



/ OCTOBER 2026

DISTRICT NEWS

SOUTH DAKOTA

October is Pastor Appreciation Month

You have most likely said this to someone in the military: "Thank you for your service."

That simple gesture recognizes the sacrifices a person made so you might remain free. Being grateful is always a good thing.

October is Pastor Appreciation Month. It is a time when many people say to their pastor, "Thank you for your service" or something similar to recognize the dedication their pastor shows to his congregation. Such comments are always appreciated. So are the cookies or cake before Bible Study, the notes of appreciation and the gifts.

Beyond these gestures, here are a few other very significant ideas for how to show your love and appreciation for your pastor, his wife and family, and the life-and-death work he is doing.

Dear Saints, please regularly pray for your pastor and his family. We sometimes forget what role the pastor has in our spiritual protection. We see him preach and teach, baptize and give us the gifts of the Lord's Body and Blood. Over time these things as well as the rest of the pastoral work can begin to seem ordinary to us.

They are not.

At his ordination and installation your pastor promised God he would pray for you, and he does. He intercedes for you, begging God's protection and healing and pushing back against the evil one and his hordes of demons.

Here is how St. Paul describes some of the work the pastor does for you when he prays for you: "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). St. James reminds us of the power of prayer as he writes, "The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working" (5: 16b).

Your pastor is praying for your protection, peace and healing. Please, regularly pray that God would protect him from the evil



Rev. Randy Sturzenbecher,

President,
SD District

one that seeks to destroy him and his ministry and stop the delivery of God's Word and gifts to you.

Most pastors I know are a little uncomfortable when October rolls around and they begin to receive an abundance of "thanks yous" and gifts. That's because the pastoral ministry is a life of humble service. **One way to show your appreciation for your pastor is to receive the gifts he wants you to have.** All these gifts are from God delivered to you through your pastor.

Be in the Divine Service regularly. Listen and contemplate the sermon. The Holy Spirit has guided your pastor to deliver these very words and thoughts to you! Inwardly digest them. They are from God delivered through his servant, your pastor.

Another way to appreciate your pastor is to let him teach you. Be in Bible Study with him. Dive deeply into God's Word with him and you will quickly begin to appreciate his God-given gifts and the wonderful Seminary education he has. All of that is for you! His teaching is to anchor you in the promises God has made to you and delivered through Jesus Christ our Lord.

One last gift you can give your pastor is a sabbatical. The word sabbatical is derived from the Biblical idea of "Sabbath" or rest. A sabbatical is designed to benefit the pastor through a dedicated time of rest and refreshment in God's Word. A sabbatical given to a pastor is a guard against burnout. It is a time away from the stress and pressure of 24-7 ministry needs. Sabbaticals are an intentional gift from the congregation to the pastor to build up the pastor's spiritual, mental and physical health.

Rev. Dr. Greg Walton of Grace Place Wellness insists, "Sabbaticals aren't a break from ministry, but an investment in it."

Dear Saints, please consider this gift to your pastor. There are many grant opportunities and other resources that will help you give this gift to your pastor. If you would like to know more about sabbaticals and the resources available, please contact me.

Thank you for loving your pastor and his family. Thank you for praying for him, caring for his needs and receiving God's Word and promises from him.

Appreciating all the pastors and church workers of the beloved South Dakota District,
President Sturzenbecher

DISTRICT NEWS

PALS Welcomes New(er) South Dakota Pastors and Families

By Rev. Daniel Grimmer

New pastors in South Dakota and their wives met at St. John's in Yankton on September 18-19 for a PALS Gathering with Rev. Daniel and Christine Grimmer, South Dakota District PALS facilitators. They enjoyed fellowship, worship, recreation, study and conversation. This meeting focused on learning how to set boundaries and find balance between church and family responsibilities in the challenging schedule of pastoral ministry.

PALS (Post-Seminary Applied Learning and Support) is a three-year program for new pastors and their wives that helps them transition from the seminary to the congregation. Several times per year, PALS families meet for worship, study, fellowship and encouraging conversation.



Pictured L-R (not including kids)

First row: Rev. Morgan Phillips, Amelia Phillips, Faith Greenmyer, Rev. Joseph Greenmyer, Rev. Daniel Grimmer, Christine Grimmer

Back row: Haley Wessel, Rev. Zachary Wessel, Rev. Tanner Sutcliffe, Rev. Timothy Schleusener

BACKPACK BLESSINGS

By Rev. Randy Sturzenbecher, District President

What a wonderful way to share Christ's love with children and families! Pastor Al Sutton recently distributed backpacks filled with school supplies to children on Pine Ridge, going door to door and sharing a church invitation brochure along with each backpack.

We give thanks to God for this opportunity to serve our neighbors and share the hope we have in Christ, and we are grateful to LCEF (Lutheran Church Extension Fund) for

providing the backpacks and to the International Lutheran Deaf Association (IDLA) who provided the school supplies through a Thrivent grant. The backpacks were put together during the 2026 IDLA conference by deaf students from South Dakota and other states.



CHURCH SPOTLIGHT: ZION, HURLEY

Editor's note: As part of our evolving print newsletter, we will be featuring brief histories of LCMS churches throughout the South Dakota District. Please email communications@sddlcms.org if you would like your church to be featured.

In early September, District President Rev. Randy Sturzenbecher preached at Zion, Hurley, and joined congregation members for a potluck.

Rev. Kurt Laskowski, who has served at First English, Centerville, and Zion, Hurley, accepted a call on July 30 to St. Paul, International Falls, Minn., and Fort Frances, Ontario.



same families are still members today from the original founders.

Another feature of Zion is its beautiful building with its 75-ft-tall steeple.

The church offers one service on Sunday morning at 8:30 am. It is part of a dual parish with First English Lutheran Church of Centerville.

The dual parish intends to call from the field.

Zion's building is the former Trinity, Heilbronn building. Trinity was the first LCMS congregation in South Dakota. Trinity was organized in 1876 with the name "Die Ev. Lut. Dreieinigkeitsgemeinde (Trinity or Three-in-oneness, congregation) UAC Unaltered Augsburg Confession.

According to member Philip Wirth, Zion Lutheran Church was formed in 1898. The congregation started outside of the town of Hurley and moved into town in 1962 when members and a local moving company moved the former Heilbronn Church building from southwest of Freeman.

Its 125-year history is part of what sets the church apart, Wirth said. Worship remains traditional, and some of the

"We are an old congregation in more ways than one, so we have not had Sunday School or a youth group for many years," Wirth said.

One young member was confirmed in June.

"With just 21 confirmed members and an average age higher than I would like to guess, we are limited in outreach," Wirth said. He said local WIC program uses the church building for distribution and the congregation financially supports another local food pantry.

Average attendance for a Sunday morning service is 13, according to Wirth.

CALL INFORMATION

PENDING CALLS

The following are prayerfully considering calls:

Rev. Keith Emshoff, Holy Trinity, Grandview, MO, to Peace, Rapid City, Sept. 21.

ACCEPTED

Rev. Robert Hinckley, Blessed Emmanuel, Sturgis and Grace, Deadwood, to Trinity, Knoxville, Iowa, Sept. 17.

Rev. Gordon Naumann, St. John, Hazleton, PA, to Trinity/Blunt, Holy Cross/Onida, Immanuel/Harrold, Sept. 10.

Rev. Michael Kumm, Holy Cross, Dakota Dunes and Faith, Pierre (vacancy pastor), to Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO, Aug. 23.

DECLINED

Rev. Cristopher Brademeyer, St. Johns, Oakes, ND, to Faith, Pierre, Sept. 10.

Rev. Daniel Grimmer, Zion, Mitchell, to Good Shepherd, Sherman, Ill., Sept. 3.

Rev. Jens Jensen, Redeemer, Armour, to Trinity, Bridgeton, MO, Aug. 19.

Rev. Oliver LaMie, Saint Peters, Dorsey, Ill., to Bethlehem, Milbank/St. John, Revillo, Aug. 28.

Rev. Kyle Lewis, Saint Martin, Winona, MN, to Mt. Calvary, Brookings, Sept. 9.

Rev. Jacob Smith, St. Paul's, Aberdeen, to St. John, Austin, MN, Aug. 19.

VACANCIES

- South Dakota District Office, Assistant to the President
- Mt. Calvary, Brookings (associate pastor)
- St. Peter, Wentworth
- St. Paul, Plankinton/Trinity, White Lake
- Mt. Calvary, Huron
- Peace, Rapid City
- Emanuel, Sisseton/Zion, Waubay
- Emmaus, Tripp/Zion, Delmont
- Mt. Olive, Watertown
- Trinity, Corona/Our Savior, Wilmont
- St. John, Revillo/Bethlehem, Milbank
- First, Wall/Emmanuel, Creighton
- Concordia, Cresbard/Immanuel, Wecota
- Faith, Pierre
- First English/Centerville, Zion/Hurley

Moments with Mary Jo

SHARE HOW YOU SUPPORT MISSIONS

It's hard to believe that fall is upon us once again. If you are like me, you are wondering where summer went. As we transition into another season, one where we look to cooler temperatures (hopefully no snow yet), we continue to joyfully proclaim Christ, support missions, and equip women to honor God by serving others.

Has your group celebrated LWML Sunday yet? LWML Sunday can be any Sunday that works for you. Traditionally LWML Sunday is celebrated in October, but perhaps November works better. Choose whatever day works best for your group and congregation.

This year's theme continues a four-year cycle focusing on the LWML Mission Statement – *As Lutheran Women in Mission, we joyfully proclaim Christ, support missions and equip women to honor God by serving others.*

For Lutheran Women in Mission Sunday 2026, we focus on **Supporting Missions**.

Remember to check out <https://www.lwml.org/lwml-sunday> for more information and helpful resources. Also, please share what you have done with your zone presidents so they can share that with others.

As our vision statement states: "The LWML is the leading group for LCMS women where each woman is welcomed and encouraged to use her unique God-given gifts as she supports global missions and serves the Lord with gladness." Share what you have done to support missions.



Mary Jo Stier
LWML District President

Speaking of missions, did you know that delegates at the LWML South Dakota District Convention selected fourteen new mission grants for the 2026-2028 year? Last biennium, the Lord blessed us as we were able to fund all the mission grants for 2024-2026 except for two who did not request the funds. For more information on each of these grants, go to <https://www.sdlwml.org/mission-grants-26-28>.

As I prepare to complete my last two years as your District President, my hope and prayer is to continue to lead you with grace and be confident in His Grace.

As we begin a new biennium, we say thank you and praise be to God for everyone who gives their time, talents and treasures to further the kingdom of God. I thank the outgoing officers — Dianne Hemminger, Heather Miller, Luann Zuercher, and Paula Warren along with Pastor Mosemann (even though he is staying on for two more years). May God bless each of you as you continue to work in His harvest fields. There are many opportunities to share your gifts and talents within the LWML.

If you are interested in serving on a committee, please reach out to me.

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Hebrews 10:24-25

As we journey into the 2026-2028 biennium, I pray that you can participate in the many LWML activities and Bible studies in your groups, zones and the district.

Please continue to fill your mite boxes.

I hope to see you in Oklahoma City for the 2027 National LWML convention, "Transformed in Christ," based on Romans 12:2.

May the Triune God bless you each day as you feel the "Confidence in His Grace."

Aberdeen Zone Update

by Betty Ochsner, Aberdeen Zone President

Our Spring Gathering was held at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Aberdeen on April 18, 2026. The guest speaker was Brady Carda from Sleep in Heavenly Peace. Their mission is to ensure that no kid sleeps on the floor in our town. To accomplish this, they have received generous donations from the community. There are also a number of local volunteers that help with making the frames for the beds and collections the pillows, sheets, bedspreads and whatever is needed to help make dreams come true, one bed at a time.

Group in Action

Our zone ladies have completed the following tasks:

- Made and delivered Valentine cookies for the senior citizens of the congregation
- Prepared Table Talks for kids, meeting every Wednesday with the kids at the church during lunch breaks
- Made sleeping mats out of plastic bags. Zone ladies meet once a week at church and give the mats to the Orphan Grain Train
- Hosted an annual dinner at the church to raise money for LWML use and needs of the local groups
- Made baskets with fruit, candy, and goodies to deliver to shut-ins. Our zone ladies do this several times a year
- Got together weekly to make quilts. Took the quilts to local organizations such as homeless shelters, cancer patients, nursing homes, and Orphan Grain Train.

Why Do We Celebrate Reformation?

COUNSELOR'S CORNER

"And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." -Matthew 16:18

Dear sisters: Grace to you and peace!

As we are getting ready to celebrate Reformation Day at the end of this month, it's got me thinking again about the great work God did through the Reformation, and how it demonstrates just how much God loves His church. You see, it's already remarkable that Jesus loved us enough to become one of us and die for our sins – but He doesn't stop there! Just like a bride and groom don't get married and then split up and never see each other, Jesus made us His and then kept blessing us and protecting us. His promise is that He is still with us as we gather (Matthew 18:20), as we receive Him in Holy Communion (Matthew 26:26-28) and as we draw near to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). And, as we read in Matthew 16, He promises the gates of hell shall not prevail against His church.

At the time of the Reformation, hell was especially attempting to prevail against the Church by getting her to trust in her own works rather than the Gospel. And Jesus would have been entirely within His rights to say, "Again with this? I've



Rev. Tanner Sutcliffe

LWML District
Junior Counselor

told you people over and over and over it's about My righteousness, not yours. I'm sick of reaching out My hand only for you to slap it away; I guess, I'll just stop reaching altogether!"

But He didn't say that! No, He promised that hell would not prevail against His church, and He meant it. So, in the Reformation, He rolled up His sleeves yet again to lovingly correct us when we had gone astray again.

Contrary to what you have likely been told by pop historians or your Roman Catholic brothers and sisters, Martin Luther did not split off from Rome to start a new church. No, Jesus Christ used Luther to help bring back the One True Church to receive the Gospel in its fullness once more. Why? *Because*

He loves us enough to bring us sheep back to His flock even though we wander so often.

That's what we celebrate in the Reformation. Not so much Luther, or Katie, or the other reformers, but Christ who still loves us enough to reach out with His Gospel to us again and again. And remember! Because of Jesus' patient and enduring love for us, not even the gates of hell will be able to stop us as we follow Him in His love.

Your Servant and Christ's,

Pastor Tanner

STORAGE LIMIT

As an archivist – a historian – I thought I was doing well at saving items related to SDLWML.

Well, as it turns out, I messed up. I was storing my e-mails, with the attachments sent in the e-mails, and got a message titled, "Storage Limit."

I forgot to save the messages to a separate file! So, time ran out and I lost the information. I should have printed them out to save them for future reference or saved them to a thumb drive or an external hard drive.

Even with some of our data gone, please know that your historical reports of your happenings matter to the history of our organization. We are alive and well. We are mission-active, moving women, on a mission to share the love of the Lord in our words and action.

As my late brother (Benny Mogler) said, "If we want the continuation of the activities and mission we must step up and make it happen."

Please send me your Historian reports by October 31, so I can include them in my reports.

Keep the storage of history going!

In Christ's service,

Lurene Mogler Denke, Archivist-Historian for SD LWML

Mission Grants 2024-2026 Fully Funded!

By Luann Zuercher, Financial Secretary

Hello from your newly elected financial secretary.

Thanks to your generosity, the mite offerings you gave completely funded all the 2024-2026 Mission Grants and contributed to our National Mission grants!

At the June convention, a Mission goal to fund 14 new grants was adopted. It was approved to continue the LWML SD District's ongoing Mission grants and contribute to the National Mission goal.

Please keep collecting mites and remitting them monthly. When gathered, these offerings reach countless people locally, nationally and globally with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

To God be the Glory!

2026 PUPPET PLACE REPORT FOR HILITES AND LWML BOARD

By Jan Larson, Gospel Outreach Committee

The Puppet Place presented "The Old Woman in the Shoe" for its show this year at the State Fair in Huron. From Wednesday, September 2 through Monday, September 7, over 950 people were entertained by Pastor Andrew Utecht and his family; nearly 200 Bible studies/booklets were shared with the families and about 450 puppets were given to children.

While we all have many shoes to wear in our lives, having a pair of church shoes to keep us walking with Jesus is the most important pair to keep wearing.

This was a new show, and it was so good!

Several of the grandchildren of Pastor Utecht manned the puppets and helped with the preshow entertainment.

God continues to bless those who attend this ministry!

The following zones worked this year:

Date:	Workers	Attendance	Bible studies	Puppets
Wednesday, September 2 – Mitchell	8	54	7	16
Thursday, September 3 – Pierre	3	164	17	76
Friday, September 4 – Sioux Falls	7	139	37	75
Saturday, September 5 – Yankton	5	276	53	121
Sunday, September 6 – Aberdeen	4	227	57	120
Monday, September 7 – Black Hills	3	95	21	41
Totals:	30	955	192	449

Praise the Lord for another year of His grace! Besides the people who come to the Fair, Pastor Andrew and his family minister to the people who travel with the carnival and vendors. This too is part of their ministry and is a great blessing to these people.

Thank you to everyone who was able to come to the Fair and help with this ministry! Without your

help, it would not be possible for us to reach as many people as we do during the South Dakota State Fair.

Pastor Utecht received a \$5,000 mission grant from the LWML South Dakota district. He has requested that we look into getting a ventilation system of some sort installed to help with the stale air inside the building. At this point, the AC is still working fine. We hope to have this resolved by next year.

LFL 2027 Annual Youth Essay Contest

by Jill Johnsen, President

Lutherans For Life of South Dakota, Inc.

Lutherans For Life of South Dakota, Inc. is announcing their 2027 youth annual essay contest guidelines. This year's theme is "Be Bold For Life" using Psalm 31:24, "Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord!"



Click QR code for this year's LFL essay guidelines

Please read through the guidelines carefully to be sure your entry follows all rules. Two categories are for 6-8th graders and 9-12th graders who are a student of a Lutheran school or Lutheran congregation.

There will be a \$500 first-place award and a \$250 second-place award for each of the two categories. The first-place winner from each category will advance to the national contest. Entries are due March 15, 2027.



Olivia Brown of Spearfish was a national winner in the 9-12th grade category in 2026 and we congratulate her!



ONE HUNDRED TO GO! THE MAIN STREET LIVING 25TH ANNIVERSARY BOOK PROJECT

by Rev. Dr. Scott Sailer

Content Editor, MSL Devotion Book Project

President Emeritus, LCMS South Dakota District

Dozens of writers have contributed to the daily devotion book project for Main Street Living. In fact, we have now received 265 devotions, on our way to the total of 365 devotions needed to complete the project! We are grateful for the response.

In case you're unfamiliar with the project, the daily devotion book is a project of the Main Street Living board of directors, as we thank God for the 25 years of broadcasting the program in South Dakota. Thanks to our pastors and other partners in this Gospel ministry, viewers throughout the state (and, in recent years,

throughout the region) have been blessed with a liturgical Lutheran worship service via television, on Sundays, and via the internet, on demand.

The devotion book, filled with 365 devotions, will be a thank-you gift to donors and a devotional resource for others in our congregations.

Professional church workers and lay people, young and old, please pray for this project and **contribute some devotions**. The **new deadline is November 30, 2026**.

Click here for the guidelines, some ideas for topics, and a sample devotion.

Please note that the devotions are to be limited to 250 words, about the length of devotions found in Portals of Prayer.

Utecht Family Puppet Place 4th Generation

The Utecht family is in its fourth generation of family members telling the Gospel story of Jesus at the Puppet Place at the South Dakota State Fair. What a great message about shoes and soles

(souls) and walking with God! The South Dakota LWML also helps the Puppet Place ministry every year, pointing all ages to come and hear the Good News of Jesus.



Share your news with us!

NOTE: With the new part-time Communications Director position comes a new email address to share your news. Please email articles/photos to Kate Meadows at communications@sddlcms.org.

DISTRICT NEWS

MISSIONARY UPDATE: ROMANIA/GREECE

By Rev. Jordon Andreassen

Serving the church with the Office of International Mission is a dynamic and constantly changing reality. This is both the same and different from parish life.

Over the last two years my role has shifted several times! This has come with a level of stress and frustration, but also a need to constantly turn to the Lord in prayer and for guidance through His Word.

Realities and needs change. For instance while I continue to serve in Greece as the primary missionary, we are on the cusp of switching the work to the local language more and more. However, this will require the assistance of those that already speak it or who are actively learning.

In Romania we have three pastors, one deacon (plans need to be made for preparation for ordination) and one student. These are all native Romanians / Moldovans. They are all wonderful theologians and pastors or pastors in the making. After eight years of work this is an outstanding beginning to the church!

My work as Area Facilitator is continuing to develop, this is primarily an administrative role in assistance to the Regional Director.

At the same time the numbers of OIM people increase in Brasov with a great discrepancy of Romanian language acquisition. This means



that while I continue my work as Area Facilitator, in Greece and only as a fill in pastor in Romania, I also add a temporary local chaplain work. This work is not directed as outreach, but for the spiritual care of all the OIM personnel and families in Braşov. The temporary nature of this chaplain work means that it will come to an end. The Area Facilitator role is pragmatically difficult from Brasov (travel time and costs). Additionally, it is very

important for me to be engaged more directly in mission as a pastor serving people. All of this means that we have begun discussing potential locations where there may be better stewardship of time and money for Area Facilitator work and which connects me and my family more fully in mission. May God bless the work that continues and also prepare in advance a work for us to continue serving to bring the Good News of Jesus wherever we might be.