



/ MAY 2025

DISTRICT NEWS

SOUTH DAKOTA

'I hold you in my heart'

Thank you

It's hard to believe that this is my last *Lutheran Witness* article as the president of our beloved LCMS South Dakota District, but it is. On May 4, I hand the baton of leadership to Rev. Randy Sturzenbecher, as he is installed that day as the new president.



Rev. Dr. Scott Sailer
District President
Emeritus

Paul's words to the Philippians, in chapter 1, verse 7, reflect what I want to say to you, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

As we take a deeper dive into Philippians, we read wonderful, warm words. Paul's heart overflows with a passion for Jesus and for His mission. His heart overflows as well for the Philippians themselves, with whom he enjoyed a partnership in the Gospel (cf. Philippians 1:5).

That's the way I feel about you, sisters and brothers, in our ministry partnership in South Dakota. I have a passion for Jesus and His mission. I've seen that



LCMS/Erik M. Lunsford

Pastor Sailer (seated at left) is pictured in 2019 at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind., going over details with new workers called or assigned to the South Dakota District. Standing next to Pastor Sailer is Rev. Nabil Nour, emeritus, who was then serving as pastor of Trinity, Hartford.

in you, too, in my 10 years working with you as your district president, for the sake of the Gospel.

It is because of the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus' love and salvation work for us, that we love and serve Him. It is because of the Gospel that we gather together in congregations. It is because of the Gospel that we call pastors and other church workers to bring God's Word to us. It is because of the Gospel that we workers in the church train and encourage you for speaking words of witness and for doing deeds of love, across the 77,000 square miles of our great state.

I have seen over and over again that you are Christ's loving, joy-filled servants. I have tried to be that, too, as your president. And I will endeavor to do that in the new ways that God places before me to serve Him and His people in my time of slowing down a little from full-time work (sometimes known as "retirement").

My wife, Sarah, and I will continue to live in Sioux Falls, and we will continue to look for ways to serve those around us. Of course, we have other plans, like doing a little more traveling and fulfill-

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Expanding in Mitchell



On March 16, Zion, Mitchell, dedicated its new Ministry Center, located just to the northwest of the church. The Ministry Center gives Zion needed space to expand its outreach and programs, and will also house the church offices.

Rev. Dr. Thomas Brown, former Zion pastor who now serves St. Paul, Spearfish, was the preacher for the Service of Dedication. Rev. Dr. Scott Sailer, district president, conducted the Rite of Dedication.

Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) helped provide financing for this project.



▲ Involved in the dedication service were, from left, Rev. Dr. Thomas Brown, former Zion pastor; Rev. Dr. Scott Sailer, district president; Vicar David Christensen, a Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, student serving at Zion; and Rev. Dan Grimmer, Zion pastor.

◀ Pictured are, from left, Adam Schulz, Building Committee chairman, and Eric Schramm, vice-chairman.



CALL INFORMATION

Rev. David Lindenberg, Peace, Rapid City, is prayerfully considering a call to St. Paul, Oak Lawn, Ill., March 16.

Rev. Sam Bobby, LCMS missionary to Eurasia, accepted a call to Redeemer, Lincoln, Neb., Feb. 23.

Rev. Kyle Whaley, Mount Calvary-Zion, Polson, Mont., declined a call to Zion, Chamberlain, Feb. 18.

Rev. Robert Zellmer, Bethel, Lawton, Iowa, declined a call to St. Paul, Freeman, March 5.

VACANCIES

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



Share your news with us!

Send articles/photos to
Kate Meadows:

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

Eleven teams compete in annual tourney

There was much fun and laughter at the 68th annual South Dakota State Dartball Tournament held March 1. Eleven teams from 10 congregations gathered in the new Ministry Center at Zion, Mitchell, for a joyous day of fellowship.

Following a devotion from Vicar David Christensen of Zion, the teams were split into two pools with each team playing at least four games. Ultimately, Risen Savior, Tea, emerged as champion. Zion, Delmont, took second; and Faith Parkston, defeated Mount Calvary, Brookings, for third place.

We are grateful for LCEF and Kurt Primuth for sponsoring the tournament again this year. We truly appreciate all they do for us.

If you are interested in having a team at next year's tournament, contact Adam Schulz at 605-999-2403 or adamschulz05@gmail.com. We would love to have even more teams join us in the years to come.

Dartball is a game of darts played similar to baseball. Two teams of nine players face off by throwing darts underhanded at a dartboard 15 feet away. The dartboard is shaped like a baseball diamond. Along with bases, it has spaces for outs, strikes, balls and fouls. The dart is thrown at the board until you get a hit (by landing the dart in a base area) or by getting an out (by striking out, missing the board, or hitting an out area). This continues until three outs have occurred for that team. One game lasts nine innings.



Headed to Nebraska

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

It is with a heavy heart that I must inform you that my family and I will be leaving the mission field in Riga, Latvia. While the mission at Luther Academy has been going very well, and the Lord has blessed it immensely, we have been encountering major challenges getting Simon the care and support he needs.

We realized this past December that remaining in Latvia was going to be unworkable. We love Latvia and the work the Lord is doing here, and we are eternally grateful to all the saints (and the leadership) of the South Dakota District who have supported us the last couple of years. We are sad to go, but we also know the Lord will continue to keep and guide His church.

I have accepted a call to serve as pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church, Lincoln, Neb., but I will stay on at Luther Academy until the end of the semester in May. We will then transition back to



the United States. Please continue to keep us in your prayers, and I will always cherish both my time serving in the district and all the wonderful relationships, by God's grace, we were able to have.

In Christ • Rev. Samuel Bobby

Moments with Mary Jo



Much to celebrate!

May is filled with many celebrations. The first is May Day. How many of you remember the tradition of May Day baskets? Do you remember putting a basket of goodies on someone's doorstep, ringing the doorbell and then running as fast as you can so as not to get caught? I'm not sure if this tradition is still alive, but consider this spin on it: When you put a basket of goodies together, add your favorite Bible verse and a mite box!

Did you know that the first Sunday of May is World Laughter Day? Psalm 126:2 is the perfect verse for this day:

Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."

We can celebrate by sharing the joy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ with those around us.

Now we can't forget Mother's Day — a day to say thank you to our moms for all they do for us. Exodus 20:12 tells us:

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you."

Many in May will celebrate a graduation. Many LWML groups remember their graduates with a special recognition Sunday at church. We can remind graduates of Jeremiah 29:11:

"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."

Last but not least, is Memorial Day, a day we remember and honor those who made the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom.

Let us also remember the selfless love of Jesus Christ, who laid down His life for us, and find comfort in the promise of eternal life.



Mary Jo Stier
LWML District President

Grant proposals due Aug. 31

LWML South Dakota District Mission Grant proposals are due by Aug. 31. Who can submit these proposals? How does this process work? And our favorite Lutheran question — what does this mean?

Mission Grants may be proposed by individual members, groups, zones, LCMS Recognized Service Organizations (RSOs) and other LCMS organizations. Grants must emphasize the mission and extend the ministry of the Word. They must also be current, ready for implementation and well-documented.

Grants within the LCMS South Dakota District will be approved by the district president or Board of Directors before consideration by the LWML South Dakota District. Grants that involve a national or partner Lutheran church need approval by the LCMS chief mission officer (CMO). Grants in another LCMS district need approval by that LCMS district president and/or the LCMS CMO.

You can find specific information on how to submit a grant proposal at sdlwml.org/mission-grant-application. Submit the electronic copy to vandeBraak4@gmail.com, or hard copy to LWML SD District Vice President of Gospel Outreach, Cathy VandeBraak, 129 N. La Salle Ave., Sioux Falls, SD 57110.

The deadline is Aug. 31.

Cathy VandeBraak • Vice-President of Gospel Outreach

Tea time in Yankton

A breakfast tea was held at St John's, Yankton, on Feb. 15. About 45 LWML sisters and guests gathered for a morning filled with fellowship and Valentine treats. Patty Peters, past LWML South Dakota District president (2020-2024), shared a message called "I am the Heart of LWML."

Mites were collected for our Mission Grants, and the invitation skit for the upcoming LWML convention in Omaha, Neb., was shared. Rev. Steve Weispfennig, St. John's senior pastor and past LWML district pastoral counselor, closed with prayer and the LWML song.

Sandy Williams
Yankton Zone



COUNSELOR'S CORNER

‘Joyous and triumphant’

Riding the wave of Easter into Ascension

Spring is probably my favorite time of the year, and I do not think that I am alone in this. After the South Dakota winter, it is enjoyable to be outside in the pleasant temperatures, to get some planting done, and imagine what the harvest will bring.



Rev. Christopher McCarthy
LWML District Counselor

But it is more than that for us Christians. It is also the season of Easter that ends in the Ascension of our Lord. The hymns are joyous and triumphant, the readings comforting and full of hope. And Christ's victory over sin, death and the devil is proclaimed boldly and enthusiastically.

I tend to think of this time as “riding the wave of Easter.” Who can feel gloomy after celebrating the resurrection of our Lord? Even the creation itself joins in our chorus of praises to our risen King!

St. Paul says:

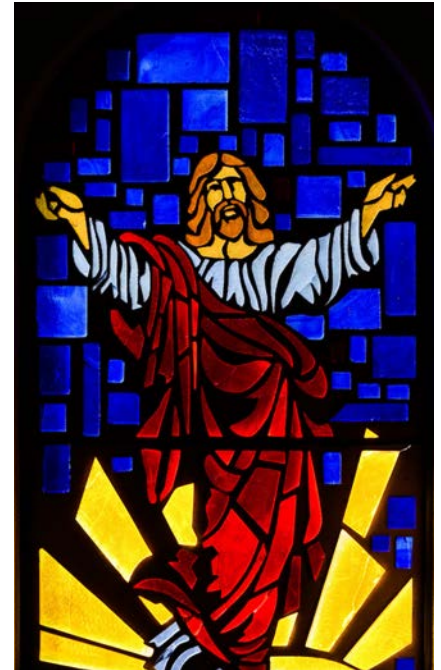
If we have been united to Him [through baptism] in a death like His, we shall certainly be united to Him in a resurrection like His.” **ROM. 6:5**

This season of the church is not some thoughtless, meaningless tradition. It is a tradition, certainly, but it has a purpose — to teach you of your baptismal life! That is, as the Son of God has taken on our human flesh and humbled Himself to the point of death on a cross (for your sake!), and has risen from the dead (for your sake!), so also through Baptism you have been united to Him in His death and resurrection! He has stooped down to the dark, ugly depths of our sin, died and was buried — to lift us out of the grave in His resurrection and bring us before the Father in His ascension.

As Paul says to the Colossians:

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.” **COL. 1:21-22**

So as you are going



through this season of the church year — “riding the wave of Easter into Ascension” — remember that you are in reality riding the wave of your Baptism into Christ to the Father's house. Or maybe a better way to say it is that Christ has taken you onto His back, so that His death is your death, His resurrection is your resurrection, His ascension is your ascension.

In this hope you were baptized. Christ is risen! Christ is ascended! Christ will come again in glory! Come, Lord Jesus.

“
**His death is
your death, His
resurrection is your
resurrection, His
ascension is your
ascension.
In this hope you
were baptized.”**

YWRs selected for national convention

Congratulations to **Katie Utecht** and **Danaca Schettler**, who were selected as the LWML South Dakota District's Young Woman Representatives (YWR) to the 41st Biennial LWML Convention in Omaha, Neb., this summer!

Katie is from Belle Fourche and her home congregation is St. Paul, Spearfish. She is married to Amos Utecht. She desires to learn more about the LWML and potentially become more involved. Katie serves the Lord with gladness in her career as a teacher. Her grandmother-in-law, Donna Utecht, describes her as a loving, kind, caring and creative young woman.

Danaca attends Zion, Sioux Falls. She was a YWR at the district convention in June 2024. Danaca says she would like to be more involved in the LWML and connect with like-minded women. She currently attends LWML–Ruth Guild meetings and helps with confirmation classes. She is also very involved in serving at church with her husband, Todd, and their three children.

We are so blessed to have these young women represent the LWML South Dakota District!

Laurel Schamber • YWR Committee Chairwoman

'I'm going to stand for life, no matter what'

An interview with South Dakota State Rep. Al Novstrup

By Rev. Ryan Drevlow

South Dakota District Life Coordinator

Last October, I interviewed State Rep. Al Novstrup about Amendment G, the proposed constitutional amendment that would have established a right to abortion in the South Dakota Constitution. The amendment was defeated on Nov. 5, praise God.

We also talked about the defense of life at all stages in South Dakota. Following is a glimpse of our discussion.

Drevlow: Rep. Novstrup, what is it like to fight for life in the South Dakota legislature?

Novstrup: Well, it's easy because there's not a lot of debate or resistance. In South Dakota, we have 105 legislators: 11 Democrats and 94 Republicans. Within the Republican Party, we're not all unified on all the issues, including abortion. There are a few Democrat party legislators in South Dakota who are pro-life and there are few pro-choice Republicans.

Drevlow: So, the pro-life group in South Dakota is the majority.

Novstrup: A strong majority, yes.

I'm an active member of the South Dakota Right to Life. Our mission statement is to protect our people from birth to natural death. South Dakota Right to Life believes that God should decide when life begins and when life ends.

Drevlow: Is that opinion held by most people in the legislature? I find there's more confusion on the sanctity of life at the end of life than on abortion. For example, a lot of people believe it is OK for someone with a terminal disease to end their life on their own terms. Do you

find the legislature is similar or are they clear on this issue?

Novstrup: Thankfully, we've never had that debate, which means it's not on the table. And no one's really thinking about it. But in these debates, whether it's euthanasia or abortion, the anti-life side seeks to muddy the water by using one example in a thousand. On the abortion side, they say, "Well, the mother is a 12-year-old, and she got pregnant by her dad." OK, that example represents one case in a hundred thousand.

Drevlow: After *Roe v. Wade* was overturned, South Dakota's trigger amendment went into place. Now there are no abortions in the state. Did the legislature plan for the abortion pill?

Novstrup: In 2005, the way the law was crafted, we did. We don't have to go back and fix anything because we defined abortion as the intentional death of a child. So it doesn't matter how you go about doing it.

Drevlow: I interviewed staff of the Alpha Center of Sioux Falls, and they have some reporting to suggest that even though the abortion pill is illegal in South Dakota, people are still getting it delivered to them within the state. How do we deal with that?

Novstrup: Attorney General (Marty) Jackley has talked about it. And the answer is we can do the best we can. Abortion is illegal in South Dakota, and you must prosecute. South Dakota is willing to prosecute people who are doing that. But prosecution of those who ship these abortion pills from out of state

is beyond our reach. We don't have the authority to punish somebody outside of our borders.

Drevlow: I think some of my fellow brothers and sisters are at times concerned about putting themselves out there and revealing to the whole community what they think about the pro-life issue. You have been an outspoken advocate for life in the Aberdeen community and in the state. Have you suffered for being a pro-life advocate? Would you encourage other people to step out in faith on this issue?

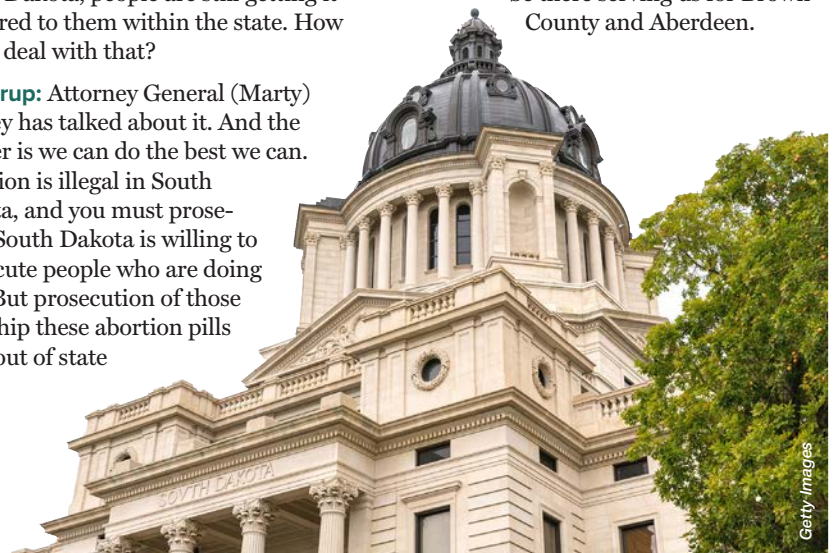
Novstrup: Well, I don't think I've ever suffered. I think I've lost some support over it. But you've got to make a decision. Are you willing to lose support? I've been told every good legislator should have some issues that he's willing to lose his position over. This is a core value and if I lose my job over it, so be it.

I'm going to stand for life, no matter what. And if the Aberdeen voters say they don't want me out there anymore, then so be it. I'm still going to be pro-life. If I only worry about whether it's going to get me re-elected or not, I'm a pretty bad legislator.

Drevlow: Thank you so much. I appreciate your time. I'm very excited for you to be there serving us for Brown County and Aberdeen.



Rep. Al Novstrup



Getty Images

Serve at LWML convention

Also, you may purchase items for three Nebraska Lutheran ministries

As part of the 41st Biennial LWML Convention June 26-29 in Omaha, Neb., please consider the following opportunities to serve:

- ▶ Blood drive, June 26, 9 a.m.–3 p.m.
Cost to participate is \$10.
- ▶ Assembling meal packs, tying quilts, making onesies and preparing feminine hygiene packs for Orphan Grain Train of Norfolk, Neb.
- ▶ Making witness bracelets for MOST Ministries.
- ▶ Assembling tool kits to be distributed to Nebraska first responders.
- ▶ Coloring and writing cards of hope for Phil's Friends.
- ▶ Creating encouragement/thank you cards to be distributed at Offutt Air Force Base in Omaha.
- ▶ Assembling Braille books and calendars for Lutheran Braille Workers.

Three ministries were selected to receive Gifts From the Heart (GFTH)

ingathering items. Wish lists for these ministries can be found at lwml.org/convention. Scroll down to “Convention Details” and find the link to the GFTH flyer, which has links for the lists. Even if you don't travel to Omaha, you can purchase items and have them shipped to convention. The ministries are:

- ▶ **Camp Luther of Nebraska**, an LCMS Recognized Service Organization that offers a wide variety programs and services for youth and families. The camp also offers special needs ministry and women's and men's retreats.
- ▶ **Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska**, an LCMS Recognized Service Organization that provides support and resources to individuals and families in need across Nebraska.
- ▶ **The University of Nebraska at Lincoln Campus Ministry**, which provides a safe environment where students can engage in fellowship as well as Bible studies.

MESSAGE

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

ing our calling as children of earthly parents, as Dad and Mom, as Grandpa and Grandma and as church members. In all of these vocations, we know we serve the God we cannot see (yet!) by serving people whom we can see.

Thank you for the kindness and love you have shown us the last 10 years. God has blessed us “real good” through you.

With St. Paul, I say: “I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace.” There is no greater gift — God's grace to us in Christ Jesus!

**Gratefully, in Christ,
Pastor Sailer**

“Not ashamed of the Gospel”
Rom. 1:16; 16:25–27



UNITED in WORD and SACRAMENT

During the past year, many people around the world have been rocked by disaster — flooding in North Carolina, typhoons in the Philippines, wildfires in California. Lutherans are not spared from the consequences of a fallen world. Yet, they are called “to be together around Word and Sacrament” even at a time like this, says Rev. Christopher Schaar, pastor of Historic First Lutheran Church, Pasadena, Calif., which narrowly escaped the Eaton fire in early January.

The Spring 2025 issue of *Lutherans Engage the World* includes these stories and more. You'll also read about a new hymnal in the Indonesian language that came about through a collaboration of the LCMS and the Indonesian

Christian Lutheran Church; two church plants that are taking root in the LCMS South Wisconsin District; and LCMS All Nations Ministry, a newly formed ministry that seeks to support those serving in Asian, Black, Hispanic, native American and other ethnic ministries around the United States.

Through good times and bad, we thank God for the projects that are completed, the people who are cared for and the seeds that are planted when the church clings to Jesus Christ and His promises.

Read the issue online at engage.lcms.org, or sign up for a free subscription at engage.lcms.org/subscribe.

Communication Critical

Welcoming a new church worker is a transition for all involved, from the church worker to the church leaders to members of the congregation. This true story illustrates why communication is key to welcoming a new church worker into your congregation.

This is the first of a 2-part series on welcoming new church workers, shared by Lutheran Family Service.

By Rev. Dave Gunderson
Emeritus

The new pastor and his wife arrived at their first church, which is located in a rural area. They were met by the congregation president, who explained to the pastor that the members had wanted to paint the inside of the parsonage, but they also had to get into the fields for early planting.

The president then added, "Maybe this works better because now you and your wife can select the colors you want."

After a couple of days, the pastor called the church president and said, "My installation is a week away and we have some extra time. Maybe my wife and I could do some of the painting ourselves?" The church leader agreed and told them to go to the hardware store and charge everything to the church.

The next day the pastor contacted the church president and said, "We picked up the paint and supplies, but the ceilings are very tall. Does the church have anything we can use?" The church leader replied, "Yes, in the church basement there are some sawhorses and in the garage are some boards. They would work for you."

Unfortunately, the church leader didn't tell the pastor that there were sawhorses that the ladies used for their quilting work, and there were old sawhorses in the storage room. The sawhorses used by the ladies were out in the open and



were used by the pastor. Sadly, they ended up with paint on them.

Two years later, some elders called on a lady member of the church who hadn't attended worship or anything led by the new pastor. When the elders called on her, she responded by saying, "Anyone who would ruin our church property like he did has no business in the ministry."

This true story illustrates how a bad beginning can create difficulty in a church worker's ministry. What could that congregation have done differently? What could any church do to help make a worker's ministry begin on a more positive note?

Pastor Gunderson is a marriage and family therapist who served as a parish pastor and U.S. Army National Guard chaplain.



Lutheran Family Service

If you as a church worker (or that special church worker in your life) are in need of Christ-centered mental health or marriage counseling, contact Angela Kollbaum, LFS director of Church Worker Wellness and Support at 402-644-8048 or akollbaum@lutheranfamilyservice.org.

You may also fill out a form at lutheranfamilyservice.org/contact.

Lutheran Family Service walks with those experiencing difficult times through mental health counseling, marriage counseling, crisis pregnancy counseling, and adoption services.

lutheranfamilyservice.org
info@lutheranfamilyservice.org