

2015 Convention Report of the Montana District Missions and Evangelism Committee

Missions And Evangelism Committee Mission Statement: *Called by God's grace and empowered by the Holy Spirit through the Word and Sacraments, the mission of the Missions and Evangelism Committee of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Montana District is to assist congregations in building up the body of Christ, providing mission vision, leadership, opportunity, encouragement, and support to the congregations of the District so that the people of God reach others with the saving Gospel to the end that everyone is presented perfect in Christ. (Colossians 1:28)*

Prior to the 2012 District Convention, the Board of Directors had already chosen to begin a mission start in the Big Timber and Livingston areas. After completing all of the preliminary work to Call a man to start work in those communities the Board of Directors began the Call process in late 2013. As it turned out the best way to do this was to Call a seminary candidate to be the mission planter there. In July of 2014, Rev. Chad Schopp was ordained and installed as Missionary-at-large for the District and placed into the Big Timber/Livingston areas and began his work. In a very short time Pastor Schopp gathered a number of people and began worship and Bible study programs. The name chosen for the group is Emmaus Lutheran Mission. While not quite large enough yet to be a self-sustaining congregation, all indications are that this group will grow and continue the proclamation of the Gospel in Big Timber and Livingston. By the time of our District Convention this year, the Emmaus constitution should be approved so that the Convention will be able to officially welcome the congregation into the synod and district.

At about the same time as the District Board of Directors and Missions and Evangelism Committee were beginning to put things together for the Big Timber/Livingston mission start, Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church of Ennis and Pastor Stensrud began holding Sunday services in Dillon. These Sunday services have gathered a small number of regular attendees who have indicated that they would like to form a congregation. While our District Missions and Evangelism budget has provided some funds to help this start, Shepherd of the Hills has supplied most of the support for these services, and Pastor Stensrud's work there. A constitution has been written and, if approved by the District Board of Directors, may mean that we will also be able to welcome this congregation at this convention.

During much of the triennium the Missions and Evangelism Committee and others in the district have put a great deal of time and effort into establishing a mission outreach to the workers in the Bakken Oil Field. In meetings with the North Dakota District we investigated some approaches to this work that the districts might do together. After a few months the North Dakota District indicated they would not be able to help in any of these actions. We then began developing courses of action we could execute ourselves. One of these was to produce a website that would allow workers to identify congregations near their lodging sites and provide devotional materials and other Gospel encouragements. Due to changes in pastoral leadership in district congregations

in the Bakken area it became necessary to postpone the work we were planning. The website is still available to us once it becomes appropriate to pursue this outreach.

Over the last several months some of our committee members have begun to work closely with synod's Rural and Small Town Mission (RSTM) organization. We did schedule an Engaging Rural Communities event some months ago, but the reservations received for participation were below the number needed to hold the event so we had to cancel it. Still we find that this initiative holds multiple possibilities to help congregations in identifying and pursuing Gospel outreach options in their communities. Our plan now is to have RSTM train one of our district pastors to lead these events so that we will be able to present them with a lot more flexibility.

Another activity of the committee has been the presentation of the Bible study "From the Heart of God," which was encouraged by the 2012 District Convention. While the number of congregations that invited us to lead this Bible study has been much less than we had hoped, the reception in all cases has been very positive. We hope that this convention will renew this encouragement so that we can widen the awareness of biblical mission and evangelism approaches within congregations of the district.

A program we hope will also help congregations expand their awareness of missions and evangelism work both near and far is our Committee Congregation Contact Initiative. To implement this we have divided the list of district congregations between members of the committee. Each committee member calls assigned congregations at least once each year to describe various missions and evangelism work in the district and synod. We also ask the contact congregation to share with us any work in missions and evangelism that they are doing, so that we can communicate that work with other congregations that might be looking for new ideas.

Our latest work effort has been to update the Missions Strategy, which was used in making the decision to begin what has become the Emmaus mission start in Big Timber and Livingston. This update should be sent to the Board of Directors prior to this convention so that they will be able to begin the process of deciding where our next mission start for the district will be planted.

Present members of the Montana District Missions and Evangelism Committee

Rev. Raymond Everet Larson, Sr., Chairman

Rev. Gerald Paul

Teacher Thomas Kosche

Bradley Williams

Heidi Sias

Glenn Stocking

Members who served the Missions and Evangelism Committee earlier in the triennium

Rev. Marcus Baikie

B.J. Mayer