

AZ-CA District Pastors' Conference
October 21-23, 2014
St. Mark's Lutheran Church - Citrus Heights, California
CONFERENCE UPDATE

Brothers:

Since two of our three presenters at this year's District Pastors' Conference are from outside our district, the conference officers (Aaron Mueller, Bill Herrmann and myself) thought it might be good to give you some background information and rationale for the papers and presenters.

- "The Quest for New Treasures Can Be Treacherous" by Pastor Aaron Christie (Trinity, Waukesha, WI). Pastor Christie was invited to preach at the service marking the 30th anniversary of St. Mark's Schantz pipe organ. As things progressed, the possibility of "one plane ticket, two purposes" came to be.

In this keynote address, Pastor Christie presents a thorough discussion of worship's purpose and patterns, sights and sounds. He encourages his readers to use all worship treasures, old and new, in their worship, but advises caution in selecting what to use. He originally wrote this paper for the South Atlantic District Conference in 2008 and re-presented it to the Michigan District Convention later that year. He has also shared it with the ELS Florida Conference. So it has been vetted both by a small church/mission district and a "heartland" district. Both strains are alive and well in our own district.

Pastor Christie also serves on the new hymnal committee and will be able to answer any questions on that as well. He will also play for the hymn festival service Wednesday night. While technically not part of the conference, you are encouraged to attend.

- "Quo Vadis WELS Lutheran Schools?" by Pastor Mark Zarling (President, Martin Luther College, New Ulm, MN). The reason for this paper is the alarm sounded in President Buchholz's report to the district convention in June concerning the closing of many Lutheran elementary schools across our synod. In the past year, two more schools closed in our district: Mt Olive (Las Vegas, NV) and Trinity (El Paso, TX). These were the only WELS schools serving these cities.

What impact, if any, will this trend have on our synod in the future? What impact has full-time Lutheran primary and secondary education had on our synod in the past and present? Are we a confessional Lutheran Church body due, in part, to this fine system of Lutheran education we have inherited from our fathers? How many of our pastors have attended Lutheran Elementary and area Lutheran High Schools or synod prep schools? Is part of the answer to have a federation type support for a LES (several congregations vs. a single congregation), particularly in outlying districts due to the smaller size of churches? What are the problems and advantages to such an approach? What other options exist or could be explored? These and other questions will be explored by President Zarling in his presentation. We will have ample opportunities to react, ask questions and offer answers.

Pastor Zarling's position as president of our college which trains teachers offers him the perspective of seeing the effects of full-time Lutheran education in our synod as well as spotting trends and changing demographics. He presented a similar topic at the symposium on Lutheran schools at the seminary in September, 2011. In preparation for his presentation, President Zarling asks you to read the 3 symposium papers on Lutheran schools (Braun, Zarling & Patterson) before conference. Go to www.wls.wels.net and click on "Grow in Grace" at the top. Then click on "symposium" from the drop-down menu.

- “The Broken Siege” by Pastor Don Pieper (Green Valley, Henderson, NV). Why does Isaiah, the “Gospel of the Old Testament,” end on such an unsettling note? The paper sets forth Sennacherib’s broken siege as a “prism” through which key themes of Isaiah I pass and are transformed in Isaiah II. The paper traces in depth seven thematic transformations. This discovery has implications for the unity of the authorship of Isaiah and sets the historical context for at least one key aspect of the doctrine of hell. Don will also offer a link to a 9-week Bible study on Isaiah.

One other reminder: Las Vegas is up to host next year’s conference. We will be looking for an invitation from one of our churches there during the conference. Think about it.

Hopefully this helps and whets your appetite for this year’s conference. I am looking forward to seeing you all in Citrus Heights in less than two weeks. God bless your preparations in serving God’s people with Word and Sacrament this week.

In Christ,

Fred Casmer
AZ/CA District Pastors’ Conference Chairman