



DISTRICT NEWS

MINNESOTA SOUTH

Through my window

In the face of decline

There is something about the cold, dark tundra that gets to you in January. You can feel it in your bones and in your mood sometimes. Seasonal Affective Disorder they call it. Quite an acronym there — SAD! That is how I feel today with the decline in membership of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod on my mind.



Rev. Dr. Dean Nadasdy
District President

The decline begins close to home. The Minnesota South District dropped from 127,679 baptized members in 2010 to 116,277 in 2016. That is a decline of 9 percent in just six years. With the planting of new churches, we have been able to maintain the number of congregations in the district. Yet increasingly we see churches struggling to make it. In the Minnesota South District, 25 percent of our churches now worship less than 50.

At the synodical level, across 35 districts nationally, membership dropped from 2,780,000 million in 1970 to 2,280,000 million in 2010. That's a decline of 500,000 in 40 years. Some projections expect another decline of 500,000 in just the next 10 to 15 years.



We are not alone. Far more severe are the losses in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). In 1987, the ECLA had 5,288,230 members. In 2013, the membership was 3,863,133, a decline of 27 percent.

While the number of Roman Catholics in America has increased 43 percent since 1970, due largely to the increase in the Hispanic population, we in the LCMS are down 18 percent.

Is it getting colder and darker in here? Meanwhile, the non-Christian Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses claim increases of 218 percent and 254 percent, respectively, since 1970. The Assemblies of God claims an increase since 1970 of 396 percent. Yet in recent years, even the Southern Baptists have begun to decline.

Truthfully, Christianity is in decline in

the United States of America. It is that simple and that SAD.

So what shall we do? Laments come easy. Excuses do too. Sure, it's the lower birth rate, but it is so much more than that. The decline speaks to every Christian in America who has never invited an unchurched friend or relative to worship with them. The decline speaks to every pastor who fails to put himself in secular settings where he can begin a relationship with a non-Christian.

It speaks to congregations that are not known for mercy and service and are unknown to their community because they don't look for feet to wash.

The decline speaks to every church which cannot recall a single new minis-

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Engaging in the mission of God

Short-term mission trips help bring vitality to congregations



By Rev. Dr. William Utech
Assistant to the President for Missions

In Acts 1:8 our Lord tells His disciples: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

In other words, Jesus calls us to be His witnesses in many and varied locales, ranging from right next door to far, far away. Why would He do this?

The primary reason, of course, would be because Jesus wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. As He sends His disciples out to be His witnesses, that is exactly what happens. People are saved and come to know and believe in Him as the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Another reason Jesus sends us to all these different places is because He knows and understands our fallen human nature better than we do. He knows that what is “familiar” and “predictable” can easily become what is “invisible” and “ignored.” In other words, if we live in one location long enough, we can become so used to it that we cease to see what’s really going on there and who our neighbors really are.

This over-familiarity with our immediate surroundings usually brings with it the unintended consequence of stunting our Christian witness to and for the people who live around us in our own particular Jerusalem or Judea or Samaria. We assume we know all about them, we as-

sume we know how many of them there are and we assume that if they wanted or needed to know about Jesus, they’d already be members of our church!

One very effective way to break out of these comfortable (and often wrong) assumptions, however, is by intentionally becoming engaged in God’s mission, not only in our own particular Jerusalem or Judea or Samaria, but also “to the ends of the earth!” This is exactly what our Minnesota South District’s “Get To Know Your Mission Trips” have been doing for our rural and small-town pastors and lay leaders for three years now.

Partnering with the Central American Lutheran Mission Society (CALMS), we, as a district, have been annually sending eight pastors and congregational leaders to Central America in order to help them rediscover how to be missionaries. By learning about new cultures and new people groups and how we might bring the Gospel to them in ways that they can actually see and hear, we also, in the process, learn again how to do the exact same thing in our home communities and contexts.

Going “to the ends of the earth” re-opens our eyes, our ears and our hearts. It renews our faith in the One who died and rose from the dead, not only for us, but for all people. It rekindles our sanctified sense of being sent by Him to the least, the last, the lonely and the lost. It reinvigorates our atrophied missionary muscles. It reengages us in the mission of God!

From left, Tim Rank, Rev. Jim King, Rev. Dr. William Utech, Rev. Dr. Steve Hughey (CALMS), Rev. Dr. Scott Fiege, Rev. Ty Zucker, Jeff Zumhofe, Norm Kopp, Jeremy McDonnell and Rev. Wayne Bernau in Antigua.

The reason for sponsoring these kinds of international missionary experiences is simple and straightforward: As pastors and congregations become more involved and invested in the Mission of God “to the ends of the earth,” they will make an eternal difference in the lives of the people there, *and* their Christian witness in their own particular Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria will also be strengthened and enhanced.

The Rev. Wayne Bernau, pastor of Immanuel, Courtland, agrees with this.

“Reaching out to others on a mission trip helps us to be better prepared to share the message of the Lord and His Gospel where it is also much needed — right here at home,” he says.

We here in the Minnesota South District have made it our mission to cultivate leaders intentionally engaged in the mission of God. We do this because we know that “as the leaders go, so goes the church.” So if you would like to see new levels of health and vitality in your congregation, then encouraging your pastor and leaders to go on a short-term mission trip is a great way to begin! Your church and your community will be blessed and changed for the better.

Shopping for greeting cards?

Terrific option exists near Twin Cities

Since 2009, a group of women from Berea Lutheran Church, Richfield, has been recycling greeting cards and selling them with the proceeds going toward LWML mites. Over the past seven years, the Berea women have contributed nearly \$2,500 toward LWML mission grants.

This small group with a big heart bears the unofficial title “LWML Card Crafters” and now numbers six women. At this point, none of the women are active in an official society since they moved to inactive status this past year, yet all enjoy coming together in His name to enjoy the camaraderie and joy in creating something new out of what otherwise would have been thrown out, along with their appreciation for the opportunity to contribute to the Lord’s mission.

Berea’s members and friends donate their unwanted greeting cards, leaving no want for material. Additional needed supplies are paid for out of Berea’s Women’s Ministry budget or are donated



ed by supporters. Cards that cannot be used for various reasons are put in the city recycling pool. All recycled cards contain Scripture verses and an LWML logo on the reverse side. The cards generally sell for 50 cents each; some specialty cards sell for \$1 or \$2.

Whenever you happen to be in the

Twin Cities/Richfield area during Berea’s office hours, the card rack is always available for shopping. Berea is located at 7538 Emerson Ave. South, Richfield, MN 55423; the phone number is 612-861-7121. Office hours are from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., Monday through Thursday.

eNews for you

Does the article on this LWML page look familiar? If not, then you’re probably missing out on our new monthly eNews!

Special thanks to Roxanne Pieper — our eNews editor — for writing the articles!



Send your stories to Roxanne at enewseditor@mnskwml.org if you want them included in one of our upcoming issues!

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DISTRICT OFFICE

- ▶ 14301 Grand Ave. South Burnsville, MN 55306
- ▶ 952-435-2550
- ▶ mnsdistrict.org

Congregation mission receipts

For the period ending Nov. 30, 2016

Actual receipts	\$143,447
Budget receipts	\$210,000
Over (under) amount	\$(66,553)

Year-to-date receipts

Actual receipts	\$2,015,309
Budget receipts	\$2,310,000
Over (under) anticipated amount	\$(294,691)

Use of mission receipts (YTD-year to date)

50% remitted to Synod (YTD)	\$821,524
100% remitted to Synod (YTD)	\$30,660
50% for district operations (YTD)	\$821,524
100% for district operations (YTD)	\$341,601
Total receipts	\$2,015,309

Mission receipts—2016 vs. 2015

Mission receipts — YTD 2016	\$2,015,309
Mission receipts — YTD 2015	\$2,087,005
Over (under) last year	\$(71,696)

2016 congregational receipts budgeted at \$2,520,000

MINNESOTA SOUTH DISTRICT LCEF

October 2016

New investments	\$885,931
Withdrawals	\$1,699,585
Net increase (decrease)	\$(813,654)

Year-to-date July 1, 2016–Oct. 31, 2016

New investments	\$3,712,065
Withdrawals	\$5,072,931
Net increase (decrease)	\$(1,360,866)

Feeding the hungry — in Jesus' name

Vitamins, veggies, soy and rice: Four simple ingredients that, when put together, become meals that mean the difference between life and death for hungry children around the world.

Members of Minnesota South District congregations had an opportunity to pack these meals at the first district-wide service project through Feed My Starving Children (FMSC) in November. About 2,500 volunteers packed 681,888 meals, which will feed 1,868 children one meal each day for an entire year. Thank you to all who made this possible with their giving of time and dollars, especially to Lutheran Church Extension Fund for its sponsorship.



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try begun in the last 10 years.

It speaks to many pastors who cannot see the doors God has opened for ministry outside the walls of their churches.

It speaks to apathy, convenience, deference, consumerism and self-absorption.

In the face of decline, we must repent. It starts there. Lord, have mercy. True repentance will show itself to be real. We will plant new churches. We will train laity as evangelists. We will begin new ministries of service in our communities. One by one, we will place ourselves intentionally with pre-Christians.

We will volunteer in the community.

We will train pastors in the fine art of building relationships. We will provide a warm welcome to those who visit our churches. We will hear sermons rooted in the Word and pointing to Christ with clear application for our lives.

Another way to look at all of this, as Christianity declines in America, is to say, "Look! Our mission field is only getting larger! What an opportunity!" On a cold, dark day in January, I invite you to affirm with me that Jesus Christ is still the light of the world (John 8:12), and so are we (Matt. 5:14)!

Well, look at that. I think it's getting brighter!



Send submissions for the district supplement to:

Billy Schultz

- billy.schultz@mnsdistrict.org
- 14301 Grand Ave. South Burnsville, MN 55306-5707

Photos sent by email should be in high resolution, at least 300 dpi.

Celebrating five years

Congratulations to Jocelyn Polley, who is celebrating five years on staff with the Minnesota South District and LCEF. Since November 2011, Jocelyn has served in a creative role, designing publications,

promotional pieces and the website for LCEF upper mid-west districts, including Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota and Wisconsin. In addition, she serves as webmaster for the Minnesota South District.

