



Dear Beloved Donors and Supporters,

We write with a mix of heaviness and gratitude in our hearts. We are sorry to inform that the Commission on Mission Services and the Board of Directors of the Wyoming District have made the difficult decision to suspend the operations of Wind River Lutheran Mission. We want to take this opportunity to share the reasons behind this decision and express our heartfelt thanks for your unwavering support throughout the years.

For over four decades, our mission to the Wind River Reservation has been a beacon of hope, offering the light of the Gospel to tribal members and their families. From 1977, when Rev. Donald Bren first began this work, to the tireless dedication and sacrifice of subsequent Pastor-Missionaries and their families, including Rev. Gregory Sonnenschein, the Wind River Lutheran Mission has touched many lives and brought the message of God's love in Christ to those in need.

However, recent years have posed significant challenges. A national Native American return to tribal religious practices has resulted in an environment that is often cold, if not hostile, to the exclusive claims of Christianity regarding the Trinity, Christ, and the Holy Scriptures. The cultural shifts within the tribes have made it increasingly difficult for Christianity to take root and flourish.

Additionally, the ongoing impact of Covid cannot be overlooked. The government shutdowns in 2020 disrupted our missionary efforts, preventing the continuation of vital programs such as Sunday School, Vacation Bible School (VBS), nursing home services, and ministry in the local jail. Despite our best intentions and the dedicated service of Rev. Sonnenschein, these restrictions still persist, severely limiting our ability to provide the spiritual care and outreach that the Wind River Reservation community so desperately needs.

Therefore, after much prayer, reflection, and consultation, the Board of Directors (BOD) of the Wyoming District has made the difficult decision to officially suspend the Wind River Lutheran Mission. This decision includes the conclusion of Rev. Sonnenschein's divine call to the Mission and the Ministry Agreement between the Wyoming District and Mount Calvary Lutheran Church, Dubois, WY. These changes will take effect on September 30, 2023.

This is a real loss, and we grieve it. The Wind River Lutheran Mission has been a testament to the Holy Spirit's work of calling all nations by the Gospel, enlightening them, and keeping the true faith. We know you share in our grief over the suspension of this mission and the potential closing of this chapter in our collective ministry.

However, even in the face of sorrow, we wish to express deep gratitude for the tremendous support and generosity that you, our donors and supporters, have shown over the years. Your gifts and donations have enabled us to make a difference in the lives of countless individuals on the Wind River Reservation, as work was done to care for needs of both body and soul. God used your gifts and prayers to sustain this mission and, by His will, helped us to bring the light of Christ to a community in need. For this, we offer our sincerest thanks and appreciation to our Lord God and to you our brothers and sisters in Christ.

While we mourn the suspension of our direct presence on the Wind River Reservation, we also want to emphasize that our commitment to the welfare and spiritual care of tribal members remains unwavering. The pastoral care of any remaining tribal members or associates of the mission will be transitioned to Bethel Lutheran Church, Lander, Trinity Lutheran Church and School, Riverton, or Mount Calvary Lutheran Church, Dubois. We urge those remaining to find comfort, support, and fellowship in these congregations as they continue to serve the Wind River Reservation community. The CMS will be working with the congregations on a strategy for continuing outreach to this community.

We implore you to join us in prayer during this time of transition. We seek God's guidance and intervention, praying that He will open new doors and create opportunities for His Word to reach the hearts and minds of the tribal members. May the ministries of our sister churches serve as beacons of hope, drawing individuals closer to God's love and grace.

In the coming months, as we navigate these changes, we will ensure that Rev. Sonnenschein and his family receive the support and care he deserves.

Regarding the Wind River Lutheran Mission's assets, we have initiated a process for their disposition. We are working on a plan to sell the land that may allow us to acquire another piece of property on the Reservation that we could use if conditions become favorable for continued work in the future.

Finally, we invite you to join us in giving thanks to God for the Pastor-Missionaries, together with their wives and families, who dedicated their lives to the Wind River Lutheran Mission. They exemplified unwavering faith, enduring unique hardships, and selflessly served a community in need. Their tireless efforts and the gifts they brought to the Mission have left an indelible mark on the lives they touched. We honor their faithfulness and offer our deepest thanks for their invaluable contributions. We also pray for all those hearts among the people on the Wind River Reservation upon whom the Seed of the Gospel has been scattered. We pray that it may find good soil, grow, and bear fruit unto life everlasting.

In conclusion, while we grapple with the suspension of our mission on the Wind River Reservation, we remain steadfast in our trust and reliance on God's providence. We acknowledge and give thanks for His guidance and blessings throughout the decades, as His pure Word and Sacraments found their way to the reservation and nurtured the faith of its members. As we move forward, we place our hope and trust in Him, praying that He continues to open doors to the tribal members through the ministries of Bethel Lutheran Church, Lander, Trinity Lutheran Church and School, Riverton, and Mount Calvary Lutheran Church, Dubois.

Thank you once again for your unwavering support, love, and prayers. Together, we will navigate this transition with hope, faith, and the knowledge that God works all things together for good for those who love Him.

With sincere appreciation and blessings,  
The Wyoming District Commission on Mission Services