

Dakota Messenger

DAKOTA CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

Incontrovertible

Mark R. Weir, President



One of my favorite historical characters is Winston Churchill. While he was a complex individual, often uncompromising and frequently demanding, he understood the world he lived in. Shunned by his colleagues for calling out an evil he saw rising, the “political correctness” of his day kept him sidelined as European leaders fell under the influence of this new type of leader, Adolf Hitler. Only when Hitler broke every promise, betrayed every trust, and used every opportunity to advance himself at the expense of others did Churchill get called back into duty. As the newly elected Prime Minister of England, appreciation for him resurfaced during a time when the proud and resolute nation faced the unexpected reality of a war yet remained unprepared and resource-limited.

Churchill once said, “Truth is incontrovertible. Panic may resent it, ignorance may deride it, malice may distort it, but there it is.”

For years, we have been a people of truth, often described as “people of the book,” rooted in diligent Scriptural study for clarity on a “thus saith the Lord.” Being Bible students defined us. We might have disagreements (and there have been many of those!), and we might hold to various perspectives, but determining truth always comes from what the Bible says. We even have a famous media ministry known as “It Is Written.” Popular opinion, popular culture, and even popular spokespersons are not where we search for truth. Yet, that pursuit of truth seems to be shifting, expanding, and wavering.

For quite some time, we have been hearing about “your truth.” Yes, each of us has “truth” for ourselves, particularly when it pertains to how we view ourselves (capable, shy, etc.)—that is “truth” through the prism of our own eyes. However, that is not what I am talking about. When “my truth” becomes more important than “the truth,” I believe problems are rapidly approaching.

All around us we see evidence of people wrestling with defining truth—from gender identity to legal wrangling; we are struggling as a society. However, my concern is primarily for our society. What happens when we, as a faith community, begin to waver?

I have been following some of the research regarding what people in our faith community are saying about truth. David Trim, the director of the General Conference Statistics and Archives Department, has been sharing some deeply concerning trends with our church leaders. I will illustrate with one example—the role of the Holy Spirit.

In 1977, George Lucas became famous for the film “Star Wars,” which became a cultural phenomenon. Integral to the story is “the force,” a power surrounding everyone that some can tap into to use for good or evil. While this impersonal power supply might make for great theater, it doesn’t align with theology. Yet, a growing number of people view the work of the Holy Spirit in a similar fashion—an impersonal power we can tap into.

Everything we hold dear as a people is under assault: home, marriage, education, faithfulness, purity, and temperance—I could go on. These concepts, plus many more, are increasingly viewed by our people as antiquated and irrelevant. I have had people upset with me because I won't marry them for the reason that they live together. I have had people tell me that worship happens in their hearts, and as long as they send a thought God's way there is no need to worship together on Sabbath. I have had people tell me that an Ivy League education is what is needed for their children's success, so don't talk to them about Christian education. I have had people tell me that a little alcohol is no big deal. I have had people tell me that God approves when they step out on their spouse. I could keep going, but I think you get the idea—there is either truth or "my truth." Unfortunately, the "my truth" perspective has not ended well in these circumstances.

As a Christ follower, a profound distinction exists. Humanity has long marched to the beat of its own drummer, focused on individual wishes, wants, and desires. In contrast, Christianity centers on Christ and my commitment to follow Him—His wishes, His wants, and His desires. Furthermore, as a Christ follower, the discovery of His will and way occurs in the source of Truth, the Word of God, where incontrovertible truth is anchored.

"Truth is incontrovertible. Panic may resent it, ignorance may deride it, malice may distort it, but there it is." In our search for certainty, a source is available. Some resent it, others deride it, many distort it, but it is still there. May we once again be a people of the Book!

Igniting Passion for Evangelism

Mark Piotrowski, VP of Administration



"Do the work of an evangelist" (2 Timothy 4:5).

Embarking on the journey of evangelism is not merely a checkbox on a church's to-do list; it is a profound calling that resonates with the very essence of our faith. In 2 Timothy 4:5, we are exhorted to "do the work of an evangelist," a directive that carries profound implications for the lifeblood of our local churches and the Dakota Conference as a whole.

Dispelling misconceptions about evangelism is paramount. It is not confined to prophetic charts, intimidating beasts, or late-night church events. Instead, it is the heartbeat of a thriving ministry, the indispensable force that undergirds the health and success of the local church. Strengthening our congregations correlates with the vitality of all conference ministries and institutions. Regular involvement in public evangelism or lack thereof will directly affect the congregation's health.

History attests to the symbiotic relationship between evangelism and the flourishing of the church. Neglecting or sidelining evangelism, even for a short time, leads to a rapid decline while prioritizing it ensures a healthy, upward trajectory for the church. As stated in *Evangelism* p. 5, "Evangelism, the very heart of Christianity, is the theme of primary importance to those called to herald God's last warning to a doomed world."

The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 is the apex of Christ's gospel. His directive to make disciples of all nations, baptize them, and teach them His teachings encapsulates the purpose and life of the congregation. The church's primary agenda should revolve around the conversion of men, women, boys, and girls to become fully devoted disciples of Jesus Christ.

Christ not only outlined the work of His disciples but also imparted the essence of their message. The disciples were to teach what Christ had taught, emphasizing the exclusion of human teachings, traditions, church authority, and man-made laws. Evangelism is not a lifeless theory but a dynamic force capable of transforming lives.

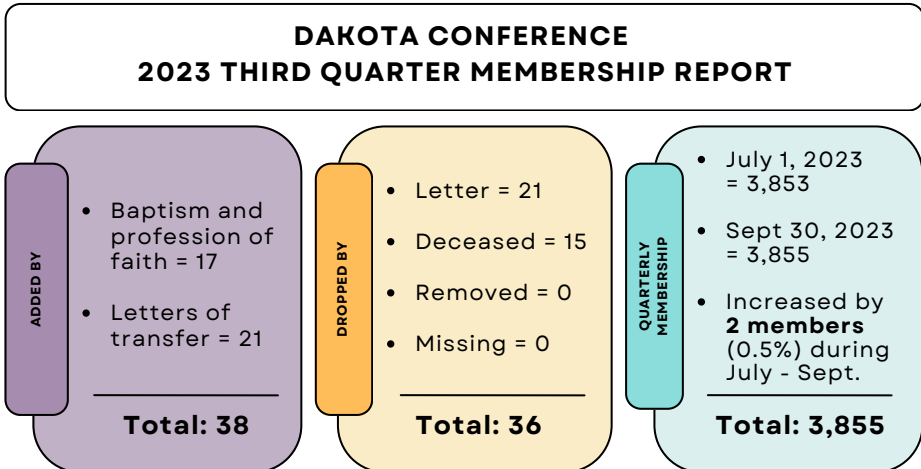
Evangelism is not a one-time event; it is a continuous process, a cycle of sowing and reaping that spans the entire year calendar of the church. Successful evangelism requires careful preparation, understanding the community's demographics, and addressing the specific needs of its people. Reaching out to various classes and demographics necessitates multiple methods, with a keen focus on tactfulness and Christ-like patience.

The apostle Paul, in 2 Timothy 4, delineates the characteristics of the calling to ministry, highlighting the need for young men and women to engage in evangelistic efforts. "The Lord calls upon those connected with the [ministries of the church], they should teach the youth to do evangelistic work" *Evangelism*, p. 24. Local churches should actively support and encourage their pastors in leading evangelistic initiatives, freeing them up to lead their churches into an effective outreach to their communities. Revelation 22:17 underscores the inclusivity of evangelism, to all "who will," encompassing individuals from all walks of life. We are to reach out to all persons, no matter what their age, lifestyle, experience, or beliefs. It includes reaching out to those who are caught up in the throes of passion, addiction, or dysfunctional relationships. Often, people do what they do because they seek fulfillment and gratification in illegitimate ways that leave them empty, in despair, and in

sorrow. Through evangelism, we guide people to the source of true happiness, life fulfillment, and joy. It is to be found in heart-felt repentance, a faith commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ, and in obedience to His Word.

As we contemplate the role of evangelism in our churches, let us consider its rank, prominence on the agenda, and our individual involvement. These questions are poignant:

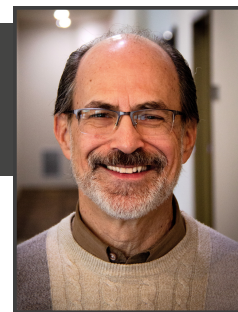
Where does evangelism stand in your church? Is it a regular topic of discussion in board meetings? Where does it feature on the agenda of the business meetings of your church? If you want to get involved but are unsure how, contact your pastor, elders, or conference leaders. Together, let us prioritize Christ's Great Commission and usher in a powerful spirit of prayer, revival, and evangelism across all our churches in the Dakota Conference. We are here to serve, and with a collective commitment to evangelism, may the Lord bless and grow our congregations, thereby thrusting the Dakota Conference on a consistent, upward course.



May the Lord stir you and your church with His Spirit to that end.

Treasurer's Report

Mark Seibold, VP of Finance

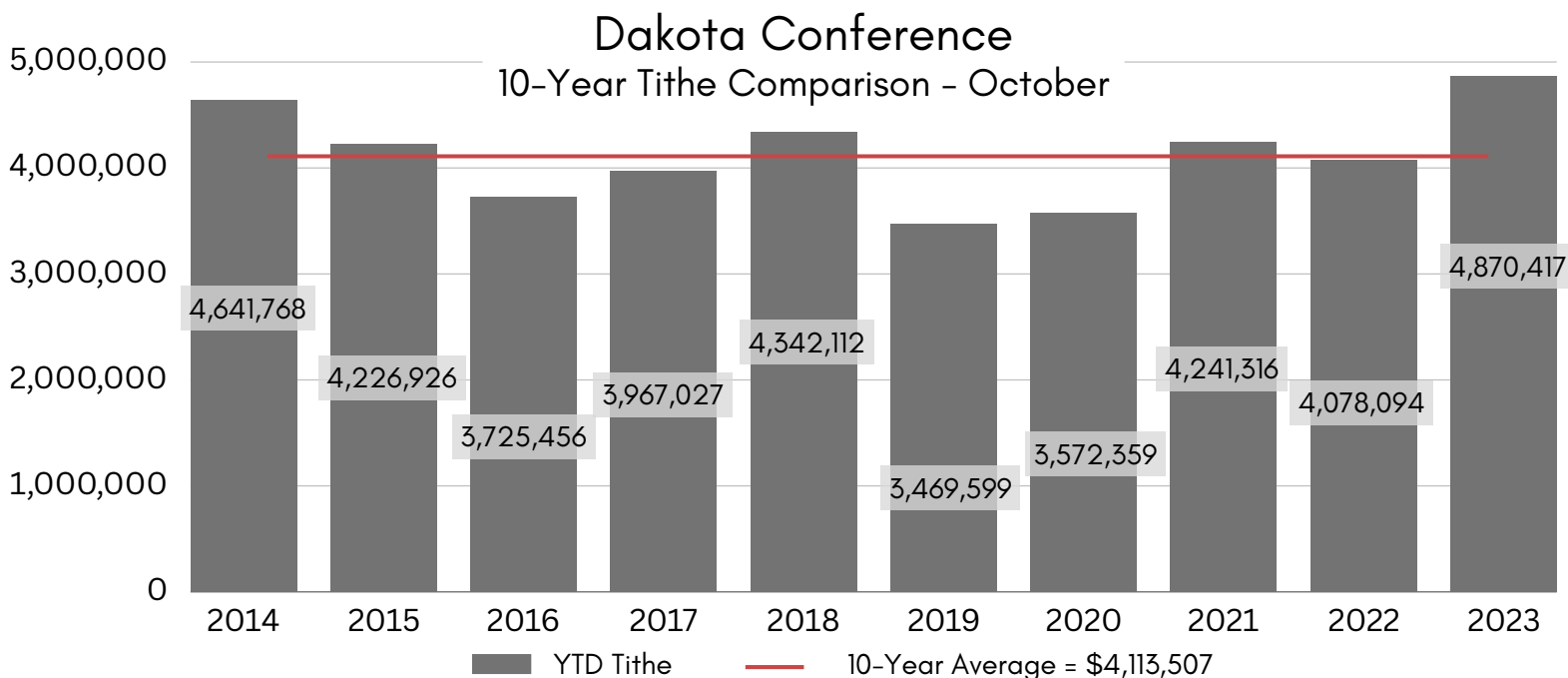


If there is a "broken record" story to be happy about, it's this year's tithe, which continues to set a new conference record.

Each time I sit down to share treasury news with our readers this year, I can't help but comment about the remarkable blessings God has granted our Dakota Conference contributors who have passed along these financial blessings. This year's total includes approximately \$300K in outside-of-conference tithe income. In addition, 2023 has seen increases in non-tithe donations as well.

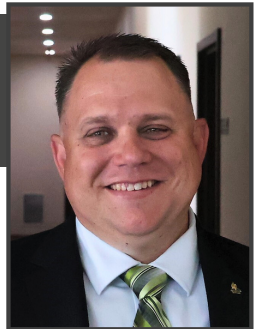
It must be pointed out that these contributions do not represent an unqualified "windfall," however. To put these gains in context, they have allowed us to partially rebuild reserves that were somewhat depleted during the past few years, meet increasing payroll expenses, and allocate funds to maintenance on conference property that had been deferred.

During this Christmas season we can be thankful for both the Reason we celebrate and for these tangible blessings we have received during 2023 to advance the mission of His Kingdom.



Building For Eternity

Ted Struntz, Youth & Young Adults Director



Just the other day, Lynnette and I were talking about the history of the Dakota Conference. Lynnette decided to research a bit more about our Conference's history and came across the Dakota Conference motto and mission statement. I think they are great, and I want to share them with you in case you may have forgotten them.

The Dakota Conference motto is: *"Sharing the unchanging love of Jesus in a changing world."* And the Dakota Conference mission statement is: *"To share the hope of a soon returning Savior, involve the youth of the conference in mission, and continue a strong camp and educational system for the strengthening of the local, national, and international Adventist movement."*

What a fantastic motto and mission statement! Every time we look around, we see how the world is changing—sometimes at warp speed. Thankfully, Jesus' love never changes, and this should give us hope and the encouragement to continue sharing Jesus. If ever we have had the opportunity to spend time together, I bet you already know what part of the mission statement makes me all warm and fuzzy inside. That's right! It's the part that pledges to "involve the youth of the conference in mission and continue a strong camp..." I could also say a bunch about the educational system of our conference, since I strongly believe in Christian education, but that is someone else's department.

During our Conference regionals, I have given seminars on how to include our youth in the mission of our church on the local level. If you haven't yet heard one of my seminars, we should talk! However, what I want to focus on today is our conference's pledge to "continue a strong camp."

Continued on page 5

Jahsoulay Walton and Lynnette Struntz



Adventist Book Center Closing

After serving shoppers since opening in early 2013, the Adventist Book Center (ABC) based at the Dakota Conference office has ceased operations.

Specializing in a variety of vegetarian foods as well as inspirational printed materials, the ABC catered to a diverse local clientele, with a particular focus on regional Adventists. Inventory was serviced by the Kansas-Nebraska Conference but due to changing market conditions, they could no longer cover their costs and, reluctantly, decided to withdraw. While Dakota Conference considered purchasing inventory for resale, it became evident that, given the increasing availability of vegetarian food in local stores and declining interest in the ABC's traditional product lines, an inventory-based business model had limited chances of success. After careful consideration, the conference executive committee voted to permanently discontinue operations, joining many other conferences that have closed their ABC locations in recent years.

Worthington and Loma Linda products, as well as Adventist publications, are still available directly through the Kansas-Nebraska ABC in Lincoln, NE, as well as other online retailers. For more information, contact Lynette Miller at the conference office.

We are so blessed to have two amazing summer camps in the Dakotas! They truly are exceptional. We run a youth program at both of these locations every summer, and young people come from all over the United States to minister and be ministered to. This past summer, we had campers from sixteen different states (and staff from thirteen different states) join us here in the Dakotas. This past summer our theme was "I AM." We focused on showing our young people what Jesus says about each one of them and how He asks them to share His "unchanging love" to others.

We are diligently working to provide a strong camp program for our young people. As the camp director, I can tell you there has been a consistent and dedicated group of lay people who have blessed our camps in a host of ways. In the past, when it didn't look like camp would happen, families stepped up and made sure our young people had that life-changing experience. When funds were needed for a plethora of projects, individuals, families, and churches came through to provide. A strong camp happens because we come together as a team and make it a reality.

My desire is to continue providing a strong camp program for the Dakotas. As you know, our two camps have been serving the Dakotas for almost 75 years, and the infrastructure of our camps needs assistance. There are needs for equipment to aid in keeping our facilities and programs running properly and safely.

This summer, we had an inspection done at both of our camps by Adventist Risk Management. The purpose was to ensure that we are properly insured, to identify areas that we are running well, and to uncover areas where we can improve. Overall we did great, but there is still room for improvement. In addition, we also had the health department inspect Northern Lights Camp. This may sound funny, but a highlight for me was having the health inspector come visit! She examined everything and gave us a 100% on our report! She told me that our camp was cleaner than most of the restaurants she inspected! This doesn't happen by accident; it's because we have dedicated, hard-working camp staff.

As you read this, you may be wondering how you can partner with us and help the youth department "continue a strong camp." This year, maybe God has blessed you in an unexpected way, or you feel His calling to become more involved with helping our camps as our other volunteers do. Whatever you feel the Holy Spirit telling you, please listen. Join with me and others who are helping the Dakota Adventist Camps fulfill the mission statement of our Dakota Conference.

For more information of how you can be involved, please contact Pastor Ted at: camp@dakotasda.org or call 701.751.6177.

DAKOTA ADVENTIST CAMPS PROJECTS

Current Needs



1. BUNK BEDS (\$9,000*)

*Building materials cost approximately \$150 per bunkbed unit. Sixty units are needed. (Also looking for people to build them.) Bed are needed at both camps.

2. VEHICLES

- TRACTOR*
- SIDE-BY-SIDE
- GAS GOLF CART

*Tractor needed for FMC. Other vehicles needed for both camps.



3. ROCK WALL (\$12,000)

This is the remaining balance on the *Tower of Faith* mobile rock wall. It has already been a great asset to our program!

Completed!

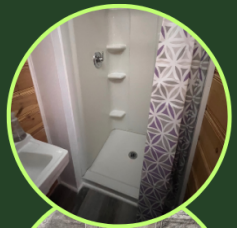
COMPLETED RENOVATIONS & UPGRADES

Flag Mountain Camp

- 10 bathrooms renovated
- Girls cabin showers tiled
- New durable flooring in Quadplex
- New water heaters in the general use bathrooms

Northern Lights Camp

- Wooden ceiling installed
- New flagpole at Dining Hall



Pathfinder Bible Experience

Calling ALL Pathfinders! Come to the PBE qualifier & Pinewood Derby Race held March 1-3, 2024, at DAA. Register by February 19. Contact: Pathfinders@dakotasda.org

www.dakotaadventist.org/ministries/pathfinder-ministries



Dakota Elementary Schools

Kelli Wasemiller, Education Superintendent



Where did the dinosaurs come from? How do fossils form? How do we grapple with the age of the earth? Can a belief in biblical creation and science coexist? This is just a sampling of the questions that were tackled during our recent "Dig Deep," Outdoor School. Elementary students from grades K-8 gathered at Flag Mountain Camp for a week spent digging deep into the study of fossils and dinosaurs.

Our Adventist elementary schools use the ByDesign science curriculum developed by the North American Division. This is a rigorous faith-based science curriculum that develops a strong academic foundation while engaging students through experiments and inquiry activities. In our fall standardized testing, your Dakota elementary schools tested extremely high in science. The average test result of our combined schools was the 74th percentile!

This scientific academic rigor was on display at Outdoor School as students rotated through teacher-led learning stations. They explored how fossils form, how to identify different types of fossils and dinosaurs, and how Divine design is present in nature through artistry such as Fibonacci's golden ratio and the Pythagorean spiral. A STEM project saw 7-8th graders leading their team of multi-grade students and mentoring younger students to design and build a volcano. The teams cheered on each other as the volcanoes erupted with colorful foam.

Annabelle Harper

One cannot study fossils and dinosaurs in the Black Hills of South Dakota without going to see them in person. A field trip to Hot Springs allowed students to visit a fossil museum where they could explore a whole array of skeletons and fossils in person. Next up was the Mammoth Site, an active paleontological dig site where the skeletons of 61 mammoths make it the largest concentration of mammoth remains in the world. After their tour, students could be heard dialoguing about how that sinkhole probably formed when "the springs of the great deep burst forth" (Gen. 7:11), and sadly, the mammoths found themselves trapped as God flooded the world. The final field trip spot found kids able to enjoy the natural hot springs at the Evan's Plunge swimming pool.



Our theme, "Dig Deep," was based on Hebrews 11:1-3:

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible."

A focus on faith further equipped our students to navigate our increasingly secular society. What is faith? Ultimately, it takes faith for a Christian to believe that God created the world, and it takes faith for an atheist to believe that mankind evolved. Where do we place our faith? As Christians, we can sometimes feel like we have to have all of the answers, but we'll probably never know for certain where dinosaurs came from, and that's okay! We wanted the students to realize that it's okay to ask questions that might not have solid answers; that's where faith comes in. Science is the perfect subject for growing faith in God.

Outdoor School is a time and energy commitment for all of the teachers, pastors, and support staff, but their dedication is greatly appreciated. From the area pastors leading out in worship services, the seniors from Dakota Adventist Academy helping with games and music, to the extra chaperones pitching in wherever needed, everyone was "all hands on deck." All week long, students were encouraged to engage in activities in God's classroom, so that they might discover God through His creation and seek to know Him more deeply. The Dakota Conference is devoted to its young people, and we look forward to our next Outdoor School.

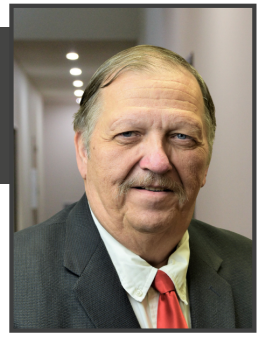
Scan the QR code to watch the Outdoor School recap video created by Annabelle Harper, Rapid City 5-8th grade teacher. If you want to be involved in a future Outdoor School program, contact Kelli Wasemiller at: superintendent.dakota@gmail.com



Annabelle Harper

Disaster Response Classes Offered

Bob Forbes, Adventist Community Services Director



On Sunday, November 19, around 40 students and adults from Dakota Adventist Academy attended a Disaster Response class taught by Pastor Bob Forbes, Dakota Conference Disaster Director. The class covered information on donation operations and how Adventist Community Services (ACS) operates during disasters. ACS Disaster Response is responsible for managing both solicited and non-solicited donated goods.

During the class, participants learned about the chain of command within the ACS Disaster Response and its relationship with other non-governmental and governmental organizations.

A hands-on exercise involved black bags filled with various items. Participants had to decide what to distribute and what to discard, discovering that most donated items were (and are) essentially trash. The bags contained damaged dolls, stuffed animals, and cans of food—some in good condition and others dented and unlabeled. Items such as hairbrushes containing hair, opened and used toothpaste tubes, new tubes of toothpaste, and previously opened boxes of food that had been taped shut represented commonly donated items.

One challenging decision involved a very tempting plate of home-baked cookies. While some students thought they were safe to distribute, most realized that homemade and home-canned foods cannot be accepted. The class also learned that used shoes, socks, and underwear are also not accepted, offering an eye-opening experience for many students.

The bulk of the class time was dedicated to studying the manual and learning about collection centers, multi-agency warehouses, distribution centers, and mobile distribution. The class learned how to set up, where to set up, and how to operate each of these centers.

The importance of being trained before a disaster occurs was emphasized. Volunteers cannot be effectively trained on-site due to limited manpower and time during an actual disaster. Just as one would prefer a trained and experienced surgeon before surgery, volunteers need training in advance during quieter times before a disaster.

With that in mind, we are seeking groups interested in receiving training. You can encourage and promote the idea within your local church and assemble a group of at least six individuals willing to undergo training. Then, contact Pastor Bob to discuss his availability for teaching the class and certifying the participants as trained volunteers. Once arrangements are made, classes can be scheduled and announcements made. This proactive approach may inspire others to join as well. Therefore, take the initiative to form groups, get in touch with Pastor Bob, and strategize to be well-prepared for any future disasters. This level of preparedness mirrors the readiness demonstrated by the 40 individuals in the class at DAA.

A "big shoutout" to the Academy for the invitation, with particular appreciation to Recruiter Darla Reed for facilitating the event. The students' attentiveness and respect throughout the six hours of class time were commendable, showcasing their enthusiasm and energy.



Bob Forbes



**Pastor Bob can be reached at:
acs@dakotasda.org**

Celebration of Praise

You're invited to Dakota Adventist Academy's annual Celebration of Praise and Bismarck Regional on December 15 and 16. The theme is "How Far is it to Bethlehem?" with guest speaker Elder Hubert Morel Jr. Friday's program begins at 7:00p; Sabbath School at 10:00a; followed by the church service. DAA will provide Sabbath lunch, but please bring a dessert to share. At 1:30p, Elder Morel will present again, followed by DAA's 3:00p Christmas concert. All programming will take place at Dakota Adventist Academy.

Dakota Conference

OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

7200 N Washington Street
Bismarck ND 58503-6301
www.dakotaadventist.org



DAKOTA MESSENGER
NON-PROFIT
US POSTAGE PAID
PERMIT #38
BISMARCK, ND

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

CALENDAR

December

- 4 Jamestown Region Constituency Town Hall (6:30p)
- 6 Dickinson Region Constituency Town Hall (6:30p)
- 10 Executive Committee - Conference Office (10:00a)
- 12 Aberdeen Region Constituency Town Hall (6:30p)
- 15 Celebration of Praise - DAA (7:00p)
- 16 Celebration of Praise/Bismarck Regional - DAA (10:00a)
- 25 Office Closed - Christmas

January

- 1 Office Closed - New Year's Day
- 3 Fargo Region Constituency Town Hall (6:30p)
- 9 Rapid City Region Constituency Town Hall (6:30p)
- 15 Office Closed - Martin Luther King Jr. Day
- 21 K-12 Board of Education - Conference Office (10:00a)
- 22-25 Pastors' Meetings - Conference Office

February

- 4 Executive Committee - Conference Office (10:00a)
- 23-24 DAA Preview Days

President, Evangelism, ASI

Mark Weir

VP of Admin, HR, Church Ministries

Mark Piotrowski

Admin Assistant, Receptionist

Jessica Stanton

Trust Assistant, Membership Clerk

Julie Brude

Communication Director

Jodi Dossenko

Development Director

Lynette Miller

Constituency Coordinator

Connie Seibold

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

Elementary Education

Kelli Wasemiller

Men's Ministries

Randy Rubbert

Ministerial

Vernon Herholdt

Prayer Ministries

Barry St. Clair

Women's Ministries

Paulette Bullinger