



Engaged in Mission

magazine

SPRING 2020



Stories about God’s people intentionally engaged in loving the Lord, people, and our Lutheran theology to make disciples of all nations in the Minnesota South District and beyond.

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COVER IMAGE

Students from nine grade schools engage in worship led by Concordia Academy students as part of their 2020 National Lutheran Schools Week celebration.

Photo courtesy Concordia Academy

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Cultivating the next generation of Christian leaders

by Lucas Woodford

From generation to generation, the Church stands upon the truth of Jesus Christ and His shed blood for us. To find our voice and speak clearly to the people living in these chaotic and confusing times—especially the next generation of Christians—we must listen to the truth of God’s Word and hear the incredible love story of how God has adorned His Church to be the bride of Christ, and especially to how He equips us to pass on that faith and raise up the next generation of Christian leaders.

Now, as ever, faithful Christians must be intentional about teaching our children and young adults what it means to be a man or woman of faith for our times. More specifically, we must be ready to equip and teach the next generation what it means to be a godly woman, a godly wife, and a godly mother, as well as a godly man, a godly husband, and a godly father.

Together as fellow redeemed, it’s good for us to be passionately for something, not simply against something—against this sin or that sin—but rather for strong men and women of faith; for faithful husbands and fathers, wives and mothers; for strong Christian leaders and workers; for compassionate care of our neighbors; and for bold witness and confession of Christ the crucified.

“IT’S IMPORTANT FOR US TO BE INTENTIONAL ABOUT CULTIVATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF CHRISTIAN LEADERS TO LIVE OUT THEIR FAITH CONFIDENTLY IN THEIR DAILY VOCATIONS.”

We are story-bound people full of the Good News of Jesus Christ. From His incarnation and birth, to His ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension, we are wrapped into the powerful story of He who is “the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). We want to tell the world about this Good News—about how the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting shape what it means to live as a family, as faithful Christians, in His grace, with His love, at this time, in this place, with Him for all eternity.

The best place to start doing this, of course, is in your family, in your parochial school, and in your congregation. Then, we can expand and go out from there into our communities, places of work, and even into the public square.

As we do so, it’s important for us to be intentional about cultivating the next generation of Christian leaders to live out their faith confidently in their daily vocations—namely, those daily stations of life in their families, schools, communities, congregations, and even in their own maleness and femaleness—beginning from the time they are little and encouraging them all along the way. As Proverbs reminds us:

“Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

Of course, teaching the faith to our young people is more than merely giving them information about the Bible or telling them about Jesus. It includes ritually forming them by the living Word of God and molding them with the yearly rhythm of the Holy Christian Church lived out in the liturgical calendar and weekly Divine Service, where they actually receive Jesus again and again.

As we form them in the faith, this also means we are willing to take an intentional, active interest in how we can encourage and equip our young people for thoughtful and informed service to God, family, and neighbor. Here, we do well to be deliberate about collaborating with other families, congregations, parochial schools, and fellow Christians in any number of creative and faithful ways to cultivate a robust devotional faith life of our young people, along with a corresponding sanctified impulse to serve others in the name of Jesus.

Our desire is to cultivate that next generation of Christians who will then go on to lead the way in passing on the faith to the generation after them. The stories in this edition look at a few ministries in the MN South District that are

intentionally cultivating the next generation of Christian leaders, as well as those continued collaborative efforts that are being engaged in for the building up of the body of believers.

From parochial schools, parent education, afterschool programs, campus ministries, mission formation teams, to the Synod’s recent survey and study results on our young people, this issue of *Engaged in Mission* will highlight the labor of love that these ministries endeavor to uphold, especially among the next generation of Christians. As you read these articles, join me in celebrating the wonderful work being done in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.



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Rev. Dr. Lucas Woodford is president of the MN South District. View his latest blog posts and what he’s reading at mnsdistrict.org/presidents-office. Email him at lucas.woodford@mnsdistrict.org.



A life-giving river

Raising up young leaders through CSP Ministry

by Shelly Schwalm

I think Jesus would love campus ministry. Have you ever thought about how the strategy to save the world by the God-in-flesh (you know, other than His own death and resurrection) was the raising up and sending out of young adults? Campus ministry feels like an echo of the years Jesus spent with a dozen young disciples, sharing meals, adventures, study, relationship. This life spent together was how Jesus chose to prepare the ones who would carry on the Church from the empty tomb forward. At Concordia University, St. Paul, CSP Ministry seeks to capitalize on the similarities of context—to raise up leaders through life together.

To be sure, it's very apparent we must do this out of necessity to make daily ministry happen. A congregation feels like a lake, stocked with leaders raised up for the long haul. Many of these leaders can and do serve congregations and communities for decades. College ministry is much more like a river. Just when leaders are beginning to get their footing, they are sent out and we start over in raising up new ones. A congregation cannot function without lay leaders, and a college ministry cannot function without student leaders. These are the hands by which God serves His children, and we need all the hands we can get.

There are times when leaders come to us. That was the story of Sam. He came to CSP as a transfer student with a little more life experience. He had an idea to start a group on campus for guys to have fellowship, study, and watch Monday night football. We said, "Go for it," and a few years later, Cornerstone Men's Ministry is still thriving and an important part of how guys on our campus find Christian community and challenge one another to grow and lead as men of God. This, in turn, also spurred on the women of campus to start a group on Monday evenings with similar purpose and fruit.

Both of these groups came from students' ideas that we said, "Yes!" to. Part of the freedom of the river ministry mentality is that things are often changing along with the students that are with us. While we have lots of pieces of ministry that stay the same, the perpetual motion of school years and student turnover gives us freedom to try things and keep trying things. We get to offer students a place to try out their ideas, their leadership in chapel or ministry groups, and their leadership in ministry to their peers—we give them a safe place to fail and grow, as well as coaching for the process. Young Christian leaders need to see and experience the Church's openness to their creativity and energy even as the Church comes alongside them with the wisdom to complement these contributions.

As much as we love leaders who come forward with ideas, a lot of the time it's not so convenient. Raising up leaders means paying attention. Who is a natural incluser and inviter? Who is someone that people gravitate toward and listen to? Who leans in to learn more and is hungry to be mentored? Who are the students who are dependable and their character looks like that of Christ? Who has a specific skill set that just needs an opportunity? These are the students we are on the lookout for.

"Have you ever thought about..." is a phrase that has changed lives and our ministry. An

invitation from a church worker or leader to a younger or less connected leader is transformational. I think of Madi, who was a quiet and shy freshman. Her sophomore year, serving in a Peer Ministry role, she took in everything she could about how to connect to her fellow classmates. Week after week at Wednesday night chapel, she had a growing row of people who were there simply because she invited them. Then, we invited her to be a student co-leader in hosting the Beautiful Feet Mission Conference, and she blossomed.

To notice a young person and give them a chance may be opening a door for a lifetime of ministry and service that they could never visualize for themselves. Every single one of our church work students could tell you a story of someone in their life who asked, "Have you ever thought about ministry?" We have to be on the lookout for the gifts of our young people and be willing to name them and invite them to be used.

As the river of campus ministry keeps rolling, we must always be on the lookout for new leaders. This means constantly asking our student leaders, "Who are you inviting along in your role?" and "Who are you teaching to do what you do?" We use the leadership square from the 3DM movement to visually grasp how each leader holds the responsibility to pass the mantle of ministry on to others. It is our prayer through this that a wider pool of students gets extended invitations.

Student leaders are very aware that a ministry that is not handed off well will likely die. Sometimes, this isn't a bad thing. It may make room for a new student's idea to spring up. Most often, though, it is a gift for leaders to remember that we are simply one piece of the process—whether to plant, to water, or to harvest (1 Corinthians 3:6-7). If we hold ministry too tightly, unwilling to pass it off, we ensure a premature death. Jesus started His ministry with plans for its continuance beyond Him and so should we.

It is sometimes overwhelming for CSP Campus Pastor Tom Gundermann and me to consider how much of a thumbprint we get to make on future and current leaders of the Church, simply by having them as part of ministry at CSP. We pray they receive some healthy rhythms and culture to take with them and the wisdom and humility to keep growing.

It is our heart that leaders formed at CSP would never outgrow their following of Jesus and their need for His grace. It is our heart that leaders would mature not to seek out roles of power but as foot-washers. As pastor Kevin Queen has said, "When we meet Jesus, he won't say, 'Well done good and faithful leader.'" We pray these leaders would be drawn to ministry through a calling of service. It is our heart that they would be sent out with joy, creativity, and experience that is a blessing inside and outside of congregations for the purpose of furthering the kingdom of God. It is our heart that, like it was said of the original disciples, it would be evident that they spent time with Jesus.

May we embrace young Christian leaders' energy and offer our wisdom generously as we realize over and over: We can't continue the mission without them.

"YOUNG CHRISTIAN LEADERS NEED TO SEE AND EXPERIENCE THE CHURCH'S OPENNESS TO THEIR CREATIVITY AND ENERGY –EVEN AS THE CHURCH COMES ALONGSIDE THEM WITH THE WISDOM TO COMPLEMENT THESE CONTRIBUTIONS."



DCE Shelly Schwalm is part of the CSP Ministry team, serving as University Ministry Associate. Email her at schwalm@csp.edu.

Your mission gifts at work

We invite you to use this list in your personal and corporate prayers, that these leaders would be strengthened in their efforts to reach people with the good news of Jesus.

2020 District-supported missions & outreach

MN South / CALMS Exploratory Trips to Central America

Rev. Dr. William Utech

District Prison Ministry

Dr. James Seemann & Vicar Joshua Miller

Holy Cross & Our Savior Lutheran Churches (Austin & Brownsdale) & East Austin Immigrant Outreach

Pastor Gemechu Olana

LINC Twin Cities

Pastor Ben Griffin & Pastor Demelash Yoseph

New Creation Lutheran Church (Shakopee)

Pastor Craig McCourt & Vicar Jorge Gomez

POBLO (People of the Book Lutheran Outreach)

Nader & Georgette Alaraj, Bloomington

John & Mariam Gayed, Rochester

ReDO / Shepherd of the Valley (Hastings)

Pastor Chad Kirchoff

St. Matthew's & Gloria Dei Lutheran Churches (Columbia Heights & Minneapolis) & NE

Minneapolis Outreach

Vicar Martin Cornes

Sudanese Evangelical Lutheran Mission of Southern Minnesota (Faribault)

Pastor Gatluk Reat

UpWorks Christian Community Development (Minneapolis)

Lisa Peterson

Woodbury Lutheran Church (Liberty Ridge)

Pastor John Kuehne

MN South District LCMS career and GEO missionaries



Rev. Dr. Thomas & Mary Aadland

Theological educator, Kenya



Rev. Vance & Linda Becker

Theological educators, Kenya



Johanna Heidorn

Photographer / communication outreach specialist, Latin America & Carribbean



Kayla Hoem

Communications specialist, Spain



Rev. Dr. Daniel & Dr. Joan Jastram

Asia theological education manager, Asia



Missionaries in their own words

Stories from your District-supported missionaries

“I was invited by Natalie, a member at Bloomington’s Holy Emmanuel Lutheran Church, to the Wednesday dinner and worship evening because she anticipated Ali coming.

“I COME TO CHURCH ... I FEEL PEACE.”

My wife and I met with Ali, who is originally from Iran, as expected. It turns out that his daughter lives a block away from the church, and four years ago, while living with his daughter, Ali and his wife started attending Holy Emmanuel. They felt unnoticed. But because of Natalie’s heart for missions and observing newcomers, she noticed Ali.

After conversing with Ali for some time, he appears to detest being around Islamic religious leaders. He literally said to me in his broken English, ‘Mullas or Imams are liars; I come to church... I feel peace...’ We will continue to meet with Ali and pray for his salvation.”

Nader & Georgette Alaraj, POBLO, Twin Cities

“Sometimes it’s not the initial crisis that is the hardest to overcome, but rather it’s the pitfalls along the way. Jonathan relapsed twice while working with his UpWorks Life Advocates. It’s standard protocol in recovery that a relapse means a participant now needs to leave the treatment program. However, there was still hope for Jonathan, as his Life Advocates continued to walk alongside him, encouraging him and reminding him of his worth.

“JONATHAN’S LIFE ADVOCATES CONTINUED TO WALK ALONGSIDE HIM, ENCOURAGING HIM AND REMINDING HIM OF HIS WORTH.”

An important piece of Jonathan’s recovery is that he understood those pitfalls did not define him or force him into a downward spiral. He credits his Life Advocates with seeing his potential even when he failed. This encouragement has allowed him to pursue and land his dream job! He’s now a gate agent at the Denver International Airport.”

Lisa Peterson, UpWorks, Minneapolis

“This last month we had a week when our sermon on Sunday focused on mental health. There are a lot of lies that our sinful nature and our culture try to push on us.

I was open and honest about some of the mental struggles I’ve had. It wasn’t easy. There was definitely a thought in my mind: ‘What if people think less of me now?’

The opposite happened—praise God!

A number of individuals sought me out to have conversations. None of them were easy, but getting struggles out into the open and connecting them to the love, grace, and mercy of Jesus is a powerful thing. It was a reminder of the power of God in the midst of our weaknesses. Where I am weak, He is strong.”

Pastor Jon Kuehne, Woodbury Lutheran Church, Liberty Ridge Campus

“GETTING STRUGGLES OUT INTO THE OPEN AND CONNECTING THEM TO THE LOVE, GRACE, AND MERCY OF JESUS IS A POWERFUL THING.”



Photo: Concordia Academy

National Lutheran Schools Week

The Gospel-centered work of MN South Lutheran schools

There are 1,950 Lutheran schools—92 of which call the Minnesota South District home. That breaks down to 46 preschools and early learning centers, 41 elementary schools, and 5 high schools. From urban to rural, large to small, new to old, these schools have this in common: They share Jesus’ amazing love with students and their families as they deliver outstanding academic programs. The result is strong Christian alumni ready to engage in leadership within their future schools, communities, congregations, and careers.

The 2020 National Lutheran Schools Week (NLSW) celebration took place nationwide the week of January 26 – February 1. This year’s theme, “Joy:Fully Lutheran,” found inspiration in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24.

Each day of the week focused on different blessings of God through Jesus: grace, joy, thanksgiving, peace, faith, and hope. Daily devotionals, special chapel services, spirit days, community projects, and special guests brought the theme of “Joy:Fully Lutheran” alive for students and teachers alike.

Here’s how two local high schools celebrated NLSW.

Mayer Lutheran High School, Mayer

Under the theme “Joy:Fully Lutheran,” Mayer Lutheran High School (MLHS) hosted Wendysue Fluegge, who shared her musical talents with over 1,100 students from 12 area Lutheran grade schools. Students enjoyed their time worshipping and praising God while learning that they were created in His image to go out and share Jesus with others. What a joy it was to come together and celebrate our life in Christ!

This year’s NLSW theme complemented how Christ’s life, death, and resurrection remain at the center of all MLHS does. Our annual NLSW celebration fits very well with our vision to increase our sphere of influence by maximizing student potential.

Susan Parrish, Director of Alumni Relations

Concordia Academy, Roseville

Concordia Academy (CA) was privileged to host a full-day event to kick off the 2020 National Lutheran Schools Week. Over 750 students from nine Lutheran elementary schools gathered together for a day of worship, fun, and celebration.

The day began with worship and praise music led by CA students. Then the specific theme for the day—“Game On!”—was introduced through a crazy game show called “Win or Suffer!” Students were reminded that we win because Jesus suffered—and died, and rose—for us. The game show theme continued with third through eighth graders (and some teachers, too) participating in “In It to Win It,” “Reverse Charades,” and “Family Feud.” Meanwhile, kindergartners through second graders walked across the street to King of Kings Lutheran School, where they participated in art projects, games, and sectionals led by Miss Sadie the Music Lady and CA’s His People choir.

The entire day was high-energy, loud, and so much fun. We were reminded that we are Joy:Fully loved and Joy:Fully saved as we worshiped, laughed, and celebrated together as Lutheran schools.

Rev. Tim Berner, Principal

Join us in continuing to **pray for** and **celebrate** our 92 Minnesota South District schools as they raise up Joy:Fully Lutheran **leaders**.



Photo: Mayer Lutheran High School



Photos: Trinity First Lutheran School

Passing the mic to tomorrow's church leaders

by Anna Gruen & Anna VanVleet



Trinity First Lutheran School is one of the oldest schools in Minnesota and also the only urban LCMS missional school in the Twin Cities. Our school is located in the Phillips neighborhood of Minneapolis, one of the most diverse neighborhoods in the country. This highly transient community has a wide variety of ever-changing needs, and we often say that our ministry is a reactive one: We seek to fill whichever need presents itself to us in the moment, because we never know how long we have with a student or family.

NEIGHBORHOOD

100+

languages spoken within blocks of our school

4

blocks from the largest **Somali mall** in the US

7

blocks from the **US Bank Stadium**

9

blocks from **Little Earth Native American Community**

What has never changed throughout the 160 years of Trinity First Lutheran School's existence is our call to share the Gospel. Our deepest desire is for our kids to know they are citizens of Heaven and recipients of the great, unimaginable, unconditional love of God. Our hope is that every child who walks through our doors will meet us again in Paradise one day.

Of course, this mission work is best done through relationships. Teachers and staff, pastors and volunteers all work together to love and train these young children. Last spring, one pastor took the time to ask a student, "What kind of eighth grader do you want to be?" The student replied, "I want to be a man of God." His answer, by the grace of God, was surely a testament to all those who have invested time and energy into teaching this young man God's Word and modeling for him the Christian life. These trustworthy relationships are microphones that allow us to speak into the lives of these precious young people.

We have worked hard over the years to create a very specific school culture. We aim to cultivate respect and responsibility, hard work and honesty. We teach students to complete homework, use proper manners, resolve playground issues with friends, keep their hands and bodies to themselves, apologize, and forgive. We use Law and Gospel as we discipline and correct, forgive and restore. Developing these attitudes and disciplines in our students is the beginning of leadership training. When students stand out to people beyond our school walls, it makes others wonder what is different about them. Without knowing it, their conduct is a Spirit-filled microphone speaking to the world.

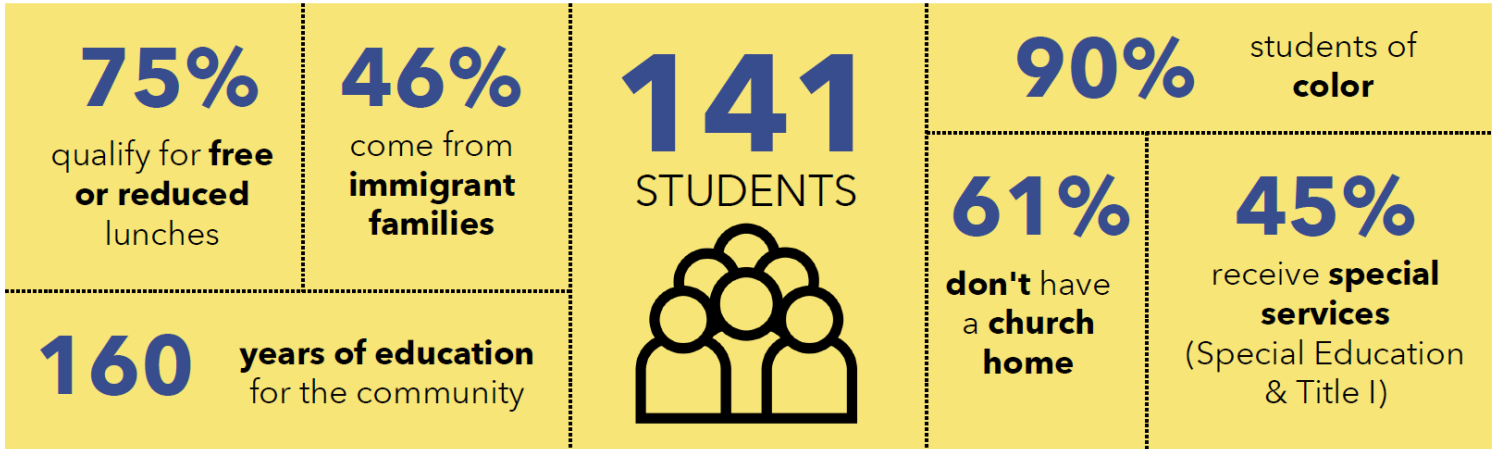
"LEADERSHIP IS FOR EVERYONE IN THE CHURCH ... IT'S INCREDIBLE WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE WILL DO AND SAY WHEN THEY ARE TRAINED IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION AND THEN GIVEN THE MICROPHONE TO SPEAK."





TRINITY FIRST SCHOOL

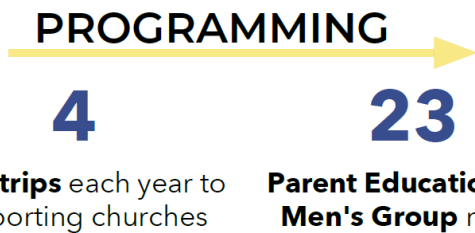
By the Numbers



We also aim to give students opportunities to lead and teach each other. Older students mentor the younger students as chapel buddies and reading buddies at various points in the school year. Two sets of combined classrooms (first and second, seventh and eighth) allow older students to set the standard for the younger students in the same classroom. These relationships are incredibly effective, and when older students lead their younger classmates, the response from both sides is dynamic.

Students are given the microphone, literally, when their class leads chapel or they participate in our student Worship Team. Our spring musical puts every student on a university stage in front of hundreds of people. They are given the opportunity to proclaim on stage God's love, grace, and mercy for all people. These moments are our favorite: when the students preach truth back to us! When students are given the platform and opportunity to lead, *we* are given incredible joy and encouragement.

meeting—it may have been his first time ever! Because someone was willing to lead, this man was given a platform to ask questions, build relationships, and also practice the kind of prayer he saw modeled for him. Since then, this family has returned to their home in China, but we know that God planted seeds while they were here with us.



A couple years ago, our campus pastor started a men's group for school dads. This men's group builds a community for encouragement, accountability, Bible study, and prayer. When our campus pastor suddenly passed away last year, a school dad decided to step up and lead the group. This last fall, a non-Christian dad and his son joined our school, and the men's group jumped at the chance to build a relationship with him and invite him in. About a month after attending the men's group, this new dad volunteered to pray at the



Leadership is for everyone in the church, and we are all commanded to "Go therefore and make disciples ... teaching them..." (Matthew 28:19-20). It's incredible what young people will do and say when they are trained in the right direction and then given the microphone to speak: "Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength" (Psalm 8:2a). And one thing we've learned: the more we speak truth out loud, the more it anchors in our hearts. Let us continue to build authentic relationships with our young people and give them opportunities to speak God's Word and what He has done for them. After all, they are the voice of tomorrow's Church.



Anna Gruen (left) is the educational support coordinator at Trinity First. Anna VanVleet (right) is the ministry support coordinator at Trinity First. To learn more about Trinity First, visit trinityfirstschool.org.





STAMP PROGRAM



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- Children ages 7-18 can earn up to \$50 a year for community service and good grades.
- Help empower ministries in Kingdom work.



Lutheran Church Extension Fund

> where investments build ministry

For more information, call us at 800-843-5233 or visit lcef.org.

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Photo MN South District Communications

RADICAL HOSPITALITY

by Phillip Johnson

Christian congregations are most effective in connecting new people with Christ and bringing current believers to a greater maturity of faith when they are intentionally engaged in joyful and loving actions. These actions aim to selflessly benefit others and create new relationships with people outside the circle of faith.

Experiences that center around extravagant acts of hospitality and service move individuals and whole congregations toward a Christlike attitude. In fact, this is the “formula” that we find consistently advocated in Scripture:

“IF I THEN, YOUR LORD AND TEACHER, HAVE WASHED YOUR FEET, YOU ALSO OUGHT TO WASH ONE ANOTHER’S FEET.”

(JOHN 13:14)

The MN South District cultivates leaders intentionally engaged in the mission of God by providing experiences of radical hospitality and service. Teams of four to six people from multiple congregations across our District have experienced extravagant hospitality and service at the Best Practices for Ministry Conference in Phoenix, Ariz.; the National Rural & Small Town Mission Conference in Bloomington, Minn.; and the Best Practices for Ministry Heartland conference in Carmel, Ind.

In 2019, six congregations applied for District grant dollars to bring a team to one of these three conferences. Each team attended a conference with questions they were hoping to answer or discuss. Leaders were encouraged to connect with and be encouraged by others within The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod who shared similar questions. Ideas were exchanged, shortcomings were expressed, and most left their conference with a reassurance of “you are not alone” echoing in their head and heart.

Pastor Vue Lee from King of Kings Lutheran Church, Roseville, said:

“Two years ago, I attended this conference [Best Practices for Ministry] the first time. I came home with lots of enthusiasm and lots of good ideas. My leaders said, ‘Good! You’re the pastor. You’re supposed to have enthusiasm and good ideas!’ Thanks to the grant, I came home with a team of leaders who had great ideas and enthusiasm for the mission of our Church. Thank you!”

Once again in 2020, the congregation mission formation effort of the MN South District is sponsoring teams of leaders to these leadership development conferences. Teams from Ham Lake, Prior Lake, Lakefield, St. Charles, and Glencoe will come together to learn, explore, and network with others from across the country.

Each team’s goal is to better understand their particular mission field and the unique opportunities they have to serve others in Jesus’ name. In October, all teams will come together for a day of sharing what they learned and how they chose to invest what they gleaned from their time together.

At the recent Best Practices for Ministry Conference in Phoenix, February 20 – 22, I was struck by the radical service of the many students who helped make the conference a success. The conference is held at Christ Lutheran Church & School, with breakout sessions in the school classrooms. So classes were cancelled some of Thursday and all day Friday of the conference. Instead of relishing the time off, many students from Christ Lutheran gave freely of their time to help make the conference a success.

Throughout the day, I watched students help during sessions, give directions, and hand out (an abundance of) free snacks. One sixth-grader stands out in my mind still. She was walking around and handing out free waffles. When I said I didn’t think I should take one, she exclaimed, “Who doesn’t want a waffle?!” Her joy and enthusiasm were contagious and a prime example of how radical hospitality engages even the youngest members of our congregations.

Have you thought about putting together a mission formation team in your congregation? We are planning to extend the granting process into 2021! Watch for information in the weekly District eNews. Together, we can continue cultivating leaders intentionally engaged in the mission of God!



Dr. Phillip Johnson is Assistant to the President for Mission Formation. To learn more about mission formation, visit mnsdistrict.org/missionformation. Email him at phillip.johnson@mnsdistrict.org.



[WHERE WE GO FROM HERE]

by Julianna Shults

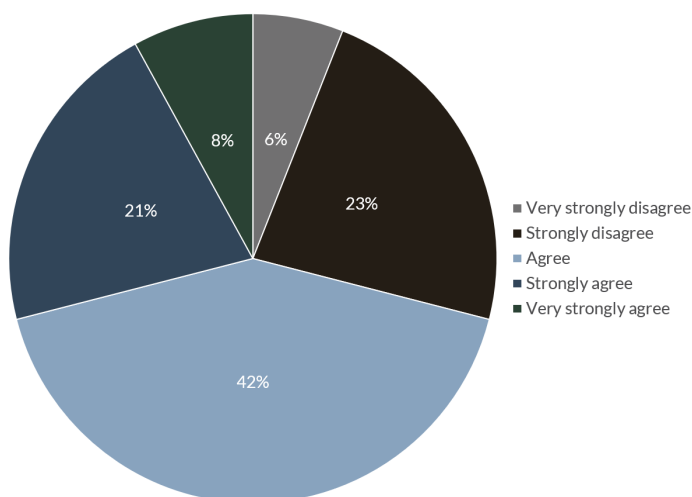


In a 2015 District-wide survey, over 550 MN South District congregational members—from pastor to pew—identified specific concerns affecting their ministry. “Where we go from here” is an ongoing series that helps congregations brainstorm ways to address these specific concerns.

How to engage young people

Many congregations struggle to find ways to help young people make meaningful contributions to their congregation.

This past summer I attended the LCMS National Convention as an exhibitor, sharing information about the Lutheran Young Adult Corps program. As I stood in the booth the first day, I was approached by a tall, young man made even taller by his cowboy hat. I instantly recognized him but was surprised to see him. Hayden had served full-time through Lutheran Young Adult Corps in Baton Rouge and New Orleans for 10 months just a few years previous.



Survey responses to the statement "Our congregation has taken intentional steps to include younger people in our ministry, fellowship, leadership, and decision-making process."

After initial greetings, he let me know that he was serving as his circuit's delegate to the National Convention. He was beaming with pride and was clearly taking his job seriously. Among the many faces that represented our Synod, I was grateful to see a young person just 20 years old confident and ready to help make critical choices for our church body. It's a joy to know his circuit and others desired to empower young leaders in such a powerful way.

LCMS Youth Ministry's recent research found that congregations with a lay leader under 32 had better markers of retention and were more likely to attract young adults. The roles they filled were varied, but all had responsibilities to direct resources, projects, and goals. It isn't surprising that young leaders have a positive impact on their congregations. Young leaders bring vibrancy through their questions and passion. They provide a unique and necessary voice for how to best reach their peers. They serve as role models. By empowering young leaders, we allow children and teens to see what their role in the congregation could be now and in the future.

The Lutheran Young Adult Corps program places young adults into full-time service work in urban areas across the country. As they serve in congregations and community organizations, these young adults gain skills and experience. Supervisors and City Coordinators mentor and guide as they grow into leaders. It's amazing to see how young people's gifts and skills are exposed and nurtured. Over the course

of a summer or a gap year, we see them expand their worldview, grow in confidence, become leaders, and deepen their understanding of faith.

That isn't to say it's easy. There are always issues that arise and failures to be debriefed. Young leaders do not have a wealth of experience, so new circumstances can throw them off track. Some are rash in their desire to see change happen. Others struggle to understand church systems or how to manage their time. Experienced leaders must serve as mentors who give guidance and who ensure they learn through the process. It is only through experience and learning that leaders develop and hone their skills.

If you do not have young people who are able to step into leadership roles, you can still take steps to allow them to give meaningful contribution. In a time of great transitions, they may not be ready or able to step up into leadership. But they can still provide insight and input into decisions. Leaders should take time to ask good questions and listen well to the young people in their congregations. Ask them to review your social media or website for direction on how it could be made easier to navigate. Be sure they have a personal invitation to events but also to voters' meetings. Help them make their voices heard.

One of the most encouraging things we heard in our research was that active young people in the LCMS were incredibly passionate about their church. They hold strong to faithful belief and practice. More than that, they express great love for their congregations and appreciation for the community of believers.

"BY EMPOWERING YOUNG LEADERS, WE ALLOW CHILDREN AND TEENS TO SEE WHAT THEIR ROLE IN THE CONGREGATION COULD BE NOW AND IN THE FUTURE."

Young people in our church want to contribute, not to take over or dismiss history. They want to be servant leaders because they care for their church. Just like you, they want to see young people become disciples of Jesus Christ for life. They want to see ministry be healthy and vibrant. There is no need to fear, but only gain in bringing up young people into service and leadership. May all our congregations find ways to do so.

For more information about our research, check out *Relationships Count* out now through CPH.org or other resources on service and leadership at youthsource.com. For more information about Lutheran Young Adult Corps, you can go to our website: lcms.org/yacorps.



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Upcoming events:

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- 3/6-7/2020** EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS CONFERENCE
@ CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY, ST. PAUL
- 3/7/2020** BUILT ON THE ROCK LEADERSHIP SUMMIT
@ GOOD SHEPHERD, OWATONNA
- 4/4/2020** BUILT ON THE ROCK LEADERSHIP SUMMIT
@ ST. MICHAEL'S, BLOOMINGTON
- 5/11-13/2020** MINNESOTA STATE PASTORS CONFERENCE
@ MADDEN'S ON GULL LAKE, BRAINERD
- 6/19-20/2020** LWML MN SOUTH DISTRICT CONVENTION
@ WILLMAR CONFERENCE CENTER, WILLMAR
- 10/12-13/2020** FALL PASTORS CONFERENCE
@ VERIZON CENTER, MANKATO
- 10/15/2020** MINNESOTA LUTHERAN EDUCATION CONFERENCE
- 1/24-30/2021** NATIONAL LUTHERAN SCHOOLS WEEK
- 6/17-19/2021** MINNESOTA SOUTH DISTRICT CONVENTION
@ CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY, ST. PAUL