

Dakota Dispatch

DAKOTA CONFERENCE: SHARING THE UNCHANGING
LOVE OF JESUS IN A CHANGING WORLD.

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Celebrating the Greatest Gift

BY ELDER VERNON HERHOLDT

As we celebrate Christmas, we are reminded of the greatest gift ever given, Jesus Christ, born to bring hope, peace, and salvation to the world. During the season's joy and activity, may our hearts remain centered on Him.

As a word of encouragement, cherish time with family and friends, extend kindness to those who may be struggling this Christmas, and let the love of Christ be seen through your words and actions. May this season renew your faith and strengthen your witness.

In appreciation, I want to express my sincere thanks for your commitment, dedication, and generosity throughout this past year. Your faithfulness in prayer, service, and giving has strengthened the work of the Church across our Conference.

I want to wish you a blessed and peaceful Christmas, as well as a prosperous New Year. Please remember that you are in my prayers. I pray that God will continue to pour out His blessing upon each one of you and your families.

Merry Christmas and God's blessings upon you and your loved ones.

Vernon

Elder Vernon Herholdt serves as the Dakota Conference president.

Dakota Insight

Executive Committee Highlights

The Dakota Conference Executive Committee met on December 7, 2025, to review ministry progress, financial reports, and plans for the future.

President's Report

President Vernon Herholdt shared updates on several key initiatives. Plans are underway to plant new churches in Brookings, Sioux Falls, Fargo, and Rapid City as part of the Conference's ongoing commitment to reach growing communities. Looking ahead, a leadership summit—*Called to Serve: Dakota Leadership Summit*—is being planned for November 6–8, 2026, at the Dakota Adventist Academy campus. The event will focus on training and equipping members and leaders for ministry.

Pentecost 2025 is nearing completion, with 26 sites registered across the Conference and the majority already completing their programs. The North American Division has expressed interest in continuing the initiative under a new format, tentatively titled *Pentecost 2025 and Beyond*. Additional updates included the hiring of Nathan Roe as camp ranger for Northern Lights Camp and Forest Mountain Camp, ongoing work to renovate the DAA gymnastics room (former ABC) into a ministry chapel, and the continued search for a Conference cook.

Membership Report

In his administrative report, Elder Jason Logan noted encouraging membership trends. The Conference has recorded 31 baptisms and 22 professions of faith so far this year, placing Dakota Conference on track for its first year of positive growth in a decade.

Financial Report

Richard Ray, treasurer, reported that tithe income through the end of October remains in line with last year and above the ten-year average. Evangelism funds continue to grow, working capital stands at 5.82 months of reserves, and both income and expenses are currently under budget.

The Finance Committee shared additional positive news. The annual Conference audit received an unmodified opinion—the highest possible rating. The committee also voted parsonage exclusions for pastors, set the operating budget at 95 percent of tithe, and approved a Christmas bonus for all Conference employees.

During the Corporation Board report, members noted that overall finances remain steady. Rent will increase by 2.5 percent beginning in July. The board also voted to clear all Dakota Adventist Academy student debt and release transcripts.

Several enabling actions were approved during the meeting, including authorization to acquire a new healthcare insurance provider. All reports and actions were approved by vote.

Looking Ahead

“The Dakota Conference is in a season of growth and opportunity. Our strategic initiatives emphasize reclaiming members, planting new churches, training leaders, and empowering youth for mission. Evangelism remains central, supported by both traditional efforts and innovative, community-focused approaches. With God’s blessing and the support of our members and leadership, the Dakotas continue to grow as a place where members and youth are equipped to strengthen the mission field,” said Elder Vernon Herholdt.

Article compiled by Jodi Dossenko, Conference communication director, from Executive Committee minutes and supporting documents.

Sharing Cookies, Gifts, and Christmas Cheer

BY GAYE OZANNE

On Sunday, December 14, the Pierre Adventist Church Women’s Ministries hosted a festive cookie and gift exchange that brought together fellowship, laughter, and seasonal cheer. Fifteen ladies attended the afternoon gathering—along with one special baby guest—and the group included four women from the community who are not members of the church.

The event began with a short devotional, then the ladies enjoyed games and refreshments before participating in a lighthearted “steal the gift” exchange that brought plenty of smiles and laughter. The afternoon concluded with each attendee heading home with an assortment of homemade cookies, along with warm memories of time well spent together.





Gaye Ozanne is the Pierre Adventist Church communication leader. She also provided the photos.

Bye, Bye Santa!

BY PASTOR LICINIUS CHIRIAC

A while ago, I read a story. It was about a boy who was praying loudly in his room: “Oh God, you can do everything! Please give me a new iPod! Please answer my prayer! Please God!”

His father, who was watching the news on the TV in the next room, finally said: “Hey, son! Don’t yell like that! God is not deaf!”

“I know, Dad,” the boy replied, “but Grandma lives next door... and SHE definitely is!”

I used this illustration because this is exactly what happens during this time of the year. Everybody is chasing gifts.

Christmas has become a wild race through crowded stores, with people trying to buy peace by the pound and happiness on sale. An entire civilization wraps emptiness in shiny paper, yet forgets that the only gift that ever mattered did not cost money—it cost blood.

Everyone is talking about Santa. Santa becomes the hero of the season—the man of the day! His name is on everyone’s lips. Parents fill their children’s heads with stories about the old man who puts a pile of presents under the tree. Santa—the Holiday Hero.

I never liked Santa. In fact, we Romanian kids didn’t even have Santa Claus. We had another old man, slower, who came on December 31st instead of the 25th, and his name was Old Freezy Man (Moş Gerilă). He was brought to us by the Russian communists, not riding a horse sleigh, but riding a tank. He had a big nose and red cheeks (probably from the Russian vodka) and spoke loudly and roughly. He never came to our homes—only to school. And he never actually knew us.

I mean... He didn’t know who we were—boys or girls, short or tall, smart or not! I

know this because once, when he brought gifts to the class, he gave me a little pink doll! Are you kidding me? All my classmates received cars, guns, airplanes... And me?! A pink doll? Come on! From that moment on, I started to hate him.

After the Revolution in Romania, Old Freezy Man was “executed,” and Santa Claus started visiting us too. But honestly, I think there is no real difference between them.

People use Santa as a commercial agent—he can sell anything fast. They also use him like a political canvasser: he makes many promises, but like any good politician, he rarely fulfills them. In a world that is poorer and sadder, Santa Claus is always fat and laughing. He never has any problems or worries.

Why don't I like Santa Claus? Because he is an impostor. He hijacked a celebration that never belonged to him.

He became a carefully crafted distraction—a pleasant decoy used by the enemy to shift the world's eyes away from Christ. Christmas was meant to be about one thing: the birth of the Savior, God stepping into our world, Light breaking into darkness. But slowly, another character stepped into the center—not born in a manger, not prophesied, not carrying salvation, but carrying packages and promises he never paid for.

And little by little, the world moved its focus: from the Child to the character; from adoration to decoration; from worship to shopping.

He asks for the spotlight without deserving it. He receives credit for gifts he didn't provide. He offers joy he cannot sustain. The most subtle deception is that he looks harmless—cheerful, jolly, innocent—yet manages to replace the sacred with the superficial.

He doesn't destroy Christmas; he dilutes it. He doesn't fight Christ; he distracts from Him. This is why I say: He took what was not his. He stepped into a story that belongs to Christ alone. And for that I can say without problems: Farewell, Santa—Christmas is not yours! It is Christ's!

So today I want to say: Goodbye, Santa. Farewell! Why? Because he gives us worthless things that we quickly get attached to, while we give up things that truly matter. The things that are valuable—eternal things—do not perish and are not fleeting. These valuable things do not come from people. Not from parents or relatives. Not from bosses, subordinates, friends, or acquaintances.

And they definitely do not come from Santa Claus—because, in fact, when he “brings” gifts to children, he is wearing their parents' shoes. The true gifts come only from the One who came down from Heaven into the manger in Bethlehem—Jesus Christ.

And today, Jesus is shamelessly being replaced by an old, noisy man dressed in red,

accompanied by strange elves. So... Farewell, Santa! I don't need you, because I met a Savior who gave me what you could never give, even if you promised me the whole world.

I want to leave you with three reasons why I choose Christ's gifts and not Santa's:

1. Santa's gifts are perishable. Christ's gifts are eternal.
2. Santa's gifts depend on someone's labor. Jesus' gifts are free.
3. Santa does not give anything from his own resources. Jesus gave EVERYTHING He had.

So tonight say, "Jesus, I love You. I have no other gift, so I give You my heart."

As for Santa... I am finished with him. Farewell, old man. I will stay with Jesus forever. AMEN.

Pastor Licinius Chiriac serves the Willston, Watford City, and Grassy Butte church district in North Dakota.

Prayer Ministries | Monthly Prayer Emphasis

PLEASE KEEP THE FOLLOWING IN YOUR PRAYERS FOR THE MONTH OF DECEMBER

Theme: Coming Advent - Remembering the First Coming, Applying the Spirit, Looking for the Second Coming

Pastoral Staff: Jonathan Olivo, Darren Purdy

Education Staff: Ercilia Patel

Office Staff: Vernon Herholdt, Jason Logan, Richard Ray

Adventist Entities: Hurley Church, Mitchell Church, Sioux Falls Church, Sioux Falls School, Yankton Church

Southeast South Dakota: Sioux Falls, Mitchell, Yankton, Hurley, Brookings, Vermillion, Yankton Reservation

Other: General Conference (GC) & World Divisions

Prayer Ministries | Monthly Prayer Emphasis

PLEASE KEEP THE FOLLOWING IN YOUR PRAYERS FOR THE MONTH OF JANUARY

Theme: Pleading for the Spirit

Pastoral Staff: Licinius Chiriac

Office Staff: Vernon Herholdt,
Jason Logan, Richard Ray

Adventist Entities: Watford City
Church, Williston Church

Northwest North Dakota: Fort
Berthold Reservation,
Williston, Watford City,
Tioga, Stanley, New Town



Other: General Conference (GC) & World Divisions

[Click here](#) to visit the Prayer Ministries webpage. Click the graphic above to join Dakotans Pray each Thursday via Microsoft Teams.

Dakota Conference Calendar

ALL EVENTS ARE SCHEDULED IN CENTRAL TIME—LOCAL TO THE OFFICE

December -

- **20: Worthy Student**
- 23-31: Conference Office Closed - Christmas break
- **27: Local Church Budget**

January -

- 1: Conference Office Closed - New Year's Day
- **3: Local Church Budget**
- 3: Elder Vernon Herholdt preaching in Watertown, SD
- 9-11: Pathfinder Leadership Training at DAA Campus
- **10: NAD Religious Liberty**
- 10: Elder Jason Logan preaching in Aberdeen, SD
- **17: Local Church Budget**
- 17: Elder Vernon Herholdt preaching in McClusky, ND
- 18: K-12 Board of Education at Conference Office (10a)
- **24: Dakota Challenge**
- 24: Bismarck Regional with Elder Vernon preaching at the Bismarck Church
- **31: Local Church Budget**
- 31: Elder Vernon Herholdt preaching in New Home, ND

Stay connected—check out our full event [calendar](#) online.

Are you a church treasurer looking for the 2026 offering readings and schedule?
[Click here!](#) Hard copies were mailed to your church in early December.

Blessed and Kept

BY CASEY BARTLETT

May you remember the name that gives this time of year meaning.
Immanuel... God with us.

May you sacrifice your stress and anxiety on the altar of Immanuel.
May the prayer of your sacrifice be a repetition of the promises of God's presence.


May you have peace, knowing the prince of peace is with you.
May you not fear the shadows, for God is with you.
May you not be troubled by attacks from the enemy, for the victor of all things is with you.
May you know joy, for the author of joy is with you.

God is with you always, to the very end of the age.

May the traditions and rhythms of the season point you away from stress and deeper into the reality of Immanuel.

Casey Bartlett is a member of the Dakota Conference. To follow Casey's podcast, *Blessed & Kept*, click [here](#).





Jodi Dossenko
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Have local church news or stories to share?
We'd love to hear from you! Send event details, news suggestions, articles, and photos to the email listed above.

Dakota Dispatch Mission: To build a climate of encouragement and blessing through the sharing of witnessing and evangelism activities. Cover photo of soybean field is by Chrystal Rittenbach.

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