



Nebraska Lutheran Reporter



Information of Interest for Lutherans in the Nebraska District of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod
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February 2011

NEW CIRCUIT COUNSELOR . . .

Rev. Kenton Birtell, Holdrege, has been appointed circuit counselor of the Holdrege Circuit upon the resignation from the position by Rev. Jeff Ernstmeyer. This term will end at the District Convention in June of 2012.

CONGREGATIONAL STATISTICAL REPORTS . . .

Congregational statistical reports have been mailed out and are to be returned by February 28. Please make two copies of the completed form, mail the original to the St. Louis office, and mail a copy to the District Office in Seward. If you have not already done so, please complete and submit this form immediately to keep District and Synod records up to date. Contact Kim Hofer at the District Office at kimh@ndlcms.org or 888-643-2961, ext. 1014, with any questions.



NEBRASKA LLL CONVENTION . . .

The Nebraska District LLL Convention will be held March 25-26 at the Divots Convention Center in Norfolk. A Wisconsin fish boil, tours of the Orphan Grain Train headquarters and devotions will occur on Friday evening with the convention sessions conducted on Saturday, ending with a banquet Saturday evening featuring the Norfolk Men's Chorus. There will be no activities on Sunday.

STAFF CHANGES . . .

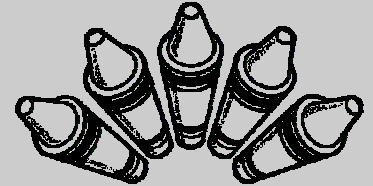
The Nebraska District staff is pleased to welcome **Sheri Hahn** as the new part-time bookkeeper. Sheri works with accounts receivable and payable, including congregational remittances. She may be contacted at sherih@ndlcms.org or 888-643-2961, ext. 1006. Sheri replaces Sandy Ruether, who left her position for new opportunities.



FROM THE PRESIDENT . . .

What is Your Favorite Color?

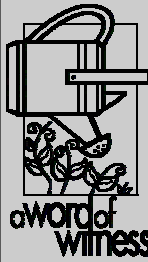
Do you remember the first time someone asked you to identify your favorite color? Most likely you were a small child when this occurred.



Pastor Douglas Escue of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Santa Fe, New Mexico, has observed:

"Color is everywhere. Color is God's way of filling his world with beauty and giving pleasure to those who live in this colorful world. Christians, for centuries, have used color in divine worship to emphasize the redemptive action of God through his Son."

During February many Lutheran Christian churches decorate their altars with the color green. Pastors also wear green stoles around their necks. Green is the color of growth. In the dead of winter where the dominant colors are brown and white, we Christians break out the green. We do this because we want to do what God inspired Peter to write: "*Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*" (2 Peter 3:18)



This growth in the grace and knowledge of Christ is vital for the mission season of Epiphany that began on January 6, engulfing February until March 6. To church we go to grow. Out of church we go to "*Be wise in the way [we] act toward outsiders; mak[ing] the most of every opportunity. Let[ting] [our] conversation always being full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that [we] may know how to answer everyone.*" (Colossians 4:5-6)

Epiphany means to "reveal," and the Holy Spirit does reveal Jesus as the Savior through our witness using God's Word. Epiphany is the "green" mission season to witness and invite those with whom we have conversations to come and see Jesus, the suffering Savior, during Lent leading up to the time of meditation during Holy Week and the resurrection joy of Easter!

February is a great mission month for our favorite color to be GREEN!

Rev. Russ Sommerfeld



a **Month of Missions**

The mission of the Nebraska District is to resource congregations, leaders, and related organizations in their mission of discipling the saved and proclaiming Christ to a lost and changing world.

HEARTS FOR JESUS . . . Each year the Nebraska District schools are invited to take part in the "Hearts for Jesus" project. This project alternates between a District ministry and a mission project outside of the District. The 2010-2011 project is Mercy Meals of Nebraska, a non-profit organization that allows volunteers to package nourishing food delivered by Orphan Grain Train to children in need throughout the world. Through opportunities to volunteer and financially support this program, children are given an opportunity to serve Christ by serving others, along with a sense of self-empowerment, civic duty, world awareness, an expression of kindness, and appreciation for the blessings in their daily lives. They learn that loving others as Jesus loves them can make a difference in the world around them. For more information on Mercy Meals, contact them at 402-649-6401. If your school hasn't started collecting its "Hearts for Jesus" offering, February is a great time to start!



ARE YOU PLANNING A MISSION TRIP IN 2011? . . . Start saving the money for the trip in an Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) StewardAccount®. This account provides money market interest rates, check writing abilities, and an ATM/Check Card for purchases or access to cash. Free, online access allows you to view statements, order checks and electronically transfer funds. Open an account as an individual or as an organization with a minimum investment of \$100. To learn more, contact the Nebraska District LCEF office today at 888-643-2961, ext. 1011.

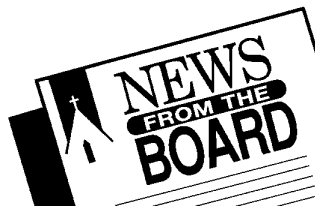


2011 SERVANT EVENTS . . . For more than 25 years, tens of thousands of Lutheran youth have participated in LCMS servant events, learning that serving others can make a difference because of Jesus Christ. Learn about the servant event experiences available in the summer, winter, spring or fall. Learn how you can serve for a weekend or a week any season of the year at an LCMS servant event. Events are listed in detail and searchable by date, region or event type. Visit www.lcms.org/ca/dcs/servevents/sehome.asp to browse a complete listing of LCMS servant events for 2011.

MISSION TRIP SCHOLARSHIPS . . . The Nebraska District offers mission trip scholarships to pastors, professional church workers, and lay people of the District. Applicants must meet certain criteria, such as completing a scholarship application, demonstrating personal financial commitment to the trip, and verifying their mission trip through LCMS World Mission. Applications and full guidelines are available by visiting the District website at www.ndlcms.org/ministries/missiondev/trip.html or by calling Connie Borchers at the District Office, 888-643-2961, ext. 1013.



ADMINSTRATORS'/EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS' CONFERENCE . . . Lutheran school administrators, along with early childhood educators and directors, will gather for their spring conference at The Leadership Center in Aurora on April 14-15 under the theme *Jesus Now and Forevermore* based on Jude 24-25. Registration materials have been emailed and the registration deadline is March 30. Information on the conference is available on the District website at www.ndlcms.org or contact Carol Oetting at carolo@ndlcms.org or 888-643-2961, ext. 1010.



BOARD SUMMARY

. . . The Nebraska District Board of Directors took the following action at its meeting on December 3:

- Approved constitution and bylaw revisions for the following congregations: Trinity, Fremont; Beautiful Savior, LaVista; and St. Paul, Utica.
- Accepted the action taken by the Lutheran Church Extension Fund Nebraska Program for Peace, Waverly.
- Affirmed the housing allowance resolution for Minister of the Gospel employees of the Nebraska District, while approving a variance to the policy as requested by Dr. Marvin Bergman due to his change in employment to a part-time employee.
- Accepted the recommendation of the Task Force for District Treasurer Position Review to provide resources in the budget for part-time clerical assistance to the treasurer and the outsourcing of the informational technology responsibilities.
- Ratified the 2011 District participation plan for Concordia Health Plans worker choice options.
- Approved a 2011 capital budget of \$44,500.
- Approved the 2011 Nebraska District mission and ministry operating expense budget of \$3,754,346.
- Modified the current General Investment Policy for the Use and Allocation of Market-Based Income to allow the Board of Directors to waive the stated priority use of investment returns and earnings and apply these funds to the general budget as they deem necessary.
- Examined a proposal for a generosity audit and authorized the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors to explore and receive bids from possible providers and contract to begin such an audit as they deem appropriate.

AUTOMATIC PHONE SYSTEM AT DISTRICT OFFICE . . . Incoming calls to the District Office are now being answered by an automated system. If you know the extension of the person with whom you wish to speak, you may dial it when your call is answered and they will take your call if they are available. If they are not available, either their assistant will answer the call to provide assistance, or you may leave a voice mail. This change results from careful management of resources due to budget constraints and reduced staff. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation.



Keep the following list of extensions near your phone so when you call in you can reach the person with whom you need to speak. If you have a general question, you may dial "0" and leave a message in the message center.

District Office	888-643-2961	
Connie Borchers (missions/gift planning)	1013	Carol Oetting (education/youth/ church worker health/lay leadership) 1010
Rich Boring (missions)	1009	
Jan Bruick (LCEF)	1011	Paul Pettit (treasurer/LCEF) 1007
Neal Koch (gift planning)	1002	Mark Rockenbach (church worker health) 1001
Sheri Hahn (bookkeeper)	1006	Russ Sommerfeld (district president) 1004
Nichole Hetz (communications/events)	1003	Barbara Von Kampen (accountant) 1005
Kim Hofer (president's office)	1014	Don Weber (education/youth) 1008

The following employees work from home offices and may be reached at the following numbers:

Marvin Bergman (lay leadership training) – call the District Office at 888-643-2961 and dial extension 1010 to reach his assistant Carol, or call him at his home office at 402-643-3724.

Gene Gierke (LCEF) - call Gene on his cell phone at 402-641-1485 or call the District Office to speak with his assistant Jan at extension 1011.

COMING EVENTS

Pastors' Conference , Younes Conference Centre, Kearney.....	February 24-26
Theological Conference on Worship , Younes Convention Centre, Kearney	February 25-26
Nebraska District LLL Convention , Divots Convention Center, Norfolk.....	March 25-26
Administrators'/Early Childhood Educators' Conference , The Leadership Center, Aurora	April 14-15
Worship Conference , St. John, Seward	July 27-29
District Youth Gathering , Embassy Suites Convention Center, LaVista.....	November 18-20

CALLS IN THE DISTRICT

COMMISSIONED MINISTERS

OTHER TRANSACTIONS

Robert Broekemeier (S'88), candidate status to non-candidate status.

Parley Jay Johnson III (SCQ'00), teacher, St. Paul, Ogallala, to candidate status.

Parley Jay Johnson III (SCQ'00), candidate status, Nebraska District, to candidate status, Rocky Mountain District.

Amy Koozer (S'03), candidate status to removed from the roster.

Chara Sype (S'04), teacher/assistant director of student life, Concordia University, Nebraska, to non-candidate status.

ORDAINED MINISTERS

CALLS ACCEPTED

Rev. Terry Buethe (StL'04), St. John, Wakefield, to St. John, Yuma, Colo.

Rev. Keith Christiansen (FtW'83), non-candidate status to St. John, Pierce.

CALLS DECLINED

Rev. John Diener (FtW'94), St. John, Tecumseh, to St. Paul, Wittenberg, Wis.; and Trinity, Darmstadt, Ind.

Rev. Matthew Tooman (StL'05), associate, Trinity, Lincoln, to Immanuel, Junction City, Kan.

Rev. Lee Weander (StL'94), senior, Our Savior, Norfolk, to Zion, Detroit Lakes, Minn.

"THE JOY OF THE LORD IS OUR STRENGTH"

The following article was submitted by Bob and Judy Bartels of Tobias after their return from a short-term mission trip to Malakal, Sudan, with Rev. John and Martha Deang this past November and December. Plans are being made to return to this area to continue the mission work there. For more information on how you can be part of the next team that goes, contact the missions department at the District Office, missions@ndlcms.org or 888-643-2961, ext. 1013. The Bartels are willing to share their story with your congregation or mission organization. Contact them at 402-243-2316 or bjbartels@yahoo.com to find a time for them to come and tell of what God is doing in Sudan.

A visit to Sudan, East Africa, is truly a blessing from the Lord. What a way to experience first hand what the Lord does with His chosen people! This visit brought us closer to the Lord and closer to each other as we encountered each new day.

The physical experiences were challenging as we endured a lack of the common luxuries we take for granted in this country. Water was contained in a barrel, using a bucket to flush the stool and pans to wash clothes by hand. Lights often went out by 9:00 p.m. and people walked more than drove vehicles for transportation. Trash lay around along the roads and in ditches, and the roads were not paved. Most of the roads were full of ditches and very difficult to travel with automobiles.

However, the atmosphere of believers outweighed the physical challenges. We felt very welcomed and appreciated from the very beginning. A service of greeting was held the first day we arrived in Malakal. This was our introduction to the enthusiastic singing we would be privileged to share over the course of the next few weeks. Both children's choirs and women's choirs were a major part of the service. The service was spoken in English and then translated into both Nuer and Shilluk. There were also Nuer and Shilluk choirs which performed during the service, including not only singing, but also rhythm actions as well. Praising the Lord in Sudanese almost always involves some kind of music.

While we were there, the dirt floor of the church was cemented by hand by the members of the congregation. It was an amazing sight to see the cement mixed by hand and carried in pails to the correct position on the floor and then smoothed out by hand. This is the church that was shipped by Orphan Grain Train and built with the help of volunteers last fall. Thanks to the Lord who worked through the congregations of the Nebraska District to make the floor financially possible.



Church interior with cement floor

Bible studies were held for the women and the children on two occasions each. At the first gathering of the women, 25 women attended and the session lasted for two hours. Again, singing was a major part of the study. The lesson had to be translated into Nuer and then into Shilluk. Martha Deang, Pastor John Deang's wife, was truly a blessing during the translation process. Thirty-six kids showed up the first day we held a session for them and it also lasted about two hours, with no disciplinary reminders needed. They truly appeared to be engrossed in learning about the Lord.



Children in Malakal

We had the opportunity to visit some Lutheran schools in remote villages during two days of our trip. The schools educate more than 300 students each and use buildings made of mud and bamboo sticks.



A teacher inside the school

The children have no desks or even seats to sit on. But then it might be rather difficult to put that many children in one of the rooms with benches or desks. Teachers use chalkboards and lecture to the students. They have very few books to use.

At the first village they thought we were going to be there for a meal and they presented us with a goat that was to be used as the sacrifice for our meal. Unfortunately, we were on a limited time schedule and were not able to stay. They feasted without us, but in our honor. Even though these schools are funded by the government of Sudan, they are still allowed to teach about our Savior, Jesus Christ, and what He has done for us.



Being presented with the goat

Most of the people we met and worked with live in mud huts with grass roofs. They have very little as far as material luxuries are concerned, but they know that it is the Lord who takes care of all their needs and especially their eternal lives. Sudanese people truly know the meaning of Nehemiah 8:10 which states, "...so do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is our strength." We encountered so much joy with these people as we shared the love of the Lord with them. Keep them in your prayers as they deal with the political changes going on in Southern Sudan.

Pray that the Lord will bless and keep the people safe from repercussions of the vote on the referendum to divide into two countries. South Sudan is about 90% Christian, and North Sudan is mostly Muslim. That is only one of the issues causing a division. They are also dealing with over 10,000 people from the North who have been relocated to their home villages in the South. Again, they trust the Lord to use this as a way to share His love.



Displaced people arriving in Southern Sudan

We were truly blessed as we visited this country. We also realized how blessed we are at home with so many conveniences, but appreciated the joy we saw in this special group of God's people who have so little. May we also find that joy and appreciation for what the Lord has done. The fields are ripe for the harvest in Sudan. May the Lord use us and the people of the Nebraska District to help with His harvest and continue to be used to bring more and more Sudanese people into His family.



School surrounded by students