

January 2026

AUGUSTANA WITNESS

Theology | Church | Mission



1st Annual Men's Retreat

Come to be encouraged, challenged, and renewed as we gather around a story that refuses to grow old.

Convocation of the Cross

Deadline looming - January 15, 2026



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Devotional: New Year, New Me?

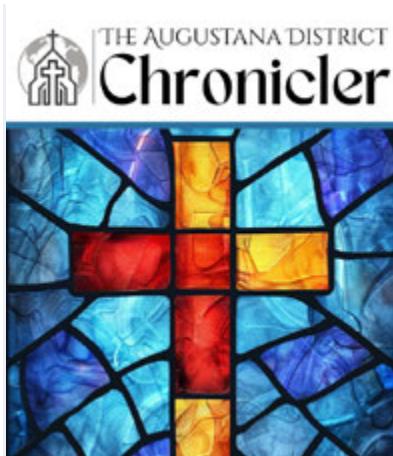
By Pastor Aaron Deutsch

Boy, do I love a good New Year's resolution. Every December 31st, before the ball drops in Times Square, I sit down with my fresh Moleskine notebook to sketch a picture of who I want to be in the next 365 days. I want to be thinner and more patient. I want to be more generous with my volunteer hours and more welcoming of the stranger. Maybe 2026 will even be the year I kick my soda habit.

For the first few weeks of January, I accomplish what I set out to do. I track my daily goals and log my steps. I make calls to local nonprofits to see how I can lend a helping hand. I even buy a case of water instead of that poisonous Diet Coke. Yet slowly, but surely, as the days drag on, I fall back into familiar patterns. I trade new habits for old routines. Soon, all my new priorities have been exchanged for what has always made me comfortable.

"New year, new me!" 2026 has arrived, and everywhere you look advertisers are beckoning you to make this the year you finally get your old duffer off the couch and create the best version of yourself. But if you're anything like me, even with a crisp new planner to get my act together, my feeble attempts at self-improvement go unrealized. By the time February rolls around, I am self-loathing at my inability to kick my old self to the curb. It's almost as if I'm a sinner who isn't making any progress. Oh wait, that's exactly who I am. And yet, we go to great lengths to avoid what our New Year's resolutions painfully expos: we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves.

So maybe we don't need a calendar to make us new. Maybe we need a Word to make us new. That Word comes to us in Jesus Christ. God is uninterested in our quests for greatness. He has already decided to be our Lord, despite what needs resolving. Instead, he comes with a Word that actually accomplishes what it says: "On account of Christ alone, you are forgiven of all your sins." The old has passed away and the new has come (2 Cor. 5:17), not because of our New Year's resolutions, but because of our compassionate Savior who seeks and saves the lost.



THE SECOND EDITION OF THE CHRONICLER IS NOW AVAILABLE

The Chronicler is a journal which chronicles the work of Christ among those whom the Holy Spirit has gathered at the Augustana District's gatherings. A video recording of the gathering can also be found on the AD website. This edition of the Chronicler focuses on the May 2025 District Convention with a focus on the two kingdoms.



Charity Without Christ?

By Rev. Nathan Hanson – Augustana District Mission & Stewardship Coordinator

“Peter said, ‘I have no silver or gold, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.’” (Acts 3:6)

As we turn the page to January, many capital campaigns are underway to cover costs for another calendar year. Countless social-service organizations and volunteer groups are actively soliciting funds for their work on behalf of people in need in 2026. Over the years, hundreds of millions of dollars have been given during these January efforts.

Jesus has never ignored those on the outer fringes of society. His concern for the vulnerable is reflected in the powerful story known as The Final Judgment. In Matthew 25, he appears as the Son of Man, seated upon a throne and addressing the nations, separated before him like sheep and goats. As King, he first speaks to the sheep: “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” Then he explains why: “For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you welcomed me; I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me.” The righteous are bewildered. “When did we see you? When did we serve you so?” His answer is well-known: whenever they served anyone in need, they served him.

Likewise, you likely remember what Jesus says to the goats, those who failed to serve others. Their sentence is grim: “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels!” Their reply begins with the same question: “When did we see you?” And Jesus answers, “As you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.”

In the year ahead, you will hear many invitations and receive many appeals to support those less fortunate. The season of giving that began in December extends into the new calendar year, urging you to provide warmth and necessities to many in need. Givers may feel they have participated in the very works King Jesus commended in the parable of the sheep and the goats.

It is important to remember, however, that meeting physical and emotional needs, even as significant and compassionate as that is, does not fulfill the command Jesus gave his followers before he ascended into heaven. You may indeed do something the King desires by caring for those who lack what you have. But you have not given them the reason for the hope that is found in the one who commands you.

Most organizations that receive funds for social needs or volunteer efforts (not all, but most) gladly accept your resources, but they will not allow you to bear witness to Jesus as the reason for your actions. My term for this silencing of your testimony is “hush money.” Non-profits that invoke “separation of church and state” to prevent any mention of Jesus are essentially saying, “Shush! You’ll disturb the populace who don’t believe as you do!”

Perhaps that is true. Yet, despite the fact that Jesus is the architect of creation, the giver of daily bread, and the most basic need of every person longing to be freed from sin, death, and the power of the devil, you are often prohibited from confessing him.

You are, of course, free to give as much as you want, wherever and whenever you want. And I believe Jesus delights in the act of giving. But as you consider the mission budget at your church’s annual meeting, ask this question: Will this gift further the name of Jesus and his forgiveness of sins, or will we be required to remain silent as funds are distributed?

The mission of Jesus Christ is distinctive, true and offensive to those who reject him or resist his name being proclaimed. Your mission funds should not become “hush money” when Jesus urges every believer to go and tell it on the mountain, over the hills, and everywhere. Your sins are forgiven for Jesus’ sake. Everybody ought to know.

Church Staff Openings

We have an a list of church staff openings on our website. If you, or someone you know is looking for a ministry position, we’d love for you to check out the listings! Scan or click the QR Code to learn more or visit www.augustanadistrict.org/church/staff-openings/



Current Listings

- Pastor | Salem & Sauk Valley Lutheran Parish | Osakis, MN
- Pastor | Living Word Lutheran Church | Alexandria, MN
- Minister of Faith Formation | Holy Cross Lutheran Church | Maple Lake, MN
- Lead Pastor | New Life Lutheran Church | Duluth, MN
- Full-time Pastor | St. Pauls Lutheran Church | Springfield, MN
- Organist | Our Savior’s Lutheran Church | Lamberton, MN
- Part-time Pastor | Our Redeemer Lutheran Church | Badger, MN

Let Us Pray: New Monthly Prayer Calendar

Introducing the Augustana District 2026 Prayer Calendar, a simple but powerful way for us to walk together in unity as the body of Christ. The first list invites us to uphold one another by name throughout the year, lifting each congregation in the district before the Lord in prayer. The next section outlines unified prayer focuses that help center our petitions on the mission, faithfulness, and vitality of our shared life together. I encourage you to use this intentionally in your congregation during Sunday worship, in prayer groups, Bible studies, staff meetings, or wherever your people gather. As we join our voices before the Father, may he bind us together in Christ, strengthen our witness, and sustain our congregations with his steadfast love. Watch for an updated list each month as we go through 2026. You can also find the full annual list on the AD website at:
<https://augustanadistrict.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/ADPrayerList.pdf>

AD Congregational Prayer Calendar: January 2026

- † Christ Lutheran Church of Blair, NE
- † Grace Lutheran Church of Erhard, MN
- † His Light Ministries of Miami, FL
- † Hope Lutheran Church of Huron, SD
- † Lands Lutheran Church of Hudson, SD
- † New Creation Lutheran Church of Perham, MN
- † Resurrection Lutheran Church of Mankato, MN
- † Shepherd of the Hills of Hubertus, WI
- † St. Paul's Lutheran Church of Springfield, MN

Monthly Unified Prayer Points for Individuals & Congregations: January 2026

Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ

- † The national staff
- † The national Board of Trustees and Ministry Board
- † Our international mission partners

Congregations Going Into the Call Process

If your congregation finds itself entering the call process, we are here for you! Reach out to Pastor Aaron Deutsch, Augustana District Coordinator, before you begin. He will be happy to meet with your leadership team, discuss your options, and suggest best ways to proceed before you even get started.

Pastor Deutsch can be reached via e-mail at adc@augustanadistrict.org or by phone 605-742-4469.

Assisting You in Ministry: Keystone Counseling

Is your congregation's staff and/or leadership team looking to be better equipped to care for individuals, couples, and families facing mental, emotional, and relational health concerns? SERV is a new branch of Keystone Counseling and Consulting designed to do just that.

The SERV program supports the spiritual, emotional, relational, and vocational needs of employees, congregants, and volunteers through an integrated psychological and faith-based approach. SERV can walk alongside your congregation in a variety of ways, including:

- † Presentations on topics such as anxiety, depression, grief, identity, trauma, addictions, parenting, and marriage
- † On-site or virtual coaching and counseling for staff or congregants (individuals, couples, families, and groups)
- † Trusted referrals for faith-based outpatient mental health care
- † Workshops and trainings that promote healthy workplaces and staff development, including self-care practices, identifying mental health concerns and developing specialized skills for serving others with mental and behavioral health needs
- † Assessment tools such as DISC, EQ, and StrengthsFinder to enhance staff functioning and support hiring practices

SERV offers individualized services that can be tailored to fit your organization and support your mission. For more information, or to explore how your pastor, staff, and/or leadership team can partner with SERV, please contact Adam Sarff, LMFT, based in Hutchinson, MN, at 320-234-0240 or info@keystonecounselingmn.com.

Direct your
**Thrivent Choice
Dollars**
Today!



Are you a Thrivent client who is eligible for Choice Dollars? If so, did you know that the Augustana District is one of the non-profits that you can designate those Choice Dollars to? You have until March 31, 2026, to designate where you would like your Choice Dollars to go if you have not done so already. Please consider the Augustana District when designating your Choice Dollars this year.

You can contact your Thrivent representative or the Augustana District office with any questions.

2026 Convocation of the Cross

I am the Way: Cross or Glory?

“On Being a Theologian of the Cross”

Part 1

CROSS OR GLORY?



February 1 - 3, 2026

“A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.” That thesis, #21 in the Heidelberg Disputation, reverberated throughout the Reformation, and still does to this day for those of us who confess as did Martin Luther. Join us for a three-year series on some of the most explosive theses in the Heidelberg Disputation – all with an eye on why it matters for pastors today. Year one will be “Theology of the Cross vs. Glory: Clothed in Christ.” Year two will focus on “What Makes a Work Good?”, and year three will explore “The Problem of the Will.”

The 2026 – 2028 convocations will be centered on the book “On Being a Theologian of the Cross” Reflections on Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation, 1518.

“I am the way and the truth and the life.” – John 14:6



Scan to find more information and register online today!

Deadline to register is January 15, 2026

Attention Pastors & Youth Directors

You're Not Going To Want To Miss This!



THE STUFF THAT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE
CONFIRMATION RETREAT
Feb 27-Mar 1, 2026 | Inspiration Point

What: Confirmation Retreat
Where: Inspiration Point in Vining, MN
When: February 27 – March 1, 2026
Cost: \$130/per person

**Paid-in-full registration is due by
Friday, February 13, 2026.**

For more details and to register, please visit
<https://augustanadistrict.org/confirmation-retreat/>

PLEASE

Update
your
Information!



Please let us know if your contact information has changed! Email office@augustanadistrict.org or call 320.234.8403

Augustana District Scholarship Fund

Congregations and individuals are encouraged to support the scholarship fund so that the district can continue to offer this opportunity to seminary students in the future. You can support this fund by donating online or sending contributions to

Augustana District
335 Main St. S.
Hutchinson, MN 55350

Note in the memo line: Scholarship Fund

The Augustana District is currently offering a one-time scholarship award for seminary students. The application deadline is June 30 of each year. The award of \$2,000 will be paid out directly to the seminary for fall classes.





AUGUSTANA DISTRICT

THEOLOGY | CHURCH | MISSION

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District Coordinator

Rev. Dr. Marney Fritts

Theology Coordinator

Rev. Nathan Hanson

Mission & Stewardship
Coordinator

Rev. Becky Hand

Ambassador Liaison

Wendy Magruder

Office Administrator

Niki Pokornowski

Financial Coordinator



Augustana District Men's Gathering



Prodigal THE ROAD HOME

The story of the prodigal son from Luke 15 is one we know well. In fact, maybe we know it too well. We've heard it in Sunday School, preached from the pulpit, retold in countless sermons, so familiar that we assume we've already mined it for all it's worth. But have we committed one of Jesus' most famous parables to memory and convinced ourselves we've already figured it out? What if this story still has sharp edges and fresh surprises for us today? What might it reveal specifically to fathers, brothers, grandfathers, and sons about wandering and returning, resentment and reconciliation, weakness and strength, sin and grace? Join us as we look at the parable of the prodigal son with fresh eyes, listening not only for what it meant then, but for what it speaks into our lives now. Together we'll explore how the relentless grace of the Father shapes our vocations as men in our homes, churches, and communities. Come to be encouraged, challenged, and renewed as we gather around a story that refuses to grow old.

**WATCH THE AUGUSTANA DISTRICT CALENDAR
FOR ADDITIONAL DETAILS AND
REGISTRATION OPENING SOON**

Address Service Requested
Hutchinson, MN 55350
335 Main St S.
Augustana District

Administrative Support Group

Office Manager | Pastor | Secretary | Financial Manager | HR Professional | Administrators



Join us at our monthly 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.

