

Convention's Over; Three More Years

By Rev. Dan Gilbert, Northern Illinois District President
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Seeing a district convention rapidly fading in the rear-view mirror is a beautiful sight for me. One reason for that is that it's just a whole lot of work and it's really great to have it checked off the To Do List.

Another reason is because a district (or Synod) convention is "like a box of chocolates—you never know what you're going to get," especially in terms of the delegates' conduct, sad to say.

At some conventions I've been to in the past—OK, make that at *many* conventions—some of the delegates didn't exactly display the Fruit of the Spirit. I've heard comments from the floor that were just plain mean, even personal attacks. I've heard sarcasm, bitterness, name calling.

But here's a beautiful thing: there was none of that at NID Convention 2015. None.

Instead, any disagreement was handled without rancor or anger. No, it wasn't perfect; yes, all the delegates were sinners (especially the chairman). But everyone truly behaved in a manner that honored the Lord who always treats us with mercy and kindness.

Looking Ahead

In case you didn't know, this convention was the last one at which I'll be elected. Our district bylaws limit all elected positions to no more than three consecutive terms except for district president who is limited to four. Since I was just elected to a fourth term, this will be my last one.

Knowing that I will be done serving as district president in three years brings a different perspective.

For one thing, I encouraged the delegates (and I encourage each of you) to be praying about a new DP in 2018 and also to talk with each other about this as brothers and sisters—not politicking or campaigning, but rather having conversations and prayers together about thoughts on the new DP.

Being in the last term also is a good time for me, along with good and wise counsel from those around me, to look at what's been working, what's not been working, and what might be good to still implement during my term.

We have several new initiatives to roll out later this year. One is a workshop for "struggling" congregations to help them look at options for their future. There will be information shared and church leader coaching if they are willing to take next steps.

Another is new witness training for the many staff in our district's early childhood programs. They especially have great opportunities for faith conversations with young and often unchurched families, which is an important demographic for New Starts...New Believers.

If you have additional ideas for our mission work together, please email me at president@ni.lcms.org.

A Final Word

It was a good convention. Really good. In fact, I have said and I've heard others say, "This was the best convention, Synod or district, I've ever been to."

Time will tell whether decisions made were good or not so good, and like I wrote above, all the words and conduct of delegates were the words and actions of fallen sinners. So it wasn't perfect.

But certainly the atmosphere of this convention was one that made me say the following as the convention was closing: "I know that pride is a sin, but I hope that in the Lord I can honestly say to you delegates that I am proud of you—not so much you, as the Lord's work within you. Thank you."

One last thought: "fallen sinners." All of us. And put me on the top of that list. (Or is it the bottom? You know what I mean.) Yes, we are.

And we're also saints, holy people of God who have received from the Lord's hands, nailed to the cross, double for all our sins. God sent his Son to save us by his death and resurrection; he sent his prophets and apostles to proclaim and to write his Word of Law and Gospel; he keeps us steadfast in his Word; and he sends us to be the hands, feet and voice of Jesus—both to those who know him and to those who don't yet.

And that grace of God in his Son Jesus is the reason why we want all our words and actions in conventions, meetings, parking lot conversations, interactions with family, friends and neighbors, all we say and do to honor the one who saved us.

Once again, delegates: thank you, and thanks be to God. And thanks to all of you for your prayers.

