



DISTRICT NEWS

NORTH DAKOTA



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Am I being punished for my sins?

I am occasionally asked by individuals if their sickness and hard times are a result of their sins, and if they are punishment for their sins. To hear people think and ask such things hurts me greatly because thinking like this makes the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross insufficient for the payment of our sins.



Rev. Arie Bertsch
District President

Come let us reason together about this. First, remember that Jesus went to the cross for the payment of the sins of the world. You are in the world and so He

died for your sins too. Along with that, Jesus cried out from the cross “It is finished.” He didn’t mean that He was finished, but rather salvation was finished. Your salvation was taken care of. Simply know, trust and believe it! It’s a concrete, absolute fact! And Jesus gives you the ability to believe it through His Word and the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

When you think and speak in wonder about your sufferings, you are looking to yourself rather than to the cross. Satan loves to pull on the heartstrings of feelings (a subjective thing instead of an absolute). Feelings are a fluttering thing that go up and down daily and even hourly. The salvation won for your sins is a concrete thing outside of yourself that doesn’t change. It is the same as

yesterday, today and into eternity. That is why God gave us outward means to see, hear, feel, smell and taste.

When Satan gives you thoughts that you are being punished for your sins, start by turning to your Baptism. Following a centuries-old church practice, many Lutheran pastors provide the newly baptized with a baptismal certificate. This is important for you because it gives you official assurance, complete with signatures of witnesses, that you were truly and properly baptized by God. Baptism is His work and His seal on you.

Yet as important as this certificate is for your life, many Christians, sadly, tuck their baptismal certificates away in a drawer or closet. Thus hidden, their baptismal certificates provide very little day-to-day comfort to them. At times of suffering, despair and doubt, they should recall their Baptism, even pull the certificate out of their back pocket and waive it under Satan’s nose and declare, “You see this? This means that you are a loser. Jesus has conquered you. I am connected to His victory over sin, death and your power. So just fly away.”

If you have a baptismal certificate hidden away somewhere, find it as soon as possible. Find a prominent place in your home to display it so that your eye will be drawn to it each time you enter the room. Each time you see your certificate, especially in times of fear or in times of distress, you will be reminded that you are God’s child connected to Jesus’ death and resurrection. It’s also a great conversation piece for evangelism.

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Welcome Deaconess Stephanie!

Rev. Rick Jones, chaplain and vice-president of Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch, is thrilled to have a full-time deaconess on the Fargo campus as Deaconess Stephanie Wilde was installed on July 25.

“Adding a deaconess to our Fargo campus means we have someone fully dedicated to bringing the presence of mercy in our kids’ lives,” Pastor Jones says. “She will not only provide weekly spiritual life groups and coordinate weekly chapel services, but also bring Christ’s spirit of hope, comfort and peace to their everyday lives.

“If a resident gets some rough news from mom and dad, Deaconess Stephanie will be there to pray with them in the moment. If the kids have a rough school day, Deaconess Stephanie will pray with kids and staff to help bring God’s calm and sense of ease to the situation.”



Please join me in adding Deaconess Stephanie to your prayers as she works with our troubled, complicated and amazing kids. Thank you and God bless you!

Stephanie was commissioned as an LCMS deaconess at her home congregation, Immanuel, Parkers Prairie, Minn., on July 11.

Tim Unsinn

Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch
Senior Development Officer
T.Unsinn@dakotaranch.org

Shepherd’s Hill at the Crossroads

Fall Homeschool Retreat

- Sept. 12 (6 p.m.)-14 (1 p.m.)
- \$35/person (\$175 family maximum), includes lodging and meals

Connect with other families from across North Dakota. Whether you are new to or are a veteran homeschooler, you’re welcome to join.

Confirmation Retreat

- Sept. 17-18 • \$85/person

Join with youth from other congregations and learn about the six Chief Parts of Luther’s Small Catechism. Pastors are welcome to bring their confirmation classes.

TO REGISTER, visit Shretreat.org or call 701-244-5225

LWML Retreat

- Sept. 17-18 | Concordia, Jamestown

Join your sisters to hear and study God’s Word. Mites will be collected as you rejoice in the God of all comfort (1 Cor. 3:7)! Visit ndlwml.org/retreat for more information or call Kathy Rubbert at 701-460-0747.

MESSAGE

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

Your baptismal certificate will console you, calm your fears and remind you of the many comforting promises God made to you when you were baptized.

You may ask, what were these promises? In Baptism, God:

- ▶ **Made you** His adopted child (Gal. 3:26-4:6). Do not fear – God never forsakes His children (Heb. 13:5).
- ▶ **Washed away** your sins (Acts 2:38). Do not fear – your heavenly Father remembers your sins no more (Heb. 8:12).
- ▶ **Joined you** to Jesus’ death (Rom. 6:4). Do not fear – if you have been joined to Christ’s death, you will also be joined to His resurrection (Rom. 6:5).
- ▶ **Gave you**, miraculously, “the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:7). Because of this

life-giving hope that now dwells in you (1 Peter 3:15, Col. 1:27), not even death itself can harm or overwhelm you (Ps. 23:4, Heb. 2:15).

There will also be days when you surely feel afflicted and beaten down by Satan and his demons. To help you in these difficult times, Jesus offers you more than a simple look up to heaven to have a good day. He offers you His body and His blood to give you strength and comfort, which no other person can give.

Each time you go to Holy Communion, you receive the true body and blood of your crucified and resurrected Savior, Jesus. Just as your body needs daily food to nourish and strengthen it, so also your body and soul need the nourishing, strengthening and comforting body and blood of Jesus in Holy Communion. Martin Luther explains it this way:

Therefore, it [Holy Communion] is appropriately named the food of the soul, since it nourishes and strengthens the new man. While it is true that through Baptism we are first born anew, our human flesh and blood have not lost their old skin. There are so many hindrances and temptations of the devil and the world that we often grow weary and heavy laden, and at times even stumble. Therefore the Lord’s Supper is given for daily food and sustenance, that our faith may refresh and strengthen itself and not fall back in the battle but grow continually stronger.



Notice that I have drawn you away from your subjective feelings to the concrete assurance of God in and for your salvation through His Son Jesus Christ, your Lord and your Savior.

Reunion is service project

Removing growths of lichens — that were more than 100 years old — from tombstones requires much patience and elbow grease. Shown in the photos are a few of the descendants of Johann Stoltenow Sr. and his wife, Justine, doing just that. Johann and Justine homesteaded a mile northeast of Great Bend in March 1886, and were life-long members of Trinity Lutheran Church.

Forty great-grandchildren through great-great-great-grandchildren gathered on July 1 at the Trinity cemetery, one mile south of Great Bend. The cemetery is near the site of the original church founded in 1875 and the Lutheran school founded in 1911, which many of Johann and Justine's grandchildren attended. The service project directed by cemetery sexton Dave Stoltenow, great-grandson of Johann and Justine, was to scrape and scrub the lichens off the headstones, many of which date back to the mid-to-late 1800s.

After a couple of hours of cleaning tombstones and renewing family relationships, the group went to the homestead where Dave lives. He led a walking tour of the farmstead, pointing out the location of the original farm buildings, only three of which are still intact. Following the tour, the group was joined by 15 more descendants for a picnic supper at Hankinson Veterans Park.

Many of the families were able to worship together at Trinity on Sunday morning, the building which their dads, grandpas, great-grandpas and great-great-grandpas helped to build in 1920. Trinity is the mother congregation of the LCMS North Dakota District and will celebrate 150 years of God's blessings in 2025. The family members shared a special offering at the worship service, which will help build Trinity's growing Perpetual-Care Cemetery Endowment Fund.



District has representation at youth conference

NATIONAL21, the LCMS National Lutheran Youth Workers Conference for high school students and professional and volunteer youth ministry practitioners, was held July 11-14 in Houston and was filled to capacity! Eleven attendees from North Dakota congregations participated in Bible studies and their choice of breakout sessions, and spent free time exploring

the 2022 LCMS National Youth Gathering city. Adult attendees were **DCE Susie Danner**, Immanuel, Fargo; **Rev. Adam Harvala**, St. Andrew, West Fargo; **Kristin Nistler**, Zion, Bismarck; and **Sara Schuh** and **Pat Sebastian**, Bethel, Bismarck.

Youth attendees participated in YouthLead, "A Walk Made Worthy,"

which focused on developing a resilient identity in Christ through times of struggle, joy and temptation. **Aidan Quirk**, Bethel, Bismarck, facilitated the YouthLead training as a member of the Leadership Team. Students attending the YouthLead training included **Joshua Harvala** and **Cecilia Lindquist**, St. Andrew, West Fargo; **Leah Tykwinski**, Beautiful Savior, Fargo; and **Caylee Nelson** and **Jessica Schuh**, Bethel; Bismarck.

Higher Things



North Dakota had 136 registrants at the Fargo conference, which accounted for 37 percent of the registrations.

A CONFERENCE REFLECTION

By **Tristian Hudson**

The Higher Things 2021 conference in Fargo (June 29-July 2) was memorable. I made so many memories during the week we were there, and here are a few of my favorites. Although the week didn't start the way I had planned, with a trip to the ER, it was still an amazing week. My favorite part was the church services. There were 13 services over the four days. I loved every minute.

We went to six different breakaway sessions. The six that I attended were "The Office of the Keys," "Are Public School Kids Going to Hell?," "Gen. Z

Survival Guide," "From Invisible to Indispensable 4 Life," "No Creed but the Bible" and "My Church and Other." The one that stood out to me the most was "The Office of the Keys," presented by President (Rev. Arie) Bertsch because I have a very strong interest in becoming a pastor.

I also learned about the conference theme, "Forgiven." I learned that no matter what sins you commit, they can be and are forgiven in Jesus. Even if you try and hide them and keep them from God, they are forgiven in Jesus. And so, the words, "I forgive you" are the three most powerful words in the universe.

They don't just change the universe for someone, but they change someone's eternity. They change your eternity! As Jesus said in John 20:23, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them."

I would definitely encourage other youth from our North Dakota District to attend a Higher Things conference. It is a great learning experience for youth of all ages. You get to stay on a college campus to hear God's Word for a whole week. You get to meet other youth from around the United States as well. It is an experience that you will never forget.

Tristian is a high school freshman in Surrey and a member of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Minot. "Forgiven" was Tristian's second Higher Things conference.



Sept. 11

- 24th Annual Charitable Auction—Shepherd's Hill at the Crossroads

Oct. 4-6

- Pastors Conference—Shepherd's Hill at the Crossroads

Oct. 21-23

- District Middle School Gathering—Ramada Inn, Fargo

Jan. 14-15

- District Men's Retreat—Shepherd's Hill at the Crossroads

January 23-26

- District Convention, Fargo

March 4-5

- District Lutheran Youth Fellowship Retreat—Chieftain Conference Center, Carrington

Milestones

Anniversaries at Shepherd of the Valley, Bismarck

- ▶ **Walter and Bernice Rehling** will celebrate 69 years of marriage on Sept. 21.
- ▶ **Don and Pat Bitz** will celebrate 61 years of marriage on Oct. 7.
- ▶ **Jim and Sherry Hawley** will celebrate 59 years of marriage on Nov. 24.