



**AUGUSTANA
WITNESS**
n e w s l e t t e r

January 2025

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Devotional

II Corinthians chapter 4, verse 16 holds these words: "So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day."

A prayer by Martin Luther begins: "Lord God, You have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending..."

What crosses your mind when you think of the word "venture?" This term used to indicate to me a different word, "adventure." In either of these words, you would be remiss not to consider "misadventure." There's more to these expressions than simply differences in spelling.

Sunita Williams and Barry Wilmore are presently on a space station awaiting their return home. They are now months into a training mission that started back in June and was supposed to last just eight days. As of this writing, they are hoping to return sometime in March of 2025. Such an extension is an illustration of what I mean by a venture becoming a misadventure. Perhaps they will be able to laugh and joke about it with their families one day. Perhaps not.

"Suni" and "Butch" are aboard the international space station, which awaits decommissioning in 2030. There are plans to bring it back, disintegrating as debris on the ground of mother earth. There is an end-game planned, a finishing clause to these very expensive space laboratories. Obsolete stations must be removed to make room for more advanced scientific ventures. These are just two of many such missions in space.

Here, our fellowships dwelling in gravity's unrelenting grip have a common mission ... as churches. Christ Jesus assigned us to "Go and make disciples of all nations" in Matthew 28. We have many ancestors who have invested hard-earned money in land and buildings for churches. Some of these were mission outreach places, in areas where Jesus' name was little revered. Faithful people came and participated in efforts to establish the faith they had come to trust. Bitter trials and utter failures struck some, but many pressed on for centers of Christian worship.

Something has happened in furthering the "development" of our modern Christian outreach. Small churches that were the gathering space for devout congregations 50-plus years ago have lost their "flock." What remains today are buildings and parking lots, graveyards and maybe a picnic shelter. The structures may be well kept, the grounds manicured, and the cemeteries secured. The "maintenance fund" remains sound but the ministry, the mission and the Word are mute.

Churches everywhere need to consider their own endings. Delightful, well-tended country church structures do nothing for proclamation if they become mausoleums or museums of remembrance, void of hope. Large city churches can prove great landmarks, but they are just as prone to this decline as relics. Shrinking families of believers may manage valuable property needs by letting ministry go dormant.

As you and your church family enter into another calendar year, pause to think and pray together. Before you set about reinvesting your Certificates of Deposit, consider your mission. Consider Christ's mission through you.

Yes, even if your church is fully insured, you certainly need money set aside for your expenses and repairs. However, if you are investing to sustain your church structures, beware you don't lose the King. Your church life is to illumine those who walk in darkness with the Light of Christ, everywhere.

For churches with great endowments, reconsider locking in funds for maintaining "your church future." Plan instead, to invest in Christ's flocks. Remember those in Estonia, whose ministry funds outreach that includes war refugees. Their ministry and instruction of the Gospel is huge, and they are struggling with very limited resources that your church family may be able to eclipse! Think of the witness of those in Africa and India, whose actions have introduced Muslims to Jesus. Their missionaries risk their lives daily as they hike to their small churches. What could they do with a good bicycle, or a sound motorcycle?

Jesus has several parables that address our urgency to demonstrate faith through the stewardship of "our" resources (God's gifts to us). Where He does His best work is in the hearts of those who believe, reaching out to lead other hearts to know Him. The missions of the Augustana District need your support for these ventures.

May Christ Jesus guide you all in your prayers of thanksgiving to spread His Word thorough mission opportunities that need your help to grow God's kingdom right now.

God bless you and your visions for His mission!

Pastor Nathan Hanson

AD Coordinator for Stewardship and Mission

Confirmation Retreat



This annual retreat will be held at Inspiration Point in Vining, MN and is designed for 7-8th grade students. The theme this year is "What Is the Church." The registration deadline for this event is February 14, last year we were at capacity so please plan to register early to guarantee space for your students. Please share this information with your confirmation families as soon as possible so that they can plan for and register as soon as possible. Registration is open!

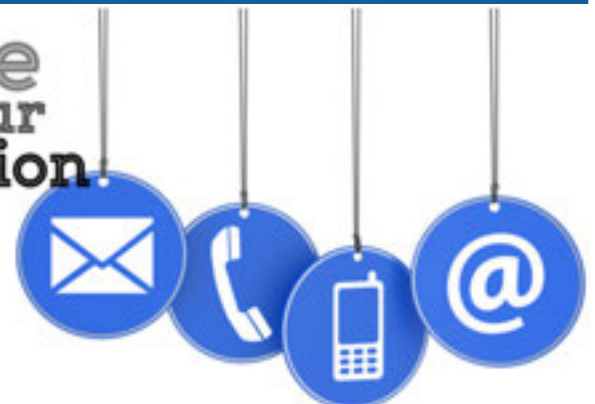
Please note that there will be a \$25 late registration fee for anyone who registers after the February 14 deadline



To see the video and get full details, scan the QRcode or visit <https://augustanadistrict.org/2025-confirmation-retreat/>



Update
your
Information!



Please let us know if your information has changed!
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Annual Report from the District Coordinator

(Please print and share in your Congregational Annual Reports!)

Dear Friends in Christ:

As 2024 comes to a close I've been hyper aware of all the transition stories we find in Scripture. Consider the stories of Abraham who is called to leave his homeland on an unknown journey, Joseph who is thrust into positions of leadership in Egypt after arriving there as a slave, Moses who shepherds God's people through the wilderness for 40 years, and the people of Judah who are led into exile in Babylon only to return 70 years later. These accounts are but a tip of the iceberg when it comes to characters of the Bible that find themselves in flux.

We have also found ourselves in a season of transition and flux here in the Augustana District throughout 2024. When the announcement came that Pastor Randy Freund was leaving the role of Service Coordinator, it was uncertain what the future would hold. Randy's absence leaves a hole in our district that cannot ever totally be filled, and we owe him a debt of gratitude for all the growth and stability he brought to us during his tenure. Not only do I want to thank Randy, but I also want to thank the Augustana District Council and the transition team that worked diligently to chart a path forward. Ultimately, the decision from these district leaders was to take the Service Coordinator position and divide it into 3 roles: the District Coordinator, the Theology Coordinator, and the Mission & Stewardship Coordinator. Why adopt this model? There are two reasons. First, to ensure that our core values of "church, theology, and mission" are well cared for. Second, rather than taking a full-time pastor out of the parish to fill Randy's shoes (which would only further add to the clergy shortage) this model allows pastors to stay in their pulpits while also serving the needs of the district. I was hired as the District Coordinator in September, followed by Rev. Dr. Marney Fritts as the Theology Coordinator and Rev. Nate Hanson as the Mission & Stewardship Coordinator in December.

As Marney, Nate and I meet, I only become more and more excited about the days that lie ahead for the Augustana District. The coordinator team is already dreaming up new ways we can support and nurture our district's congregations and pastors. After all, this is what districts are designed to do: encourage and surround you, the local body of Christ, and be a resource for any number of joys and concerns that arise in your faith community. I am available for consultation with congregational leadership and pastors on conflict response, church council retreats, and call committee coaching. Marney is available for questions on keeping good theology at the forefront everything you do in your church and is also working in tandem with the Board of Theology and Ministry to ensure we continue to have a strong pastoral endorsement process. Nate is passionate about domestic and international missions and will help you become connected with a ministry you can support, while also engaging with the Board of World Missions on how we can help fulfill the Great Commission globally.

All of this is to say, our God has been and continues to be faithful to the Augustana District as he was for Abraham, Joseph and Moses. God continues to match us step for step as we walk into this new season. The Creator of the universe, who hung the stars in place, and has numbered the hairs on your head, is a promise keeper, and his promise is to never abandon or leave his people. As new congregations join the district, and as you encounter new challenges and opportunities in your own congregations, Marney, Nate and I, along with the rest of the district staff, stand ready to answer the phone and be there for you.

In closing, I want to acknowledge Augustana District Office Administrator Wendy Magruder, Financial Coordinator Niki Pokornowski, Program Coordinator Rev. Becky Hand, and Webmaster Karen Eckstrom. Further, I am grateful for Todd Johnson, the Augustana District Council Chair, who has been an excellent leader during this time of transition. With a group of exceptional, dedicated individuals like this, an enthusiastic coordinator team, and the cross of Jesus Christ standing at the center, we are well equipped for whatever is coming in 2025.

In His Service,

Rev. Aaron L. Deutsch

Augustana District Coordinator

Financial Update

Thank you district congregations and individuals who continue to bless the mission and ministry of the Augustana District with financial contributions and support. Going into the new year, Augustana District is sitting in a better financial position than last year. Giving is holding steady, but one important fact that we need to keep in mind is that we now have the three coordinator positions filled. That means that after six months of significantly lower expenses that number will now start to increase as in past years. As your congregations hold their annual meetings and plan for your 2025 budget, we ask that you prayerfully consider how you and your congregation can support, or continue to support, the work of the district.

Thank you and Happy New Year!

Another way to support the district: Did you know that the Augustana District has a Scholarship Fund for Seminarians? Please consider how you can support the education of budding new pastors by supporting this Scholarship Fund so that the Augustana District can continue to support these students.



WoW



Greetings from Perham, Minnesota on a very cold winter day!

My name is Jennifer Howey, and I am blessed to be the Coordinator of the Augustana District Women of the Word for 2025. My congregation, New Creation Lutheran Church in Perham, will be the location of the WOW Fall Gathering on Sept. 20, 2025. Please mark your calendars as we are in full preparation mode to offer a wonderful day focusing on Psalm 46:10, how and why to “Be Still.”

As God reminds us to be still, I am reflecting on a recent devotion. This devotion was about a young boy taking a very long walk to find a particularly rare shell to give his pastor for Christmas. The pastor was very touched and acknowledged the amazing effort on the part of the boy to walk so far to find this gift. The boy’s response was, “The long walk is part of the gift.”

I was so touched by this, recognizing how applicable it is to waiting and being still. Most often, we prefer to be in charge and in control of so many aspects of our lives, that somehow, we rush answers and challenging situations. How beautiful it is to remember that the long walk, or journey, is part of the gift...the gift of Jesus and eternal life.

As you begin this new year with perhaps new resolutions and new goals, please consider this young boy’s reflection, and remember that the long walk IS part of His gift to you. May God bless you abundantly in this new year!

Church Administrative Staff Support Group

For Church Administrators | Secretaries | HR Professionals | Finance Coordinators

JOIN
on the
US 2nd
TUESDAY

Join us at our monthly administrative support group where experienced and new staff come together to collaborate, share insights, and learn from each other. It’s a fantastic opportunity to network and grow in your role.

The support group meets via Zoom the second Tuesday of each month from noon – 1 p.m. Participants are welcome to enjoy their lunch while we talk. If you are interested in taking part in these conversations please contact the district office for the Zoom link at 320-234-8403, [email Wendy](mailto:Wendy), or scan the QR Code.



MARTIN LUTHER ON *Mental Health*



2025 Convocation of the Cross Annual Conference “Pastoral Care: Battling Doubt, Despair, and Desperation” February 3-4, 2025

More than 1 in 5 US adults live with a mental illness and 1 in 25 adults live with a serious mental health condition. While mental health is discussed more often today, that doesn't mean the problem is new. Martin Luther's Letters of Spiritual Consolation cover many issues like anxiety and depression with his family and friends, as well as addressing the spiritual aspects of these struggles. What is the role of the church in the mental health concerns of the people we care for? How does our own mental health as pastors and leaders fit into the equation. Join us for Augustana District's annual Convocation of the Cross entitled Pastoral Care: Battling Doubt, Despair and Desperation as Dr. John Pless and Pastor Randy Freund present on these topics.

Registration is now open!

Register on or before January 20, 2025 to partake in the Monday Luncheon.

To see full details, download the brochure or register online
by scanning the QRCode or by visiting

<https://augustanadistrict.org/2025-convocation-of-the-cross-annual-meeting/>

**Please note the early bird price savings if you register BEFORE January 15.
After that date there is a **LATE REGISTRATION** Fee of \$25 per person.**

Watch or download the video here: <https://vimeo.com/997983090>



LCMC's Three Days of Prayer is an opportunity for us to come together as one across the association at the start of the new year with a shared purpose: to pray.

As we gather together as one association on those days, let us pray for our families, our churches, our leaders and members, and for those who do not yet know Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Each congregation or person can structure these days of prayer however seems best. In the past, some congregations put together a prayer vigil – people signing up to pray in 30-minute intervals – perhaps for all three days or a few hours each day. Others have offered a prayer service at a set hour on each of the three days. Some have encouraged their people simply to pray at work, home, or school, wherever they are and whatever they are doing. We encourage you to do whatever works best and whatever is safest for your congregation.

No matter how you structure this time of prayer, let's come together as an association of congregations across the U.S. and around the world to pray.

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Father, we ask for Your divine wisdom and discernment as we navigate the unknown paths of this new year. Order our steps and direct our paths according to Your perfect will. Grant us clarity of vision to see the opportunities You place before us and the courage to pursue them boldly. Amen.