

JULY-AUGUST 2016

# LUTHERAN SENTINEL

A PUBLICATION OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

## 99<sup>th</sup> Annual ELS Synod Convention

recap: pg. 10



*Tell of all His wondrous works! (Psalm 105:2)*

# Longing for A Better Country

Dear Members and Friends of our ELS:

**B**eliefs influence actions. If a person believes that a certain food is harmful to one's health, it is natural to expect the person to avoid eating the food. On a greater level, if a person believes that God is simply Nature and not personal, it would be natural to expect the person to have a deeply passionate fervor for ecology concerns. For all who believe in the Triune God of the Bible who secures for sinners eternal salvation through faith in Jesus, we can expect believers to live in a way that indicates heaven is their real home.

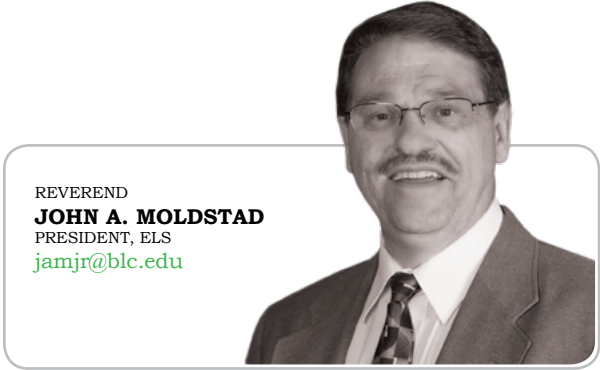
Well...at least, that is the way it should work! Our sinful flesh gets in the way. We want to be heavenly-minded, but we so often fail. The concerns of this life and the short-lived pleasures of the present world cloud our good intentions to focus on the beautiful place yet to come. Thanks to the Holy Spirit, who keeps our faith alive, we Christians are renewed daily in the forgiveness of sins won by Christ and offered in the Word. This moves us to see through the cloudy maze with a longing gaze for the homeland above!

God has given us some great examples of faithful believers who have gone before us. If you have not read Hebrews 11 for some time, I urge you to do so. Take a look at the many believers in Old Testament times who kept their sights on a better land while sojourning here below. Attention is given to Abraham and his wife Sarah. In the days of Nehemiah and Ezra, the prayer of the Levites references the faith of this great patriarch. Stephen mentions Abraham right at the outset of his powerful sermon, after which he was stoned. Our Lord Jesus spoke about Abraham in his preaching. Once he rebuked the unbelieving Jews by saying, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56).

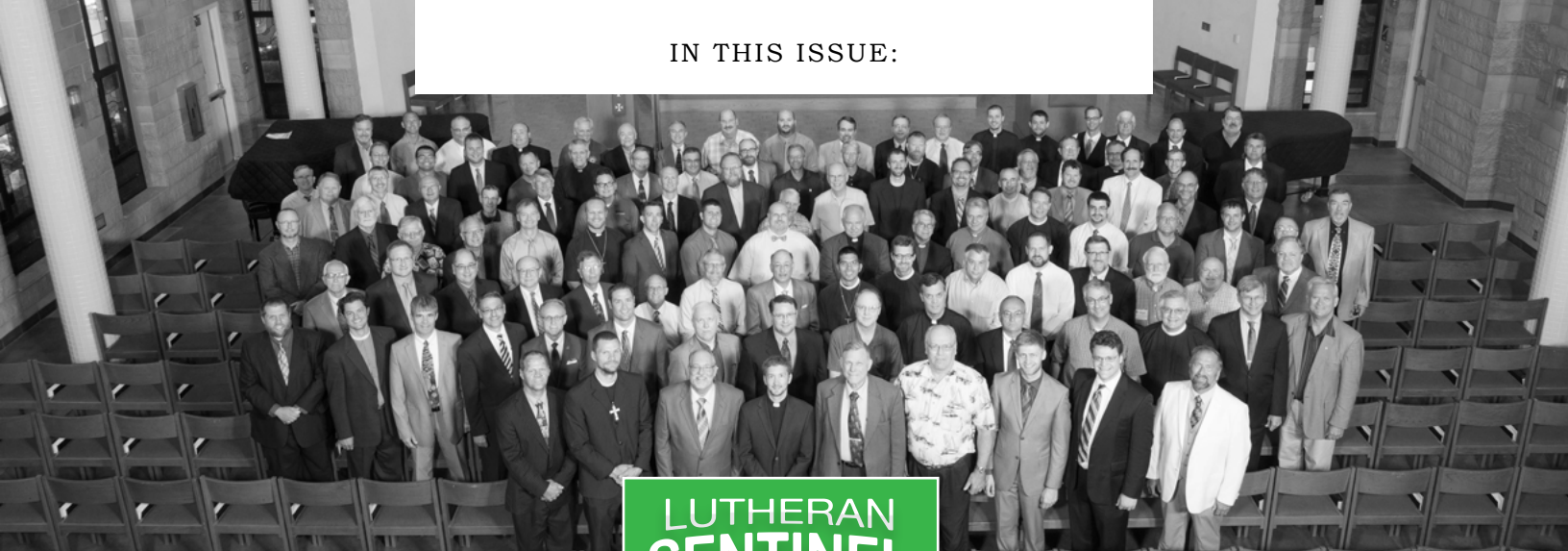
Oh, Abraham and Sarah and all the others mentioned as heroes of faith also had their moments of weakness. You and I too will continue to have those failing moments as we make our way on the journey. But, as Abraham looked to Christ and rejoiced, we too look again and again at Christ and the promises he has given us. This is how our faith is preserved under lock and key for admission into the blessed eternity.

Like Abraham and Sarah, are we not simply pilgrims in this world, longing for a better country? In Christ, we have that celestial territory!

For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. Hebrews 11:10



REVEREND  
**JOHN A. MOLDSTAD**  
PRESIDENT, ELS  
[jamjr@blc.edu](mailto:jamjr@blc.edu)



**LUTHERAN SENTINEL**  
JULY - AUGUST 2016

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**STAFF:**

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Ryan Madson - MADSON DESIGN CO. .... *Layout & Design*

## HOME MISSIONS

# A Reflection on Mission Strategy



**strat•e•gy** (strāt'ə-je) *n.*

1. Plan of action designed to achieve a particular goal.

**What is strategy?** Strategy in mission work does NOT mean a duly executed plan of action based on human observation and experience that brings people to faith, not unless we are speaking about the calling, gathering, enlightening, and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. However, we can speak of mission strategy if we mean a well-formulated but flexible method of procedure developed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and subject to His direction and control to take the Good News of Christ to people. This understanding of strategy has been beneficial as God grew Abiding Shepherd from a cold start mission into a sizeable congregation.

**What are the early stages of mission strategy?**

The first thing I did was get to know the people and community of Cottage Grove. Much of this was accomplished with door to door canvassing. I also set about getting to know my mission field by speaking to community leaders, local business owners, and core contacts suggested through neighboring ELS/WELS churches.

Once I understood the nature of this mission field, I could figure out what would and would not work. For example, while canvassing I learned the best time to have a worship service in this community was 9 a.m. Sunday mornings. That seems obvious, but a year after we started, another mission church also began in this area. They chose to worship on Sunday evenings – and they lasted less than a year.

Next, we planned our opening service. With a core group in place, we designed our worship space, a rented storefront. We also designed our service to meet the needs of the community with the pure Gospel. Implementing some variations to our traditional Bugenhagen liturgy, we designed our service to allow more time to deliver exegetical teaching of God's Word, including visuals to reflect the picturesque original languages of Scripture. The Holy Spirit blessed these efforts to reach many unchurched as well as formerly churched people.

**What is the strategy for building?** When we outgrew our rented space, we began our land search with one major criteria – to be a visible part of this community. Though our land was expensive, three acres on the main road, it has paid dividends in exposure and ease of access. It allowed us to become well-known in this community as a friendly place to find spiritual help.

**What is the strategy for future growth?** As we move forward, we have tried to keep in place much of the strategy by which God has already blessed us: simple Biblical teaching and a caring part of this community. Also, as part of our administrative structure, we have a Strategy and Planning Team so that we continue to move forward in a Godly way.

**What are some key components to good mission strategy?** These have made quite a difference in our efforts to engage others with Jesus:

- Get out of the Holy Spirit's way by preaching the text.
- Differentiate between outreach and evangelism. Outreach methodology is flexible to fit mission fields. Evangelism is sharing the unchanging Law & Gospel.
- Most people are looking for a shepherd, not an expert in theology. While good scholarship is important for our pastors, the priority is tending Christ's sheep.
- Tradition is important. Employ it when it offers value. Move on when it gets in the way of the Gospel. It's not about the building, location, the music, or the furniture. It's about the Gospel and dying souls who desperately need it.

REVEREND

**NATHAN KRAUSE**

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

ABIDING SHEPHERD LUTHERAN CHURCH  
COTTAGE GROVE, WI

**A NOTE FROM THE ANNIVERSARY OFFERING COMMITTEE:**

*Our home missions work is an integral part of our ELS. Be sure to support the Anniversary Offering by giving generously.*

*Visit [els.org/offering](http://els.org/offering) to learn more and support our students and missions online.*

SEND YOUR GIFT TO:

**ELS Anniversary Offering**  
6 Browns Ct.  
Mankato, MN 56001

.....

QUESTION: .....

Q

*Some of my older friends go to churches that offer a “Ceremony of Commitment,” a ceremony that takes the place of a wedding. Is this God-pleasing for Christians?*

A

ANSWER: .....

Earlier this year, Florida repealed a 148-year-old law banning unwed couples from living together. The law did not apply to same-sex couples. It is no longer illegal for unwed couples to live together as man and wife.

People, even couples, live together for many reasons. God regulates marriage and our sexual behavior with the Fourth and the Sixth Commandments. The Sixth Commandment forbids sexual relations outside of marriage. The Fourth Commandment commands us to obey our parents and superiors: “By parents and superiors God means our parents and all others whom He has placed over us, such as fathers and mothers, pastors and teachers, employers and government officials” (ELS explanation of the Small Catechism, questions 46).

In our society, the State (government officials) regulates the legality of marriage. States are not uniform in marriage laws. What constitutes a legal marriage varies. Under the Fourth Commandment, Christians will follow the laws of the state.

God does not empower His Church to act outside her authority by usurping or undermining state laws unless those laws are contrary to God’s will. Unless the state allows couples to be married without a license or solely by a “Ceremony of Commitment,” such a union is not valid. The couple is not legally married.

A pastor’s heart goes out to couples facing financial loss (Social Security and retirement benefits) because they strive to serve God by enter-

ing into a legal, God-pleasing marriage. God’s Church will not help God’s people circumvent the intent of the legal authorities by a show of right (see Luther’s explanation of the Ninth commandment). It is fraud to pretend to be legally married when we are not.

Such agonizing questions are not new to Christians.

St. Peter writes (I Peter 2:11-24):

*Beloved...abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation. Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bond-servants of God...For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps... “Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth”; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.*

REVEREND  
**CHARLES KEELER**  
RESURRECTION LUTHERAN CHURCH  
WINTER HAVEN, FL  
[cjohnk@aol.com](mailto:cjohnk@aol.com)



the *Gospel* according to  
**ISAIAH**

PART 4: **ISAIAH SEES AND HEARS THE HEAVENLY COUNCIL** (ISAIAH 42, 61)

In many Bibles, *the words of Jesus are printed in red*. But did you know that in the Old Testament, Christ speaks? And they are some of the most beautiful, tender, comforting words! These words could be embossed in gold, they are so precious.

.....

**W**e hear a conversation between God the Father and His only Son. This is the “heavenly council.” God the Father speaks to His Son lovingly and Christ before His incarnation speaks to His Father, all in the presence of the Holy Spirit. This is shown to us because it concerns you! It concerns your salvation and the great love God has for you.

► **READ:** ISAIAH 42:1-7 & ISAIAH 61:1-3

ISAIAH 42:1-7

At the beginning of Isaiah 42, who is speaking? God the Father. About whom is He speaking? His only-begotten Son, whom we know to be Jesus Christ.

The first word, “Behold!” is spoken to God’s people. Someone is being pointed to whom we should look upon— just as John the Baptist would later say: “Behold! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

The next words are: “*My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights!*” Martin Luther echoes these words in a hymn we love to sing: “But for us fights the Valiant One, whom God Himself elected” (ELH 250:2). This is a preview of the words God the Father spoke at Jesus’ baptism and at the transfiguration: “*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*” (Matt. 3:17).

God the Father declares many great things about what this “Servant” would do: He will be “a light to the Gentiles” (v. 6) and will “bring justice” – righteousness and justification – “to the Gentiles” (v. 1). He says, “He will not fail” (v. 4). He says, “I have put My Spirit upon Him.” That is to say, the Holy Spirit is in perfect harmony with what is being said and is working with Christ. Then He says: “He will not cry out, nor raise His voice...” He would not cry out in complaint for what He was commissioned to suffer.

All of this is a grand declaration that God the Father makes. His Son is listening, and it is as if there is a look of concern upon His face when in verse 6 the Father turns to speak directly to His Son – and lets us listen in!

He says: “I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand; I will keep You...” Earlier, the Father said His Son is “My Servant whom I uphold.” The Father tells His Son that He will hold His hand, hold Him up, and preserve Him when He would drink the cup of woe.

The Father knows “the wrath and stripes are hard to bear” (ELH #331:2) and conveys this loving concern for His Son. He encourages Him by making promises about what Christ will do. He will “open blind eyes, bring out prisoners from the prison,” etc. These are promises that Christ would free people from the prison of the Law.

### ISAIAH 61:1-3

What did Christ have to say? When does He speak? In Isaiah 61:1-3. Hearing all that God the Father said, knowing the Holy Spirit has been placed upon Him, what does the Son of God have to say? “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me,” He says. “The Lord has anointed Me” – Messiah’ed Him – “to preach good tidings to the poor ... heal the brokenhearted ... comfort all who mourn ... give the garment of praise instead of the spirit of heaviness...”

He speaks the Gospel, Jesus’ proper work. For troubled sinners, He has only tender words of love, just as the Father had only tender words of love for Him. Here Christ is not only speaking to us. He is answering the Father’s words in chapter 42 and speaking in the presence of the Holy Spirit, declaring their unity of purpose.

This is why the Lord wants us to hear these conversations. It is to give you confidence. It is to help you answer the accusations of the devil. It is to give you a good conscience. We lean and depend upon what the Triune God has decreed from eternity in His secret council, carried out in the work of Jesus and brought to us by the Holy Spirit in the Divine Service, where Christ is still the Servant, serving us with His salvation.

You cannot receive this from an emphasis on Jesus’ Lordship over your life. You can only receive this from hearing that He is the Servant. He came to serve and to give His life as a ransom for all – for you. He “made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant” (Philippians 2:7)... for you.

*He serves that I a lord may be;  
A great exchange indeed!  
Could Jesus’ love do more for me  
To help me in my need?*

(Nikolaus Herman; ELH 148:7)

REVEREND  
**JERRY GERNANDER**  
BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH  
PRINCETON, MN  
[revjerome@nsatel.net](mailto:revjerome@nsatel.net)



NEXT ARTICLE (PART 5) IN THE SERIES: **ISAIAH SEES THE SUFFERING SAVIOR**



# Let the Children Come

The baseball season is now in full swing, and Facebook pages are scattered with pictures captioned, “Junior’s first Twins game!” Those one-year-olds often don’t look as thrilled as the parents about the experience. They’re frightened by the cheers, the shouting, and the flying food and drinks from exuberant fans. They don’t understand what is going on and probably won’t remember it, and yet parents see value in taking the children to ball games.

The best family activity is bringing children to the Divine Service. This can be a frightful exercise, not for the kids, but for the parents. The potential for kids’ shouting, flying Cheerios and sippy cups, and all the wiggling in the pews makes for anxious times. There certainly are appropriate times to take a noisy child out temporarily to reprimand or offer a moment to cool down. However, with that real need comes the temptation to regularly remove the child from the Divine Service, whether it is to play with toys in the nursery, to send them out to hear Bible stories and color in “children’s church,” or not to take the children at all. After all, we don’t want to distract other people from their worship, and parents feel that they can get more out of church if they don’t have to give half their attention to wrestling Junior.

Contrary to parents’ fears and concerns, children, as part of the body of Christ, belong in the Divine Service long before they understand all that is going on. Jesus’ words recorded in Luke 18:16, “*Let the little children come to me,*” are evidence enough. Jesus wanted them to come to Him so that He might bless them. Two points are important for us to examine further. The first is God blesses through His Word, and the second is faith receives God’s blessing.

First, Jesus blesses children and all in attendance in the Divine Service through His Word. Christ’s Word carries the blood-bought blessings of His sacrifice on Calvary. He liberally dispenses the treasury of His heavenly blessings through His Word. He blessed the children by water and the Word through which He brought them forgiveness of all their sins and entrance into His eternal kingdom. He commanded Peter, “Feed My lambs,” and still today, through the preached and taught word of the pastoral (shepherding) office, Jesus nour-

ishes and feeds His little lambs, blessing them with that same forgiveness and life.

Second, recognize that faith alone receives these blessings. Rational capacity or attentiveness are not conditions for receiving God’s blessing. When Jesus commanded the disciples to let the parents bring their children to Him in Luke’s Gospel, it says that the parents were bringing specifically their infants (βρέφη) to Him. Jesus didn’t require them to have certain rational capabilities or to stop wiggling first. But Jesus held those wiggly, noisy children and blessed them. And blessed they were, for Christ gives His heavenly blessings and faith alone receives it. Luther contends that children are better candidates for faith than adults because they lack reason, “for reason is diametrically opposed to faith” (AE, Vol. 68, p. 22). Since children can have the gift of faith, St. Paul could say of Timothy, “*from infancy, you have known the Holy Scripture, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus*” (2 Timothy 3:15). Christ’s Word is not spoken to children in vain, for His little lambs are part of His flock and they hear His voice.

Bringing children to the Divine Service is more than just giving them an experience that we value and find worthwhile. It is even more than creating in them the vital habit of regular church attendance. It is recognizing that Jesus and His proclaimed Word are *for them*. By bringing them to the Divine Service, parents bring them to Jesus that there they may be blessed by Him. It’s not easy wrestling, disciplining, and teaching them. Patience wears thin. You don’t get to pay attention as well as you would like. But it is a sacrifice that God commands parents to make, and it is worth it. You are bringing your children to gather with you and the baptized family of God and to sit at the feet of Christ. And there, at Christ’s feet, old and young alike are blessed by the Word that is Spirit and Life (John 6:63).

REVEREND  
**JOSHUA SKOGEN**  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER  
HOPE LUTHERAN CHURCH  
PORTAGE, IN



# Accidentally LUTHERAN LYRICS

WHEN A POPULAR ARTIST OR SONGWRITER, PROBABLY BY PURE ACCIDENT, GIVES EXPRESSION TO THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IN KEEPING WITH LUTHERAN CONFESSION.

**SONG:** IMPERMANENT THINGS **ARTIST:** PETER HIMMELMAN **YEAR:** 1992

*All these impermanent things  
Present yet elusive; Passive yet abusive  
Tearing out the heart in utter silence.  
All these impermanent things.*

.....

The nine-month-old boy watched as the interesting fluid filled the giant saucer in which he was placed. Even more captivating was the shiny snout that was sticking out from the wall gushing forth with more of this clear, warm fluid. After observing this continuing flow for some time, the inquisitive boy couldn't contain himself any longer. He had to have it! He reached out and snatched at a handful of the fluid. But when he opened his hand, he had nothing to show for his effort. Again he tried... and again... and again. Each time, to no avail. The substance was so desirable, it was as if the boy's heart had leapt out of his chest for it... only to be left out in the open, vulnerable.

It's a silly anecdote when it's a boy desperately trying to grasp a handful of water. But the illustration loses its humor when it casts us in the starring role – our hearts leaping out of their chest cavities, covetously looking up to that next income bracket as “the crown” to be had, loving the youthful beauty that seems forever available at the scroll of a mouse, entrusting ourselves and our children to currency that pays the bills and pleasures the senses. All these impermanent things...

**God declares:**

You shall have no other gods  
(created things) before me.

*Luther expounds:*

We are to fear, love and trust in God  
above all 'things.'

Our flesh fails:

Fearing (looking up to), loving,  
and trusting in 'things' above all.

God's law deals a death blow to our hearts. It shows us to be idolaters – profound lovers of impermanent things. God's law also gives our hearts good direction. It points our love toward that which is good, the permanence of God Himself. But there, God's law has done all it's given to do. It cannot join our thing-loving hearts to the holy God. But what God's word of law cannot do, His other Word does do. This Word is Itself God – God from the very beginning, in fact. This Word, then, is the perfectly permanent thing. And this Word joined Itself to the impermanent things of this world. This Word became flesh. Jesus was born to deliver to you and me the permanence we hopelessly seek in all these impermanent things. And deliver He has! Your permanent treasure is not found in gold or silver, not in stocks or bonds, not in pleasure or world peace. Your permanent Treasure is Jesus Himself: His holy precious blood, His innocent suffering and death. Here, in Jesus, God gives us the permanent kingdom we hopelessly seek in impermanent things. God the Father donated His own heart, Jesus, to rescue us from our own impermanent thing-loving hearts. And His donation has purchased you a place in His permanent kingdom that you might serve Him there flush with His Son's righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. Jesus is your Permanent Thing. This is most certainly true!



REVEREND  
**KYLE MADSON**  
MANAGING EDITOR, LUTHERAN SENTINEL  
DIVINE MERCY LUTHERAN CHURCH  
HUDSON OAKS, TX  
[pr.madson33@gmail.com](mailto:pr.madson33@gmail.com)



The 99th Annual Convention  
OF THE  
Evangelical Lutheran Synod

**SYNOD SUNDAY:** JUNE 19

The 99th Regular Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, the 60th Annual Meeting of the Bethany Lutheran College Corporation, and the 1st Annual Meeting of the Lutheran Schools of America began with a festival Synod Sunday Service in Trinity Chapel beginning at 3:00 p.m. Pastor Shawn Stafford (Hartland, Minnesota) preached the sermon based on Psalm 105:1-7 The Rev. Christopher Dale (Port St. Lucie, Florida) served as the liturgist.



**MONDAY:** JUNE 20

The first working day of the Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, was opened with a devotion conducted at 9:00 a.m. in Trinity Chapel. The chaplain, the Rev. Michael Muehlenhardt (Cottonwood, Minnesota) preached the opening sermon based on Hebrews 10:15-25 under the theme "Remembering God's covenant, we proclaim His grace."

<< **President Moldstad addressed the convention** with the annual president's message: Eternal hope is only set forth in holy Scripture. We have gathered at this 99th convention of our Evangelical Lutheran Synod to be refreshed in the living hope we enjoy in our Savior. We have ample reason for cheerful confidence in God and His promises!

- **Other greetings to the convention** came from:
  - the observer from the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC)
  - the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC)
  - Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary
  - Missionary Timothy Erickson, who has served as the longest tenured missionary in the history of the ELS
- **Committee work** filled the afternoon and evening time.





**TUESDAY: JUNE 21**

The Tuesday morning devotion was conducted by Rev. Jeffery Merseth (Oklee, Minnesota). The sermon was based upon Romans 1:14-17 with the theme “Empowered by the gospel, we proclaim salvation.”

Other happenings included:

- ✓ **Two congregations, two pastors, and two teachers were received into membership** and invited to the stage and welcomed by the president.



- **Rev. Steven Lange, from the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS)**, brought greetings to the convention from our sister church body.
- **President Moldstad introduced the essayist, the Rev. Timothy Hartwig** (North Mankato, Minnesota). The essayist began reading the essay, Proclaim the Wonders God Has Done! Give Thanks to His Name!
- **During the report of the Doctrine Committee**, by unanimous voice vote, the convention adopted the “Joint Statement Regarding Termination of Fellowship” which was presented to the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) and Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC).

**WEDNESDAY: JUNE 23** *(continued on following page)*

(continued from previous page)

### WEDNESDAY: JUNE 23

The Wednesday morning devotion was conducted by the Rev. D.Hartwig (Okauchee, Wisconsin). The sermon was based on Colossians 4:2-6 with the theme: Giving thanks for God’s wonders, we proclaim wisdom and grace.”

Other happenings included:

- **Mr. Leroy Meyer** was brought to the front of the convention hall and presented a stained-glass plaque in recognition of completing fifty years of service to the synod as a member of the Board of Trustees. During his tenure, he served with four presidents, eleven vice-presidents, three secretaries, three treasurers and a total of thirty three different men as trustees.
- **The essayist, the Rev. Timothy Hartwig** (North Mankato, Minnesota) continued reading the essay.
- **Ten men were who were reaching significant anniversaries** of their ordination were recognized for their years of service.
- **The convention essay - Proclaim the Wonders God Has Done! Give Thanks to His Name!** – was completed.



In his concluding remarks, President Moldstad quoted President M. E. Tweit’s words from the 1958 convention:

*“Truly we are highly favored who are permitted to live in this love through the preaching of the unconditioned Gospel and the right administration of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. From this is ought to follow that ‘we love Him, because He first loved us,’ 1 John 4,19. May the words of the hymn writer Kingo be our faith and confession as we say:*

*Thy love, O gracious Lord and God,  
 All other loves excelling.  
 Attunes my heart to sweet accord,  
 And passes power of telling;  
 For when Thy wondrous love I see,  
 My heart yields glad submission;  
 I love Thee for Thy love to me  
 In my poor, lost condition.*

*“With this love of Christ constraining us let us set as our aim at this convention to provide for the following goals of accomplishment in the days, weeks, and months ahead:*

- 1. To preserve purity of doctrine and practice within our congregations.*
- 2. To strengthen the bonds of faith and the unity of confession which unites us as a synod.*
- 3. To increase our mission work so that we reach an ever wider field with the saving gospel.*
- 4. To start more elementary schools within our congregations; to enlarge and strengthen our Bethany High School, College and Seminary so that the generations to come may reap of the rich blessings we have received.*
- 5. To increase our Christian giving until it becomes a true reflection of love to our Savior for His boundless love to us.*

Following the adjournment of the convention, the Communion Service was conducted in Trinity Chapel beginning at 7:30 p.m. The Rev. T.Buelow (Carthage, Missouri) preached the sermon based upon Colossians 3:15-17 with the theme “Give Thanks to God the Father through Christ.” The Rev. L.Ulrich (Mankato, Minnesota) served as the liturgist for the service.

Soli Deo Gloria



The 99th Annual Convention OF THE Evangelical Lutheran Synod



# 2016 Seminary Commencement



The Commencement Service for Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, which included both the assignment of calls and graduation of students, occurred on Wednesday, May 11, 2016, at 4:00 p.m. in Trinity Chapel. The Rev. Craig Ferkenstad (Norseland and Norwegian Grove Lutheran Churches, Saint Peter, Minnesota) served as preacher, Pres. Gaylin Schmeling served as liturgist, the Rev. Herbert Huhnerkoch represented the Board of Regents, and Mr. John Baumann was

the organist. The sermon was based on Hebrews 12:2-3, telling the candidates and vicars that as they go forward, they are to keep looking to Jesus, who is the Author and Perfecter of our faith. We look neither to the world nor to popular opinion, but keep looking to Jesus as we proclaim the Law and the Gospel of reconciliation. We do so until the day when we see Him face-to-face in the heavenly home which He has prepared for us.



**GRADUATES**

**MASTER OF DIVINITY:**

Matthew Behmer,  
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Jeffrey Hendrix,  
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Andrew Soule

**MASTER OF ARTS /  
LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL  
STUDIES:**

Elisabeth Urtel

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Grace Lutheran Church  
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Redeeming Grace Lutheran Church  
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Rock Dell Lutheran Church  
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Frankenmuth, MI

**KURTIS FREIMUTH**, Vicar  
Grace Lutheran Church  
Vero Beach, FL

ELS Circuit #12  
Pastors' Conference  
West Jordan, UT  
January, 2016

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## Enough to Make Your Pastor Curse!

January's (2016) ELS Circuit #12 Pastors' Conference met at Hope Lutheran Church, West Jordan, UT. Our brothers and sisters of this congregation were truly hospitable. Pastor Paul Webber arranged an evening train ride to downtown Salt Lake City for us so that we might take an instructive tour of the Mormon Temple Square. There, too, we were cordially welcomed, treated to a tasty dinner overlooking the attractively illuminated Temple and engaged with stimulating conversations. Elder Steven Snow, one of the Seventy and the Chief Historian of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints, welcomed our questions, answered them with apparent frankness, and with genuine curiosity asked us questions.

It was observed to Elder Snow that on our tour at the foot of the large statue of the resurrected Lord Jesus (see picture), the two young women, who gave well-rehearsed speeches at all our tour stops, used some very familiar Lutheran terms. For example, they referred to Jesus as the "Savior" and the message of His work for our salvation as the "Gospel." But in their closing message, it was stated while Jesus made it possible for us to be saved, we must live according to His commands in order to be saved. However, based on their use in Scripture, these familiar terms have different meanings among confessional Lutherans. The Gospel as taught in Scripture is the Good News that not only did Jesus make full payment for all our sins with His holy sacrifice, He lived the righteous life that is imputed to us so that salvation is more than a possibility; it is an accomplished fact. Elder Snow acknowledged this difference between us. How sad it was to hear those familiar terms of



ELS Visitors to the Mormon Temple Square, Salt Lake City, UT

our salvation used in a way that robs the sinner of real comfort and certainty.

These words from Galatians come to mind:

*"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed." (1:6-8, ESV)*

While we love our gracious Mormon hosts, their distortions of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus must be condemned. We pray for their conversion. They certainly heard from us the true Gospel several times in our conversations. Interestingly, we were informed that their familiar "door to door" work is proving less "fruitful" for them, so their missionaries are being directed to volunteer for community service. But do not be fooled. They still teach an accursed gospel, which remains eternally unfruitful. Unless they repent and believe the real Gospel that Jesus alone has done all to save them, too, they sadly will in the end be cursed for all eternity.

REVEREND  
**GLENN OBENBERGER**  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER  
PARKLAND LUTHERAN CHURCH  
TACOMA, WA



# TRANSGENDERISM:

## IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT THE BATHROOMS

One of the most significant social issues impacting our current culture landscape is the issue of transgenderism. This is a heated and controversial topic for the Christian church with much fear and anxiety about court rulings and state laws that are being written regarding bathroom access, school policies, and employment nondiscriminatory practices. Many children and families are inundated with information in our media about the evolving view of best practices for providing care and counsel to individuals that do not feel that their biological sex matches with their gender. Gender fluidity, a rejection of stereotypical gender norms, has also become a popular social trend for many young children and adolescents. For example, young men have started fandoms that allow them to embrace traditionally feminine interests (e.g. Bronies = Men/Boys who love the television program My Little Pony, a show originally geared towards young girls). And perhaps most notably, Bruce “Caitlyn” Jenner and North Carolina bathrooms have become instant buzz phrases that break the internet as everyone has an opinion on the issue.

How the church communicates with and reaches out to the secular culture regarding the issue of gender conformity during these times is very important. But before we begin, it needs to be stated that the medical community is not consistent in regards to the research about the causes, treatment, or outcomes for transgender care. There is much ambiguity and inconsistent results in regards to the best practices, but needless to say this has not stopped the social and political machine of postmodern tolerance from promoting a particular agenda of affirm-

ing transgenderism and medical interventions. I hope to provide some initial reflections on how to speak truth with grace and compassion on this issue.

First, it can be fairly easy to jump on the bandwagon that suggests the Christian church has already conclusively determined everything that there is to say in regards to gender, sex, and natural law. There are numerous oft-quoted Scriptures which do give some clear indication of Biblical support of the male-female created order: “He created them male and female and blessed them” (Genesis 5:2) or when Jesus reiterated this original design when he stated, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female” (Matthew 19:4). These Scriptures are important to consider and they obviously should be part of the dialogue in this issue. I would, however, encourage that we do not use these verses as a bludgeoning weapon whereby we do not allow a conversation to occur. I also believe that we need to be mindful of how sin has changed humanity from the original creation of being perfectly made in God’s image.

The fall into sin has corrupted all of our existence, and the impacts are far-reaching as this has distorted everything about our human sexuality, which includes our thoughts, behaviors, and even our genetics and physical bodies. These biological variations can very much impact one’s personality and how one experiences their own gender. Some may characterize me as being unnaturally feminine because I, as a counselor, am more willing to express emotions and be nurturing. Men should be tough and show no emotion, right? Or there are many examples of young

In your blest body let me be / E'en as the branch is in the tree / Thy life my life supplying.  
P. NICOLAI



girls who love to play football and reject the idea of wearing a dress and playing with dolls. So the question must then be posed: If we have discovered genetic and chromosomal abnormalities within someone's sexual anatomy or gender expression, does that suggest that the original created order of male and female in Genesis does not exist today? I will claim that we can make those statements about a progressive sinful deterioration without affirming the belief that this gives credence to the idea that there are souls born in the wrong sexual anatomy. We know that God's original created design only included distinctly male and female. We also know that due to our fallen sinful state, our sexuality is veiled from its original creation in God's image. However, when all humans, including transgendered individuals, were "knit together in the mother's womb," this was a definitive imprint that God made to assign them within their vocation as male or female. And I would also add that even though personality traits with their corresponding gender variations exist, this does not suggest that we should encourage a more drastic procedure of changing one's sexual anatomy through sex change surgery or hormone replacement.

As was stated earlier, the research regarding transgender development and care is in its infancy. We are very wise to hesitate with making drastic recommendations for children and adolescents during early, developmentally crucial times, especially as there is research that suggests that gender nonconformity is a "phase of life" and that intervening with invasive procedures can have long-term damaging impacts. With the conversation and debate about the medical field aside, I do hope that a bottom line can be made. We should understand that transgenderism is

not just a social issue. These are human souls, beautifully designed by God and redeemed by the blood of His Son. We cannot afford to view them simply as a deviant social issue or a debate in our political culture.

We must be able to engage and create a safe place for confused and disoriented individuals to understand God's plan for their bodies. There is a vocation within gender and our human sexuality, and we can speak with grace and compassion to these individuals and to the unbelieving world.

PSY.D  
**JOSHUA MEARS**  
YOUNG BRANCHES, EDITOR  
HERITAGE LUTHERAN CHURCH  
APPLE VALLEY, MN





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### 07/01/2015 — 06/30/2016

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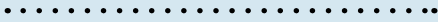
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MANKATO, MN 56001

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The Board of Regents of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, Mankato, Minnesota announces that the following have been placed in nomination for Professor of Old Testament at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, Mankato, Minnesota.

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*Mark DeGarmeaux*

*Christian Eisenbeis*

*Timothy Hartwig*

*Matthew Moldstad*

*Timothy Nass*

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*Timothy Schmeling*

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Christ, Port St. Lucie, FL • Hope, West Jordan, UT • Parkland, Tacoma, WA •  
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