



WORKING THE VINEYARD

Greetings to you from our Lord Jesus Christ.

WOW! What a different nine-and-half months of this year we have all experienced. The Coronavirus pandemic has changed our lives in so many ways - our professions, our homes, our educational system, our worship, our shopping, and all the ways we spend our time and energy. Even though our church communities have adapted worship, Bible studies and meetings through virtual modalities, we have not been able to conduct a virtual Via de Cristo weekend. The sharing of ideas, prayers, and concerns seem to be more personally valuable in an in-person setting and virtual meetings are best understood and more productive between people who already know each other.

In Via de Cristo, we have not been able to conduct weekend events for ten months. Many secretariats had made plans for weekends in the spring, again in the summer and again for this fall, and all have had to be cancelled. So where does this leave us as we continue to have hopes and plans for the coming year in Via de Cristo? Our work of training and calling Christians to walk with Christ in loving and serving others cannot give way to what the events and conditions of our world are at any given time. We cannot sit and wait for the world to get well to work in God's vineyard. The harvest is ripe and needs our creativity and our labor of love.

Jesus tells a story about two brothers whose father asked them each to work in the vineyard during harvest. One promises his father he'll go work in the vineyard, then doesn't. The other says that he can't help, but ends up going to help in spite of his initial decision to not work. Both continue to be sons and both continue to belong to the family. Both will likely be invited into the same work next week. But Jesus asks the hard question: "Which of the two did the will of his father?" Ultimately, only one of these two sons will make the claim that he did the will of his father.

God, in baptism, has laid claim to our lives. God has promised that wherever our life's journey takes us, we'll always have a home in the forgiving grace and renewing power of the Gospel. Yet with this claim, God has called us to a life of faithfulness, a life of working in the vineyard, a life of living as a disciple of Jesus Christ. He has called us to a life of continuing in the covenant He made with us in Holy Baptism: living among His faithful people, hearing His Word and sharing in the supper, proclaiming the good news of Christ through word and deed, serving all people, following the example of our Lord Jesus, and striving for justice and peace in all the earth. It isn't as though we have said we would work in the Via de Cristo vineyard and then refused to go. We have been held back from going to work in this vineyard. But our witness and work for the Kingdom of God is not limited to our Via de Cristo weekends. There is a vineyard in our home communities, helping those who are out of work, helping those who cannot shop for themselves, delivering meals to the sick and homebound, teaching a Bible study on Zoom, praying for the ill, the homeless, and helping others rebuild after a hurricane that leveled their homes. The people of the Lord's vineyard are just needing to go wherever the harvest is and it is all around us.

As we consider this pledge - a pledge made whenever we welcome new brothers and sisters into our family of faith, whenever we plan a weekend of Via de Cristo for new pilgrims, and when we get disappointed and cannot conduct the weekend we planned, we remember our Lord's question: "Which of the two did the will of his father?"

Our God, who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast

IN THIS ISSUE

Working the Vineyard
Page 1-2

NLS Annual
Gathering 2021
Page 2

Building the Bridges
that Connect Us
Page 3

Letter from Papua New
Guinea
Page 4

Region 4 & 5 Reports
Page 5

Fellow Servants
Page 6

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Our Mission Statement:

By grace, with the Holy Spirit, we challenge leaders to discover and achieve their personal calling, assisting them to influence their environments with the Gospel.

love, reminds us of the faithfulness that is expected from each one of us. Which of us will do the will of the father? Which of us will acknowledge that God has called us to work and ask God to guide us to that work? Which of us will see to it that our "light so shines before others that they may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven?" Which of us will live as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ? The day will come when we can do Via de Cristo weekend training again, but in the meantime, let's go to the vineyard wherever it is.

My prayers go up for each of you in Via de Cristo as you deal with the effects of this pandemic and the healing of our nation and our world. Keep on planning for a weekend and keep on serving in the vineyard where God leads you. May God bless you and your work in God's vineyard. God loves you and so do I!

Pastor Sue Beall - NLS, Spiritual Director

READY FOR AN ADVENTURE?

The National Lutheran Secretariat (NLS) is searching for the next Secretariat to host one of our Annual Gathering in the future. Alongside the NLS, the Annual Gathering will be in Texas 2021. We do not have anyone who has taken a leap of faith for our next adventure in 2022.

We realize this might sound daunting, but it is not! We will help you all the way. We have a complete guide with step-by-step instructions on raising money and the day-to-day tasks to be done. Take this adventure and see what fun this could be for your Secretariat. This could strengthen your local Secretariat and bring people together to help.

Contact Debbie Klatt at vpadmin@viadecristo.org

NLS ANNUAL GATHERING 2021 - SOUTHERN STYLE

Our gifts from God, directly to you! That is our plan. We are so thrilled to be hosting the next Annual Gathering. There will be four Secretariats (A/OK VdC, North Texas VdC, Texas Gulf Coast VdC and Texas Lutheran VdC) hosting the next Annual Gathering in south Texas. It will be held at Texas Lutheran University in Seguin, Texas, which is just a few minutes from southern San Antonio!

As we continue to build our commitment and committee, we are strengthening our resolve to have one outstanding Annual Gathering that we hope no one will want to miss. After so many months of the pandemic, we all could use some revitalizing in our communities. The strength of Via de Cristo is our dependence on the Holy Spirit and our commitment to prayer. We are praying for God to help us in this endeavor.

From the beginning, the National Lutheran Secretariat met in order to share common fundamentals and to be a resource to the ministry we now know as Via de Cristo. Even though it may seem like a lot of work, we consider this an honor, serving Christ and those He loves.

The purpose of the NLS Annual Gathering:

1. It is a gathering of delegates from member secretariats to conduct the necessary business of the NLS.
2. It is to learn and share. This may be accomplished through forums, Exchange of Ideas, workshops, seminars, small groups and/or guest speakers, and discussing how other secretariats are successfully carrying out the Via de Cristo Mission.
3. It is to hold true to and teach the rudiments of our ministry, the fundamentals of Via de Cristo, and visions for the future as we change and grow, while maintaining continuity with the gift that has been given to us.
4. It assists the hosting secretariat in furthering their community by building relationships and developing leadership in a non-monetary way.

As we continue to work toward strengthening our daily lives and those in the 4th Day Communities, we have chosen a 2021 theme: "Love One Another", based on John 13:35, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." This verse was chosen because of all the strife in this world and how we need to focus on Christ and to bring everyone together.

Our Host Committee team is gearing up and making all necessary plans for July. The registration and travel forms will be available around the first of the year. When making your travel arrangements, you may choose to fly into the San Antonio International Airport (closer to the University) or Austin International Airport. Whichever airport you choose, we will make sure you get to the Annual Gathering!

We look forward to serving you as you join us in Texas this coming July 22-25, 2021! De Colores...

My hope is in the Lord,
Debbie Klatt - Vice President of Administration

BUILDING THE BRIDGES THAT CONNECT US



By Frits Ahlefeldt

Hello, all 4th Day-ers out there!! God's peace and love be with you all. In this installment of the "Corner", I want to give you an update on Bridge Building. In my Annual Report, that was one focal point I want to highlight and focus our ministry on. I am glad we are not talking about physical bridges, because I am "all thumbs" and you probably wouldn't want to cross any bridge I built. But, as with any bridge, physical or metaphorical, you start with building blocks and apply the effort to make it take shape and ultimately connect

two sides that are distant. That is what I want to focus on as a 4th Day Community. There are three building blocks that the Executive Committee is discussing and plan to launch that we pray will help us all.

1. **Communications Committee:** Communications are what connects us as humans and as we have learned in our weekends "an isolated Christian is a paralyzed Christian." We feel, as a leadership body, that our communications can improve in several facets. We are in the process of defining the scope and goals of a Communications Committee to explore and define the tactics on how the Via de Cristo Ministry can become more effective communicators. We will reach out to the entire community to fill this committee in the near future. Watch for more information.
2. **Technology Committee:** As the Covid-19 pandemic has taught us, we are more reliant on technology than ever before. If you aren't sold, find a busy street corner or mall and just watch people walk by. Three out of four have their heads in a phone, or earbuds, talking to someone. We are widespread throughout the US and places outside the US, so technology is a critical element of traversing the physical distance between us. We are also in the planning stage for creating a Technology Committee to help us determine new and creative ways of bringing us closer together as the body of Christ in our 4th Day. Watch for more information later this fall or early winter as to how you can serve on this team.
3. **Grant Writing Team:** As any of you have served on a Secretariat Leadership Team or at the National level know, the monetary part of the Via de Cristo Ministry can be difficult, especially during these times when we are not hosting weekends. God always provides, but we also need to do our part as well. Remember the phrase, "Pray like God will do Everything; Work like God will do nothing". I have been asked to create a grant writing team with the goal of expanding our revenue streams beyond the weekends and Annual Dues to better support the activities of our secretariats. This is not just a National endeavor, but one that every secretariat can embrace. I would love to have people who have some experience help me get this off the ground. Please spread the word among your fellow 4th Day-ers and reach out to me if anyone is interested.

I want to leave you with a thought from the devotional my reunion group is doing. It is "Jesus Calling" by Sarah Young. I love it as it is written in the first person - like Jesus is talking directly to you. One of the days last week was on time management, which is something I have struggled with as of late. The takeaway was, "Learn to Master Time or it will Master You!!" If I can do a better job at this, there will be more time for me to devote to His ministry. I challenge you to work together with me and hold me accountable. That additional time can really help our ministry.

I pray the road rises to meet your feet, the wind be at your back, the sun shines warm on your face and God holds you close in the palm of his hand until we talk again!! God Loves You and So Do I.

Brian Schwarz - Executive Director
executivedir@viadecristo.org

LETTER FROM PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Below is a letter I recently received from the Lead Spiritual Director in Papua New Guinea. My husband and I were treated like royalty when we visited and worked with the secretariats on the island in 2016. Please join me in prayer for these wonderful people as they pray for us.

Wendy Showalter - President



Dear Sister Wendy and Brother Jay,

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always, Amen. We thank God for you and pray for His continued protection over you during these turbulent times of great uncertainty and confusion globally. It is comforting to know that you both are well and in good health as you serve our God. All the news we hear about America and other developed nations just makes us scared of this pandemic. However, despite the cruelty of this pandemic, PNG is not as severely affected as predicted. Everything seems normal despite the new normal lifestyle and pandemic

laws. Last week, the Pandemic Controller revoked all pandemic laws and declared normalcy in PNG.

This has amazed us and is only a testimony of God's blessings and protection on our nation and our people. All of this, I believe, is the result of the sacrificial service that you and many other missionaries, Pastors and Evangelists have made for God as you all invested in God's mission work in our country. So I thank you all personally and give glory to God for His love and mercy on us all.

I thank you both also for coming to visit PNG for the VdC program. The VdC Leadership Symposium that you participated in has caused a new shift within the secretariats in Lae and Madang by accepting and running the weekend respectively. Last week, Lae Secretariat hosted their 2nd VdC weekend. It was a blessing to see God raising His Church through the ministry. I served on the weekend as Chaplain along with Amelia and other 4th Dayers from Goroka.

My family and I thank you along with your big family in Christ here in PNG. We hope God will make a way for us all to meet again.

Thank you and God bless you.
Your brother and servant in Christ,
Pastor Baital



REGION 4 REPORT	REGION 5 REPORT
<p>Region 4, like everyone else has been in a holding pattern this year. All weekends have been cancelled for 2020 and rescheduled for 2021 with prayers they can be held then. Some secretariats are holding virtual board meetings and virtual Ultreyas. Most are hesitant to meet in person even with the restrictions easing up a little. I know many were excited that the 2020 Gathering in Minnesota was so close to us but were disappointed it had to be virtual. I think the NLS Board and the speakers did a great job with the virtual meeting but it was not the same as having the face to face fellowship with everyone.</p> <p>2020 will be a year to remember for sure, but I hope it will be a year that we all learned to depend on Christ more than ever. I read a devotion that really stuck with me this past summer. It was talking about living on purpose. Our purpose is a mission that we should take on every day. Isn't that what VdC is all about? Each day we should be a mission to shine Christ's light in our environments. Are we living up to that? Do we show Christ's love when we are in a store with our mask on? Are we reaching out to others that need help in our churches and our neighborhoods? Are we actively trying to do what God wants us to do? Our lives should be lived intentionally and with enthusiasm every day for His purpose. That is a big task for sure, but with God's grace and His guidance we can accomplish that task. He will never let us down when we depend on Him.</p> <p>God loves you and so do I, Pam Gross - Region 4 Coordinator</p>	<p>In these strange times, it has been difficult to keep our communities on track, but who's timing is it really? Even though most secretariats had to cancel weekends, ultreyas and meetings, the thing to remember is God's way is always perfect, even when we cannot see it. He is in control even when things seem out of control. In Colossians 1:17, Paul reminds us that, "He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together."</p> <p>Looking deeper into what's happening in 2020, we see how God is orchestrating the events in each of our lives. Many of us have suffered hardships and maybe even felt our prayers and cries to God were not heard. Just because we didn't see an immediate change in our situations, doesn't mean God didn't hear us. What we interpret as a slow response is actually God working things out in His timing. In Proverbs 16:9, Solomon explains, "The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps." This seemed like such an important point that it is again repeated many times throughout Proverbs including Proverbs 19:21, "Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand."</p> <p>The best example I can give of how perfect God's timing really is would be through my own experience. I am a private caregiver for the elderly, but by the end of March, I found myself jobless with no income. I prayed that God would meet my needs and help me get back to work. Well, He did meet my needs, but instead, my mother became my client. She became seriously ill with a host of issues including a dangerous pelvic prolapse. If I was still working with my clients, I could not have taken care of her the way she needed, including taking her to the hospital in DC for appointments and eventually surgery. When I look back at all that has transpired this year, I see God's hand orchestrating the events in my life so that I could be where He needed me to be. I am happy to say she has made a remarkable return to health after surgery and I have been able to return to work.</p> <p>This pause in our lives has given us a second chance to reevaluate our faith and trust in God and His timing – to actually see God's work in action. After all, our lives can change in a blink of an eye. This gives us an even more powerful reason to live for all the moments He gives with joy and purpose. God has a plan for each one of us. Trusting God's plan for our lives and not our own plans will give us much needed peace in the process. His plans always exceed our wildest expectations because it matches us up with what we are meant to be doing and not what we think we should be doing. This should give us hope as Jeremiah relays this in Jeremiah 29:11-12, "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.'" The only way we can trust in God's timing fully is to spend time with God and allow His Word to seep into our hearts in all the corners that hide fear, sadness, discouragement, worry and anxiety.</p> <p>Your path this year may be dark and may be blocked by obstacles in your way. A sorrow may have overshadowed your life. The plan for your life may have completely changed. You may not know which way to turn, but our God is faithful and He will embrace you!! You may not understand it, but He does and that is enough. As we close in on the end of 2020, whether it has been sunshine or clouds, plenty or want, sorrow or joy, sickness or health, one thing I have learned is His way IS perfect! God loves you, and so do I.</p> <p>Rose Briggs - Region 5 Coordinator</p>



Regional Coordinator positions for Region 6 and Region 7 need to be filled. If you are interested in learning more, please contact Vice President of Outreach, Lindsey Daugherty at outreach@viadecristo.org.

Your Fellow Servants

Executive Committee:



Wendy Showalter
president@viadecristo.org
President



Jeanne Gaston
Secretary@viadecristo.org
Secretary



Debbie Klatt
vpadmin@viadecristo.org
VP of Administration



Brian Schwarz
executivedir@viadecristo.org
Executive Director

Rev. Sue Beall
spiritualdir@viadecristo.org
Spiritual Director



Lindsay Daugherty
outreach@viadecristo.org
VP of Outreach



James Ryan
treasurer@viadecristo.org
Treasurer



Appointed Committee Chairs:



Skip and Lori Gooch
archivist@viadecristo.org
Archivist / Historian



Rick Hanzlik
webmaster@viadecristo.org
Web / AV Coordinator

Paul Sabatier-Smith
palanca@viadecristo.org
Palanca Chair
Krause

Rhonda Balsley
Non-Profitadvisor@viadecristo.org
Non-Profit/Tax Advisor



Hollie Jennings
newsletter@viadecristo.org
Conexiones Newsletter



Marcia and Randy Poisel
update@viadecristo.org
Database Coordinator



Tom
distribution@viadecristo.org
National Distribution Center



<https://www.viadecristo.org/Formsite/nlsdc.php>



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The **CONEXIONES** is a quarterly publication to inform affiliated secretariats and their members, Lutheran Bishops, along with District Presidents about VdC / NLS events and activities.

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