

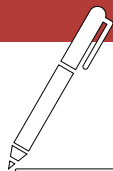


# DISTRICT NEWS

## SOUTH DAKOTA

### Walking letters

May our story be told by the



### 'PEN OF THE SPIRIT'



Photos: Getty Images



Rev. Scott Sailer  
District President

Rudy K. was an amazing man, one of the nicest guys you could ever meet. He was a mailman in Hot Springs. Everyone loved Rudy bringing their mail to the door. It was a daily event to meet this joyful Christian.

It was my privilege to have been Rudy's pastor for a few years — all too few years. Alzheimer's cut short his career as a mailman and cut short his life, too. In fact, he never served as our family's mailman. But we heard stories of this remarkable man's remarkable life.

At his funeral I preached on 2 Cor. 3:3:

You are a letter from Christ.

Rudy was one of those "walking letters"

from God to everyone he met. He shared the love of Jesus in words and deeds.

Why did the apostle Paul refer to the Corinthians as a "letter from Christ"?

Paul's authority and motives were questioned by the people in and near Corinth. But Paul was ready to face this challenge and prove his status as a servant and messenger of Christ. He

wrote that he was not a "peddler of God's Word" as some others might have been and as some so characterized him (2 Cor. 2:17). No, Paul's purpose was genuine and all for the glory of God in Christ Jesus.

As for a letter of recommendation proving this, he wrote:

You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient

See **MESSAGE** page 3



## District welcomes Pastor Mercer

Rev. Dennis Mercer was ordained and installed as Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) at Divine Shepherd Lutheran Church, Black Hawk, on Jan. 22. Rev. Scott Sailer, district president, was the officiant; Rev. Randy Sturzenbecher, Pastor Mercer's supervisor and Divine Shepherd senior pastor, was the liturgist; and Rev. Thomas Brown, St. Paul, Spearfish, was the preacher. Welcome to the ministerium of the LCMS, Pastor Mercer!



◀ Pastor Mercer is pictured with his wife, Joni.

▲ From left, Rev. Christopher McCarthy, Vicar Ross Davis, and Revs. Don McKillop, Albert Sutton, Randy Sturzenbecher, Bryan Meadows, Dennis Mercer, Dr. Joshua Jones, Scott Sailer, Dr. Thomas Brown, David Warner, Bob Anderson and Bob Gardner.

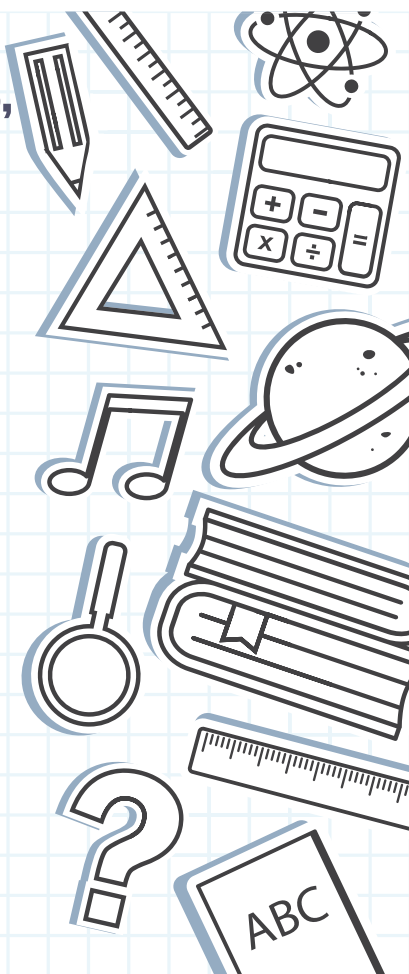
## Bethesda Hot Springs, to add fourth grade

Spurred by parents eager to keep their outgoing third graders enrolled in Christian education, Bethesda Lutheran Church and School, Hot Springs, recently decided to add fourth grade to its primary school.

“We are thrilled at the idea of growing the Lutheran school by adding this new class,” said Rachel Utecht, Bethesda Lutheran Church and School primary teacher. “We are eager to continue educating the children and be able to serve our community.”

The school is currently seeking an additional teacher to help serve the elementary school kids. For more information, visit [bethesdalutheralschool.org](http://bethesdalutheralschool.org) and scroll down for the job description and application.

Student enrollment for the 2023–24 school year is now open.



## Call Information



**Rev. Samuel Bobby**, senior pastor of St. Paul's, Aberdeen, accepted a call from the LCMS Board of International Mission, Feb. 26.

**Rev. Don McKillop**, pastor emeritus of Trinity, Belle Fourche, is prayerfully considering a call as pastor of Trinity, Feb. 19.

**Rev. Doug Slavens**, associate pastor, Memorial, Sioux Falls, is prayerfully considering a call as associate pastor of Salem Lutheran Church, Salem, Ill., Feb. 28.

**Rev. Christopher Navurskis**, senior pastor, Mount Calvary, Huron, accepted a call as senior pastor of King of Kings, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, March 13.

### VACANCIES

#### Senior pastor

- Zion, Rapid City
- Lord of Life, Sioux Falls

#### Sole pastor

- Concordia, Immanuel/Cresbard, Wecota
- Grace, Blessed Emmanuel/Deadwood, Sturgis
- St. Paul, Trinity/Plankinton, White Lake

# Going to the TOOLBOX



**EDITOR'S NOTE:** *We are in the midst of a roughly year-long series exploring the youth and education professionals who work in and bless the LCMS South Dakota District. This month, Rev. Paul Winckler, assistant to the district president, considers the tools available to congregations of all sizes for youth and children's ministry.*

Over the last few months, we've heard from some of our directors of Christian education, highlighting some of the ways they serve their congregations. Something you've probably noticed is that many of them play an integral role in their church's youth and children's ministry.

This is terrific, you might think, for those congregations that have the resources to employ a worker to lead their ministry. But what about the rest of us?

All of our congregations rely on loving, dedicated volunteers. They are *vital* to youth and children's ministry. In many congregations these volunteers — together with the pastor — lead the youth ministry (if there is a youth ministry). Maybe in some of your churches, this ministry has recently been dormant.

For pastors and volunteer youth leaders, the tasks of coordinating youth and children's ministries can seem daunting. What should we do and how do we do it? If you'd like to start or renew youth ministry in your congregation the question might be, "How do we get started?"

No one should ever think they have to "go it alone." Resources are available. To highlight just one, check out a page published by Synod at [youthsource.com](http://youthsource.com). The site has tons of resources, including Bible studies, lesson series and thought-provoking articles.

Especially helpful for those looking to start or revamp a youth ministry are the "Seven Practices of Healthy Youth Ministry" (click the "7 Practices" tab).



While serving as pastor of Zion, Rapid City, Rev. Winckler visits a congregant at Monument Health Hospital.

This is a great resource for those seeking to sharpen the focus of their ministry. Spring and summer are perfect seasons to begin planning and get intentional about what you're going to do for ministry during the 2023–24 school year. Also, don't forget to include your high schoolers and middle schoolers in these conversations!

If you'd like more guidance in this area, please feel free to contact me at 605-361-1514 or [paul.winckler@sddlems.org](mailto:paul.winckler@sddlems.org). I'd be glad to listen, offer support, guide you to resources or help you connect with one of our awesome professionals who can offer a wealth of wisdom.

St. Paul reminds us we are not "loners," but God has brought us together — to work together and support each other — as the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-31). God bless and strengthen you as you live in faith to Him and for one another.

**In Christ, Pastor Paul Winckler**

## MESSAGE

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. **2 COR 3:2-6**

From first to last, the competency of Paul was based solely on the Good News that God revealed for our salvation. Certainly the grace that saved Paul also changed him. His words and deeds reflected that he was a redeemed child of God.

These days, people are very suspicious. Trust is more important than ever. So are integrity, honesty and authenticity. These are worthy attributes for Christians and for Christian churches. Such characteristics reflect favorably on our claim that we are God's people. Such characteristics are part and parcel of being competent for the Lord.

Your age doesn't matter. Neither does your job. The above-mentioned characteristics reach beyond your birthdate, beyond your career, beyond your wants and desires. In fact, those characteristics, flowing from the Gospel, are an integral part of a Christian's life and need nurturing on the Word of God regularly.

You are a "letter" to other people. May your story of God's love be told by the pen of the Spirit, in your words and actions, in ways you can't even imagine!

**Your servant in Christ,  
Pastor Scott Sailer**

### Share your news with us!

Send articles and photos to Kate Meadows:

- [kate@katemeadows.com](mailto:kate@katemeadows.com)
- 420 E. Liberty Street, Rapid City, SD 57701

**June-July 2023 issue  
deadline: April 15**



## PATTY'S PONDERINGS



# HAPPY EASTER!

Young women are recognized at the LWML 39th Biennial Convention in Lexington, Ky., in 2021. The 40th convention is in Milwaukee in June.

This month we will celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ! What a glorious day Easter is!

Yet we have been traveling through the season of

Lent. During Holy Week, we look upon Jesus, our suffering servant, and see there is no greater love than this: that He laid down His life for all people of all time.

Each day we need to ponder our sinful condition and ask for forgiveness from God. He is always listening for our prayers.

I hope that many of you will attend the **district LWML Spring Retreat** April 21-22 at Peace Lutheran Church, Brookings (see article on this page). The theme is "With One Voice," based on Rom. 15:5-7. We will have lots of fun being in the Word together through Bible



**Patty Peters**  
LWML South Dakota District President

study and singing, participating in a servant event and mission grant mite walk, and celebrating the 80th anniversary of our LWML South Dakota District.

And we have a surprise for you on Friday night. You don't want to miss it! Please see the March *HiLites* or visit [sdlwml.org/district-retreats](http://sdlwml.org/district-retreats) for the retreat registration form.

Another opportunity to "Celebrate the Lord of the Nations" is the **LWML 40th Biennial Convention**, to be held June 22-25 in Milwaukee. If you have not been to a national convention, I urge you to go and experience being together in worship and fellowship with thousands of your sisters and brothers in Christ.

There will be a communion service, Bible study, singing, servant events, Mites in action reports, fun at the booths in the exhibit hall, a mission walk and much more! Please see the information about the convention in the Winter 2022 *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly* or visit [lwml.org/2023-convention](http://lwml.org/2023-convention).

May God richly bless your work for Him as you reach out to your neighbor with the Gospel and love of Jesus.

# Make plans to attend SPRING RETREAT

Please make plans to attend the LWML South Dakota District Spring Retreat, which will be held April 21-22 at Peace Lutheran Church, Brookings. The theme is, "With One Voice," based on Romans 15:5-7:

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

Revs. Brian Mosemann and Clint Thorson, our LWML district pastoral counselors, will lead the retreat Bible study.

During the retreat, we will assemble care packages for district pastors, DCEs and deaconesses. Please also be prepared to write a note of encouragement to go with the care package. You are welcome to take some care packages with you and deliver them to church workers near you!

Please bring items from the following list:

- \$25 Walmart or \$25 Visa gift card
- Trail Mix (individual servings)
- Cough drops (about 30 count)
- Water flavor packets of 10
- Tic Tacs
- Mustard Seed Devotions packets



In addition, please consider bringing a cash donation for Sleep in Heavenly Peace of Brookings. Sleep in Heavenly Peace is a group of volunteers dedicated to delivering to children hand-built bunk beds free of charge. Oftentimes, the kids who receive one of the beds have never owned a bed of their own. For every \$250 collected, a child will receive a bed, mattress, pillow, set of sheets and comforter.

If you would like to order a feather pin, please contact me at [dihemm@rushmore.com](mailto:dihemm@rushmore.com).

**Dianne Hemminger**

Vice-President of Special Focus Ministries



COUNSELOR'S CORNER

# Out of the lion's den

Then the king commanded, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. The king declared to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!" DANIEL 6:16

Daniel prays to his God, Yahweh. King Darius, however, doesn't change the rules for Daniel even though the king loves him and doesn't want him to die. Why doesn't the king just change the rules? Because it doesn't work that way. The law is inflexible, for "not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished" (MATT. 5:18).

For us sinners, this is terrifying news.

A misconception about Christianity is that grace involves setting aside the Law of God. Jesus's work of salvation is seen as lowering the bar of the Law, as if He takes God's Law and turns it into "Do your best to love God and one another." This is a profound error con-



**Rev. Brian Mosemann**  
LWML District Counselor

cerning Christ's work. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus explained how high the bar of the Law has always been.

When we sin, God does not set the Law aside. If He did, we would have no peace. We would wonder what God would do next time we sin or what He would do if we kept repeating the same sin. Would He keep setting aside the Law?

Putting aside the Law is not grace. Moreover, instead of peace, it leads to fear.

The good news is that God does not set aside the Law. Instead, He closes the lions' mouths.

Jesus did not come to set the Law aside but to fulfill it! When we are confronted



with our sin, we don't have to hope that we can bend the rules. We know that the Law has been placed on the shoulders of another and that He has been cast to the lions in our place. Daniel walked out of the lions' den without a scratch, saved by God.

Jesus does one better. He was raised, victorious over sin and death. He triumphed over the lions. He shut their mouths — and not just for Himself, but for you.



## MILBANK ZONE REPORT

Six of our ladies had a wonderful time helping at the Puppet Place (at the South Dakota State Fair) and reported that the puppet show was a popular attraction for people of all ages. We are so blessed to have such giving ladies in our zones!

The Milbank Zone held a Fall Rally at Emanuel Lutheran Church, Milbank, under the theme, "Let the Children Come to Me." Sharon Falk, a member of Mount Olive, Watertown, led the opening with a devotion titled "Children Come to Jesus." Rev. Arthur Drehman of Our Savior's, Wilmot, and Trinity, Corona, led an inspiring Bible study on our rally theme. Twenty-four members attended.

Our ingathering supported Backyard Bulldogs Day Care in Milbank. Kelsey Buttke, owner and operator, talked to us about her work at the day care. Her excitement and passion for children and instilling positive behavior in them was so evident. She appreciated the items our zone donated for the day care.

Many of our ladies plan to attend the district Spring Retreat in Brookings this month. Several members are making plans to attend the LWML national convention in Milwaukee in June.

Our 2023 Fall Rally will be at St. John's, Revillo.

**Jeanette Gravdahl**  
Milbank Zone President





## JESUS | *The base of the olive tree, where our roots find solid ground*

**Editor's note:** *The following is part two of a two-part series in which Alison Andreasen, wife of Rev. Jordon Andreasen, pastor of Our Savior, Aberdeen, and St. John, Columbia, explores the symbolism and beauty of the olive tree as it relates to the sanctity of life. Alison is a Lutheran teacher who enjoys writing, reading and trying to grow things. She and her husband and their five children live in Aberdeen.*



Last month, I shared what little I know about olive trees and how the saplings grow up around the base of the tree. Many people who grow olive trees see these numerous, pesky shoots as a nuisance to be destroyed, but it is these very saplings to which the Lord compares the children of the blessed man. If they are not cut away, these shoots grow into the existing tree, helping the tree to live for thousands of years. The first part of my message was about children. This, the second part, is about you.

At one time, you were one of those olive shoots on the outmost, most vulnerable part of the olive tree. We all were. You were not cut away. Instead, God tended to and nourished you with His living water and His teachings. He has given you a firm foundation and other shoots to lean upon. What a beautiful image of God's people!

Here is something else you may not know about olive trees: their trunks are hollow. This detail would be deemed dangerous if it described an old cottonwood tree. But a hollow trunk on an olive tree is completely normal. The hollowness doesn't affect the fruitfulness or stability of the tree at all. But it gives us a powerful illustration of God's perfect design. The trunk of an olive tree is hollow because the older generations of shoots

that are on the inmost part pass away. This means the younger parts of the tree continue to bear fruit and grow.

If you are a shoot that belongs to God's body, the church, where do you fit? Are you on the outer edge with a view of the horizon? Are you in the middle, simultaneously supporting the younger shoots while honoring the older shoots that are farther inside the tree? Or are you in the innermost parts of the tree, with generations of younger and more tender saplings sheltering you?

Someone had to be the first shoot that gave all the other shoots a base around which to grow. We are reminded of the familiar prophecy:

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. **ISAIAH 11:1**

Jesus was that first shoot, coming out of the stump of Jesse. It is around Him that we all gather!

Remember how, in Psalm 128, the blessed man's olive shoots were gathered around his table? The same is true with us. Christ, the most righteous, God-fearing man there is, and His bride, the fruitful vine in His house (the church), unites us olive shoots around His table. And what is on that table but the very blood and body of our Savior?

These last two Lutherans For Life articles have offered a glimpse of the olive tree from the outside in. The base of the olive tree is Jesus. He is the foundation whereupon our roots find their solid ground, and it is in Him that we grow together and produce fruit. He came first, and He gathered us into Himself. He died and rose again and because of Him, we will, too.

When our time comes to be in the inmost part of the tree that is dying away, we can rest from our labors as we await a resurrection like His. Until He comes again, we pray that His church will continue to grow and be kept firm in the faith by His Word, water and lifeblood. Now that is Good News for olive shoots!

Christ, the Word of God Incarnate  
Christ the shoot that springs triumphant  
From the stump of Jesse's tree;  
Christ, true Vine You nurture branches  
To bear fruit abundantly.  
Graft us into You, O Savior;  
Prune our hearts so we remain  
Fruitful branches in your vineyard  
Till eternal life we gain.

**LUTHERAN SERVICE BOOK 540, V. 3**

Have you been blessed to know the difference Jesus has made using your work and witness in His name? I'd enjoy hearing that life story. A fellow worker may need to hear it. Contact me at:

- ▶ [pcnavurskis@gmail.com](mailto:pcnavurskis@gmail.com), or
- ▶ 605-352-7121



# WANTED: Future church workers

## SET APART TO SERVE

LCMS CHURCH WORK RECRUITMENT



*Set Apart to Serve* is the intentional effort of the LCMS to identify, encourage and form future church workers for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ until His return.

Your congregation can help spread the word about this effort and point interested future workers in the right direction by sharing information about the *Set Apart to Serve* initiative within your congregation. To download bulletin inserts and presentations, and to learn more about the initiative, visit [lcms.org/sas](http://lcms.org/sas).



## PASTORS: Conference is April 17-18



The 2023 Spring Pastors Conference will be held April 17-18 at the Crossroads Hotel and Huron Event Center in Huron.

Rev. Andrew Richard, assistant pastor of Mount Hope Lutheran Church and School, Casper, Wyo., will present on the topic "Be at Leisure: A Lutheran Approach to Outreach." He will draw from his own experience in church planting and share some of his discoveries and experienc-

es in Christian education while serving as headmaster and upper-level humanities teacher for Mount Hope Lutheran School.

Pastors should bring a copy of *Lutheran Service Book* to use during the daily prayers.

For more information about the conference, including a conference agenda, visit [sddlcms.org](http://sddlcms.org) and click the "News & Events" tab and find the conference listing on the right side of the page.





Pictured are, from left, Howard Mueller, elder; Linnea Schwandt, Orphan Grain Train; Alyssa Henderson, Teaneashea Vogel, Eliana Peiker, Mackenzie Mueller and Evan Henderson. Not pictured is teacher Melissa Mueller.

## Big Kids serve community **IN BIG WAYS**

Students of the Emanuel, Milbank, Big Kids Sunday school class collected new and gently used sports equipment and baby items for Orphan Grain Train. They also decorated a Christmas tree for the Grant County Festival of Trees, for which they won third prize in the community voting.

The Big Kids Sunday school class comprises students in grades 5 through 8, and meets to develop their Christian leadership skills. The goal of the class is to foster service and help the group prepare to take on adult roles in the church after they are confirmed.

Pictured are, from left, Teaneashea Vogel, Alanna Vogel, Alyssa Henderson and Eliana Peiker.



## Got news to share?



We are always in need of more submissions for the South Dakota District *Lutheran Witness* insert. Your stories remind us of what God is doing around the South Dakota District. They also share ideas for nurturing those God has already gathered into His church and for reaching those still outside of the flock with the Good News about Jesus. It finally reminds each of us that Christ's church is much larger than just our particular congregation.

We welcome pictures and stories of congregational events, youth events, outreach events, installations, events from your men's or women's group, servant events, conferences, anniversaries, church renovations or additions, and much more. If you would like an upcoming event publicized, please make sure we have the information at least two months in advance.

**Submissions for the June-July issue are needed by April 15.**

Send articles and photos to Kate Meadows at:

- [kate@katemeadows.com](mailto:kate@katemeadows.com) or
- 420 E. Liberty Street  
Rapid City, SD 57701