

Nbr. 67 – February, 2025

### **A Voice from the Past**

*Several of this newsletter's opening thoughts this year will be from Dr. Franz Pieper's 1916 Southern Illinois District Convention Essay. Our source for these excerpts is a handy new book, Atonement in Confessional Lutheran Theology: Franz Pieper (Sidney, Montana: Synoptic Text Information Services, Inc., 2024).*

*We begin, however paradoxically, with a section from the end of the essay. Paragraphing is supplied.*

"The whole history of the human race is centered in the atonement of men with God through Christ. We divide the time of the world into the periods before and after Christ.

"The world which is standing to this day is merely the scaffold for the edifice of the Christian Church. The fact that there are states, cities, and countries is only to serve the purpose of preaching the Gospel. The sun, moon, and stars shine only for the sake of the Gospel.

"Everything that takes place in heaven and on earth occurs not for its own sake, but only in the interest of the Gospel. All things, even this war [World War I, at the time], must serve the preaching of the Gospel, so that man may be brought to a knowledge of sin and salvation.

"For this reason we ought not to harbor any regrets as to the humble position which we occupy in the world. Even though the world regards us Christians as insignificant, we are in reality the center of the universe."

*See? WOW!* "Let us then use the time during which God still permits the world to continue for the propagation of the Gospel and the true Christian faith."

### **Next Small Church Summit in CID: Feb. 22 in Pekin**

Trinity Lutheran Church, Pekin will be the site for the Small Church Summit (SCS) meeting on February 22. The bad weather date is March 1.

Sign-in starts at 9:30 a.m. Opening devotion will commence at 10:00. Adjournment will be at 2:30 that afternoon.

Before lunch, I will present on the Witnessing Helps that can be found online at <https://www.cidcms.org/outreach-witness-ministry.html> At the SCS, I will hand out copies of the four Witnessing Helps sheets on 1) beginning an evangelistic conversation, 2) listening discerningly to a nonchurched person, 3) making a simple statement of the Gospel, and 4) defending the resurrection.

Lunch will be provided. In the afternoon, interest sessions will include:

- Further conversation about the Witnessing Helps
- A session with Mr. Trip Rodgers of CID staff on various available resources
- A session with CID President Michael Mohr on record-keeping in smaller churches, especially during pastoral vacancies

SCS is free and available to all congregations of not only CID but also the Southern Illinois District. You need not be from a small church to attend. It works best if you bring along three or four others from your church. Talk in the car on the way to and from.

C-WOWs, here is an in-person event in CID that will introduce our Witnessing Helps to pastors and laypeople alike. Please encourage your Circuit churches to send folks to this SCS!

Trinity Lutheran Church is at 700 S 4th St., Pekin, IL, 61554-4504. The deadline to register is Tuesday, February 11.



**Circuit Witness and Outreach Workers**

*Worth considering:*

**Small Church issue of *Lutheran Witness***

The February *Lutheran Witness* issue will feature small congregations. Some readers may be surprised by what would qualify as a truly small LCMS church in 2025.

These days, if your church has an average attendance of around 50, it falls pretty much in the *middle* of LCMS congregations, if they were lined up according to that statistic. There are much larger churches in the Synod, of course. But there are about as many where average attendance is lower.

How did we reach this point? There are several reasons, some demographic in nature. Many LCMS (and CID) congregations are located in rural areas from which many are moving away. (It might be noted, however, that the Synod's small congregations are not all rural. Some, for example, are in the inner city, and they face many of the same challenges that small rural churches have.)

Another factor is that the bulk of our Synod's member churches are located in parts of the U.S. that are not exactly on the leading edges of population growth. There are fewer non-churched people for mother-daughter church plants to reach in these places. Still, these people – largely in the Midwest, it would be fair to say – are folks for whom Christ died, and they need to hear the Good News that He lives and forgives.

Still another factor compounding the difficulties that small LCMS churches face with outreach is the age of most of our members. In many cases, our people lack the vigor or the ability to do the range of things that they used to do in support of their churches when they were younger.

I myself wonder whether we have collectively wrapped our minds around the reality that today the LCMS is what might be called a Synod of small churches. Up and down the church body, in everything from the size of the congregation at which our parish life resources are aimed to the assumptions with which we train future church workers, do we have a realistic understanding concerning the membership numbers in a typical LCMS congregation?

Let's even get a bit personal. Most of the church workers on the roster today came up at a time when LCMS churches were bigger. Can our expectations about "doing church" be out-moded?

The *Lutheran Witness* February issue aims to encourage small churches. When people are gathered around the Gospel and Sacraments, where Christ gives His saving gifts, He is present in His fulness. The smallest congregation has as much of Him and His blessings as any other.

Some evangelism basics lie within the grasp of every congregation, e.g., following up on visitors and encouraging/training members for day-to-day witnessing. I was asked to contribute an article to the February *Lutheran Witness* highlighting the evangelistic contributions that can be made by the priesthood of believers. The Synod has most strongly encouraged the involvement of laypeople in the area of evangelism. (See 2016 Res. 13-01A.)

There is no getting around it: the outreach approach of a smaller church will differ in some respects from that of a larger one. Here is an ongoing challenge for us all. We need to talk about it. I invite you to join me in this conversation.

– Ken Schurb [kschurb@cidlcms.org](mailto:kschurb@cidlcms.org)

