

BOARD OF DIRECTORS, SOUTHEASTERN DISTRICT, LCMS

2018 Convention Report

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the mission,

In June of 2015, while my dad and I were visiting some dear friends in Wales, I received an email from the District Office. The title of the email was “Southeastern District Board of Directors selects a Chair” – when I opened the email the message read, “It’s you.” For the past three years, it has been an honor and a joy to serve in this capacity on the board. ☺ The board continues to meet four times per year – and often conducts additional business via email. Our meetings are infused with the practice of listening prayer – a method of Bible study and devotion that teaches us to leave room for the work of the Holy Spirit. During our times together, as we listen and learn from our president, the staff, and each other about what’s happening in our district, we strive to make decisions that further the mission of our Southeastern District.

I am happy to report to you that the health of our district is good and the ministries of our district are strong and vibrant as, in many and various ways, we work to connect people to Jesus. And as we connect people to Jesus, it is exciting to see lives being transformed, and encouraging to witness the growth of God’s kingdom. As a board, we have had opportunities to hear from pastors, parishioners, church workers, and others with stories of the miracles of God’s grace that are happening while we move forward with our iNeighborhood initiatives. People are being equipped through a variety of opportunities to share the love of Christ with their neighbors – and these Gospel sharing opportunities are beginning with a basic desire to get to know our neighbors, communicate with them, and live our lives simply as God’s children, marked with kindness and concern. St. Francis of Assisi has been credited with saying: “Preach the Gospel everywhere you go – when necessary, use words.” Simply living openly as God’s children in the midst of our neighborhoods, while making an effort to know and love our neighbors, can be the beginning of an amazing experience of sharing the love of Jesus. We are seeing that, from these simple encounters, come life-giving moments of prayer, teaching, sharing, and affirmation.

The financial state of our District is strong. Under the direction and management of Steve Heemann and the finance committee, the board members carefully monitor the income and expenses in a comprehensive and meticulous way. We undergo audits and reviews to insure that we are able to anticipate any changes that may be on the horizon. In addition, we are continuing to find ways to develop new resources for funding as well as opportunities for our faithful donors to maintain their strong support of this mission.

Care for our workers is essential as we move forward in ministry. To that end, our district staff continues to offer workshops, conferences, and other learning opportunities for our workers to hone their craft and sharpen their skills. In addition to that, the Worker Care Team has been re-established to insure that the well-being of our called church workers, both ordained and commissioned, is constantly a priority.



Our Board of Directors and the Office of the President monitor the activities, decisions, and practices of our national church body, the LCMS. We are happy to become involved in issues and discussions when we feel that our participation can be helpful to the whole, and when the topics directly connect to the mission and vision of our district. Knowing that some issues could easily derail our attention from the work of mission, we pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance in discerning if and when to become involved in those national conversations. In general, however, the board remains primarily focused on ministry in the district and stands solidly behind President John as, together, we work to connect the people of our neighborhoods to Jesus.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve on the Board of Directors. It is a privilege to participate on this board – and it is even more of a privilege to work alongside the other men and women of faith who have also been called to service in this way. The servant leaders that gather around the board table are deeply invested in the ministry of our district and are committed to making decisions that will connect people to Jesus. In addition, I am very grateful for the men and women of our district staff who daily dedicate themselves to touching the lives of the 32 million people within our borders – and to many outside our borders as well – with the grace and mercy of a God who loves them very much. These humble servants have a real heart for God's people and for mission – they work tirelessly to guide and direct, create and maintain, and to propel the mission forward.

While it's impossible to predict the future, we know the heart of the One who is already there. I imagine that the next three years – and hopefully many more – will be filled with story after story of God's incredible work in the lives of His people. I can sense the excitement and can feel the amazement as God uses you and me to be His hands and feet in this part of the mid-Atlantic.

To Him be the glory!

Blessings!



Dr. Dina Carol Vendetti, Chair
SED Board of Directors



THE DISTRICT PRESIDENT'S REPORT

2018 Southeastern District Convention

“LET’S GO FISHING!”

Bookend Fishing Stories

Our convention theme is inspired by St. Peter who said, “I’m going out to fish.” The other disciples said, “We’ll go with you.” (John 21:3) Even though they were expert fishermen, they caught nothing. A few verses later, Jesus enters into the story and the disciples’ boats were suddenly swamped with fish.

Jesus got the immediate attention of His fisherman disciples on two different occasions with a miraculous catch of fish. Both times because of the holy suggestion of Jesus, the disciples go from fish-less discouragement to being fish-full joy. These two fish stories



form the basis of our convention theme. These stories are so similar one might easily be confused into thinking they are one and the same story emphasizing different eyewitness details.

Both fishing stories happen in the vicinity of Capernaum and the northwestern coastline of the Sea of Galilee, but they happen three years apart from one another. The first story is told only by Luke, while the second fish story is told only by John. One happens at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry – the other happens at the end of His earthly ministry, just prior to His Ascension into heaven. The stories serve as bookends of the Gospel of Jesus.

The First Catch – Leads to a Calling

After being surprised at the huge catch of fish after a fishless night on the Sea of Galilee, the disciples (Peter, Andrew, James and John) were in awe of the power of Jesus, who had instructed them, “Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.” When they had come ashore with the best fish story ever, it appears they didn’t need any more convincing as they hear: “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will catch men.” (Luke 5:1-11) The first catch of fish gives a glimpse at their future call, but before they do any spiritual net-work they have the invitation to follow Jesus as disciples.

It’s fascinating to consider that there is never another reference to catching people in the Gospels. There are no recorded “how-to” catch people lessons. And while we see the disciples back on the water sailing this way and that, their apostolic vocation is pronounced. They are disciples of Jesus, who continue to support their ministry through their old livelihoods. But their main job is to learn to follow Jesus. They’re hooked.

*“Simon Peter told
the other disciples,
‘I’m going out to
fish.’ They said,
‘We’ll go with
you.”
(John 21:3)*



The Second Catch – Leads to a Commissioning

John's fish story is at the end of his Gospel. In those 40 days between Jesus' resurrection and His ascension, we find the disciples back at the Sea of Galilee. Without Jesus there to lead them, they must not have known what to do next. One day Peter says, "I'm going out to fish." His companions said, "We'll go with you." (John 21:3)

As they return from their outing, a mysterious man on the shore inquires of their catch and, on hearing their report, tells them to fish on the right side of the boat. Nets become so full, they cannot be pulled into the boat. Fisherman John gives the report: 153 large fish.

That's when they recognized Jesus. Through full nets they see the signature of the resurrected Lord and they recognize Him. This sets the stage for Peter's restorative walk on the beach with Jesus. Jesus commissions Peter with the words, "Feed my lambs." Peter and the disciples are part of the big catch once again.



Fishing – Endorsed by Our First LCMS President

The first President of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod was an avid soul fisherman. In his address to the 1st Session of the Synodical Conference, President C.F.W. Walther spoke these words:

"What would happen if we really would make the saving of souls the ultimate purpose, the end and aim of our joint work? . . . Even though all kinds of strife-causing questions might arise yet, the question: 'Which course is best for the salvation of souls?' will quickly give the right solution . . . Whatever will win the most souls for Christ, that would decide between us . . ."

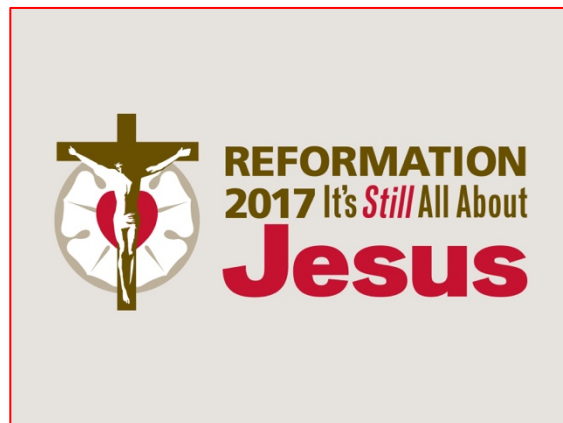
Walther argued that as the church body would focus on "the saving of souls," it would keep the church body tenacious in holding on to pure doctrine of God's Word. The starting point for a church body (whether a denomination, a congregation, or an individual) is our heavenly Father's heart.

We see our Father, running to catch Adam and Eve when their spiritual and eternal lives were at risk. He comes down to the Garden of Eden to find them, and speaks His Word of promise to them. The Father's actions reveal an enormous love that stops at nothing – even sacrificing His one and only Son on the cross to win us back through the blood-bought forgiveness. Then He stuns all creation with the surprise of a resurrection. His focus is all about net-work, that is, "the saving of souls."



Last year, as your congregations celebrated the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, we remembered God's design through which the life-saving Gospel was rediscovered by Martin Luther. In the same way that Martin Luther was used in a global lifesaving mission, our Lord wants to work through each one of us. As we read and study God's Word, we recognize we are not only saved from something – we are saved **for** something.

God's ultimate plan is to use the very ones He has rescued to be part of His lifesaving mission. As we engage in our Father's work, the doctrines of His Word (The Holy Trinity, the incarnation, Law and Gospel, justification and sanctification) are put into motion as His kingdom comes to the hearts of His precious children. One does not happen without the other. The saving of souls and doctrine are inseparable.



“Oh, how important it is, therefore, my brothers, that, above all, we make the salvation of souls the ultimate goal of our common labor in the kingdom of Christ! Then it is impossible for us not to ‘give heed to the doctrine’ and thus not to remain vigilant, not to flag in faithfulness to God’s Word in any way.” (CFW Walther, *Address to the 1st Session of the Synodical Conference, 1872*)

So how is the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod doing at its soul-saving task? What about the Southeastern District? What about your congregation, school, or mission? If you were called upon to give a report to this Convention about your personal fishing results, what would you say?

THE FISHERMEN’S REPORT

The Probing Question

Jesus stands on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and asks a question because He already knows the answer: “Friends, haven’t you any fish?” For fisherman who have wrestled for hours, repeatedly throwing nets out and pulling them in, only to find them empty again, it had to be a discouraging question. While it asks for simple information, it also highlights the failure of their fishing expedition. Obviously, there were lots of fish in the Sea of Galilee, it’s just that none of those fish were in their nets.

“Jesus called out to them, ‘Friends, haven’t you any fish?’”
John 21:5

The Disturbing Answer

Imagine Jesus calling to each of us today as He peers from a distance at us working in and around our ecclesiastical boats, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?” Like the disciples, many of our pastors, commissioned workers, and lay leaders are discouraged, frustrated, and sensitive. We have been doing everything we know



how to do and are finding little or no fish. If an adult baptism or an adult confirmation is a signal of the catch, many are finding that our nets are also empty.

A 2010-2016 comparative report to the LCMS Board of Directors based on statistics from 2015 showed our challenge. (Hopefully, 2017 statistics will be available by the time of the SED Convention.) While we were one of only a few Districts that had growth in the number of congregations, we still lost thousands of members.

Southeastern District			
2010		2016	
204	Congregations	212	Congregations
67,241	Baptized members	61,295	Baptized members
51,237	Confirmed members	47,613	Confirmed members
LCMS			
2010		2016	
6075	Congregations	5987	Congregations
2,312,111	Baptized members	2,056,566	Baptized members
1,784,139	Confirmed members	1,606,632	Confirmed members

Figure 1 LCMS Statistical Report

Holy Spirit Stocked Waters

Jesus' question is particularly poignant because there is no lack of fish to catch. As sailors on the missional waters of the SED, we know the facts. The population of the United States continues to multiply, now measuring 327 million people. We live in one of the geographical areas that has an ever-expanding population. Three years ago, more than 32,225,000 people lived within the borders of the Southeastern District. That number has grown to be 32,500,000 in the last three years. No other LCMS District serves a greater number of people. We have 10% of the United States living next to us in 3878 zip codes.

Numbers that count	
32,500,000	people
61,295	baptized
3,878	zip codes
216	congregations
84	schools
32	missions

Around 80% of the population no longer attends church – meaning that almost 26 million people in the SED are not being spiritually fed. That's a lot of fish. The waters we fish are stocked by the Holy Spirit. The mission waters around our churches, schools, homes, and places of work are teeming with hungry fish.

The Lord's Instruction and the Disciples' Response

Everyone one of us knows that disturbing report, many of us see it in our own congregations. Even if trend lines are plateaued or on the rise in our congregation, we know the facts of life of Christian congregations across the North America.



In the Johannine account, Jesus tells these experienced fishermen what to do: *“Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.”* When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.” (John 21:6)

*“Throw your net
on the right side
of the boat and
you will find
some.”
John 21:6*

Our pastors, commissioned workers, and lay leaders can easily be as tired and discouraged as Jesus’ disciples after their fishless labor. Our Lord Jesus, Lord of the Church, comes to us today by the power of the Holy Spirit to remind us of this multiplication story. This is a story for the Lord’s fisher people today. We also have an opportunity to go out into the deep.

As we look at what is right in front of us, we discover our boats also have a “right side” of amazing mission opportunity. More than that, we realize that there is a significant calling not only for our pastors and commissioned workers, but for our laypeople as well. Our Lord has called each one of us to be a valued part of this fishing crew.

THE SED FISHING EXPEDITION

Time to Learn Some New Fishing Skills

The challenge today is that many of us have forgotten how to fish. Our personal fishing technique was not needed since we depended on the fish to jump in our boats – and they did! The bait was the elementary school, the youth group, the early childhood center meeting in our school. Once a family was bringing their children, we could build a relationship with them and catch them for the kingdom. As individuals, we could put away our poles and nets and make sure we were showing up on the boat as a helpful crew. That way of fishing has been working for all the years the church has existed in the United States.

*“Jesus said, ‘Come,
follow me and I will
make you fishers of men.’
At once they left their
nets and followed him.”
Matthew 4:19-20*

As a result, we have gone on figurative cruises and excursions, skimming over the top of the water, enjoying the fellowship, good food, and the sights and sounds of the ship. Meanwhile, many confirmed Lutherans have never had the experience of baiting the hook, feeling the tug on the line, setting the hook, and reeling in one of those fish. Now, with only 18 - 20% of Americans attending church, the Lord is inviting us to come fishing for some very hungry fish who are biting on any and everything.

The tug on our hearts is that it’s not just an issue of the 80-82% who are not attending church. It’s personal. It’s not some illiterate tribe that doesn’t have the Bible translated into their language. The uncaught ones include our children, grandchildren, friends, and neighbors. Many of those overboard are those who have actually jumped out of our boats for one reason or another.



It's time for each of us to hear those words of St. Peter in a new way as he calls to us and says, "Let's go fishing."

Our Shared Vision

In faithful response to our Father's enormous love displayed in the sacrificial death and resurrection of His Son for the forgiveness of our sins and the gift of life for all who would receive this gift of love in faith, the 2015 SED Convention delegates, under the theme "God at Work for Each One," overwhelmingly mandated everyone to go fishing in their neighborhoods as they put the mission and vision in place.

For most of us, fishing in our neighborhoods, outside the walls of the church, is tantamount to Jesus' instruction to throw the net on the right side of the boat. The Father has stocked each of our neighborhoods with fish that are waiting to be caught in the amazing web of the Father's love.

Our mission: In grateful response to God's grace and empowered by the Holy Spirit, it is the mission of the Southeastern District to connect people with Jesus.

Our vision: As we work together To connect our neighbors to Jesus, Lives are transformed and God's kingdom is growing.

Our Strategic Focus for the "Right Side of the Boat" Fishing

If we're going to arrange a fishing expedition involving 216 churches, 84 schools, 32 missions and 61,000 people across the SED, we need to have a strategy. Otherwise, we could have tangled lines, torn nets, colliding vessels and frustrated fisher people. This is our strategy:

End Statement #1: Partnering – The people of SED congregations, schools, and ministries are partnering to develop mission opportunities so that neighbors are connected to the saving message of the Gospel.

Partnering: Congregations have ministries serving in multiple places in the community where the laity are doing neighborhood ministry

Goal: 50 congregations trained in iNeighborhood (iN)
Report: 94 congregations participated in training events

The SED has been partnering with congregations via iNeighborhood (iN) training. We're excited to report 94/216 congregations have received iNeighborhood training. Our



Facilitators for Mission Engagement and the Mission Engagement Team members bring the training to congregations so that lots of folks can be involved.

During that training, participants take a picture of the “As Is” state of their church and their neighborhoods. Then prompted by God’s Word, they take a snapshot of the “To Be” state. We put fishing equipment in the hands of your congregation’s team, work with them to develop a goal and a plan of action to reach that goal.



We are learning to be intentional about blessing our neighbors. Remember what God said to Abram,

“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” (Genesis 12:2-3)

As Abraham was used by God to bless all nations, God has positioned us to bless our neighbors. One of the “nets” participants learn to use is the B.L.E.S.S. model. It is the simple way that we develop a deeper relationship with those around us. Many of us are learning that as we follow the B.L.E.S.S. map in getting to know our neighbors, important friendships are created that may position us to one day share the hope in Jesus Christ that fills us. People involved in this ministry rediscover the joy of the Lord and the energy of the Holy Spirit.



End Statement #2: Discipling – Leaders and church workers are being equipped to enhance their knowledge, skills, and attitudes to actively and personally model and lead members to be the priesthood of all believers in their neighborhoods.

Discipling: Pastors and Commissioned workers can tell stories about the work they are doing in their own neighborhoods

Goal: 100 leaders and church workers actively serving in their neighborhoods

Report: 72 leaders and church workers are active in their neighborhoods

The laity of our congregations seek to follow those who lead them. If fishing for people is important to our leaders, it will become important for those they lead. Unless I, as your leader, have stories of both fishing success and failure, I do not have an effective



way to lead you. This is a place of growth for all of us because most of the action has been inside the walls of the church. The Word and Sacrament in Sunday's Divine Service inside the church fuels our divine service outside church walls.

To do this, church workers and laity need to be released by their congregations and themselves to invest in new relationships in their communities and neighborhood. Investing time and energy to form relationships with those around us is our new stewardship. We need to be intentional about developing relationships with people outside the church otherwise they may never be engaged with the Gospel. These opportunities to be with people we know outside of church often can happen without adding another date to our calendar, but simply having a new awareness of all the "fishing pools" we already inhabit (our neighbors who live around us, softball teams, the parents who gather for our children's soccer team practice, the High School band parents organization, the car pool, the gym, etc.).

End Statement #3: Sending – Congregations, schools, and ministries are sending people into their neighborhoods sharing acts of compassion, mercy, and witness and receiving them back with thanksgiving as lives are transformed and God's Kingdom grows.

Sending:	SED people are intentional in using BLESS to develop relationships with their neighbors
Goal:	6000 SED iGo missionaries sent out to neighborhoods of the SED
Report:	1159 SED iGo missionaries are working in their neighborhoods

Imagine standing on the shore and overhearing the conversation Jesus had with the disciples as they pull up anchor and set out for the deeper water with Jesus' words echoing in their minds. What would it look like to see all of our pastors, commissioned workers, and lay leaders making a commitment to BLESS their neighbors and tell the story of what happened next?

This is exactly what Luke describes as He sends out the 72. Jesus sent them out to the villages where He had not yet visited and they went out to share His kingdom news. They were so excited to come back and tell the stories of what had happened. Jesus invigorated His followers by giving them an encouraging invitation and a significant challenge. Imagine that kind of energy in each of our congregations. When God's people understand the Father's heart, recognize the urgent need, are equipped to serve, and are supported on their fishing expeditions, there is a different fish report. We call these people who are going "iGo people." We pray for a tithe of the 61,000 baptized who are on the mission field to be moving forward in iNeighborhood ministry.



End Statement #4: Engaged – Congregations, schools, and ministries are encouraging people to engage in new, accountable, and sustainable ministries of the Word

Engaging: People in our neighborhoods across the SED are connected with Jesus

Goal: 500 new neighborhoods are engaged
Report: 26 new Word Communities
18 Ministries live streaming
138 New Neighborhood ministries

God has blessed us with 216 congregations as of the writing of this report. In addition to those ministries we have 84 schools and 32 missions. We have a presence in about 275 of 3878 zip codes. Through the work being done in partnering, equipping, and sending, we want to engage 500 new neighborhoods with a ministry presence of Jesus. More than that, we pray that this beginning neighborhood work in 500 new neighborhoods will yield 50 new church starts within our SED over the next few years. Pray every day that 50 or more of our neighborhood ministries will grow to become new chartered congregations.

THE FISHING FLEET

Our Fleet of Fishing Boats

Certainly boats are significant in both stories of the miraculous catches of fish. They provided the floating platform from which the fishing could happen. The boats carried fisherman, fishing equipment, and eventually the fish. In a similar way, each of the congregations, schools, and missions are vital in the mission we share.

If we would imagine the Southeastern District as a large body of water, our congregations are the fishing boats on this Southeastern Sea. Considering the size of the body of water and the number of fish, we have a modest size fleet of 216 congregations, 84 schools (daycare, preschool, elementary, junior high, and high school), and 32 missions. If we would be faithful to our call to connect 32,000,000 people to Jesus, then we need more boats.

Welcoming New Congregations (Boats)

One of the joys of this Convention is the opportunity to introduce newly chartered congregations since our last Convention in May 2015. We cherish each of these congregations and know God will bless this Gospel partnership so that many more children from every tribe and race will have life in His name.

Throughout the pages of Scripture, we see how the Holy Spirit strategically moved people this way and that for the sake of His covenant people. On the days following Pentecost, He scattered the newly baptized across the then known world, and the Holy Christian Church was planted in the most unlikely places. The Holy Spirit continues to move among us today in miraculous ways.



Among the congregations we welcome are those whose members come from other parts of the world. Our immigrant churches recognize that just as Lutheran missionaries came to their various continents last century, they are now responding to the call to serve as missionaries to the United States, the world's third largest mission field. Many of the older members of these churches bear the actual scars of persecution, imprisonment, and other tragedies under governments not friendly to the Christian faith. As we hear their stories, we may begin to understand why the Holy Spirit brought them to our shores and within our SED at this particular time in our history.

Since May 2015, the following churches have been chartered:

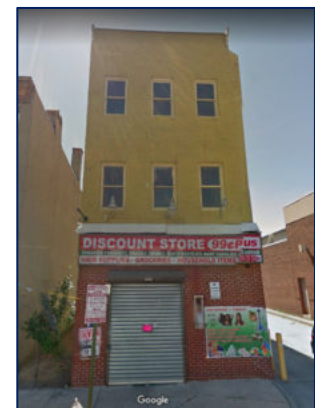
- Ethiopian Evangelical Mekane Yesus Lutheran Church, Cary, North Carolina
- Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Midlothian, Virginia
- New Hope Lutheran Church, Mooresville, North Carolina
- Oromo Evangelical Lutheran Church of North Carolina, Cary, North Carolina
- Oromo Lutheran Church of Baltimore, Baltimore, Maryland
- Oromo Resurrection Evangelical Lutheran Church, Kensington, Maryland
- Trinity Hmong Lutheran Church, Newton, North Carolina

New Fishing Spots

In both of the Gospel-recorded fishing stories, the disciples had fished for hours with no results. But Jesus spoke the Word and everything changed. In neighborhoods that would have never yielded a chance for ministry opportunity, the Holy Spirit has used difficult circumstances to create new ministry possibility out of situations of great need. Here are a number of examples:

In Response to Racial Tension – Sandtown, MD

Our last SED Convention was held two weeks after the rioting in Baltimore following Freddie Gray's death. In its first decision, the Southeastern District in Convention resolved to confess our own attitudes of prejudice, to confront racism that even finds its way into our churches, and to respond to the Lord's call to us to love our neighbor as ourselves. As an LCMS District, we serve in the geographic region that was the epicenter of the Civil War. Newspaper headlines over the last three years identify the significant racial tensions, violence, and injustice that impact all of our communities. The church is being called to fish in these waters.



Through the dedicated work of a faith-filled and committed nucleus of workers, a new ministry has been born. Through the generosity of many congregations and individuals, Faith and Work Enterprises, Inc., has leased property in the heart of one of the most impacted neighborhoods of the Baltimore riots. Faith and Work Enterprises, Inc. is opening Pennsylvania Avenue Chocolates that will create both jobs and a place of worship. The Holy Spirit has even provided a worker who has been living and working in the Sandtown area and who is likely to be prepared as a Specific Ministry Pastor to oversee the ministry.



In Response to Consecutive Years of Flooding – Lumberton, NC

Last year's Hurricane Matthew brought devastation to North and South Carolina. Lumberton, NC was hit by significant flooding. Many of our churches were active in their communities in the recovery and rebuilding effort. One of the worst areas of flooding was in economically depressed Lumberton, NC. Among the recovery efforts, teams from a number of our churches in North Carolina (Bethel Claremont, St. John's Conover, Hope Wake Forest, St. Paul's Norlina, and others from their respective circuits) spent time, energy, money, and skilled labor to rebuild a child care facility that was owned by an individual without flood insurance or FEMA help. The generous donations from people across the SED, bolstered by the grants coming from LCMS, allowed us to position trained and certified coordinators who directed much of the rebuilding activity. If the coordinators and the congregations would not have stepped in, the childcare facility would not be open today. Our teams are just completing work in Lumberton as I write this report. Through these acts of generous love, a new door is opening for an ongoing mission in Lumberton.



A Way to Respond to People in Great Need – The Comfort Dog Ministry at Island Lutheran Church, Hilton Head, SC

Meet Sasha, the Comfort Dog. Sasha gives Island Lutheran Church entry into lives of people who are making the headlines of the Nightly News. In between the school shootings, hurricanes, fires, and terrorist attacks, she touches hundreds of lives each week. Phil and Brenda Burton coordinate the schedule and volunteers at Island Lutheran Church who support the Comfort Dog Ministry. Recently Sasha and her handlers were in the homes of families whose children had died in the horrific shooting at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. Prior to that they had been bringing the Gospel to survivors and those grieving the Pulse Night Club shooting, Orlando, FL. As I write this report, Sasha and her handlers are preparing to travel to Maryland to visit Trinity (Lexington Park, MD) and Great Mills High School, Great Mills, MD.



Through the Comfort Dog ministry, doors are opened up for God's Word to touch the lives of those who are desperate for the comfort of the Gospel. Three more dogs are being trained to begin their work in churches and communities around the Southeastern District.

The Benefits of Partnership Between Churches

St. Luke describes the way in which Peter and Andrew signaled their fishing partners to bring their boat to assist with the great catch of fish after Jesus spoke the Word. In a similar way, a number of our English-speaking churches have learned the blessing of opening the doors to another ethnic church partner, not with the goal of earning extra money, but as true mission partners.



Because of the significant need for worship space in the metropolitan areas of the SED, many of our churches have offered worship and meeting space to ethnic churches. English speaking congregations with big hospitable hearts are positioned to assist first generation churches by providing English Sunday School for the children of the ethnic church who are English speakers. As the host church offers English as Second Language (ESL) classes for the parents and other members of the community, the two churches form significant relationships with one another. A generous LCMS “Stand with your Community” grant administered through Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS) over these past two years opened the door for a number of our congregations to develop strong ESL programs. Now a number of the ESL programs have developed into Bible Studies where participants are learning to read English Bibles.



As the pastors, commissioned workers, and lay leaders of both the English-speaking church and the ethnic church begin meeting together, praying together and studying God’s Word and the Lutheran Confessions, the Lord blesses the partnership in multiple and surprising ways. These conversations have led the ethnic pastors to pursue colloquy into the LCMS and for their congregations to be chartered. It seems that the Holy Spirit blesses the English-speaking churches that have these open hearts with new opportunities and blessings on the basis of their hospitality and generosity.

THROWING NETS ON THE RIGHT SIDE

What Might Nets on the Right Side Look Like?

The Growing Edge diagram provides a simple picture of the strategic focus of the SED as we look at our work over the coming three years and beyond. Due to the Father’s great heart for all of His children, we believe He is calling us to go deeper in our mission and ministry activity in our respective neighborhoods (neighborhoods can be places we live, where we work, or go to school).

The disciples threw the net on the right side of the boat once they heard Jesus’ words. Of course, His Words were the authoritative Word of God. The call to action for us is fueled by the Word and Sacrament (green zone). God’s Word calls each one of us from the green zone to the pink zone.

For any one of us to move from the green zone to the pink zone, that person would need to cross the white line. The white line symbolizes everything that keeps us from actively engaging the mission field where we



Figure 2 The Growing Edge



live. No one will cross that white line unless the Holy Spirit is working through the Word of God to overcome our fear through our faith in Him. That's why we call this diagram "the growing edge." Whether pastor, commissioned worker, or lay person, the Holy Spirit is shaping our hearts for something more. Every baptized person is called and spiritually gifted for this service.

The design of the Holy Spirit is that we step across the white line. Our ministry might begin simply by starting to pray for one's neighbor and watching how the Lord opens the door. Then we pray for courage to walk through that door. Once that happens – the net is cast.

Motives are important! We need to remember why it is that we are doing this. The motive of blessing our neighbors is not to get new members for our church. That would be manipulative. We have a higher kingdom purpose. Our motive is simply to bring the love of Jesus into the lives of those around us. Over a period of time – whether days, months, or years – the Lord will give us the opportunity to share the Gospel News of forgiveness in Christ. We need to be ready to do that in a winsome way. That's another aspect of "the growing edge." We believe that the Lord will take care of our congregations as we engage in His work.



The Growing Edge – Our Work in the Next Triennium

The disciples had to work together to retrieve nets now bulging with fish. The simple goal was to get the fish out of the water and into the boat. If we are loving our neighbors with Jesus' love, they'll get caught in that love. They will want more of it. Our neighborhood ministry is not just about sharing the Good News of Jesus with our neighbors. This is really about making disciples of Jesus.

Our work over the past three years has centered on the green and pink zone through our neighborhood cohort training.

- Word and Sacrament communities (green zone) prepare and send their people into the neighborhoods
- New relationships are formed as people B.L.E.S.S. their neighbors (pink zone)

Over the next three years we will continue that work, yet we are also seeking to develop more support for the next three important areas of the growing edge.

- Those leading the neighborhood ministry gather together to respond to the needs of the community. As we work side-by-side in the community, we not only show God's love to the people around us. We are also having the opportunity to work side-by-side on 1st Article needs (creation, protection, and preservation). In these settings, the use of God's Word and prayer within our neighborhood gatherings is a natural outgrowth of our care for the community. Almost without knowing we've crossed a line, we're in the blue zone.



- New Word Communities are neighborhood ministries centered on the Word of God as they continue to serve their community (orange zone). The difference between the blue and orange zone is the use of God’s Word as the focal part of the gathering. As we gather around the Word of God, things can’t stay the same. These gatherings begin to set the stage for the development of a new Word and Sacrament community, and the eventual planting of a new church. The rhythm of the blue zone community resembles the early Christian Church:



“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:42-47)

- New Word Communities are poised to become Word and Sacrament Communities (green zone) who begin to release their people into neighborhood ministry. Under the leadership of the pastor, the congregation might begin worshiping in two or more neighborhood gatherings every week. While the participants in the Word community may not be drawn to worship in your home congregation, our living rooms and family rooms may become the seedbed for a brand new house church under the leadership and mentoring of a pastor and the congregation.

THE FISHING CREW

All Hands on Deck

Can you imagine any of the fisherman disciples sitting in the boat surrounded by nets full of fish, sitting idly by, not doing anything to pull in the nets? It would not make sense. Everyone was engaged in the catch.

The disciples started fishing for people only after they received the redemptive love of Jesus’ suffering, death, resurrection and ascension. Following the outpouring of the



Holy Spirit, they recognized the significant love of the Father that could absolutely change the lives of every individual, whether Jew or Gentile.

The closer we get to our Father in heaven, the better we see what He sees. When we see the people around us – His children – through His eyes, and know how much He has spent to give them a new life, then we are being shaped to go fishing, too. The more the Holy Spirit shapes and forms our hearts and lives to look like Jesus, the more we seek to follow Him and respond to His call to serve. This equipping and training demonstrates how critical it is for pastors and commissioned workers to raise up God's people for their works of service. We are thankful for all who have responded to God's call for public ministry.

Our Rostered Workers

The SED is blessed to have hundreds of church workers who have responded to the Lord's mission call, ordained and commissioned workers who are highly trained for specialized work in congregations and ministries across the SED. The ordained workers are our pastors, while the commissioned workers include: Deaconesses, Directors of Christian Education, Directors of Christian Outreach, Lutheran Educators, Certified Lay Ministers, Directors of Family Ministry, Directors of Parish Music, and other areas of specialized ministry.

The SED has:

- 235 Pastors
- 153 Emeritus (Retired) Pastors
- 195 Commissioned workers
- 76 Retired commissioned workers

Blessed by Our Retired Workers

The SED has a significant number of church workers who retired from a career in ministry but still look for meaningful ways to use their gifts while enjoying some of the freedoms retirement provides. Their willingness to serve has been a great blessing to some of our smaller congregations who can no longer afford a full-time pastor.

The retired work force of ordained and commissioned workers are very generous with their willingness to serve vacancies, provide pulpit supply, and assist in others ways across our district. Through the combination of active pastors, retired pastors and lay deacons we have always been able to meet that need. In some places, we are challenged to find pastors to serve. Currently 48 of the 216 congregations (22%) are served part-time, many by retired pastors or lay deacons.

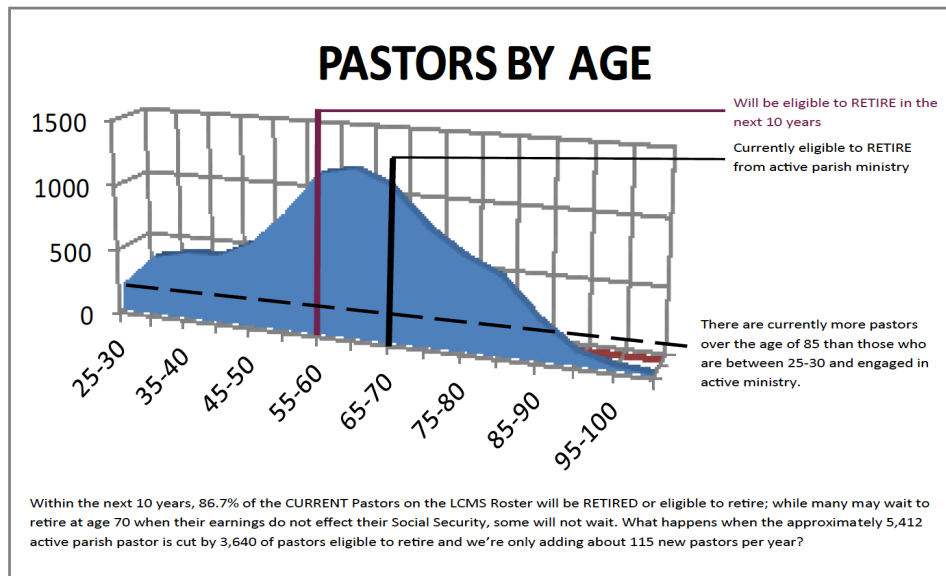
An Aging Work Force

The LCMS is demographically challenged, like all mainline Protestant Churches. The challenge is felt in every aspect of the church:

*“So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.”
Luke 5:7*



- The majority of ordained and commissioned workers will be eligible for retirement in the next 10 years. The graph below tells the story of our ordained workers.



- Our Concordia University system used to be the “farm system” to the seminary. Now there are very few church worker students in our schools.
- Our seminaries have smaller numbers of graduates to offer the church. Last year, there were requests from 61 churches for a seminary graduate went unfilled.
- The average age of the church member is often decades older than the community the church serves.

More Routes to Public Ministry

While always putting the emphasis on residential programs for ministry formation in our Concordia Universities and our Seminaries, our church body had the foresight to create routes to ministry that utilized online education.

The Specific Ministry Pastor Program, Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology, and the Center for Hispanic Studies are alternate online routes that are actively being used by students to prepare them for pastoral ministry. These programs of ministry are very demanding on the student who is receiving

Alternate Routes to Ministry

- SMP Pastors
- EIIT (Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology) Pastors
- EIIT Deaconesses
- Center for Hispanic Studies

theological education, continuing to show up for a day job, and doing assigned work in his church under the supervision of another pastor. The benefit is that these routes of



ministry open the door for the best of theological training and ministry formation to individuals who have an inner call to serve in ministry but do not have the ability or the financial support to move to the seminary or university.

Equally important is that these programs provide pastors and commissioned workers for our churches who might not normally have opportunity to afford them. Many of our EIIT and SMP pastors are bi-vocational workers who keep their day job following ordination, allowing some of our churches to be served that might not normally be served. This will be a growing way that we provide Word and Sacrament ministry for our churches in the SED.

Nonetheless, each of these routes to ministry is still very expensive. Because of the cost of these programs, the price tag still keeps some who have gifts for ministry from receiving this training. This is a place where we need the financial support of congregations and individuals. Because of our great mission need, the SED needs to be proactive in recruiting and supporting men and women of every age for professional church work.

Currently, the SED has students in each of the following programs of ministry:

- 10 Seminary Students Residential Programs
- 5 Specific Ministry Pastor Program
- 2 Specific Ministry Pastor–Español/English (SMP–EsE)
- 6 Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology
- 5 Students Enrolled in Commissioned Worker Programs

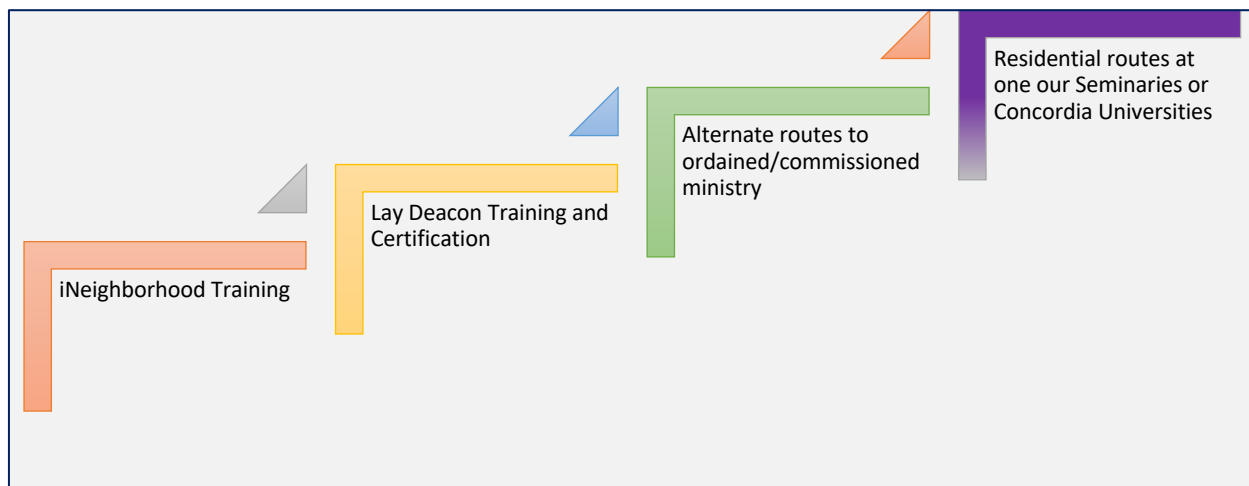
Equipping God's People for Leadership Roles

Over the last few decades, the ministry of the church has benefited from second career workers who respond to the Lord's ministry call. Within the SED, men and women of our church are given opportunity to be affirmed by the body of Christ as they use their gifts in a variety of places. The affirmation of the body of Christ can assist them in discerning the call of the Holy Spirit as an ordained or commissioned worker.

A new "farm system" has developed across our Southeastern District for men and women who are called into individual and public ministry.

- People are shaped as followers of Jesus through the ministry of fathers and mothers and their home congregation
- iNeighborhood training equips people of our churches to pray for and B.L.E.S.S. their neighbors, develop leadership skills in leading their neighbors in compassionate love responding to needs in their community, to use God's Word and prayer within their homes and in their neighborhood
- Lay Deacon Training and SED Lay Deacon Certification, through Concordia College – New York or Concordia – Portland's Mission Training Center, prepares men and women for the evangelical work in their congregation and neighborhood
- Alternate Routes to Ordained or Commissioned Service in the Church
- Residential Routes to Ministry in the Church





How the Lord is Providing Crew Members for the SED

This report has outlined challenges we face in having crew members for the fishing boats in future years. But you also need to know the story of what God is doing right now. It is as if the Lord is honoring your step of faith to move the mission forward by coming to meet you with the gifted people who are needed to lead at this moment. Like a cavalry riding over the hill at just the right time, we've had an amazing group of individuals whom the Lord has prepared to serve Him. You need to hear these stories.

The story of a young musician pastor – This young millennial pastor was raised in the ELCA and in his search for a denomination that was faithful to the inspired Word of God, ended up in the Baptist church. He has served in a unique niche with expertise in putting worship bands together for worship services. Even though he found a denomination that based its teaching on the Word of God, he still was searching for a denomination that recognized the significance of the Sacraments. He started serving a large Baptist Church but ended up meeting with one of our pastors at a neighboring LCMS church. Up until that time he did not know about the LCMS. He was befriended by the neighboring LCMS pastor and is now completing his colloquy vicarage to become an ordained LCMS pastor.

The story of an Ethiopian pastor – A pastor in the Ethiopian Lutheran Church (Mekane Yesus), who is a gifted evangelist, has been called to serve our LCMS church at Kent Island, MD. The congregation has no Ethiopians, yet this fisherman pastor has a call to bring the Gospel to the fishing community.

The story of two Millennial church planters – Two young men in the SED are interested in the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology (EIIT) program to become pastors – one is currently enrolled, and one is in the application process. As lay people, they had both already planted churches for the 2nd generation millennials of every nation. One is an African Immigrant and the other is Latino, but their worship is done in English for the millennials of every tribe, nation, and people. They have not met each other, but both have similar callings and vision. Each of their churches is already worshipping 40 or 50



people. By the time they finish their seminary education, they may have congregations that are chartered and ready to call them.

The story of a Lay Deacon trying to become an SMP Pastor – An African American warehouse worker, husband, and dad who is just about to complete his Lay Deacon training is feeling called to get more theological training and, if the funds are raised, is hoping to be accepted into the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program. He only gets two weeks off for vacation at work and might have to use vacation time and go without income to be able to go to school. This calling is very significant in a time when we have very few African American males who have heard a call to enter the Holy Ministry.

The story of a homeless man in Washington DC – A Liberian refugee found himself homeless and begging on the streets of Washington DC after he fell through the cracks of the resettlement program. He was noticed by someone who connected him to a Lutheran pastor and reconnected him to Lutheran Immigrant and Refugee Service. Now that homeless man has been raised up to be a Washington DC Metro police officer and detective and is studying to be an LCMS pastor in the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

OUR FISHING PARTNERS

Peter and Andrew had James and John as fishing partners. The strength of the Southeastern District is the diversity of language and people groups who work together in the Lord's kingdom work.

The SED Ministry Staff

The Southeastern District Staff is in place to support you as you do your work. Our congregations, schools, and missions are well-served by these dedicated workers, as am I. They are gifted and dedicated servant leaders who are well-regarded as missional leaders throughout Synod. You'll get a sense of their spiritual gifts as you read their reports. Our District is very blessed to have them.

SED Executive Staff and Facilitators for Mission Engagement

Central Region Facilitator	The Rev. Travis Guse
Cross-Cultural Facilitator	The Rev. Dr. Yared Halche
Northern Region Facilitator	The Rev. Donald Schaefer
Southern Region Facilitator	The Rev. Dr. William Seaman
Congregational Outreach/District Operations	Deaconess Sally Hiller
Stewardship & Finance/LCEF Vice President	Mr. Steve Heeman

Areas of Specialty in the District Office

Receptionist and LCEF Support	Ms. Vicki Edwards
Administrative Assistant to the President	Ms. Elisa Ferguson
Business Manager	Mr. David Kennedy
Registration and Data Specialist	Ms. Cathy Long
Stewardship and Finance Support	Ms. Carolyn Plue



Congregational Outreach and Communications
Digital Outreach Coordinator
Bookkeeper

Ms. Sirpa Quinn
Mr. Ryan Radke
Ms. Kim Winston

The Mission Engagement Teams

In order to provide the support needed for all of our iNeighborhood work, each facilitator works with a Mission Engagement Team (MET). The MET is trained to support the iNeighborhood work in your congregation. Their role is to recruit, equip, and coach, working with your congregation's iNeighborhood plan to reach the goals your congregation has set. We're so thankful for the people who are serving as engagement team members throughout the SED.

Our Elected Leadership

Vice Presidents and Circuit Visitors

The job of being a Vice President or Circuit Visitor is one of the most invisible but significant positions in the church serving as an extension of the District President. They are most often working behind the scenes to respond to the need and concerns of their circuit or region. The Circuit Visitors work very closely with our Facilitators for Mission Engagement when congregations are navigating a vacancy and call process.

Board of Directors

Our Board of Directors is made up of pastors, commissioned workers, and lay people who are representing the congregations and rostered workers in the SED. They ensure the SED is working to achieve the mission, vision, and strategic focus mandated by the Convention. God's Word and prayer is key to the deliberation and decision-making process when we face challenging tasks and decisions. No decision is made without first giving the Lord Jesus voice at our table. The SED Board of Directors is committed to our missional focus and direction. Our Board of Directors works well as a team.

Our SED Reconcilers

Each district has four District Reconcilers appointed by their respective Board of Directors. Our District Reconcilers are Rev. Matthew Sorenson, Mr. Bryce Thomas, DCE Tara Wolf, and Rev. David Ziehr. Mr. Thomas has served both the SED and the LCMS for many years, and is now preparing to step back, having fulfilled another six-year term as one of our Reconcilers. Through the teaching and the work of these people, miracles occur – broken hearts and broken relationships are ultimately healed.

A Host of Other Helpers

The SED Worker Care Team

Over the last three years, the SED Worker Care Team has been formed and begun its work in support of all of our rostered workers. After conducting a comprehensive survey of our church workers to identify their needs, they are now at work to address those needs. We are blessed to be in the ministry care of DCE Stacey Crosson, Teacher Stephanie Guelzow, Ms. Sheila Langston, Rev. Kevin Martin, DCE Emily Phoenix, Mrs. Ann Teske, Rev. Art Umbach, and Mrs. Lana Wingate.



Our Intentional Interim Ministry Consultant

The Rev. Daniel Quiram has assisted the SED in launching and coordinating this vital ministry for congregations who need special expertise before calling their next settled pastor.

Our Spiritual Life Team

As the SED intentionally works at moving into 500 new neighborhoods, we have attracted the attention of the enemy. We have had churches struggling under the weight of accusation and subtle persecution inside and outside her walls. Without a doubt the churches involved in the mission are scaring Satan. Undergirding the kingdom work in which we are engaged is a group of committed people that is actively praying for all of us, whether working in our congregations, schools, missions, and neighborhoods. In addition, the neighborhood ministry has advanced through the work of visual faith as people learn how to pray and use God's Word using visual arts. We give thanks for the continual prayers of Mrs. Connie Denninger, Rev. William Gittner, Dcs. Sally Hiller, Dcs. Robie Hillhouse, Dcs. Deb Lennox, Rev. Quentin Poulson, Rev. Dan Quiram, Ms. Pennie Trevillian, and Ms. Denise Wright.

Mid-Atlantic Lutherans in Mission

It's exciting to report that five individuals from the Southeastern District have partnered together to form an independent 501c3 for the purpose of supporting the mission efforts of the SED. Much like the Lutheran Laymen's League was formed to assist the LCMS, this group has come together for a similar purpose. They work in collaboration with the SED to understand our mission priorities and to provide grants to the congregations, schools, and missions of the SED. While our SED is primarily supported through the financial partnerships of our congregations, the work of Mid-Atlantic Lutherans in Mission is funded by individuals across our District and beyond, along with bequests, estates, and other gifts given by the ministries of the SED. The Board of Trustees includes members of congregations of the SED who have been in leadership positions in the LCMS or the SED. The current Board of Trustees of this new ministry are:

President:	The Rev. Dr. Art Scherer
Vice President:	The Rev. Dr. Jon Diefenthaler
Secretary:	Mr. Gene Partlow
Member:	The Rev Tim Fangemeier
Member:	Mr. Fred Kraegel

They look forward to expanding their circle to include others who will help them grow a harvest of dollars to support the new fishing expeditions across the SED and beyond.

A Word of Special Thanksgiving for Your Mission Partnership Support

Thank you for your partnership in the Gospel. Your congregation's mission partnership support comes in many ways. We want to say a special word of thanks for the financial support you provide that ensures the Southeastern District is able to be active in mission and ministry within our borders and beyond. Your gifts provide the resource for the activity of the SED, including:

- scholarships for new workers
- micro grants for work for neighborhood initiatives



- grants to support the planting of new churches
- learning activities for our cross-cultural ministries
- emergency support for church workers
- support for our international work in Peru and other places around the world
- the Church Worker Care Ministry
- the ability to support churches/schools/missions
- support and training for Circuit Visitors

These are only a few examples of all that you support. Your gifts make huge difference.

Spiritually healthy individuals, congregations, and districts model our heavenly Father's generosity. For that reason, the SED gives a double tithe of our mission partnership gifts to the LCMS. An additional gift is given to support our international mission partnerships that we have throughout the world.

This year we commend our newly chartered and ethnic churches who have become mission partners of the SED, sharing what is certainly a widow's might. We realize that many of our churches that do not provide a gift may have some other challenges or priorities that may impact their ability to participate. When a congregation gives a mission partnership gift, they are sharing in the vision to connect people with Jesus throughout this region, and through our national and international work. Making this possible is the diligence of pastors and lay leaders who are teaching Biblical principles of stewardship and encouraging their congregation's generosity.

A Final Word of Personal Thanks

It has been a tremendous privilege and blessing to serve as President of the Southeastern District over the last six years. Constance and I are humbled by your expressions of love, your ongoing care, and your ongoing prayers.

While our daughters and their husbands live both near and far, we are strengthened to serve and filled with joy as we watch them live out their faith. If the LCMS is to grow by having babies, as some have suggested, Connie and I are doing our part – at least through our daughters and their husbands. Since serving in this role they have given us five little grandsons, with number six grandson waiting to be born in Ann Arbor in just a few days. I am looking forward to our fishing times together.

A CALL TO ACTION

God's great love in Jesus fills our lives with abundant life and love. His Word calls for response from you and me, just as it did from the disciples. Jesus told His new followers that He would teach them another kind of fishing. They responded as they followed Him, and were shaped by His Word and His sacrificial love.

Only ten days after Jesus met His disciples on the Mount of Olives and ascended into heaven, the Bible records a great catch. This time it was not fish but people. Three thousand new followers of Jesus – people were drawn together at the sound of the



rushing wind and flames of fire on the apostles' heads as they each heard the Word of God in their own native language. They were captured in God's net of love.

The Holy Spirit brings the bookend fishing stories to every one of us at this Convention with the same call and commission given to the first disciples. He's stocked our waters with 32 million spiritually hungry people. He's ensured that one of those spiritual searching individuals lives across the street, works in the next cubicle, is in the same car pool, or has married into our family. Each one of them is precious to the Lord. So what are you going to do?

I'll tell you what I'm going to do: "I'm going fishing!"

My hope, my prayer, my dream is that you and your congregation will say: "We'll go with you!"

May the Lord bless us with a great catch!

In the royal service of the King,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John R. Denninger". The signature is stylized with a large loop at the end.

John R. Denninger, President
Southeastern District, LCMS
March 20, 2018



REV. TRAVIS B. GUSE

Facilitator for Mission Engagement, Central Region

Now in my second year as the Facilitator for Mission Engagement in the Southeastern District Central Region, there is much for which to be thankful. Being new to the District, my first goal was get to know the pastors, church workers, and congregations of the Region. I spent the first half of the year attending the various circuit meetings around the region, learning about the unique mission opportunities and challenges for each ministry represented. This time learning and asking questions has allowed me to better understand the unique landscape of ministry within the Central Region.

I have especially taken time to reach out and learn how iNeighborhood covenant congregations in the Central Region are implementing this District vision in their local context. Working in conjunction with our newly formed Central Region Mission Engagement Team, we developed a questionnaire to better understand what was working well, what wasn't and how we can better be a support to the ministry of our iNeighborhood congregations in implementing their vision. My team and I then followed up with these congregations for personal visits to try to better understand the feedback we were getting and build our working relationship with them.

What our team discovered is that there have been some gaps between the initial training and how iNeighborhood has been shared and implemented in many of these ministries. Many of the iNeighborhood congregations we followed up with reported that an individual or a team went to the initial trainings, but it did not go beyond that group to really take hold in the congregation. At times even the individuals who went to the training were no longer with the ministry. While not the desired response, this has helped us understand the importance of bringing this training directly to these ministries to further inspire, equip, empower and resource God's people to more effectively connect with their neighbors through love and service in order to connect them to Jesus. In this way the training doesn't remain with just an individual or a small group, but has the chance to spread through and shape the ministry at large.

Along with planning a number of these trainings, we have begun quarterly iNeighborhood meet-ups for those who are involved with implementing this mission vision in their ministries. We will also use these meetings to share with those who are interested in learning more.

I have had many opportunities for working with local congregations beyond iNeighborhood. In addition to guest preaching in various congregations in the Region over the last year, to date I have facilitated Envision events in New Hope (Chesterfield, VA), Redeemer (Fredericksburg, VA), and Peace (King George, VA) to name a few. Often times, the strategic planning process tends to focus on what's wrong with the organization and seeks to find solutions to fix those identified problems. Envision instead is an appreciative inquiry process, helping these congregations recognize the best of who they are and what God has done in their ministries, and use that as a springboard for envisioning the future they sense God is calling them to be in Him, with



each other, and for their communities. The process begins with participants interviewing each other, celebrating stories together of high points of God's working in their personal involvement with the ministry as well as hopes and dreams for the future. Through this sharing, many relationships are deepened and new relationships are formed. From these stories, participants identify the root causes of success for the ministry, as well as their positive core. From there, they begin to envision what can be through fun, innovative enactments, creating a provocative propositional statement about who they are as a ministry and the future God is calling them to together. Finally, participants identify strategic opportunities for their ministry to make this vision a reality and then break into work teams to develop a 90-day action plan for each opportunity identified. Overall the response I've received is that this is a fun, positive, relationship-building process that might end at the same place as other strategic planning processes do, but reaches that goal in a very different way.

I have also led several Strengthsfinder staff empowerment training events. The Strengthsfinder assesses 34 talent themes that are universal to all people and have been found to lead to success in life and organizations. Over the last 10 years, I have found this assessment tool to be a great way to create awareness and conversation around discovering the God-given talents of believers as an approach to stewardship and personal discipleship empowerment. Often times when we look at our personal lives and ministries they look lifeless and barren, as though lacking resources. Yet, through tools like Strengthsfinder, we can begin to drill down and discover the vast amounts of untapped resources that are just under the surface and unleash them for the Kingdom. In these trainings participants receive a report indicating their top 5 talent themes. Then, through the empowerment training, we help each participant not only understand how to develop their talents into strengths in their own callings in life, but also how everyone's talents work together to develop strengths-based teams and ministries.

I facilitated a CAM 501 "Foundations of Christian Coaching" coach training at King Of Glory (Williamsburg, VA) for not only a number of their members, but also for members of our Central Region MET members. The goal of this coaching training is to help support pastors, church workers and God's people apply the vision and training of iNeighborhood to their lives personally. In Luther's Doctrine on Vocation, he does not put much value into imitation. The reason is that the context and the needs of one's neighbors for one person will be different from that of another, let alone the unique God-given talents and gifts they will bring to bear. Coaching is not mentoring, but a supportive relationship and process that empowers individuals to live out their faith uniquely in their context, serving as a creative think partner with the person being coached to come up with their own strategies and solutions, providing encouragement and accountability along the way. The CAM 501 training equips participants in basic coaching skills like how to engage in active listening, asking powerful questions, giving appropriate direct communication, as well as coaching strategies to guide a "coachee" through the coaching relationship. As of yet, our MET members have not had a chance to put their coaching skills to practice in their roles, but it is my hope that there will be



ample opportunity to coach people and congregations as we do more iNeighborhood trainings and initiate the quarterly Meet-ups.

Lastly, I am coaching several church workers and have truly enjoyed personally investing in these servants of Christ as they seek to lead their ministries and impact their communities for the Kingdom. With a much better understanding of my ministry role, as well as the opportunities and challenges of congregations throughout the region, I am excited for the new opportunities to serve that the Lord will open up in the next triennium.



REV. DR. YARED HALCHE

Facilitator for Mission Engagement, Northern Region And Cross-Cultural Ministries

We live in the age of migration and immigration. There are over one billion regional and international migrants in the world. The largest number of international immigrants (46 million) reside in the United States and almost everyone comes to our expanding cities. The nation's capital continues to attract many new people groups in larger numbers, including people from El Salvador, Ethiopia, Nigeria and other nations. The greater Washington DC area alone has approximately 450,000 Ethiopian immigrants and over 100 Ethiopian Christian churches. The Lord has positioned the Southeastern District in a unique time and place where the harvest is ripe and nations look for lasting peace and stability. The Lord indeed has blessed our District with a distinct vision of evangelistic outreach through everyday neighborhood connections. Fulfilling our communal mission objective is the top priority in my mission engagements. To that end, my burning desire serving regionally and among various cross-cultural communities can be summarized as "equipping missionary leaders, and multiplying missionary churches." As the Lord provided His grace, we have seen encouraging results in our ministry. Just to mention few:

- Four Ethiopian congregations (in North Carolina and Baltimore) have become chartered congregations.
- Two additional Ethiopian congregations hopefully will become chartered congregations soon.
- Three cross-cultural congregations are at the early stage in the chartering process.
- Four new missional communities have been established, including Ethiopian outreach at The Lutheran Church of St. Andrew (Silver Spring, MD), Multi-Ethne mission congregation (Alexandria, VA), Pastoral Leadership Institute (PLI) multi-ethnic learning community, and Ethiopian Lutheran Mission Society.
- Our Northern Region Mission Engagement Team continues with its regular meetings, visioning process and engaging congregations to maximize neighborhood outreach.
- I have had the privilege to identify, connect, encourage and coach a growing number of mission leaders. Through iNeighborhood evangelistic training, over 100 mission leaders have been trained, encouraged and sent out to various mission fields in our District.
- Seven young adult leaders have been identified and coached in their spiritual journey and mission engagements. While four of them are in the process of joining Concordia College – New York, one of them just started her academic journey.

I would like to share a few examples and stories of the Lord's blessings through equipping missionary leaders and multiplying missionary congregations in the SED:



- Fabricio Velasquez comes from a church worker family, but outside the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Fabricio spent his early years in his native El Salvador, growing up with his grandparents while his parents relocated to the United States in search of a better life. This experience has uniquely shaped Fabricio to understand and minister to immigrant family members who are separated from one another, even as he himself was early in life. He is fluently bilingual (Spanish and English) and is already bi-vocational. Fabricio has been leading a house church called Multi-Ethne Church (MEC), and they are now meeting at St. John's Lutheran Church (Alexandria, Virginia) with an average 35-40 young adults in attendance. Fabricio's vision is for a mosaic ministry that reaches out to second generation immigrants (not just Latinos) who are fully American and college-educated millennials. Fabricio is on the track for admission into Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology as part of his journey to ordination in the LCMS. Fabricio represents the face of future church workers.
- In the last couple of years, I helped Galilee Lutheran Church (Chester, MD) with pulpit supply. The smaller but spiritually warm congregation struggled with shrinking membership. Evangelist Belete Belay of Ethiopia, after being certified through Colloquy for the Ordained Roster of the LCMS, was eagerly looking for people of God whom he can spiritually shepherd and work with even if it means serving without any financial compensation. Galilee Lutheran Church stepped up and called Pastor Belete with the view of making a bold change for the sake of Christ's unfailing mission. The congregation pledged to provide financial support beyond their ability to help Belete focus on his ministry. Words fail me to describe the excitement in Belete, his family and the congregation as they look forward to what God does in their midst and in their community.
- Rev. Million Belete, a Lutheran pastor from Ethiopia, currently resides in Northern Virginia. Last year he visited The Lutheran Church of Saint Andrew in Silver Spring, MD, where he met with his former church members from Ethiopia. About sixteen of them worship at The Lutheran Church of St. Andrew. Rev. Million immediately decided to join St. Andrew and continue supporting his 'former' flock in a new environment. Furthermore, he decided to bring immigrant members of his denomination to the Southeastern District, as many of them were looking for a larger church umbrella to call home. He is excited to bring his church's ministry association to work under the auspices of the Southeastern District. Rev. Million joined the leadership recently to start Ethiopian outreach at St. Andrew, and has just begun the colloquy process through our District to be certified for the LCMS Roster.
- Our District hosted the first PLI multiethnic learning community to empower missionaries who serve in the United States. The training helps to foster collaboration among missionaries as they work together in the mission field. We had 33 pastors (some with spouses), deaconesses and young church leaders who attended the training. Participants came from six districts of the LCMS



representing four countries of origin: United States, Ethiopia, Liberia and Eritrea. The greatest majority of participants were from Southeastern District.

- Our District also helped in bringing together immigrant pastors and church leadership under the auspice of the Ethiopian Lutheran Mission Society to encourage strong networking and coordination among the missionaries, church leaders and mission organizations. In addition, this missional community seeks to encourage resource exchanges and good stewardship among its constituents. Five district presidents and twenty missionaries attended the event held at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Springfield, VA.

As the Lord grants strength and wisdom, more work can be done through creating intentional collaboration between our congregations' millennial generation and immigrants' second-generation groups. We see promising missional in-roads at Multi-Ethne Church in Virginia, Hope of Glory Ethiopian Lutheran Mission in Silver Spring, MD, and others. About 43% of the millennial generation come from families whose primary language is not English.

As a number of our urban congregations struggle with aging and changing demographics, the intentional welcoming of our new Christian neighbors and church leaders can have a strengthening impact to productively reach out to the larger society.

Many of our missionaries have an amazing passion for sharing God's Word, but they have very limited theological and cross-cultural training. Thus, it begs our continued effort to facilitate training opportunities for our missionaries and millennial church leaders.

Lastly, as we enjoy and marvel at God's amazing blessings, we will continue to rely on the Lord Jesus Christ to even do greater things beyond our imaginations for His glory!



REV. DONALD SCHAEFER

Facilitator for Mission Engagement, Northern Region

To say that the landscape has changed for the institutional Christian church in America would be an understatement. Our emphasis on church as institution over and against church in mission has caught up with us. The shift in societal thinking regarding authority and truth has impacted us even more.

While 35% of Americans still check off the “I am a Christian” box on Gallup polls, only 14-16% check the “It is important that I attend church” box. This would suggest that for some Americans, “being Christian” is more a cultural thing than it is a growing faith-in-Christ lifestyle.

The resulting pressure on congregations and Professional Church Workers (PCWs) is high. Most of the congregations that I have the privilege of serving have the same challenges. An unfortunate litany that I often hear is, “We have an aging demographic in our congregation, fewer members coming in the front door than going out the back door, beautiful but high maintenance buildings, the cost and availability of PCWs – pastors and otherwise – and a leadership vacuum.”

The result is that congregations and PCWs are having to adjust to ways of doing ministry that are creative. It is not the institutional symbols of buildings and stained glass that attract people to the Gospel hope as much as it is relationships of trust filled with compassionate grace. It is exciting to see congregations and PCWs in the Northern Region of the SED embracing this challenge.

Over half the congregations in the Northern Region have gone through the iNeighborhood training. Thanks to the formation of Mission Engagement Teams (MET), we now are able to couple individual congregations with trained coaches who can assist in the implementation of iNeighborhood principles.

Even more exciting to me is watching almost all of the congregations trying new ways of engaging with their communities. Even if they have not yet gone through the iNeighborhood training, they are putting missional thinking into practice in the ways they do ministry.

The presence of new ethnic ministries among us is also helping all of us to realize the Gospel imperative. Rev. Dr. Yared Halche has been a tremendous gift of grace to the SED as he works tirelessly with those of other cultures who wish to become part of the SED/LCMS. While much of his work is with congregations begun by church planters from Mekane Yesus, he also is connecting with Liberians, Nigerians, Latinos and others.

Many of our congregations in the Northern Region are using the demographic tools of “MissionInsite” and the “Mapping Center” to better understand who is in their communities and what needs they might have. Using technology of social media and



livestreaming, they are also finding new ways of being more in the information flow of society rather than sitting on the sidelines.

The shortage and cost of having pastors is becoming a significant issue for many congregations. As of this writing, there are about 1/3 of the congregations in the Northern Region who are pastorally vacant. Several of those will, in all likelihood, not be able to afford a full-time pastor ever again.

The SED is attempting to help these congregations with the addition of trained deacons who have gone through the two-year series of theological courses offered by Concordia College – New York. Several of them are now assisting some of our vacant congregations. Thus far, the diaconal ministry has been received well by congregations.

Several of our congregations in the Northern Region have had to close their schools due to cost and lack of enrollment. Some have even closed their preschools for the same reason. At least one congregation in this category has found a new ministry in offering 12-hour per day child care which brings young couples into their buildings who otherwise would never have been there, along with the opportunity to nurture young children in the Gospel hope.

Following the unfortunate death of Freddie Gray in Baltimore, MD, a group of our PCWs began to prayerfully work on establishing a ministry presence in West Baltimore. Faith and Work Enterprises, Inc. is due to begin operation later this Fall. While it will include the making of “Pennsylvania Avenue Chocolates,” the local people who will work there will be grounded in prayer and discipleship.

Currently, there is growing energy in Baltimore as six congregations have entered into dialogue about the future vision for ministry in their neighborhoods. They are considering what they can do better together as one voice in mission.

The situation in many of the Northern Region congregations is in a state of great change. There is no predictable course for any of our congregations or our PCWs. Grounded in the Gospel hope, however, many are finding new ways of incarnating Christ’s love and mercy. In some ways all of this is new but, in other ways, it is as old as the book of Acts when Christianity was a movement instead of an institution. It is exciting for me to serve as an “encourager” to our people.



REV. DR. WILLIAM SEAMAN

Facilitator for Mission Engagement, Southern Region

In the Southern Region, there are fourteen congregations that have had representatives attend iNeighborhood orientation. Each of these has been assigned to one of five Mission Engagement Team (MET) members. MET members have contacted each of their assigned congregations to introduce themselves and to offer support, encouragement and resources to the iNeighborhood teams in the congregation. Some MET members have made on-site visits to their assigned congregations.

MET members attended an orientation and training session at Hope Lutheran Church, Wake Forest, NC on August 6, 2016. Since that time, we have met via conference call several times to discuss goals and progress in the work with congregations. The results have been varied.

Some congregations are making progress with neighborhood activities. Most congregations are active in several undertakings which impact the neighborhoods in which they are located, but they still are operating on a programmatic approach. Very few congregations have instituted any kind of neighborhood regular gathering or Bible study.

In other congregations there has been no one to lead the charge and little or no progress. Circumstances, such as a pastor accepting a call to another congregation, can shift a congregation's priority. Some congregations have organized small groups to develop plans for implementing iNeighborhood. Other congregations have decided to regroup with a new group of leaders for the process.

While MET members are willing to carry out their activities, they have been hampered by a lack of response from individuals within iNeighborhood congregations. It appears to me that the Facilitators are going to have to work diligently with each congregation in getting teams organized and connecting them with the MET members who can then move the process forward.

Another challenge mentioned in a previous paragraph is the lack of understanding of iNeighborhood as a process; instead people see this as a program and use a programmatic response. There will need to be a major culture shift. The Synod resolution in 2016 regarding lay ministry has also had an unintended impact in that lay people do not see themselves as valued leaders and so are more reluctant to initiate home Bible studies that can lead to house churches. It appears to me that the future of the church depends on iNeighborhood or a similar approach to ministry; however, it is going to take time to retool our people to understand the basis and basics of iNeighborhood. We need to continue to talk, teach and lead in the direction of lay and small group ministry.

My next challenge as a Facilitator for Mission Engagement is to recruit additional MET members. I am losing one due to her husband being transferred by the military out of



our District. I need additional team members in parts of the region where we have no one and the geographic distances are far for existing members to travel. I also need to recruit leaders in congregations for iNeighborhood as at least one key leader has died and others have transferred to other congregations. I think that there is an opportunity for me to work on the statistics of iNeighborhood in terms of the number of zip codes in which we serve and what our zip code potential is. At present, we are assuming we have as many zip codes as we have ministries. This is not the actual case, as I know in Catawba County, NC, we have several zip codes that have more than one congregation in the same zip code. I also began a database listing the zip codes for members of congregations for which I had membership lists. I found that every congregation with which I worked had at least a dozen or more zip codes represented by their members.

One of the strengths of iNeighborhood that I see is that it is creating opportunities for congregations to share what they are doing and thus helping to develop networks of ministry. The challenge discussed above is to help congregations move beyond seeing iNeighborhood as another program and to adopt the process as the focus of their ministry both within and beyond the congregation. The threat that I see is the mindset in Synod to continue to denigrate the role of the laity and elevate the role of the clergy. This not only impacts the availability of competent lay workers, but discourages the kind of ministry that is so essential to this movement. The opportunity that we have is to plant new home groups within the communities where LCMS members are moving but where there is currently no LCMS presence. During the fifteen years I have been in this position, I have had dozens of contacts from people who wanted the SED to plant a mission in their community because the nearest LCMS congregation was half an hour or more away. If we had been involved in iNeighborhood at that time, we could have had at least a dozen or more new house churches by today.

As an individual, I am active in Pray 4 Every Home and Bless Every Home. In addition, my wife and I are actively involved in “Blessing” the neighbors on our court; however, all of them are Christians, though not all are active weekly church attendees. We have 120 homes in our neighborhood and I am walking on a regular basis and renewing contact with neighbors I knew and meeting new move-ins. Many people in my neighborhood are not Anglo and a significant number are likely not Christian. I have been able to identify those who are practicing Christians. I have an opportunity to share my faith with those that I meet on a regular basis. We have not attempted to have any kind of regular home Bible study because of my erratic schedule, but we have had neighbors into our home on an occasional basis.

On a personal note, there are several people with whom I meet on a sporadic basis who are not Christians. When I first became acquainted with them, they were strongly anti-Christian. As I have met with them, entered into gentle conversation and socialized with them, I am gaining a hearing and there is interest in several of them of learning more about why I believe what I do and how my life has been impacted by my faith. They are still anti-church as an organization and anti-religion as an institution, but they are no longer anti-Jesus.



MR. STEPHEN HEEMANN

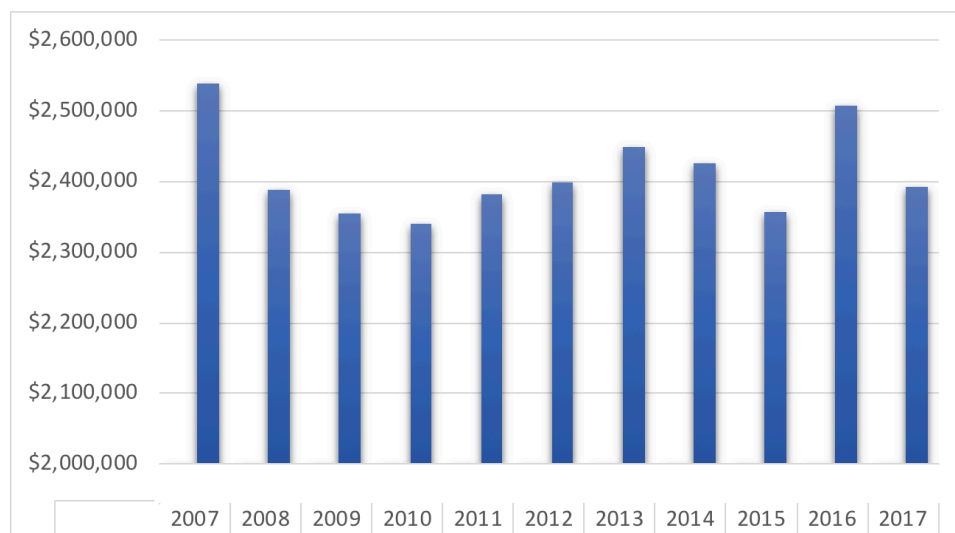
Executive Director of Finance and Stewardship Vice President – Lutheran Church Extension Fund

As the iNeighborhood initiative continues to grow throughout the District, I continue to use this initiative as a base for my work in the areas of finance, stewardship, and Lutheran Church Extension Fund. While these disciplines are not initially recognized as providing a means of establishing relationships with our neighbors, each can still play an integral role in support of this Southeastern District ministry focus.

Finance

We recognize the importance of budgeting, financial reports, and other aspects of dealing with the funds with which we are entrusted in the context of maintaining solid financial backing for all District initiatives. We also recognize that the support of congregations is critical in enabling the SED to fulfill its mission as these congregations provide 71% of revenue used for District operations through Mission Partnership Support gifts.

The bar graph below provides a history of Mission Partnership Support gifts from congregations to the Southeastern District over the last eleven years. This graph illustrates a decline from the high-water mark of \$2.539 million in 2007 to \$2.339 million in 2010 that we believe was primarily the result of the financial downturn and the banking crisis that took place during the 2008 to 2010 timeframe. The uncertainties of the day resulted in a more conservative fiscal approach being taken by many congregations, generating fewer support dollars coming to the SED. This was followed by a gentle recovery from 2011 through 2013 as concerns eased. A second wave of reductions in financial support followed in 2014, 2015 and again in 2017 as a greater number of congregations found themselves with financial challenges on the front burner.



As iNeighborhood is all about our relationships with our neighbors, so the nurturing of Mission Partnership Support gifts from congregations is all about our relationships with congregations. These relationships are strengthened through our presence in congregations which gives us greater opportunity to connect to church workers and leaders. The finance group has looked toward relationship building through a number of practices:

- We thank congregations for their support by acknowledging financial support during visits by the staff and in writing through the cover letters that accompany the reports of gifts that were shared.
- We enhance relationships by forwarding information to pastors and church leaders by name and personalizing the letters, especially to the major supporters.
- We make personal connections to congregational treasurers through annual workshops.
- We practice full disclosure relating to all information provided.

Intensifying these strategies is essential to maintain and potentially increase Mission Partnership Support gifts from congregations. Strengthening relationships through the efforts of the entire staff is assisting with the alignment of many District congregations with iNeighborhood. Additional challenges remain as 19% of District congregations did not financially support the SED in 2017, usually as the result of financial or political issues.

The Southeastern District also continues to be blessed with a strong and stable financial position. Our December 31, 2017 (pre-audit) balance sheet reflects \$3.1 million in cash and long-term investments and \$3.4 million in net assets with both of these areas being strengthened over the past year.

We have also been able to manage the District budget in a manner to achieve positive variances each of the past six years averaging \$115,900 per year. This was accomplished while still meeting planned obligations and taking advantage of both planned and unplanned opportunities. Our financial stability enables efforts to reach the 32 million for Christ with less time needed to work through financial and viability issues that are present with a number of other Synod entities. We are prayerfully confident that enhanced relationships between the District and congregations and increasing congregational alignment through the iNeighborhood ministry will have a long term positive influence on SED finances.

Stewardship

Christian stewardship principles anchor efforts for neighborhood ministry by providing the biblical basis for the development of financial resources through tithes and offerings to help connect the 32 million to Christ. We provide congregations with resources for the teaching of biblical stewardship principles and programs that can be used for annual stewardship emphases. We also welcome opportunities to resource individual congregations upon request.



The most effective form of face to face education for stewardship leaders stems from the annual stewardship workshops offered each fall season in four locations. The 2017 workshops featured the Rev. Wayne Knolhoff, retired Stewardship Executive of the LCMS, speaking on “Changing the Stewardship Culture.” Rev. Knolhoff also provided information on two new stewardship resources being introduced for the first time, *StewardPath* and a new fourth module of Consecrated Stewards that offer a more abbreviated process that can be completed without a guest leader.

It is also our priority to provide information on estate planning and planned gifts for ministry. To meet this need, Mr. Robert Schulze began his time of service as the SED Planned Giving Coordinator in January 2017. In this new role, Mr. Schulze’s focus is:

- To meet with members of SED congregations on an individual basis to help them work through the planned giving process
- To arrange for group meetings within congregations as they develop strategic fundraising plans
- To participate in speaking engagements and planned giving seminars
- To prepare correspondence to promote the availability of Planned Giving resources
- To maintain a working relationship with the LCMS Foundation

During 2017, Mr. Schulze was present at District events and completed numerous presentations within congregations. Mr. Schulze looks forward to working with individuals or couples to complete a planned gift for ministry. If you are interested in personally working with Mr. Schulze on a planned gift for ministry or having him visit your congregation to present planned giving information, he would welcome that opportunity. Please contact him through the District Office to complete these arrangements.

Lutheran Church Extension Fund

An LCEF priority is the support of the iNeighborhood initiatives. LCEF Ministry Support continues to provide free demographic reports through MissionInsite, supplying valuable data to assist with the development of strategies for neighborhood ministry. The use of MissionInsite has created a better understanding of the people around us and how to best equip workers for neighborhood ministries. I believe that MissionInsite (along with Mapping Center) is contributing to the goal of 100 Leaders and Church Workers serving in their neighborhoods and 6000 iGo People Sent.

Investments in LCEF provide the resources for loans for ministry expansion and in support of the congregations that are leading the way with neighborhood ministry. With LCEF investment options, there is “something for everyone.” Promotion of LCEF investments through LCEF Sunday and “Lunch and Learn” mini-conferences for investors have increased the number of investors so that there are now 3,682 investors within the Southeastern District, the largest number of investors in the history of the SED LCEF program, with \$91,636,702 invested in support of church extension activities.



Loans to congregations continue to serve as partnerships to enable ministry expansion. The number of congregations that are in the midst of or preparing for the borrowing process has been on the rise. There are now 22 congregations in some phase of the application or loan fulfillment process with loans ranging in size from \$15,000 to \$8.3 million. Perhaps the most notable new LCEF loan has enabled new Ethiopian neighborhood ministry for the Virginia Evangelical Lutheran Church Mekane Yesus (Annandale, VA). This loan challenged us to consider the cultural and ethnic differences that came into play and to customize the underwriting process to accommodate these differences, the result being that the loan was approved.



Recent months could be identified as a time of transition for LCEF. Former LCEF President, Rich Robertson, retired from this position on September 30, 2017. Following an extensive search process, The Rev. Bart Day was called as the new President and CEO, beginning in this role on October 1, 2017. In his letter following his acceptance of this position, Rev. Day

expressed his desire to “center the core values of LCEF around stability and relevance, assuring that the changing church of tomorrow has the strong financial and ministry capacity LCEF enjoys today. With strong financial standards and the continued blessing of our Lord the best days are yet to come.”

Additional transitions occurring in 2018 will impact how work with congregations and schools is supported within the districts. In the past, promotion and administrative support roles have been provided by staff within each District Office. Beginning this summer, most support personnel will be centered in a regional office, with each of three regional offices supporting approximately 10 districts. New regional positions will assist with marketing, communication, training, and loan underwriting with the District Vice President as the only full-time LCEF staff position serving from the District Office. This restructure, known as “regionalization,” is intended to improve levels of support within the smaller districts and to provide greater efficiency nationwide. The challenge will be to maintain a high level of support to the larger districts who previously had dedicated staff within the District Office.

My Work as an iNeighborhood Missionary

My neighborhood work has intensified from conversations to actions with the potential of more meaningful ministry implications. There have been opportunities to befriend a number of elderly adults and one other with special needs to be in a position for a faith sharing moment. Conversations have brought with them an exchange of contact information and relationships that did not previously exist.



Details on Another Transition that is About to Occur

I have recently announced my intention to retire on December 31, 2018 from my dual role as SED Director of Finance and Stewardship and Vice President – Lutheran Church Extension Fund. I have been truly blessed to have served in these areas for 20 years and am thankful for the opportunities to engage with many congregations over the years as a ministry partner. In the months ahead, we hope to introduce the person to whom God will lead us as my replacement. It is my prayer for a smooth transition later this year and my hope to be of assistance wherever and whenever possible in support of the ministry initiatives offered by the Southeastern District and the Lutheran Church Extension Fund.

Summary

Looking at the areas of Finance, Stewardship, and LCEF, I see both opportunities and challenges.

Strengths and Opportunities:

- Strong financial position of the SED to enable ministry
- Strengthening relationships with pastors and lay leaders through personal communication
- Strengthening the financial and stewardship roles through annual Treasurers and Stewardship workshops being offered this Fall for the tenth consecutive year
- Strong network of LCEF advocates that get the word out in over 100 SED congregations about the ministry of the Lutheran Church Extension Fund and opportunity to partner with congregations to help fulfill their mission within the neighborhood

Threats and Challenges:

- Financial challenges within congregations result in cuts in Mission Partnership Support gifts to the SED
- The politics within the church distract us from our mission of neighborhood ministry
- Alternate income streams through donors or legacy gifts do not keep up with the need for mission funding

I look forward to the continued opportunities presented to us during this triennium and the continued expansion of neighborhood ministry to help reach the 32 million for Christ.



DEACONESS SALLY J. HILLER

Executive Director for Congregational Outreach Director of Operations

“Can it be that God will actually move into our neighborhood?” (1 Kings 8:27) At the very heart of iNeighborhood is the sending of the 60,000 members of our congregations to their neighborhoods to be the visible image of the heart of God amongst their neighbors. Yes, God actually does want to move into our neighborhoods and He is sending an incredible team of iGo missionaries to do just that.

Partnering

The first emphasis in iNeighborhood has been in partnering with congregations. With thanks to Dr. Bruce Jaeger, the equipping materials for iNeighborhood 1 and 2, and a 1-day congregational/circuit event have been prepared and are available on the iNeighborhood website.

We are also thankful to Carolyn Plue who prepares the participant manuals for each event. She is doing an excellent job of managing regular changes and edits in the manual and having them ready for use.

We encourage our congregations to use the “Mapping Center for Evangelism” demographics and the “Bless Every Home” prayer program. Ryan Radke serves as the frontline resource person of these resources and can often be heard helping a congregational leader work his or her way through the program.

Bless Every Home is a program that has evolved and provides exciting opportunities for congregations to identify prayer partners who commit to praying for as many as their 100 nearest neighbors. This is one of the easiest ways to prepare people to go into their neighborhoods with purpose. We still have several full-year grants for congregations who wish to try this ministry of neighborhood praying. Currently, three congregations have 30 people praying for 1,455 households. I believe the Lord will use this in a way that will shine the Gospel light on our neighborhoods.

There have been 82 congregations across the District to participate in an equipping event and 28 have agreed to become Covenant Congregations, pledging to pray for the neighborhoods of the District and initiate a new ministry in three zip codes per year. The 2017 Tending the Flame conference recognized the congregation of Greenwood (Greenwood, SC) for their work in reaching out to the neighborhoods around the church. We received this note from Jan Richards, the congregational president, following the conference: “I am overflowing with praises of thanksgiving. First, “Tending the Flame” and how our small body of believers were honored. Then, on Wednesday, August 30th, we stepped out in faith, and committed ourselves to the responsibility of purchasing a building, to be dedicated as Greenwood Lutheran’s new church. I was thrilled to learn that we will be ministering in a new zip code area. There are only two zip codes in Greenwood, SC. Please pray that we will discover the needs of the new community and become a beacon of hope for them.”



This is the growing story of a partnering congregation connecting with the community through regular monthly events.

Discipling

Perhaps the most difficult of the four strategies to address, discipling becomes a matter of time and priority for the church worker who is already overworked serving the congregation, school, or mission. In this strategy, we are specifically looking at how professional church workers are modeling discipleship by being involved in their own neighborhoods.

While there may be many who are actively and intentionally so engaged, it is only when we hear or read of it that we count it. At the Tending the Flame conference, we recognized DCE Stacey and Jeff Crosson (Prince of Peace, Springfield, VA) for their ongoing ministry in the neighborhood – a ministry that began with organizing Sunday afternoons in Advent in the driveway, to a portable movie theater for summer fun, and the setting up a Hope picnic table in the front yard. They have many stories of amazing conversations of grace with neighbors.

In my own journey story, I committed to two years of PLI Missional Leader Learning Community. This was the first cohort to be held in the District and, because I was the staff responsible for this event, I felt it would be good to experience it as a participant. There have been many interesting learnings as we come to the conclusion of this two-year commitment. My own work in iNeighborhood has included increased engagement with my neighbors and the development and nurturing of a small group of 10-15 women. It is with this group that I am experiencing where some of our gaps are as we look at the role of the leader...especially when relationships deepen and the request for pastoral care moves toward ministry that we would define as Word and Sacrament. How will we equip the workers of the many small groups, neighborhood gatherings, house churches or digital communities that are forming without the presence of a pastor? In my group, those who are not churched are not likely to find their way to a church, yet we have become the church to one another. How do we continue to grow and serve those who thirst and hunger but do not desire the formalities of building and ritual that we recognize and hold dear? Who will be responsible for identifying “acceptable leaders for these groups and how will we equip them?” As discipling continues to grow outside the walls of the church building, our answers to these questions will become even more critical.

Sending

The sending of the Neighborhood Missionaries is made complete when they return to the congregation with stories of what the Lord is doing in their communities. It is our goal to send at least a tenth of our 60,000 members so that we will increase the opportunities to reach the 3,878 zip codes of our District. Throughout all the events of our district – Professional Church Workers and Educators conferences, Congregational Presidents, Fall Treasurers and Stewardship conferences, and Tending the Flame – we



seek to equip and prepare our congregational members to be Neighborhood Missionaries.

In fact, since the last Convention, more than 60 events have been held that required the support of Cathy Long who manages the database and registration processes. She serves with patience while gathering the complete information needed for a successful event.

We have prepared two sending services for congregational use and these are on the iNeighborhood website. I have also had the joy of working with St. John's Elementary School (Dover, DE) to formally 'send' their students to serve as neighborhood missionaries. They shared the story of how they discovered that the afterhours leader did not know the Lord's Prayer and they took time to teach her and give her a catechism. There are many touching stories coming from the work of the students – an indication of what happens when there is a sending of the disciples to disciple.

We continue to seek ways to strengthen the communication of stories and resources: regular postings on Facebook, a growing following on all of the District Facebook pages, excellent graphics, and artwork. Sirpa Quinn is the staff member who has developed most of the graphics, memes, and visual arts for the District. Her work continues to be outstanding. We often find it used by other Districts in their printed materials.

Thursdays@Noon is a relatively new effort for providing resources and stories. This weekly 30-minute Facebook live conversation has included Neighborhood Missionaries, resource presentations, book studies, and guests throughout the Synod. While we cannot tell how far and wide this goes (it has a life of its own), we have had as many as 1200+ viewers, with one viewing from Japan. It truly is the act of broadcasting the Gospel!

During this past year, Ryan Radke has created a small studio for both live broadcasting and recording videos presentations. With our new schedule in hand, we are looking forward to a very interesting season on Thursdays@Noon.

Engaged

All the work of Partnering, Discipling, and Sending lead us to Engaged:

- Engaged congregations sending their members to be the church in the neighborhood
- Members engaging their neighbors through acts of compassion, repeated contact that "BLESSes" another
- BLESSed neighbors seeking to engage in deeper level conversations of grace that begin to develop into Word and Sacrament communities

It is beginning to happen. We are beginning to see just a bit of what will develop as intentional communities are being shaped, as digital communities grow around Word and Sacrament, and as immigrant communities seek to formalize relationships with the Southeastern District.



To resource and assist ministry leaders with the desire and gifts to move from neighborhood events to an intentional gathered community, Dr. Peter Meier of the Center for U.S. Mission joined us in February 2018. As a result of this meeting, plans were put to conversation and paper for 11 new outreach ministries that are primed to step into a new Word community.

Disasters provide a necessary opportunity for community engagement. During the past three years, there have been 11 disasters within our District. Hurricanes, tornados, explosions, vandalism, and riots, we have experienced the worst that disaster brings and best that compassion reveals. In the midst of all of this, there is a new mission in Sandtown (Baltimore City, MD) that brings hope through Faith and Work Enterprises, Inc. and a product that will come from this venture known as Pennsylvania Avenue Chocolates. From the destruction caused in Lumberton, NC through a Hurricane called Matthew rises an incredible partnership with the owner of a childcare facility, Miss Bernice. It may just be that with the help of Hope (Wake Forest, NC), a new mission in Lumberton will be developed.

Since June 2015, we have received \$141,188.21 in funds from over 145 churches, individuals, and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. We have supported flood relief efforts to the tune of \$111,150.50 which includes assistance to First (Towson, MD) and responses to Hurricanes Matthew and Sandy, as well as a special response to the unrest in Baltimore. The remaining funds of \$30,037.71 continue to be used for Hurricane Matthew recovery. Serving our communities through acts of compassion and mercy has opened the door for mission work.

Finally, an opportunity for generosity is gaining momentum and this is Giving Tuesday. Recognizing that the great majority of contributions are received between Thanksgiving and Christmas, this naming of the Tuesday after Thanksgiving is becoming well known. For the past three years, the SED has participated and the response continues to grow. You may recall that in 2016 President Denninger took a plunge into a lake to help raise support for the mission work taking shape in Sandtown. In 2017, staff members and special friends allowed themselves to be “slimed” all for the purpose of raising scholarship funds.

Supporting

I will conclude with what is foundational to the success of each of the four main strategies of iNeighborhood, and that is the people who are supporting this effort. It truly takes the hands and hearts of many to give shape to a vision. We are blessed with a seasoned staff in the District Office.

Our Financial team is outstanding – and not just in finances. Kim Winston, Vicki Edwards, Carolyn Plue, and David Kennedy are willing to serve wherever the need. They produce meeting materials, help students apply for loans, answer phones and a myriad of questions, keep the finances straight, and find just enough time to marvel at a solar eclipse.



Ryan Radke, Cathy Long, Elisa Ferguson, and Sirpa Quinn support people and events with excellence. They manage President Denninger's and my complicated schedules with grace.

There are more incredible servant leaders at work. We have a Spiritual Life Team who prays for the work of the Holy Spirit and the workers of the District. The Task Force on Constitutional Review continues to complete the review of many new and revised constitutions. District Reconcilers are often at work with both formal and informal concerns. The Circuit Visitors are among the busiest of the District's volunteers, meeting with congregations and workers. The newly formed Mission Engagement Teams are becoming intricately involved as coaches for iNeighborhood congregations and teachers of the equipping events. National Lutheran School Accreditation Team Members assist in the accrediting of our Lutheran Schools. The Disaster Response Team can be called in on a moment's notice. The Southeastern District Worker Care Team is in the midst of developing resources to support worker health. And finally, the SED Board of Directors continues to challenge, support, and expect excellence in ministry and mission.

Can God actually move into our neighborhood? He has already done so and now He is sending us out to continue the work of connecting people with Jesus.

