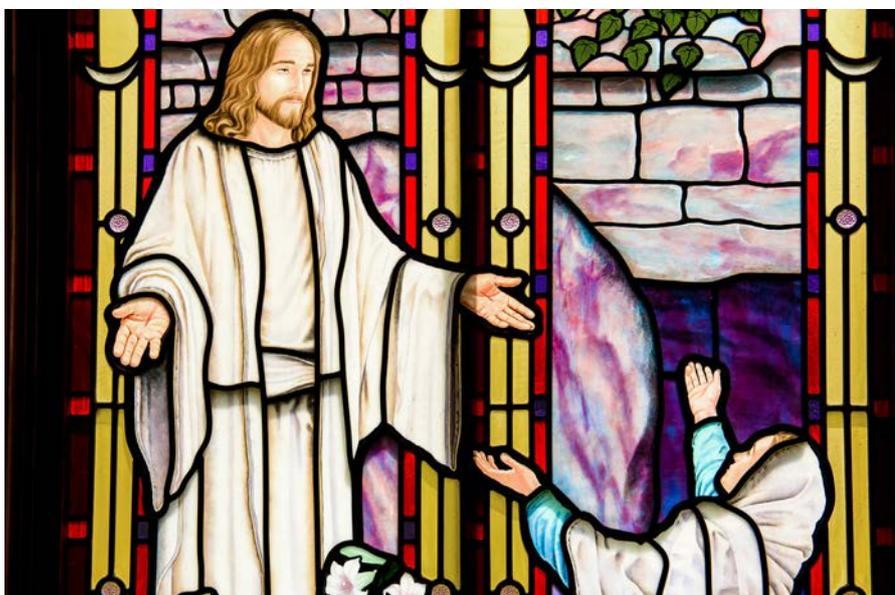




DISTRICT NEWS

NORTH DAKOTA



We all have sinned and deserve eternal death from the Almighty God, into the fires of weeping and gnashing of teeth. It would be good that we keep this in mind. For death, at any age, should never be a surprise to us. If it is, maybe you do not understand death. As Scripture clearly says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23), and, “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). And yet we praise God because our Lord Jesus identifies with and connects Himself to our grief in the face of death — our death and the death of those we love when He came in flesh to die. “Death was swallowed up in victory” as He rose from the grave. Because of this victory, we have a unity that exists between the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant.

‘WITH ALL THE COMPANY OF HEAVEN’

ALL SAINTS DAY is one of my favorite Sundays in the Church Year because it’s about the unity of the Church Militant (us here on earth) and the Church Triumphant (the saints in the glory of heaven, who had faith in the One to come, the One who did come and the One who will come again). Let it be clear to you: There is only one Church and it includes a unity that exists between the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant.

We both gather before the throne of God to sing our endless praise for the victory Jesus has given us in His life, death and resurrection. We do it with St. John,



Rev. Arie Bertsch
District President

who in Rev. 7:12 gives us the revelation of glory of the saints in heaven:

“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

For the Church Militant, our praise ascends even though we continue to cope with the sting of death of our loved ones and eventually ourselves. This sting of death comes from original sin and the actual sins that we do in thought, word and deed — your thoughts that shouldn’t be; your words if even said under your breath; your deeds of what you have done and haven’t.

In Revelation, God comes to John with visions and at the core of those visions is the central theme: “God wins!” Sin, death and the devil are defeated! The Church reigns triumphant and she enjoys an eternity with Christ, who loved His body, the Church, unto death, even death on a cross.

John gives us a glimpse of that eternal glory that is ours in Christ. Listen to it carefully and picture the one you loved who has died and is now enjoying the victory that is theirs in Christ:

“They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will shelter them with His presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall

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District convention postponed

The North Dakota District Convention, which was scheduled for Jan. 24-27, 2021, has been postponed to January 2022 due to COVID-19.

All elected district officials will remain in office and will continue the work of the district for one added year. Term limits will not be affected.

District conventions and LCMS conventions will still be held

every three years. A vote among LCMS congregations to postpone the next LCMS convention (from 2022 to 2023) will conclude Feb. 15. Should the proposal be approved, the current Synod triennium would be extended one year.

The North Dakota District will soon begin the timeline of forums, nominations, overtures and so forth for the January 2022 district convention.

GivePlus+ now available to support district

Visit nodaklcms.org/giveplus+ for a new way to support the work of the LCMS North Dakota District. Submit a one-time donation or set up an automatic

recurring donation. Check out this new feature today! There is also a mobile app. More information can be found on the website.

IN MEMORIAM

Harold "Bud" Gessner, 87, of Bottineau, passed away on Dec. 30. He was born in 1933 on the family farm near Russell. Bud retired from farming in 1990 but continued to help out on family farm.

Bud was baptized and confirmed at St. John's, rural Upham. In 1996, he became a member of Our Savior's, Bottineau. He held several offices in the North Dakota District, volunteered at the Bottineau Braille Center and was president of the Orphan Grain Train North Dakota Branch.

He is survived by his wife, Avonne, of 52 years; three daughters;

six grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren.

Judith "Judy" Nelson, 74, Kongsberg, formerly of Garrison, died on Dec. 12 in Max. She was married to Rev. Paul Nelson, who is currently pastor of St. John, Kongsberg, and St. Martin, Anamoose.

Judy was born in 1946 in Minneapolis and was baptized at Trinity, Minneapolis, on July 14, 1956. She married Pastor Paul on March 16, 1965.

The couple have two children, four grandchildren, two step-grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

MESSAGE

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and He will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

—Rev. 7:14-17

Even as God dries the tears of those in the Church Triumphant, so He dries our tears as well. Grieve not, my friends, for those who you knew, for they now see "face to face what we can only know dimly, as in a mirror" (1 Cor. 13:12). God wins!

"Death is swallowed up in victory!" "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. — 1 Cor. 15:55-57

As you wait for that great reunion day, when those separated in death are joined before the throne of the Lamb, take comfort too in the unity of the Church Militant with the Church Triumphant.

When serving a parish, I remember a woman who lost her husband in death. As you would expect, she grieved tremendously over her loss, and I noticed that she wasn't coming to communion. I went to her and asked why. She expressed her sorrow of going to the Lord's Table alone. I, of course, had no magical remedy to take away her pain. So I spoke of the resurrection and the life of the world yet to come. She, of course, was comforted by that promise. Still, she said, "Pastor, I'm grateful that my husband is in heaven and at peace." The problem is, "I want him here with me!" Such is the pain of sin and death.

I believe firmly what is confessed in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, namely that we, "with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven laud and magnify the Lord's glorious name." So I said to this grieving woman, "When you come here to this communion rail, God unites you with your husband in a way that your eyes cannot see. As surely as your neighbor kneels beside you at the rail, so your husband joins you in the Sacrament of Christ's body and blood from the other side of the communion rail; you from the Church Militant, he from the Church Triumphant." Oh, that our eyes could see the true unity of the Church expressed so beautifully at the Lamb's High Feast.

So take comfort, my friends, in that unity that you have with your loved ones who have gone before you in Christ. For they, like the rest of the Church, join in that endless song of praise to Christ who loved them unto death, even death on a cross. "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

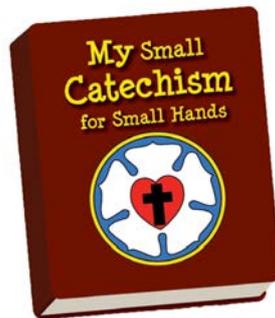
Board book teaches children the faith

“How much time do we spend teaching our young children God’s Word?” That’s the question Lisa Wolters asks parents purchasing her children’s book, *My Small Catechism For Small Hands*.

Lisa is a pastor’s wife, mother and grandmother and now an author of a children’s board book featuring activities and movable pieces.

With the help of graphic designer Cheryl Rackov, the self-published book was released in 2020. Created for children ages 2 through 6, the book is an interactive teaching tool introducing faith concepts found in Luther’s Small Catechism. “Teach me your way, O LORD” (Ps. 86:11) is the theme.

Redeemer Lutheran Church, Dickinson, and its LWML group have



given ongoing support to the book venture, including prayers, gifts and hours of volunteering. Relative to other children’s books, this was costly and time-consuming. Each page of the book features interactive activities using various materials and many movable pieces. A unique laser die-cutting technique allowed for the creation of the movable pieces. Thank you, Redeemer LWML, for your on-going support!

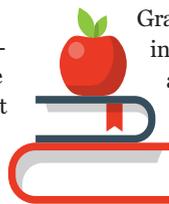
It is the prayer of *My Small Catechism For Small Hands* creators that parents will have as much fun teaching the life-giving concepts to their children as they had creating this book for them. To God be the glory!

More information is available at littlelutheranbook.wordpress.com or by sending an email to littlelutheranbook@outlook.com.

Grace Lutheran School says ‘thank you!’

Thank you to all who joined Grace Lutheran School, Fargo, for “A Celebration of Grace” in November. The staff is so humbled by the consistent generosity of its family, friends and congregations. An incredible \$38,761 was raised. Each year, an essential need is identified and this year it was lunch tables. Six safe, sturdy fold-up tables were installed in the gym in October.

This year, in addition to providing in-person learning to children who are benefiting from being in school five days a week,



Grace also distributed over \$100,000 in scholarships. Cost should never be a barrier to a Christian education.

All children have a place in the Grace family, which is grateful for the continued support from its congregations, family and friends that make this possible for all who desire a Grace education.

Grace is still enrolling for all grades for the current school year.

All at Grace hope you had a wonderful, Christ-filled holiday season.

Need a getaway?

Shepherd’s Hill at the Crossroads has several options for you and your family to retreat at a cabin! Come and see the winter wonderland and get out of the house for a while.

We have several cabins that have their own kitchen for your cooking needs, or talk with us about meals. Call today to reserve your space.

Rev. Jon Bonine, Executive Director

- shretreat.org
- director@shretreat.org
- 701-244-5225



March 5-6

- District Lutheran Youth Fellowship Retreat—Carrington

March 26-27

- Higher Things Retreats—St. Paul’s, Minot, and Immanuel, Wahpeton

June 29-July 2

- Higher Things Conference, “Forgiven”—NDSU, Fargo

HIGHER THINGS

Retreats: What is Church?

Two Higher Things youth retreats will be held March 26-27 at St. Paul’s, Minot, and Immanuel, Wahpeton.

Is church just a building? Is it where people come to pray? Does a church have to have stained glass windows and a steeple? Is church better if there are more people and loud singing?

What is the purpose of the church and



why should we even go? Do we go to church to give God our best, or do we go to receive God’s best in Christ via the Word and Sacraments?

For more information or to register, contact Rev. Dr. Matt Richard (for the St. Paul’s retreat) at pastor@anchoredminot.com, or Rev. Matthew Tooman (for the Wahpeton retreat) at looktoxp@reagan.com.



Thank you for supporting mission in Kenya

Christ's Care for Children: Kenya is a child sponsorship program that matches individuals, families or groups in the United States with children who are living in one of the Project 24 boarding facilities in Kenya. These facilities are managed by the LCMS and our partner church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK).

The North Dakota District has been supporting Christ's Care for Children: Kenya. Because of generous hearts like yours, the students who complete the program often have more opportunities to continue their education.

Sofia Chepengat (**top**) and Daniel Sengoi (**right**) are two such students who lived in Project 24's Udom facility. After Sofia completed her secondary education, she enrolled at Precollege Lutheran Academy to study Lutheran theology. She is engaged to a pastor from Kajiando central diocese and will join the college as an ELCK deaconess!

Daniel comes from a very humble background in Parkoya village, Sekeer parish. After completing his secondary



education, he also enrolled at Precollege Lutheran Academy to study Lutheran theology and he has a call to continue as an evangelist. He has applied for courses at Kapenguria Bible College in northwest diocese.

Congratulations to both Sofia and Daniel for continuing to do the Lord's work!

For more information on Project 24 or to sponsor a student through Christ's Care for Children: Kenya, please contact Jennifer Hummel at 314-996-1326 or jennifer.hummel@lcms.org.



Share your news with us!

We are always in need of more submissions for the North Dakota District *Lutheran Witness* insert. Why should you send them in? It helps remind us of what God is doing around the district. It is also a way to share ideas for nurturing those God has already gathered into His church and for reaching those still outside of the flock with the Good News about Jesus. It finally reminds each of us that Christ's church is much larger than just our particular congregation.

We welcome pictures and stories of congregational events, youth events, outreach events, installations, events from your men's or women's group, servant events, anniversaries, church renovations or additions, and much more. We understand the church looks different these days, but please share with us how your church is still engaged in ministry and what your life together currently looks like.

Please ensure photos sent electronically are high resolution.

Send submissions for the district supplement to Marie Johnson at news@nodaklcms.org.