no comfort and little peace. Nobody wants to be in the hospital. We all want to be healthy and able to enjoy the life we have been blessed with. But when times of physical, mental or spiritual pain happen, God's Word is able to bring comfort and peace.

Over these past four years, the visits have been many. Let me share just a few with you. The birth of a child is supposed to be a time of great joy. But when that birth happens long before the due date, that joy can be shattered. But that shattered joy can be restored if you have skilled medical staff and a caring pastor. The pastor was able to baptize the child soon after the birth, the medical staff was able to care for both mother and child over the next few months and I was blessed to be able to share Jesus until they were able to leave the hospital and go home. Another someone needing surgery, being told that the odds of surviving the surgery were minimal at best. Visiting with them and their family and seeing the faith they have regardless of the outcome. Then, being able to visit when everything went well and the doctors almost couldn't believe it. Being able to be there when someone is in a bed they will never get out of while their parents and child sit nearby. Sharing the promises of meeting again on the last day. What a comfort God is for those who trust in Him.

I would like to encourage you to remember me when you or someone you know is going to be in one of our Sioux Falls' hospitals. It is almost impossible to get a list of LCMS patients anymore. Please contact me so that I am able to visit. Also, if you are in one of our hospitals let the chaplain there know that you are LCMS and would like a visit by an LCMS chaplain. Many of them know me or at least of me and will usually contact me. I can be reached at (605-338-LCMS).

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Thank you again for allowing this ministry to happen. There are countless pastors and others who truly appreciate your support.

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## **Church Worker Education Debt Assistance (CWEDA)**

Rev. Dr. Scott C. Sailer, for the District Board of Directors

Since it was established by action of the 2004 District Convention, the Church Worker Education Debt Assistance fund – or CWEDA – has provided grants to rostered church workers in The South Dakota District. Such grants are needed by our pastors, teachers, deaconesses, and DCEs because most of the new workers coming into our District are bearing significant debt from four to seven years of payments for tuition and housing from their college and seminary training. Typically, each of the workers assisted through CWEDA brings from \$30,000-80,000 in such debt with them into their brand-new ministries in South Dakota. A few bear more than \$100,000 in debt. With beginning salaries for brand-new pastors in South Dakota being around \$40,000, and salaries for new commissioned ministers in the low to mid-\$30,000s, it is easy to see that such debt is difficult for them to manage. Therefore, the CWEDA grants have been a tremendous blessing to our church workers.

The grants are funded by undesignated gifts to the District. In addition, there is a small CWEDA endowment fund, totaling about \$29,000. Congregations, church groups, and individuals are encouraged to consider a gift to the CWEDA endowment fund.

The Board of Directors set aside \$20,000 for CWEDA grants in 2021 and 2022. In the summer of 2022, the Board authorized a “bonus” awarding of grants, in addition to the normal year-end awarding of grants. In 2023 and 2024, the Board set aside \$40,000 each year.

The increases in 2023 and 2024, along with the “bonus” grants in 2022, were the result of the adoption of 2021 District Convention Res. 1-07, “To Allow Grants from the District Assistance Fund to Church Workers to Pay Down Student Loans.” The resolution authorizes the Board of Directors of the District “to annually transfer a portion of the balance of the Assistance fund to be used to supplement the Church Worker Educational Debt Assistance grants.”

Here is a listing of the number of grants and the average grant amount for the past four years:

2021:	13 grants awarded (12 pastors and 1 commissioned minister)	\$1,538 – average grant
2022:	14 grants awarded (11 pastors and 3 commissioned ministers)	\$1,500 – average grant
	Summer of 2022 “bonus” grants: 10 grants (7 pastors, 3 commissioned)	\$1,800 – average grant
2023:	10 grants awarded (7 pastors and 3 commissioned ministers)	\$4,000 – average grant
2024:	5 grants awarded (4 pastor and 1 commissioned minister)	\$4,000 – average grant.

The Lord has graciously given us full-time workers in the Church. His generous people in the District have been the Lord’s instruments to assist these workers in this special way with CWEDA grants. I join these workers in the District in expressing our thanks to you for this needed, tangible support!

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## **Lay Leadership Institute**

Reverend Paul Winckler, Assistant to the President

In 2007 the South Dakota District inaugurated the Lay Leadership Institute with the goal of strengthening laity the in faith and equipping them to serve as leaders in their congregations. Since it’s inception dozens of laypeople have enrolled in the programs, including some men who have moved into the pastoral ministry through the seminaries and SMP.

LLI classes are offered on a Fall/Spring semester schedule and the cost remains \$200 per participant. To complete the program participants enroll in nine classes. Courses are taught by Pastors and DCE's of the District and include in-person learning opportunities combined with electronic and teleconference class meetings.

Over the last triennium five classes were offered and 29 students enrolled in classes. Among those students, two successfully completed the entirety of the course and many more are on the way to achieving completion.

New to the LLI program over these last years has been the combination of the "Worship" and "Homiletics" classes into one "Proclaiming the Gospel in Worship" class. This new class focuses on reading a prepared sermon text instead of students writing their own sermon.

A special thank you to all who helped with the LLI classes over the triennium, including our instructors: DCE Joshua Schmitt, Rev. Christopher Navurskis, Rev. Kevin Koester, Rev. Dr. Brian Mosemann, Rev. Micah Bauer, and Rev. Tim Rynearson. Thank also to Rev. Sam Handschke and the people of Faith Lutheran in Pierre as well as Rev. Kevin Koester and the people of Mt. Calvary Lutheran in Huron for hosting classes.

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## **TOGETHER IN MISSION**

### **Reverend Dr. Daniel Jastram, Missionary to Japan and Asia**

Dear Pastors and Congregations of the South Dakota District:

As an LCMS missionary kid born and raised in Japan, I always had difficulty answering the question "Where are you from?" Hartford, South Dakota was my family home in the States where we always came for furloughs. Niigata Japan was my family home overseas where my parents served as missionaries. These two "homes" each have exerted a life-long influence for my current missionary work in Japan.

After graduating from my international high school in Tokyo Japan I returned to Hartford and Sioux Falls. Then following college in Vermillion, seminary, graduate school, and a call into LCMS ministry as professor and pastor, I followed in the footsteps of my father and accepted this call as a missionary to Japan where I have now served for eight and a half years.

My parents, after twenty-three years of LCMS missionary work in Japan, had returned to the States in 1976 to serve at Emmanuel Gettysburg, South Dakota. They and their colleagues left behind in Japan a well-established Lutheran partner church body with over 30 Japanese congregations, about 30 Japanese pastors, two Japanese Lutheran high schools, and one jointly owned and operated seminary in Tokyo.

However, in the following decades, liberal theology overcame the Japan Lutheran Church. After more than fifty years of considering women's ordination, and under the influence of liberal Lutheran church bodies and entities, and after a dozen years of dedicated theological dialog and brotherly admonition from the LCMS, the Japan Lutheran Church finally broke relations with the LCMS in 2021 by officially adopting the ordination of women as pastors.

As that break was officially recognized by the 2023 LCMS convention, our Japan mission work took on a new direction. Instead of supporting the previous church body partner, we now focus on three goals: 1) to provide regular worship services in Japan faithful to sound Lutheran doctrine and practice; 2) to manage translation work of Lutheran theological resources; 3) to nurture relations with local Lutheran pastors who desire to be faithful to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

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Over the past eight and a half years, God has richly blessed this work in Japan. During my initial mission support raising, South Dakota District congregations became generous partners through my visitation of 42 out of the 114 district congregations.

This support made it possible to establish our mission station in Tokyo and to begin work on our current mission goals. We provide regular Divine Services of Word and Sacrament at three different worship sites. We manage the translation of substantive theological texts now reaching nine titles. We nurture close relations with six identified Japanese Lutheran pastors dedicated to sound Lutheran teaching and practice. One of these six is currently enrolled in the Ph.D. Missiology intensive study curriculum at our LCMS seminary. One serves at our LCMS “sister congregation” in Kobari Niigata. And three eagerly look forward to official theological dialog with the LCMS to clarify specific points of unity in doctrine and practice.

Mission efforts like these depend on your generous Together In Mission (TIM) district partnership. Your partnership, and the additional sustaining contributions of individuals, congregations, and LWML groups make this mission work possible. As the sole LCMS missionary currently serving in Japan, I thank you.

Thank you, thank you, thank you, for your TIM partnership and for the contributions of individuals and church groups throughout the South Dakota District.

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## **TOGETHER IN MISSION**

### **Reverend Jonah Domenichelli, Missionary to Germany**

Dear pastors and congregations of the South Dakota District:

It is truly a joy to work with you as partners in delivering the Gospel: God's power unto salvation, to those living abroad in an area of the world where we would expect the good news of Christ to be present.

In 2020, I was ordained and was called by Christ to serve the beloved saints of a small rural congregation in Tea, SD for the first three years of my ministry. Just shy of a year ago, in November 2023, I was called through the LCMS Office of International Missions (OIM) to serve as a career missionary in Germany to plant a church where Word and Sacrament ministry is sorely lacking. To my surprise the specific mission target was not German nationals as you might suspect, but rather US men, women and children, living in Germany, near and around Spangdahlem Air Base, a US air base with lots of DoD, military, and expatriate personnel around that location. That is not to say that I would not or could not serve German nationals, only that my focus are those US persons (your sons, daughters, grandchildren, etc...) who have been sent to serve in Germany at the behest of the US government or simply living abroad, who are in desperate need of the Gospel received through real, tangible Word and Sacrament ministry.

As a retired Airman of the US Air Force, and having lived in Germany before, I felt this call was important because I had experienced a similar situation when I served in this country. I received my orders to serve in Germany in 2007. I went willingly in service of my country taking along my wife and my 11-month-old son. What I did not expect was that even though I was moving to “the-land-of-Luther,” I would be confronted with a very secular culture and a huge limitation to receive faithful Word and Sacrament ministry. That is not to say we don't have faithful LCMS chaplains who are serving around the world, but at the time my family and I were stationed in Germany, there was not a faithful LCMS pastor available to serve us, nor a body of believers we could be in full fellowship with. In many ways this left us lonely and without a strong cohort of Lutherans to help us through some of the most difficult and strenuous times in our life.

This new call brings with it challenges and struggles, but also joy, thanksgiving and praise to our living God. On June 1, 2024, we arrived in country with nothing but suitcases. Within 1 week of

arrival, we were able to find an adequate home for our family to live in, thanks be to God! It's fitting place to live, as the distances between our mission location and the children's school were the important factors to finding the right home for our family. We enrolled our children in the nearest international school and we spent the first two months working on the paperwork to establish residency in Germany, find vehicles sufficient for our family, and furnish our home with the necessary items such as beds, a table and kitchen supplies. As we worked toward getting ourselves established, I also worked toward coming up with a plan for planting a church near Spangdahlem AB, Germany, and acquiring the necessary items to hold Divine Service. As we planned our way, the Lord established our steps. I coordinated with the Kaiserslautern Evangelical Lutheran Church (KELC), an LCMS sponsored, English-speaking congregation located in Kaiserslautern, Germany near Ramstein Air Base, to assist with identifying LCMS families living near Spangdahlem AB. Upon identifying three families, I contacted each of them to determine their desire to be a part of a new church plant closer to their area. Each family agreed with joy. Four families in total, including the Domenichelli family, came together through Word and Sacrament to form a new congregation in the Spangdahlem area. At the time of submitting this letter in October 2024, for publication in the 2025 South Dakota District Convention Workbook, we have held four Divine Services with six Bible Studies with this new church plant congregation since September 1, 2024.

So, I give thanks to God for you dear saints of the South Dakota District for the support you have provided thus far. Your partnership in the Gospel matters. We could not have made it here, set up a place to live, and begun working on this church plant without your faithful prayers and offerings to God on our behalf through the Together In Mission (TIM) program. Your mission dollars matter. We thank God for everything that He has provided. The growth of this new church plant is His workmanship through His saving Gospel. Together we are witnessing the work of the Holy Spirit who calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies His people into the body of Christ. The same body you dear saints are a part of and receive the Gospel into your ears and mouths for you every Lord's Day. Please continue steadfast in these things and greet each other with the love of Christ on our behalf.

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## **TOGETHER IN MISSION**

### **Reverend Jordon Andreasen, Missionary to Romania**

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the South Dakota District,  
„Căci mie nu mi-e rușine de Evanghelia lui Hristos, fiindcă ea este puterea lui Dumnezeu pentru mântuirea fiecăruia care crede...” Romani 1:16

“For I am not ashamed of the Gospel (of Christ), for it is the power of God for salvation of everyone who believes...” Romans 1:16

It is with joy that I am granted to share this report not only as a former pastor of the district, but now as your missionary serving as a Church Planter and Theological Educator with the budding Confessional Lutheran Church of Romania.

These words of St. Paul are words of promise and exhortation for us as the people of God. They are words of promise and strength as we do not see the efforts of the church through human invention or strategy, but rather in terms of God's work in Christ. We faithfully administer and trust God to work through His promised Means of Grace to bring about faith and salvation. When questions arise, we do not turn to our wisdom, but the Word of Christ. We do not seek to preach something new or better than what Jesus preached. We seek to hold fast to the confession that we have received. Jesus himself only proclaimed what He was given from the Father we are not above our teacher! This is true in Romania as it is in Africa, Asia and in South Dakota!

At the time of my writing this report (October 2024) we are only now preparing to depart for Brașov, Romania. We have been deployed to St. Louis spending time learning Romanian as we

awaited the birth of our son Simeon. It has been a blessing for all this to take place before moving overseas. It will indeed be a blessing as we move and adjust to life in Romania. Even more, to be about the work of proclaiming Christ clearly! By the time this report is available for the convention I will, God willing, be further acquainted with and increasingly involved in the evangelistic work in Romania, Moldova, Bulgaria and Greece and elsewhere! As we do this work it is in this simple reality of God's promise and work through His Word and Sacraments. This is only our work in that God has called us to preach and teach without shame. He is the one who will work faith through His promised means. That is our trust and that is the lens through which we work and see what He is doing.

This too is your place and work. It may have greater complexities in a District and congregations much larger than are present here, but the truth is the same. The same danger to doubt God's work, the same danger to lean on our own understanding exists there as here. The same danger for other things to remove our gaze and focus from God's Word and promises. God works where and when He pleases through the Word and Sacraments, we are called by Him to be faithful. These are not things for which we are ashamed, but the source of confidence and faith in Christ Jesus who is the Savior of the World! We look to Christ, we cling to His forgiveness and we give a defense for the hope that is within us until He returns.

May the Lord bless you all and grant that we all remain steadfast in the Truth of Christ until He comes!

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## **TOGETHER IN MISSION**

### **Reverend Sam Bobby, Missionary to Latvia**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ of the Beloved South Dakota District,

I submit this report with all humility and joy, ever thankful and amazed at God's work in and through His church. I commend President Sailer for choosing such a befitting theme for this year's convention. Like St. Paul, how can we be ashamed of such a great salvation? The gospel truly is the power of God who, through the Word made flesh, brings us eternal gifts well beyond our sinful imagination.

I wish to inform you of the work God is doing here in Riga, Latvia by utilizing your convention theme. The gospel is the power of God for salvation to all who believe, and I see that power manifesting itself in the work God has put before me and the rest of the missionaries at Luther Academy, Riga, Latvia. One mark of God's gospel power has been trust. On the mission field, so much is out of your control, so God calls you back over and over to your baptismal promises and teaches you to trust Him.

But this trust extends well beyond me individually. Luther Academy is the seminary for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia (ELCL), a church with whom we in the LCMS have been in fellowship since 2002. In 2018, one of their bishops came across a new law that allowed an accredited educational institution within a European Union (EU) country to extend its accredited program to all the countries of the EU *if* that program introduced an English-speaking component. That is how the LCMS became involved. Leadership in the LCMS realized for some time that sending potential pastors from the Eurasia region to ecumenical seminaries resulted in pastors with poor doctrine and very little practical training. This new law would give the LCMS an opportunity to partner with the ELCL and provide an accredited professional seminary degree.

This is where so much of what followed was simply trusting in the Lord because of the Savior and gospel we shared. Through the extensive work of missionaries prior to me arriving, a reduced residency seminary offered in English was formed. Would students enroll? They had to trust the Lord! That trust was not in vain. Students from all over the region enrolled, and within a couple of

years these missionaries had well over 20 students studying through this fledgling confessional Lutheran seminary program located in the heart of the Baltic region.

I was called to Luther Academy to teach classes on Lutheran doctrine. Since arriving, I have also taken on the roll of chaplain and Director of Vicarage. This year we have 26 total students from 16 different countries. These students are men from all walks of life who will go back to their churches and regions to proclaim the gospel as the power of God for salvation just like St. Paul says. I work with them and the pastors from their home congregations to ensure that the vicarage process is effective and faithful. I organize all our Monday evening chapel services, and I teach our students the importance of the Lutheran Confessions and sound doctrine.

I cannot overstate the potential impact Luther Academy could have throughout Eurasia. Each of these pastors will spend the rest of their days, God willing, shepherding their flocks, witnessing to Christ through the life of the church, and teaching, training, and counseling people in God's word. Each soul is precious to God, and the work done through Luther Academy, through each pastor God sends from here, has the prospect of claiming innumerable men, women, and children for Christ. Will that happen by necessity? No, but I trust that God will bring it to completion because of the gospel and the power that gospel engenders.

Another manifestation of the power of the Gospel is thankfulness. My family and I are thankful for you and for the support you provide. This thankfulness is not mere words but a deep recognition that we are joined by our common need for Jesus and our common desire for all to be saved and come to the knowledge of our Lord. We continue in this joint gospel venture with all of you *because* of all of you. Thank you.

We here at Luther Academy will see our first class graduate next spring, and we are very excited. You should be excited too. These pastors go out because of your partnership and commitment and because all of us trust the power of the gospel to accomplish that for which God sent it.

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## **TOGETHER IN MISSION**

**Reverend Cory Rajek**

**Office of International Mission, Missionary – Eurasia Region, Riga, Latvia**

*“Be strong and courageous ... for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.” (Deuteronomy 31:6)*

The words above are part of Moses' great goodbye spoken to the people of Israel as he prepared to hand over leadership to Joshua. Moses served his purpose. He led the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt, through the forty years of wilderness wandering, and to the shores of the Promised Land. But, with the Lord's good pleasure, it was now time to move on. His time of leading God's people was over.

As I reflect upon this text, I can resonate a bit with what Moses must have been experiencing. In a span of about three years, I left Faith Lutheran in Pierre to serve first as a missionary/theological educator in Riga, Latvia, then as an associate regional director (ARD) of Eurasia, then as a regional director (RD) of Eurasia, and finally as the Executive Director of the Office of International Mission (OIM). As a missionary/theological educator, I taught seminary students from the Eurasia region at the regional seminary started by the LCMS. This seminary, called Luther Academy – Riga, is now fully accredited in the European Union and has a student body approaching 40. Aside from teaching, I also served on the academic council where I worked to develop the curriculum for the seminary. Additionally, I worked with our local partner church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia, to plant an English-speaking congregation in Riga for tourists and expats. After a short time teaching at the seminary, I had served my purpose, and with the Lord's good pleasure, it was time to move on.

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Next, I was appointed as ARD for the Eurasia region. In this role, I mainly worked directly with LCMS partner churches and in planting a Lutheran church in Israel. Currently, a small group of native Israelis are meeting for worship services conducted in Hebrew and soon there will be a native Israeli man who will be ordained as a Lutheran pastor to serve this group. After a very short time as ARD, I had served my purpose, and with the Lord's good pleasure, it was time to move on.

Following my six-month service as ARD, I was appointed as the Eurasia RD after my predecessor retired from the position. As the RD for Eurasia, I was responsible for LCMS mission and business activities from the birthplace of Lutheranism to the Holy Land to the heart of Islam in the Middle East to India, which is the LCMS's first international church plant, and finally, to the formerly atheistic Soviet Union. The Eurasia Region is OIM's largest region in land mass. It was a busy year of meeting with missionaries and church partners, developing strategic plans, approving budgets and regional expenses, and giving lectures on what LCMS international mission is all about. In addition, I worked to expand our Lutheran church plants beyond Israel to several other countries. But after a year as RD, I had served my purpose, and with the Lord's good pleasure, it was time to move on.

In January 2024, I accepted a call to serve as the Executive Director of OIM. In fact, as I now write this report, I am serving in St. Louis in this capacity. As the Executive Director of OIM, I oversee the staff in St. Louis, all LCMS international missionary care, the overall direction (mission and business) of international mission for the LCMS and OIM's interactions with LCMS church partners around the world among other things. Additionally, I represent OIM to the LCMS at large and the good work our OIM missionaries are doing internationally.

While my role over the last few years has dramatically changed, the mission our Lord has given has not changed. He continues to make disciples through Word and Sacrament as He has promised in Matthew 28. With the support of people and districts like South Dakota, OIM will continue to work toward Planting Lutheran Churches and connecting people to the places where our Savior has promised to be present. On a personal note, I cannot express enough my profound thankfulness to the South Dakota District for the support I received over the last few years. It has been a great privilege and honor to partner with you in the mission God has given us. Thank you for all you have done for me and the Lord be with you!