# **The District President Address to the 2022 Convention**

As we gather in the name of the Triune God for this 59th Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod’s Southern Illinois District, it has been quite the journey. The Covid-19 pandemic delayed our convention for a year. Then back-to-back winter storms postponed our gathering another day. We are thankful that you are safely here. We pray that the Lord will bless our time together as we elect officers and boards, consider resolutions, and learn more about the work of our District and Synod. It promises to be a busy, but productive, day and half.

The theme for this year’s convention is “One Foundation” based upon 1 Corinthians 3. The apostle Paul writes: **“According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. 11For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— 13each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. 14If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. 15If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.”**

Several things stand out. One is that the apostle was called by Jesus and sent by the Holy Spirit to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles. He would establish churches in the places he visited. Paul compares himself to a skilled master builder. The skill of this master building is more than the ability to work with his hands to lay a foundation. He is a “wise” (Sophos) master builder. One who is filled with wisdom and discernment in bringing the Gospel to the Corinthians. Everything Paul does with these people is to establish a firm foundation for the church. The foundation Cornerstone is Jesus Christ (cf. Ephesians 2:20). The apostles and prophets bear witness to the Christ.

Peter picks up on this imagery. He calls believers “living stones” being built upon the foundation of the Cornerstone, choice and precious, who is Jesus Christ. Jesus is the stone that the builders rejected that has become the Capstone. He is stone of stumbling to the Jews and foolish rock of offense to Gentiles (1 Peter 2:8; 1 Corinthians 1:23-24). **“But to those who are called, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men”** (1 Corinthians 3:24-25). Christ alone is the **One Foundation** upon which the Holy Spirit builds the Church to the glory of God the Father.

The building materials for the Church matter. Paul writes of materials such as gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, and straw. At various times and places each of these materials have gone into the physical structures of church buildings. Paul is not speaking so much of buildings, but rather of the people who comprise the Church, the Body of Christ. Christians are born from above in the waters of Holy Baptism. They are unable to will themselves into the Kingdom or merit God’s favor by their own works, strength, or merits. Our beloved Confessions teach us God’s Word. *“People are freely justified for Christ’s sake, through faith, when they believe that are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake. By His death, Christ made satisfaction for our sins. God counts this faith for righteousness in His sight (Romans 3 and 4 [3:21-26; 4:5])* (Augsburg Confession, Article IV, Justification).

The very next article tells us how we receive such faith and standing with God. *“The ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. Through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given [John 20:22]. He works faith, when and where it pleases God [John 3:8], in this who hear the good news that God justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ’s sake. This happens not through our own merits, but for Christ’s sake”* (Augsburg Confession, Article V, The Ministry).

God’s Word proclaimed, taught, heard, and read is the means through which the Lord creates faith in people. The Word combined with the water in Holy Baptism gives birth from above (1 Peter 1:3) as it joins us to the death and resurrection of Jesus (Romans 6:3-4). The Lord saves us, according to His great mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:5-7). God’s Word and Sacraments are the gold, silver, and precious stones through which He builds His church on earth.

Unfortunately, Biblical illiteracy is rampant today. Congregations are not exempt. How many can find the book of Daniel without looking at the index? Where does Jesus teach the Sermon on the Mount? Where does the Bible tell us that we are dead in our trespasses and sins? Unfamiliarity with the Bible is but a symptom of a greater complacency or spiritual apathy that is widespread among us. Some mistake membership in a congregation to their names being written in the Lamb’s book of Life. **“Without faith, it is impossible to please God”** (Hebrews 11:6).

The pandemic produced interesting responses. Some people longed for the Word, especially the Lord’s Supper. They yearned for opportunities to receive it regularly. Others found a convenient excuse to stay away. What about the lukewarm? Some are slowly returning to worship; some have grown cold; few are on fire for the Lord. Could it be that many are building their lives with the lesser materials of wood, hay, straw, or stubble? How will these withstand the Day when fire tests everything (1 Corinthians 3:13)?

We are inheritors of a rich history of men and women whose lives were built upon the One Foundation. The Lord Jesus worked faith and love in their lives. You may remember some of them fondly. Maybe you admired their inner strength or their wise counsel. You appreciated their generosity and love. They may have spoken the hard truth that you needed to hear but fought against. It’s interesting that they are often more admired after they are gone than appreciated while they were alive. Such is life in a fallen world this side of heaven.

These men and women of faith were built upon the one foundation that is Jesus Christ. “**The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will He keep His anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to His children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it and it is gone, and its place knows it no more. But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children’s children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do His commandments. The Lord has established His throne in the heavens and His kingdom rules over all”** (Psalm 103:8-19).

Consider these last words well. The Lord has established His throne in the heavens and His kingdom rules over all. It is time to practice the faith that we confess. Do we fear, love and trust in God above all things? Do we fear people more than the One who can destroy both body and soul in hell (Matthew 10:28)? The Lord does not change (James 1:17). Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). He is the One Foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11), the Christ the Son of the Living God. Upon this rock, this confession, Jesus builds His church, and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it (Matthew 16:15-18). Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and treasure it (Luke 11:28). This is the good news that has been preached to you (1 Peter 1:25).

Rev. Timothy J. Scharr, President

Southern Illinois District - LCMS