

President Paavola, I join our District and Synod in giving thanks to the Lord of the Church for your first term of service and leadership,--and now congratulations on your re-election for a second term. We include in that thanksgiving your faithful wife, Pat, at your side and supportive in every way, The Board of Directors, and also our gratitude to the dedicated staff team in our District Office! When you were elected three years ago as Mid-South's District President, the 5th in our history, you certainly hit the ground running! No doubt you're ready for some retreads! Each time the torch of this office has passed to the next DP since our first servant leader, Dr. Griesse, new challenges loomed large, as reflected in the President's report to each Convention. We who have served our District quickly recognized this when we took office. Looking back, we breathe prayers of thanksgiving that we were not overwhelmed by the responsibility!-- God has been our help in ages past! You are using the Holy Spirit's gifts and your life experiences to guide our District in a direction that is faithful, Gospel centered and mission focused. Along with emeriti DPs, Ken Lampe and Norman Groteluschen, with the help of God, I add my personal assurance of support and prayers.

Recently I had the experience of attending the 50th reunion of my Concordia Seminary Class of 1965 in St. Louis. I'm amazed at the changes that have occurred during my 50 years in the ministry--changes in family and marriage in our society; the erosion of Christian values in culture; the invention of computer and internet in my lifetime, with an explosion of technological advancements in the ways we communicate, even in the Church. In spite of these changes and challenges, the Word of the Lord that we believe, teach and confess abides forever and does not change! Our Lord equips, empowers and sends us into His mission field, not ashamed of the Gospel. We proclaim it to all people because it is the power of God for salvation.

My encouragement to you as delegates is to read again the District President's workbook report with his valuable summary on pages 54 and following of our District's mission history and opportunities. Use it as a resource to share with your congregation in your delegate report. Help them see the large view of mission, and how God is continuing to lead us in this changing landscape described by President Paavola in this way: *"Today, there are other new settlers coming to this rich land. Not many of them have the same appearances and cultures as our forefathers. Today, immigrants from Africa, Latin American, the Middle East, and the Far East are joining us in the land of opportunity and becoming our co-workers, class mates, and neighbors. The landscape of America is changing."* It's clear that God didn't guide our early LC-MS pioneers from Saxony to these shores just to escape the spiritual dangers of rationalism in their homeland, or to preserve German culture in their new setting. God had a message for them and for us to proclaim! You and your congregations are Christ's deployed soldiers of the Gospel, on the front lines in the Mid South District of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod for such a critical time as this in God's Kingdom! Our District vision expresses it clearly: ***"We see every ministry reaching the lost and discipling the found."***

As delegates at this family reunion of the District convention, you will return to tell other family members in your congregation about your experiences as a delegate and how blessed we are to be united in Christ with the urgent mission God entrusts to us. You want to communicate to your congregation the blessings of His goodness in our past and present time, even as we eagerly anticipate 2016 when we celebrate our Mid-South District's 50th anniversary. You'll be hearing much more about the anniversary emphasis, ***"Each One--Reach One"***, a theme that carries forward God's purpose for Mid-South since our founding in 1966.

Changes, challenges and opportunities which place increasing responsibilities on the service of called and lay leaders, our congregations and schools, compel us to a continuing trust in God's faithfulness. Continue to pray for one another, partner with one another, and encourage one another, as we, with great hope, hear the sound of the distant triumph song of our Ascended Lord's return. It's His Church--always has been, is now, and will be until He comes again! We want to remember this in times of discouragement and uncertainty, as well as when we are called to be bold in the Gospel. Fight the good fight, finish race, keep the faith! Hold to His unfailing promises-- He is the God of our blessed past, our challenging present and our hopeful future. May the goodness of our gracious God be poured out richly on you and our District in this 19th Convention!