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Becky's Billet-doux, Faith Matters, March 2021 Newsletter for Faith Fellowship, Odessa, TX

*"A witness is someone who has encountered the truth, has been possessed by it, and then attempts to pass that truth along to someone else. But the actual witnesses—the actual people, their lives—display or show the truth of what they announce and not just their words." (Myron Penner, *The End of Apologetics, Christian Witness in a Postmodern Context*, (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2013,101.)*

Kierkegaard says that a witness is one "who proclaims the teaching and existentially [in actual existence] expresses it." (Soren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers, vol. 6, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Assisted by Gregor Malantschuk, [Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1978], 6251)

Myron Penner claims in his book, *The End of Apologetics, Christian Witness in a Postmodern Context*, that the "truth I proclaim...will be evident from how I live." (Penner, 102) He argues that convincing someone that God loves them is ineffective as a debate based on logic, reason, or Biblical facts. It is, on the other hand, effective in simply telling the truth of your belief and how that belief builds you up. Truth is not something we own, it owns us. (Penner 106, 117) How living in Truth affects us—our lives, our outlook, our peace, and our behavior—is something we can joyfully share with another person. The Truth that possesses us is something we can talk about, but it is also something that can be seen in how we live. Our witness, then, is two-fold. It is our speech and our lives.

What we witness (or testify) is as important as how we testify. The Apostle Paul said he became all things to all people that he might win some. (1 Corinthians 9:19-23) As Paul lived out the Gospel, he sought what was best for the other person or other people. He didn't try to make people be like himself, instead he made himself to be like them. He put them first. This could open their hearts to hear and their eyes to see the very truth that possessed Paul, the truth that overpowered him, changed his heart, and saved his life.

In his ministry to the neighbor, Paul lived Jesus' summary of the 10 Commandments, "Love God and love your neighbor as yourself" (See Matthew 22:37-39). Paul was willing to be weak so that the strength of God could be seen. God's power was witnessed to by

Paul when he became vulnerable by putting his neighbor first. This is a way of living—living out the Gospel—and being a witness to the Truth, Jesus Christ. This Gospel-living happens not only with our voices but with our lives.

Paul says in Galatians 3:26-28, “...for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” Our differences, though they remain, are much less important than our ‘oneness’ in Christ.

Once in Christ we are all equally joint heirs with Christ. Those outside of the body, however, deserve respect and consideration for their own sake and salvation. We share what God has already done for us and declare that He loves our neighbor and desires their well-being and blessings too. In lifting up the other, we humble ourselves, and God’s might and love become visible through the power of the Holy Spirit, even to the unbeliever. This happens when we treat the unbeliever as a beloved child of God for the sake of Christ to win our neighbor. After all, you too are a beloved child of God for the sake Christ, who humbled himself for you.

Pastor Becky Hand

INDIA MISSION WITNESS

I am Mahafuj Rehman Khan. I live in Beitul, Madhya Pradesh with my wife Annur Ansari. I met Bro Habibur Rehman almost 2 years ago. He was giving gospel in somebody’s house in my village. I went there with my brother and criticized these people and also threaten to kill them but nothing shook them as they were ready to even fight with the entire village. That time we went home but after some days Bro Habibur Rehman met me at a tea stall and there he told me about Jesus. He told me a simple thing which was ‘Do I knew anyone who loved me so much that he would give his life for you without any hesitation?’ My natural answer was no. He said ‘ Jesus loves you that He gave His life for you.’ We talked for a few hours but the conversation changed me and I had a felling that the teachings of Jesus could be right. He also gave me some literatures to read namely - **What do you think about Jesus Christ. Do you know God’s Salvation is ready for you. Did God appear in the Flesh. Sin and atonement in Islam and Christianity.** I also told about it all to my wife, my brother and his wife, who at first were reluctant to listen to me but after few days agreed to read the

literatures with me every day. And so, we started to read daily. Several months passed by as we read the literatures and tried to understand the word. Me and my wife started to feel peace in our lives which we never felt before. Then, we were invited to join Sunday fellowship and went to different seminars with Bro Abdul Rouf. He also gave us a Bible to read. We started reading the Bible every day and prayed. Our favorite Bible verse is **John 3:16 - For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.** Then time went on and our faith in Christ grew more and more and by May 2019, we accepted Christ as our personal Saviour. When people of our village came to know about our faith, they criticized us and even threatened us to leave the village or else they would beat us to death. But by God’s grace nothing happened and so on 26 November 2020 me, my wife, my brother and his wife were baptized and started our new life. Please pray for our new faith. Also pray for our family that they too could come to Christ.

Sayed Hasan Ahmed

AIMJ REPORT

AIMJ had organized 9 baptisms camps, in which 89 people were baptized.



On Monday, February 8, the Board for Theology and Ministry held the annual Convocation for the Theology of the Cross. Unlike previous years, we had several satellite sites throughout the U.S. and individuals who joined us from church and home offices as far away as Chile. The content of this year's conference was centered on the Augsburg Confession (Augustana in Latin, which might sound familiar). Our keynote speaker was The Rev. Dr. Ken Sundet Jones, professor of theology and philosophy at Grand View University. Ken's new book *A Lutheran Toolkit* is a commentary on the Augsburg Confession. It was released in early February. Ken helped us to think about the God who hides behind the masks of creation and situations and the revealed God who comes to us in Scripture and Jesus Christ. Also, he helped us think about new obedience created in faith.

In addition to these two lectures, Pastor Culynn Curtis was our morning preacher on Philippians 3:1-16. Also, Pastor Aaron Deutsch, Pastor Randy Freund, and Pastor Julie Smith participated in a panel discussion about the pastoral challenges of the last year. We also reflected on those challenges and the future of the Church in a post-COVID world. Dr. Jones helped us to reflect on these experiences through the Augustana articles regarding the Church (as defined by articles VII and VIII, a key article in the formation of LCMC). Updates from LCMC, AD/BTM, and the 2020 Initiative were shared.

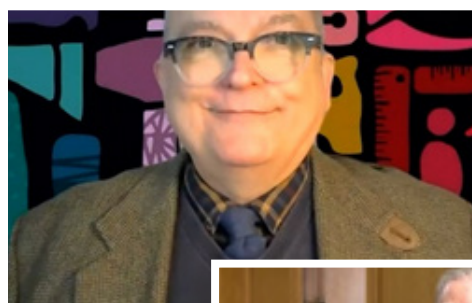
The Board for Theology and Ministry continues to support seminarians and new pastors to LCMC

through certification interviews and endorsements. We are also looking for resources to be shared with our clergy and congregations. Lastly, if you have ideas about themes for upcoming webinars or conferences, we would appreciate hearing from you.

If you would like to watch the conference you can find the recording on the Augustana District website at <https://augustanadistrict.org/video-channel/>

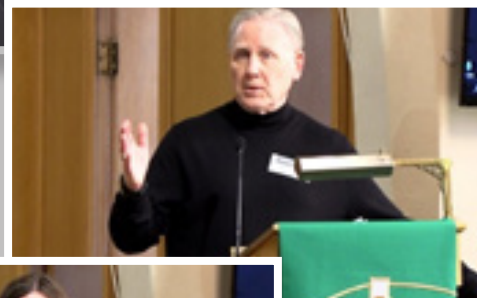
Pastor Culynn Curtis

Board of Theology and Ministry Chair

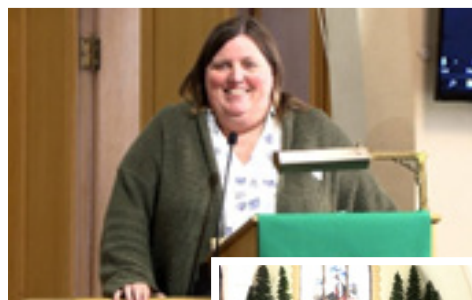


Rev. Dr. Ken Jones speaking to the conference via Zoom

Pr. Freund giving an Augustana District update



Pr. Julie Smith giving an AD update on the 2020 Initiative



Q and A time at Faith Lutheran to Rev. Dr. Jones on the Zoom screen



A Panel Discussion with Pr. Julie Smith, Pr. Randy Freund, Pr. Aaron Deutsch and Rev. Dr. Jones



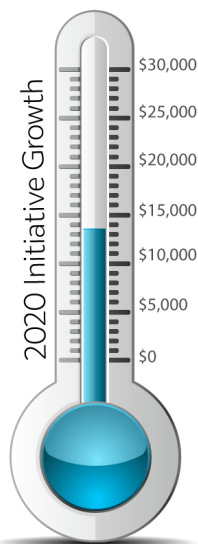
PRAYER REQUESTS

May God guide decisions and direction of the 2020 Initiative. Thanks for the description presented by Julie Smith at the theological conference. May His Spirit multiply our efforts, attract participants, and call many others to join in these plans. What a wonderful opportunity to generously spread the seeds of the Gospel through Sioux Falls, Fargo- Moorhead area and Twin Cities. Provide the needed resources for the priorities.

- ✝ Thanks for the Word spoken at the AD conference. Thanks for the fellowship; there was encouragement, comfort, and renewal. God's Word continues to call, gather, and enlighten.
- ✝ May God provide prayerful and financial gifts for our mission partners; may God work through all means to support governments that allow for religious freedom and protect all their citizens from religious persecution.
- ✝ Christian friends who are in the country of Myanmar (which is in turmoil these days) -- We cannot name these friends for security reasons, but I am inviting you all to please join me in praying for peace and freedom to be restored in this nation, for the love of God to be showered down upon its people, and for God's will to be done there on earth, as it is in heaven.
- ✝ Brother Titus – PTL for miraculous strength to run for 4 hours; grant healing of his soul from the scars of terror, and provide strength to continue to witness to Christ in the face of daily fear of death
- ✝ Provide good order to the lives of those affected by the cold weather. If anyone has plumbing skills and is able to help out, tickle their hearts and skills to join in helping with repairs. May all congregations in Texas use this 'event' as a time for providing spiritual support for their communities.
- ✝ Prayers for our nation – restore our trust in You

PRAYER OF THE MONTH

Prayer of the month: Holy Lord, make your presence known to us as we walk this Lenten season. Open our hearts to accept your gracious gifts. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.



2020 INITIATIVE

“Youth Leadership, Campus Ministry, Church Plants”

As of February 19, 2021, the 2020 Initiative is up to \$13,850. If you wish to support this initiative please send your contribution to: Augustana District * 335 Main Street South * Hutchinson, MN 55350 and specify “2020 Initiative” in the memo section. Thank you for your support!



CONSOLIDATED APPROPRIATIONS ACT 2021

Did you know Congress recently passed a new Act that could affect your charitable giving this year?

The Consolidated Appropriations Act 2021 (H.R. 133) has three important provisions that may positively impact your charitable giving through the end of the year!

This Act, which was signed into law in December 2020, provided an additional injection of stimulus into the economy, including relief for businesses and non-profits. There were also specific provisions that were extended from the CARES Act of March 2020 for those who support their favorite charities.

Specifically, these three provisions may impact your giving through the end of calendar year 2021.

1. You may deduct cash donations up to 100% of adjusted gross income through December 31, 2021, if you itemize your deductions. The CARES Act provision for cash donations was set to expire on December 31, 2020 but has been extended. The limit

for cash contributions was 60% of adjusted gross income prior to both acts being passed, which may increase the opportunity to give more this year to help offset income.

2. For those who do not itemize, the above-the-line deduction was extended through December 31, 2021 as well, with an added boost. Non-itemizers can now deduct \$300 per filer (\$600 for joint filers) as an above-the-line deduction. This is an increase from the CARES act which was limited to a \$300 deduction per tax return, including joint filers.

3. The Consolidated Appropriations Act extended giving incentives for corporations, as well. Through 2021, corporations can give up to 25% of their taxable income through cash donations or food inventory. This is an increase from the 10% deduction allowed against taxable income prior to these acts being passed.

Contact your financial planner or tax advisor for more information.



Varinia Cuello from Chile as an Associate Individual Member

MISSION MINUTE FROM THE LUTHERAN CHURCH OF MYANMAR

This month's mission minute is focused on the Lutheran Church of Myanmar (LCM) one of our most recently vetted ministries with the Augustana District. The LCM is a smaller Lutheran church body in Myanmar. Their outreach ministries focus on three educational outreaches that have become the center of their community work. The first is called Damadi Home, and the other two go by the name of the Hope Education Center, one based in Htauak Kyant township and the other in Pyae village near Inle Lake, Shan State. Both centers offer free education to underprivileged children who cannot afford to go to school. The school provides primary education along with reaching the families with the Gospel. They also offer a relief arm of the church called Helping Hands Relief Work. The relief arm provides resources to thousands of families around the country and in crucial ministry outreach areas which has been crucial under the COVID19 pandemic. Their seminary is called Myanmar Institute of Lutheran Theology (MILT) and currently offers up to a bachelor's degree in ministry, they are hoping to provide additional

facility resources to support their ongoing growth and looking for those theological educated to travel to Myanmar to help teach courses.

LCM is looking for key partners to support their ministry and to come and to serve in short or long-term missions to the country of Myanmar. As you are praying this month, keep the LCM in your prayers: 1) last February their country had a military coup and there have been multiple deaths by the military and police over protests of the coup. 2) Pray that God will provide the financial support that the LCM requires each month to support all their ongoing project. 3) Pray that God will move those with in the church to go Myanmar to participate in their ministries directly.

If you have any questions you are welcome to contact the President of the LCM, Rev. Martin Lalthangliana at lcmyanmar@gmail.com or you can contact the BWM contact for this ministry, Pastor Tom Thorstad, at tomt.lelc@gmail.com



Seminary

Lutheran Church
Chaung Khua village





REGISTRATION FOR THE ANNUAL CONVENTION WILL BE OPENING SOON!

When? May 1, 2021

Where? Faith Lutheran Church, Hutchinson, MN.

Watch the website for additional information.



Dear AD Ambassadors and Pastors,

During Lent we have decided to meet only one time per month instead of the usual twice. All meetings are on Wednesdays at 10:00 a.m. CST. The upcoming meeting schedule is as follows:

March 17th (St Patrick's Day)

April 14th.

Then we begin meeting every other week again: April 28th, May 12th, May 26th...etc.

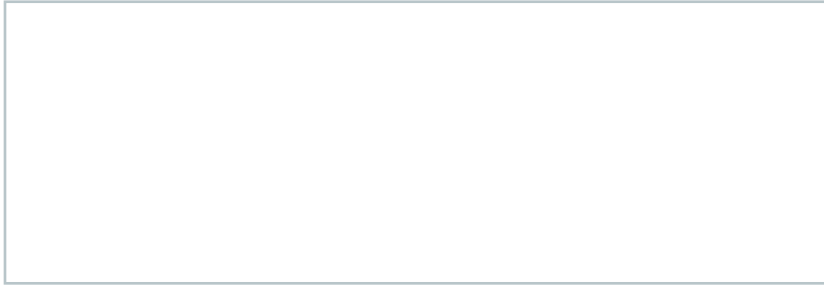
Please contact Pastor Becky Hand at becky@augustanadistrict.org for a Zoom link to join these discussions.

THE AUGUSTANA DISTRICT FINANCIAL REPORT

I would like to acknowledge the phenomenal job our AD Staff has done in holding down their expenses over the last year. This has allowed AD to remain on a solid financial footing with our income exceeding expenses by over \$10,000. With only one month left in our fiscal year, we look forward to a strong finish in March. We would also like to encourage you and your churches to support our AD World Mission Partners and our new AD 2020 initiative. We hope and pray that Augustana District can continue to be a beacon of light during these tough times!

Warm Regards,
Eric Knutson, AD Treasurer






AUGUSTANA DISTRICT
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SAVE THE 2021 DATES

- ☒ Augustana District Convention on Saturday, May 1, 2021. **NOTE: The convention has been moved to Faith Lutheran in Hutchinson, MN.**
- ☒ Women of the Word (WoW) Conference Saturday, September 18, 2021 in Dawson, MN.

Dates subject to change based on current Covid restrictions.

Please watch our website and Facebook page for the most up to date information!