

2023 Annual Report of the President of the NLS

My brothers and sisters in Christ –

This past year has been a blessed one, albeit one still with challenges. The best news is that the past 12 months have seen a return to something more like “normal,” with most secretariats able to resume holding weekends again. Women and men around the country are once again hearing God’s call that “Christ is counting on you,” and are receiving training and encouragement in how they can respond to that call. Praise God for sustaining this ministry through the past years – and thank you to everyone who remained faithful and energetic in helping us resume activity after the COVID interruption.

Of course, the past three years did leave some lingering effects. We’ve been informed by two secretariats that they had to close their doors this past year, unable to recover from the interruption of regular activity. And several other secretariats have let us know they are struggling and are unsure about their futures. Should any of you have similar concerns, don’t feel like you have to wrestle with these challenges alone. *Assisting local secretariats is the primary reason for the existence of the National Lutheran Secretariat.* Reach out to us, starting with your regional coordinator. I can personally attest that these wonderful servants of Christ have been actively helping several struggling secretariats. Remember - an isolated Christian (or secretariat) is a paralyzed Christian. But never forget – together, you and Christ are an unbeatable majority. Let the NLS help you as you move forward with Christ.

The past 12 months have also seen us achieve a long-sought-after objective: we finally were able to review and approve necessary changes to our by-laws. The online town hall meetings allowed members to review the proposed amendments, ask questions, and get more background information. On December 3, a quorum of delegates overwhelming voted to accept all proposed amendments, helping clarify some of our bylaws and making it significantly easier to constitute a proper quorum while ensuring adequate representation was maintained. I cannot thank all our membership enough – NLS Executive Committee members, Regional Coordinators, Lay Directors, and individual delegates – for all your help and support in helping ensure we finished this work while allowing everyone to participate.

One of our goals last year was to improve communications and this past year has seen us sustain and increase our efforts. I hosted a Lay Directors’ Round Table discussion online each quarter which was well attended and creates a forum for leaders to share ideas and discuss common challenges and solutions. If your Lay Director (President/Convener) cannot attend, he or she is welcome to have a representative attend. The restriction of one attendee per secretariat is only to keep numbers to a reasonable size and allow everyone to participate – we aren’t trying to keep anyone out. Remember – this is *your* forum, an opportunity to have the same kind of open discussions we enjoy here at the Annual Gathering. Please take advantage of these meetings to be heard and learn from other VdC leaders.

And in the same vein, Pastor G. Karl Gaston has initiated a periodic Spiritual Directors’ Round Table. I encourage every secretariat to have their own Spiritual Directors join in these discussions. We’ve also been sending out monthly “NLS Update” emails to the broadest possible audience. If you’ve not been receiving these emails, please reach out to our database coordinators at databasecoordinator@viadecristo.org to ensure you are included in our mailing list. The update

provides shorter messages keeping you abreast of upcoming events, NLS activities, and opportunities to serve.

This spring, we started a new Website Revision committee. The mission of this small group is to develop new or revised content for the NLS website to make it more useful for secretariats. If you've ever gone on the NLS site and felt there was something missing or had an idea for something that would be helpful, this is the group for you. We are a small band right now and are initially focusing on aids to sponsors, such as a welcoming video and an informational brochure that secretariats could download and modify for their own use. If this sounds intriguing to you, please reach out to me at president@viadecristo.org. We can use all sorts of talents, from IT professionals to creative people with good ideas.

Finally, many of you have noted that I am not running for re-election as President this summer. It has been an honor and a privilege to serve you these past two years and you have all uniformly shown me Godly grace and generosity throughout my tenure. For a number of reasons, I do not believe God is calling me to a second term, though I will happily support the next President and NLS Executive Committee in any way they deem helpful. It has been humbling to be permitted to serve God and the Via de Cristo movement in this capacity for the past two years and I remain confident that God has even greater things in store for us all as we seek to serve our mission: *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.*

God loves you all – more than you can realize – and so do I!

John Aclin

President of the National Lutheran Secretariat