

## 2012 Convention Report of the Montana District Missions and Evangelism Committee

**Missions 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)*

A week after the 2009 District Convention District members from congregations in Sidney to Hamilton (and several in between) gathered at 7<sup>th</sup> Ranch RV Camp in Garryowen to participate in our District 2009 Indian Heritage Event. The goal of the Event was to assist Crow Lutheran Church at Crow Agency and Lodge Grass, and Circle of Life Lutheran Church at Lame Deer in various projects for their facilities. The group separated into several teams which during the week completed the reroofing at Circle of Life and the repainting of both buildings Crow Lutheran uses for worship.

The Fall of 2009 brought the beginning of two significant actions of the Missions Committee. One was the initiation of work leading to the placement of a missionary-at-large in the Plains/Thompson Falls area to begin mission work there. The other was to begin studies designed to develop a missions strategy for the District.

As will be attested to at this Convention, the mission start at Thompson Falls has brought the desired results. When Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church of Thompson Falls signs the Synodical Constitution at the Convention we will rejoice at the blessing of the Lord of the Church in this mission work these last three years. The District Board of Directors Called Rev. Mark J. Nicolaus as Missionary-at Large to accomplish this work. Rev. Nicolaus began work in Thompson Falls and Plains in January 2010. By May, when worship services began, approximately 30 people were regularly attending. Throughout this process members and congregations of the Montana District have been instrumental in this mission start. For instance, Trinity Lutheran Church in Superior developed a close working relationship with the new mission, helping especially with some of the administrative matters of the mission. During the summers congregations of the District helped the mission hold Vacation Bible School in several communities in the Thompson Falls area. Very important, too, are the large number of financial donations by individuals, families and congregations given to the District which allowed the District to fund this work without having to take funds away from other District ministries and programs. The mission worships in the Senior Center in Thompson Falls but has been able to establish opportunities and sites to hold Advent and Lenten services as well as a Sunday school. The group continued to grow in numbers and determined in the Fall of 2011 to form a congregation. By the time our Convention starts the congregation will have called its first Pastor.

Right after the last convention the Missions Committee began studying 14 Montana communities as possible sites for another mission start. Shortly after the study started District committees were reorganized. Part of the reorganization brought the Missions and Evangelism Committees together into one Committee. With the addition of new members to the Committee we resumed and expanded the study so that we could present a more comprehensive mission strategy proposal to the Board of Directors. The total number of communities now being considered is 19. The first part of the strategy lists and prioritizes those communities which the Missions and Evangelism Committee recommends be started by the District's Missionary-at-Large. This recommendation was presented to the Board of Directors in October of 2011. The Board of Directors accepted the strategy and from it determined to begin another mission in the Big Timber and Livingston area in the summer of 2012. Because Rev. Nicolaus has chosen to move on to another ministry, the Board of Directors plans to call a new Missionary-at-Large this spring.

The second part of the strategy will list several communities/sites which may best be started as daughter congregations of existing District congregations. Once this list is established and validated by the Board of Directors we will begin encouraging and resourcing congregations which may want to be part of such a mission plant.

One of the communities originally on the study list is Dillon. Before the Committee was able to complete and submit the strategy recommendations, Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church in Ennis decided to begin work in Dillon. If things go as planned this work will have begun before this year's Convention. The Board of Directors has designated some of our missions funds for 2012 to assist Shepherd of the Hills in this endeavor.

The Missions and Evangelism Committee has also noted that the Hispanic population in Montana is growing. It will be prudent that the congregations of the District maintain an awareness in their communities as to the growth of this and other minorities. Often an early congregational connection with these groups contributes to a credibility which creates opportunities for evangelistic Gospel proclamation.

The Synod's Operation Barnabas is another great opportunity for congregations to reach out into their communities. While the position of Operation Barnabas Counselor is separate from the District Missions and Evangelism Committee, the program itself has a definite missions and evangelism focus. Operation Barnabas provides ideas and resources congregations can use in reaching service members and their families prior to, during, and following deployments away from Montana. Originally meant to serve reserve and National Guard members and families, Operation Barnabas now encompasses active duty families and members as well.

Another evangelism opportunity present in the District is the area in eastern Montana and western North Dakota where the population is quickly expanding because of the growing oil and gas business there. Presently Concordia Lutheran Church in Williston, North Dakota, and Trinity Lutheran Church in Sidney are reaching into this widening population with various human care actions as well as providing the Good News of Jesus Christ in a great number of diverse settings. As things progress in these areas, there may come a time that congregations in the District, as well as the District itself, will be able to assist these two congregations in this ministry.

Along with all of this, the Missions and Evangelism Committee continues to look for means and opportunities to assist congregations of the District in identifying and pursuing evangelism possibilities in their communities. While some of this encouraging may occur in presentations designed as seminars for groupings of congregations, the Committee does stand ready to assist individual congregations as may be appropriate.

Present members of the Montana District Missions and Evangelism Committee

Rev. Raymond Everet Larson, Sr., Chairman

Rev. Matthew Nelson

Teacher Thomas Kosche

Bradley Williams

B.J. Mayer

Arnie Gidlow

Heidi Sias

Members who served the Evangelism Committee earlier in the triennium

Rev. Darold Reiner

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Members who served the Missions Committee earlier in the triennium

Rev. David Warner

Teacher David Topp