



**June 2026**

# **AUGUSTANA WITNESS**

**Theology | Church | Mission**

## **Hope in a Summer of Empty Spaces**

A summer meditation on Habakkuk's bold "yet," reminding us that even in seasons of emptiness, God's unshakable promises give reason to rejoice.

## **Mission Update**

The Blessings Abound Through a 12-Year Partnership with the Tabor Congregation of the Ethiopia Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus

## **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 Men's Retreat Recap
- 4 2026 First Call & Seminarian Retreat
- 5 2026 AD Convention Recap
- 6 Ambassador Highlight
- 7 Confessing Christ Together
- 7 Church Staff Openings
- 8 Prayer Calendar
- 9 Online Prayer Gathering
- 9 Scholarship Fund
- 10 WoW Registration Form
- 11 Support Group

## Augustana District Staff:

### **Pr. Aaron Deutsch**

District Coordinator

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

### **Pr. Nate Hanson**

Mission & Stewardship Coordinator

[msc@augustanadistrict.org](mailto:msc@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:

## *Yet I Will Rejoice: Hope in a Summer of Empty Spaces*

School's out! Church life has waned (maybe): a new season. Vacations. Time with family and friends. Longer days to read. Relax. So much to be thankful for.

YET, the reasons to feel anything and everything (but thankful) are hard to ignore. Why is there so much sadness, longing, and annoyance in this tiny little YET? Our lives are overflowing, yet we feel empty. Summer is a slowdown, yet everything feels like a chore.

In full honesty, I don't spend a lot of time in the Old Testament without some prodding from The Table's youth. Maybe it feels too daunting, or hard to connect to today's life. But this past weekend, I stumbled on Habakkuk (thanks to my adult son—kids, they're wise and weirdly wonderful, sometimes) and was struck by the YET.

“Though the fig tree should not blossom,  
nor fruit be on the vines,  
the produce of the olive fail  
and the fields yield no food,  
the flock be cut off from the fold  
and there be no herd in the stalls,  
yet I will rejoice in the Lord...”  
Habakkuk 3:17–18

Fig tree disaster. Barren fields. Hungry. Lonely. And still a reason to rejoice? (What was I saying about hard to relate?!)

YET. Is there really good news in a sea of heartbreaking headlines? Is it possible I never really felt the freedom in such a

simple, unwavering conjunction? Have you heard the promise of YET?

The world is going to deal us ugly hands: a family hearing the words “palliative care,” marriages breaking, jobs sucking the life out

of us. Loneliness. Despair. Longing. Smiles masking the worry. Faking our way through our days (and nights). YET, God is there. In your empty. The bare. The devastating. The darkness. In whatever mess is left over at the end of a hard day, His goodness trumps whatever it is choking the life out of us.

This—this is the hope our hopeless is promised. We are weak, yet He is our strength. We doubt (a lot!), yet He gives us faith. It's not about us, what we do, but what has been done for us. For you. Wherever this word finds you, there is a YET for you.

This is a promise, not just some hollow platitude. So now, friends, as we head into a new season, let the YET bless you and keep you: light in the darkness, joy in the junk, reason to rejoice. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Pastor Erica Varcoe,  
The Table Ministry



# Mission Update:

## *The Blessings Abound Through a 12-Year Partnership with the Tabor Congregation of the Ethiopia Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus*

Opportunities and challenges have marked the evangelical outreach of The Tabor Congregation in the years since 2014, when a delegation from the Augustana District had the privilege of establishing a partnership with this amazing body of disciples of Jesus Christ. To stand with these witnesses to the Great Commission has been a blessing for their outreach, but also for us, in so many ways.

One important reality has been that this partnership has been a significant help in Tabor Congregation establishing 63 congregations during the past 12 years. Currently, despite religious persecution this year, work has been going strongly at 16 outreaches and 42 mission centers. Four new congregations are being established this year. The congregation is recruiting, training, and commissioning 18 new evangelists.



One thought shared with us that we may never have imagined is that the country of Ethiopia, because of the Middle East war, is facing a fuel shortage with spillover effects on their mission outreach work.

You may wonder why our partnership has made a difference. In the time since our partnership began congregations and families within the AD have given a total of \$674,298. This is a huge blessing for their witness. The Board of World Missions thanks all who have given faithfully and generously. We would also invite and encourage more congregations and families to join in this amazing witness.

Pr. Paul Knudson  
For the AD Board of World Missions



# 2026 Men's Retreat Recap

Seventy-four fathers, grandfathers, brothers, uncles, friends, and neighbors gathered at Christ the King Lutheran Church on Saturday, April 18, for the Augustana District's inaugural Men's Retreat—a day centered on faith, fellowship, and the freedom found in Christ. Under the theme “Prodigal: The Road Home,” men of all ages revisited one of Jesus’ most beloved parables through the lens of their vocation as husbands, fathers, sons, friends, and servants in the world.

From the opening worship service led by Pastors Steve Olcott and Brian Nehring alongside the worship team at Christ the King, to keynote presentations from Pastor Randy Freund, the day was filled with Gospel-centered teaching, honest conversation, encouragement, and practical wisdom for daily life. Attendees had the opportunity to participate in three breakout sessions, choosing from topics including “Faithful Parenting and Grandparenting,”

led by Pastor Randy Freund; “Facing Conflict,” led by Augustana District Coordinator Pastor Aaron Deutsch; and a hymn sing led by Pastor Paul Koch.

More than anything, the retreat served as a reminder that no man walks alone. Christ continues to call sinners home, speaking forgiveness, restoring the weary, and strengthening His people for lives of service and love. Plans are already underway for next year's retreat, which will once again be hosted at Christ the King Lutheran Church on April 17, 2027.

A heartfelt thank-you goes out to our gracious hosts, speakers, volunteers, and especially Wendy Magruder for the countless behind-the-scenes efforts that helped make this first-ever Men's Retreat such a tremendous success. Mark your calendars now—we hope to see you there next year!



**Pr. Randy Freund**

# First Call & Seminarian Retreat 2026

The Augustana District's 1st Call Pastors' Retreat this year was arranged around the topic "Boundaries and Balance: Sabbath, Rest & Limits in Ministry." From April 23–24, 2026, 34 first call pastors, seminarians, those discerning a call to ministry, and staff, along with four spouses of pastors and pastors-to-be, attended the event at Mount Carmel Ministries camp. The time was spent in fellowship around meals and roasting s'mores, sharing in small groups, and listening to key presentations about the ways in which those in ministry both struggle with and find balance and rest in serving in their local settings.

We were blessed to hear from Julie Smith, LCMC Service Coordinator, on expanding our understanding of the 3rd Commandment and Luther's explanation in the Small Catechism. She emphasized the irony that we need a commandment to rest. She reminded us that though this is a commandment, we fail miserably at keeping it. Christ has given us the Sabbath as a gift for us when He sends us preachers to hear the Word of forgiveness. She encouraged all in attendance to participate in, not always lead, a local Bible study.

Dave Wollen and Steve Olcott then took turns in sharing observations of the busy pastor and the effect of stress in various sectors of life, of which pastors are far from

immune. Dave lifted the veil with a quote from Hilary of Tours to reveal the pastor's "blasphemous anxiety to do God's work for Him" (*irreligiosa sollicitudo pro Deo*). Steve shared that between January of 2021 and March 2022, 29%–42% of pastors thought about leaving their calls or the public office altogether. Further, a 2014 study revealed that 50% of new pastors leave ministry after five years, and 90% felt frequently exhausted or fatigued. They both encouraged us with various examples of ways that we can find rest in listening to the Word and in physical activity and its importance for our own well-being and for our continued vocations as pastors.

Additionally, small groups for discussion were formed around first call pastors, seminarians, those discerning a call, and spouses of pastors. These groupings were greatly appreciated by participants. We also gathered around Word and Sacrament, with Aaron Deutsch, Augustana District Coordinator, handing over the goods with a sermon on the passage from the road to Emmaus.

We give thanks for a fruitful time together and all those who helped serve, including Nate Hanson, Marney Fritts, Lexy Carson, Megan Curtis (spouse of Culyynn Curtis), Mike Hanson, Paul Koch, and Dan Stout (spouse of Naomi Stout).



# 2026 AD Convention Recap

The Augustana District Convention was held on April 25, 2026, at Mount Carmel Ministries. This was attended by 84 faithful leaders from AD member congregations, District staff, as well as Becky Hand and our international pastors in mission in Uruguay, Miguel Nñez and Varinia Cuello joined in via zoom. Wendy Magruder, Niki Pokornowski, and Aaron Deutsch worked hard behind the scenes to put together our District Annual Report for 2025. We give thanks for the strong leadership provided by Todd Johnson who concluded his term as council chair and council member. The council unanimously voted Steve Olcott to be the new council chair, Jesse Carson to vice chair, and Brian Bentley to become the new secretary. By the vacancy created on the council by the completion of Todd Johnson's term, the convention delegates voted Donald Thorlacius to the district council. Both Karen Seifert and Terrill Sorenson were nominated and voted by the delegates to their second terms on the district council.

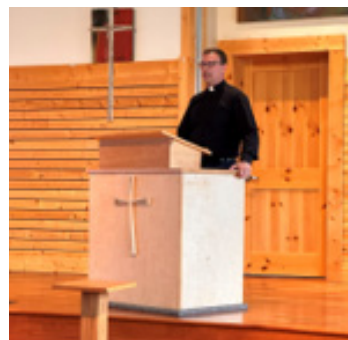
The convention also recognized the many years of service by Eric Knutson on the Board of World Missions. Eric was presented with the Distinguished Service Award on behalf of the Augustana District. Not only was he a member of the District's Founding

Board, but he has served for two terms on the Board of World Missions and has been integral in the District's partnership with the Tabor Congregation in Ethiopia.

The District also celebrated our new mission partner, the South Ethiopian Rehoboth Synod (SERS). The partnership was spearheaded by Pastor Ketema Kamile, president of SERS. This is a very large synod in the southwest of Ethiopia with 155 congregations and 82 outreach locations. They have 75 pastors and 192 evangelists serving over 136,000 members. Pastor Kamile has identified over 200 locations in the synod needing outreach and therefore in need of pastors and evangelists. They are looking for congregations and individuals to join them in the venture!

For the first time, the Augustana District was able to hear directly from one of the recipients of the District's \$2,000 seminary scholarship. Michelle Anderson of Norfolk, NE, is a seminarian at Saint Paul Lutheran Seminary and one of the four recipients of the scholarship for the 2025–2026 academic year. She shared the ways in which she may be assisting congregations in her region as pulpit supply while they are in transition to LCMC and those seeking pastors.

(continued pg 6)



Eric Knutson, Distinguished Service Award Recipient / Pr. Mike Hanson / Pr. Nick Hopman

The theme of the convention was “Who Is My Neighbor: Understanding Vocation.” Our keynote speakers were Rev. Dr. Nicolas Hopman, pastor at Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church in Iron Mountain, MI, and instructor at Christ College of the Institute of Lutheran Theology, and Pastor Michael Hanson of Good Shepherd Lutheran in Morris, MN. Rev. Dr. Hopman opened with the historical background of the Lutheran teaching on vocation, which removed the notion of a religious class of monks, nuns, and bishops,

and identified all Christians as having vocations in life, beginning with the most important of neighbors: spouse and family. Pastor Hanson then took up the particular story of Joseph, whose vocation was to be husband to Mary, the mother of God, and earthly father to Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Make plans now to attend the 2027 Convention on Saturday, April 24, at Mount Carmel!

---

---

## Ambassador Highlight!

Pastor Brian Nehring is the ambassador for Christ the King and Faith in Hutchinson, St. John’s in Howard Lake, St. Matthew’s in Stewart, Zion Evangelical in Buffalo Lake, and Vernes in McIntosh, MN. The next Ambassador meeting via Zoom is on July 1, at 10 a.m. CST.

Brian Nehring serves as co-pastor at Christ the King Lutheran Church in Hutchinson, MN. He is married and has three children ranging in age from 9 to 17. He is currently busy preparing for his son to attend college in the fall, attending school concerts and dance recitals, and preparing for a summer filled with writing new confirmation curriculum. His family enjoys their evenings and weekends at the lake with their dog, Finnegan.

Brian has served at Christ the King for the past 10 years. He plays guitar and sings in the church praise band, sings in choir, and plays in the bell choir. He and his colleague Steve are also involved in playing in musical groups throughout the community whenever they have time. In his spare time, Brian enjoys reading, is a Lord of the Rings fanatic, attends concerts and musicals, and spends much of his free time cooking for his family.

Brian looks forward to serving as ambassador for the congregations of Hutchinson and the surrounding community. If he serves as your ambassador, feel free to reach out. He’s always up for a cup of coffee, talking Twins, sharing the good news of Christ’s death and resurrection, and lifting our joys, praises, concerns, and needs in prayer. He can be reached by email at [pastorbnehring@gmail.com](mailto:pastorbnehring@gmail.com).





Rev. Dr. Marney Fritts, Theology Coordinator for the Augustana District of LCMC, will be hosting a series of free online classes covering the theological distinctives the District is held together by, and which give the fellow congregations life and nourishment when gathered. The classes will cover topics such as: *What is in the AD Statement of Faith; The Law-Gospel Distinction; The Power of Proclamation: Handing Over the Goods; Justification and Vocation; Sanctification as Purely Passive; On Being Theologians of the Cross; The Office of Pastor and the Royal Priesthood of Believers.* These classes are

geared for those congregations that are interested in Augustana District AND for member congregations. The classes will be held via Zoom the third Thursday of each month from 7-8 p.m. (Central), September 17, 2026 – March 18, 2027. The Zoom link may be found in the Events tab of the Augustana District website: <https://augustanadistrict.org/events/>. Any questions may be directed to [dtc@augustanadistrict.org](mailto:dtc@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 the QR Code to learn more or visit [www.augustanadistrict.org/church/staff-openings/](http://www.augustanadistrict.org/church/staff-openings/)



## Current Listings

- Pasor | St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church | Stacy, MN
- Co-Lead Pastor | Christus Lutheran Church | Clintonville, WI
- Pastor | Living Word Lutheran Church | Milbank, SD
- Pastor | Aurdal Lutheran Church | Aurdal, MN
- Pastor | Salem & Sauk Valley Lutheran Parish | Osakis, 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: June 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: June 2026

- ✝ Bethany Lutheran Church of Storden, MN
- ✝ Holy Cross Lutheran Church of Maple Lake, MN
- ✝ Living Word Lutheran Church of Moses Lake, WA
- ✝ New Life Lutheran Church of Gallipolis, OH
- ✝ Our Savior's Lutheran Church of Lamberton, MN
- ✝ Pioneer Lutheran Church of White, SD
- ✝ Sauk Valley Lutheran Church of Osakis, MN
- ✝ St. John Lutheran Church of Flanagan, IL
- ✝ Vining Lutheran Church of Vining, MN

## Monthly Unified Prayer Points for Individuals and Congregations:

The AD Board of Theology and Ministry

- ✝ For faithful adherence to the Scripture and Lutheran Confessions
- ✝ Their stewardship of the pastoral endorsement process

## 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.

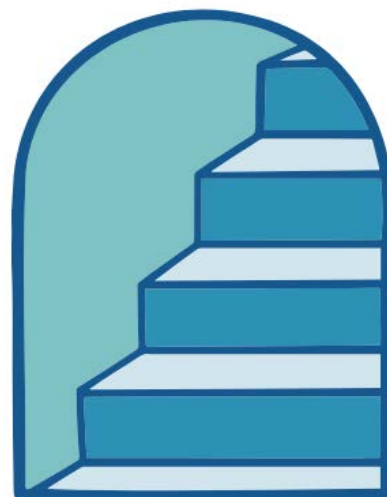
Pastor Deutsch can be reached via e-mail at [adc@augustanadistrict.org](mailto:adc@augustanadistrict.org) or by phone 605-742-4469.

# Online Prayer Gathering

You are welcome to join us regularly or whenever you're able. We meet by Zoom at 9:00 AM on the second Tuesday of each month. 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**. If you are unable to attend you are still encouraged to send your prayer requests so we may lift them up on your behalf.

Join us for our next meeting on Tuesday, June 9, at 9:00 AM - this link will give you access to the prayer room each month <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/85469245577> so you may want to bookmark it.

In Christ,  
Pastor Aaron Deutsch  
Augustana District Coordinator



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



## 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/>

# THE RESURRECTION



THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING



## 2026 WOW Gathering

**September 19, 2026**

Resurrection Lutheran Church  
Mankato, Minnesota

## About Our Gathering

The resurrection of Jesus changes everything. Through baptism, we are united with Christ in his death and resurrection. Because Christ lives, we no longer live in fear, shame, or despair, but in freedom and promise. Join women from across the district as we gather around God's Word, prayer, worship, and fellowship to explore what it means to die and rise with Christ each day. Together we will reflect on how the resurrection shapes our identity, hope, relationships, and life together as God's faithful people.

### WHY JOIN US?

*inspiring speakers – engaging breakout sessions  
delicious luncheon – uplifting worship – real connections*

### Keynote Speaker: Rev. Julie Smith



The Rev. Julie Smith is an author, speaker, theologian, mentor and currently serves as the national Service Coordinator of Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ. An LCMC-certified and Augustana District-endorsed pastor, Julie is a graduate of Gustavus Adolphus college in St. Peter, Luther Seminary in St. Paul, and widely sought after as a teacher and preacher. Along with serving on the faculty of St. Paul Lutheran Seminary, Julie travels thousands of miles across the United States each year proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

### REGISTRATION DEADLINE: SEPTEMBER 7TH

**Questions?** Contact Myrna Chamberlain at 605-290-3974 or [myrnach@charter.net](mailto:myrnach@charter.net)

*The worship offering will be designated to the Madagascar Health & Wellness Project. Please make checks payable to Global Health Ministries.*

# Augustana District Fall 2026 Women of the Word Gathering

## September 19, 2026

### Resurrection Lutheran Church

1735 East Main Street – Mankato, MN 56001

<b>AGENDA</b>	
9:00am: Registration and Coffee Fellowship	9:45am: Worship 3:00pm: Dismissal
<b>PLACES TO STAY</b>	
<b>Courtyard Marriott</b> 901 Raintree Road Mankato, MN 507-388-1234	<b>Motel 6</b> 1731 Premier Drive Mankato, MN 507-345-6666
<b>TownePlace Suites</b> 911 Raintree Road Mankato, MN 507-344-1234	
<b>COST</b>	
In-person: \$25   Individual Online: \$25   Church Online: \$50	

### Send Registration & Payment To:

WOW Treasurer – c/o Gail Telecky  
607 Bluff Street NE – Hutchinson, MN 55350

*Pay checks to: Women of the Word*



## 2026 WOW Gathering Registration Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 City/State: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Email: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Church Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Dietary Needs/Special Accommodations: \_\_\_\_\_

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.

