

February 2026

LENT

Fast, Pray, Give

AUGUSTANA WITNESS
Theology | Church | Mission

1st Annual Men's Retreat

Prodigal: The Road Home

Explore the prodigal son with fresh eyes and discover how its story still shapes and challenges men in home, church, and community.

1st Call Retreat

Sabbath, Rest & Ministry Limits

A retreat for new pastors and seminarians to rest in God's Sabbath, embrace healthy limits, and sustain a joyful, lasting ministry.

2026 Annual Convention

Who Is My Neighbor?

Discover how God's gift of vocation—our everyday callings—becomes both a cross and a freeing compass, grounding us in Christ and directing us to love our neighbors.



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Devotional: Agapé Not Affection

Recovering the True Love Behind St. Valentine's Day by Pastor Scott Grorud

St. Valentine's Day commemorates an actual saint who lived in the 3rd century, although he is almost entirely absent from modern celebrations of the day. At least three Valentines appear in ancient lists of saints and martyrs, although they may all refer to the same person. St. Valentine's Day is on February 14 because that is the day when two of the three were said to be martyred.

St. Valentine's Day is associated with love, because one of the Valentines reportedly defied the Roman emperor and conducted secret weddings for Christian couples. One account claims he gave these couples hearts cut out of paper to remind them of their marriage vows and God's love for them, starting the tradition of giving heart-shaped Valentine's cards.

As we celebrate St. Valentine's Day, knowing about the original Valentine(s) highlights the complex nature of love. It is well known that New Testament Greek has several words to describe different types of love, while English has just that one word. That makes it harder to distinguish all the emotions and actions that are called love. English speakers can say with a straight face, "I love mashed potatoes" and "I love my spouse," but those had better not mean the same thing!

Given such imprecise language, the ministry and martyrdom of St. Valentine points to what God's love for us in Jesus Christ truly means. It runs much deeper than the emotional or sensual love which now dominates Valentine's Day. It is far richer and more complex than cultural concepts that equate love with giving permission to every wish and desire.

God's love is what the New Testament calls agapé, pure, altruistic, sacrificial love that is devoted entirely to the good of others, not ourselves. It is a tough love that is willing to say no to harmful decisions, but also stick with sinners through thick and thin. It is a love so profound that God graciously *"made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."* (II Corinthians 5:21)

That is the love that inspired St. Valentine to defy the emperor and courageously face martyrdom. As we celebrate his festival again this month, let his example inspire us to distinguish the agapé love of God from all other loves and to embrace it in our every thought, word and deed.



Mission Update: Heart for Mission - Laos

By Tom Thorstad

Greetings, AD, from Laos. I am always thankful for another opportunity to write to you about what is happening here, regionally, and globally as one of your endorsed missionaries.

Since my last note from March 2025, the ministry has not stopped but has kept moving forward. Our "Pigs for Pastors" program is able to support three new families this year. This program helps local pastors set up a small side income to support the family of a pastor who isn't paid by the church but desires to serve the church full time. We have found it helpful for pastors in rural settings with limited support as a way to provide for their families in a small but meaningful way. Churches can give any amount to this ministry or sponsor one pastor's family for \$2,000.

My work in theological education is making significant progress, with the announcement that three of my doctoral students I have been advising and guiding through their Doctor of Theology program graduated this past December and did significant theological work for the Lao Church. I expect at least five to seven more students from Asia to join a new cohort that I will supervise and, with the help of a few other faculty, advise and lead seminars for. I am thankful for the work of publishing a textbook on Christian Apologetics for the Mekong, which was used for teaching an M.Div. course for students from Thailand and Laos.

The 36 languages I am supervising as a translation consultant in Central Asia have made significant progress in translating the New Testament into local minority languages. I now have two part-time consultants, with 24 different books currently pending consultant review for quality assurance in the translation process. However, between the three of us, we can review around four to six books a month, depending on the size. When moving into the Epistle texts, reviewing is naturally much faster. However, I have one Old Testament project that takes time.

Family-wise, after the new year we had a chance to take a family holiday. As we enter the new year, our three boys returned to school and participated in several international science and math competitions, earning medals from gold to bronze. We are in the process of purchasing land to build a house and ministry office, so please keep us in prayer as we do this.

We are thankful for all your prayers and support, and, like all ministries, your support, prayers, and gifts make all this work possible. Please learn more by visiting us at <https://www.alwm.org/laos-thailand>.

Blessings,
Tom Thorstad

Mission Vetting

At the request of congregations, the BWM will research and vet recommended mission organizations. If an organization you are interested in is vetted, the BWM will offer a brief introduction on the AD website with their contact information for others to consider for congregational or individual support. If there are agencies, missions, and/or organizations that you would like to have considered by the Board of World Missions, please contact them through the district office by sending an email to office@augustanadistrict.org.



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 | Living Word Lutheran Church | Milbank, SD
- Pastor | Peace Lutheran Church | Watertown, MN
- Pastor | Aurdal Lutheran Church | Aurdal, MN
- 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
- Organist | Our Savior's Lutheran Church | Lamberton, MN
- Part-time Pastor | Our Redeemer Lutheran Church | Badger, MN

Let Us Pray: February Prayer Calendar

The Augustana District Prayer Calendar is a simple but powerful way for us to walk together in unity as the body of Christ. This monthly 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. We 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.

AD Congregational Prayer Calendar: February 2026

- ✝ Faith Lutheran Church of Hartwell, GA
- ✝ Grace Lutheran Church of McGregor, MN
- ✝ Hosanna Lutheran Church of Watertown, SD
- ✝ New Hope Lutheran Church of Comfrey, MN
- ✝ Peace Lutheran Church of Deshler, NE
- ✝ Rushford Lutheran Church of Rushford, MN
- ✝ Trinity Lutheran Church of Birchwood, WI
- ✝ Trinity Lutheran Church of Hallock, MN
- ✝ Zion Lutheran Church of Scotland, SD

Monthly Unified Prayer Points for Individuals & Congregations:

The Augustana District Coordinator Team:
✝ Rev. Aaron Deutsch, Rev. Dr. Marney Fritts, and Rev. Nate Hanson
✝ Their discernment and leadership with our boards

You are always welcome to submit additional prayer requests to be shared here by sending them to Wendy at office@augustanadistrict.org.

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.

Attention Pastors & Youth Directors

LAST CALL TO REGISTER!!!

TRICKY
QUESTIONS



THE STUFF THAT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE

CONFIRMATION RETREAT
Feb 27-Mar 1, 2026 | Inspiration Point

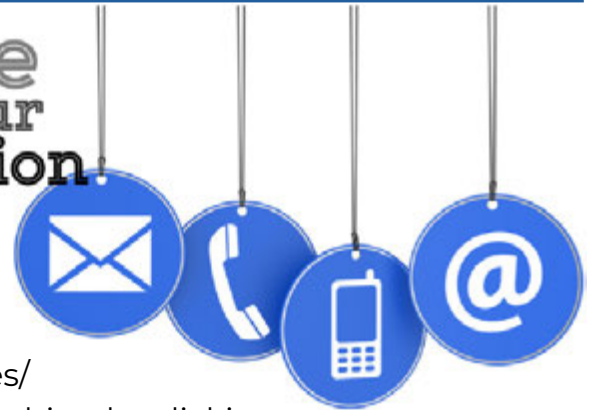
**Paid-in-full registration is due no later than
Friday, February 13, 2026.**

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

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

PLEASE

Update
your
Information



See the new look and check your congregational information on the Augustana District Congregational webpage at

<https://augustanadistrict.org/church/roster-of-churches/>

Please let us know if we need to update or change anything by clicking on the "Update Church Information" button at the bottom of that page.

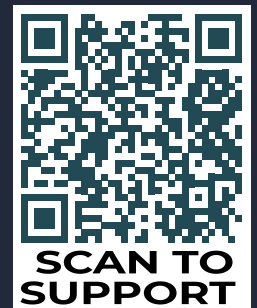
Augustana District Scholarship Fund

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.



SCAN TO
SUPPORT



AUGUSTANA DISTRICT

THEOLOGY | CHURCH | MISSION

Rev. Aaron Deutsch
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

SATURDAY, APRIL 18
8:30 AM - 3:00 PM

Christ the King Lutheran Church Hutchinson, MN

The prodigal son story in Luke 15 is so familiar that we may assume we've already learned all it has to offer. But this parable still has sharp edges and fresh surprises — especially for fathers, brothers, grandfathers, and sons.

Join us as we revisit this story with fresh eyes, exploring what it reveals about wandering and returning, resentment and reconciliation, sin and grace. We'll consider how the relentless grace of the Father shapes our callings as men in our homes, churches, and communities. Come to be encouraged, challenged, and renewed by a story that never grows old.

REGISTRATION IS NOW OPEN!

augustanadistrict.org/events/ad-mens-conference/





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BOUNDARIES and BALANCE



SABBATH, REST & LIMITS IN MINISTRY

FIRST CALL PASTORS RETREAT

Ministry rarely fits tidy hours or expectations. The Augustana District First Call Retreat offers pastors (and those discerning ministry) space to rest in God's Sabbath gifts, embrace healthy limits, and sustain faithful, lasting service.

Open to all Seminarians and First Call Pastors & spouses.

REGISTRATION NOW OPEN!

augustanadistrict.org/events/2026-first-call-retreat/



APRIL 23-24, 2026
Mt. Carmel in Alexandria MN.

**Register before Holy Week
so you don't forget!**

Who Is My Neighbor?



Our everyday callings—as spouses, parents, workers, and neighbors—become God's way of grounding forgiven sinners in Christ and directing us to love and serve others with both costly sacrifice and real freedom.

REGISTRATION IS NOW OPEN!

augustanadistrict.org/events/2026-annual-convention/



APRIL 25, 2026
Mt. Carmel in Alexandria MN.

**Register before Holy Week
so you don't forget!**

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

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](#), or scan the QR Code.

