



DISTRICT NEWS

NORTH DAKOTA

The Season of Lent

Greetings to you in this Lenten Season,

Yes, it is the season of Lent; a penitential season. Meaning, Lent is a time of the church year before Easter in which we look at the reason for Christ Jesus having to go to the cross. It was because of our sin — not only everybody else's sin, but my personal sin. Thus it is a season of penitence because Jesus had to die to make payment for sin.

Sin had to be paid for in order for you to receive life and salvation. This is what Jesus has done for you.

Thus, the season is more somber and there is a bigger emphasis on Confession and Absolution!

First off, confession is what Christians do. We confess our sins and hear from God that our sins are forgiven through Jesus Christ.

Confession and Absolution is one of the first things that we do every Sunday in the church service. For from God's Word we understand and confess our sins because we know that we are born with sin and therefore have a sinful nature.

Ps. 51:1-5 states:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to



Rev. Arie Bertsch
District President

your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

From Rom. 5:10 we hear that “we were God’s enemies.” We are enemies because since the fall of Adam and Eve into sin all humans are born with sin. That is why we die, “for the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). That is why even babies die. And so we confess, from God’s Word, that we are sinners who deserve to die. For as we say in the liturgy from 1 John 1:8-10:

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

In the Absolution we hear from 2 Cor. 5:21:

God made Him (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

He made payment for our sin so that we are no longer in our sin. Therefore, we are able to approach God. Prior to our confession and absolution, we are unable to approach God because in our sin we cannot be in the presence of God. Holiness and sin cannot be together.

Now that we understand that we are sinners and that Christ Jesus has made payment for

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MESSAGE

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and removed our sin, how is it that we receive this forgiveness, absolution? In John 20:22-23, we understand that God does this through those who are called to proclaim this to us:

Jesus said (to the disciples before He ascends into heaven), "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Many are surprised today to hear that Jesus has given His church on earth the power and authority to forgive and retain sins.

In Matt. 16:19, we read:

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

From Luther's Small Catechism we confess, teach and believe that Jesus calls this authority His "keys." Jesus' keys can be briefly described as "the peculiar power which Christ has given to His Church on earth to forgive the sins of the penitent sinners, but to retain the sins of the impenitent as long as they do not repent."

Jesus has given His keys to each congregation. Each congregation calls a pastor, who has the authority to forgive your sins, to open the door of heaven; and to retain sins, to close the door of heaven to those who refuse to repent.

In other words, Jesus has authorized pastors to announce the forgiveness of sins that He earned through His bloody death on the cross. They are the vessel, the tool or the instrument through which God speaks to you. This is known as the absolution.

The absolution is not simply talking about God's Gospel of peace, pardon and forgiveness. It is the announcing of God's peace, pardon and forgiveness through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Maybe this example will help you understand this better: Let's say you are sitting in prison for a crime that deserves death.



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While you are waiting for your death to happen, you hear much talk about your pardon, forgiveness and freedom. This is fine to talk about and to hope for. But until you hear the warden or governor say "You are pardoned," will you experience the joy of the pardon? No! So it is when you hear from the pastor, as from God Himself, that your sins are forgiven and you will not die, but you will live.

This is just as valid here on earth as in heaven.

God could have done this pardoning many different ways: Sending angels, putting the message right into your heart, calling all people to Himself, or proclaiming it with a loud voice from heaven. Instead, He uses men. That is why Jesus said to his disciples:

"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

— Matt. 9:37-38

After that He said:

"Go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give."

— Matt. 10:7-8

As they were able to heal and cleanse in Jesus' name, so they were able to forgive sins in Jesus' name.

God has used the church — with the "keys" — to open or shut heaven for you. The church calls pastors to announce that your sins are forgiven; and they are forgiven!

May this understanding create an urge to hear the forgiveness of your sins every week!



Candidates sought for offices

The LWML North District Nominating Committee is still seeking candidates for the following positions to be voted on during the upcoming district convention (June 26-28 in Fargo):

- ▶ President
- ▶ Vice-President of Mission Grants
- ▶ Vice-President of Human Care
- ▶ Vice-President of Communication
- ▶ Treasurer

If you wish to serve in one of these offices, please send an email to nominating@ndlwml.org.

Plan to attend LMWL CONVENTION

The LWML North Dakota District Convention will be held June 26-28 at Delta Hotel by Marriott in Fargo.

The theme is “Great is the Lord,” based on Ps. 145:1-3:

I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever. Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable.

Among the many highlights, Jan Struck will be the keynote speaker; Rev. Dr. Robert Roegner, former director of LCMS World Mission, will be the mission speaker; and Wendysue Fluegge will be the songleader and provide entertainment. She was songleader at the LWML convention in Albuquerque, N.M., in 2017.

Rev. Dave Suelzle, senior pastoral counselor and pastor of Grace, Fargo, will lead Bible study.

For more information, visit ndlwml.org/convention-2020.

Registration open for Higher Things events

It’s that time of year already – time to get registered for another Higher Things conference!

Groups are going in two different directions this summer for “Watermarked” — one to Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colo. (June 29-July 2) and one to Calvin University, Grand Rapids, Mich. (July 21-24). There is group transportation being arranged for both locations, along with some fun events along the way.

Tana McKenna, parish assistant of Zion, Gwinner, will handle registrations for Michigan. You can reach Tana at zion.gwinner@gmail.com or 701-308-0411.

Diane Pierson, Board of Christian Education chair, St Paul’s, Minot, will handle registrations for the Colorado trip. You can reach Diane at christianed@anchoredminot.com or 701-721-7844.

For more information about the conference, go to higherthings.org/conferences/watermarked2020. For more information about Higher Things, visit higherthings.org.



Also consider attending a Higher Things retreat, which will be held at two sites in North Dakota.

The retreat titled “What is Church?” will be held March 27-28 at St. Paul’s, Minot, and Immanuel, Wahpeton. It is one retreat at two

locations with area North Dakota District pastors presenting.

Picture the sanctuary filled with teenagers — eager for the organ to begin the opening lines of the liturgy or their favorite hymns — listening intently as they learn how their Lutheran faith applies to their lives and relationships, and laughing as they horse around playing games and getting to know other youth from the area. That’s a glimpse of what will happen at this retreat.

The cost is \$50 per registrant, which covers lodging, food, speaker fees, games and snacks.

For more information, visit higherthings.org, click on “Retreats” and scroll down for the link to either Minot or Wahpeton.

Follow in Paul’s footsteps

Christian Travelers of the North is presenting a trip to Greece: “In the Footsteps of Paul the Apostle,” featuring a three-night Greek Islands and Turkey cruise, to be held May 6-16.

Tour highlights include Athens, a taverna dinner show, Mykonos, Ephesus, Patmos, Santorini, Thessaloniki, Kavala, Philippi, Meteora, Delphi, Corinth and the Acropolis.

For more information, visit the North Dakota District website at nodaklcms.org.



District LYF Retreat is March 6-7

The district Lutheran Youth Fellowship (LYF) Retreat will be held Friday and Saturday, March 6-7, at Chieftain Conference Center in Carington.

Students in eighth grade and up and adults are invited to this retreat. Registration begins at 7 p.m on Friday and activities begin at 7:30. If your schedule allows attendance at only part of the retreat, you are welcome to join when you can! The retreat concludes Saturday at 4 p.m.

The retreat theme is "Motivated by Love," a companion piece to the *Every One His Witness*® evangelism program created by LCMS Witness and Outreach Ministry. Jacob Nistler, a member of Zion, Bismarck, will facilitate four sessions, giving teens the tools to "Listen, Ask, Seek, Share, Invite and Encourage" their



friends for the sake of Christ. Nistler and Aidan Quirk, a member of Bethel, Bismarck, were trained to facilitate "Motivated by Love" at an LCMS teen leadership training in 2019.

The retreat will also include Bible study led by Rev. Adam Harvala (assistant pastor of St. Andrew, West Fargo), morning and evening devotions, music by the district LYF leaders, an optional morning walk/run, singing, fellowship and snacks with Golden Acres Manor residents, breakfast, afternoon and evening snacks,

noon buffet at Pizza Ranch, a visit with a Concordia University, Seward, representative (tentative) and more.

The registration fee is \$75. A prorated registration fee is available if you attend only part of the retreat.

You may register at the event.

The registration forms can be found at ndyouthonfire.org/downloads. Please bring the forms with you to the retreat.

You can also register by contacting Caylee Nelson, district LYF secretary at 701-805-1877 or cayleen1012@gmail.com. If you register by phone or email, bring the registration form and fee with you on March 6.

For more information, contact Pastor Harvala at 701-936-1156 or revad07@midco.net or Pat Sebastian, LYF lay advisor, 701-471-3289 or patsebbis@aol.com.

Shepherd's Hill at the Crossroads

Almost summer!

Or so we dream! The brochures are out and online registration for our camps is ready for you to book your plans to spend time with us this summer. Check out our website — shretreat.org — or check with your church for the brochures that include the summer camp list.

We will be coming soon to hold a Thank You Dinner at a church near you! We are going on the road in March, visiting congregations to give updates on what is happening this summer, what camps we will offer and how you can be involved.

Please check out your church bulletin and newsletters, or our Facebook page for dates and plan on joining us.

Rev. Jon Bonine • Executive Director

- ▶ director@shretreat.org
- ▶ shretreat.org
- ▶ [Facebook.com/shretreat](https://www.facebook.com/shretreat)

Broken and bullied, healed and restored

Madison was bullied severely at school. Her classmates were merciless. Before coming to the Ranch, she was broken, crying every day, skipping classes and lashing out in anger.



DAKOTA BOYS AND GIRLS RANCH

But Madison found a very different environment at the Ranch. She was treated with respect by her classmates and our staff. And she got the help she needed to excel in school, deal with the deep emotional hurt and rebuild her shattered self-esteem.

Madison's grades have improved dramatically and she's getting past her crippling depression. But most important, her faith in God has grown.

To receive more inspiring stories like this one directly to your inbox, sign up for the e-newsletter at DakotaRanch.org/signup.

Help us record our history

How many U.S. presidents were LCMS members? I don't have the answer as none of them were even born in North Dakota. Still it's lovely when our district office has church history books in our vault for those who want to know when a church started or their Baptism dates.

Please mail your current history book to P.O. Box 9029, Fargo, ND 58106. Call Vicki at 701-293-9001 if you have questions. Thanks to the people who sent items to the office in January!