



DISTRICT NEWS

MINNESOTA SOUTH

💡 TALKING POINTS WITH PASTOR

Collaboration: *Go First!*

We live in a time when technology makes networking and collaborating easier than ever. Social media, instant messaging, email and video chat makes planning for things like community outreach events, youth groups or church meetings timelier and more efficient. Of course, technology is no replacement for incarnate ministry. Our Lord's own incarnation teaches us that. But it does aid us in our incarnate ministry.



Rev. Dr. Lucas Woodford
District President

the behavior and thought of culture throughout the realm. Eventually the link between life and faith dominated and was considered inviolable for almost a millennium. In fact, "Christendom" became a defining feature of western culture: daily life and commerce transpired under a pervasive Christian veneer. During the Reformation, features of this church and state alliance began to look

different depending on the region one lived, but it remained for hundreds of years more. Churches of various confessions enjoyed both privilege and widespread influence in public morality and thinking. Likewise, social pressure ensured general conformity to Christian virtue, and biblical standards were the widely accepted norm.

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Collaboration and networking should be welcomed and embraced. We live in what is being called a post-Christian world. It is the understanding that "Christendom" has ended. That's different than Christianity. Jesus promised His Church will always remain and that the gates of hell will not prevail against His Church (Matt. 16:18). Christianity will always remain. However, Christendom refers to the alliance between church, state and society.

In 313 A.D., emperor Constantine legalized Christianity. Soon Christian doctrine and teaching began shaping



GO FIRST

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

But now no more. Christendom has ended. The ancient political and cultural alliance with the church is over. Now, Christianity is no longer accepted as the predominant religion or cultural belief system shaping public norms and behaviors. In fact, segments of the broader American culture are even hostile not just toward the tenets of Christianity, but toward Christian churches in general and, at times, toward individual Christians. Simultaneously, denominations across the United States (including ours) are declining in membership. Reports indicate many congregations are aging and shrinking, with a significant number closing (the Minnesota South District closed 12 churches in the last four years). As a result, congregations report difficulty paying full-time pastors, let alone a staff of multiple church workers.

That seems like a lot of doom and gloom. But it should not surprise us. Jesus told us we would have trouble in this world (John 16:33). If anything, it's simply a wake-up call for the Holy Christian Church to be bold and audacious in being the Church. After all, the New Testament church did not have the benefit of Christendom. The book of Acts records how even when the church was persecuted it grew all the stronger and more vibrant. Therefore, perhaps losing our privileged position in culture will help us become even more robust in our mission of saving souls by the proclamation of Christ the crucified.

To be sure, we have the promise of Jesus to be with us always, even to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20). We need not fear. We are not alone. But we also have one another. That's why networking and collaboration are so important. As Paul reminds, "we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (ROM. 12:5).

Collaboration is one of the four tenets of the Minnesota South District *Go First!* initiative. It's acting upon the conviction that Christ has called us to be united as the body of Christ. Again, as Paul says:



“**Take on the challenges of our age in the confidence of our Lord, who took on sin, death and the devil in our stead. Walk through these troubles together as the body of Christ and in the confidence of Christ, whose very body was raised from the dead and is now ascended on high.**”

There are many parts, yet one body, where the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary ... God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

1 COR. 12:20-25

We need not let the troubles of our time intimidate us. We serve a Lord who looked death in the face and did not blink. We trust Jesus to inspire us to action. That allows us to trust others and inspire them to action. We do this through His Holy Spirit and His Holy Word, which leads us forward as the body of Christ — to be His hands and feet, His eyes and ears, His mouth and heart — to a broken and dysfunctional world desperately in need of healing, forgiveness and hope.

The goal of the *Go First!* initiative is to unleash the potential of our congregations in the name of Jesus. We want to bless, not to impress. We want to grow and not simply show. As the body of Christ, we want to complete each other rather than compete against each other.

Look to collaborate with your sister congregations and sister schools. Look to network with your fellow pastors and church workers. I've previously shared examples of others collaborating through shared youth groups, starting an urban outreach center and cooperating on a food drive. Congregations and schools are also considering ways of how they can share church workers. I'd love to hear about your collaboration.

Take on the challenges of our age in the confidence of our Lord, who took on sin, death and the devil in our stead. Walk through these troubles together as the body of Christ and in the confidence of Christ, whose very body was raised from the dead and is now ascended on high.

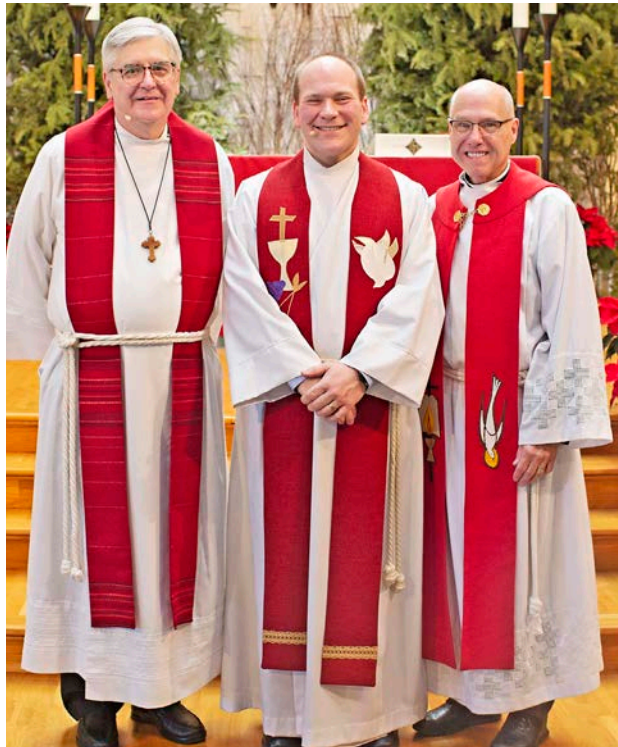
As difficulties come, so do the opportunities for collaboration. We, though many, are united by our Lord as the body of Christ. My challenge to you and your congregation is *Go First!*

Blessings at Beautiful Savior, Plymouth



TOP: Rev. Thomas Stoebig offers the benediction at Beautiful Savior on Dec. 11. He retired after 40 years in the ministry, and had served Beautiful Savior as senior pastor since 2006. Praise be to God for his service!

RIGHT: Rev. Joe Behnke was installed as senior pastor of Beautiful Savior on Jan. 8. From left, Rev. Dr. Dean Nadasdy, Minnesota South District president emeritus; Rev. Joe Behnke; and Rev. Tom Evans, district second vice-president and senior pastor of Emanuel, Inver Grove Heights.



District welcomes **NEW ASSISTANT**

Rev. Vue Lee has accepted the call as Assistant to the President, Missions, of the Minnesota South District. His start date is Feb. 1. We



are excited God has led him to serve in this capacity and welcome him to the district office!

Pastor Lee desires to help bring the Good News of Jesus to all nations. He previously served for 13 years at King of Kings Lutheran Church and School, Roseville. At King of Kings, the people, outreach and discipleship were his passions and joy.

Before Pastor Lee moved his family to Minnesota in 2008, he worked on planting churches and making disciples in California. He also passionately supports organizations in mission work overseas.

Pastor Lee is married to his high school love, May Lee. They have three daughters, two sons-in-law, and four grandchildren. Pastor Lee and May love to travel in their 4x4 off-road vehicle across the country. They enjoy exploring the beaches, hills and mountaintops. May is a photographer, which is a plus in capturing God's beautiful creation. Together they are both committed to serving and loving God's people.

Daily, they spend time with their children and grandchildren because all three generations live together in one house. Everything Pastor Lee does, and everyone who he comes in contact with, is an opportunity to share Jesus. One of his favorite sayings is, "You don't need to go share Jesus; share Jesus as you go."



TO ALL GENERATIONS

Minnesota South District

In 2015, our district in convention approved a resolution that began an effort to enhance the quality of our Christian education, both in the parish and in schools, through a fundraising appeal. This became known as *To All Generations* (TAG).

We find these meaningful words in Ps. 145:4:

One generation shall commend your

works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.

And so it is that in our churches and schools and in our homes, the faith that professes Jesus Christ as Lord has been passed down from generation to generation. We are thankful for the many faithful donors that have given and continue to give to the *To All Generations* appeal.

To All Generations encourages a renewed emphasis in Christian education by making available grants to target new ideas and strategies beyond the scope of normal church/school budgeting. Ministries are able to apply for grants to help fund what they would not be able to fund within their normal budgets. Specifically, three areas of grant focus were identified:

- ▶ TO STRENGTHEN education ministries, including enhancing the quality of Lutheran schools, encouraging

opportunities in parish education, planting new schools and early childhood centers, and supporting educational leadership.

- ▶ TO DEVELOP unified marketing strategies.
- ▶ TO INCREASE efforts toward parental choice in education.

To All Generations grant applicants are also encouraged to maximize grant dollars by using collaborative efforts between education ministries.

The next deadline for To All Generations grant proposals is Friday, March 24. Grant application windows will continue every 12 months until all *To All Generations* funds are expended. More information about grants and grant applications is available at mnsdistrict.org/tag.

Rejoice with us as we strengthen Christian education across our district and *To All Generations*!

Trinity Lutheran School, Waconia

Trinity was blessed to receive a 2022 TAG grant (\$2,810).

We began offering a Family and Consumer Science (FACS) program in the 2019-20 school year. The class is an elective for grades 6-8. This year we have also included a modified FACS class for students in grade 5. With money provided through our annual Chroma Dash school fundraiser and a contribution from the church, we were able to remodel a room to help expand this program. The grant money was used to buy convection ovens, microwaves, pots and pans and other small appliances and kitchen equipment to make this class possible.

We also do hand sewing and hope to add sewing machines soon. We teach budgeting, meal planning, laundry and other life skills. Students share their finished products and use them to serve others. Food made during FACS class will be shared at nursing homes and with our shut-ins.

Students came into the class having skills ranging from those who have little experience in the kitchen to those who help cook at home. Some have learned that you need hot water when you wash dishes by hand and the dishrag needs to be wet when you wipe off the counter. It has been a joy watching our students, including those with special needs, work together and find success in this class.

Submitted by Julie Dierks, Middle School teacher



Julie Dierks shows Ethan Fjelland how to measure baking powder.

Concordia Classical Academy, North Mankato

Concordia Classical Academy (CCA) is a mission of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church. This year we received a 2022 TAG Grant (\$6,900). The name of our project is "Communication is Key." We used the funds for a school information system, called FACTS. This system has been used to increase communication with our families and participation in the ministry of CCA.

Submitted by Jenean Cherney, Interim Principal and Kindergarten teacher

Martin Luther High School, Northrop



The TAG grant (\$14,000) at Martin Luther High School was used for generating a JESUS Generation-Spanish Enrichment program.

Specifically, the grant money is being used to pay the salary and supplement the travel expenses of Senora Veronica Balderas, who teaches Spanish, and to provide Christian materials for the students. Public-school funding was used for textbooks, but it would not cover anything religious.

We took advantage of the wonderful resources of Concordia Publishing House and purchased “La Historia de Jesus” (“My Stories about Jesus”) for each student to keep, and the following books for classroom use: 25 “Cien Historia Biblicas” (“One Hundred Bible Stories”) as well as the companion activity book and bilingual edition for the teacher; “Las Preguntas de la Vida, Las Respuestas de Dios” (“Life’s Big Questions, God’s Big Answers”); and “La Vida de Jesus: Pasion” (“The Life of Jesus: Passion”). In each book we placed a sticker that states:

This book was provided to you by the “To All Generations” Grant of the MN South Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod via Martin Luther Jr/ Sr High School. GO AND TELL OTHERS ABOUT JESUS!

Our goal is to help students become more

familiar with Hispanic culture and the Spanish language so they will be prepared to witness. The mission statement of Martin Luther High School is “preparing students for discipleship until Christ’s return.” The mission statement of the LMCS reads, “In grateful response to God’s grace and empowered by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacraments, the mission of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is vigorously to make known the love of Christ by word and deed within our churches, communities and the world.”

Understanding, familiarity and compassion prepares hearts for ministry. Senora Balderas has the heart for ministry and the skills to introduce young children to an unfamiliar culture. Along with Martin Luther school, she teaches Spanish for grades 7-8 at St. Paul Lutheran School, Fairmont and St. Paul’s Lutheran School, Truman.

When we originally applied for the grant, Martin Luther did not have grades 7-8. Since that time, we have added those grades to our campus — all by the grace of God. In the long term, students could end up with six to eight years of Spanish training rather than two or three. This immersion will better prepare them for mission work and to interact with their Hispanic neighbors.

Submitted by Marge Thiesse, Director of Development and Recruitment

Pictured are, from left (front row) Samuel Marroquin Balderas, Cedar Bohlsen, Veronica Balderas (teacher), Hailey Simpson, Vienna Thompson; (back row) Noah Johnson, John Henry IV, Levi Stevens, Caleb Meyer, Ashley Burkey and Kate Kolbe.

Hope Lutheran School, Winona

Hope Lutheran High School used the grant (\$9,484) primarily to promote specific activities and outreach opportunities at our school to help make Christian education and our mission visible to the community and world.

The school has 10 association congregations involved with providing information about events hosted by their churches and schools, some of which were in conjunction with our own activities. We worked together to promote our Lutheran schools in the newspaper and on the radio and internet.

With the use of this grant, our enrollment has nearly tripled in three years. Other factors that contributed to this increase were COVID and moving into a new building. However, with more visibility and increased ability to promote a Christ-centered education through the TAG grant, we have been able to make a concerted effort and have a greater impact on reaching more souls for Christ.



From left, Emmanuel Adu-Twum, James Apam, Rocky Sandcork, Russert Kyei, Naa Addy and Divine Sambian.

Our international student program has also grown significantly, and being able to promote this through advertising has made our school more visible and accessible worldwide. Our students from Ghana are making a presentation to our

association congregations on how God led them to Hope Lutheran School in southeastern Minnesota, while sharing about their culture and their families.

Submitted by Rocky Sandcork, Principal/Teacher/Activities Director

Redeemer Christian Academy, Wayzata



Redeemer Christian Academy, similar to many other Lutheran schools, was blessed with tremendous growth following the pandemic. For a variety of reasons in 2020, new families were looking for a safe haven for their children and Redeemer was able to keep their doors open for them and share the Gospel with every student, returning and new.

As inquiries and applications increased throughout the year, it became clear we had a decision to make about the

future direction of Redeemer. Through much prayer and conversation, God continued to open doors that allowed us to start an additional kindergarten classroom which would accommodate both the inquiring kindergarten students and many of their siblings.

Receiving the TAG grant (\$15,000) was a blessing that allowed us to fully furnish an additional kindergarten classroom, fill it with manipulatives and curriculum, and staff it with a called teacher who has diligently shared the Gospel with the students daily. With this grant, we ordered tables, chairs, cubbies, storage, toys, learning manipulatives, additional curriculum, classroom decorations and many other one-time expenses that make starting a new classroom so difficult. This allowed us to properly budget for the year and be good stewards of the gifts with which God was blessing us.

Our mission is to equip students for their journey on the road through this life to eternal life with teachings for a lifetime. This begins with our youngest students as the Gospel is instilled in their hearts and shared in their homes. We are committed to excellent Christian education that is making disciples for life!

Submitted by Natalie Raabe, Principal

Trinity First Lutheran School, Minneapolis

Trinity First Lutheran School, Minneapolis, used the TAG grant (\$3,595) for the “Telling the Story” biblical literacy project. Funds were used to purchase Bible curriculum for our day school; videos that highlighted the information found in the book, “The Story,” for our chapel; and resources for an adult Bible study centered on “The Chosen” streaming series.

Our school community comes from different backgrounds and belief systems. Roughly half of our school families are connected with a church. A number of our students and families do not know basic accounts of the Bible. How can anyone believe if they have not heard? We desire for all our students and families to know the Bible — and especially know about Jesus.

We used this grant to help update our Bible curriculum to help our students dive into the Scriptures. We also used “The Story” and “The Chosen” resources to lead students and their parents to view Scripture in a mode that can speak to people of all backgrounds.

Trinity First has seen a considerable difference in student understanding of Bible stories as well as some of the overarching themes. Even our youngest students have memorized numerous Bible verses. They know our chapel litany by heart as they speak the truth: “I am a child of God.”

Students in grades 4-8 know the words of 2 Tim. 3:16-17 by heart. Moreover, they can state the narrative of Scripture through the Old Testament, and can clearly identify examples of God’s faithfulness, human rebellion and God’s rescue plan for all of humanity.

Parents are also growing in their interest in Scripture. Our parent Bible studies are growing in attendance, with a few first-time attendees each session. “The Chosen” videos have allowed



Third-grade students watch a video during chapel

us to use closed captions in different languages to aid some of our parents who do not know English as well. Some parents are even re-watching episodes at home with their families and beginning to pray regularly for the first time.

In December, a student was having a hard morning, struggling with things at home. A teacher took a moment to check in with her. At the end of the meeting, the teacher asked if they could pray. During that prayer time, the student prayed that her mom would start believing in Jesus and what He actually taught. In an answer to prayer, the student’s mother came to the next Bible study, the first this parent has ever attended.

On this particular evening, we watched an episode of “The Chosen” that recounted Jesus healing a paralytic who was let down through a roof by his friends (Matt. 5:17-39). Watching the episode, the parent’s eyes filled with tears. She shared that she had never had such a tangible view of Jesus’ love for people. She left saying, “I have to make time to watch this series with my daughter and read the Bible together.” We pray that the Holy Spirit would continue His amazing work of transformation in this parent’s life!

Submitted by Rev. Jon Kuehne, Campus Pastor

Empowering parents with school choice



As public education in Minnesota and across the nation continues to show significant disregard for the God-given authority of parents in the educational lives of their children, as well as indoctrinate children in the divisive and inappropriate educational concepts of “woke” and anti-Christian ideology, the Minnesota South and North districts have joined with our public policy partners in the Opportunity for All Kids Coalition (OAK) to create a coordinated campaign designed to inform and empower parents across the state.

To that end, *To All Generations* funds were used to host a gathering of parents, politicians and community advocacy groups in Mankato on June 4 to:

- Inform attendees about the concept of Education Savings Accounts
- Begin to influence public opinion on the issue by raising the profile of parental empowerment as a factor in the then-coming 2022 elections.

To advance these goals, we enlisted the services of a public affairs organization specializing in the use of social media as well as other like-minded public policy organizations, both to educate the general public on the issue and to invite them to consider attending our gathering and supporting our OAK efforts more broadly.

It was a successful effort, both as a

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The best Valentine

By Wendy Sjoblom
VP of Communications
LWML Minnesota South District

As you are all familiar, February is usually chilly and dark in Minnesota. In the middle of the month we have a holiday that focuses on love, which gives many people a warm, fuzzy feeling.

Through most of my single life, I found Valentine’s Day to be cold and lonely. It always reminded me of the life and relationships I longed for — being a wife and a mother. Unfortunately, I had lost sight of the most important love of my life, the One who loves me the most.

When I started teaching at Sonshine Preschool, I found some great Christian-themed Valentine’s crafts to make with my students. It was while planning these lessons that I was reminded of the best Valentine I could ever have — God. It was humbling to be reminded that God loved me so much that He sent His only Son to die for my sins and save me from an eternity of death, separated from Him. This year I will celebrate Valentine’s Day with my husband and newborn son, and we will be reminded of God’s great love for us, His Son Jesus Christ.



If you’ve lost sight of the best Valentine, or the love in your life, remember:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. JOHN 3:16

CHOICE

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7)

free-standing event as well as in bringing together interest groups that had not previously worked together. These include both groups of parents wishing to leave the public system in favor of a religious school, as well as those wishing to stay in public education but enact real reform to the system. This has proven to be a great benefit to our parent empowerment effort, which despite an election outcome that was disappointing on the surface, nevertheless has catalyzed a newly energetic and broad coalition to carry our educational

choice program forward in the current legislative session. Specifically, this new energy has allowed OAK to hire a new full-time executive director and has allowed us to introduce a new Education Savings Account bill into the 2022 Minnesota legislature.

These developments point to a bright future for school choice in Minnesota and, while owing to the efforts of many in our OAK coalition, are also due in no small part to the efforts made possible by the Minnesota districts through the TAG grant program. And for that we say, “To God all praise and glory!”

Congregation mission receipts

For the period ending
Dec. 31, 2022 (unaudited)

Actual receipts.....\$255,934
Budget receipts\$170,848
Over (under) amount\$85,086

Year-to-date receipts

Actual receipts.....\$2,091,623
Budget receipts\$2,050,000
Over (under) anticipated amount.....\$41,623

Use of mission receipts (year to date)

50% designated to district and Synod ..\$1,624,290
100% designated to district operations ...\$396,694
100% designated for Synod operations\$70,639
Total receipts\$2,091,623

Mission receipts—2022 vs. 2021

Mission receipts — YTD 2022\$2,091,623
Mission receipts — YTD 2021\$2,289,967
Over (under) last year(\$198,344)

2022 congregational receipts budgeted at \$2,050,000 (does not include designated to Synod operations)

MINNESOTA SOUTH DISTRICT LCEF

November 2022

New investments.....\$2,136,413
Withdrawals.....\$1,476,930
Net increase (decrease).....\$659,483

Year-to-date July 1, 2022–Nov. 30, 2022

New investments.....\$7,090,612
Withdrawals.....\$7,516,768
Net increase (decrease).....(\$426,156)



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