



Report to the 67th Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

“Joy:fully Lutheran” | July 20–25, 2019 | Tampa, FL

Our work in the Kansas District is aptly reflected in the theme of our 2018 convention: “Life Together in Mission.” We chose that theme to draw attention to the all-important “partnership in the Gospel” that Paul talks about in Phil. 1:3–5. We certainly “thank God with joy” for the privilege of supporting and encouraging the members of the district—160 congregations, 14 elementary schools, 44 preschools and nearly 400 workers—in carrying out the mission Christ has given His Church. We’re thankful, as well, for opportunities we’ve had to maintain and enhance our work with other valued partners, including the Synod, RSOs, auxiliaries, and related agencies.

GOALS

If you click on “About Us” on the homepage of our website, you’ll see the phrase “Synod in this Place,” a nod to LCMS bylaw 4.1.1.1. Our “common work” in the Kansas District—captured in our mission statement, goals, and priorities—strongly aligns with the Synod’s constitutional objectives, bylaw purpose, and convention priorities while also taking into account directives from our district convention.

Following is a brief summary of progress on the major directives and priorities that have guided our work since the last Synod convention.

DISTRICT RESOLUTIONS

2015 Res. 15-01-02: Reaffirm Mission Support for Guinea. Since 1997, the Kansas District has been the sole district supporter of mission work in Guinea. During the past triennium, we’ve worked with the LCMS Office of International Mission (OIM) to identify promising ways to continue supporting Guinea while aligning our efforts with new Synod strategies for French-speaking West Africa, which include a strong emphasis on theological education. As such, we’ve now designated our annual Pentecost Offering to the Lutheran Center for Theological Studies (CLET) in Dapaong, Togo, which provides pastoral training to African students. In the past two years, the offering has raised enough to cover full tuition for three Guinean students at the CLET.

2015 Res. 15-01-03A: Encourage the Kansas District to Work Together in Mission. This resolution encouraged involvement in the Synod’s *Planting Gospel Seeds* program, which has since been subsumed under the *re:Vitality* program. The Kansas District has actively encouraged congregations to participate in both *re:Vitality* and *Every One His Witness* (thereby also addressing 2016 Synod resolutions 1-01 and 1-03). Our missions executive continues to receive training as a *re:Vitality* facilitator, and the district offers grants to congregations interested in conducting workshops.

2015 Res. 15-06-04A: Improve the Call Process. One of our highest priorities has been to improve the call process, particularly with respect to efficiency and communication. We’ve looked for ways to reduce bottlenecks and keep the process moving smoothly, and we’ve made significant progress. I make it my practice to lead every pre-call meeting to get the process off to a good start. We’ve developed ways to

keep the process moving forward, even when I'm out of the office for extended periods of time. I keep detailed records on every call and communicate any significant developments to both the lay point person and the CV, which helps promote accountability. During a recent two-year period, the ball was in the court of the district president only 10 percent of the total time of those vacancies.

2015 Res. 15-06-01 (also LCMS 2016 4-05A): Koinonia Project. Another high priority has been implementing the *Koinonia* Project throughout the district. In the 2015-2018 triennium (and for several years prior), we had three of our 16 circuits engaged in the *Koinonia* Project. Now *Koinonia* is an even higher priority in the new triennium. We discussed the concept under the theme "Life Together in Ministry" at our 2018 Pastors Conference, and we've just established a District *Koinonia* Task Force, which will develop a plan for expanding the project throughout the district.

SYNOD PRIORITIES

LCMS Bylaw 4.4.4: Visitation. We conducted 48 "official" visitations (of 139 parishes/160 congregations) in the Kansas District during the district triennium (2015-2018); 45 of those were during the Synod triennium (2016—to the present). In addition to the formal visits, CVs, VPs, and the DP were involved in numerous other situations where an unusually great amount of time was spent with a congregation and resulted in wide-ranging, two-way communication about the ministry of those congregations. The first round of visitations was largely a "get to know you" visit and a general survey of congregational ministry, since the custom of such visits had been absent for many years. The second round will be based very intentionally on the description for visitations listed in the Synod bylaws.

2016 Res. 4-04A: Common Order for the Lord's Supper. We've made intentional efforts to model this practice at our district convention and conferences. We also expect that the *Koinonia* Project will provide opportunities for the "full and open discussion" of unity and freedom that districts have been asked to undertake.

2016 Resolution 4-05A: Koinonia Project. See discussion of 2015 Kansas Res. 15-06-01 above.

2016 Res. 12-02: Workers on Candidate Status. We currently have two pastors on candidate status and 54 commissioned ministers on candidate status. During the last triennium, I focused primarily on the pastors, ensuring that they have pastoral care and annually reporting their situations to the Council of Presidents, our circuit visitor conference, and in our district newsletter.

2016 Resolution 8-01A: Lutheran Ethos of Our Schools. The 2018 Kansas District delegates in convention adopted Res. 18-04-07, "To Encourage Colloquy or Other Educational Tracks for Non-Rostered Teachers to Be Inculcated into Lutheran Theology," by a vote of 175-17. Some of our schools have now acted on this resolution. We also have a district NLSA (National Lutheran Schools Accreditation) commissioner who works closely with our schools on the accreditation process.

2016 Resolution 13-02A: Licensed Lay Deacons (LLDs). In October 2016 (shortly after the Synod convention), the Kansas District had 58 LLDs, but most were not serving in regular Word and Sacrament ministry as *de facto* pastors. Of these 58, 41 were current in submitting their annual reports and requesting annual credentialing. Since that time, we identified deacons who seemed to meet the criteria for SMP colloquy; one has completed SMP colloquy and has been ordained. Today the district has 32 LLDs, all of whom are current with their annual reports, with three LLDs still in the final stages of their application for SMP colloquy. In two additional cases, congregations have requested an exception to continue to be served by their LLD for a limited time and for a specific reason.

PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

A few months prior to our 2018 convention, we took stock of how we've used the "talents" the Lord has given us (Matt. 25), assessing what we've accomplished and where we might go next. That stock-taking exercise yielded over two dozen items (listed below), all of which are aimed at enhancing our service to district members, strengthening our partnership with the Synod and other organizations, and exercising faithful stewardship of the gifts entrusted to us.

Worker Support

- Increased emphasis on church worker care through the Core Needs Survey, expanded committees for follow-up, broadened executive staff involvement, and renewed focus on organization and efficiency
- Increased the number of Winkel visits
- Implemented PALS (Post-Seminary Applied Learning and Support) and launched a new worker orientation event
- Appointed a District Life Coordinator
- Increased intentional attention to congregations and workers in central and western Kansas

Congregational Support

- Improved the call process
- Increased congregational visitation
- Reviewed 45 congregational constitutions and gave final approval to 32 of them
- Reorganized District Disaster Response (appointed a District Disaster Response Coordinator; encouraged the involvement of LERT teams)

Missions

- Filled a vacancy: Assistant to the President for Missions and Stewardship
- Filled a vacancy: Administrative Assistant for Missions and Stewardship
- Established a partnership with Mission Central and LCMS Mission Advancement
- Established a partnership with the LCMS Office of International Mission (West Africa/Guinea)
- Planted two new worship sites: Ascension, Pratt (chartered in 2017) and Concordia (exploratory; now conducting weekly services)
- Designated 10 percent of congregational receipts each year to district mission grants

Communication/Transparency

- Created new mission and vision statements
- Added a new position: Communication Specialist
- Redesigned website and logo
- Added new information to the website, including board report summaries, Board of Directors minutes and an enhanced budget summary
- Conducted "Meet the District Staff" events in 10 locations throughout the district

Administration

- Developed a new strategic plan
- Realigned and balanced budgets
- Refined the procedure for annual Pastors Conference elections and business meeting
- Conducted an assessment of the Kansas District Retreat Center; launched a plan for improvement
- Made numerous improvements to the District Office building
- Extensively revised the District Operations Manual
- Welcomed a new volunteer archivist, with plans to improve organization and access to resources

LOOKING AHEAD

Shortly after our 2018 convention, we created a strategic direction document to guide our work in the new triennium. At the core of the document are three key aims:

- ❖ Witnessing Faithfully
- ❖ Fostering Unity
- ❖ Helping Ministries Thrive

The challenges we face as we pursue these aims are likely very similar to those in other districts: demographic and cultural shifts, shrinking resources, and resistance to change. But we're excited about the opportunities we're exploring—including potential partnerships, networks, and grant funded projects—that will help us address those challenges and strengthen our ministries in the Kansas District.

Perhaps most encouraging is the growing spirit of unity and fellowship in the district. At our 2018 convention, we asked delegates to respond to the statement, "I am optimistic about life together in the Kansas District." The vast majority (84%) strongly agreed or agreed. In an open-ended comment, one delegate noted: "I believe the theme for this year's convention [Life Together in Mission] was well chosen and served to remind all participants that working together in Christian love towards our common goals is far more beneficial than doing otherwise."

United in our Baptism, confession, and common work, we in the Kansas District are Joy:fully Lutheran! And we have every reason to "Rejoice, Pray, Give Thanks!"



Rev. Peter K. Lange
District President

