



THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

Minnesota South District

...joyfully serving together in making disciples of Jesus Christ

Dear Brothers in Christ,

I thank God for you, especially for your faith in Jesus and for the partnership that we share in the Gospel. I count it a joy to call you a brother in Christ. As we begin another triennium, I look forward to our ministry together here in the MN South District of our beloved Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. I find Paul's words very fitting: ³**I thank my God in all my remembrance of you,** ⁴**always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy,** ⁵**because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.** ⁶**And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. (Phil.1:3-6)**

There is something very comforting about the comradery of brothers united in mission as we share in the Gospel. The Smalcald Articles calls this "the mutual conversation and consolation of brethren." It's the confession that "God is superabundantly generous in His grace" providing us "counsel and aid against sin" in manifold ways. "First, through the spoken Word, by which the forgiveness of sins is preached in the whole world [Luke 24:45-47]. Second, through Baptism. Third, through the holy sacrament of the altar. Fourth, through the power of the Keys. Also through the mutual conversation and consolation of brethren, "Where two or three are gathered (Matthew 18:20)", (Part III, Article IV, The Gospel).

Encouragement in Circuit Gatherings

One of the most prominent ways for brothers to gather in this way has long been the circuit meeting. Winkels have a storied history in our Synod, and an important role in our life together. Our Synod formally gives a role to these gatherings for the purpose of spiritual development and enrichment, continuing education, conversation and consolation of the brethren, and the sharing of mission and ministry (see also Synod Bylaw 5.1).

The Circuit gathering is to be an esteemed and cherished gathering of our brothers and congregations. However, not all circuits enjoy such a consistent experience. My hope is that we can reclaim and restore the circuit to its historic role as a profound source of enrichment and encouragement as you walk together in mission and ministry. To that end, I have assembled the circuit visitors and provided extended training, resources, and encouragement to lead your circuit.

Charge to Myself: Go First!

Please know that over the next three years I am making it a priority to go first in visiting each circuit gathering multiple times to invest time and care into your life and ministry. It is part of my *Go First!* initiative, but also an intentional effort to care for you. We are here together for such a time as this.

Charge to Circuit Visitors

My request and expectation to circuit visitors is that they will provide the circuit with good planning, programming, and leadership that will make it worthwhile and essential for all brothers to attend Winkel gatherings, precisely because it provides mutual conversation and consolation in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I have charged them, on my behalf, to care for you, encourage you, visit you, and support you in your life and ministry. This is to be done chiefly through quality circuit meetings shaped by worship, study of the Word and confessions, the care of souls, collaboration, and casuistry, but may also include other attendant care and visitation as fitting.

Charge to You

Therefore, dear brother, my expectation is that you as an active parish pastor will, likewise, make it a priority to attend and participate in the circuit Winkels on a regular basis, not begrudgingly, but willingly. Your presence is valuable and crucial to the mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren.

In an age that is hostile to the church and her pastors, one that fosters chaos and unrest as well as all manner of division and hatred, we cannot afford to be isolated from one another or remain an island unto ourselves. We need one another.

I look forward to our mutual conversation, consolation, and ministry collaboration in the name of Jesus!

Your brother in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rev. Dr. Lucas V. Woodford". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Rev. Dr. Lucas V. Woodford, President
MN South District - LCMS