

## Montana District LCMS

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering for He who promised is faithful.” This was the theme of the 2009 Montana District convention. We are confident that since our faithful God is holding fast to us in Christ Jesus He will also keep us holding fast to the confession of our hope. The purpose of holding fast to the confession is so that the Gospel may be heard and that people may be brought to and strengthened in the faith by it. The Lutheran confessions tell us that the chief article of the Christian faith is justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Another way of saying this is; Lutherans believe that the main thing is the Gospel of Jesus. When Lutherans say, “Let’s keep the main thing, the main thing” it means that we are being held fast to our confession. God is faithful. He will see to it that the Gospel does its work. The “main thing” could never be something we do, or a manner in which we respond. The main thing is not our participation in the mission of God. To speak in this way is to replace an act of justification, (God’s act to save us), with an act of sanctification, (God’s act in us to lead holy lives). If our actions, even those by which God is at work in us, become the main thing then the Gospel will not be heard in its truth and purity.

Lutheran doctrine is carefully structured for the sake of the Gospel. We believe, teach and confess in such a way that the Gospel may be heard and people brought to and strengthened in faith by it. In today’s world the Gospel is under attack. Jesus, if He is regarded at all, is taught to be just one among many good teachers. Even many who claim to be a part of the Church do not confess Him as God and Savior.

How shall we respond to these attacks? Let me encourage you not to panic. The response of fear is idolatry. It is a fearful, idolatrous response to suggest that we are responsible to “save” the true confession. Such a response means that we are afraid that God is not able to preserve His Church. The proper response to the attacks that the Church is experiencing now is a confident, bold, faithful proclamation of the Gospel. We need not search for worldly success in terms of the response. God calls us to hold fast to the confession of our hope, and to let Him take care of the results, for He who promised is faithful.

God has demonstrated His faithfulness to the Montana District in many ways during the past triennium. He has sustained our congregations to grow and thrive in their proclamation of the Gospel. He has protected and strengthened our Pastors in their proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. This is no small wonder. Over fifty percent of our congregations are in declining population centers. This creates considerable pressure on those congregations to continue as proclamation outposts. As a result of these demographics over fifty percent of our congregations are also in multiple congregation relationships. Consequently we are seeking new and creative ways to maintain the centers from which the Gospel is proclaimed in Montana.

We are also seeking to expand the number of centers from which the Gospel is being proclaimed. Our Missions Committee has been charged with the job of examining the 12 communities in Montana that have a population of 1500 or more where the LCMS is not represented. In other parts of the Synod such small communities may be overlooked. This is what we have to work with in Montana and the Lord has seen fit to bless us. In January of 2010 we installed a missionary at large to begin work in a western Montana valley for the purpose of starting a new congregation. In addition we have five congregations that have begun Lutheran Day Schools in the past triennium. These are also considered to be mission outposts.

God’s faithfulness was also shown in that He received the Rev. Dr. George Wollenburg into eternal rest during the last triennium. President Wollenburg faithfully served the Synod for 51 years. His was a great loss to us, but a great gain to him.

We in Montana remember the LCMS in our prayers. As we look to the future we know that He will hold us fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

Terry Forke