



Dakota Messenger

DAKOTA CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

The Best Laid Plans

Mark R. Weir, President



Every day is a new and unknown reality. When we wake up, we may think we know what is going to happen that day. We may have ideas regarding what we intend to do, and I imagine on many days what we thought would happen, actually did. This could be as mundane as simply going to work and making it back home. Yet, life often throws us a curveball.

So, what is the value of planning when our well-crafted ideas can be so easily disrupted? For me, it is simple: choose a course of action and then plan to make the necessary adjustments as needed. However, never deviate from the intended direction even when things are not going "according to plan."

I am a very novice golfer. If I am on a golf course four times a year, it has been a really good year. So far this year, I am at zero! Yet, as I watch talented golfers, it is not the great shots that truly impress me. It is the recovery from the bad shots that gets my attention. Even professional golfers make major mistakes. When they step up onto the tee box and swing their club with energy and focus, they have a well-thought-out plan. From the club selected to the intended route and distance, careful thought has gone into the decision-making process. None of them intend to end up in the water, the sand, or the deep weeds—but sometimes this is where they find themselves.

Imagine a golfer, after hitting a bad shot, breaking all of his or her clubs. Does this solve anything? Are things suddenly better? No. It is only after the difficulty has come that the need for planning becomes evident—how do I plan to get out of this situation?

We, too, often find ourselves in the deep weeds and must admit that things are going wrong—this can be a car that doesn't start, a phone call regarding a tragedy, or an unexpected change at work or school. I am aware that things do not always go according to plan; however, it is what happens NEXT that is worthy of consideration. It is what we have planned to focus on and how we react to the situation that shows what we value and demonstrates how we choose to live.

As long as we know what our goal is, a complication is just a detour on the way to our ultimate goal. Difficulties are simply opportunities to exercise creativity and determination. Creativity means we have to look at our situation differently. We have to ask, "What if...?" Or maybe we ask, "How about...?" Once various ideas are considered, we choose the best option available and do our best while we continue to focus on our goal. Sometimes it may only be short-term planning based on the immediate situation, but still, we must continue to focus on whatever our ultimate goal is.

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Jesus came to offer salvation to mankind. That was His plan, but difficulties came His way. The Bible says He was "a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3). People tried to trap Him with tricky questions, disparage His heritage, throw Him over a cliff, and ultimately kill Him. Yet, because His goal was salvation for humanity, He continued in the direction He was going to go. And NOTHING could stop Him from that goal.

I pray that nothing will keep each of you from your plan to be with Jesus in heaven. Difficulties will come, but may we all keep our eyes on our ultimate eternal goal.

Let's Strengthen the Building Blocks

Mark Piotrowski, VP of Administration



"It is the church of the living God, the support and bulwark of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15).

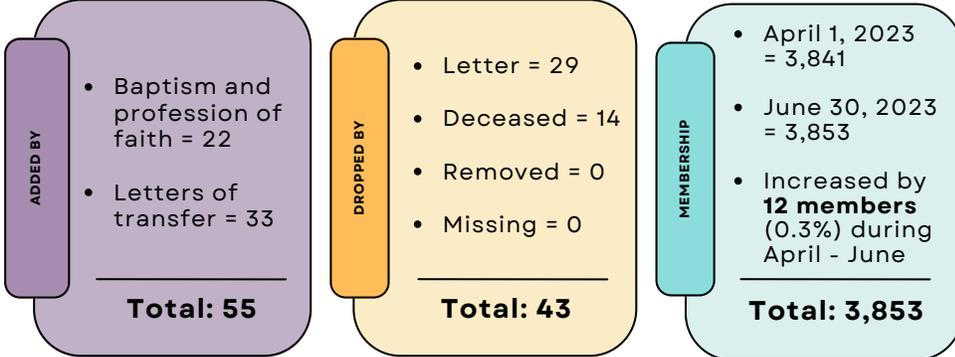
In the divine plan for Christian ministry and completion of God's end time mission, the local church stands as a foundational and irreplaceable unit. As believers, we are called to recognize and embrace the profound significance of the local church as the primary vessel through which God's transformative work is carried out. Think about it carefully. None of our ministries, whether children's, youth, our elementary schools, the academy, or all other church ministries, can exist without our local churches' presence. What makes the Dakota Conference what it is, is first and foremost because of the existence of our local churches. Through these we grow, expand, finance, human resource, and sustain the work of God throughout the states that make up our territory. If the foundational strength of the local church is compromised, it can adversely affect the vitality of all other ministries. Conversely, when the local church is robust and flourishing, it tends to imbue a similar vigor into the broader spectrum of ministries.

The local church, much like a cornerstone in a grand architectural design, also plays a vital role in establishing and nurturing a thriving Christian community. It serves as a haven for believers to gather in worship, study, and fellowship, fostering an environment of spiritual growth and mutual encouragement. Acts 2:42 paints a vivid picture of the early church, where believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer.

Moreover, the local church serves as a radiant light in its immediate surroundings. In Matthew 5:14, Jesus calls His followers "the light of the world." This illumination begins at the local level, as churches impact neighborhoods, workplaces, and families. Through community outreach, benevolence initiatives, and compassionate service, the local church embodies Christ's love and compassion, drawing those in need toward the hope found in Him for their eternal destiny. It is a sobering thought that the work of the local church has eternal consequences for all persons in our communities. "The church is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men" (Acts of the Apostles, p. 9).

Furthermore, in the local church, God placed a unifying power that transcends cultural, social, and economic barriers. Galatians 3:28 beautifully encapsulates this truth: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Within the local church, diverse backgrounds converge under the banner of Christ's love, fostering unity amidst a fragmented world. This is a powerful witness for the truth when

DAKOTA CONFERENCE 2023 2ND QUARTER MEMBERSHIP REPORT



it is evident in the church or works against it when unity is absent (John 17:21). We could also speak about the local church being the place where Christian leaders are formed, and where believers are equipped for ministry, but that will have to be for another time.

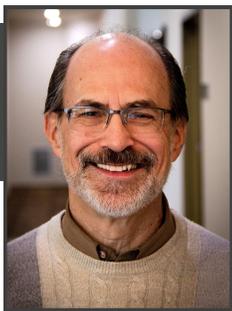
In the present digital age, the local church remains a tangible and personal expression of Christian community. While online platforms can partially supplement fellowship, they cannot replace the power of face-to-face interactions, shared worship, and interpersonal prayer. Hebrews 10:24-25 exhorts us not to forsake gathering together, recognizing that our collective presence fuels spiritual momentum and vigor; and therefore, we ought not to neglect to take our place in the local church "all the more as we see the Day approaching."

And then the local church is undeniably the basic building unit of Christian ministry in any city or community. It encapsulates the essence of Christ's teachings—the revealed will of God, manifesting His love, truth, and transformational power in tangible ways. As believers, we must value and actively participate in our local congregations, acknowledging their vital role in shaping our spiritual journeys and impacting the world around us. Through the local church, God's redemptive plan unfolds, one life and one community at a time.

May the power of His Spirit move our churches forward to an effective ministry: to successfully proclaim His message and be the strong building blocks upon which all our ministries can be supported.

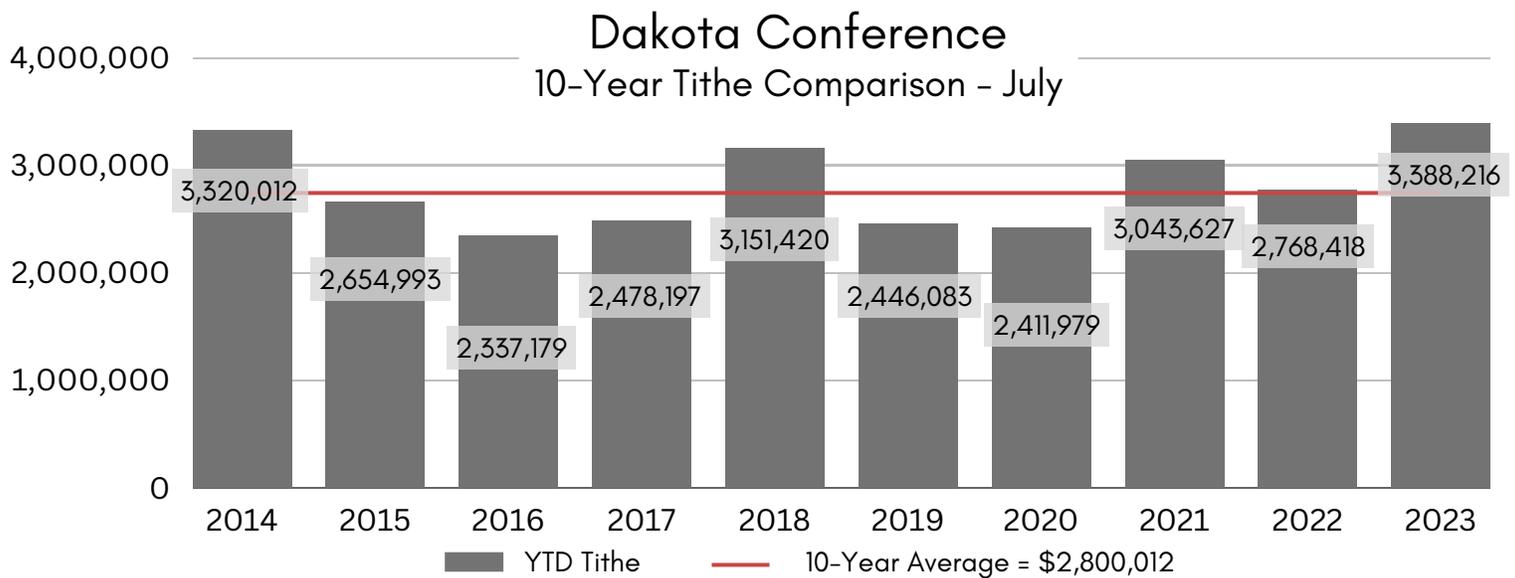
Treasurer's Report

Mark Seibold, VP of Finance



Luke 6:38 asserts "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." According to Deuteronomy 14:23, one purpose of tithing was to teach the people of Israel to put God first in their lives.

Could it be that if we recognize God's ownership in all things, in essence putting Him first with "our" material resources, we can enjoy the benefits of a closer relationship with Him? That's what I understand these passages to promise. This should not be confused with what has been called "Prosperity Gospel," which can be argued "uses" God's favor to achieve material gain for ourselves on this earth. That strikes me as a misplaced priority. "Put ye first the kingdom of God" should be the priority, and God promises that what we need will follow.



Building For Eternity

Ted & Lynnette Struntz, Youth & Young Adults Directors



On Wednesday, August 9, Pathfinders from around the Dakota Conference arrived at Flag Mountain Camp, located in the Black Hills of South Dakota, for the 2023 *Building 4 Eternity Dakota Conference Pathfinder Camporee*. Although Pathfinders in the Dakotas have had the opportunity to attend the last two union camporees and the international camporee, it has been years since the Dakota Conference has held a conference-wide camporee.

“One of my initial goals when I decided to accept the call to be the Dakota Conference Youth Director was to restart Dakota Conference Pathfinder camporees,” says Pastor Ted Struntz, Dakota Conference Pathfinder, Youth, and Camps Director. “These events help our Pathfinders make friends from all over the conference area and show them that there are other young people, just like themselves, who are learning through the Pathfinder experience and curriculum. Pathfinders provides excellent leadership training for our youth. It is vital we offer frequent and consistent opportunities for our kids to have fun being around other young Christians.”

Pastor Nathan James, pastor of Hot Springs and Custer churches, was the main speaker for the four-day event and shared captivating stories of how God answers prayers and wants His children to prepare to live for an eternity with Him.

Each day, Pathfinder clubs led out in the raising and lowering of the flag. The young people were proud to take part in this solemn ceremony. Richard Ray, Cleveland Prairie Trails Pathfinder Director, organized and led out in this special activity for the Pathfinders.



Photos by Johnsouley Wilton and Lynnette Struntz



Throughout the camporee, Pathfinders were busy learning new things and new skills as they earned different honors. Thanks to the amazing Pathfinder leaders and staff, a dozen honors were offered during the camporee. Honors included animal tracking, archery, blacksmithing, drilling and marching, edible wild plants, insects, knots, music, red alert, rivers and streams, seeds, and standard first aid.

Pathfinders quickly picked up and shared what they learned with others. Odin Bowen, member of the Rapid City Mountaineers Pathfinder Club, stated, “My favorite part of camporee was all of the activities I got to do. Archery was the best because I got to learn the different parts of the bow and how to shoot. I want to come back and do all of the activities again and meet more friends!”



Dedicated volunteers put in a lot of time and effort in helping the Pathfinders work through the many different honor requirements. Pathfinders and leaders worked together to learn from each other. The camporee executive team was particularly excited to offer the teens and adult leaders the blacksmithing honor. This honor is typically only offered at international or very large union camporees; however, the *Building 4 Eternity* camporee was able to host this for its Pathfinders because of Nathan Roe, who spent the summer working as the ranger for Flag Mountain Camp. Nathan, a skilled blacksmith who has a heart for Dakota Adventist Camps from working as summer camp staff years ago, offered blacksmithing as a Flag Mountain Camp summer activity and then taught the honor to Pathfinder teens and leaders during the camporee. The Dakota Pathfinder Family is blessed to have so many people willing to share their skills and knowledge with their youth!



During the camporee, Dakota Pathfinders made new friends who came from different parts of the Dakota Conference territory. From helping each other set up tents, to playing Gaga Ball, the new bonds of friendship were built stronger due to shared experiences.

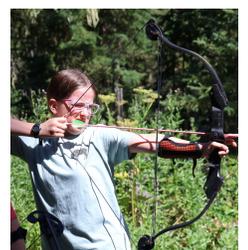
Tori Ray, member of the Cleveland Prairie Trails Pathfinder Club, was thrilled to attend. "The camporee is awesome! You feel a lot closer to God here, and you are friends with everyone here without it being weird," she shared. "I definitely want to come to the next one!" Her friend and fellow club member Natalie Erickson agreed. "I really liked coming here to camporee because everyone believes the same things I do here, and I have learned a lot."



This is one reason it is vital to hold regularly scheduled camporees, so that young people in the Dakotas can build relationships to take into eternity. LuAnne Larson, Rapid City Mountaineers Club Director, said, "It's great to have our kids together to get a bigger sense of how big Pathfinders is. It's not just a local thing, and they have so much fun learning together. I am so glad my Pathfinders were able to come!"



The hope is that all of the young people from throughout the Dakota Conference would be able to join a Pathfinder Club and experience the fun that comes from being a part of an organization of young people their own age who love and serve Christ.



Dakota Elementary Schools

Kelli Wasemiller, Education Superintendent



The Dakota Conference education team was blessed to join 5,500 other Adventist educators at the North America Division (NAD) educator's convention in Phoenix, Arizona. The theme was "Something Better," and focused on Adventist Education's Journey to Excellence 2.0 initiative. Journey to Excellence affirms that, "Adventist Education is compelled to be the best for the benefit of God's youth whom He has created and redeemed" (journeytoexcellence.com).

Dr. Carlton Byrd began the convention by addressing the importance of Adventist Education and that the clear purpose of our education system is because God did not create us for fun; He created us for a purpose—to glorify God (Jeremiah 1:5). The Holy Spirit empowers us to live out our created, customized, comprehensive, and connected purpose. Every morning, Pastor Donnette Blake affirmed God's call to our teachers. She said, "Every teacher's desk is a pulpit proclaiming the gospel of Jesus and that our children are designed by their loving Creator God. If the work of redemption and education are one, (Education p. 30), if they are the same, which is more important?"

Dr. Mario Acosta, with the Marzano Resources team, shared studies demonstrating how the quality of the classroom teacher is the number one determining factor in the outcome of the student. Across the field of education, we are seeing teachers burning out from workload, job pressures, lack of support, and more. Dr. Acosta reminded everyone that our school system must allow our teachers to prioritize their focus on the needs of their students—not the needs of the parents, school board members, or church members. Teachers are here for the children, and too often their energy is so zapped by all of the external noise that they are unable to invest properly in the kids. May we support our teachers, so they may devote their energy to our children.



Teachers had more than 300 different breakaway sessions to select from for professional development, covering everything from math skills and reading literacy to student mental health support and school marketing techniques. EdTalks provided leadership insights and featured musicians Laura Story and Nicole C. Mullen. Over 150 exhibitors showcased the latest educational initiatives and curriculum: STEAM, robotics, classroom gardening, biblical social-emotional learning, mission trips, student outreach, and so much more. There was never a dull moment, as teachers were able to reunite with their Adventist family, visiting with former teachers, students, and coworkers. Ron Reese, teacher at Brentwood Adventist Christian School, connected with one of his former second grade students who is now a high school teacher and was an exhibitor at the convention.

Jodi Dossenko



Dr. G. Alexander Bryant, president of the NAD, concluded the convention with a special commitment service dedicating our Adventist educators and schools for the new school year. He spoke on Daniel 1 and presented this formula: God's plan + God's favor = Something Better. He said, "Adventist educators are the secret sauce of God's plan" and proceeded with a prayer of dedication over the body of educators, reminding them that Jesus offers each of us something better.

Join me in praying for our schools, teachers, and students this 2023-2024 school year. We appreciate your support of Adventist Education in the Dakota Conference and know God is doing something better this year.

Employees on the Move

Jodi Dossenko, Communication Director



Mike Garcia

Mike Garcia graduated from Southern Adventist University in May and promptly moved to the Dakotas to pastor the Cleveland/Edgeley church district in North Dakota. Pastor Mike felt called to pastoral ministry at a young age and has been actively involved in church activities his entire life. He enjoys talking to people and getting to know them on a personal level. His main motivator is drawing people closer to Jesus and giving them something that our world just can't.



Jacob Pittenger

Nathan and Charolet James have made the move to South Dakota and pastor the Custer/Hot Springs church district. Pastor Nathan grew up in northern California and recently served in the Nevada-Utah Conference. He is enjoying the sincerity and commitment of their new church families, the close proximity to Flag Mountain Camp, and the bison disrupting his commute. The couple has two high-school-aged children.



Nathan & Charolet James

Jacob Pittenger is the new associate pastor of the Bismarck/Dakota Adventist Academy church district. He steps into the role previously held by Pastor Marveen Gentillon, who has moved to the Spearfish Church in South Dakota. Pastor Jacob is from Peoria, Illinois, and has five older siblings. He graduated from Union College in May and has been enjoying the people who have been placed in his path and being able to connect with them.



Dusty Ricketts

Nate and Rachel Skaife have accepted the call to pastor the Jamestown/New Home church district in North Dakota. The couple has two daughters and moved to the area in June. Pastor Nate has previously pastored in the Rocky Mountain and Wisconsin conferences. He is passionate about observing God's transformative work in the congregation and community, fostering journeys to introduce people to Jesus, and bringing lasting positive change to their lives.



Nate & Rachel Skaife

Dusty Ricketts is the new lower grades teacher at Hillcrest Elementary School in Jamestown, North Dakota. She is a lifelong learner and implements the skills she learns into her teaching style. Ms. Ricketts enjoys writing, nature photography, crafts, and felines. She loves making a difference in the lives of her students.

For updates on our new Dakota Adventist Academy staff, please see pages four and five in the recently delivered *Alumni Newsletter*.



ADVENTIST COMMUNITY SERVICES FEDERATION MEETINGS

You are invited to attend the annual ACS Federation meetings held across the Dakotas. These gatherings provide an opportunity for church members to gather and share what their church has done throughout the previous year in the area of community outreach. Christ sent out the disciples to different locations to do His work—when they returned, He had them relate what they had accomplished. All meetings will be held at the local Adventist Church and begin at 10:00a local time. Come, rejoice, exhort, share, and learn. Attend by yourself or send a church representative who can take a report back to your home church. Lunch is provided.

- September 10: Aberdeen, SD (10a CT)
- September 11: Jamestown, ND (10a CT)
- September 17: Rapid City, SD (10a MT)
- September 18: Bowman, ND (10a MT)

Dakota Conference

OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

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CALENDAR

September

- 4 Office Closed - Labor Day
- 8-10 Prayer Retreat - Northern Lights
- 10 Executive Committee - Office (10a)
- 10 SE ACS Meeting - Aberdeen Church (10a)
- 11 NE ACS Meeting - Jamestown Church (10a)
- 17 SW ACS Meeting - Rapid City Church (10a)
- 18 NW ACS Meeting - Bowman Church (10a)
- 18-21 Elementary Outdoor School - Flag Mountain
- 29-1 Women's Retreat - Medora, ND

October

- 1-31 Pastor Appreciation Month
- 6-7 DAA/PVA/SRA Alumni Weekend
- 14 Rapid City Regional
- 22-24 New in Ministry Meetings

November

- 5 K-12 Board of Education - Office (10a)
- 7 Executive Committee - Zoom (7p)
- 11 Sioux Falls Regional
- 11 Sioux Falls Region Constituency Town Hall (5:30p)
- 13-16 Mid-America Union Year-end Meetings - Lincoln, NE
- 16 Mid-America Union Executive Committee
- 22-23 Office Closed - Thanksgiving
- 28 Bismarck Region Constituency Town Hall (6:30p)
- 29 Minot Region Constituency Town Hall (6:30p)

President, Evangelism, ASI
Mark Weir

VP of Admin, HR, Church Ministries
Mark Piotrowski

Admin Assistant, Receptionist
TBD

Trust Assistant, Membership Clerk
Julie Brude

Communication Director
Jodi Dossenko

Development Director
Lynette Miller

VP of Finance
Mark Seibold

Associate Treasurer
Cindy Miller

Treasury Clerk, Trust Director
Judy Weir

Youth & Young Adults, Camps
Ted Struntz

Associate Youth Director
Lynette Struntz

Maintenance Services
Marlin Miller

Field Directors
Adventist Community Services
Bob Forbes II

Education
Kelli Wasemiller

Men's Ministries
Randy Rubbert

Ministerial
Vernon Herholdt

Prayer Ministries
Barry St. Clair

Women's Ministries
Paulette Bullinger