



John List • 971 Pepper Ridge Terrace • Boca Raton, Florida 33486 • John@JohnList.com

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Brothers & Sisters in Jesus:

Fan into flame the gift of God ... For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid,  
but gives us power, love and self-discipline. So do not be ashamed  
of the testimony about our Lord ... — II Timothy 1:6-8

St. Paul's directive to Timothy applies to all Christians today. We are to boldly testify about our Lord — infused by the Spirit. Jesus in Matthew 28:18 commands “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

In just a few days, we'll be joining delegates from other Districts across our Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod in voting for the next Synodical President. This is an important decision that will directly affect the direction our national church body takes for the next three years – and an historic vote as it's the first time that the LCMS leader is being selected by representatives of each congregation via an electronic ballot. I've no doubt that we have all been giving this decision prayerful consideration.

I am sending this to you because of my concern and love for our Synod, which has experienced such decline over the past ten years and shows signs of continued decline as we seem to become more inwardly focused. While this is not intended to be a political statement, I feel a personal responsibility as a voting delegate and as Communications Director of the Florida-Georgia District to share this information with you as fellow voters and partners in the mission of our District (and the Synod) to “vigorously make known the love of Christ by word and deed within our churches, communities and the world.” With this vision the Florida-Georgia District has recently become engaged with Lutheran Hour Ministries to pilot a program of outreach geared at reaching our communities to connect them to Jesus.

As our Florida-Georgia District President Greg Walton has reminded us, we are living in a post-church culture. In the current issue of **Lutheran LIFE** Pastor Walton underscores the mission all Christians have and provides some insight into our times:

*We are sent as missionaries out into the world for the sake of Jesus. We gather each week to be fed on the Word and Sacraments so that we are empowered to serve Jesus in the various places He puts us in any given week ... We truly are baptized for this moment. That serves as the theme for the 65th Regular Synod Convention of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. What a great reminder for us that we live as God's chosen people, baptized and set apart for this time. Clearly the world around us continues to move farther from our Christian faith and the roots that have been part of this nation*

since its foundation. The church culture that had favored us for so long is no longer predominant in our communities. Perhaps this is because many congregations have failed to carry out the command of Jesus to proclaim the good news. In recent times we've allowed interior controversies, doctrinal issues and power struggles to get in the way of simply sharing Jesus with our communities. We've become so enamored with providing for our facilities and making sure that they are comfortable for us that we've not moved out into our communities as the face of Jesus, caring and loving people with His love. Or, maybe it's simply fear or unawareness of all the opportunities around us. Yet, it was for such a time as this that God saved us and called us to be His very own! It's time to commence our service for Jesus. We are Christ's hands and feet in the world. We have been baptized for this moment!

Three men of God have been nominated to lead our church body during the next three years. Each has served the Lord and His Church faithfully in a number of ways during their respective careers. They share their thoughts on specific issues and questions in the latest issue of our District's newsmagazine, **Lutheran LIFE**. This is the link to the pre-convention issue:

<http://flgadistrict.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Life2013Vol3.pdf>

The candidates' visions for the future of the LCMS reflect two different concepts or – and I'm going to quote Northwest District President Paul Linnemann here because he said it so well – “two different paths.”

President Linnemann explains the difference between these paths in relation to our country's culture:

*The first [path] sees the church as reacting against the culture – making a defense for the Gospel before those with whom we disagree. The second [path] sees the church as seeking to engage the culture in conversation in an effort to introduce more people to the love of God in Jesus Christ – making a witness for the Gospel to those who don't know Him yet. The first depends upon an approach that attempts to contain the influence of the culture on the church. The second looks for points of contact with the culture in an effort to initiate conversation. The first path is invested in setting **limits**. The second is invested in **opportunities**.*

*To be fair, there are pitfalls and blessings involved in both. The first path blesses in that it seeks to avoid undue error. It has the challenge of missed opportunities and communicating a message of judgment. The second path blesses in that it provides doorways into the lives of people who might otherwise be left outside the household of faith. It has the challenge of communicating a message that there is no judgment at all and that all beliefs are equally viable. The first follows a paradigm of **limitation**. The second follows a paradigm of **empowerment**.*

Looking at three presidential nominees, Pastor Linnemann notes that *while all three candidates' positions reflect aspects of both paths, President [Matthew] Harrison is guided more by the position reflected in the first path ... Our current Vice President, Rev. Herb Mueller, hasn't publically spoken to the same extent, but he has worked hard the past three years in support of the current president ... Michigan District President, Rev. David Maier, represents the second path described above.*

We are blessed to be in a District that most frequently follows that second path. Florida-Georgia is known for its mission emphasis and reaching the lost outside traditional Lutheran settings. We constantly focus on *connecting people to Jesus*.

President Robert Newton from the California-Nevada-Hawaii District — which shares our mission passion — wrote recently, *All three [candidates] are devoted to the Lord and His Word, desire to see the Gospel proclaimed to the ends of the earth, and love this Synod deeply. The differences between them lie primarily in the road upon which each would lead us. Of the three, David Maier champions the missionary posture.*

You now have the opportunity to make your own decision, do your own research and pray that the Holy Spirit guides your thoughts. Online voting is scheduled from this coming Saturday, June 22nd through Tuesday, June 25th. Please immediately advise our District office or the Synod directly if you need any information on voting procedures.

This is the Lord's Church; He knows where He wants it to be and how He wants us to serve in this world. Blessings on your deliberations and in your personal quest to connect people to Jesus.

Peace in Jesus,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John List", with a large, stylized initial "J" and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

John List

Florida-Georgia District Communications Director  
Voting Delegate, St. Paul | Boca Raton, Florida