



**President's Report to SWD 2012 Convention**  
*Life Together, Life Forgiven; Church*  
*Sunday, June 10, 2012*

Brothers and sisters in Christ, fellow pastors, commissioned workers who serve as teachers, directors of evangelism and education, lay ministers, deaconesses and parish workers; and especially those of you whom we call the laity, viz. the priesthood of all believers. People of various congregations, yet together we are church, unified by our common faith in our Lord Jesus.

Welcome to the 2012 Convention of the South Wisconsin District of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod!

We thank Concordia University for their hospitality, as well as President Ferry for his leadership at this fine university, and for his churchmanship. As you may know, CUW is the flagship of the Concordia system. Its theology faculty is top notch, led by Dr. Jastram. One of the theological staff is on our agenda, leading our Bible study time: Rev. Dan Paavola.

### **1. Life forgiven, life together**

The theme for this triennial South Wisconsin District convention is “Life Forgiven ... Life Together.” That theme rises out of President Harrison’s threefold emphasis for our Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, which is “Witness, Mercy, and Life Together” in Christ, for the Church and the world.

Somewhere buried in the LCMS website one can find these words describing President Harrison’s focus. It reads:

*These phrases—Witness, Mercy, Life Together—illustrate how the church lives and works together to proclaim the Gospel and to provide for our brothers and sisters in Christ in our congregations, communities and throughout the world. And in all we do, Christ is at the center, leading us, sustaining us, keeping us focused on our mission. This will never change.*

The Greek word for “life together” is κοινωνία, “koinonia.” It’s one of the extraordinary words in New Testament Scripture. It is a word that speaks about our relationship with God and our relationship with each other. κοινωνία is translated from the original Greek in several different ways.

- In Acts 2: They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship (koinonia), to the breaking of bread and the prayers.
- In Philippians 1: I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership (koinonia) in the gospel from the first day until now.
- In Philemon 6: I pray that the sharing (koinonia) of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that *is in us for the sake of Christ.*

*Fellowship, partnership, sharing. κοινωνία is a word that reminds us that we are part of something much larger than ourselves, something even much larger than our local congregation; something even*

much larger than the South Wisconsin District. We are part of a much larger church. We are part of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod; part of the Holy Christian Church, part of God’s family of believers.

Dr. Martin Luther writes on this about *κοινωνία*:

*This fellowship consists in this, that all the spiritual possession of Christ and his saints [i.e., believers] are shared with and become the common property of him who receives this sacrament. Again all sufferings and sins also become common property; and thus love engenders love in return and [mutual love] unites. (LW 35:51)*

For each of us that fellowship, or that relationship begins at a very personal level, when our Lord Jesus claims us to be his own in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. There in those precious Sacramental waters our Lord washes away our sin and adopts us into his family of believers. That is a relationship is lived out as we become members of a local congregation, as we gather for our Lord’s blessing of Word and Sacrament at the altar of that congregation.

The ministry of our local congregation is church. District and Synod are not. The local congregation is where Word and Sacrament ministry takes place. The local congregation is on the front lines, bringing the gospel message of our Lord Jesus to God’s people, sharing the message with those who have lost their way, with those who have never heard about our Lord Jesus. I will never forget how, shortly after the mission congregation in Tomah put up their first building, I was giving a new family a tour and some of the teenage kids pointed, asking “What’s that?” They were asking about the altar. Needless to say, I was surprised. I had never been asked that question before.

As we know, the altar is the focal point of ministry in the local congregation. Worship services begin with the pastor standing before the altar, speaking, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” We confess our sins facing the altar. The pastor pronounces forgiveness from the altar. The elements used in the Lord’s Supper are placed on the altar and consecrated there.

In some places such as a mission start the altar may at first be nothing more than a table with a white cloth and a cross. In larger, well-established congregations the altar can be an old and ornate configuration with inlays and even paintings. In other congregations the altar is crafted or hewn out of wood often with Christian symbols carved into it.

In South Wisconsin there are 214 congregations with such an altar. The altar is the place where we come for God’s blessing. The altar is the place where we bring our offerings. The altar is the focal point of our *κοινωνία* with our Lord and Savior. It is also the symbolic focal point of our fellowship with each other; with those in our local parish and with those who gather at the other 214 congregations that make up the South Wisconsin District of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, and with the approximately 6,000 congregations that make up the LCMS throughout our country.

As part of that relationship, each of our congregations have responsibilities and accountabilities to their sister congregations in the church at large, and especially to sister congregations in “The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod.” Our *κοινωνία* is not merely about one altar; it is rather about and with every altar in The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. Each and every congregation, large or small, is a precious member of that fellowship.

Writing this the words of St. Paul come to mind, “In fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Corinthians 12:18, 24f).

What can the thumb really do if it is not connected to the body? What could the eye see if it were laying on the countertop, not connected to the body? Our Lord has brought us together by his grace, defined and measured by the sacrifice which was made by our Lord Jesus on the cross. Sometime take your Bible, pick a quiet time, and read 1 Corinthians chapters 10-13. Listen to what the Lord says there. What is the church? Why did our Lord create it? Synod is indeed a manmade organization; but our unity in the church is a gift from our Lord.

Our Lord has bought us together in this church body with a unique Christ-centered confession and for his own unique purpose. So as not to miss the point, St. Paul writes this in 2 Corinthians 5:20, “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.” We represent our Lord in this world. He has entrusted his message of forgiveness and life to us—not to hoard but to share with the world.

The question is: will we honor our calling as the church in this time and this place? Will we work together for his purpose, or our own purposes? It is easy for us as individuals or even as a congregation to go marching off in our own direction, doing our own thing, without taking into consideration or sister congregations, concerned only for ourselves. But our Lord has not called us into the church to be “lone rangers.” He has called us together into **κοινωνία**, “life forgiven, life together” for his purpose.

We can get so much more done for our Lord’s Kingdom by working together than we could ever accomplish individually. Our gospel voice in this world is *magnified as we speak together*. Our Christ-centered witness in this world is *maximized as we work together*. Our Christ-centered impact on this world is *multiplied by our κοινωνία*.

But are we the body of Christ in this place? Are we united in a common purpose as the people of God in this time and this place? Are we as the people of God united in our direction, heading toward the same goal? Do we share our Savior’s passion for the lost, a passion that He defined and measured with the breadth of his hands nailed to the cross? Is your congregation about you and what you want or about him and what he wants?

Important questions for us to ask ourselves: Don’t start with the person next to you, or even the person in the next row. They are questions for us; for you. Are we united in a common purpose as the people of God in this time and this place? Are we as the people of God united in our direction, heading toward the same goal? Is ours a positive Christ-centered witness to the community and to the world in which we find ourselves?

It is no secret that our church body, much like our society, is oftentimes fractured and broken, riddled with self-will, division and discord. Though we are forgiven, we still suffer the scourge of carrying with us a sinful human nature.

And yet we want to be “one.” God wants us to be one. The Apostle Paul writes this to the Philippians, “So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.”<sup>1</sup>

However, at times in an effort to implement a false and hypocritical unity we try to force some sort of uniformity on God’s people. But contrived uniformity is not unity. Just doing the same things, saying the same things doesn’t make us bring us together, doesn’t make us one. Unity is a gift of the Spirit. Unity is about something much deeper, something more sacred.

True unity is what is defined in the Augsburg Confession.

***Augsburg Confession: VII. Concerning the Church***

*Likewise, they teach that one holy church will remain forever. The church is the assembly of saints in which the gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly. And it is enough for the true unity of the church to agree concerning the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies instituted by human beings be alike everywhere. As Paul says [Eph. 4:5, 6]: “One faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.”<sup>2</sup>*

Even our confessional Lutheran forefathers understood that there was and will continue to be different and acceptable practices in between congregations.

***Formula of Concord:*** *We also believe, teach, and confess that no church should condemn another because the one has fewer or more external ceremonies not commanded by God than the other has, when otherwise there is unity with the other in teaching and all the articles of faith and in the proper use of the holy sacraments, according to the well-known saying...“Dissimilarity in fasting is not to disrupt unity in faith.”<sup>3</sup>*

What matters is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. What matters is the blood, which he shed to purchase our freedom. What matters is the sacrifice which he makes on the cross, cursed with our sin; the sins which we know, the sins which we don’t know, the sins which we attempt to hide from others for fear of embarrassment or loss, even the sins which we refuse to acknowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2001 (Php 2:1–2). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

<sup>2</sup> Kolb, R., Wengert, T. J., & Arand, C. P. (2000). *The Book of Concord : The confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (43). Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

<sup>3</sup> Kolb, R., Wengert, T. J., & Arand, C. P. (2000). *The Book of Concord : The confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (516). Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Sin is an awful creation of the devil. Sin sours and even devastates so many of our relationships in so many ways, even within the church. Character assassination takes place on blogs in the name of the church, for the good of the church. It has to be our way or no way. E-mail broadsides are fired off to put someone in their place. Disparaging remarks are swift from sinful lips when a decision is made that we don't agree with. I dare say that you may even hear some of that happening at this convention. After all, we are sinners. That sinfulness adversely affects everything that we say, everything that we do, even as the people of Christ; even gathered here.

To free us from that our Lord Jesus willingly went to the cross. Have we stood, or better have you kneeled at the foot of the cross lately? The blood, which streams down the rough-hewn wood, is there for us. The feet are nailed to the cross because we ran our own way and not in God's ways. The hands are nailed there because we do our own thing. The thorns that are twisted into the crown are there because we have a sinful desire to be the masters, the kings and queens of our own lives. His lips are silenced in death because of our bitterness, our malice, our lies, and our filthy language.

That sacrifice is for us. That blood is shed as payment for our sins of neglect and our sins of rebellion. Jesus dies our death so that we might truly be the people of God, people who set free from sin to now measure our lives by the shadow of the cross. The Apostle Paul writes these words to the conflicted congregation in Corinth: "For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Corinthians 5:14).<sup>4</sup>

As the church at large gathered here, it is time for us to take those words to heart, time for us to set aside our self-will, our willfulness; time for us to cherish the forgiveness that Jesus purchased for us, time to live that forgiveness as we interact with each other. It is time for us to put aside political gamesmanship, time to put aside political wrangling, time to end the party spirit that so often divides us.

Preparing these remarks I remembered reading this quote:

*No matter where it appears in the Church, party spirit is a sign of serious danger. If it is not overcome, it will without fail ruin the Church. Invariably, church parties are a fatal poison. They are incompatible with the real character of the Church since solely the will of God, as it is definitively expressed in the Bible, is to have authority in the Church....*

*Hence, if a church body wishes to be preserved from party spirit or be cured of this malady when it has broken out, the only remedy is diligent study of God's Word. The Word of God has the property of unifying and preserving in unity. Those who say that doctrines should not be discussed in order to avoid divisions within the Church do not know what they are talking about. Luther writes in the Smalcald Articles: "Therefore the Church can never be better governed and preserved than if we all live under one head, Christ, and all the bishops, equal in office (although they be unequal in gifts), be diligently joined in unity of doctrine, faith, Sacraments, prayer and works of love."*

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<sup>4</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2001 (2 Co 5:14–15). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

Those words were first spoken by Rev. Friedrich Pfotenhauer at the 32nd Regular Meeting of the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and other states, June 20-29, 1923.

The very next paragraph of Pfotenhauer's remarks begins: "Our Synod has so far been preserved from party spirit." Oh that those words were true today! Oh for the good old days! Oh, for God's people to stand up and say, "Enough! We are not doing this any more!" And if it is done we will call you to repentance. The only ones who can make that happen are you and me, living forgiven lives together.

Hence the reason for us more than ever, now, to dig into the Holy Scripture and to actually read and study our Lutheran Confessions. In Holy Scripture we discover what it means to be a believer. In Holy Scripture we learn what it means to be in a relationship with our fellow believers. In Holy Scripture we learn what our Lord wants us to be about. Reading and studying our Lutheran Confessions, we better understand the faith that has been passed onto us from previous generations. Our Lutheran Confessions are as timely and meaningful today as the day when the ink was still drying on the original drafts.

It is time for us to be genuinely and unabashedly Lutheran. Time for us to be the both the confessional and caring Lutheran church that our Lord has called us to be. Caring for each other in the way that the early church cared for their own. Caring for the lost with the same passion that our Lord Jesus cared when he was nailed to the cross, with the same passion that the early New Testament church demonstrated as it send missionaries out armed only with the gospel message.

To assist us in getting better at living forgiven and forgiving lives together, as a District we have made the commitment to be part of the Koinonia Project. You may have heard about it. LCMS First Vice President Rev. Herbert Mueller, who is with us for the duration of this convention, perhaps can talk about it a bit later. He has invested a great deal time, wisdom and passion in developing a process where we can discuss our differences, and hopefully come to an understanding that is consistent with Holy Scripture and our Lutheran Confessions; and which brings various sides together talk through those differences.

The South Wisconsin vice presidents and I are also involved and invested in this Koinonia Project.

1. Worship: Rev. Randy Raasch, senior pastor at First Immanuel, Cedarburg, as well as our first vice president, is coordinating a Koinonia group that will be discussing "worship." What makes a worship service distinctly Lutheran? Are there scripturally mandated worship forms? Does every Lutheran congregation need to use *Lutheran Service Book*, or is it proper for a congregation to adopt a more contemporary form of worship and still be Lutheran? What does Lutheran worship look like?
2. Communion practices: Rev. Daniel Torkelson, pastor of St. John, North Prairie, and second SWD vice president, is coordinating a group of pastors which will discuss proper scriptural and confessional Communion practices. What does closed communion look like? More basically, what is the Sacrament of Holy Communion about? What is the essence of the Sacrament? Who is to properly receive the Sacrament?

Considering those two issues, it is good also to measure what we want by the words of Dr. Martin Luther from whom we hear this in Volume 38 of his works:

*For we must believe and be sure of this, that baptism does not belong to us but to Christ, that the gospel does not belong to us but to Christ, that the office of preaching does not belong to us but to Christ, that the sacrament [of the Lord's Supper] does not belong to us but to Christ, that the keys, or forgiveness and retention of sins, do not belong to us but to Christ. In summary, the offices and sacraments do not belong to us but to Christ, for he has ordained all this and left it behind as a legacy in the church to be exercised and used to the end of the world; and he does not lie or deceive us. Therefore, we cannot make anything else out of it but must act according to his command and hold to it.*<sup>5</sup>

The legacy of our Lord Jesus is the legacy of the cross. A legacy for every generation. A legacy of forgiveness and peace. We are here to share that legacy with all peoples, here to share the news of forgiveness with those close and with those far away, with those who look like us and with those who come from a different cultural background. Our Lord Jesus makes that point very clearly as he stands among his disciples on Easter Sunday and says,

*"Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." (John 20:21ff)*

Like our Lord Jesus before us we have been sent to be about our Father's business. That business is centered in the gospel, proclaiming Jesus as Savior. That business is living our lives in together in his forgiveness and peace with God through our Lord Jesus. That business is sharing the forgiveness which he purchased with his blood; sharing it with those here, sharing it with those everywhere. That is our *κοινωνία*: life forgiven, life together.

## **2. Our SWD tagline is: "Passionate Believers Changing Life" as we magnify partnerships, maximize resources and multiply ministries.**

The theme for this convention—*κοινωνία*, life forgiven, life together—is all part of the reason why our SWD tagline is "Passionate Believers Changing Life." Passionate believers changing life as we 1) magnify partnerships, 2) maximize resources and 3) multiply ministries. So much good is being accomplished as we work together in the church. I want to spend a few moments looking at each of those three points.

### **a. Maximizing resources:**

- Resources are often measured in terms of dollars. The stewardship of our financial gifts is part of our relationship with God and with each other. When we look at our financial resources, it is easy to see that from the 2012 SWD financial report that like nearly every LCMS district, SWD is experiencing reduced mission intentions from congregations.

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<sup>5</sup> Luther, M. (1999). *Vol. 38: Luther's works, vol. 38 : Word and Sacrament IV* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (200). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

- To help you understand what we are dealing with: In the year 2000, which was 12 years ago, South Wisconsin District congregations contributed \$3.25 million to our joint SWD mission and ministries. This year we are estimating that we will receive just over \$2 million dollars from SWD congregations for our common mission and ministry.
- In the year 2000 SWD forwarded 40% of unrestricted dollars to LCMS mission and ministries. Right now we are forwarding 15% of each unrestricted dollar to LCMS mission and ministry. My hope is that with our next fiscal year we will be able to increase that number to 20% of each unrestricted mission dollar. But that depends on us working together in our Lord's kingdom. It depends on us understanding who we are and what our Lord wants us to be about in this present world.
- At the completion of our last fiscal year which ended January 31, 2012, our auditors reported that not only did we close out the year once again well into the black, but our financial team was commended for the fine work they are doing keeping track of the precious gifts which we receive from our various congregations and other donors.
- Another very positive financial item that needs to be noted is that back in 2006 our capital indebtedness was \$5.5 million. This last Thursday Tim Dittloff informed me that our capital indebtedness is now down to \$2.38 million. In the last six years we have more than cut that indebtedness in half.
- The kudos for all that positive financial news goes to many: especially to Herman Strozier, our business manager, to Ralph Klevenow, our SWD treasurer, to our SWD board of directors and finance committee. I am sure that not many are all that familiar with the finance committee. It is a group appointed by the District president. They serve in an advisory capacity to our board of directors and myself. I want to thank those who serve on this special advisory committee: Robert Pieters, Myron Buss, Marvin Reitz, John Powers, Joel Groskreutz and Jon Schumacher. Recently we added Tom Kuchta. If that name sounds familiar, it is because for many years he served as LCMS treasurer in St. Louis; but now he has retired to Elm Grove. I thank each of them!

**b. Multiplying ministries:**

Three years ago in Resolution 3-03A, the 2009 SWD Convention adopted a goal of starting 50 new missions and/or ministries in the next five years. Current count puts us at somewhere just over 30 at reaching that goal; but it has not been easy, especially in light of our financial limitations. One of the things we have learned along the way is that it is not about brick and mortar, not about buildings; but rather it is about Word and Sacrament, it is about relationships, *κοινωνία*—life forgiven, life together.

- Whether we are willing to admit it or not, we live in a different world than where many of grew up. I remember growing up in a time when the church parking lots were full on Sunday morning; and if you didn't get there early enough, the family was forced to sit up front because every other pew was full. But now we live in a world, in communities where less than 20% of the people go to worship on Sundays. That is merely our reality, as it is in nearly every



other LCMS district. That highlights our Lord's words about the fields being white for harvest. And together we are working hard at gathering the harvest of sinners. Here's a snapshot of what's happening:

- Rev. Eric Wenger and the people of Community of Life in Oregon have set their sights on calling a seminary graduate to develop a new church start in a neighboring community. That candidate has been assigned. He will be ordained and installed later this summer.
- There is a POBLO mission team housed at Brookfield Lutheran, and working in Brookfield and Waukesha. POBLO is "People of the Book Lutheran Outreach." We are partnering with POBLO so that together we can extend a gospel invitation to those among us that come from Pakistan, from India, from the Middle East. The necessity of this is highlight when we take notice of the 27 Islamic centers in South Wisconsin. Just to the north of Shepherd of the Hills, Pewaukee, is a Hindu temple that looks right out of Asian continent. On Calhoun Road there is a huge addition being built at the Sikh temple. My understanding is that the POBLO mission team has found several hundred Pakistanis in Waukesha that they are beginning work with.
- As we make it our goal to "multiply ministries," one unique twist is the lead article in the recent *Passionate Believers* magazine. Rev. Gui Kasongo's visited several congregations in the Congo that he helped to found. Pastor Gui was in my office earlier this week. Later in July he is heading back to the Congo once again to work with the seven worshiping groups he serves there. There are two congregations now established and five other worshiping groups. Pastor Gui's visit there will not be a vacation. He is going there to teach Lutheran theology. As he described going back to the Congo, he spoke of needing \$3000 to buy a field where God's people could grow corn, sell it and support their congregation. I learned after our meeting that he is also in need of catechisms at \$8 apiece. By the way, the congregation which Pastor Gui has been called to serve, International Lutheran Church of Zion, will be recognized later as one of our newest SWD congregations. By and large it is a congregation of French Congolese immigrants. They are currently looking for a church building where they can gather for worship and start a new elementary school. Until that happens, they continue to gather at Benediction Lutheran on Milwaukee's northwest side.
- On Milwaukee's south side, Grace Lutheran has made the commitment to reach out to the fastest growing people group in their community. Germán Novelli, Jr. has received his visa and will serve as Grace's SMP vicar. Germán Jr. returns from Venezuela later this month and will begin studies with Dr. Harald Tomesch.
- A little farther south at Santa Cruz in Racine, Rev. Germán Novelli, Sr. holds Spanish worship services at Holy Cross where an Anglo congregation also worships. Santa Cruz is growing. They are supporting their pastor, and they are also supporting our common mission and ministry; just this last week Pastor Novelli informed us that Santa Cruz was increasing its financial commitment. Pastor Novelli also assists Rev. Tim Sims, who serves at Oklahoma Avenue Lutheran as the people there reach out to the Latinos in their community. Pastor Sims is bilingual and has a great passion to reach the Latinos in Milwaukee. Soon their work will expand

as we reach a little deeper into the Latino community around St. Martini. Part of that partnership involves a Spanish Lutheran Hour Ministry Center on the south side.

- At this convention we will welcome at least three new congregations into the SWD: Grace and Truth, Oconomowoc, with Rev. John Bergson; International Lutheran Church of Zion, Milwaukee, with Rev. Gui Kasongo; and the merger of two congregations that gave birth to Living Savior Lutheran Church of Fort Atkinson, served by Rev. David Emmerich.
- Karenni: Trinity Lutheran of Freistadt, along with Beautiful Savior, Mequon, and Chapel of the Cross, Milwaukee. It's really a story of amazing grace. A couple of years back Rev. Peter Kelm and the people of Trinity-Freistadt in Mequon hosted two refugee families with the help of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service. They were Karenni families. You will hear more about this in one of our mission moments later in the convention. The fantastic part of this mission effort is that the oldest Lutheran church in SWD—Trinity-Freistadt, founded in 1839, is spearheading work among some of our newest immigrants.
- Then, there is Russian outreach: In a developing partnership with Living Christ Lutheran of Madison, their pastor, Rev. Dan Kowert; Luther Memorial, Shorewood, and their pastor, Rev. Ken Wieting, the SWD staff, and a Russian graduate student at the UW campus we are setting our sights on a burgeoning population of Russian immigrants in Madison and Milwaukee. In Shorewood alone there are approximately 25,000-30,000 Russian-speaking immigrants.
- The House of Correction in Franklin and Free at Last: Afam Ikanih, now graduated from the Ethnic Institute of Immigrant Theology and eligible for a divine call, serves along with Rev. Elijah Ndon and layman Pat Batom inside and outside the House of Correction with "Free at Last Lutheran Ministries." On Sundays inside the House of Correction worship attendance exceeds 100. There have been well over a hundred baptisms. Outside the House of Correction Mission of Christ opens its doors to those who have done time, sharing the forgiveness just as our Lord did as he hung on the cross.

**c. Magnifying partnerships:**

Where to begin? Koinonia is the key to all that we are accomplishing for our Lord in his Kingdom. Two hundred fourteen congregations, 120,000 people, 58 elementary schools, pre-schools, 6 high schools, CUW—sharing a common faith, sharing a common purpose, aimed at a common goal of making a difference with the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have so many resources: people resources, financial resources, resources that come from the gospel news of forgiveness and peace because of our Lord Jesus.

- While the mission intentions in some congregations have slipped, mission support and financial commitments in other congregations have increased.
- There is a new collegial group of pastors from large congregations with schools that is starting a learning community to discuss common concerns, challenges and opportunities. It's been tagged "Peter's Group," and Bob Gleason is serving as a consultant.

- In Madison we are working at creating a partnership between Mount Olive Lutheran and Calvary Chapel so that we might more effectively serve our LCMS students on the UW campus, and so that we might more effectively bring a gospel witness to the 40,000 students on the campus. The interesting aspect of this new approach is that earlier this week the “Leadership Network” wrote this as it talked about campus ministries: “Multisite student ministries around the U.S. utilize various ministry models and leadership structures to accomplish the same goals but all agree that joining forces across multiple locations is netting strong results.” Thanks to the forward thinking of our former mission executive Rev. Dan McMiller, it appears that we are right in the thick of things.
- We are magnifying partnership as we work together with the Lutheran Deaf Mission Society. Together with Rodney Rynearson, SWD Pastors John Reinke and Bud Palmer and other deaf leaders, the Lutheran Deaf Mission Society was formed. We entered into a three year “memorandum of understanding” with the mission society to provide financial support. That remains in effect until early next year; and we are already in conversation with LDMS to renew that support. Between salary support, mortgage payments, and interest payments our mission dollars support deaf mission and ministry well in excess of \$110,000 this year.
- The stewardship focus, led by Tim Dittloff, continues to highlight partnerships; with SWD leading the way in number of congregations now engaged in the stewardship discussion.
- In the area of schools there is a growing partnership developing between our SWD schools and the school in the Dominican Republic. The latest example of that a group of teachers from Divine Redeemer, Hartland, is heading to the Lutheran school in Palmar Arriba, Dominican Republic, to lend their expertise and wisdom to the burgeoning new school and its teachers.
- An example of what can be accomplished working together is Luther Memorial, Shorewood, with Rev. Ken Wieting and Bessie Fick. Bessie heads up student ministry at Luther Memorial that reaches out to the UWM campus, with all of its cross-cultural students. Bessie also helps on Milwaukee’s south side with our Lutheran Hour outreach. Luther Memorial is one of our congregations that is reaching out to its neighbors who are multiethnic and cross-cultural.
- We see partnerships in action with God’s people from various SWD congregations heading to the Dominican Republic to help with building projects. But it’s more that merely sweat and cement. It is about God’s people—Americans and Dominicans—working together, believing together, and even playing together. The first five days of March I was blessed to be in the Dominican Republic where we are fully partnering with Bethesda Lutheran Communities, LCMS World Mission and Human Care, along with the Lutheran Seminary of Argentina, the Lutheran Church of Brazil, as well as a congregation from Fort Myers, Florida, and others to plant a new confessional Lutheran church body. In the five years that we have been participating, the small church plant has grown dramatically in to a vibrant church plant. There are several worshipping congregations, a parochial school and a group home for the developmentally disabled. This past year a new worship facility was built and dedicated with the sweat and hard work of many from SWD, including Brian and Jeannette Keller who are coordinating the building process. The first

indigenous pastor, Willie Gaspar, was also ordained and installed. Rev. Ted Krey is with us and will talk more about what is happening in the DR during his presentation. He will also be at our SWD booth in the front if you would like to speak with him.

- That partnership, by the way, has been described by many as a model for the way in which the LCMS needs to do overseas missions in the 21st century. At our last partnership meeting in March, there was a group of people who are involved elsewhere in a Latin American mission. They came to see how the DR partnership works.
- Regarding the Dominican Republic, about 9 months ago Mark L'Heureux, our schools executive, led a small group of elementary school principals to visit the elementary school in the DR. Afterward, I asked one of those principals what she thought. Her comment was, "I left a part of my heart there. It's a third world country. The poverty is extreme. But the Word is powerful and the saving faith of the Dominicans is amazing."

There are so many more wonderful mission stories, mission partnerships, to talk about. We thank our Lord for the way he is blessing his Word in our midst. We thank our gracious Lord for many congregations and church workers who are living forgiven lives together, reaching out with our Lord Word, touching lives with his forgiveness.

And if you didn't notice, many of our mission stories are about those of other cultures, not necessarily in far away places, but in places like Racine and Milwaukee; in Franklin and Waukesha. The fastest growing demographic group in South Wisconsin is no longer Pommeranian (although I am one); it is Hispanic. There are also Asians like the Karenni and Hmong. There are those from the Middle East; Hindu, Sikh and Muslim. There are African immigrants from Nigeria and the Congo. Reaching out to these new cultures in our midst with the gospel, they become part of our **κοινωνία...life forgiven, life together**. And that is a fantastic blessing from our Lord!

An interesting aside at this point is that where the District office is at 81st and Capitol Drive in Milwaukee, Anglos like me are a minority. That's quite a change since I was a kid growing up on the far west side. That begs the question: When will Anglos here be a minority?

### **3. SWD staff update:**

Since we last met in convention, June 2009, a new schools executive has come online. Many have gotten to know Mark L'Heureux. He came to us from serving as an elementary school administrator in Colorado. Mark is by far the youngest member of our SWD staff. He is still under 40. He, his wife, Kathy, and their children live in Germantown. Mark is a great addition to our SWD team. He is doing an outstanding job of working with our schools and commissioned workers as together we set our sights on being bold witnesses to the gospel of our Lord Jesus in this post-church world.

There is one more bit of news that comes from our mission effort. Sadly for us, Rev. Dan McMiller, who has served so ably for seven years as our SWD mission executive and a member of our executive staff, has accepted a position with Luther Academy. Luther Academy hosts confessional Lutheran conferences in parts of the world where there is precious little confessional Lutheranism and where

indigenous pastors have precious little training. I know that I have been blessed by Pastor McMiller's presence on our executive team. I have learned much from him about cross-cultural, multiethnic ministries. While Pastor McMiller will be missed, we wish him our Lord's richest blessings in his new area of ministry.

Regarding the process of replacing Pastor McMiller: our SWD board of directors has established a call committee which will begin its work shortly after this convention ends. Their first order of business will be to recut the job description for the mission executive; and then to open the call list so that names might be received for consideration. When that time comes, it will be posted on our SWD website, in the *Passionate Believers* magazine, as well as in the "Changing Life" e-newsletter. While we may not find another "Pastor McMiller," our Lord has blessed South Wisconsin over the years with one fine mission executive after the other: Pastors Bernie Raabe who helped start so many congregations that our now celebrating their 50th anniversary; Pastor E.J. Otto, who was mission executive when I was called to start a new church in Tomah; Pastor Earl Bleke who loved missions, who was instrumental in helping to start the Dominican Republic effort, and who was also instrumental in getting SWD connected with it; Pastor Robert Hoehner who is just about to retire from serving as placement director at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

On a personal note: I want to once again thank everyone for your prayers as my wife, Lynn, travelled down that cancer road milestones tagged "radiation" and "chemo." I know that many of you, your wives and family members have been down that road as well. It's an interesting faith journey that reminds us that while we are nothing more than frail and fragile, sinful human beings we have a God, we have a Savior who loves us so much that he willingly left his heavenly throne, wrapped himself in human flesh and blood, was born of a Virgin, crowned with thorns, nailed to a cross, died, and was raised to life so that together we might be his people. We give thanks that Lynn has just recently reached her one year milestone of being "cancer free."

#### **4. Miscellaneous and conclusion.**

Now on with our convention! Κοινωνία...life forgiven, life together.

κοινωνία—look at what we share; faith and forgiveness, Word and Sacrament, a unique Lutheran confession that has been passed onto us by the generations, we share a forgiven life and divine purpose. The word *κοινωνία* is *not* used in Ephesians 4, but it exactly what the Apostle defines when he writes: "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."<sup>6</sup>

κοινωνία—look at what we have accomplished for his kingdom together. Once again, together right now here within the boundaries of SWD we are reaching more varied people groups, cross-cultural,

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<sup>6</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2001 (Eph 4:1–3). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

multiethnic peoples, with the gospel than we ever have before in the history of SWD. And we are doing it together.

κοινωνία—look around. There is so much more that we can accomplish together. The fastest growing people group in SWD is Hispanic; and yet right now we have only a meager handful of pastors reaching out to this precious group of people. Look to the future which John pictures in Revelation 7: “a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands.” That is there, in eternity, but it begins here in this world, here in South Wisconsin as we live out “Witness, Mercy, and Life Together” in your communities, in this state, in this country and in this world.

On behalf of so many who hear the gospel because of our partnership, I thank you and your congregation for all that you do for the church at large, for all that you do and are for our Lord’s kingdom. Thank you for being the people of our God together!

May our gracious Lord who has brought us together in his Church bless us as we stand together at the foot of his cross for the next 48 hours, discussing his business, chartering a course so that we continue to be *passionate believers changing life...living life forgiven, living life together!*

Respectfully,  
Rev. Dr. John C. Wille  
President South Wisconsin District LCMS  
Sunday, June 10, 2012

Francis Pieper upon the assassination of President McKinley: Where the Gospel is despised, there godlessness rules in life. If Christ does not rule in the hearts of men through the Gospel, then the flesh rules. There is no third possibility. The works of the flesh are (Galatians 5:19–21) “sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.” We cannot go into these individual sins more precisely with respect to the way they rule in our country and how they demand God’s vengeance. Harrison, Matthew C. (2011-07-01). *At Home in the House of My Fathers: Presidential Sermons, Essays, Letters, and Addresses from the Missouri Synod's Great Era of Unity and Growth* (Kindle Locations 13554-13558). Concordia Publishing House. Kindle Edition.