



DP Vantage Point

*For Christ and for His world SWD Magnifies partnerships,
Multiplies ministries, and Maximizes resources.*

12 January 2015

Dear brothers in the Office of the Holy Ministry:

Growing up Lutheran, attending a Lutheran elementary school, every year our teachers would show us the old black and white version of “Martin Luther”. Those were the days before computers, smart phones and even color televisions. Invariably, after the movie, the teacher would talk to us about the great blessing we enjoyed because Martin Luther re-discovered the Gospel and confessed his faith. They would also teach us how generations before us made that good confession, passing the faith on from generation to generation; from fathers and mothers to their children, and then on to their grandchildren, and then to us.

That is why many of our ancestors came to this ‘new world’, America. Some of my ancestors came because they were tired of the wars (One of my grandfathers was an officer in the Prussian army). Others came in search of religious freedom, as a means to escape the Prussian Union, eager to remain faithful to their Lutheran identity and confession. Regardless of why they came, they were Lutheran Christians who passed their faith on to their children.

These days I continually give thanks for what I received through my parents from generations of faithful Lutheran Christians before me. What a precious gift!

But now, what of us in this current generation, our generation? Following the footsteps of those who have gone before us, are we concerned about passing on our Lutheran Christian faith to the next generation? What will the future of our church be? What is the present condition of our church? Living in a decadent culture where so many are so wrapped up in themselves (both outside of the church and inside of it) will we pass on the faith that has been entrusted to us?

We find ourselves in a dangerous and challenging time in the history of the church. Here are a couple of quotes from articles that I recently read. The first is from Les Strobel “We are facing a crisis in America. Skepticism is rising. Too many young people are leaving the faith. Few Christians are able to effectively share Jesus with others,” Strobel told [a Christian magazine]. “At many churches, reaching spiritually lost people falls to the bottom of their priorities. This is a crisis we need to confront — urgently!” The second is from David Kinnaman, president of the Barna Group. In a recent article titled, “*Beyond the 'Nones': Secularism Rising as Christians Turn Churchless*” Kinnaman concludes: “The younger the generation, the more post-Christian it is:

- Millennials (born between 1984 and 2002) — 48 percent
- Gen X-ers (born between 1965 and 1983) — 40 percent
- Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) — 35 percent
- Elders (born in 1945 or earlier) — 28 percent.

Whether or not you appreciate Kinnaman or Strobel, their statistics and their observations are informative and revealing. Christianity is suspect in our American culture. There’s a new book out titled, Firing God. A reviewer writes, “For a while, nothing was going right in Cheryl Abram’s life. The God she had put her faith in was doing absolutely nothing for her. So she got rid of Him. It’s not that her life suddenly got better, but a huge weight was lifted off her shoulders.” Change the name, we all probably know someone like that; perhaps a family member.

So many have bought into the lie of the Evil One. Remember the first temptation? It is still the core temptation. The evil one “said to the woman, Did God actually say, You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?...God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” We know the deadly effects of that temptation. We hear it referred to several times in the Book of Judges: “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” That is a deadly temptation that appeals to individualism.

A dreadful cocktail which gives rise to arrogance and skepticism. A wicked concoction that is enticing even to us in the church.

No wonder many of our congregations are struggling with declining membership, with worship attendance that continues heading south. Our faithful members are growing older. Many of our congregations are filled with those born before 1964, sadly with few of the younger generations. It is estimated that three out of every four congregations are highly conflicted with no clue on how to solve their conflicts. This is not an indictment of our theology or of our pastors; but a reality of our present situation. We live in a time when church, Christianity, is no longer a pillar of our society. Our society is becoming more and more un-Christian and even anti-Christian.

The questions for us are simple; Where do we go from here? How do we make a difference? Can we make a difference? Can we turn this around? How do we pass on the Lutheran faith to the next generation? Such questions are best answered from the pages of Holy Scripture.

From our Lord's words to His disciples on Easter Sunday, we know that as the faithful in New Testament times we are called to be His witnesses. Our Lord Jesus, the Christ, says, **"Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:46).**

Kittel defines μάρτυς (the Greek word for witness, martyr, a root for martyr which is the ultimate witness or confession) stating, "The proper sphere of μάρτυς is the legal, where it denotes one who can and does speak from personal experience about actions in which he took part and which happened to him, or about persons and relations known to him. He may be a witness at a trial or, in legal transactions of different kinds, a solemn witness in the most varied connections."

As the faithful in past generations we are called to confess the faith. Being Lutheran Christians we understand confession. For us as Lutheran Christians confession and life are always about the Gospel of our Lord Jesus. Confessing the faith has always been about justification and faith in our Lord Jesus. Confessing the faith has always about what God does for us in His Son. Confessing the faith has been part of our identity since the day Martin Luther stood before the Emperor, and since the writing of the Augsburg Confession.

Philip Melancthon writes in the opening paragraphs of the Augsburg Confession: **"We offer, in this matter of religion, the Confession of our preachers and of ourselves, showing what manner of doctrine from the Holy Scriptures and the pure Word of God has been up to this time set forth in our lands, dukedoms, dominions, and cities, and taught in our churches... and regarding this we even here solemnly and publicly testify."**

Confessing the faith is what God calls upon His people in every generation to do. In Old Testament times the Psalmist Asaph proclaims: "He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God." [Psalm 78:5-7]

That is also what the New Testament Church was and is also to be about.

- Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so *that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* [Philippians 2: 5-11]
- Hebrews 10:23-25, *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*

That responsibility and the opportunity to confess Christ have now fallen to us in our generation. This is the time and the culture into which our Lord has deliberately placed us. But we are not orphans any more than the original twelve were in John 14. This is our time to come together as brothers in the church to make a difference. (Notice I did not use the word congregation, but church. Both are essential.) This is our God-given time to proclaim and confess the saving name of Christ Jesus. This is our time to teach our children and grandchildren who Jesus is and what He does for us. This is our God-given time to confess Christ to a “crooked and twisted generation” (Philippians 2:15).

The last responsibility that is listed in the Supplement to the Diploma of Vocation for when a congregation calls its pastor is:

- To serve the congregation as an example of Christian conduct; to endeavor earnestly to live in Christian unity with the members of the congregation, fellow workers, and sister congregations in the Synod; and by the grace of God to do everything possible for the edification of the congregation and the up building of the church in Christ.

As the called and ordained we are to do that in the congregation that has called us, in the church at large, and in the community where we serve. Our vocation as pastors in the church is to confess Christ in this generation for the next generation.

May our gracious Lord bless us each with a boldness to confess His saving name, with a passion to make a difference by living and proclaiming the Gospel clearly in our communities His name will be blessed by this generation and the next. As we move forward those words, “**Confessing Christ for the Next Generation**” will be our focal point. In future articles we will look at the four goals that the SWD staff has been discussing:

1. **This is our time to be distinctively Lutheran,**
2. **This is our time to plant new congregations.**
3. **This is our time to honor our vocations.**
4. **This is our time to embrace our communities.**

May our gracious Lord bless us as we faithfully confess His saving name!

Rev. John C. Wille
SWD president

PS. There will be more about this vision and its goals in the months ahead. Below is an additional article on this subject for what it is worth:

The David Kinnaman article: <http://www.charismanews.com/culture/45898-beyond-the-nones-secularism-rising-as-christians-turn-churchless>

A Word from the Reformer commenting on Zechariah 2:7...

For all who are to accept Jesus are strange beings and wonders to the world. For the kingdom of Christ on earth is so offensive, foolish, and wretched a thing that all who believe in Him are considered mere fools and wretched people, as also Paul says (1Cor.4:9), “We have become a spectacle to the world,¹⁷ to angels, and to men.” And Is. 8:18 speaks in the same vein: “Behold, I and the children whom the Lords has given me are signs and portents” and are set for the fall and offense of both houses Israel, etc. “Christ is a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles,” 1 Cor. 1:23. Whoever therefore preaches and confesses Christ must also be an offense and a fall to the highly intellectual, wise, and saintly. And so the angel remarks also here that this promise of Christ is so offensive that his friends, who are to hear it with him, must permit the other Jews and the whole world to consider them fools and nothing but strange, peculiar people. It is therefore necessary for the angel to admonish them to hear, as though he would say: “Listen, listen, dear Joshua and your friends, you must listen and simply give attention to the Word and cling to it. If you do not hold to the Word, you will not be able to stand against the offense which the kingdom of Christ brings with it.”¹

¹⁷ Luther actually quotes, ‘to God, to angels, and to men.’ Cf. the same quotation p. 39 above. ¹Luther, M. (1999). *Luther’s works, vol. 20: Minor Prophets III: Zechariah* (J.J. Pelikan, H.C. Oswald & H.T. Lehmann, Ed.) (Zec 2:7). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House.

Other SWD News:

Two important updates from the Dominican Republic Mission in which SWD is a full partner:

Attached to this document are two PDFs, updates from the Dominican Republic mission plant. Many of us have been to the Dominican to help with various projects. I know of at least one church, Bethlehem Sun Prairie, which has definite plans to head down there again very soon. There are other congregations with pending trips. There is much to be done, especially with the new property in Licey, with a vision for a new church and Lutheran Day school in that community. Please take a look at the attachments. You may share them as needed. If you would like to lead a trip or join a trip to the DR, please let us know. This is such a wonderful opportunity to connect a mission project. Those who have been there can give witness to the impact it has had on them.

“Passionate Believers’ Conference”: Equipping lay leaders and pastors for engaging their communities with the Gospel.

WHEN: Saturday, January 31, 2015

TIME: 8:00 a.m. Registration – 2:45 p.m. Closing

WHERE: Divine Redeemer Lutheran Church & School, Hartland

The 8th annual Passionate Believers Conference is where church workers and members enjoy coming together to learn what’s new in the South Wisconsin District and gain a better understanding of our district’s ministry.

Keynote speaker will be Mike Zimmer who serves the Northern Illinois District as a Mission Facilitator and will talk about Revelation 22:2, *“For the healing of the nations.”*

There is also an addition to the breakouts. Rev. Hal Senkbeil is going to join my first break-out on caring for our clergy. As you know, Rev. Senkbeil heads us DOXOLOGY.

More information, especially about registration is either on the flyer you received from us or on the SWD.org website. There are many breakouts scheduled to address various aspect of congregational life.

SWD Mission Intentions:

This is the time of year when we remind congregational leaders and pastors about the “2016 SWD Mission Intentions”. If you haven’t filled out your congregation’s mission intentions, please do so in short order. Your intention helps us on the district level to plan our common mission and ministry. As you may know, 25% of every unrestricted dollar which we receive is shared with the LCMS to support our common mission and ministry throughout the world.

My hope and prayer is that our congregations and you as their pastor set an example of generosity. Please remember the words of Paul to the Corinthians:

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. ¹² For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. ¹³ By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others. 2 Corinthians 9:10-13

SWD Convention Dates of Importance, Assessment etc.:

On June 7-9, 2015, our South Wisconsin District will hold its 54th triennial convention at Concordia University Wisconsin campus in Mequon under the theme, "Walk humbly with our God."

The Convention Nomination letter has been sent out to our congregations. Please note that by January 30, 2015 all recommendations and nominations for offices other than President and Vice-President must be received. March 2, 2015 is the deadline for nominations for President and Vice-President. In February 2015, District congregations will receive an invoice for their Convention assessment. That assessment has been tentatively set at \$1.60 per communicant member of your congregation.

Deadline for overtures to the SWD Convention is: March 9, 2015. Late overtures will be considered to their merits according the SWD bylaws.

Congregational assessments and information regarding delegate registration will shared in short order. Each parish is entitled to one pastoral delegate and one lay delegate according to the LCMS Bylaws. Each pastoral delegate and each lay delegate who attends the SWD convention then will also be a voter in the election of the Synod President in 2016.

Current SWD Financials:

January 31 closes out our SWD fiscal year. As you read in last month's Vantage Point you saw that congregational intentions were lagging behind. The good news is that December was a banner month for intentions: \$ 258,338. Thank you for your generosity, and the generosity of God's people!! Seeing the report is uplifting!

The challenge before is that our intentions are still lagging by \$110,000. To reach our SWD goal for the 2015, the target for January's intentions is \$285,300.00. Thanks for your attention to this and your generosity!! May our gracious Lord bless your work in His church!

Welcome to the Old Latin School in Wittenberg Germany:

Check out this video on YouTube: <http://youtu.be/7XeEg0a8Fp0>

Say hello to the Lutheran Federal Credit Union. What follows is a news release from LCEF about an exciting new endeavor:

Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) is pleased to announce that the National Credit Union Administration (NCUA) has granted a charter for the launch of a Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod-focused credit union to be named Lutheran Federal Credit Union (LFCU). Its offices will be at 10733 Sunset Office Drive, Suite 460, St. Louis, MO 63127. In his letter to LCMS partners and organizations, LCEF President and CEO, Richard Robertson, said, "Along with the granting of a charter, the NCUA has approved the field of membership for the credit union to include The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS); associated districts; congregations and schools, and their members; LCMS agencies, employees and their families. "The Lutheran Federal Credit Union is a totally separate entity from the LCMS and LCEF, with its own governing Board of Directors. LCEF's role has been to provide organizational assistance and start-up capital to bring this new entity to fruition. The LCEF board and staff are pleased to have been part of the process that has led to the granting of a charter to operate."

Details surrounding the offerings, scheduled launch and timeline for full roll-out will be announced by the credit union board, whose members include:

Michael Kzirian – Board Chair
Sue Elsholz – Secretary and Treasurer
Ken Krueger – Board Member
Randall Peterson – Board Member
Richard Robertson – Board Member

PW's Calendar Highlights:

January 4 - Preach and Install Rev. J. Patrick Niles at Trinity Rantoul
January 5-7 A couple days with my mother who lives in northwest Arkansas. I haven't seen her since before my surgery last April.
January 9-10 - KOINONIA Think tank meeting at IC in St. Louis. SWD is well represented on this taskforce as Pastor Hal Senkbeil and Dan Torkelson are also part of the group.
January 11 - Led Divine Service at Sherman Park Lutheran. Pastor Totsky is recovering from bypass surgery. Please keep David in your prayers. He is such a blessing to our SWD and to me personally. May our gracious Lord bless David's recovery!
January 12 - SWD Presidium meets at SWD Office & meet with Pastors John Reinke and Bud Palmer re Deaf Lutheran Missions
January 13 - Circuits 16 and 17 at Messiah Ripon
January 13 - Meeting with Elders of Pilgrim Wauwatosa
January 15 - Convention Planning meeting
January 18 - preach at Mission of Christ Milwaukee
January 20 - SWD team meeting
January 20 - Call Committee meeting at Our Redeemer Wauwatosa
January 21-24 - LCMS Life Conference, Washington DC
January 25 - preach at Good Shepherd Oshkosh, Pastor Roger Erdman's retirement
January 25 - Ordination/Installation of Moses Thao at Redeemer Manitowoc
January 28 - Preach at St. Bartholomew Brillion
January 31 - Passionate Believers Conference, Divine Redeemer, Hartland

Calling Congregations, Divine Calls, and Clergy Roster:

- Arlington – St. Peter (sole)
- Beloit – St. John
- Brookfield – Immanuel (Associate)
- Hartland – Divine Redeemer (Associate)
- Lebanon – St. Peter
- Menasha – Trinity (associate pastor & principal)
- Milwaukee – Hope
- Necedah – St. James/New Miner – St. Paul
- Pleasant Prairie – Good Shepherd
- Portage – St. John
- Racine – Prince of Peace
- Wales - Bethlehem

Pastors considering a call:

- Michael Salemink – St. James, Lafayette, IN to Prince of Peace, Racine
- Andrew Steinke – Candidate to Immanuel, Brookfield
- James Thelen – Ascension, Tucson, AZ to Bethlehem, Wales
- Kurt Wenzelburger – Divine Redeemer, Hartland to St. John, Portage

Pastors accepting a call:

- Joel Brandt – Trinity, Wausau to Bethlehem, Sun Prairie
- James McCoid – Community of Life, Spring Grove, IL to Community of Life, Oregon
- J. Michael Stock – Pella, Waupun to Grace & Trinity, Bear Creek, WI
- David Ramirez – Zion, Lincoln, IL to St. Paul, Union Grove

Prayer considerations:

- David Jensen and family at the death of his mother Edith
- The family of Lowell Holtz as he was called home to glory
- David Totsky who had successful bypass surgery and his recovering at home

May our Lord bless!!

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Passionate Believers...Changing Life...Confessing Christ
empowering life changing ministries of bold, passionate witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.