

Int'l LLL Proposal for Biennial Conventions

Talking Points – (Around 15 minutes)

[Introduce yourself and your affiliation/history with Lutheran Hour Ministries]

Good morning/afternoon/evening. I am glad to be here today to talk about possibilities for future international conventions of the International Lutheran Laymen's League. For everyone here who has attended an international convention, you no doubt view it as one of the highlights of the year.

It is a chance to worship with fellow Christians, reconnect with friends from around the country, learn what is happening with the ministry, discuss best practices with people from other regions and districts, and receive training that helps you more effectively serve as a volunteer at the grassroots level.

While our international conventions remain popular among current supporters, our numbers have decreased to right around 1,000 attendees over the past several years. We believe there are a number of reasons for this trend. As many of our supporters are no longer physically or financially able to attend the international convention each year, we are not replacing these

attendees with new people. It is difficult to get new people, especially younger people who have daytime jobs, to travel across the country and devote three or four days to an organization with which they have had very little involvement in the past. We have to make our conventions something these younger groups will want to attend while also making them more convenient.

The lack of increasing numbers at the conventions should really come as no surprise to anyone here. Many volunteer organizations, ours included, continue to see a steady decline in membership, especially active membership. In just a third of a century, Americans have dramatically changed their style of civic association. A civic world once centered in locally rooted and nationally active membership associations is a relic. Today, most Americans are more interested in volunteering for causes and projects, but only rarely as ongoing members. Contemporary volunteering can be intermittent and flexibly structured, an intense one-shot effort or spending an evening a week on an activity for a few weeks as time permits, rather than having to make a long-term commitment to an organization. This is why it is important to get back to presenting our ministry to new people at the grassroots level.

We also continue to see increasing costs of gas, hotels, and food, so many of our current supporters can no longer afford to attend an international convention each year. For example, an individual attendee of the 2008 convention in Kentucky spent about \$600 just on the hotel and meals. Depending on how far the person had to travel to get to Lexington, that number as much as doubled in some cases once transportation costs were factored. Surveys from the last couple conventions show that people who are paying their own way to attend the international convention are having more and more struggles coming up with the necessary money to go.

Cost is also a factor for the ministry. The ministry spends around \$600,000 per year to conduct the international convention. These expenses include committee expenses; rooms, meals, and transportation for about 375 board members, district presidents, district delegates, VIPs, and staff members; audio/visual expenses; facility rentals at convention centers and accompanying hotels; meals for The LHM Foundation and Board of Governors meetings, catalyst breakfasts, and other events; and miscellaneous charges for banquet speakers, equipment rentals, signage, brochures, giveaways, and other items produced specifically for the convention each year. The international convention also takes up an enormous amount of staff time preparing for and participating in the annual

international convention. The staff of LHM spends between 4,000 and 5,000 hours coordinating and attending brainstorming sessions and planning meetings, booking speakers, running reports, writing scripts, developing publicity materials for churches and districts, and much more.

Finally, in a fast-paced world where many people have the pressures of two career families and a lack of family time due to long commutes, long working hours, and the prevalence of electronic entertainment, many people are much less inclined to be active participants in organizations like individuals of past generations were. This trend makes it difficult for someone who wants to get involved in our ministry's work to devote time and money to attend district, regional, AND international conventions each year. When given a choice of how to volunteer their extra free time with an organization, they are much more likely to get involved with something closer to home.

I provide all of this information not to downplay the importance of the international convention or to imply that it no longer serves a purpose. We think the international convention is a very important way to energize the laity and stay in contact with many of our most involved supporters. But we

also recognize that this organization must continue to look at ways to reach new people.

This brings up an important question about how can we better connect to people at the grassroots level. Over the past several months, the Policy Study committee of the LLL's Board of Governors has worked with the staff of Lutheran Hour Ministries to examine what could be done if the International Lutheran Laymen's League decided to make some changes to the international convention. A proposal to consider moving to biennial international conventions was offered to the Board of Governors and District Presidents at the opening session of their joint meeting in January.

The proposal examined our aging membership base and dwindling convention participation, a need to make our conventions more accessible to younger and/or working folks, and opportunities to bring conventions closer to the grassroots and reach more people with the excitement of Lutheran Hour Ministries, offer greater exposure to the ministries, and provide outstanding training and motivation to all. Although significant cost savings, about \$200,000 per year, could be expected to Lutheran Hour Ministries, the value of greater exposure, accessibility, and engagement with participants are the key benefits. If approved by the membership at this year's

convention in Greensboro, North Carolina, international conventions would be held in the even numbered years. In the odd numbered years (beginning in 2011), the proposal calls for conducting approximately 15 regional conferences across the country. The staff of Lutheran Hour Ministries would work with Int'l LLL districts within each of these regions to make sure these conferences expand upon the business activities of "regional" events now being held by some districts and offer many of the same opportunities of the international convention in a condensed format.

After evaluating the possibilities for conducting biennial international conventions, the District Presidents recommended that the Board of Governors place the concept of biennial conventions on the 2009 international convention ballot this summer. If the measure passes at that time, the Board will prepare the actions needed for adoption at the 2010 international convention to facilitate changes in corporate bylaws and policies dealing with matters such as convention timing and the election of officers.

We believe an enhancement of the LLL's regional conventions every other year could both save money for ministry and increase our overall attendance numbers among the regions compared to the number of people who

currently are attending the international convention. And we believe we could accomplish many of the same things that we do at the international convention, just on a regional level that allows us to reach out to more pastors and laypeople in congregations in the immediate area and get more Ambassadors actively involved through their attendance at these conferences.

So you're probably wondering, if the measure passes, what would be done during the alternating year to increase participation at the regional level? The regional conference could cover a day and a half, starting Saturday morning and finishing up Sunday around noon. This timing would allow districts and zones to hold their business meetings before the regional conference on Friday evening and possibly cut out the need for a separate district convention every other year. Limiting the regional conference to a day and a half, or two days for district and zone officers, would keep hotel and meal costs, as well as transportation distance in many cases, to a minimum.

There are three major items that these regional conferences would strive to accomplish: creating excitement for our ministry, training and equipping our grassroots volunteers, and reaching out to new supporters. A regional concept could include any combination of the following:

- Spiritual rejuvenation through an opening and/or closing chapel service, Bible studies, and a prayer chapel for individual meditation and prayers. The worship service and Bible studies could possibly be led by Pastor Klaus or Reverend Keith Grimm, our International Pastoral Advisor, if they are available, or in cases where they are not by one of the district pastoral advisors from the region where the conference is being held. The Bible studies would offer a chance to use the content developed for the Men's NetWork as a way to promote the program to people who may not be familiar with it.

- A motivational keynote speaker of regional prominence, such as Pat Day in Kentucky or Ned Jarrett in North Carolina, to provide personal stories, education, and/or entertainment. A lot of local celebrities are often willing to serve as keynote speakers at minimal cost, while providing the name recognition that will bring people in from the local community to hear them speak.

- A "welcome session" involving greetings from LCMS organizations in the region. This could include comments from the LLL regional governor and/or district presidents from the region, an LHM staff member, an LCMS district president, a representative from the local chapter of the LWML, and

possibly representatives from seminaries or colleges in the area. This would be similar to the general sessions held at the international convention, but would be much shorter and allow for video updates of ministry activities to be shown to engage the audience.

- Training and seminars to educate attendees about the ministry and how to more effectively reach the lost. In order to minimize costs, these sessions could be video-based and moderated or led by volunteers from the area. The breakouts could include subjects such as a shortened Equipping to Share workshop, a Men's NetWork "how-to" session, information about sharing LHM's message or fundraising best practices, a panel on how to form a ministry action team within your church, or other topics that appeal to regional leaders. This would also be a great opportunity to incorporate topics that have been used in the Reach Conference for younger adults to reach out to younger members of the congregations in your community. For new people in attendance, we could host a Catalyst Event to explain all the great things our ministry has to offer.

- Finally, each regional conference would have a service project to get members of the local community involved. A Parenting Families workshop, a Men's NetWork project, a Global Care Packages event, or a JCPlayZone

Carnival are some of the possibilities. Obviously, this event could be tailored to meet the needs of the immediate community. LHM staff would be able to help in the coordination of this service event as well as promotion to congregations and local media.

The regional conference would be staffed with volunteers from the region as well as three or four LHM staff members. Staff members in attendance could include the region's Ministry Advancement Officer, a staff member to help with convention logistics such as hotel coordination, meals, and room set-up, a cross-trained ministry representative to provide a report about the ministry in the conference's opening session and answer on-site questions during the training sessions, and possibly Pastor Klaus and/or Phyllis Wallace depending on their schedules.

It is important to note that this alternating year format has been very successful for the LWML. Nearly 5,000 people have attended the national LWML convention every other year over the past decade and their biennial district conventions have been extremely successful at getting more people involved on the local level. Most of their district conventions draw hundreds of attendees in the off-year with a format based around service activities and spiritual enrichment. If the LLL decides to pursue a biennial international

convention, it will start the regional conference concept in 2011, which would allow for our international conventions to be held in years opposite to the LWML's national convention. This would hopefully lead to better cross-attendance between the two organizations.

Keep in mind that what we are talking about are really just idea starters for if the biennial proposal passes this summer. It's important to remember that the Board of Governors believes this concept will be a way for the ministry to better connect at the grassroots level and hopefully lead to new supporters getting involved with the League and the work of Lutheran Hour Ministries so that this ministry can continue sharing Christ's message of hope with those who need to hear it for many years to come. We look forward to hearing your feedback and working with you to make our conventions even better in the future. Thank you for your time today and for all you do for the Int'l LLL and Lutheran Hour Ministries. Does anyone have any questions?