
SOUTH DAKOTA

DISTRICT NEWS

DISTRICT NEWSLETTER



JANUARY 2026

HOLD YOUR CAMELS, KINGS!

Dear Saints,

I saw a meme close to Thanksgiving that had the Thanksgiving turkey shaking his fist of feathers at Santa Clause saying, "Wait your turn, fat boy!" The meaning was clear: Let's celebrate Thanksgiving before we rush into the Christmas season.

We have moved from Advent to the Nativity of our Lord, and now we are into the Church season of Christmas, looking forward to Epiphany. We need a meme that has Joseph with his hand up in a stop motion saying to the Magi, "Hold your camels, Kings!"

Almost every Christmas nativity scene and Christmas pageant has the angels, and the shepherds and the Magi gathered around Mary and Joseph and Jesus. St. Matthew tell us, "Behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw His star when it rose and have come to worship Him'" Matthew 2:1b-2. Yes, the Magi did follow the Star that came to rest over the place where the child was, and by the time they got to Jesus He and Mary and Joseph were in a house.

My point is not to just be historically accurate with the events of Christ's birth but to take the time to see each event and celebrate the wonderful gift and promise they bring. The Magi are an important part of all our salvation story. We wait for that story - not for the Christmas season but for Epiphany.

The Nativity of Jesus is unprecedented in human history. Babies are born all the time, but this birth is Almighty God incarnating Himself. The eternal, almighty second member of the Holy Trinity took on human flesh and blood, was born of virgin Mary and came to live in our world. That event alone demands our attention. God (Jesus) is born into our world because God (the Father) made a promise when our first parents, Adam and Eve, brought sin into our world and lives. Read Genesis chapters 1-3.

But wait, there is more! Jesus was born for you. When you gathered with your family and friends at Church on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, you heard about one of



the first physical signs of the length God will go to, to forgive you and give you eternal salvation. St. John says it this way: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. John 1:14, 16-18.

Jesus being born into our world and in our lives through faith is God's grace. A gift we do not deserve, but a gift of love. Jesus' birth points us to the truth of what He came to do. "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost". Luke 19:10. Jesus was born to save us. And He did. Nailed to a cross, the perfect sinless sacrifice was offered for the imperfect sinner, you. The last part of the last verse of the hymn, "O Little Town of Bethlehem," becomes our Christmas prayer, "O come to us, abide with us, Our Lord Immanuel!"

President Sturzenbecher

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth ... For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace." -John 1:14, 16

District News

CHANGES TO DISTRICT NEWSLETTER/ E-NEWSLETTER AND NEW CONTACT

The beloved South Dakota District is working to improve our communications with our South Dakota congregations. With the Synod's recent decision to no longer publish District news inserts, our South Dakota District will put together its own monthly printable newsletter and will continue to send out two e-newsletters each month.

As communication modes are changing, we hope to provide more news, features and profiles for our readers. We will also strive for an increased social media presence. Beginning in January, a printable newsletter will be emailed to congregations, allowing each church to distribute it as they see fit.

Please send any news about your congregation, service project, building project or feel-good human interest piece to communications@sddlcms.org.

We look forward to sharing your stories and praying alongside you!

-Kate Meadows
Communications Coordinator
communications@sddlcms.org



BLESSED REDEEMER WELCOMES PASTOR ANDREW RATCLIFFE



Pastor Andrew Ratcliffe was installed as pastor of Blessed Redeemer, Brandon, in a special service on Nov. 23. Pastor Ratcliffe served at St. Paul's, Perham, Minn., prior to coming to Brandon.

Pictured, from left: Revs. Matt Wurm, Gary Klatt and Bill Newal, former South Dakota District President Scott Sailer, Rev. Daniel Deardoff, current South Dakota District President Randy Sturzenbecher, and Revs. Ratcliffe, Keith Ratcliffe, Cory Aker, Joe Howlett, Michael Kumm, Matthew Nix, Tom Batchelder, Chris Ascher, Ed Borchardt, Josh Lowe, Brett Simek and Doug Slavens.

REV. NATHAN HENSCHEN INSTALLED AT ST. PAUL'S, FREEMAN



Rev. Nathan Henschen was installed as pastor of St. Paul's, Freeman, in a special service on Nov. 30. Rev. Henschen served previously at St. John's, Lyons, NE, and St. Paul, Bancroft, NE.

Pictured, front row, from left: Revs. Thomas Christopher, Brian Mosemann and Nathan Henschen, District President Randy Sturzenbecher and Rev. Zachary Wessel. Back row, from left: Revs. Nabil Nour, Richard Weeman, Wayne Bernau, Tanner Sutcliffe and Joshua Mork.



FROM THE LUTHERAN HERITAGE FOUNDATION

Free Lutheran Resources: Do you have a friend, neighbor or family member who doesn't speak English as a first language? [The Lutheran Heritage Foundation](http://www.lhfmssions.org), a recognized service organization of the LCMS, has translated and published books like Luther's Small Catechism, A Child's Garden of Bible Stories, God's Word For You, and more into nearly 190 languages like Spanish, Hmong, Swahili and Chinese. Best of all, these books are FREE to any church or individual who needs them. Simply visit www.lhfmssions.org to search by language and send an email with your request.



LUTHERAN SCHOOLS FOCUS

*to share your Lutheran school/preschool news, please email Dawn Wombold, District Education Executive, at Dawn.Wombold@sddlcms.org

SIoux FALLS LUTHERAN



Ribbon Cutting & Dedication for SFLS Middle and High School Wing:

Sioux Falls Lutheran School will host a special ribbon cutting and dedication ceremony on Tuesday, Jan. 20, at 4:30 p.m., to celebrate the opening of its new Middle and High School Wing. Association church members, families, students, alumni, and supporters are invited to be part of this exciting milestone in our school's story! Location: 6715 S Boe Lane Sioux Falls, SD 57108.

Become a Mentor at Sioux Falls Lutheran:

This spring, Sioux Falls Lutheran is launching a new Mentor Program for K-12th grade students—an initiative rooted in Scripture, modeled after the ministry of Jesus, and built on the simple but transformative power of consistent, caring presence. Learn more about the program and how you can apply to serve a child in this meaningful way. Visit <https://bit.ly/sfls-mentor-program-2026> for more info.



SFLS Middle/High School Principal Completes Colloquy



James Stubkjaer, Middle and High School Principal and Activities Director at Sioux Falls Lutheran School, was recently commissioned and installed as a Called Worker in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod after successfully completing the Synod's Colloquy program.

James holds a Bachelor of Science in Education, a Master of Science in Sport Pedagogy and a Master of Education in School Administration from South Dakota State University. He is licensed as an administrator in both South Dakota and Minnesota.

Since joining SFLS in 2021, he has provided steady, visionary leadership during a season of significant growth. During his tenure, the high school has more than doubled in size, middle and high school academic programming has expanded—including the recent addition of a STEM program—and the school's athletics and activities offerings have grown substantially.

James has been instrumental in shaping athletics and activities programs that are deeply aligned with the school's mission, vision, and core values. Under his leadership, varsity-level programs have been added in volleyball, cross country, football, basketball, track and field, and golf—each intentionally grounded in Christian character formation, servant leadership, and discipleship. James leads with a clear conviction that athletics and extra-curricular activities are not separate from the mission of the school, but a powerful extension of it—forming students who are World-Ready and Faith-Secure.

LUTHERAN SCHOOLS FOCUS

BETHESDA LUTHERAN

Bethesda Lutheran School Welcomes South Dakota Service Dogs for Hands-On Learning Experience

Students at Bethesda Lutheran School received a special visit on November 13, 2025 from South Dakota Service Dogs, an organization dedicated to training dogs that assist veterans and first responders by providing them with specially trained service dogs at no cost. The visit was part of an ongoing effort by the school to connect classroom learning with real-world service and compassion.

Handlers from the organization brought service dog, Honey, to the school, demonstrating how the animals learn essential skills—from retrieving dropped items to providing physical support and interrupting anxiety episodes. Students watched as the dogs followed complex commands with calm focus, learning how long and intensive the training process can be. The school’s interest in service dogs grew earlier this year when students chose South Dakota Service Dogs as the recipient of their weekly chapel offering. Moved by what they learned about the organization’s mission, they decided their donations could make a meaningful difference.

Principal Hunsaker said she couldn’t be prouder of her students’ choice.

“Our kids showed such genuine compassion when they selected South



Dakota Service Dogs for their chapel money,” Hunsaker said. They saw a need, wanted to support it, and were able to see exactly how their generosity helps. I’m incredibly proud of their hearts and their willingness to give.”

Teachers say the visit helped students better understand not only how service dogs change lives, but also the patience and dedication required to train them. Many students had the chance to ask questions, meet Honey up close, and learn about different types of disabilities these animals support.

As Honey trotted out of the building—tail wagging and students cheering—staff members remarked that the experience was one the children are unlikely to forget. With plans already underway for future service-learning opportunities, Bethesda Lutheran School hopes to continue fostering a spirit of empathy, curiosity, and community engagement. Students from Bethesda Lutheran School with Honey and her handlers. Each student received a collapsible dog food bowl from South Dakota Service Dogs.

MAIN STREET LIVING PROGRAMMING - JANUARY

“Main Street Living” is a liturgical worship service broadcasting a different local pastor each Sunday morning. It airs along with the classic Lutheran Hour program, “This is the Life”. Both can be viewed on KDLT (NBC) & KEVN (FOX). KEVN (FOX) airs at 8 a.m. Central Time. Visit www.mainstreetliving.com/ to view current and past episodes.

Jan 4, 2026
KDLT (NBC) channels 5.1 / 46.1
10 AM - “The Other Wiseman” - Another Magi, making his journey to the Christ child, encounters others and shows kindness along the way.
10:30 AM - Rev. Joshua Jones, pastor at **Bethlehem Lutheran Church** in **Rapid City**, presents a message titled, **“Behold, Your King!”** The sermon is based on Matthew 2:1-12.

Jan 11, 2026
KDLT (NBC) channels 5.1 / 46.1
10 AM- “The Christ We Share” - Sharing the Gospel is neither swift nor easy, but truly rewarding in the end.
10:30 AM - Rev. Albert Sutton, pastor at **Evergreen Lutheran Church** in **Evergreen, SD**, presents a message titled, **“What is true Spirituality?”** The sermon is based on Matthew 3:13-17.

Jan 18, 2026 (Sanctity of Human Life)
KDLT (NBC) channels 5.1 / 46.1
10 AM - “Live Option” - A 15-year-old pregnant daughter and her mother disagree on the future of her child.
10:30 AM - Rev. Michael Salemink, from **Lutherans For Life** presents a message titled, **“From Invisible to Indispensable.”** The sermon is based on 1 Corinthians 12:22.

LUTHERAN WOMEN'S MISSIONARY LEAGUE

Moments with Mary Jo

Theme: Confidence in His Grace

"Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."
-Hebrews 4:16

Confidence in His grace is the theme for the 2026 South Dakota LWML District Convention. Together, we will focus on the idea of approaching God's throne of grace with confidence. I hope you will join us on June 5-6, 2026, at the Ramkota Best Western in Rapid City for this wonderful, nurturing event. During our time together, we will contemplate these ideas at work in our lives:

1. Approach the throne of grace as believers to receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need
2. Trust our mediator, Jesus Christ who is our throne of grace and intercedes for us
3. Enjoy the pure goodness and blessings given to us by God

Happy New Year! God's blessings to you all.



ZONE UPDATE

Chamberlain

The Chamberlain Zone did not hold a Spring Workshop this year, as we hosted the LWML SD Spring Retreat on April 25-26, at Cedar Shore in Oacoma.

In August, the Gregory and Chamberlain groups assisted with the Puppet Place on Sunday during the South Dakota State Fair. On October 4, 2025, St. John's Lutheran Church hosted the LWML SD District Christian Life Workshop which was also attended by 30 people. The ladies also hosted our Fall Rally on the same day. A total of twelve ladies attended the Chamberlain Zone Rally.

Our groups are actively gathering mites and joyfully serving the Lord with gladness. The ladies of Messiah Lutheran in Murdo and Zion Lutheran in Presho are working together to make quilts for their graduating high school seniors. St. John's Lutheran LWML in Gregory prepared 30 goodie bags at Easter to be distributed to shut-ins.

Additionally, Zion Lutheran in Chamberlain hosted their annual Potato Bake, serving 150 meals, with the proceeds going toward missions and mites.

Susan Swanson
Chamberlain Zone President

Invitation to the 2026 LWML SD District Convention

The members of the LWML Black Hills Zone cordially invite you to the 64th LWML South Dakota District Convention, which will be held June 5-6, 2026, at the Ramkota Best Western Hotel and Convention Center in Rapid City.

The theme, "Confidence in His Grace," is based on Hebrews 4:16 – "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." The ladies in the zone are excited to have you come and enjoy Rapid City, the city of presidents, but also the beautiful Black Hills and the numerous historical sites throughout the area. We already are in the beginning stages of planning for your arrival and hope you will be making plans to attend the convention.

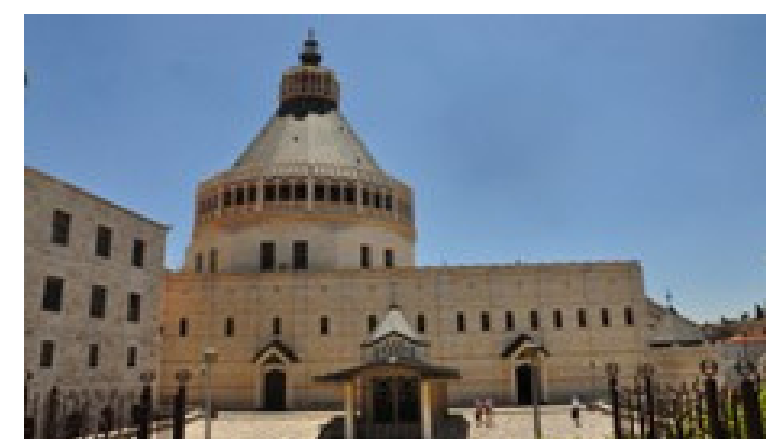
Elaine M. Hankel, Convention Chairman



January Mission Grant Resources

Story and Prayer Guide for Mission Grant #6 - Phil's Friends (U.S.), Christ-Centered Hope for Cancer Patients - are now available for January. Learn more at <https://www.lwml.org/2025-2027-mission-grant-6>.

Invitation to 28th Israel "Nour Tour"



Join Pastor Nabil Nour on his 28th tour of the Holy Land, scheduled for Sept. 29-Oct. 12, 2026! During the 13-day tour, travelers will experience two civilizations – the old and the new.

Along the way you will....

- Walk where Jesus walked
- Cruise the Sea of Galilee
- Climb the Mount of Olives
- Walk the Triumphal road, the same road on which Jesus entered Jerusalem
- See the Old City of Jerusalem
- Visit Tabgha, the site of the miracle of the Loaves and Fishes

See NOUR TOUR, page 6

LUTHERAN WOMEN'S MISSIONARY LEAGUE

Counselor's Corner

Rev. Dr. Brian Mosemann



Your Light Has Come

"Trust the science!" We hear it constantly. Yet science, for all its brilliance, is not infallible. What was once proclaimed as truth crumbles under new evidence. Science is a tool, not a savior. The wise men observed a star, interpreted its meaning, and followed the science. It led them to Jerusalem, to Herod's palace. Close, but wrong. They missed Bethlehem by about six miles and the true King by an eternity. Science got them near; only God's Word got them there.

Science is God's gift. It heals diseases, powers cities, feeds billions. But when we idolize it—trusting it for ultimate meaning, life, or salvation—it becomes a false god. The Magi needed more than stars. After Herod, the priests quoted Micah 5:2: "Bethlehem... from you shall come a ruler." Scripture redirected them. The star reappeared, but now guided by the Word of God, it led to Jesus.

Knowledge alone fails us. From Eden, the serpent promised godlike wisdom through forbidden fruit. Adam and Eve chased knowledge apart from God and reaped death. Darkness spread, as Isaiah foretold: "thick darkness [shall cover] the peoples" (Isaiah 60:2). Sin divides, devalues life, and death steals it. Science prolongs life but cannot defeat sin or the grave. Sometimes it accelerates destruction—weapons, addictions, ethical compromises.

Yet light breaks through: "Arise, shine, for your light has come!" (Isaiah 60:1). God's Word became flesh. Jesus, the Light, entered our darkness. Born in Bethlehem, baptized with sinners, eating with outcasts, He bore our sins on the cross. Darkness peaked at Calvary, but on the third day, He rose, shattering death's power. Forgiveness, resurrection, eternal life—these are His gifts.

Herod and the priests knew the Scriptures but rejected the Word made flesh. Fear drove Herod to massacre innocents; fear led priests to demand crucifixion. We too fear what following Jesus might cost: reputation, comfort, relationships. The Magi show another way. Guided by Scripture, they found the Child, fell down, worshiped, and offered treasures. Their joy was exceeding. Science points to order, but Scripture points to the Creator.

Wise men still follow His Word. The gifts differ—time, service, love—but the Gift is the same: Jesus, who baptizes, forgives, feeds us with His body and blood. Walk in His light. In Him, we depart this life not in fear but in peace, shining with His light. The Lord make His face shine upon you.

REPORTS ARE DUE



It is time to update the LWML SD District Directory. The forms for submitting the necessary information can be found at the LWML South Dakota District website: <https://www.sdlwml.org>, Resources, Officer Report Forms. If paper copies of the forms would be helpful, please contact me at luannzuercher@gmail.com or 605-222-0769.

Group presidents and secretaries – please send your completed Officer Report form to your zone secretary by January 15, 2026.

Zone presidents and secretaries – please complete both the Group Officer Compilation Report form and the Zone Officer Report form. Send them to me by February 1, 2026.

Receiving this information in a timely manner is greatly appreciated. I look forward to hearing from you!

Thank you,
Luann Zuercher
LWML SD District Secretary

MSL (continued from page 4)

Jan 25, 2026

KDLT (NBC) channels 5.1 / 46.1

10 AM - "Missing Ingredient" - Bob (Jack Nicholson) and his fiancée, Lynn (Susan Crane) are planning their wedding when she overhears her parents planning to separate shortly after.

10:30 AM - Rev. Norman Wacker, pastor at **Mount Calvary and Bethlehem Lutheran Churches in Sundance and Moorcroft, WY**, presents a message titled, **"The Word Brings Light!"** The sermon is based on Matthew 4:12-25.

These MSL programs are interpreted and closed captioned for the deaf and hard of hearing. For more information visit: www.mainstreetliving.com

NOUR TOUR (continued from page 5)

- Visit the Mount of Beatitudes
- Visit the site of the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus chose the 12 disciples
- Walk the Via Dolorosa (Road of Suffering) to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher
- Stroll the Garden of Gethsemane
- Visit Bethlehem and the Church of the Nativity—the birthplace of the God-Man Jesus Christ

Pastor Nour is a native of Israel, born in Nazareth.

Cost for this trip is \$5,290.00 per person and includes: roundtrip air fare from Chicago to Tel Aviv, lodging (double occupancy) tips, entry fees and all meals.

For further information contact:

Rev. Dr. Nabil S. Nour, Pastor, proud grandpa, and Foot Washer Phil. 1:6
605-201-6998 (Cell)
preachermanfootwasher@gmail.com

LUTHERANS FOR LIFE

THE STAGGERING STATISTICS OF DOWN SYNDROME BABIES

In 2020, Sarah and Grant DeJong felt called to adopt a baby with Down Syndrome. Already parents to five children at the time – including their oldest, Cheyenne, who was born with Down Syndrome – they wanted to open their hearts and loving home to another child with an extra chromosome. That heartfelt decision became the seed that God used to grow the Down Syndrome Adoption Program at Lutheran Family Service.

75% of babies in the United States diagnosed in the womb with Down Syndrome are aborted.

Through prayer and perseverance, Baby Grace joined the DeJong family in December 2021. Today, Grace is a joyful toddler, loved deeply by her parents and siblings, and a living witness to the blessing and value of every child.

The presence of Down Syndrome is usually discovered before birth, with the sad result of this test most often being a death sentence: 75% of babies in the United States diagnosed in the womb with Down Syndrome are aborted. Since doctors often don't know of the many families eager to adopt a baby with Down Syndrome, they never present adoption as a life-giving option. In recent years, LFS has invited your partnership to educate obstetrics professionals in Nebraska, Iowa, and Illinois about adoption as a hopeful, available choice. That effort expands to South Dakota this year. With your support –and without charging fees – LFS helps two families each year adopt a child with Down Syndrome. It's making a difference: so far, three babies are now thriving in safe, loving Christian homes.

Through programs offering traditional, Down Syndrome, and embryo adoption in four states (with more on the horizon), Lutheran Family Service continues to build on our nearly 125-year history of wrapping the Church and Christian families around babies who need them. Each child is placed with a father and mother who are married, love God, and are active in their Christian faith. Each baby will also be brought into God's family through the waters of Holy Baptism. Our ability to place children with married male/female Christian parents is only possible because of partnerships with people like you whose annual and legacy gifts sustain this ministry without the use of government funds, which would otherwise direct policy and practice.

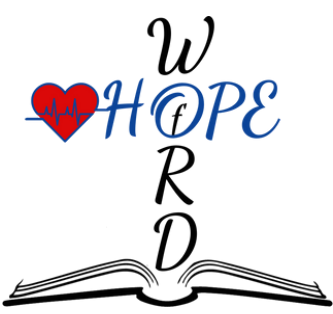


“Faithfulness springs up from the ground, and righteousness looks down from the sky. Yes, the Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before him and make his footsteps a way.”
Psalm 85:11-13

Suicide Awareness, Intervention and Postvention Program



sponsored by Lutherans for Life of South Dakota
featuring Deaconess Chrissie Gillet, Director of Word of Hope



2 dates/locations:

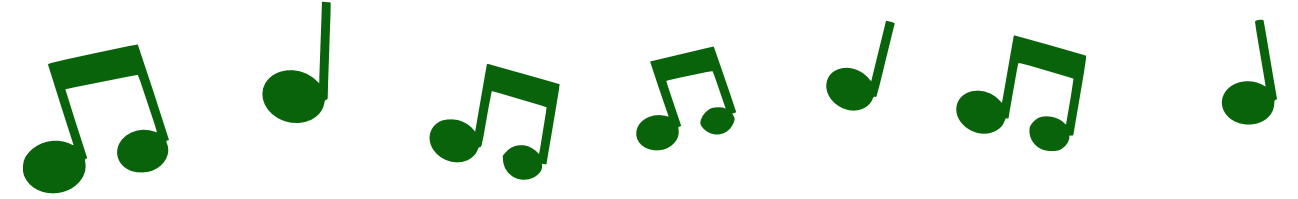
Saturday, April 18, 10:00am to noon
Zion Lutheran Church
314 S. Main St., Chamberlain

Sunday, April 19, 3-5 p.m.
Resurrection Lutheran Church
5500 26th St., Sioux Falls

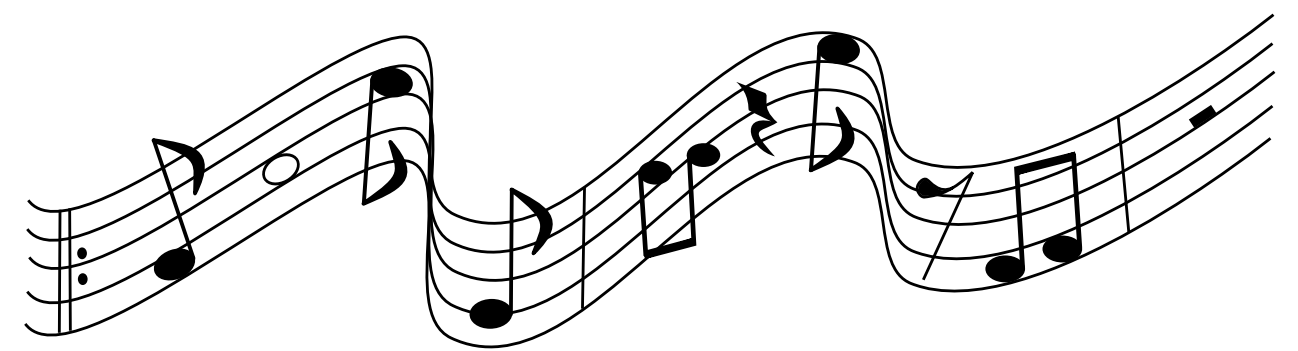
RSVPs appreciated but not required to jjohns8@yahoo.com.
Refreshments will be served during the program. All are welcome.
Questions? Call 605-361-1514

District News

NOMINATE YOUNG MUSICIANS FOR LUTHERAN SUMMER MUSIC PROGRAM



You're invited to nominate a student for LSM 2026! Lutheran Summer Music (LSM) is a faith-based residential music academy for high school students (grades 8-12) who come together from all over the country to immerse themselves in musical excellence and build an intentional, supportive, and FUN community. LSM 2026 takes place at St. Olaf College in Northfield, MN from June 21-July 19 (Full Session) or June 21-July 3 (Half Session). Standard enrollment deadline is March 1. Nominate students at [LSMacademy.org/nominate](https://www.lsmacademy.org/nominate). Watch and share our LSM Experience Video at <https://www.lsmacademy.org/lsmvideo> to learn more!



CALL INFORMATION

PENDING

The following are prayerfully considering calls:

- Rev. Daniel Grimmer, Zion, Mitchell, to Trinity, Hilbert, Wisc., Dec. 16
- Rev. Brian Lemcke, Zion-Delmont/Emmaus, Tripp, to First Trinity, Bloomfield, NE, Dec. 3
- Rev. Joseph Hanson, First, Missouri Valley, IA, to Emanuel-Sisseton/Zion-Waubay, Nov. 24

ACCEPTED

Rev. Paul Winckler, Assistant to the District President, Sioux Falls, to Zion, Sioux Falls (Associate), Dec. 19

DECLINED

- Rev. Eli Lietzau, Wheat Ridge Lutheran, Wheat Ridge, Colo., to Divine Shepherd, Black Hawk, Dec. 15
- Rev. Doug Slavens, Memorial, Sioux Falls, to Trinity, Fairbault, MN, Dec. 14
- Rev. Steve Weispfennig, St. Johns, Yankton, to South Shore Trinity, White Bear Lake, Minn., Dec. 5
- Rev. Wade Harr, Christ, Winner, to Mount Calvary-Colstrip, Mont./Circle of Life-Lame Deer, Mont., Nov. 27
- Rev. Samuel Handschke, Faith Evangelical, Pierre, to Immanuel, Alpena, Mich., Nov. 21

VACANCIES • Trinity, Blunt/Immanuel, Harold, Holy Cross, Onida • Mt. Calvary, Brookings (associate pastor) • St. Peter, Wentworth • 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 • Mt. Calvary, Huron • Peace, Rapid City • Emanuel, Sisseton-Waubay

To God be the glory!

Attention Pastors In South Dakota: Tell Your Wives To Save The Date!

Lutheran Family Service will host a **South Dakota Pastors' Wives Retreat** in the Spring of 2026. Based on Matthew 11:28-30, join us as we find rest in Jesus and support one another as a pastor's wife.

Location: Faith Lutheran Church, Pierre
Date(s): May 1 & 2, 2026