



/ AUGUST 2025

# DISTRICT NEWS

## SOUTH DAKOTA

### Evangelism in unexpected places

August in the beloved South Dakota District is when evangelism occurs in places you might not expect. You might see Lutherans For Life equipping Lutherans and their neighbors to be Gospel-motivated voices for life at your county fair. Lutherans For Life is very good at helping people realize what the psalmist writes:



**Rev. Randy Sturzenbecher**  
District President

For you (God) created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful; I know that full well.

**PSALM 139:13-14 NIV**

From conception to the last breath we are all created, loved and forgiven by our gracious and merciful Father in heaven. That message of love and life fleshed in First Article gifts is evangelism at its finest.

If you go to the state fair, you will see evangelism in action as the LWML hosts the Puppet Place. The Utecht family has been using magic and music, puppets and juggling to tell the Gospel message of Jesus Christ since 1972! The Puppet Place is a multi-generational ministry that started with Rev. Robert



Members and volunteers at Blessed Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Sturgis, prepare made-to-order omelets for Rally guests.

and Donna Utecht and now is carried on by their family and friends. Every time the puppets and marionettes begin to animate, our attention is centered on the hope and joy that comes through Jesus Christ. The LWML and the Utecht family remind all of us that there are many different ways and places to evangelize. St. Peter writes:

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

**1 PETER 3:15 NIV**

Always be prepared to share the Good News of Jesus — on the golf course, at the fair, fishing for walleye and in the everyday activities that you do.

When you think about August in Sturgis, you might be thinking of the 85th motorcycle rally, not evangelism. The saints of Blessed Emmanuel, Sturgis, and the Black Hills Circuit, as well as numerous volunteers, have seamlessly joined food, fellowship and the Good News of Jesus together. The biker breakfast is a made-to-order

See **WITNESS**, page 8



## Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Thank you for the many well wishes, prayers and gifts as I concluded my service as president of this beloved district. Throughout my 10 years of service, I relished the times spent in meeting you, God's precious children, throughout this beautiful state. Your faith and dedication encouraged me. Your love



**Rev. Dr. Scott Sailer**  
District President  
Emeritus

for Christ and your congregations stands out in my memories of working with you.

Of course, your church is really the Good Shepherd's church, and we must diligently seek to do His will within our own walls and outside those walls in our communities, and yes, even into

the world as Gospel ambassadors, sent by the Lord of the church, Jesus Christ. For the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16)!

God bless you in the days and years ahead. Continue to be rooted in the Holy Scriptures and stand firm on the confessions of our church, because those confessions are indeed a correct exposition of God's perfect, saving Word.

Sarah and I look forward to seeing you again, if not at some gathering of God's people within the district, certainly in the life to come in the new heavens and new earth Christ promises for us.

## Congrats!

On May 11, Zion Lutheran Church, School and Preschool honored Principal Ann Solinsky and Preschool and Daycare Director Hope Genzlinger for their 25 years of faithful service to Zion.

Over the past 25 years Hope and Ann have faithfully taught God's children, mentored new teachers and staff and have overseen the successful day-to-day operations of the school and preschool. They have been loving co-workers and friends and have blessed many lives with their servant hearts. We thank God for all the ways they have used the gifts He has given them to bless our church, school and preschool. We also thank God for their



From left, Hope Genzlinger and Ann Solinsky.

families and the sacrifices they have made in supporting these women to live out the calling God has placed on their lives.

Congratulations, Ann and Hope! We look forward to many more years of serving God alongside you!

## CALL INFORMATION

### PENDING

The following are prayerfully considering calls:

#### Rev. Christopher McCarthy

Emmanuel, Creighton/First, Wall, to St. Paul's, Jerome, Idaho

**Rev. Jeremy Richert**, Holy Cross, Dakota Dunes, to Mount Olive, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada

### DECLINED

**Rev. Brian Lemcke**, Emmaus, Trip/Zion, Delmont, to St. John's, Madison, Minn.

**Rev. Ryan Eden**, Redeemer, Winona, Minn., to Zion, Chamberlain.

**Rev. Paul Winckler**, assistant to the South Dakota district president, to St. Paul, Freeman.

**Rev. David Strable**, Trinity, Blunt/Holy Cross, Onida/Immanuel, Harrold, to First, Phillipsburg, Kan.

**Rev. Jeremy Richert** to Lutheran Hour—St. Paul, Ontario, and International Falls, Minn.

### ACCEPTED

**Rev. Thomas Mueller**, Emanuel, Sisseton and Zion, Waubay, to Zion, Chamberlain.

### VACANCIES

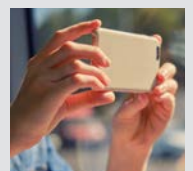
- Divine Shepherd, Black Hawk (senior pastor)
- Concordia, Cresbard/Immanuel, Wecota
- St. Paul, Plankinton/Trinity, White Lake
- Memorial, Sioux Falls (senior pastor)
- St. John, Wagner/Trinity, Fairfax
- St. Peter, Wentworth

## Share your news with us!

Send articles/photos to  
Kate Meadows:

• [kate@katemeadows.com](mailto:kate@katemeadows.com)

• 420 E. Liberty  
Street;  
Rapid City, SD  
57701



## Birstiehl commissioned as LCMS teacher

Mindee Birstiehl, a music teacher at Sioux Falls Lutheran School (SFLS), recently completed the teacher colloquy program of the LCMS, and was then called by the school.

During a chapel service on April 30, Rev. Dr. Scott Sailer, district president emeritus, commissioned Mindee as a rostered LCMS teacher and installed her as a teacher on the SFLS staff.

Rev. Aaron Asmus, senior pastor

of Memorial, Sioux Falls, had served as Mindee's mentor for the colloquy program. We are grateful for the effort made by Mindee in completing the colloquy process. We thank the Lord of the church for raising her up as a teacher in His church!

In photo, Revs. Asmus (left) and Doug Slavens, Memorial associate pastor, speak words of blessing to Mindee on behalf of the congregation.



## New president installed

Rev. Randy Sturzenbecher was installed as the 15th president of the South Dakota District during a service on May 4 at Divine Shepherd Lutheran Church, Black Hawk, where he had been serving as pastor.

Rev. Dr. Nabil Nour, LCMS fourth vice-president and Trinity, Hartford, pastor emeritus, was the officiant, while Rev. Dr. Michael Kumm, Holy Cross, Dakota Dunes, assistant pastor, preached.

From left, (front) Revs. Dr. Nabil Nour, David Warner, Randy Sturzenbecher, Dr. Michael Kumm; (back) Dennis Mercer and Dr. Scott Sailer.



## CALL DAY 2025



**ABOVE:** Tanner Sutcliffe received a call as pastor of Risen Savior, Tea, during Call Day service at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, on April 30. He is pictured at left with his wife, Caelin, along with Rev. Randy Sturzenbecher, district president, and his wife, Vonda. The installation is scheduled for Aug. 17.



**ABOVE:** At Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (CTSF), following call service on April 29, Pastor Sturzenbecher (right) looks at a South Dakota map with Timothy Schleusener (second from right), who was called as pastor to St. John, Montrose, and Zion, Canistota, and Rev. Dr. Nabil Nour. At left is Zachary Wessel, who was called as pastor to Trinity Hartford (where Nour is pastor emeritus), and his wife, Haley. **LEFT:** Joseph Moore, a student at CTSF, was assigned as vicar to Zion, Mitchell. He is pictured with his wife, Margaret, and their daughter, Evangeline.

## Moments with Mary Jo

### DIVINE ENCOURAGEMENT

Sometimes I wonder if I am doing justice in everything I am involved in. Have I gotten myself in over my head? Often the answer to my question is most definitely yes. Then the Lord steps in at just at the right time and gives me that little boost to remind me that I need to look to Him for guidance and put my trust in Him for the ability to continue.

One of those little boosts came in April at the District Retreat — spending time with my LWML sisters!

Friday night, we were entertained with wonderful music from Java Jives. It was a wonderful night of great music and laughter. On Saturday morning, a few of the attendees participated in the Mission Walk along the banks of the beautiful Missouri River. What a glorious morning! The rest of that day, we were blessed with Bible studies led by our pastoral counselors. Throughout the retreat, we were entertained with a style show. We had a look at apparel from the past. It was wonderful to hear stories about each of the items.

I would like to thank the retreat committee: Susan Swanson, Kristy Ring, Ann Cruse, Heather Miller and Rev. Brian Mosemann; and the Chamberlain Zone.

I was recently reminded that I need to continue looking to the Lord for guidance. He will lead my path and will be with me through thick and thin. Isaiah 43:2 tells us, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.”



**Mary Jo Stier**  
LWML District  
President

### Volunteers needed for Puppet Place

Please consider volunteering at the Puppet Place during the South Dakota State Fair, to be held in Huron Aug. 27–Sept. 1. The Puppet Place is an ongoing mission of the LWML South Dakota District. This will mark the 53rd year of the Puppet Place reaching out at the fair.

Zone presidents, please reach out to your groups and gather names of volunteers for your assigned day. Volunteers will greet visitors and hand out puppets, Bible studies, devotions and more. Please send volunteer names from your zone to Cathy VandeBraak at [vandebrak4@gmail.com](mailto:vandebrak4@gmail.com).

#### Volunteer Schedule

Wednesday, Aug. 27 — Yankton Zone  
Thursday, Aug. 28 — Aberdeen Zone  
Friday, Aug. 29 — Black Hills Zone  
Saturday, August 30 — Brookings Zone  
Sunday, Aug. 31 — Chamberlain Zone

## District Retreat recap

Lutheran Women in Mission welcomed 116 men and women at the Cedar Shore Resort in Oacoma April 25–26 for the 2025 LWML South Dakota District Retreat. “Living God’s Praise,” based on Psalm 119:175, was the theme.

Friday evening, Java Jives, from Gregory, provided musical entertainment with several harmonious Gospel renditions.

Saturday Bible studies based on the retreat theme were presented by district pastoral counselors Rev. Dr. Brian Mosemann and Rev. Christopher McCarthy. Pastor Mosemann led a study titled “The Cry of the Lost Sheep,” and Pastor McCarthy led a study called “Praise — What Is It?”

Servant events included the making of 333 hand puppets for the Puppet Place ministry at the South Dakota State Fair, and over 175 witness bracelets for MOST Ministries. Gifts from the Heart included \$900 in gift cards for First Circuit CASA (Court Appointed Advocates for Children) and over 2,700 items for the Missouri Valley Crisis Center. The Mission Walk brought in \$294. Mites offerings totaled \$1,627.

— Nancy Bogenhagen • Webmaster-IT

## Sioux Falls Zone update



The LWML of Faith, Sioux Falls, used a Thrivent grant to purchase items for 59 Easter baskets for McCrossan Boys Ranch. Pictured are, from left, Lynn Boyd, Patty Peters, Elaine Sestak, Jeri Melstad, Denise Schmidt and Brenda Paulson.

The Sioux Falls Zone has had a busy first half of the year. We started in February with the Prayer Service, hosted by Our Redeemer, Sioux Falls. Women of Faith, Sioux Falls, made Easter baskets for McCrossan Boys Ranch. Trinity, Hartford, hosted a pie and ice cream fundraiser to raise funds for renovations to their parsonage. Then, we added the annual Mite Walk (it’s always a joy to put our painted rocks of encouragement along the trail), the Empower Your Health Women’s Seminar, and the Spring Retreat in Chamberlain. Our women served a few Lenten meals, which raised \$487 for Mites.

What a blessing all these faithful LWML members are. They truly are the hands and feet of Jesus.

— Mary Dunlap • Sioux Falls Zone President

COUNSELOR'S CORNER

# Honoring Mary



**Rev. Christopher McCarthy**  
LWML District Counselor



Aug. 15 is the feast of St. Mary.

I know, I know, Lutherans can get a little squeamish when we start to talk about the mother of our Lord. And I am not going to advocate for invoking Mary. It is not as if our Lord will listen to His mother more than He will listen to the saints for whom He bled and died. His blood testifies that He Himself desires us. Will He not listen to the cries of His people, for whom He suffered, bled, died and rose again? Yes, He will! As our Lord Himself says, "If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it" (John 14:14).

So, we do not want to hold Mary up as a mediator between men and Christ. Christ Himself is the mediator between God and men (1 Tim. 2:5), who mediates for us by His own passion and death, the one sacrifice which appeases God's wrath against our sin and renders Him gracious toward us.

But we can hold Mary up before us as an example.

The Apology to the Augsburg Confession gives three ways that we can honor the saints who came before us. First, we can give thanks to God for the mercy that He showed them and the gift He gave to the church. For example, on the feast of St. Mary, we can give thanks to God for the mercy that He showed to her, who was "of humble estate," knowing that He is pleased to "fill the hungry with good things." And we can also give thanks that through her, the Son of God, our Redeemer was born in human flesh.

Second, we can honor the saints when we are encouraged through their story,

See **MARY**, page 7

## 2025 CHRISTIAN LIFE WORKSHOPS

Two Christian Life workshops are being planned for October. The first is "Living God's Commandments," on Oct. 4 at St. John, Gregory. The second is "Deeper Relationships. Wider Kingdom Influence," on Oct. 18 at Lord of Life, Sioux Falls.

### 'Living God's Commandments'

As God's children, we are given the Ten Commandments, which are impossible to keep. Ten blessings — keep them and life is pretty good. When we break one of the commandments, we are actually breaking the others. How does the breaking of any of the commandments actually break the first?

How do the commandments affect our lives and the lives of our neighbors? Why do we study them in the Small Catechism and what does this mean? Faith is based on God's Word and promises. With these promises, Rev. Bill Serr, pastor of Grace, Springview, Neb., and

Immanuel, Newport, Neb., will teach, remind and show how important the commandments are and break down how and why we study them.

### 'Deeper Relationships. Wider Kingdom Influence.'

It is no secret that Christianity is met with a fair bit of skepticism among younger generations. As our young disciples see conflict, experience moral failure among leaders and witness Christians who limit their faith to Sunday mornings, they walk away asking, "What's the point?"

Rev. Billy Newell, pastor of Lord of Life, Sioux Falls, has a passion for empowering every Christian to reach those who are far from Jesus. During this workshop, we will explore the power in deep relationships and personal witness. We will explore the balance between presence and proclamation. While young people are skeptical of the

church, they long for community and seek to know God. While they may not come to their church, they will come to your dining-room table. Through it all, we can be encouraged that Jesus goes ahead of us, comes behind us and walks beside us!

— **Kristy Ring** • VP of Christian Life

### Itinerary

- 9–10 a.m. Registration and fellowship
- 10–10:15 a.m. Opening devotions
- 10:15–10:30 a.m. Greetings, introductions, and announcements
- 10:30–11 a.m. Speaker
- 11–11:15 a.m. Break/activity/fellowship/LWML Store
- 11:15 a.m.–noon Speaker
- Noon–1 p.m. Lunch break/LWML Store
- 1–1:45 p.m. Speaker
- 1:45–2 p.m. Break/singing/fellowship/LWML Store
- 2–2:45 p.m. Speaker
- 2:45–3 p.m. Closing devotions

## The Adoption Journey



# 11 MYTHS and REALITIES

By Sue Shields

Lutheran Family Service

Adoption is a lifelong journey filled with joy, complexity, growth and faith. As families consider adoption, it's important to separate fact from fiction. Our culture, media and even well-meaning friends often contribute to adoption myths or misunderstandings that can make the adoption journey more challenging. At Lutheran Family Service (LFS), we walk alongside families to offer truth, support and a Christ-centered perspective every step of the way.

Here, we explore some of the most common adoption myths and the truths that reflect the real experiences of adoptive families.

### **Myth #1: We have to be the perfect parents to adopt**

There's no such thing as a perfect parent. Adoption agencies and birthparents aren't looking for a flawless family. What matters most is a heart willing to love and a home that's safe, stable and faith-filled. Families who feel called to adopt and desire to raise a child in a loving Christian home are already on the right path.

### **Myth #2: We will fall instantly in love with our adopted child**

While some parents do feel an immediate bond, love often grows through time,

shared experiences, and consistency. That's true for both adoptive and biological families. Attachment takes patience, grace and a daily choice to show up and care.

### **Myth #3: Adoption is "second-best"**

Adoption is not a backup plan or second-best option — it's a beautiful way God builds families. Just as we are adopted into God's family, earthly adoption is a powerful expression of love and calling. Many adoptive parents look back with gratitude for the journey that led them to adoption. Whether through biology, foster care or adoption, every path to parenthood is uniquely blessed.

### **Myth #4: Our adoption is everyone's business**

Especially in cases of transracial or international adoption, people may feel entitled to ask questions or make assumptions. The truth is, families adopt for many reasons — and those reasons belong to them. What you choose to share is your decision. Children deserve dignity and privacy and should be empowered to share their story in their own way and time.

At the same time, it's healthy to build a trusted circle of support. Whether you share a little or a lot, do what's best for your family and your child.

### **Myth #5: Real women do hard labor**

Motherhood isn't defined by giving birth — it's defined by love. The myth that "real women do hard labor" dismisses the heart

of parenting, which is daily sacrifice, nurturing and showing up no matter what. Adoptive moms don't have anything to prove. Their love is just as real, deep and committed.

It's normal to wrestle with feelings of inadequacy. But real parenting is about walking alongside your child through every joy and challenge, not about biology.

### **Myth #6: Adoptive parents feel only grateful**

Adoption is full of gratitude — but it's also full of complexity. Waiting parents may wrestle with the pressure to feel grateful before they even become parents. Even after adoption, emotions like grief, disappointment and resentment can surface — and that's OK.

You may grieve the loss of a dream or the experience of childbirth. You might feel overprotective or overwhelmed by your child's emotional needs. That doesn't make you a bad parent — it makes you human.

This duality of gratitude and grief affects birth parents and adoptees too. Parenting isn't about being appreciated — it's about giving love freely and walking in grace.

### **Myth #7: Adoptive parents should fear their children will want to search for birth parents**

Children are naturally curious about their story. In open adoptions, many questions are answered early, reducing confusion and anxiety. In closed adoptions, questions may linger longer, especially if the truth is withheld.

Honest, age-appropriate conversations build trust. Children can handle truth when it's shared with love and safety. It's OK if your child is curious — that doesn't mean they love you less.

### **Myth #8: Children should be told they're adopted when they're older**

Children should grow up always knowing their adoption story. When they do, adoption becomes a natural, celebrated part of their identity. There's no "right age" to start — it begins with simple, loving conversations even in infancy.

Books, family traditions and open dialogue help kids feel confident in their story and secure in your love.

Continued on next page

## Myth #9: Adoptive parents aren't the child's "real" parents

Being a parent isn't about DNA — it's about the daily work of loving, guiding, and nurturing a child. A "real" parent is the one who stays up at night, celebrates the milestones and comforts the tears. Use terms like "birth parents" instead of "real parents" to honor all parts of your child's story.

## Myth #10: Children who are adopted won't fit in with the family

All families face doubts and challenges, whether formed biologically or through adoption. It's normal to wonder, "Will this child feel like mine?" or "Will we bond?"

With time, shared memories and unconditional love, families grow strong. Adoptive parents bond with their children just as deeply as biological parents.

## Myth #11: Adoption is a one-time event

Adoption is a lifelong journey. As your child grows, they'll revisit their story in new ways. Their questions may evolve. Their emotions might shift. And that's all part of the journey.

What matters most is your willingness to walk with them, listen without judgment, and offer consistent reassurance that they are loved, wanted and chosen.

"He predestined us for adoption to Himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will." **EPHESIANS 1:5**

**WE WOULD BE HONORED** to walk beside you in prayer, support and hope. Learn more about Christian adoption through Lutheran Family Service at [lutheranfamilyservice.org/adoption-services](http://lutheranfamilyservice.org/adoption-services)

**CALL:** 515-251-4900

**EMAIL:** [info@lutheranfamilyservice.org](mailto:info@lutheranfamilyservice.org)

**WEB FORM:** [lutheranfamilyservice.org/contact](http://lutheranfamilyservice.org/contact)

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

## Congratulations, Pastor Asmus!

Rev. Aaron Asmus retired on April 27 after 39 years in the pastoral ministry. A 1986 graduate of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Pastor Asmus had served Memorial, Sioux Falls, since 1999.

Thank you, Aaron, for your exceptional service as an undershepherd of the Good Shepherd. May God bless, keep and guide you and Lisa in the years ahead.



Rev. Aaron and Lisa Asmus are pictured in center with their family. At left is Adam and Vania Asmus. At right is Rev. Jesse and Alissa (Asmus) Baker. Jessie is holding Olivia and Alissa is holding Kalan. In center at top is Andrew Asmus.

## MARY (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5)

and see that God does truly forgive the sins of real people. For example, we can be encouraged that, though Mary inherited the sinful flesh from Adam (as we all have), yet He was pleased to dwell in her womb, not because of ignorance or blindness to her sin, but because and on account of His own coming sacrificial death. We are then encouraged when the same Christ comes to dwell with us, and in us through His Supper.

Third, we can set the saints before us as examples to imitate, both in their faith and in their virtues, according to their vocation.

We sing the *Magnificat* (Mary's song in Luke 1:46-54) in many of our services to imitate Mary's faith. Mary's song reminds us that, just as the Lord has done great things for her, though she is of low estate, so also the Lord has done great things for us, as it is written, "at the right time, Christ died



for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6). That's you and me.

Remember also Mary's vocation as mother, and that God was pleased to enter this world under the care of a human

mother, who performed all the duties required of her for her Child. She fed and swaddled and changed diapers, brought her Child to the Lord, searched for Him and found Him in the temple, and stood at the foot of His cross when she was given to the care of John.

Motherhood is truly hard work, but God has not left you alone. He finds it honorable, and has even given us the example of Mary, the mother of God.

**“Mary's song reminds us that, just as the Lord has done great things for her ... so also the Lord has done great things for us.”**

## 'Well done, good and faithful servant'



**Above:** Teacher Rachel Utecht and students, from left, Olivea Lauing and Kaydance Kathman (holding baby James) sold fresh baked cinnamon rolls and other treats. **Below:** The students collected used toys and held a toy drive to help raise funds for the school; from left, Odin Pokorski and brothers William and Boe Rausch.

Members of Bethesda, Hot Springs, have been busy with fundraising events for Bethesda Lutheran School. The School Board issued a challenge based on the parable of the talents from Matthew 25: Each family was given \$25 and asked to use their God-given talents to make it grow. The results have been thrilling.

From retirees to students, the Bethesda family has stepped up to raise funds for the school using their unique gifts. From crafting jewelry to baking treats and propagating plants, Bethesda members used their \$25 in creative ways. At the end of April, a bazaar was hosted in the church's fellowship hall. Along with working at vendor booths with



their families, Bethesda students made cinnamon rolls to sell and donated toys for a used toy drive.

It was a wonderful evening

and a fantastic way for everyone to continue learning more about our brothers and sisters in Christ sitting in the pews next to us.

## WITNESS

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

breakfast rivaling anything you would find in a large-scale restaurant. The cooked fresh food is delivered to the bikers by pastors, youth or any number of faithful volunteers, all ready to not only feed the body, but also feed the soul with the truth and promises of Jesus. The sanctuary is open for prayer and meditation. Prayer requests are received. Bikes are blessed and riders are prayed for.

That is evangelism. It is not difficult or scary. Find people you know and have something in common with and share your joy. The Good News about Jesus is delivered to His blood-bought people.

Evangelism is not a duty or a demand of being Christian. God grows His church. God through His Holy Spirit changes hearts and lives by connecting them to Jesus, and His cross and the forgiveness He accomplished for all people. With that firmly in mind, evangelism now becomes a fruit of being forgiven. It is a natural thing to help and serve and tell others of the hope that we have, the peace we have in our risen Lord Jesus. God bless you as you find new and creative ways to share the hope that you have in Jesus.

