

Making Disciples for Life



HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE REGIONAL CONFERENCES

➤ What We're Trying to Accomplish

The world is at a tipping point. Many are speaking of our culture as “post-Christian.” We behold great challenges and great opportunities as we proclaim salvation in the valley of the shadow of death. Our opportunities are obvious; “the fields are white for harvest.” The LCMS is one of the few remaining strong, internationally relevant, and unabashedly biblical church bodies in the world.

Among our challenges is that we are not walking together, sharing resources and listening to each other as we should. If we are to meet the tests of the day, clergy and laypeople, congregations, districts, national Synod and Synod institutions must break free from their silos and love, support and encourage each other. We must share wisdom and resources. While holding firmly to the truth, we must challenge the legacy of distrust that has isolated us from one another.

The design of *Making Disciples for Life* (MDFL) conferences will change over time as we learn and grow smarter about the ways to best work together. We hope to **create powerful feedback channels** through which our resources, our opportunities and our mission can be evaluated, shared and undertaken together. We want to **learn about the gifts and resources** the Lord has given to our church outside of our individual experiences. We want to **learn about the gaps in our resources** and discover the best ways to create what the church really needs. We want to **get to know one another** and fulfill the Bible's depiction of the church as a body in which all the parts work together for the common good.

➤ Why This Conference Is Different

Traditional conferences and resource sharing events tend to be *information dumps*. Experts speak to rooms full of people. They tell the audience why they are failing. “A change in mindset, activity and behavior is all you need to succeed.” In terms of Law and Gospel, this is harsh Law. Studies have shown that conferences structured this way have little lasting impact.

The first difference is that MDFL conferences are built on the baseline idea that we need to respect the wisdom, insights and needs of forgiven sinners who daily engage in our shared mission. Our job is to help each other, encourage, provide resources and otherwise assist each other in the harvest. MDFL conference planners studied insights from the latest psychological and educational sources and contacted experts to create a conference design that has demonstrated success in secular continuing education. As we guessed, it led us back to the model that is found everywhere in Scripture.

MDFL conferences include a significant component of *tabletop* discussions wherein everyone, under the leadership of a subject matter expert, shares ideas, needs and solutions to the challenges we face together.

The design of our group sessions is different too. These are conscious attempts to build cohorts of people who have a common base of resources from which to draw and build.

Presentations by LCMS leaders are not intended to be folks on top giving marching orders to the troops. Instead, they are opportunities for these leaders to talk about what specific challenges and opportunities loom large from their vantage point. They are opportunities for you to learn about mission matters from a broader perspective. We hope to create an environment like St. Peter's, when he said, "Your brothers and sisters are going through the same sufferings you have," or St. Paul's, who said, "I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, about the suffering we experienced in Asia." These are times to take heart and to share information and wisdom that will allow us to take action together.

➤ How Do You Prepare?

As you come to the MDFL conference, keep in mind that this is the church gathered together. Affirm one another in our identity in Christ. We can put our mission successes and missteps on full display because we all need the wisdom that comes from these lessons. We should learn from each other because we forgiven sinners are gifts to one another from a God who loves us and died for us.

For the tabletop discussions, do not just sign up for discussions about topics with which you need help. Come prepared to share your own resources if you have them. Remember that one outcome we want is information about *what we don't know* or *a resource we don't have, but should*.

Build networks and help us be a part of those networks. We want to meet people who are *in mission*. Please be prepared to give feedback. MDFL conferences seek to be a part of an active conversation held throughout the Synod that benefits everyone. We will listen and learn as we go.

Finally, pray for our mission. God the Holy Spirit has endowed us with gifts too great to fully understand. God the Son purchased this church with His blood. God the Father wills that all be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.