



Northern Illinois District
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Ministry UPDATE

FALL 2021

President's Commentary *The Community of Christ*

Just today I met a fellow servant of the Church for lunch. We were chatting away. We ordered our food and then I asked the server, *"We are going to have a prayer before lunch. Is there anything we can pray for you in your life?"* She told us and we did.

She returned and then told us excitedly she was a teacher at a Lutheran preschool in a local community. She spoke positively about her pastor, church, and school. We had a connection and a common confession of Jesus! We were brought together, not in church, but in the community in Christ!

"And all who believed were together and had all things in common" (Acts 2:44). The earliest Christians shared a common faith in the Crucified and Risen Jesus that was lived out in how they cared for each other. They sacrificed and had "each other's back."

But I've built and maintained sinful and self-serving walls and so have you. Let's be honest; we've justified our sin and our walls. Satan loves our walls in the church and our self-righteousness. These walls are spiritually dangerous and harmful to the mission.

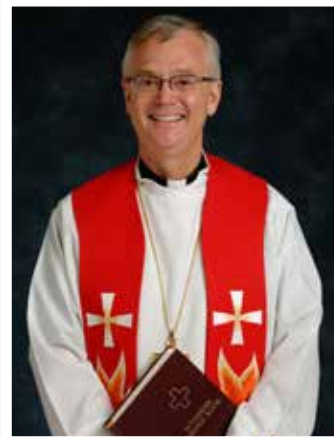
Enter Jesus, *"[who] is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ... [that he] might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility"* (Ephesians 2:14, 16). Hostility has been killed by the One who was killed to reconcile you to God and reconcile us to each other! The work of the Risen Christ is big!

We do not cheer for theological compromise, but

we do rejoice in the mighty work of the Gospel to connect us to a faithful confession and mission!

One great opportunity for me this summer in the NID was with a small group of pastors coming together to discuss a common mission. These men of God gathered from all around the District, from small and large congregations, and from a variety of ministries to discuss and be encouraged in our life in the LCMS. It was uplifting to witness first-time meetings. Others had not seen each other since seminary or even college and we reconnected! Connections and reconnections in the church are a gift from the Lord. How will you foster a reconnection with sister congregations or ministries?

This Ministry Update gives just a glimpse into the work that we are doing together. **Most of it would not happen except that we are working, serving, confessing, praying, and giving together.** Support and give thanks for "the things we have in common." There is so much more happening! We humbly need to work on building and restoring our relationships and it's all possible because the Gospel still works!



Rev. Dr. Allan R. Buss
President
LCMS Northern Illinois
District

Coming Together ABROAD

The LCMS Northern Illinois District is witnessing God's work in action through its partnership with the Belize Mission Society. The BMS helps support the village of Seine Bight, Belize through a feeding and scholarship program.



The elementary school feeding program started about four-and-a-half years ago when construction workers on a

home site noticed that some of the children coming home from school for lunch had nothing to eat. The workers shared their food with the children but soon noticed they weren't the only children in the area who weren't getting lunch.

Mission coordinators began to ask, "How do you study if all you're thinking about is where you're going to get your next meal?" Hence, Food for Thought was born, the umbrella organization for the feeding and scholarship programs.

Cathy Dulgar, executive director of the Belize Mission Society, is fond of using the example that it takes only the price of two McDonald's Happy Meals to feed one child for a week. To break that down even more, just one dollar a day feeds a child and pays for a uniform and registration.

Another blessing for the feeding program has been LCMS Hearts for Jesus. Lois Stewart, Mission Facilitator for Schools in the NID, has been the bridge between BMS and the Hearts for Jesus focus. Donations to the program brought in enough gifts to support 18 Belize students for an entire year.

"This whole program is completely God-driven," Dulgar said. "I never thought I would be doing anything like this!" She also stresses that the BMS works shoulder-to-shoulder with the people who live there.



Coming Together IN ETHNIC MINISTRY

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Rev. Tom Johnson took on the role of Ethnic Ministry Development in 2019. That position consists of assisting President Buss in reaching out to the District's ethnic workers, organizing gatherings, recruiting speakers, serving as a cultural translator, and assisting in any way he can to help them understand ethnic ministry.

"It's a real blessing and a privilege to serve God in this way," said Johnson. "The biggest blessing is the people I've met who come from such diverse backgrounds. When you meet an Ethiopian or Guatemalan pastor and see how they are impacting their flock and the communities they serve, you truly see God's love."

Martín Zárate, a pastor from Mexico City who serves St. Paul Lutheran Church in Melrose Park, is one of those blessings. It makes such a difference when people can hear the Gospel in their own language and see it in practices that are familiar to them. By providing this kind of continuity, many in his congregation have come over to our confessional position.

Waktola Dufera, an Ethiopian pastor currently worshipping at St. Philip Lutheran Church on Chicago's North Side, is also providing continuity to his congregation, many of whom speak Ethiopia's Oromo language.

Another example of racial integration is occurring at St. Philip on Chicago's South Side. There, African American Rev. Elstner Lewis has been serving a black Lutheran congregation. With his community gentrifying, Pastor Lewis feels blessed to have new white and Asian members of his church. This is also true of Rev. Alex Merlo of San Pablo in Aurora, whose Spanish sermons are translated into English for their non-Spanish speaking members.

***"Eleven o'clock on Sunday morning is the most segregated hour of the week."* Martin Luther King, Jr.**

Pastor Johnson explains that all of these pastors and others are navigating that transitional bridge between what they are accustomed to and how they can intersect with the Gospel. We as a denomination need to be very welcoming to these pastors, we need to apply Grace and help them transition to worshipping in the United States. Christ's church is intended to be multi-ethnic, but all of this takes patience.

"When you're not taking risks, you're not taking any steps in faith. It may feel risky to partner with someone who did not grow up in The Missouri Synod. It may be risky to plant a church in an unknown community, but this is Christ's mission to make disciples of all nations. We serve out of joy and gratitude for the privilege we have to participate in the work of His kingdom."

Coming Together AT THE SCHOOL FOR MISSIONARIES



Cruz & Family (bottom),
Luis & Family (left)



The School for Missionaries (Escuela Luterana Misionera) is lighting hearts on fire and helping spread the Word of God to communities that otherwise might not have known Him.

The Rev. Alex Merlo of Iglesia Luterana San Pablo in Aurora heads the school with the goal to further the knowledge of the Word of God for Spanish-speaking laypeople. The program includes congregational, missionary, and seminary levels of study.

Students can study at the school to grow into effective disciples and leaders within their congregations, become local missionaries and church planters, or to pursue education at the Center for Hispanic Studies, Concordia, for certification as pastor or deaconess.

Classes meet once a week during spring and fall semesters. Since there are students from Elgin, Lake Forest, Schaumburg, and as far away as Honduras and Mexico, classes are held via Zoom. Two current students, Luis Andre and Cruz Gonzalez, are going on to seminary.

Cruz feels the School for Missionaries has helped him to feel more confident and prepared him to better evangelize the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He hopes to become a pastor of a healthy congregation, a church in motion that has programs involving children, youth, parents, couples, and community events.

Luis believes that the Missionary School has prepared them to understand much of the theological part and to be able to distinguish between Law and Gospel. *"We also have a great teacher in Pastor Alex Merlo who supervises our progress and who helps us understand everything."*

"We believe in what the Lord tells us to do, to make disciples of all nations," said Pastor Merlo.

Coming Together FOR BIBLE STUDY

Imagine the power of prayer and sense of community possible if all LCMS Northern Illinois District congregations participate in the same Bible study. That's a potential of more than 200 churches and as many as 67,652 communicate members.

Pastor Kris Whitby, Assistant to the President - Mission & Ministry, has written a study based on that community with materials now available for exploration. Any congregation or individual wishing to participate can join in the district-wide study.

"I believe that having all congregations of our District participating in the same study reminds us that we, in our various congregations and ministries, are a part of a greater group of Jesus' followers known as the Northern Illinois District of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod," said Pastor Whitby. *"If we're all diving into God's Word through the same materials, it affords us the opportunity to promote dialogue church-to-church, both in person and through social media."*

This study is designed to now invite people to return to an 'in person' community of faith by exploring the God-given blessings that come as the followers of Jesus gather around His Word and Sacraments.



A Bible Study from the LCMS Northern Illinois District

The study is available as a free downloadable resource on the NID website at nidlcms.org/incarnate-community-bible-study. It's designed to be a four-week, or four-session study. Sermon-related materials will also be made available to pastors if they would like to address the study from the pulpit. While the study materials are designed for groups, they can also be used as a self-study resource.



Education MINISTRY UPDATE

To God be the glory for our NID schools that were able to offer summer camps this past summer. As we reflect and think about the wellness of our students, we give thanks that children in many parts of the District were able to enjoy activity, learning, and the Word of God during camp. There were volunteers and staff that led the children in many activities throughout the summer. Smiles were an ever-present blessing.

As we look forward to another school year blessed by God, we know He holds all staff and students close. May the memories of summer camp carry the children into the 2021-2022 school year.





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Summary of Financial Activities

For the Years Ended January 31, 2021 and 2020
includes restricted activity

Support, Revenue & Other Additions	2021	2020
Support from Congregations	\$1,639,088	\$1,717,111
Support from Individuals	346,825	278,253
Conventions, Conferences & Workshops	4,440	205,059
Other Revenues & Additions	187,017	264,358
Total Support, Revenues & other additions	2,177,370	2,464,781
Expenses		
Program Services	1,132,509	1,185,337
Synodical Programs	285,372	480,922
Supporting Services	702,545	808,659
Expenses related to operations and activities	2,120,426	2,474,918
Change in Net Assets related to operations & activities	56,944	(10,137)
Investment Income (loss), net	247,263	259,649
Gain on disposal of property & equipment	(16,310)	3,723
Net Change in Net Assets	\$287,897	\$253,235

Information is derived from the audited financial statements of the Northern Illinois District. Copies of the audit report are available from the District office, upon request.



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The work of the Belize Mission Society fits hand-in-hand with the NID's mission pillar of Wellness: Promoting and encouraging health and vitality in congregations, schools, ministries, professional workers, and lay leaders.

And never for a minute is the most important focus of the BMS forgotten.

They share the Gospel with the students any way they can. The students pray and talk about mercy, grace, and love. It's a beautiful thing to behold.



Bringing It For Belize

is a FREE District-wide wellness event taking place the week of October 17-23, 2021.

This event focuses on the district's Wellness pillar - wellness of the members of our district and wellness of the underserved in Belize.

Proceeds will go to the Belize Sports Camp held alongside their VBS program as well as other Belize initiatives. All that's required is tracking the number of minutes you exercise during that week, no matter what kind of exercise you prefer. You can participate in Bringing It For Belize on your own at home as well as in church and school groups if the COVID-19 protocols at that time allow for gatherings. For more information visit nidlcms.org/bringing-it-for-belize.



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OUR MISSION:

Filled with living hope in Christ, Confessing, Praising, and Advancing His Kingdom

As LCMS Lutherans in Northern Illinois, we will carry out this mission by upholding three pillars. These pillars direct our work together in the vision laid out for us.

- **WORD:** Helping congregations be more centered on a rich life of Word and Sacrament, with congregational support in transitions as well as time of joys and sorrows.
- **WELLNESS:** Promoting and encouraging health and vitality in congregations, schools, ministries, professional workers and lay-leaders.
- **WITNESS:** Encouraging personal witnessing, congregational engagement with their community, support of our NID partnerships and missions and sharing in a world mission field together.