



Dakota Messenger

DAKOTA CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

Faithful

Mark R. Weir, President



I can only imagine what it would have been like to watch the world you had known crumble. On that day when the walls of Jerusalem were breached, when everything he had known and counted on disappeared, on that day when the long march to Babylon began, Daniel had to make a choice: Abandon all he believed simply because the city of his heritage was destroyed, or remain faithful?

It is very difficult to remain faithful when all you have known and depended on is suddenly gone. Be that health, wealth, job, or spouse - the list is endless. But we have evidence that the decision Daniel made was not based on circumstance or surroundings. How? Scripture records that after arriving in Babylon he asked for foods that God had outlined, and after a 10-day test, the evidence was obvious. Daniel and his friends remained faithful.

Today, if there were any description that I would want to be applied to me, that would be it. Faithful. To my wife, to my family, to my calling from God, and to the constituents of the Dakota Conference. Faithful. Why would I choose that term? Because faithful is something that is internal, and that inner conviction helps to guide and direct during difficult or confusing times. It doesn't always mean you will be successful, but you won't live with regrets. It was Daniel's three friends saying to the king when threatened with the fiery furnace that they would do what God asks even if He didn't deliver them.

As most of you know, we have been wrestling with an issue here in our Conference - finding a way to fund Dakota Adventist Academy. We have written about this struggle and are currently on our second round of Town Halls to update constituents. We want to be faithful to the current and future youth of our Conference. We also want to provide assurances to our staff, so that they can know that there will be a place for them to serve as well. Yet, the biggest question that comes is also one of faithfulness - what will be done to preserve the proceeds we will be receiving from the land sale?

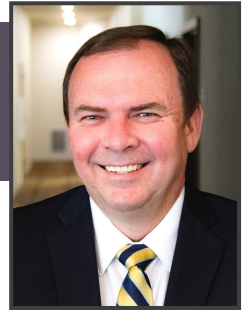
That question deserves an answer. Our constituency needs to know with certainty what is being planned and how that plan works out. There must be not only words but clarity, that we who are charged with the operational reality of our Conference have been faithful. To that end, I make this promise: Every decision will be made public and what happens to every dollar will be made known.

The history of our Conference is filled with the stories of faithful people: generous, dedicated, and committed. This heritage is one we should be proud of and build upon. Since this is the reality of our members, it must be the expectation of those in leadership.

My prayer is that God finds us all to be faithful.

A Call to Local Church Revitalization

Mark Piotrowski, VP of Administration



“Forget about what’s happened; don’t keep going over old history. Be alert, be present. I’m about to do something brand-new. It’s bursting out! Don’t you see it? There it is! I’m making a road through the desert, rivers in the badlands” (Isaiah 43:19, The Message).

If you grew up in the Seventh-day Adventist church as I have, then you are most likely familiar with a slew of terms and expressions that were a part of your upbringing. You may remember when phrases like *evangelistic crusade* or *ingathering*, *branch Sabbath School*, *lay activities*, and *church planting* began circulating in our churches, becoming a part of our unique sub-culture. Some of these have faded with time while others have been updated such as *evangelistic series*, *lay ministry*, and the like. In the last few years, the expression *church revitalization* has been flowing fast and free throughout the world church, particularly in the Western parts of the globe like here in North America and in Europe. It speaks to what needs to be done within what many call legacy or established churches. In this conversation, a new church plant is not needed; instead, there is a need for revitalizing - literally to “imbue something with new life and vitality” - churches that have long been stagnant or declining.

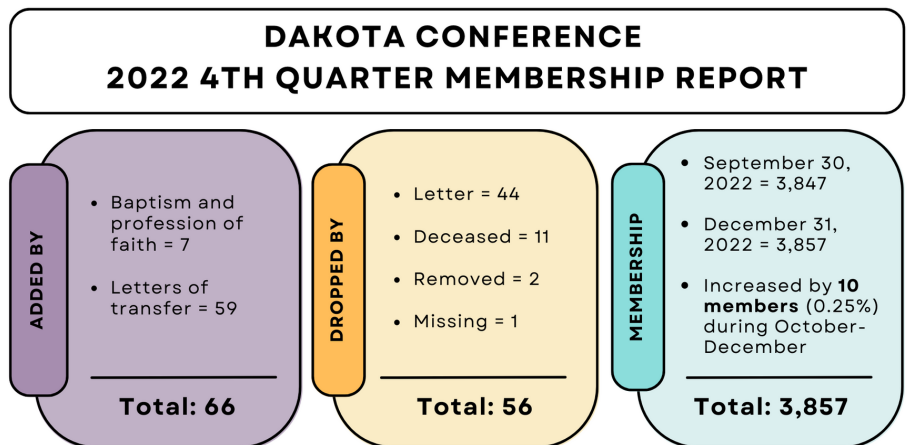
Many churches in more affluent areas of the world are awaking to the fact that they have let ministry drift, that ministry has deteriorated so much so that many members have forgotten what the purpose of their church is and why they exist. At the heart of revitalization is a spiritual regeneration and new power from heaven for the church - we are not speaking here about the buildings and other forms that we loosely define as church, but rather the people which have always defined what the church is. Revitalization seeks for God’s believers to become imbued with new vigor and energy where it was depleted. This can only happen by the empowering Spirit of God in the context of biblical discipleship. Truthfully, this is hard and delicate work, which can only be accomplished with much prayer and careful heart work.

Most denominations in the Western world find themselves in a state of decline. Within our own context, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America has also been affected. The latest statistics (2021) show that **62%** of our churches are declining (experiencing a member loss of at least 2% per year on average), and **11%** are plateauing (growing from 0 to 2% annually on average). That is sobering.

But there is good news. Despite the

declining churches, the membership of the North American Division has grown. We also see clear signs of revitalization happening across the continent. In the same year (2021), it was shown that **27%** of churches in the North American Division, located in all demographical areas - large cities, smaller cities, and rural areas, too, are growing (2%-7% member growth on average per year). There are amazing stories of breakthroughs that churches of any size can be encouraged.

Looking at our own mission field, we are blessed to have 44 churches located across North and South Dakota. It was our church’s joy to welcome **47** new members by baptism or profession of faith in 2022. Our conference grew by **0.18% or 21** members this past year which brings our total membership to



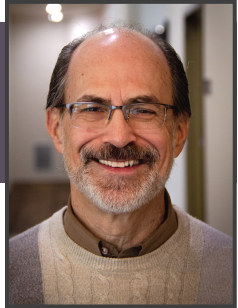
3,857 members. We are grateful to the Lord for the growth that He has given us. However, what continues to be a concern is that our overall conference membership is still some **7.6%** lower than it was ten years ago. We are making strides to recover the lost ground and are engaging our pastors, churches, and all our members to purposefully plan for growth through felt-need community events and reaping evangelistic series.

The Dakota Conference recently launched an initiative “ReVITALIZED” in our territory with this goal in mind. The first church which has embarked on the journey is the Sioux Falls Church (located in a fast-growing community) this past January. The Minot Church has accepted the invitation to begin their journey in February followed by the Aberdeen Church later this spring. It is our goal to get at least 10 churches (representing 25% of our conference) on this journey by year’s end. All our churches will be invited to be a part of this initiative. The plan is simple: First, we meet with the pastor and then later the church board. A presentation is made of the revitalizing process which includes making prayer and revival the center of congregational life. Second, the church is introduced to an assessment survey to help leaders identify which areas of ministry the church needs to begin working on. Third, a church health task force in conjunction with other church leaders oversees a process of recalibration, realignment, and restructuring of different dimensions of ministry with the goal to help their church achieve optimum health and thereby enabling it to grow in a sustained manner (and not just have periodic “growth spurts” from time to time). What is needed for this time-tested method to prove successful? A motivated pastor, then willing church leadership, and most importantly, much, much prayer. The results speak for themselves. The church gets to fulfill the mission using God-given potential and gifts that He has already placed in His church (James 1:17 and 1 Peter 4:10).

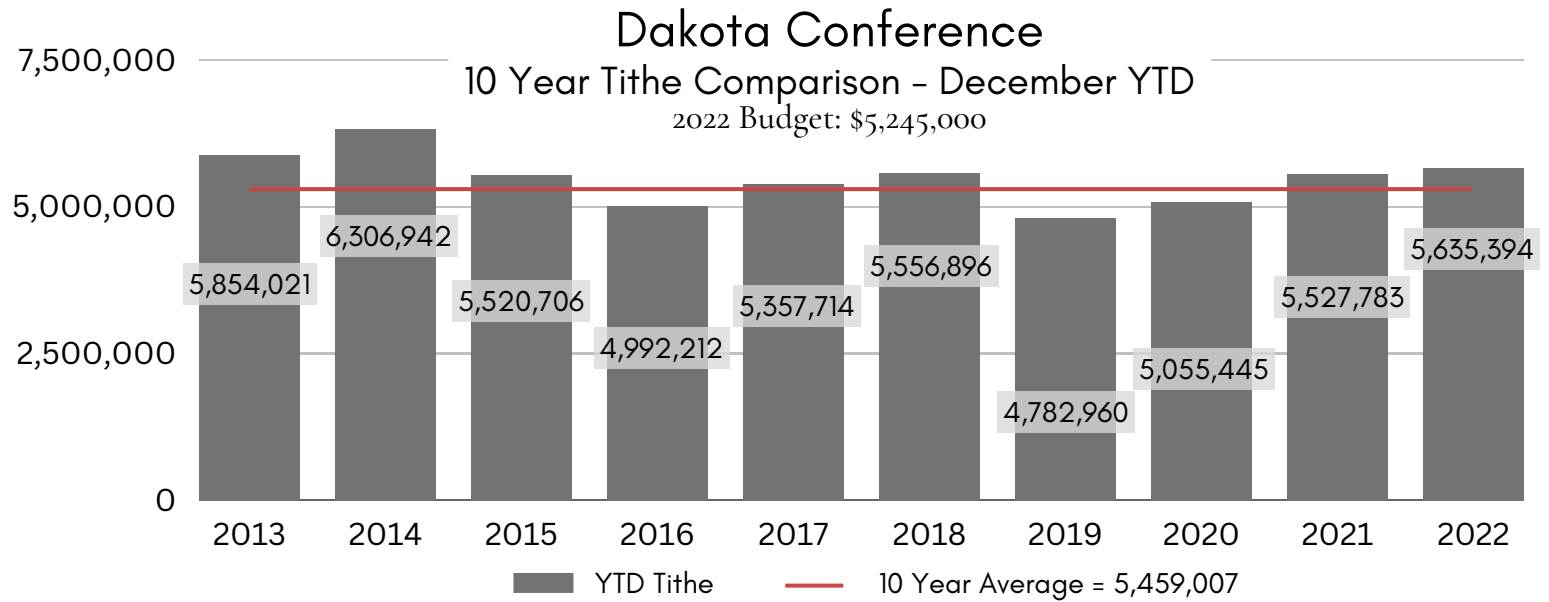
In Isaiah 43:19, God tells His people that He delights to do new things. I believe we are on the verge of great progress that the Lord wants to bring about across our conference. How will you respond?

Financial Report

Mark Seibold, VP of Finance

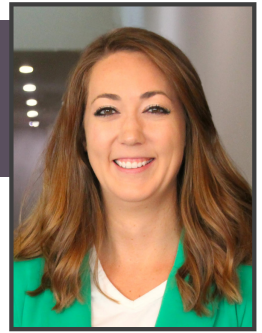


The faithfulness and generosity of the Dakota church members was in evidence again in 2022. The year-end tithe surpassed budget by over \$390K, despite membership holding even over last year. At last accounting, expenses were substantially under budget, yielding the strong possibility of a much better than budgeted fiscal year. We’re grateful for the commitment of our Dakota members in supporting the mission of the church through Dakota Conference as well as our associated higher-level church organizations. Thank you!



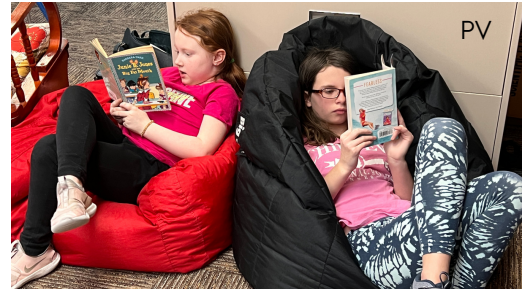
Dakota Elementary Schools

Kelli Wasemiller, Education Superintendent

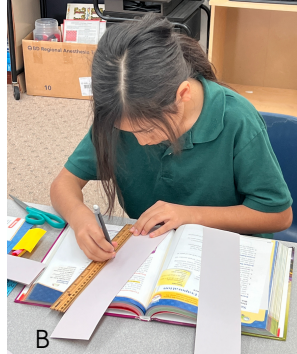
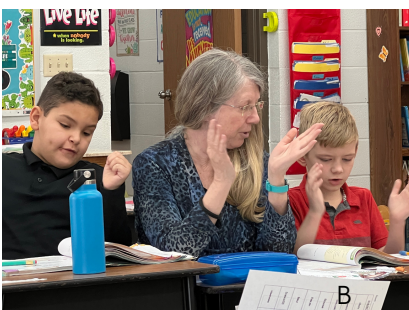


As the superintendent, it is my amazing privilege to visit our schools. I have been personally blessed by each teacher and student. Below is a small glimpse of what's been happening across the Dakotas in our elementary schools. To learn more about our Adventist elementary schools, contact Kelli Wasemiller at: superintendent.dakota@gmail.com

Hillcrest - Jamestown, ND: Mrs. Lang and the lower grade class collected gloves and mittens to take to their local Salvation Army. Every morning during class worship, they take out songbooks, make requests, and sing together praising Jesus through music. Mrs. Smith's upper-grade class recently completed their study of North Dakota state history. Students researched different topics to present to their class and then created a board game to play as a culminating activity. The class went above and beyond with their creativity and might give Monopoly and Candy Land a run for their money.



Brentwood - Bismarck, ND: Mrs. Eszler and Mr. Reese found their Christmas program rescheduled due to snow, but the students did a tremendous job singing, playing chimes, and sharing a drama about the many gifts of Jesus. Students recently finished a country research project where they created PowerPoints with pictures and information about their country to present to their school community. They even found recipes and made food, so everyone could sample a taste of their country's cuisine.



Invitation Hill - Dickinson, ND: This year's Christmas program, "Christmas at the White House," took us back in time to James and Ellen White's home and all of the ways we can celebrate Jesus. Mrs. Wright and Mrs. Hay did an amazing job coordinating music, costumes, and decorations, all while being flexible since snow storms caused the program to be rescheduled. Mrs. Hay is teaching her lower grades classroom all about the Bible: the order and categories of books, how to look up passages in the Bible, and how all the different books are part of God's big story of love and redemption. Watching Mrs. Wright work one-on-one with her students is a joy as her close relationship with each student is apparent as she makes sure that each student's individual needs are met.





Prairie Voyager - Grand Forks, ND: There's never a dull moment in Mrs. Erickson's class. For Bible class, students used fabric markers to draw different scenes from the life of Elisha. The pictures will then be sewn into a special class quilt. In science they are studying energy, so they built a roller coaster and are working on accompanying STEM projects. Perhaps the real highlight is the mountains of snow out in the parking lot that makes for some amazing fort building and sledding. Creativity abounds at Prairie Voyager!

Rapid City - SD: Ms. Howell and Ms. Harper organized a Christmas program entitled, "The Nazareth Evening News," which told the story of Jesus's birth through the evening news complete with eyewitness reports, reporters in the field, and interviews with Mary and Joseph. They are currently studying weather and climate in science class and took the entire school on a field trip to a local news station. They were able to watch a live broadcast and practice their meteorology skills with a green screen.



Sioux Falls - SD: Mr. Roberts in Sioux Falls has worked with his students to create an aquaponics system. Fish tanks feature a variety of class pets, but above the tanks, students planted seed starts. Soon a garden will be growing in their classroom with a sustainable cycle of nutrients supplied by the fish, while plants reciprocate by filtering the tank water. The class is also in the middle of 40 Days of Prayer, and following their daily themed devotional, they write down prayer requests and each take turns talking to their friend Jesus.



DAKOTA ADVENTIST CAMPS

SUMMER 2023

Flag Mountain Camp

CUB (ages 8-10) June 14-18
 JUNIOR (ages 11-13) June 18-25
 TEEN (ages 14-17) June 25-July 2

Northern Lights Camp

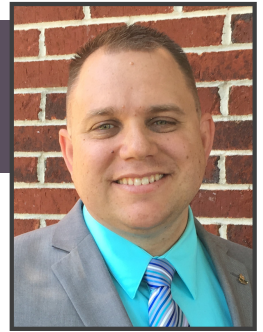
CUB (ages 8-10) July 12-16
 JUNIOR (ages 11-13) July 16-23
 TEEN (ages 14-17) July 23-30

REGISTER ONLINE!

REGISTER: dakotayouthandyoungadults.org

Once a Pathfinder, Always a Pathfinder

Ted Struntz, Youth & Young Adults Director



When I was a child, a gentleman in my church was a Marine. It didn't matter that he was at the "age of retirement"; it was abundantly obvious he still represented the USMC, and he was proud of it! He liked to say, "Once a Marine, always a Marine." Well, I believe the same can be said of Pathfinders: once a Pathfinder, always a Pathfinder. And this phrase is clearly lived out in the Dakotas.



Pathfinders from around our conference met together at DAA February 3-5 to participate in our conference Pathfinder Bible Experience (PBE). PBE is a revamping of Bible Bowl where Pathfinders diligently study a book (or several books) of the Bible and then demonstrate their learning by correctly answering questions. This year, our clubs faithfully studied the Gospel of John. This weekend we also unveiled our new conference Pathfinder patch, designed by Lynnette Struntz, that highlights some wonders of God's creation in North and South Dakota.

On Friday evening, I spoke on Psalm 119 and the power of Scripture in our daily lives. Leading out in music for the weekend with me were Drs. Mike and Jaime Bohlman from Hot Springs, SD, and their two daughters, Pathfinders Christina and Micaela. Two Sabbath morning highlights were Bible Jeopardy led by Richard Ray, Pathfinder area coordinator, and the Master Guide investiture of Jaime Bohlman.

Lynnette Struntz



It was awesome and heartwarming to see all of the Pathfinders in their Class A uniforms. While it is not uncommon for Pathfinders to wear their Class A's on Sabbath, this occurrence was especially meaningful and a powerful demonstration of the brotherhood and sisterhood of Pathfinders in light of a recent personal tragedy suffered by two leaders of our Rapid City Rushmore Mountaineers Club, LuAnne and Don Larson. Barely two weeks before the start of our PBE weekend, the Larsons' home completely burned down. Through God's miraculous working, they both escaped from the fire; however, besides losing all of their own possessions, most of their club's uniforms and equipment were also lost because

they had been stored at their house after a recent Pathfinder weekend. Their PBE team had been diligently studying throughout the year, and now they were missing the Class A uniforms required for participating in PBE. Immediately, word spread throughout the Pathfinder community; quickly, different parts of Class A uniforms started arriving for the Rushmore Mountaineers. Leaders and Pathfinders outside of the Dakotas also heard about the predicament and jumped at the chance to help part of the Pathfinder community. Soon they had the necessary uniforms. It was moving to see each member of the Rapid City PBE team proudly wearing Class A uniforms that had come from different Pathfinder "family members."

Another poignant moment of the weekend was when each Pathfinder shared how long they had been in Pathfinders - some, like LuAnne Larson, have been Pathfinders for nearly 50 years! Others shared how they hadn't been "active" Pathfinders for several years but were now back as leaders - truly living up to my belief: once a Pathfinder, always a Pathfinder.

That afternoon, teams participated in PBE and did well! Rapid City Rushmore Mountaineers earned a third-place finish and Black Hills Lightbearers earned a second-place finish. Hermosa Battle Creek Warriors and Cleveland Prairie Trails had first-place finishes and will represent the Dakota Conference at the Mid-America Union Conference PBE event on February 18. We're so proud of all the Pathfinders that were able to come to our conference event. Our next big Pathfinder event will be our Pathfinder Parade held during Campmeeting; then our conference Camporee at Flag Mountain Camp in August. We can't wait!

Jodi Dossenko



Dakota Conference
28th Annual Men's Retreat

THE CHRISTIAN & THE NATION

March 10-12, 2023
Speaker: Dr. Cedric Vine

ROUGH RIDER HOTEL
301 3rd Avenue
Medora, North Dakota



For more information & to register use the QR code.



Lynnette Struntz

Lynnette Struntz has been hired as the new associate director for youth and young adults. She began working for the conference in January and comes to us with a strong background in communication and years of experience working with and ministering to young people. Her position was made possible due to the generosity of a private donor who deeply values youth ministries and wants to specifically see the young people of the Dakota Conference ministered to. In her new position, Lynnette will assist in the planning and implantation of department programs including Club Ministries, Camp Ministry, youth and young adult retreats, and rallies. For the time being, Lynnette has also been hired to work part-time as the office administrative assistant and morning receptionist. Lynnette is married to Ted and the couple has two daughters.

For the last two and a half years, Judy Weir has worked at the office as the treasury clerk. This year she has also taken on the role of trust director. Judy graduated from Union College with a degree in elementary education. Her first teaching position was the director of adult education in Berrien Springs, MI, while her husband Mark went to seminary. During the day she worked for a corporate and estate planning attorney and taught adult education each evening. Since that time, Judy has worked primarily in the law field in multiple states earning a paralegal certificate. She loves the wide-open spaces of the Dakotas, the blue skies that stretch forever, and the conference members who are generous beyond measure. Judy is excited to serve the members in the capacity of trust director and looks forward to meeting new faces. Judy is married to Mark and together they have three children and two grandchildren.

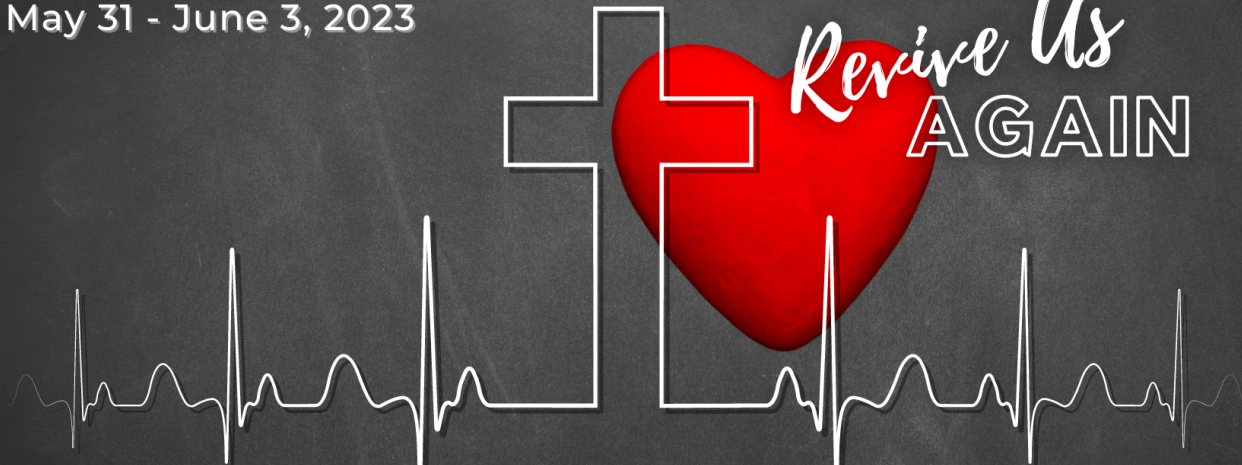


Judy Weir

DAKOTA CAMPMEETING

May 31 - June 3, 2023

Revive Us
AGAIN



Dakota Conference

OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

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www.dakotaadventist.org



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CALENDAR

February

- 18 MAUC Pathfinder Bible Experience - Lincoln, NE
- 20 Office Closed - Presidents' Day
- 23-26 DAA Preview Days - DAA

March

- 5 K-12 Board of Education - Office (10a)
- 10-12 Men's Retreat - Medora, ND
- 19 Executive Committee - Office (10a)
- 25 Jamestown Regional
- 26-28 New in Ministry Meetings - Office

April

- 3-4 Teacher Spring In-service - Office
- 8 Education Sabbath
- 10 Office Closed - Easter
- 16 DAA Community Work Bee (8a)
- 20 MAUC Executive Committee - Lincoln, NE
- 29 Fargo Regional
- 30 K-12 Board of Education - Office (10a)

May

- 7 Women's Mini-Retreat - Bismarck, ND (12p)
- 19-21 DAA Graduation Weekend
- 31-3 Dakota Campmeeting

President, Evangelism, ASI

Mark Weir

VP of Admin, HR, Church Ministries

Mark Piotrowski

Admin Assistant, Assoc. Youth Director

Lynnette Struntz

Trust Assistant, Membership Clerk

Julie Brude

Communication Director

Jodi Dossenko

Development Director, ABC

Lynette Miller

VP of Finance

Mark Seibold

Associate Treasurer

Cindy Miller

Treasury Clerk, Trust Director

Judy Weir

Youth & Young Adults, Camps

Ted Struntz

Maintenance Services

Marlin Miller

Field Directors

Adventist Community Services

Bob Forbes II

Education

Kelli Wasemiller

Men's Ministries

Randy Rubbert

Ministerial

Vernon Herholdt

Prayer Ministries

Barry St. Clair

Women's Ministries

Paulette Bullinger