



**OUR Northern Illinois District Magazine**  
**February – April, 2018**  
**Partnerships**

Imagine the scene – you’ve heard and read it many times: It’s the dawn of creation. The first two human beings, created perfect and holy by God, are cowering in the bushes, hiding from God and from each other. For the first time ever they feel fear – terror, really. They know they’re going to come under God’s judgement: death. Then they hear God speak the curse on the serpent. Their terror only increases. But then Adam and Eve – Eve especially – hear God say to the serpent that he (God) will use Eve and her Offspring to fix this terrible brokenness. I can imagine Eve’s eyes going wide and her thinking, “What did God say? He’s going to fix this and he’s going to use *me*?”

And yes, that’s exactly what God did. He didn’t need Eve, but he chose to make her a partner with him in his plan of salvation.

Many years later, God resets creation because it’s gotten so bad. He found Noah and family to be the only righteous people left. God could have created an ark for them and simply said, “Get on board with all the critters.” But instead he puts Noah and family to work. He didn’t need them, but he chose to make them his partners in his plan.

More years pass. Aged Sarah hears God say that she will have a son within a year, and that through that son all nations will be blessed. Her reaction? She scoffed, she laughed. God’s reaction? He chose to make her his partner anyway.

More years go by; God establishes more and more partnerships with broken people: Moses, Ruth, David, Isaiah, Esther, Nehemiah and many more. It’s his way of doing things, not because he has to but because he chooses to.

Then one day the angel Gabriel appears to a teenage girl in Nazareth. God doesn’t need her to bear his Son. He could simply have his Son become a full-grown man and get to work. But he chose Mary as a partner in his great plan. And God’s children have called her blessed ever since.

Thirty-some years later eleven apostles and others who were with them hear the crucified and risen Lord say to them that “repentance of forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.” (Luke 24: 47, 48.) God could have sent angels to proclaim the message of sin and grace. He could simply zoot people and make them believe. Instead, he chooses to make all his children his partners in the on-going mission of taking the Good News to all.

Partnerships. God doesn’t need any help; he doesn’t need any partners. But it’s his choice to do so. What a privilege, what an honor we have to be his partners in his mission. We’re not worthy, but the worthiness of Jesus makes us so; we’re not capable, but the gifts of the Holy Spirit make us so.

To be sure, these partnerships are not just a “God and me” kind of thing. They’re a “God and *us*” thing. It’s always GOD’S mission; at the same time, because of God’s choice, it’s also OUR mission.

God's partnerships. He is always the initiator: first through baptism, then through various God-given vocations, but never working alone. It's always "us" together with the Lord and with each other.

And so it is with the Lord's mission in each congregation: the Lord calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies his whole Church on earth and each individual congregation – not to be Lone Ranger congregations, just as we're not called to be Lone Ranger believers. We are called to work together as partners.

Partnerships: working together with others in our congregations. Congregations working with other congregations. Congregations working with community organizations. Congregations with Lutheran schools or preschools working together in partnership in the Lord's mission. Pastors, teachers, DCEs, deaconesses, church musicians, parish nurses working together with peers and members.

And yes, Synod and district: we walk TOGETHER in partnerships to guard our doctrine and practices and to work together as the Lord carries out his mission through us.

This is the first district president's column in the new district magazine, *OUR Northern Illinois District*. As I've been saying for years, district and Synod are not simply elected leaders, staff members, board members. It's girls and boys, men and women, believers in Jesus confessing the faith to each other and to the nations and to the neighbors. It's not "them;" its "US."

And yet, it's not really "our church" or "our Synod" or "our district" or even "our mission." None of us bled and died to form the Bride of the Lord Jesus. But because of the Lord's choice, these things are also "ours," because first they are HIS.