



The Puppet Place

An ongoing grant of the LWML SD District.

Leader: The Puppet Place ministry began in 1972 with Pastor Robert Utecht and his wife, Donna, with a simple puppet show that was given at the LWML booth at the South Dakota State Fair in Huron. Over fifty years later, his son, Pastor Andrew Utecht and his wife, Lori, along with his brother, Pastor Peter Utecht and their families continue to present the Gospel through a puppet show throughout the days of the State Fair. Although these shows are simple enough for children to enjoy and hear the Good News of Jesus, they speak God's Word to everyone who comes.

Reader 1: *Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."* (Matthew 19:14)

Leader: Each year, the Utecht family writes the puppet show based on a Bible event. They remake or create new puppets to use, write the script, and pick out the songs to go along with the narration. Lately, the LWML South Dakota District has made hand puppets to give out to the children that attend. Pastor Andrew does a magic show before each performance and gives out balloon toys for the children to take home. The adults receive Bible studies and usually there are devotional booklets for the families to take, too.

Reader 2: *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up* (Deuteronomy 6:4-7).

Leader: In 2024, thirty-four workers gave away over 400 puppets and nearly 200 Bible studies to approximately 900 souls who attended the shows. With the addition of an added day to the Fair, we hope the numbers keep increasing! What a blessing to be an active part of the ongoing mission to spread the Good News of Jesus!

Reader 3: *Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans* (Proverbs 16:3).

Leader: The Puppet Place ministry is the longest and financially largest mission that the LWML SD supports here in South Dakota. Maintaining the building, paying the fees associated with having a permanent building at the fairgrounds, and helping defray the costs of putting on the puppet show each year takes time, commitment, and funds. Keeping this ministry in your prayers is essential for it to continue. Helping with the running of the shows each year is also a necessary component of the mission. Each year, at least six people from each zone are needed to help put the shows on. Without this help, it becomes very difficult to present the shows. Plan to be a part of helping this next year — it is a wonderful experience! You will be part of an active mission project here in South Dakota!

Prayer: **Your greatest desire Lord is for everyone — young and old alike — to come to the knowledge of You! In our world today, it seems more and more people are lost, without hope, and searching for something or someone to help. You are that Help! Through this ministry of The Puppet Place, use the words, actions, and stories of the Utecht family to convey Your love and hope to everyone who attends the shows. Let the women and men who help during the Fair reflect Your love to everyone they encounter. Bless the families that attend, fill their lives with Your Spirit, and wrap them in Your arms of love and grace. Help them connect with Your church family when they go home. Bless the efforts of everyone involved in this ministry. In Your name we trust and pray, Amen.**