



A Message from
Rev. Dr. Roger
Paavola, President

THE EIGHTH DAY

The ancient Roman calendars created meaning behind every month. February was named after the feast of Febru, the goddess of winter period. March was named after the Roman god of War, Mars. May was named after the goddess of rain, Maia. June after Juno, July and August were named after the Emperors Julius Caesar and Caesar Augustus. But January is a Latin word that means "a door or window" that allows a person to look forward or back. The Roman God Janus was supposedly able to look back and forth in all directions.

Our New Year's Eve is a time for us to look back at what has happened, and the possibilities of what lies ahead. St. Luke writes, *"On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise Him, he named him Jesus, the name the angel had given Him before He had been conceived."* On the first day of creation, God said, *"Let there be light; and there was light."* On the second day God separated the waters from the earth. On the fourth day, God created the sun, moon, and stars. On the sixth day God created Adam in His own image. On the seventh day, God rested because everything was

perfect and complete. So, what happened on the 8th day?

Not many people remember the eighth day, but St. Luke lets us know what the eighth day really means. He doesn't refer to the eighth day of creation, but the eighth day after Christ's Incarnation and His blessed birth. He was circumcised under the Old Testament laws, just so that it could happen eight days after the traditional day we celebrate as Christmas. Mind you, there are similarities between the eighth day and our celebration of New Year's Day.

Usually when New Year's begins, we see highlights of the past year on TV. The wars around the world, the death of some celebrities, the anxiety of the entire world over climate and economics will no doubt be in those highlights. These highlights put a wrapping on 2025 and let us move to 2026. Maybe we'll learn from past events. But similarly, when Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day, God closed the book on the past; not closing the book on a calendar year but closing a chapter of a whole generation of people since Adam. God ended what Adam

shattered by sin and made all things new and perfect – complete in the new creation.

God once took Abram and said, *“Look up into the heavens and count the stars if you can indeed count them. So shall your offsprings be.”* God promised the Savior would come through Abram’s descendants. In the Abrahamic covenant, every male child was to be circumcised on the eighth day after his birth as a sign of that covenant. Through the Rite of circumcision, every male child was given that guarantee and reminder of the coming of a Savior.

Jesus once said, *“If your hand or foot cause you to sin, it would be better to cut them off for you to go through life maimed than to have two hands and be thrown into the eternal fires.”* He’s not saying to maim ourselves, but to avoid our members from sinning. Preventing sinning by cutting off body parts doesn’t get to the root of the problem. So, why did God choose such a strange Rite as circumcision? Would cutting off a fingertip, a foot, or plucking out an eye avoid the reality of original sin? In Psalm 51, we find the answer to what has puzzled many people about the reality of original sin for years: *“Surely I was sinful from my birth, to the time my mother conceived me.”*

Circumcision shows what it is that Jesus was going to do for the whole human race. Jesus was circumcised under the Old Covenant. He took the obligation, the punishment, and the guilt for every sin ever committed plus the inherited sin into which we are all born. Jesus didn’t come to just cover the actual sin we commit, but He went to the root of the problem, dying for the sin we inherit at our conception.

The Old Testament covenant promised the Savior who would fulfill the law perfectly for us. In this way, New Year’s Day is like celebrating the eighth day of the old creation and heralding the new covenant we have in Christ. Jesus’ sacrifice ridded mankind of everything that was broken by Adam and everyone since then. Jesus fulfilled all righteousness when He gave us a new circumcision - the circumcision of our heart done by the hand of God and the Rite of Holy Baptism.

But what is more, Jesus put Himself under God’s law that applies to us. He shared the proclamation with His disciples, *“Do you not think that I have come to abolish the law, but I have come to fulfill it?”* St. Paul records this confirmation: *“In the fullness of time God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.”* Yet, Christ’s circumcision was just the beginning of His blood redemption to win back our souls from being enemies of God. Jesus shed His blood in the circumcision under the old law that marked the beginning of His ministry of suffering and service. Yet, it foreshadowed the blood-bought punishment Christ would suffer at the cross for the sins of the whole world.

Jesus withstood the entirety of God’s wrath against sin on the cross. No more sacrifices were ever needed or even acceptable when God’s Son shed his blood for our sins on the cross. All New Year’s resolutions that try harder to justify ourselves before God are unnecessary and are likely a sin in themselves because they deny the completeness of Christ’s sacrifice for us.

The nice thing about New Year’s is that it fosters hope. Our 2025 is over and 2026 let us get a fresh start. Some of the Jews in Christ’s day were uncomfortable with this new freedom we have in Jesus. St. Paul explained the relationship of the old with the new covenant, that there is no longer Jew or Greek, circumcised or uncircumcised. In baptism, we are all made members of Christ’s body - His Holy Church. But the Jews were so bound to their old covenant of circumcision that they insisted converts to Christianity needed to be circumcised first before being baptized.

St. Paul clearly states that if a person tries anything by themselves or within the Old Testament Law in order to win the salvation in their own way they have rejected Christ’s sacrifice and the salvation He freely offers. They are trying to be justified by works and archaic practices, rather than the fullness of redemption through Christ Jesus. They are in danger of having fallen from grace; instead of being saved by God’s only gracious means. Those who totally reject God’s

action, salvation plan, and Holy Baptism place themselves under the obligation of keeping the law perfectly.

New Year's Day brings a spark of New Hope. Think about it this way: The name Jesus means "the Lord saves." Notice it doesn't mean the Lord will help people save themselves. It needs to stay that way in order for us to have this blessed assurance of peace with God. Eternal salvation has nothing to do with what we do. In fact, the opposite is true of anything we try to do to add, delete or modify salvation that only comes in Christ's work for us. Jesus is the only one who can actively, completely, and perfectly keep the law.

God says through His prophet Jeremiah, *"For I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel and the House of Judah. It will not be like the covenant made with their forefathers. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."* That's what Jesus promises - forgiveness of our sin. For His sake, God no longer holds any sin against us. Just like circumcision happened once, Baptism happens once. We're born again, from above, by the Holy Spirit. St. Paul writes to the Galatians, *"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call; one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all. But by grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift."*

We cannot nor must not turn the gift of God's grace into one of our acts. It's sin: the sin identical to what Adam tried to do when he thought himself he could be as good as God. God won't bring out a ledger on judgment day delineating all of our sins. His Word says that when we were baptized, He crucified our sins in Christ and raised us to new life in Him. Baptism, not done by the hand of man, but done by the heart and by the hand of God, cuts us off from our old sinful nature.

At our baptisms, God washed away our sin in the blood of Christ and gave us the gift of faith by the power of the Holy Spirit. It's God's means

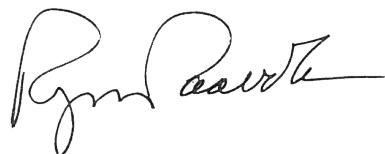
not ours. Would we slap Him in the face and say, *"That wasn't enough. I have to do some more because Christ's blood sacrifice, His death, and His resurrection aren't enough for me?"* How sinful that might be!

No matter what has happened in our past, it's behind us. We face a New Year with confidence and hope. Not because of what we've done, but because of what Jesus Christ has already done for us - pure Gospel. Jesus fulfilled the entire law of God! He worked perfectly, restored us to His new creation, and offers His promise of life everlasting.

That all changed on the eighth day- the first day of our new life in Christ. On the sixth day of the week, the beginning of the Sabbath, the day of rest, Jesus, true God and true Man was offered as a sacrifice before God. His body went in the tomb on the seventh day - the seventh day of the old creation. However, on the next day, the first day of the new life for us all, the eighth day of this new creation, Christ rose victorious from the dead. Not just the living divine Spirit, but true God and true Man in glorious flesh, raised above the boundaries of sin and death.

This He gives to you and me each day. At our baptism, joined us together in Jesus Christ, giving us His name, His reputation, His perfection, and His righteousness for us to stand before God. Would we dare stand before God with anything less on the last day? Christ gives us this hope and courage that His grace and mercies are new to us each day for whatever 2026 offers. This is why we celebrate the eighth day - it is complete perfection of everything that fell apart with sin. But Jesus came to make it all new. It's like a new life day and a New Year.

Your servant in Christ Jesus,
Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola



Ordination & Installation for Rev. Duncanson

The Rite of Ordination and Installation took place on Sunday, December 7, 2025 for the Rev. Peter Duncanson at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Memphis. Participating in the Rite were (Front L-R) Rev. Jon Petering, Senior Pastor, Immanuel, Memphis; President Roger Paavola; Rev. Pete Duncanson; Rev. Russell Hildebrant, Emeritus, Texas. (Back row L-R): Rev. Jerry Stougbaugh, Holy Spirit, Oakland; Rev. Terry Tieman, Grace Celebration; Rev. Jim Belles, Grace Celebration and Messiah; Clarence Martin, Emeritus; Rev. Clayton Sellers, Faith, Collierville; and Rev. Jake Bennett, Peace Lutheran, Oxford, Mississippi.



NATIONAL LUTHERAN SCHOOLS WEEK

Let's
Make
a Joyful
Noise PSALM 98:4



January 25 to January 31, 2026. National Lutheran Schools Week provides more than 1,800 preschools, elementary schools and high schools with the public opportunity to proclaim and celebrate God's work among us in schools of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. We thank God for the opportunity to provide excellent academic preparation for the children we serve. We are most grateful for the opportunity to share Jesus' amazing love with children and their families.



LUTHERAN
WORLD RELIEF

Mid-South District 2025 CareVAN By the Numbers

LOCATIONS



6 Drop Sites
27 Congregations

DONATIONS



\$5,488
Collected for
Shipping Costs

ITEMS COLLECTED



996 Handmade Quilts
1,425 Personal Care Kits
101 Fabric Kits
535 School Kits
75 Baby Care Kits

At this year's Lutheran World Relief CareVAN ingatherings, the Mid-South District had **six drop sites to collect donations from the 27 congregations** who participated. The drop sites were Zion of Avilla, Alexander, AR; First, Fort Smith, AR; Cross of Christ, Chattanooga, TN; Grace, Knoxville, TN; Our Savior, Nashville, TN, and Immanuel, Memphis, TN. In addition to the

\$5488 donated to help with shipping costs, items collected included 996 handmade quilts, 1,425 personal care kits, 101 fabric kits, 535 school kits, and 75 baby care kits. The trailers were loaded with 387 boxes totaling 7593 lbs. **THANK YOU Mid-South District!!** Lutheran World Relief will distribute these quilts and kits to those in need, both domestically and internationally.

Free Lutheran Resources In Multiple Languages

Do you have a friend, neighbor or family member who doesn't speak English as a first language? The Lutheran Heritage Foundation (www.LHFmissions.org/publications), a recognized service organization of the LCMS, has translated and published books like Luther's Small Catechism, A Child's Garden of Bible Stories, God's Word For You, and more into nearly 190 languages like Spanish, Hmong, Swahili and Chinese. Best of all, these books are **FREE** to any church or individual who needs them. Simply visit the LHF website (www.LHFmissions.org/publications) to search by language and send an email with your request.



Treasurers' Workshops

Mid-South District

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH - MISSOURI SYNOD

REGISTER ONLINE

Congregational treasurers are urged to mark their calendars to attend one of the Mid-South District's free Treasurers' Workshops, coming up in January of 2026.

Complete details and online registration are available on the District website at <https://mid-southlcms.org/2026-treasurers-workshop>.

Each half-day workshop is divided into two sessions. From 9:00 AM-11:00 AM, presenter Charlie Rhodes, retired Executive Director of Synod Accounting, covers Volume 1 of the Synod Treasurer's Manual. Lunch is provided from 11 AM-11:30 AM, followed by a second session on Church treasurer "best practices," which is led by the District's Executive Director for Business & Finance, Angela Fowler. The workshop concludes at 1 PM.

Please note that attendees are encouraged to have either a printed or digital copy of the Treasurers' Manual - Volume 1 with them at the workshop. To access the online manual or request a copy, please visit <https://mid-southlcms.org/business-finance/>.

To Register

- 1) [Register Online](#)
- 2) Or, download the Treasurers Registration 2025 form and return it to the District Office

For additional information/questions

Angela Fowler

E-mail afowler@mid-southlcms.com

Telephone (866-373-1343)

Dates and Locations

January 3, 2026 — Knoxville, TN

9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. Treasurer's Manual – Volume 1
11:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. Lunch (provided)
11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Church Treasurer Best Practices
Grace Lutheran Church
9076 Middlebrook Pike
Knoxville, TN

January 10, 2026 — Nashville, TN

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

January 17, 2026 — Jacksonville, AR

9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. Treasurer's Manual – Volume 1
11:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. Lunch (provided)
11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Church Treasurer Best Practices
Hope Lutheran Church
1904 McArthur Blvd.
Jacksonville, AR

January 24, 2026 — Springdale, AR

9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. Treasurer's Manual – Volume 1
11:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. Lunch (provided)
11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Church Treasurer Best Practices
Salem Lutheran Ministries
1800 W. Emma Ave.
Springdale, AR

January 31, 2026 — Cordova, TN

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

Mission Trip to Tanzania 2026

— May 14-24, 2026 —

We are excited to announce that planning is underway for a Mid-South District LCMS mission trip to Tanzania in 2026. Bishop Yohana Nzelu of the Southeast of Lake Victoria Diocese (SELVD) has recommended that our mission activities take place during the week of May 18–24, 2026.

Our team will depart from the United States on Thursday, May 14, and arrive in Tanzania on the evening of Friday, May 15. Upon arrival, we will travel to Shinyanga, where we will stay throughout our mission work from May 17 through May 24.



Mission Activities

The diocese is organizing our church-planting mission in the villages of Mwamadulu and Mihama in the Kishapu District. Each day we will drive from Shinyanga to one of the villages for church planting outreach with Pastors and members from the Kishapu district.

We will celebrate the mission trip in worship in Mwanashele, a congregation that was started through work of a district outreach team in 2011.

Safari Extension

Some team members plan to participate in a safari adventure into the Serengeti. This group will drive to the Western Gate of the Serengeti to meet their tour guides on Monday, May 25. They will return to Kilimanjaro Airport on the evening of Wednesday, May 27 for their flight home.

Please note, participation in the safari is optional. Not all team members will be joining this portion of the trip.

Additional Outreach Opportunities

Beyond church planting, we expect to visit the Buhangiji Albino Center in Shinyanga, the medical clinic at the cathedral, the deaconess home for young albino women, Mwadui Lutheran Secondary School, and the group homes for albino children established by St. John Lutheran Church in Bingen, IN and Mwadui Lutheran Secondary School.

We look forward to a meaningful and impactful mission experience, serving communities and sharing the love of Christ in Tanzania.

For more information

Contact Bob Allen if you have questions or need more information, email rjallen@prodigy.net or call 270-535-7370.



Prayer Summary, December 2025

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.

PRAYER CONCERNS

REV. RONALD HALAMKA (Waxahachie, TX)
MRS. ALISON HAWKINS (Mid-South District Office)
MRS. MARY ANN HERD (wife of Rev. Clifford Herd, Hixson, TN)
REV. TOM SAYRE (Emeritus, St. John's, FL)
REV. TOM MOORE (Emeritus, Cordova, TN)
REV. ALBERT EICHELBERGER (Emeritus, Knoxville, TN)
REV. MYLES SCHULTZ (Pastor, Grace Lutheran Church, Holiday Island, AR)
REV. DR. LEE HAGAN (District President, Missouri District)
MR. JERRY SCHEER (Lafe, AR)
MRS. NANCY CALLIES (wife of Rev. David Callies, Emeritus, Former District President MDS)
MRS. FLORENCE EICHELBERGER (wife of Rev. Albert Eichelberger, Knoxville, TN)
MRS. NORMA MOORE (wife of Rev. Tom Moore, Emeritus, Cordova, TN)
MRS. JUNE WIESE (wife of former MDS Pastor, Rev. Ron Wiese)
MS. STEPHANIE ELSEROAD (daughter of Rev. Rich Elseroad (EM) Knoxville, TN)
MR. ROBERT NERGER (Former Mid-South District Board of Directors, Wartburg, TN)
REV. JOSEPH RANDRIANASOLO and LIME (Madagascar)
REV. DR. JOHANA NZELU (SELVD Bishop) and REV. EMMANUAL MAKALA (former Bishop of SELVD) and the Lutheran churches in Tanzania during this time of political and religious riots across the country.

CALL UPDATE

VACANT CONGREGATIONS & MINISTRIES

ACCEPTED: **REV. GERALD HEMMINGSON**, Emeritus, Joplin, MO accepted the Call to serve as pastor to First Lutheran Church, Harrison, AR. *Installation date pending.*
REV. DR. HAROLD RISTAU, Luther Classical College, accepted the Call to serve as Senior Pastor to Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Bowling Green, KY. *Installation date pending.*
PENDING: **REV. TOM BOECK**, Pastor to Peace Lutheran Church, Conway, AR, received a Call to serve as pastor to Trinity Lutheran Church of Southwest Florida, Port Charlotte, FL; *in addition*, Pastor Boeck received a Call to serve as pastor to Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church, Onalaska, WI.
REV. DANIEL GRAY, Pastor to Martin Luther Chapel, Pennsauken, NJ, received a Call to serve as Pastor to Concordia Lutheran Church, Kingsport, TN.
REV. KEVIN MCREYNOLDS, Pastor to Redeemer Lutheran Church, Mountain Home, AR, received a Call to serve as Pastor to Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Crete, NE.
DECLINED: **REV. MATTHEW ALBRIGHT**, Pastor to Christ Lutheran Church, Little Rock, AR returned the Call to serve as Pastor to St. John's Lutheran Church, Wilcox, Nebraska.
REV. CHRISTOPHER HOWELL, Pastor to Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church, SeaTac, WA returned the Call to serve as Pastor to St. John's Lutheran Church, Stuttgart, AR.

VACANT CONGREGATIONS & MINISTRIES

Concordia Lutheran Church, Kingsport, TN – Pastor

IN THE CALLING PROCESS - COMMISSIONED MINISTERS

Our Savior Lutheran Academy, Nashville, TN – Full-time PreK Teacher; Full-time and Part-time Preschool Teachers and Aides

Christ the King Lutheran School, Memphis, TN – Director of Christian Education

First Lutheran School, Knoxville, TN- Middle School Math; Several part time teaching positions

Grace Lutheran Church, Knoxville, TN – Director of Christian Education



Congregational Mission Commitments

Mission Commitment Receipts as of 11/30/2025 (11 Months)

Anticipated Amount
(91.67% of budget) \$1,492,971
Actual Receipts 1,443,247
Over (under) anticipated
amount..... (\$49,724)

Use of Mission Commitment Receipts (11 Months)

Allocated to Synod for World
Missions \$410,058
Allocated to Tanzania 22,917
Retained for District Mission/Ministry
Support (70% of receipts) 1,010,273
Total Receipts \$1,443,247

Mission Commitment Receipts Prior Year Comparison (11 Months)

Actual Receipts as of
11/30/2025 \$1,443,247
Actual Receipts as of
11/30/2024 \$1,484,289
Over (under) prior year
receipts (\$41,042)

Share your news with us!

Encourager Topics in 2026

We invite you to share your stories with us please email stories by 20th to Rhonda, webmaster@mid-southlcms.com.

Here's a look at the upcoming topics for 2026.

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,
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Angela Fowler,
Executive Director for Business & Finance

Michelle Fischer,
Executive Director for Education, Youth & Family

Scott Roberts,
LCEF Vice President

Missy Washburn,
Executive Assistant to the District President

Renae McElwain,
Communications & Marketing Specialist

April Jones,
Administrative Assistant for Education, Youth & Family

Lisa Pennington,
Finance Assistant

Robin Moyer,
Deaconess

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