



**April 2026**

# 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.

## The Upper Room

You are warmly invited to join us for The Upper Room — Augustana District's monthly virtual prayer gathering.



## What's Inside:

- 1 Devotional
- 2 Mission Update
- 3 Meet An Ambassador
- 4 Confirmation Retreat Recap
- 5 Confirmation Retreat Photos
- 6 Mission Vetting
- 6 Church Staff Openings
- 7 Let Us Pray
- 8 Prodigal Son Men's Retreat
- 9 1<sup>st</sup> Call Retreat & Annual Convention
- 10 The Upper Room Monthly Prayer Meeting
- 11 Sponsorship & Scholarship Information

## Augustana District Staff:

**Pr. Aaron Deutsch**

District Coordinator

[adc@augustanadistrict.org](mailto:adc@augustanadistrict.org)

**Pr. Nate Hanson**

Mission & Stewardship Coordinator

[mhc@augustanadistrict.org](mailto:mhc@augustanadistrict.org)

**Pr. Marney Fritts**

Theology & Ministry Coordinator

[dtc@augustanadistrict.org](mailto:dtc@augustanadistrict.org)

**Pr. Becky Hand**

Ambassador Liaison

[b.hand@augustanadistrict.org](mailto:b.hand@augustanadistrict.org)

**Wendy Magruder**

Office Administrator

[office@augustanadistrict.org](mailto:office@augustanadistrict.org)

**Phone:**

320.234.8403

**Mailing Address;**

Augustana District

335 Main St S

Hutchinson, MN. 55350

**Website:**

[www.augustanadistrict.org](http://www.augustanadistrict.org)

# Devotional:

## *Garden to Garden: From Christ's Tomb to Our Hope of New Creation*

“Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid.”

- John 19:41 ESV

In the garden there was a new tomb. This is where our Savior was laid to rest. While a giant stone was rolled in front of the entrance, it would not hold Christ for good. If you were to ask folks where Jesus was laid, I would imagine many could point out that He was placed in a stone tomb. But how many would remember this tomb was located in a garden? Zooming way, way out, we can be reminded that all of this happened because of the events in the first garden, Eden—a place of goodness and perfection, where the creatures of God worshiped the Creator by stewarding His creation. Following the first sin, Adam and Eve were removed, for they trusted the words of the devil and their own, rather than what God had spoken. Eating from the forbidden tree, they desired to be like God and know what only He knows. Yet while this first sin brought separation from God, it was also followed by a promise: that God would send, through the woman, the seed who would bruise the head of the serpent. In His death, Christ would die a cursed death by hanging on a tree, and yet He would be the fruit of our redemption.

Walking around in our own gardens in life, we find ourselves in different seasons. Some of you are sowing seeds of anticipation for the future ahead. Others are tending and weeding, grinding through the busy

and challenging days of life. Still others are preparing for the harvest after years of labor with little rest, and finally, others are setting down their tools with their labor near completion. Try as we may to be good stewards of God's gifts, our sin causes us many problems—especially when the vineyard owner reminds us that what we claim as our own isn't really ours. This is painful and distressing, but there is a greater future ahead. As we labor in the garden of this old world, we are sustained by the living water that Christ brings. Resting in Christ's promise of Baptism, we are delivered through death—first from our lives of sin, and ultimately when we return to the earth as dust. In that time, we will be resting in the peace of Christ, a word more calming than gentle waters washing ashore, and awaiting the new creation that is to come. It will be paradise (a Persian word for “walled garden”).

God's peace,  
Pr. Mark Nassen



# Mission Update:

## *Joy To The World! The Lord Is!*

Mission is where congregations (you and I) meet together, find expression of theology (faith, for you and me) in Christ Jesus, and do something with what we discover.

If you are a Christian, you will hear Jesus' word to His hearers: "Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am gentle and lowly of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Let's visit the context of this word from Jesus. How would you hear such an expression but by gathering to hear it? You may have heard this firsthand, from Jesus Himself. (You may yearn to have been in His very presence the moment He said these words, but He is elsewhere for a while.)

Perhaps you wouldn't have been able to hear Jesus' statement about rest. These words Jesus spoke to a crowd, just after He had told John the Baptist's disciples to go back to their imprisoned teacher and tell him what they were hearing and seeing about Himself.

How close would you have to be, in a crowd of people, to be able to hear what He said? Could you hear Him without distraction, or with unimpeded eardrums? Perhaps you would not have been able to go hear Him at all. You may have been mucking out the stalls for a centurion's horses. You may have had miles to walk to a field to put grain up for harvest. Perhaps you were scrounging for food from someone's table scraps, before the rats could get them. Many of the people in Jesus' day simply would never have had

any time they could go off to hear Jesus speak without serious sacrifice of their hour-by-hour quest to survive.

How would these "outsiders" hear?

Somebody they knew may have come back to tell them. Maybe the witness was wound up with such promising words and was able to share them with eagerness and joy to a group in the street. Picture another scene, where one listener, privileged to have been in attendance, returns to share with someone who spits back, "We don't have time for that now." This witness, undeterred, invites all those she encountered to sit by the public well together to hear what she heard among a crowd gathered around Jesus.

Jesus well knew the impediments to getting this Word, this living Word, out to the people. He is God. He knew, long before we ever had hand-crank telephones, that this "information age" was coming. Why not wait until everyone had an app? Jesus could have been an "influencer," made headlines, and wooed billions with the sweet solace of His comfort and His promises! Imagine!

Yes, He could have left us out of all the doing. No more "ruining" our weekend projections with obligations to go and hear, in padded pews, in air-conditioned comfort, with food and drink at hand, what Jesus said. We wouldn't "have to" go mix with people we don't really cherish and commit to sit still for someone to read Jesus' words to us. There would be no need to do anything but tune in on our phones and

let Jesus sink into our hazy existence. We wouldn't have to get out and really get to know anyone else. That's another of Jesus' gifts: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." It takes at least two people—not "Jesus and me," but you and me in Jesus' name. Jesus really is all about mixing people together in His Word.

Jesus had, and still has, perfect theology. Jesus gathered people, who congregated to hear what He had to say, because His words were, and still are, words of eternal life. Jesus loved people too much to have them sift off into shadows, to leave them as roadkill by the wayside through life, victims of assurances phoned into their ear, nursing A.I. as real hope. Jesus taught His disciples, and is teaching us yet, there may be many

words out there for people to sort as "truth." He wanted His followers to go and see, to get into the mess and hear, to give it all they had for people to know what a believer in Jesus gets to know, being yoked with Him. This is not mere "mingling." This is "mixing it up" with Jesus.

Mission links what we teach and believe about God to groups of people who seek His grace, and wonders happen. This is not a mission "we choose to accept." This is a mission Christ Jesus does with you, and He's really excited about what you're going to learn about Him.

Pastor Nathan Hanson  
Stewardship and Mission Coordinator

---

---

## Meet An Ambassador!

In the next few editions of the Augustana Witness, we will feature an Augustana District Ambassador and share the congregations that they work with so that you can get to know your congregation's ambassador. This month, we introduce Pastor Becky Hand.

Becky serves as pastor for Faith Fellowship in Odessa, and Hope in Midland, Texas. She is married, has three grown stepchildren, and five granddaughters; the oldest serves in the Navy. She and her husband have two dogs and one cockatiel (no cats, as that would complete the food chain).

Becky is the Ambassador Liaison for the Augustana District and is the ambassador for the Illinois congregations: Faith in Moline, St. John's in Flanagan, and Stavanger in Seneca. She also serves His Light Ministries in Miami, FL, and Reformation in Cataula, Georgia, as well as her two home churches in Texas.

If Becky is your congregation's ambassador, feel free to reach out to her with any AD questions via e-mail at [b.hand@augustanadistrict.org](mailto:b.hand@augustanadistrict.org).



# Confirmation Retreat Recap

## ~ Tricky Questions ~

The Augustana District held its 13th Annual Confirmation Retreat the weekend of February 27 at Inspiration Point in Vinning, MN. The leadership hosted 177 youth and adults from 20 different churches.

Through this year's theme students explored:

The safety to ask questions. The permission to not know. The promises for them in Christ. Stations of games and activities. Questions. Answers. Service. Beautiful, messy chaos.

Through engaging stations, a variety of teaching, wild games, a panel discussion, along with wisdom and real life from a variety of leaders, the group tackled some relevant "WHY" questions... Why Baptism? Holy Communion? Why Worship? Why Prayer? Why the Bible? Why do I doubt? Why is there suffering? Why care about others?

There was time throughout the weekend to ask questions. To learn alongside, and appreciate perspectives from, other youth groups and confirmation classes. To feel safe to admit that we don't always know the answers to life's many questions.

The group went on an early morning prayer walk, competed in a photo scavenger hunt, worshiped together, sang, danced, laughed and cried ... together. There were large group games, team building activities and time for the adults to participate in a Bible study.

A lifetime of impact in a couple of days. There were new friends. Late nights. Lifelong lessons. SO MANY LAUGHS. And HIS PROMISE, HIS TRUTH, HIS LOVE...MEETING THEM, ALWAYS!

A new element this year was a Love our Neighbors/Service to Others component. Adults and students worked together to make over 40 fleece blankets for unhoused students in the Sioux Falls School District. It opened up conversations about not knowing what others are going through, being kind to others', and the gift of forgiveness in Jesus Christ to free us to love and serve our neighbors.

We are thankful for the opportunity to share these many memorable experiences with our Augustana District confirmation students and are grateful for the pastors, churches and leaders pouring into them.

Put the 2027 Confirmation Retreat on your calendars today (February 26-28) and watch for details coming late summer or early fall.





# 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](mailto:office@augustanadistrict.org).



## WoW Annual Fall Gathering September 19, 2026

Resurrection Lutheran Church  
1735 E Main Street, Mankato, MN 56001

# 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/](http://www.augustanadistrict.org/church/staff-openings/)



## Current Listings

- Co-Lead Pastor | Christus Lutheran Church | Clintonville, WI.
- 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: April 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: April 2026

You and your congregation are invited to continue to pray for the Augustana District:

- ✝ Abounding Joy Lutheran Church of St. Cloud, MN
- ✝ Hazel Run Lutheran Church of Hazel Run, MN
- ✝ Hope Lutheran Church of Midland, TX
- ✝ Living Word Lutheran Church of Milbank, SD
- ✝ New Life Lutheran Church of Duluth, MN
- ✝ Salem Lutheran Church of Osakis, MN
- ✝ St. Paul Lutheran Church of Hull, IA
- ✝ St. Paul's Lutheran Church of West Falls, NY
- ✝ Trinity Lutheran Church of St. Charles, MN

## Monthly Unified Prayer Points for Individuals and Congregations:

The Augustana District Council

- ✝ Clarity in their deliberations as they consider and discuss future ventures
- ✝ Discussions that are marked by humility and respect

## 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](mailto:adc@augustanadistrict.org) or by phone 605-742-4469.



# 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 CLOSING SOON!**

[augustanadistrict.org/events/ad-mens-conference/](https://augustanadistrict.org/events/ad-mens-conference/)





# 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

## 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 CLOSING SOON!!

[augustanadistrict.org/events/2026-first-call-retreat/](http://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?



The 2026 annual convention will look at how our everyday callings—as spouses, parents, workers, and neighbors—become God's way of grounding forgiven sinners in Christ directing us to love and serve others with both costly sacrifice and real freedom.

### REGISTRATION IS CLOSING SOON!

[augustanadistrict.org/events/2026-annual-convention/](http://augustanadistrict.org/events/2026-annual-convention/)



**APRIL 25, 2026**  
**Mt. Carmel in Alexandria MN.**

**Worried about the registration cost?  
See the note on Page 11!**



# 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

Dear friends in Christ,

You are warmly invited to join us for The Upper Room—Augustana District's virtual monthly prayer gathering. This is a simple and informal time for people from across the district to come together and lift up the needs of our congregations, communities, and world.

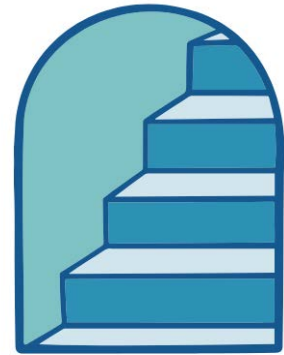
You are welcome to join us regularly or whenever you're able. We meet by Zoom at 9:00 a.m. on the second Tuesday of each month. This link will give you access to the prayer room each month:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/85469245577>

If you have specific prayer requests, you may share them during the prayer time, or you can email them in advance to [prayers@augustanadistrict.org](mailto:prayers@augustanadistrict.org). If you are unable to attend, you are still encouraged to send your prayer requests so we may lift them up on your behalf.

I hope you will consider joining us as we gather to bring our praises, burdens, and petitions before the Lord. Save the link above and join us for our next meeting on Tuesday, April 14, at 9:00 a.m.

In Christ,  
Pastor Aaron Deutsch  
Augustana District Coordinator



**THE UPPER ROOM**  
monthly virtual prayer gathering  
Second Tuesdays | 9:00am



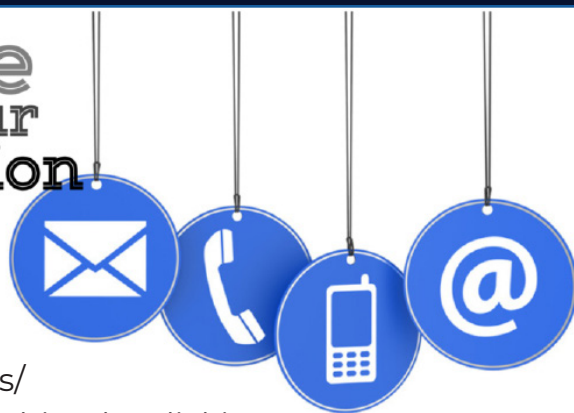
# Delegate Registration Fee Sponsorship

## **NEW: District Convention delegate registration fee sponsorship now available!**

Does your congregation have a delegate or two that are interested in attending the district convention, but your congregation does not have the funds to send them? Good news! There is an Augustana District congregation who has generously offered to cover the registration fee of any delegate who is hesitant to attend due to the cost. Contact the district office at 320-234-8403 or e-mail [office@augustanadistrict.org](mailto:office@augustanadistrict.org) for more information.

**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

The Augustana District is currently offering a one-time scholarship award for seminary students. The application deadline is June 30. An award of up to \$2,000 will be paid out directly to the seminary for fall classes. Scholarships are available to students enrolled in a seminary that has a working relationship with LCMC including:

- Beeson Divinity School
- Cross-Cultural Ministry Center
- Faith Evangelical Seminary
- Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
- Institute of Lutheran Theology
- Kairos University: Luther House of Study
- The Master's Institute Seminary
- St. Paul Lutheran Seminary



Apply online at <https://augustanadistrict.org/theology/scholarship-application/>

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

# Administrative Support Group

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



You are invited to a 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 during the meeting. 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.

