

Encourager

JANUARY 2023

Mid-South District LCMS



A Message from Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola, President

God is love!

As we begin a new year, many of us think that flipping a page on the calendar is going to change the way things were last year. Really?! Inflation will be the same. Sickness and world troubles will continue. Why the optimism about a "Happy New Year"? There's a song that goes like this, "Oh how I love Jesus, Oh how I love Jesus, Oh how I love Jesus because He first loved me." Poetically it's pretty weak. Theologically, it's not something I'd encourage anyone to sing at church. It really doesn't dig deep telling about God's unconditional love.

"Because He first loved me" maybe sounds alright, but St Paul makes it quite clear that before any one of us could do anything; before we were able to even think about trying to do anything,

Jesus already loved us. Isaiah's prophecy says, "God knew me in the womb." That's precisely what the Gospels declare. We're all His sons and daughters.

In January, we will celebrate the days when Jesus was baptized by John the Baptizer in the Jordan River and the beginning of His formal earthly ministry. God the Father, spoke the words anointing His Son and the ministry of our reconciliation. *"This is My Son, the Beloved One, with whom I am well pleased."*

Jesus then went into the Wilderness, to prepare for His earthly ministry and where He was tempted by Satan. Only after His 40-day ordeal in the desert did Jesus return to heal the sick, make the lame to walk, raise the dead, give sight to the blind and comfort the lost. All these miracles

point to Jesus as the Christ - the Promised One of God.

God's statement destroys any false thoughts that posits that Jesus only became God, but a lesser god than the Father. God's declaration demonstrates that He knew the Christ - the Second Person of the Trinity before time and creation. So, Jesus returned from His ordeal in the wilderness to give life and hope to people out of the love of God. No price, no terms or conditions because God loved us first.

This manifestation of Divine love shows that God didn't create beings so that they could praise God and make Him feel good about Himself, as some would suppose. The entire creation and all its creatures are a manifestation that the very essence that "God is love." It's an uncreated,

non-material love that can only come from God.... undeserved by us, and not as a result of what we can do or say to God.

This is the love God showers on us through His means of grace. In Holy Baptism, the simple water joined together with God's Word becomes the waters of regeneration - covering us in Christ's righteousness, washing away our sins, giving us the gift of the Holy Spirit and faith that declares us as heirs of God's eternal promise.

Of course we love Jesus. But we can't love Jesus by our natural human condition. From the time of our conception, we're born enemies of God. There's nothing we can do to make God love us. His love is unconditional. Unconditional love (Agape) was with God and is of God before creation. But with our identity in Jesus Christ, we're free to live as God's Word proclaims. We live

by God's design - not our decision or any feeble attempt to offer ourselves to God. He already "owns" us! In our baptisms, led by the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves to God to live a life in response to His great love. Without His love as the foundation of our love for others, we could never truly love unconditionally. Since God accepted us unconditionally, how could we not love others as He has loved us?

That's why we commit ourselves to teach our children of God's love when we bring them to worship, Sunday School, and family devotions. We can't expect a child to physically live if we only give them birth but, then, never feed them. The same is true for the new birth in Christ through Holy Baptism. Simply bringing a child to baptism because we think it might just be the right thing to do, but then never nurture, feed

and instruct through worship and Bible Study - - it's cruel and irresponsible.

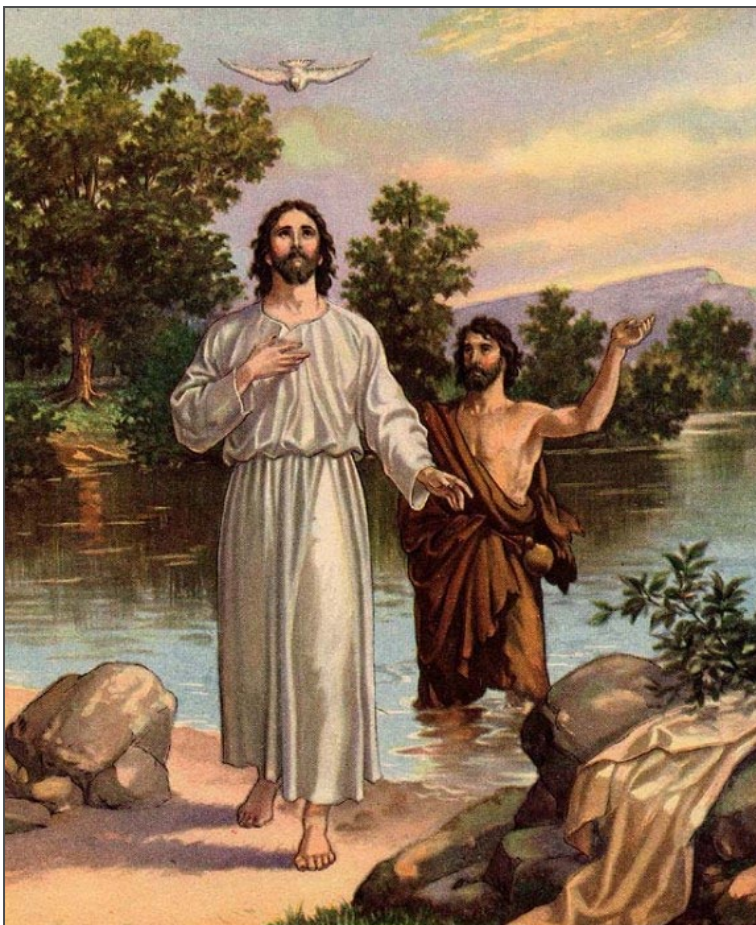
Our ministry begins at our Baptism. Just as Jesus was tempted in the desert right after His Baptism, Satan will begin pitching his fiery darts in our direction as well. There's trials and pains. We open ourselves up to the needs of others, fully

knowing that the commitment on our part makes us vulnerable for those who would take advantage of any Christian love. We respond to those who are sick, hungry, naked, and in prison in a literal sense, but so much more in a spiritual sense.

Unfortunately, there are those who misunderstand Baptism not knowing that it is God's action toward us. Unfortunately, the Rite of Baptism would become a repetitive routine unless we stop to think about the Word and what it promises. It begins with our declaration of our worth, forgetting God's view of the world, and yet, ironically, His foundation of love. But, Baptism is not an end, but the very beginning of our life... a life in the promise of God that has no end.

We begin funeral services with these words from the book of Romans: *"When we were baptized into Christ Jesus, we were baptized into His death. We were buried, therefore with Him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life."* Baptism is new life given in accordance with God's Word. Our new life is founded on His unconditional love. In Baptism, we're given a ministry - our own ministry in the priesthood of believers. Our identity to the world is either based on the new life of our Holy Baptism in Christ; or it's based on the corrupt sinful nature into which we were born.

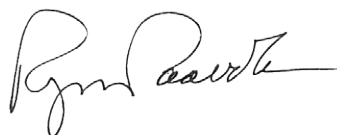
At His baptism, *"Jesus said, 'Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness. Then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptized, He went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and He saw the Spirit*



of God descending like a dove and lighting on Him. And, a voice from heaven said, "This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased." Since Christ was righteous in Himself. It's for giving us His righteousness that we are baptized because He repeats the command for Baptism at His glorious Ascension. Jesus meant His Baptism is for our righteousness. The evidence of the Triune God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - are present in the mystery of Holy Baptism for our sake. Certain that Christ takes on the responsibility and requirements under God's Law to fulfill all righteousness perfectly for our sake happens in Baptism. Following the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, our shattered and imperfect natural image is restored, renewed and made alive through the merits of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

This is just one of the many mysteries of the Incarnation of Christ - when the divine nature of God took on our human flesh to suffer and die in our place, and rise to life in flesh, so that we may be made anew in the image of God's own Son, Jesus Christ - the manifestation of God's love for us. It's really not only for a New Year, but for an entirely new life given to us out of the grace, mercy, and love of God for us in Christ Jesus, our Lord and King forever. Have a blessed New Year in Jesus!

Your servant in Christ +
Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola



NATIONAL LUTHERAN SCHOOLS WEEK

RAISING UP THE NEXT GENERATION OF FAITHFUL CHRISTIAN DISCIPLES

- › Experiencing and celebrating God's lavish gifts of love, grace and mercy
- › Sharing those gifts with others
- › Being transformed by God's Word
- › Clinging to the cross of Jesus

SCHOOLS > 1,854
TEACHERS > 21,312
DISTRICTS > 35

PROVIDING EXCELLENT ACADEMIC PREPARATION

- › Developing love for and excitement about learning
- › Excelling at reading, writing and effective communication
- › Training minds for success at the next academic level
- › Creating a strong work ethic, critical thinking skills and the ability to relate well with others

LEARN MORE
888-THE LCMS (843-5267)
lcms.org/school-ministry



SHARING THE LIFE-CHANGING MESSAGE OF JESUS' LOVE WITH MORE THAN

180,000

STUDENTS, THEIR FAMILIES AND THE COMMUNITY

 THE LUTHERAN CHURCH MISSOURI SYNOD
School Ministry

Faith Lutheran Sharing the Good News

Collierville, TN

"Faith Lutheran Preschool was very excited to present six Christmas music programs for all of our Preschool families this Christmas. The older classes all dressed as the Christmas Nativity and we loved sharing the good news of Jesus Christ's birth with all of our families."

"In news coming up, we are looking forward to our next school year! On December 5th our current families were able to register siblings of our currently enrolled students. We have such a high demand for placement in our school that parents started lining up at 3:00 am to get spots in our school. We have already sold out all of our two and four year old classrooms and expect our toddlers, three's and Junior Kindergarten to be full as well! God is so good!"



Holy Trinity Growing in Christ

Rogers, AR

Holy Trinity Parents' Day Out opened May 31 and we are grateful recipients of the GROW Grant! With the grant we were able to help families in need with scholarship money, purchase childcare management software, a colorful banner, office laptop and tablets for teachers to research curriculum, track attendance and communicate with parents!

Shown are pictures of the children in our program learning and growing in Christ. There's also a picture of Holy Trinity in the Rogers, AR Christmas parade displaying our banner!



A Sleepover Over for Animals

Bowling Green, KY

Kindergarteners at Holy Trinity Lutheran School brought their favorite stuffed animals to have a sleepover at school. After their kids went home, the stuffed animals had a blast having story time, making ornaments, eating a snack, and running around the school. The children were very excited to see their animals the next day and hear about all of their overnight adventures.



Did you know? LCMS Congregations and Day Schools...

- ▶ Operate more than 1,100 early childhood centers & preschools
- ▶ Serve 81,000 children
- ▶ Ages infants, toddlers to 5-year-olds
- ▶ 750 elementary schools with 113,000 students
- ▶ 650 early childhood centers and elementary schools *are accredited under the National Lutheran School Accreditation program*

Go Shine!

Immanuel Lutheran, Memphis, TN

Go Shine! This is the theme for the 2022-23 school year at Immanuel Lutheran School Memphis and we are so blessed to be shining God's light brightly. Our students and staff are practicing a growth mindset and discovering so many new skills as we take on new challenges. As one of only two schools in Shelby County with a SmartLab STEM program, we were thrilled to get a lab refresh with new computers, new equipment and new study units. As part of our quarterly chapel offerings, ILS is supporting Literacy Mid-South by buying supplies for book vending machines. We devoted an entire day to literacy with buddy reading and making #ShareYourSkills901 bookmarks. ILS was able to shine a light on veterans during our Veterans Day luncheon and program. We highlighted character traits of these heroes and thanked them for their service to our country. Immanuel will continue to Go Shine as we grow in faith together as family and prepare for a bright future.



Nourishing Souls of Each Child

Jonesboro, AR

All Saints Lutheran School is well into our second year. All Saints is dedicated to being genuinely Lutheran, thoroughly classical, and intentionally small. At All Saints, we prepare children for heavenly and earthly citizenship by means of a classical Lutheran education so that they might be grounded firmly in the truth of God's Word, abound in knowledge and virtue, and share God's grace in all of their various vocations, present and future.

Each day begins with the praying of Matins, with Divine Service on Wednesdays, and includes vigorous instruction in Scripture, the catechism, Latin, and the Liberal Arts. This year we had our first Recitation Night where we invited families of our students as well as members of the parish to come and hear from our young scholars what they have been learning. The students recited Scripture, poetry and Latin declensions as well as showing Latin translations and geometric proofs. We look forward to continuing to cultivate wisdom and virtue by nourishing the soul of each child on truth, goodness, and beauty.



WHO WE ARE

Trinity HOPE is passionate about following God's lead to serve a noon meal to over 61,000 children each day in Haiti. Visit us at www.trinityhope.org for more information. You can also follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/trinityhopehaiti. Here, we share information regarding our schools, our mission work, and any updates out of Haiti.



Who We Are:

Trinity HOPE's mission is to actively seek and be careful stewards of each dollar God provides so that the maximum number of the students in the schools of the Christian churches of Haiti have a meal each day.

- The ministry partners with over 270 Christian schools throughout 13 districts in Haiti.
- The infrastructure in Haiti is 100% reliant on the Haitian workforce. Trinity HOPE invests in the economy by contributing to over 500 Haitian jobs by employing over 34 feeding program directors who supervise the program, purchasing food from local vendors, and ensuring each school pays for at least one cook.
- Each day, the children and staff we serve hear the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They go home sharing His love, and become missionaries in their communities.
- Trinity HOPE has been rated one of the TOP charities through Charity Navigator and Guidestar. The ministry is one of only 17 international non-profits with a score of 100%! We are transparent in our work and good stewards with your donations.

Platinum
Transparency
2022

Candid.

Double Your Donation



- ALL new, recurring donations will be MATCHED for a LIFETIME!
- ALL new school sponsors will be MATCHED for a LIFETIME!

A Recurring donation of \$25 per month will feed over 2,000 hungry souls!

2 Family Camps Coming in 2023

A family camp designed especially for families of LCMS pastors and church workers has been added to the 2023 summer camp schedule at Camp Trinity, the Lutheran Camp on Petit Jean Mountain. The summer schedule also has two weekend family camp sessions, which is more convenient for most families, but because pastors who have attended family camp in previous years have had to leave early to lead worship on Sunday, it became apparent that a mid-week session would better serve church worker families.

Family Camp starts at lunch on Wednesday, July 5, and runs through Friday afternoon, July 7. Families are welcome to stay another day to spend time exploring Petit Jean Mountain. The first six families who register will be able to stay in the newly completed retreat lodge at the camp.

Camp Trinity is cutting camp fees in half for families of LCMS church workers as a means of serving the servants. Additional financial aid is available on request.

Family Camp for church workers is for all ages. Camp staff will lead a sampling of summer camp activities – hiking, swimming, canoeing, large-group games, and a visit to the petting zoo (with horseback riding available for a separate



fee). Each day begins with First Word (quiet devotional time), with Bible study after breakfast. Both evenings end at a campfire with lots of singing and message about God's love in Christ.

Those interested in this or any other sessions of summer camp can learn more and register at the camp website: Lutheran Camp on Petit Jean

Senior High Youth Retreat



The Linkt retreat for senior high youth at LCMS churches in the Mid-South District is **March 3-5 at Camp Trinity**, the Lutheran Camp on Petit Jean Mountain. The Rev. Dr. Leroy Leach, who was the main presenter at the Linkt junior high retreat in October, is returning to lead Bible study and worship at the senior high retreat. He will also lead an "Ask the Professor" session in the evening where youth can ask questions about faith, sin and temptation, evolution v creation, relationships or anything else on their minds.

The theme is Fight the Good Fight, based on 2 Timothy 4:7. Activities will include worship, hiking, games, Bible study, a service project, fellowship and campfires. Churches sending youth are asked to also send adult chaperones. The early registration discount deadline is Feb. 5. Pricing, checklist and other details can be found at the Camp Trinity website: [LinkT Youth Retreats | petitjean \(lutherancamp.org\)](http://LinkT Youth Retreats | petitjean (lutherancamp.org))

2022/2023 Treasurer's Workshop



[Register Online Now](#)

Join us for one of the upcoming workshops. The Presenter for the Treasurer's manual (Volume 1) session will be Mr. Charlie Rhodes, Executive Director of Synod Accounting (Retired) with time reserved for specific questions and answers. The afternoon session will be presented by Angela Fowler with a focus on QuickBooks Best Practices. It would be helpful for you to have a copy of the manual with you, either the CD, hard copy or online version. The Treasurer's Manual is available on the LCMS website.

For additional information contact
Angela Fowler by e-mail
afowler@mid-southlcms.com
or telephone (866-373-1343)

Dates and Locations

January 7, 2023

9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. Treasurer's Manual – Volume 1
11:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. Lunch (provided)
12:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. QuickBooks Best Practices
Christ Lutheran Church
315 S. Hughes St.
Little Rock, AR

January 14, 2023

9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. Treasurer's Manual – Volume 1
11:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. Lunch (provided)
12:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. QuickBooks Best Practices
Our Savior Lutheran Church
5110 Franklin Road
Nashville, TN

January 21, 2023

9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. Treasurer's Manual – Volume 1
11:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. Lunch (provided)
12:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. QuickBooks Best Practices
St. John Lutheran Church
500 N. Cumberland Avenue
Russellville, AR

January 28, 2023

9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. Treasurer's Manual – Volume 1
11:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. Lunch (provided)
12:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. QuickBooks Best Practices
Mid-South District Office
1675 Wynne Road
Cordova, TN

Prayer Summary, December 2022

Following is a list of all the people that have appeared on the Mid-South District website prayer list www.mid-southlcms.com during the month of December 2022.

PRAYER CONCERNS

REV. RICHARD AMES (Emeritus, Hot Springs Village, AR)

REV. PAUL DONNER (Emeritus, Paducah, KY)

REV. RONALD HALAMKA (Waxahachie, TX)

MRS. ALISON HAWKINS (Mid-South District Office)

MRS. MARY ANN HERD (wife of Rev. Clifford Herd, Hixson, TN)

MRS. SHIRLEY EIMMERMAN (ECE Director, First Lutheran Preschool, Knoxville, TN)

REV. CHAD PHILIPP (St. Luke, DeWitt, AR & St. Paul, Gillett, AR)

REV. GIL PINGEL (Emeritus, Chattanooga, TN)

REV. WILLIAM STEVENSON (Emeritus, Dyersburg, TN)

Our deepest sympathies to the family and friends of Mr. Michael MacDowell (Hopkinsville, KY) who recently passed away. Funeral services were held on Thursday, December 15, 2022, at Faith Lutheran Church, Hopkinsville, KY.

Our deepest sympathies to the family and friends of Mr. Leslie Weiser (Bartlett, TN) who recently passed away. Visitation took place on Friday December 16, 2022, at Memphis Funeral Home and Memorial Gardens. A Celebration of Life service was held on Saturday December 17, 2022, at Grace Celebration Lutheran Church, Cordova, TN.

Our deepest sympathies to the family and friends of Mrs. Susanne Elseroad (wife of Rev. Richard Elseroad, Grace Lutheran Church, Knoxville, TN) who recently passed away. Funeral services will be held on Friday, January 6, 2023, details are pending.

We continue to lift up the Florida-Georgia District and all those affected by the devastating effects of Hurricane Ian.

CALL UPDATE

DECLINED: **Rev. Eric Clausen**, Associate Pastor to Christ Lutheran Church, Brea, CA has returned the Call to serve as *Associate Pastor to Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Rogers, AR.*

Rev. Kent Schaaf, Pastor to Grace Lutheran Church, Little Rock, AR, has returned the Call to serve as *Pastor to Ebenezer Lutheran Church, Greensboro, NC.*

VACANT CONGREGATIONS & MINISTRIES

Heavenly Host Lutheran Church, Cookeville, TN- Pastor

First Lutheran Church, Blytheville, AR - Pastor

**First Lutheran Church, Harrison, AR – Pastor
Messiah Lutheran Church, Memphis, TN – Pastor**

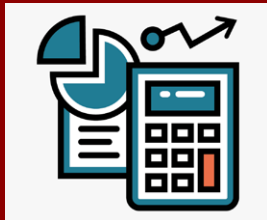
**Peace Lutheran Church, Conway, AR – Pastor
St. Paul Lutheran Church, Sevierville, TN – Pastor**

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Murray, KY – Pastor

IN THE CALLING PROCESS- COMMISSIONED MINISTERS

Christ the King Lutheran School, Memphis, TN – Preschool Teachers

First Lutheran School, Knoxville, TN – Teacher for 4th/5th grade



Congregational Mission Commitments

Mission Commitment Receipts as of 11/30/2022 (11 Months)

Anticipated Amount (91.66% of budget).....\$1,391,398
 Actual Receipts1,403,669
 Over (under)
 anticipated amount\$12,271

Use of Mission Commitment Receipts (11 Months)

Allocated to Synod for World Missions\$398,184
 Allocated to Tanzania22,917
 Retained for District Mission/Ministry Support (70% of receipts).....982,568
 Total Receipts \$1,403,669

Mission Commitment Receipts Prior Year Comparison (11 Months)

Actual Receipts as of 11/30/2022..... \$1,403,669
 Actual Receipts as of 11/30/2021\$1,394,939
 Over (under) prior year receipts \$8,730

SHARE YOUR NEWS WITH US!

Encourager Topics in 2023

We invite you to share your stories with us please email stories by **16th** to Rhonda, webmaster@mid-southlcms.com. Here's a look at the upcoming topics for 2023

- February – Outreach
- March – Youth
- April – Volunteers

Lutheran Witness Supplement

The monthly deadline is the 15th. Please email your original high resolution digital photo (.pdf or .jpg files only) and a short paragraph, to The Lutheran Witness Supplement editor, Judy Otto.
 Email: LW@mid-southlcms.com
 phone: 662-252-1004. Judy will always acknowledge receipt of your submission if it is sent directly to her.

Mid-South District, Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod

Staff

Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola,
President

Rev. William Zwick,
Executive Director of Mission & Ministry & Executive Director for Schools and Early Childhood

Angela Fowler,
Executive Director for Business & Finance

Paul Reaves,
Executive Director for Development & LCEF Vice President

Missy Washburn,
Administrative Assistant to the District President

Renae McElwain,
Communications & Marketing Specialist

Julie Tyler,
Administrative Assistant for Missions and Education

Contact

1675 Wynne Road
 Cordova, TN 38016
 PHONE: 866.373.1343 /
 901.373.1343
 FAX: 901.373.4826

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