



THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

# Minnesota South District

*...developing leaders intentionally engaged in the mission of God*

May 30, 2019

***[Jesus said]<sup>8</sup>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.”<sup>9</sup>And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.  
(Acts 1.8-9)***

Dear Brothers in Christ,

A blessed Ascension Day to you! Before our Lord ascended into Heaven, He promised His disciples He would not leave them as orphans (John 14:18). He promised to send them the gift of the Holy Spirit, who would give them power to be His witnesses to the end of the earth.

Pentecost is just around the corner. But lest we be too hasty, it is good to revel in the Ascension of our Lord. We’ve come through Lent, kept watch during Holy Week, wept as our Lord hung upon the cross, and exalted in His Easter resurrection. And now we stand among the apostles to glimpse the culmination of the whole saga of our salvation as Jesus completes his earthly ministry and ascends up on high in glorious triumph over sin, death, and the devil.

In the hurried lives we live, pausing to take in the awe of Ascension Day is done best together in community. But this festival day is often a mere blip on the radar of our lives. As pastors, we come off the intensity of the Lenten season and then the emotional high of Easter Sunday services a bit drained. Sometimes, the effort of gathering the congregation together for yet another midweek (Thursday) service seems more laborious than rewarding. Yet on this day, it’s good to recall and celebrate what Jesus accomplished for you and your flock—how all authority has been given to Him as He sits exalted at the right hand of the Father. Scripture makes clear that remembrance is best done together: <sup>24</sup>“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup>not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” (Heb. 10:24-25).

This “togetherness” of the Christian community is important for every worshipping congregation in our age of rampant individualism, but it’s absolutely essential for pastors. It’s crucial that you are in community with brother pastors. As I have experienced and witnessed many times during my years in ministry, there’s a devastating loneliness that plagues many pastors. Some even call it a loneliness epidemic. It is a sinister tactic of the evil one to drive pastors to despair, to forsake their calling, effectively giving up on the Holy Christian Church and the communion of saints.

Brothers, I want you to know that you are not alone. First, our Lord Christ has baptismally sent His Holy Spirit to comfort you and encourage you—Jesus has not left you as orphans. Even more, Jesus Himself comes to you with His very own body and blood to soothe all loneliness, thwart temptation, lift the sin that oppresses you, and cleanse all defilement that presses down upon your soul. Second, the Lord places His Word on the lips of your brothers in office to bring you the consolation of the Gospel, even as you are sent to bring that same comfort to the people you serve. Finally, I am here to speak Christ’s freeing Word to you and come alongside you as bishop and pastor.

Our Lutheran theology is Gospel-rich, and it’s meant for you, dear brother:

We will now return to the Gospel, which does not give us counsel and aid against sin in only one way. God is superabundantly generous in his grace: First through the spoken Word, by which the forgiveness of sins is preached in the whole world (Luke 14:45-47). This is the particular office of the Gospel. 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) and other such verses (especially Rom. 1:12).

*Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article IV. Of the Gospel.  
(Reader's edition)*

Therefore, brothers, I urge you to support one another, especially in your Winkels. I realize that some circuits take a summer break, but I urge you to make meeting together a top priority. These days, we need each other more than ever. Your circuit meetings not only provide helpful continuing education and fraternal rigorous theological discussion; they serve a truly essential role in our convoluted times. Your Winkels are your opportunity to build each other up, care for each other, and console one another with the Gospel. (This includes retired pastors as well as any part-time, pulpit supply, or bi-vocational pastors—all should be welcomed, cared for, and loved in Christ's name).

I urge you, brothers, attend them regularly. I've enlisted your circuit visitor to request your attendance and help you see the value and benefit of the circuit gathering (ensuring it is worth your while) so you can benefit from the fellowship it provides. If there are any serious differences among you, I'm happy to attend personally to help facilitate a collegial reconciliation rooted in our common doctrine and foster the fraternal joy of the unity we have in the Gospel. If we cannot commune together, we should have the fortitude to reason together and address our differences openly as brothers rather than stay away and suffocate in loneliness or fall prey to Satan's temptation “to deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice” (*Small Catechism*, The Sixth Petition).

These are trying times. But you are not alone. We have each other, and we have our risen, now-ascended Lord. Christ Jesus has promised His abiding presence within the brotherly fellowship of His fellow servants—stewards of His sacred mysteries, one and all. Know that your district president understands the shoes you wear and the burdens you bear (loneliness included). My prayer is that the Lord continues to lead us forward united in faith and fervent in love.

Your brother in Christ,



Rev. Dr. Lucas V. Woodford