



# DISTRICT NEWS

## NORTH DAKOTA

### What's your resolution?

For many the new year is a time for a fresh start. Some have made lists of things to change or accomplish in the new year. Others have simply thought it over and have a strategy to turn in a new and better direction. How about you? What's your resolution?



Rev. Arie Bertsch  
District President

Is there some bad habit you want to break and leave behind? Is there some better habit you wish to form? Are you going to quit your gossiping and putting the worst construction on everything and everybody and, instead, start speaking well of everybody and putting the best construction on all things? Some have had a bad year and are just looking for it to end. You are not alone. For some reason, a new year gives us the sense of a fresh start and more promising future.

But, unfortunately, we are often setting ourselves up for disappointment. I have quit making resolutions because by February I have failed to keep them — and my resolution has just become a nagging reminder of how difficult it is to change. Can you relate to that?

Last year, many of us maybe hoped we would slow down and spend more time with family and friends. But we didn't. We thought we would be in better shape, lose some weight, quit a bad habit, get out

of debt and get organized. But we failed. Instead, we're more disappointed than ever.

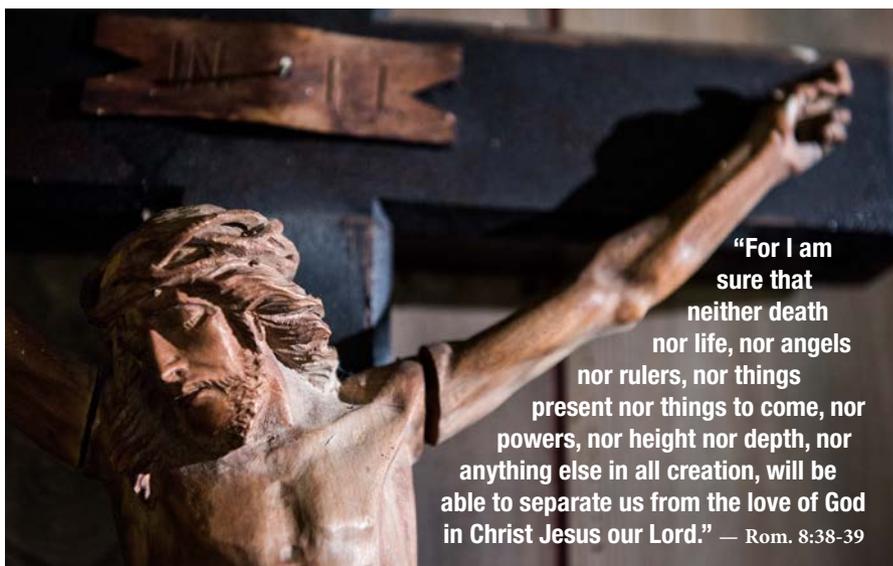
And frankly speaking, these are the small things — the things that we at least have a chance to change, that we are at least theoretically capable of improving somewhat. The bigger things that need to be changed, we can't change at all.

This year, last year, every year we're on earth, we're sinful. By nature, we're sinful through and through. Try and resolve as we might, we can't do anything about that. On our own, we are only self-centered, egotistical and arrogant. No resolution of ours is ever going to change that.

Many of the things we'd like to change about ourselves are good and worthy of the effort. But St. Paul offers us the best resolution we can have in Rom. 8:38-39, which starts with: "For I am convinced" (NIV), or, "I am sure" (ESV). The Greek word used could also be translated as "I am resolved." About what is Paul resolved?

Paul's resolution is not about himself. It's about his Lord. It's a resolution of faith — that there is no safer place than the love of God. It's a growing trust in a loving Savior for whatever may come along. He is resolved that nothing can surpass, overpower or destroy the love God has for us. "For I am sure" — resolved, convinced — "that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth,

See MESSAGE, Page 4



"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." — Rom. 8:38-39

# God's people in action

In late October, Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch hosted a Faith in Action Mercy Conference on its Fargo campus. Attendees were inspired and energized to be a part of God's mission to bring hope and healing to the world.

Attendees packaged 1,662 meals for people in Africa, rekindled their passion to help people in need, learned about more than 20 ministries of care, and experienced healing and release with Eddie Comfort Dog. Conference attendees also learned about ministries that are building boarding schools in Africa, feeding and clothing underprivileged people on all continents, healing and educating children in North Dakota and more.

The engaging keynote speakers, Rev. Dr. Matthew Harrison and Dr. Rob Stadler, opened participant's eyes to new possibilities for Christ-centered compassion and drew hearts toward practical ways to make a difference in the lives of others.

Harrison, LCMS president and author of several books, spoke of the role of mercy in the church. With more hurting people around us than ever before, God's people are called to get off the sidelines and lend compassionate care. That is what Jesus did, and it is what followers of Christ are called to do today. Harrison cited Scripture to illustrate Jesus walking toward people in need, while everyone else was walking away.

From the time of the early church until

now, mercy has been a part of the church — Harrison encouraged Christians to rediscover ministries of mercy for a new generation.

Stadler, author of "The Scientific Approach to Evolution," recognized that our focus on providing mercy can be inhibited when the foundation of our faith is attacked. The growing conflict between science and faith, centered upon evolution, has turned many away from God. Stadler explained his approach to resolving this conflict, which is to appreciate different levels of confidence in scientific evidence. When evidence that provides high confidence (for example, evidence that is repeatable and obtained through planned experiments) is properly prioritized over weak evidence (for example, evidence that is not repeatable and relates to singular events in the distant past), the theory of evolution breaks down. With high confidence evidence, science and the Christian faith are in full agreement. By resolving this conflict, our faith in God's Word and our focus on mercy can be restored.



▲ Dr. Stadler makes his presentation.



▲ Christians came together at the conference to learn, laugh and serve.

A forum to discuss how society cares for its most vulnerable citizens seems to be more important now than ever. The Ranch is grateful for the opportunity to bring people together to explore ways all can be the hands and feet of Christ.

"Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch is just one part of a much larger call to care for the needs of people around us," said Rev. Rick Jones, Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch chaplain. "We are not alone, and the work of all ministries represented at the conference is important and valued."



**Rev. Nathan Schieber** was installed as pastor of St. John, Underwood, and Trinity, rural Hazen, on, Nov. 25 at St. John. From left, (front row) Vicar Brock Schmeling, Rev. Dr. Matthew Richard, Rev. Russell Fitch, Rev. Arie Bertsch, Rev. Nathan Schieber, Rev. Michael Wolters, Rev. Jonathan Walla, Rev. Brandon Woodruff; (back row) Rev. Matthew Thompson, Rev. Kevin Zellers, Vicar Justin Woodside, Rev. Kirk Peters, Rev. Zelwyn Heide, Rev. Carlyle Roth and Rev. Lester Wolfram.

## Immanuel to hold workshop covering care ministry

On Saturday, Feb. 2, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Fargo, will host a lay workshop focusing on elders in the church. The workshop, however, will not be for elders alone; it will also cover care ministry within a congregation.

The Immanuel elders will provide lunch. The workshop begins with registration at 9 a.m. A freewill offering will be taken to defray the workshop costs. For more information, call 701-293-7979.

# LCEF honors Bill Sharpe



Rev. Max Phillips (left), LCEF Board of Directors chair, and Rev. Bart Day (right), LCEF president and CEO, present the Arthur C. Haake Award to Gale Sharpe (center) on behalf of her late husband, Bill Sharpe. Gale is flanked by her daughters Rachel Hohn (left) and Rebekah Collins (right), who is holding granddaughter Elise.

Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) awarded the late Bill Sharpe the Arthur C. Haake Leadership Award on Nov. 16 during LCEF’s Fall Leadership Conference in San Diego, Calif.

Sharpe served as North Dakota District LCEF vice-president for more than 25 years, from August 1991 up until his untimely death in April 2017. He also served as the district’s business manager and its sole executive staff person outside of the district president.

Sharpe graduated from Concordia University Nebraska in 1978 and served in teaching and administrative positions in Iowa, Florida and Illinois before he was called to serve the Dakota Boy’s Ranch in North Dakota in 1987. In 1991, he was called by the North Dakota District.

“Bill was the district,” said Rev. Bart Day, LCEF president and CEO, “and was a sought-after resource by congregations, ministries and church workers.”

One of his more recent mission successes was the purchase of a large piece of acreage in a growing part of Fargo, the largest city in North Dakota. Once purchased, Sharpe sold off individual lots for single family homes that fueled the construction costs of a new mission congregation and surrounded it with new houses that could be reached as new potential mem-

bers. This was simply a brilliant win-win solution for both district mission work and LCEF.

“Bill exemplified our mission of reaching more people for Christ through our work in congregations,” Day said, “and assisted them for over 25 years with counsel and building needs.”

Sharpe was known for his dry wit, subtle humor, laid-back personality and humility, which worked wonderfully in relating

to his upper-Midwest audience. Behind that was always a passion and practicality to do Christ’s work serving in the North Dakota mission field.

Day concluded: “Bill may have served a smaller district, but he leaves a large legacy of service, commitment and mission work for both the North Dakota District and LCEF.”

The Arthur C. Haake Leadership Award honors a retired LCEF staff member for his or her service to the organization and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. It celebrates the life of the late Art Haake — LCEF’s second president — who helped guide the organization through its early years and saw its rapid expansion.

LCEF, a non-profit organization, has served as the financial extension of the LCMS since 1978, offering funding and resources to congregations, schools and rostered church workers through invest-

ment support of LCMS members.

The mission of LCEF is to support the Church in fulfilling its mission of sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ by being a Christ-centered servant partner of the LCMS, ensuring that funds and services are available now and in the future.

“Bill may have served a smaller district, but he leaves a large legacy of service, commitment and mission work for both the North Dakota District and LCEF.”

— Rev. Bart Day

Learn how you can be a partner in ministry at [lcef.org](http://lcef.org).



Rev. Aaron Filipek was installed as pastor of Zion, Gwinner, on Sunday, Dec. 2. From left, Revs. Aaron Hambelton, Adam Filipek, Aaron Filipek, Arie Bertsch, Sean Daenzer and Adam Harvala.



Send submissions for the district supplement to Marie Johnson at [news@nodaklcms.org](mailto:news@nodaklcms.org)

## Can people find my church?

What kind of an image does your church facility present to the community?



The visual presence can impact how the church is viewed. Is it clean and tidy, or do the grounds and buildings look tired?

Well-maintained grounds and buildings can be an invitation and clue to the quality of the experience inside. Here are some ideas that you may consider to raise awareness of your church.

### Lighting

Light the important features of your facility. The front façade, steeple or ground sign when lit and attached to a timer are effective tools to draw attention to your facilities.

### Landscaping

Beyond the obvious trimmed landscape, consider a colorful flower garden around your yard sign or sidewalk edg-

ing. Identify an ideal spot for color and empower a “green-thumbed” member of the congregation to work wonders with a minimum of investment. In general, well-chosen plant materials continue to be the most cost-effective way to enhance your facilities.

### Signs, banners, flags

Signs are often under-scaled. If you can't read the sign when passing in a car at 30 mph, your sign is too small to be effective. Some of the best signs have a component of movement. Consider an American flagpole or feather-shaped advertising sign to draw attention to your facilities.

Take a long look at your facilities and see if some of these ideas have merit.

Visit [lcef.org](http://lcef.org) or call 800-843-5233 to find an Architectural Advisory Committee member near you, or contact, Tami Ulland, North Dakota District LCEF vice-president, at [Lcms.nd.busman@gmail.com](mailto:Lcms.nd.busman@gmail.com).

## MESSAGE

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Paul's resolution is that God is for us! He boasts: “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31). All the enemies of this world are being mocked. So resolved is Paul that he doesn't even expect an answer. “Who can be against us?” No one or anything like illness or even death is of any significance or a real threat if God is on our side. God has not held back any of His resources and power — He has sent His Son for us. He died and was raised for us. The Gospel declares us innocent for His sake.

Paul tells us to be sure, to be resolved, to be convinced, to stand firm in Christ and say to our accusers: “Your condemnation, your charges against me, a child of God — they mean nothing. Your voice carries no weight in the courtroom of God's justice. God the Judge has cleared me of the guilt of my sins. I have been declared ‘not guilty’ by the One mouth that matters.”

So confident of this reality, Paul is not troubled over the suffering and death we experience in this life. He asks: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?” (Rom. 8:35).

Paul is convinced that the love of God through Jesus Christ is what the world needs. It is the love of God that brought the Son of God to humanity. It has bridged the gap between man and God. It is God's love that caused His Son to endure death on the cross with joy for your salvation. It is God's love that caused Him to be raised from the dead as a pledge and guarantee of your eternal life.

Paul's resolution is grounded on God's resolution for us. It's a resolution in the love of God that has already defeated our sin and weaknesses. It has already defeated death. It has already claimed eternal victory for you. Can anything we face in this life finally defeat us? Paul's answer is a resounding “No!” He boldly proclaims, “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.”

Sure, we face trials and tribulations. But we have something even more awesome, even more powerful than all the forces of hell — the love of God in Christ Jesus. It is Jesus, your Savior, who made the greatest resolution in all eternity — His love for you. His love has never failed. His plan to make you His own has never been forgotten. His resolution is to unite you to God and one another forever.

The Father is resolved — He sent His only Son to secure you unto life everlasting. The Son is resolved — He lived, died, rose and intercedes for you even now. The Holy Spirit is resolved — He creates and strengthens faith in you through Word and Sacrament. He secures you in the Gospel. The Triune God's grip on you is infinitely sure. He is resolved never to let you go. Even though you face a new year of challenges, you need not despair. It is His resolution for you that really counts. You can bank on that, and not just for a new year, but for eternity!

Our resolution, then, is not the one we make and fail to keep, but the one that God has made for us.

Amen.