



Grace across China NOW

“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.” John 3:16

District Convention Report – Summer 2024

Prayers are not restricted by distance or culture. Let me pastorally zoom in on a prayer request for one of our Chinese sisters, Theresa (pseudonym) who has recently faced a life-ending health crisis. Truly, she has been a committed bible study student, a translator, an encourager, an organizer, a communicator and recruiter for our Grace Bible Institute for a decade. Now she’s in the hospital, post-surgery, wondering what God’s plan is for her life. Join your hearts with mine in prayer, “Lord, you know what our dear sister in the faith is dealing with. You have known her from the time she was conceived and born. You have loved her through the sacrificial work of your Son, offering her a crown of glory when her journey here is over and her new life in heaven with you begins. For the sake of her family, friends and fellow students, we ask you to spare her great suffering. Continue to use her life as a testimony to your grace, even as you reassure her that you will not leave or forsake her. We entrust her future into your gracious hands, knowing that you will be there for each of us when our time comes. Bless her with the confidence of faith to the very end.” This is how the family of faith bonds together across the miles and the borders. In Christ and in his forgiveness, we are one family – the family of faith.

About 316NOW
316NOW is a ministry of WELS and ELS members who are committed to bringing the gospel to the Chinese people by empowering Chinese Christian leaders and churches through Scripture study, mentoring, and consulting. As a partner ministry with the WELS, 316NOW collaborates with other WELS ministries that are China-focused.

Grace Bible Institute (Pastor Bob Balza, Administrator)

For the past nineteen years, this has been the core of 316NOW’s (previously China Partners) work. Many pastors have taught online through interpreters and then visited their study groups and house churches in China. Those tours of mainland China have stopped for a simple reason: China doesn’t want Christian influence outside of its control. The pandemic allowed the government, led by Xi Jinping, the president of the People's Republic of China (PRC) since 2013, to restrict travel by foreigners, especially Christian preachers and teachers. In these past four years, only a few of our American pastors have entered mainland China. Their teaching could only be done in very small groups that met privately, out of sight of the government.



Deep in contemplation of God’s Word

Our online classes diminished during this time and communication became strained. Many students no longer responded or joined our studies. However, as covid restrictions lightened in 2022, we were able to slowly start again and rebuild our contacts. Currently, we work through liaison pastors who have become the hub for relationships. (More detail on this below). With their counsel and recruitment, we are back up to four or five concurrent classes. Our teachers gathered their classes during Spring,

and continue their weekly studies. In addition to the standard studies (like John’s Gospel, Parenting, Law & Gospel, and Baptism) we are introducing a new deaconess curriculum.

The goal remains the same – to raise up confessional Lutheran leaders (both men and women) to serve their churches, house churches and study groups. We work whenever and wherever possible with the Asia One Team to coordinate and communicate mission opportunities.

One new development seems to be on the horizon within our digital communication platform, enabled by AI (artificial intelligence). The closed caption features a “translator” that may offer transparency for our English-speaking teachers if they can catch some of the Mandarin responses before the translator speaks.

Expatriate Outreach (Pastor James Enderle, Administrator)

Because so many Chinese people have emigrated (there are now fifty million expats from China spread all over the world), we’ve initiated a new division of work called Expatriate Outreach. With the assistance of a digital consultant from Texas, we have started recruiting students in America through Google Ads and a new website.

Our goal is to broaden our bandwidth of communications as we guide individuals toward a local ministry where they can worship, receive the Word and Sacraments, and grow in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. As they mature in faith, we expect some students to self-identify for deeper study and potential leadership. We’re working with the Pastoral Studies Institute to help those who are called by the Holy Spirit to seek training for pastoral ministry.

*The **Diaspora of the Chinese people** (this is a Greek word that means the “dispersion or spread of a people from their original homeland”) has opened doors all over the world as huge numbers of people leave the mainland for a better life. Click this link [DIASPORA](#) for a detailed explanation of the numbers and this for the [impact on expatriate strategies](#) across Christianity.*

Mentoring Counseling Ministry (Pastor Adam Gawel, Administrator)

This team primarily supports our pastors, leaders, and house churches in mainland China. Adam has direct contact with our liaison pastors as they think and pray over their people and develop strategies to invite others into the framework of confessional Lutheran (biblical) teaching.

Pastor Barnabas (pseudonym) has expanded his role to develop a new network of leaders and coordinators throughout the mainland. His efforts have resulted in many baptisms, workshops and training in confessional Lutheran doctrine. His study of John’s gospel has grown significantly these past couple months. Details here are best not put into print, but the administrators are thrilled to see the ownership by the



local pastors. Ultimately, the strength of church planting remains word of mouth and personal relationships. We pray like Paul for those who serve in these leadership positions, *Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift! (2 Cor. 9:13-15)*

Security remains a concern for every individual and group. We consult with IT experts as well as our students on how to keep God’s people safe in their communications. Yet we also continue to reach out carefully to identify new students. By mapping our contacts and leaders, we have a much clearer picture of who is where and what they’re doing.

Mission Advancement (Pastor Jim Kleist, Administrator)

Our team has worked hard to advance our communication and interaction with supporters. We especially thank Pastor Jim Aderman for his contributions to these efforts during the past decade. His unique gifts of writing and marketing will continue to support our work as our special consultant. Jim Kleist and his support team respond to all inquiries or questions about our ministry. They thank and inform donors, keep accurate records, produce brochures, pamphlets, reports, and cards. Together with Pastor Aderman, Jim is creating a strategy for next year based on the 20th Anniversary of 316NOW. You will be hearing more about this in 2025.

Family & Marriage (No Current Administrator)

316NOW is building a clearinghouse for marriage and family materials that Chinese church leaders will use to train families for a better, more biblical balance in marriage and parenting. Up to this point, we have defined our strategy and gathered resources. We're in a holding pattern as we recruit a leader for this work. We continue to pray that we might find the right person at the right time to move this effort forward.



Sheep to Lambs helps at home

Sheep to Lambs (Bob Fischer, Administrator)

This division equips Chinese Christians to teach children about God's grace in Jesus. This is important in China because it's illegal to teach anyone under 18 about the Bible. Sunday schools, Christian camps, and Christian schools no longer exist in China. *Sheep to Lambs* provides training and lesson materials so any teacher can be successful. It also provides age-appropriate and biblically sound materials for students.

During the last calendar year, a second set of Sheep to Lambs lessons for grades K-2 has been written. These are currently being translated into Mandarin and will be linked to our 316NOW website for use by Chinese

families here in the US and in China. Parents will be directed to these lessons by church leaders (pastors, deaconesses, teachers) for use in their homes. In addition, five lessons instructing leaders in the best way to guide parents in their efforts have been written.

From our Liaison (Pastor Barnabas, pseudonym)

Many details are purposely not specific.

- AB's Seed ministry has been around for 10+ years. (Three cities) all have fruit of God's prosperity through this ministry. As far as (one city) is concerned, there are more than 20 groups serving 350 souls, with several pastors. This ministry continues to grow today.
- God used me to reach out to the CD Church in the west through an online ministry during the time of the epidemic, including theology classes. I visited them. They have grown from a church of 100+ people to a church of 300+ people today under the teaching of such pure truth, in 2 major cities in the west, with more than a dozen congregations, and several pastors.
- (another avenue of outreach) One by one, he invites individuals to come to the Savior, then invites them to receive the grace of baptism, and then contacts the pastors of Lutheran connection to complete the baptism. In the past two years this ministry has baptized over 80 souls. Some brothers over 50 years old are willing to study theology and serve full-time. A budding group has also been planted in (a city), and we at

316now are helping this group to grow. This would not have been possible without the wider support and collaboration (of several groups).

- We can see all of these wonderful God-allowed successes above have been accomplished with cooperation. We are very hopeful that 316now can give more help to make our ministries work better together. Pray that we may continue, to travel freely and converse about such important spiritual matters.

Annual Meeting

Our Board of Directors will meet face-to-face in early June to review the overall health of our organization, adjust our strategic plans for future ministry, and advise our executive team on how to improve our daily operations. We are learning how to leverage technology on all levels to enhance our communications while keeping the information and people involved secure.

Informing Confessional Lutherans

316NOW shares information about Chinese culture with American Christians. God has been remarkably generous to China, the most populous nation in the world. We share the stories of those blessings. We also highlight the spiritual challenges that are currently there so believers here can consider how God has positioned them to help. You'll find our blog at 316NOW.org/connect.

316NOW makes presentations to congregations, Bible study groups, Sunday schools, elementary schools, youth groups, and gatherings of friends. Our pastors are also available for preaching at worship services. Depending on the number of questions and comments during the presentation, our presentation will be between 45 and 60 minutes. Our presentations can be in-person or online. We prefer that our travel costs be covered; that allows us to use those funds for ministry in China. However, we are happy to work with groups on our covering costs.

More information
You'll find more information about 316NOW on our website: 316NOW.org.

Email us at 316NOW@316NOW.org
Sign up to receive occasional email updates here:



We completed our annual [15 Days of Prayer](#) effort in late February. Thank you for inviting your members to participate. We offer a [free prayer guide](#) that can be used during any month.

Rev. Mark Wagner
Executive Director
7180 Glencoe Drive
Cedarburg, WI 53012
(262) 488-1899 (C)

Rev. Wayne Hilgendorf
Board Chairman
339 Arlene Ct.
New Richmond, WI 54017
(715) 423-5181 (C)

Jeff Davis
Board Vice-Chairman
PO Box 178
Lake Mills, WI 53551
(920) 342-0800 (C)

Vacant
Exec Comm Secretary
(262) 012-3456 (H)
(414) 012-3456 (C)

Jamie Gabb
Board Treasurer
3021 E. Forest Hill Ave
Oak Creek, WI 53154
(414) 839-1328 (C)

Rev. Bob Balza
Admin of Education
76 Thistle Down Ct
Appleton, WI 54915
(920) 284-2824 (C)

Rev. James Enderle
Admin of Expat
7387 County Rd W
Greenleaf, WI 54126
(920) 949-1038 (C)

Rev. Adam Gawel
Admin of Mentor/Counsel
1909 W. 34th Place
Chicago, IL 60608
(773) 217-8132 (C)

Bob Fischer
Admin of Sheep to Lambs
2907 S. East St.
Appleton, WI 54915
(920) 450-8830(H)

For information:
Call/Text Pastor Wagner
(262) 488-1899
Email at
markwagner@316NOW.org