

# Encourager

Mid-South District LCMS | February 2021



*A Message from*  
*Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola,*  
President

## OUTREACH – Getting the Church’s “OARs” in the Water

A rowboat makes no progress without its oars in the water. If those oars aren’t deep enough in the water, they may be beating the water to a foam, but not making much progress. Being witnesses of Christ’s Gospel is our privilege and our duty as Christians (1 Peter 2:8-9). Throughout Holy Scripture, bringing the message of God’s Word carries an unmistakable urgency of witnessing – churches getting their OARs in the water. Yet, accompanied with the proclamation, conversion and receiving souls into the gathering of God’s people comes an equally urgent plea for the people to remain in the church. *“And now, dear children, continue in Him, so that when He appears we may be*

*confident and unashamed before Him at His coming.”* (1 Jn. 2:28).

Jesus’s Great Commission articulated a call for His people to be sent to seek the lost and to care for the sick, the prisoners and the widows, the fatherless and the poor. Reaching out in the dark waters of this world, receiving members, and giving them a comfort within the church is only half the job of the imperative – “to make disciples.” Assimilating and retaining members is a major portion of the on-going work of the church. In an attempt to demonstrate outreach success, most churches point to bigger membership. But Christianity’s focus becomes more than well-tried evangelism. They no longer ask, ‘What is the mission of

the church?’ Rather, the entire concept of outreach should be, ‘How can the church effectively carry out its mission of being the church?’

Most outreach models focus specifically on that - outreach. Evangelism becomes getting the unchurched people inside the church - reaching the lost. But, one is hard pressed to find any of the models that include anything on assimilation or retention. Most evangelism models focus on getting people in the front door, yet seldom focus on “closing the backdoor.”

If evangelism is to share Jesus Christ and bring non-Christians into the fellowship of the Church, the message we bring should go beyond just an outreach

program. They need more. For us in the Mid-South, the dynamic tension between a focus on Lutheran doctrine and the necessity to reach the lost is illustrated in an article by Scott Stiegemeyer from our Fort Wayne Seminary, "We have a divine imperative to make disciples of all nations. It is an urgent task because our Lord warned that the night is coming when no one can work, meaning that the end is near and then it will be too late for reaching the lost... Sometimes, in our circles, folks will appear to make a division between those who are guardians of the pure doctrine and those who are mission-minded... To imply that pure doctrine is unimportant is to imply that a correct understanding of God's Word is unimportant... On the other hand, to imply that mission is unimportant is equally an affront to God, because it is the very nature of God to seek and save the lost."

Outreach for God's Kingdom is largely quantitative. God provides the growth. Assimilation is more difficult because it is more qualitative - since it can only be measured by the absence of exiting members. Therefore, assimilation and retention cannot be measured in strictly quantitative terms. It must include the qualitative aspects as the principle measure of congregational healthiness.

That means "Good Outreach is grounded in Good In-reach." If a church is truly interested in making disciples, they will be concerned about what happens to the new converts, the transfers, the dropouts, and the young confirmands. When advancing outreach, the first reflection needed is in a mirror on the congregation itself. The congregation cannot grow or hold their memberships without understanding its ecology - its own organism of structure and the environment in which it exists - the pathology of the body of the church; what businesses call "market differentiation." But, in order to understand our objective in the outreach, assimilation, and retention work of the congregation, we need to understand how we got to this point.

Lutherans aren't well known in this part of America. Although many outreach programs in the

local congregation consider this to be a gigantic disadvantage, look at the "market differentiation" that makes up our communities. We'll never "Oout-Baptist" the Baptists. We'll never "out perform" the non-denoms. If our music and style aren't at least as good as the non-denom down the street, we can never expect to penetrate that "market share." On the other hand, if someone asks, "What do you Lutherans believe?" you have the door of evangelism's outreach flung wide open to you. We can touch the lives of the unchurched when our in-reach has taught our members ("*...and teach them to observe all that I have given to you*" Matt 28:18-20) in catechesis, as a necessary part of in-reach and effective outreach.

David Preus, former president of the old American Lutheran Church, noted, "People feel like they are not being dealt with adequately if they are not being entertained as part of their congregational life."

Post-modern values, rapidly growing religious plurality, and economic disparity within our society radically question parochial worldviews of theologies. It is tempting for some Lutherans to focus attention on coping mechanisms, but research shows that congregations need both this organic, spiritual growth as well as numerical growth for the congregation just to survive - long term. The congregation is not a static organism. It must live and show itself to be alive, regardless of what "method" might be carted out by someone's guru.

If a congregation is doing outreach just to count more members, of what value is that to the Gospel? The Kingdom of God cannot happen apart from the external Word of God, and teaching (continuous catechesis) all things given in His Word. There remains an open "market" for confessional worship in every one of our cities founded on the belief that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ - the theology of the cross.

Assimilation and retention for early Lutheranism was simple. It was based on ethnic "bridges." However, in our heterogeneous society today, assimilation to ethnic traditions and languages is not as simple. Joel Heck observed, "... as a denomination

loses its ethnicity, thereby increasing its capability to reach out with the Gospel to those of different ethnic backgrounds, it also loses much of its ability to assimilate easily." Preaching, teaching, and proclaiming the Gospel remain at the center of ministry in the future.

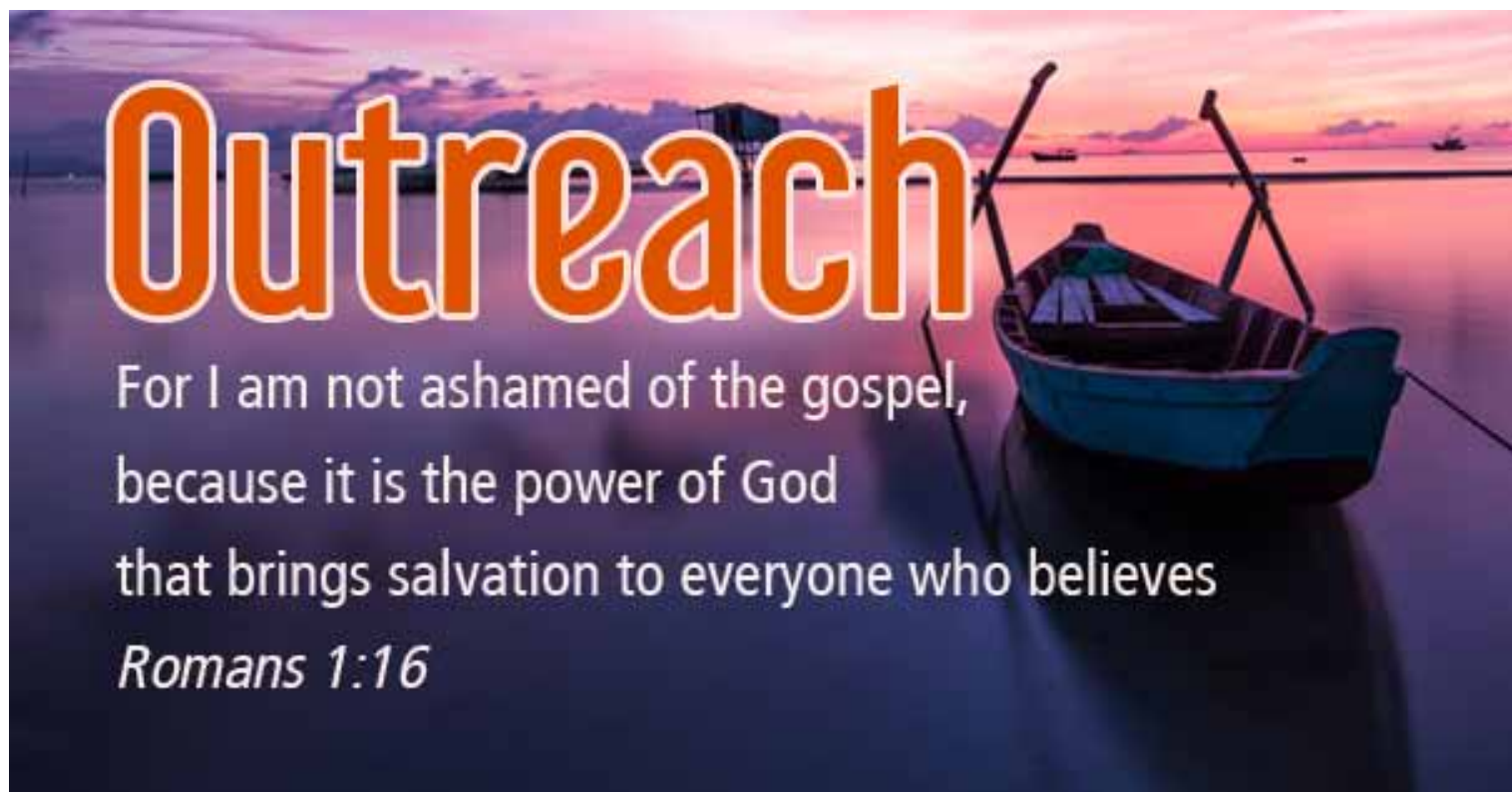
Congregations need to avoid the shotgun approach that pelts as many people with our efforts to make up for the losses for those who have lost interest, have married, or those who just became bored with worship. Our mission should focus on opening the front door, closing the backdoor, and eliminating any problems *before* they get to the front door. It's our subscription to the Gospel. If we believe that the Holy Spirit converts and the Gospel cures the human condition, outreach to the unsaved is a given. An organized effort to discover where the "doors" are for the spiritual, physical and emotional needs sets the place where the post-modern person "gets in the door." The outreach, assimilation, and retention process will make that connection.

Assimilation helps bridge the gap between what new members need and what longtime members know. Effective assimilation helps prevent future backdoor losses. The best place to prevent losses

from the back door is at the front door – good in-reach. Think of it this way: A strong guard rail at the top of a cliff is better than a well-equipped ambulance service at the bottom.

Outreach connected with in-reach may produce, in accordance with the will of God, may result in Numerical Growth (hard numbers); Maturational Growth (subjective growth in stature and maturity); Organic Growth (functional growth in the community); and Incarnational Growth (taking the "meaning and values" of our confession and making them real). OAR's deep in the water help move the rowboat along. Outreach, Assimilation, and Retention is our part in the economy of God's mission for the Church.

Your servant in Christ +  
Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola





## *Ralph Weiser Excellence in Ministry Award Announced*

The recipient of the 2020 Ralph Weiser Excellence in Ministry Award was given to Mr. Michael MacDowell at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Murray, KY on December 20.

The annual award is given to a layperson who has contributed services and stewardship to the Mid-South District's missions and ministries in honor of Ralph Weiser. In addition to the bronze statue, the Mid-South District donates \$5000 to the Lutheran charity of the recipient's choice. Mr. MacDowell chose the Lutheran Association of Missionaries & Pilots, Inc. (LAMP) and Lutheran Bible Translators to receive this year's award.



*Congratulations Mr. Mike MacDowell!*



Pictured include (L-R) Angela Fowler, Executive Director of Business and Finance, MDS; Pat Paavola; President Paavola, MDS; Michael MacDowell; Diane MacDowell; Nancy Lee, Retiree, MDS; and Paul Reaves, LCEF Vice President and Executive Director for Development, MDS.



# PASTOR RECOGNIZED FOR MAKING A DIFFERENCE



In addition, another “20 under 40” honoree acknowledged Pastor Graves impact on his life.” Travis Wilson states, “My renewed faith has made an impact on mine and my families lives. I grew up in a Baptist Church and I was at church every Wednesday and Sunday. When I got out on my own I developed a huge fear of church and stopped attending. My friend Nathan invited

me to St. Paul Lutheran Church so I decided we would go. After we attended for the first time I realized I really enjoyed it and we even began taking classes with Pastor David. The church family at St. Paul helped me get back my faith and I could not ask for a better group of people. Pastor David kinda saved me from what I was going through and I am just thankful for that.”

## DAVID GRAVES



ARTICLE BY JENNIE CHEVALIER  
MORGAN COUNTY NEWS

Pastor David Graves joined the Morgan County community about 8 years ago. Graves was called upon for St. Paul Lutheran Church in Wartburg.

Graves is originally from Columbia, Missouri but has found an appreciation for the sense of community in Morgan County.

“The people here make the difference,” Graves said. “You can be called to your own ideal place in your mind, where you think you want to be, but if the people are no good or not a good fit, then you can be in your favorite spot in the whole world but be miserable. The people here have made it worth every second for me here. Not just as their Pastor but also part of their family and the community. Despite the challenges of being a city person the beauty and people of this county make up for that.”

*“His constant care and concern for his congregation and his community is inspiring.”*

When Graves was little he had big dreams to be Darth Vader.

“When I was very little I wanted to be some sort of superhero,” Graves said. “I became more seriously interested in the ministry when I was in college and I wanted to be an

attorney or go into politics but found that was not fulfilling. Through learning Latin in college it got me into the classics and then everything started to come together.”

Graves became Lutheran in college but was raised as Evangelical.

Graves appreciates the sense of community and appreciates the wisdom that is drawn from the long periods of suffering in Morgan County. He also appreciates the natural beauty and especially the weather.

Graves has been influenced by the insights of St. Bernard & Luther and Ambrose of Milan heavily in his way of thinking. Growing up the biggest influences for Graves were his mom and dad, his Pastor David Mueller and his mentor at seminary David Lewis.

“My parents taught me how to be a big Christian person,” Graves said. “They are extraordinarily religious people but people who were good about modeling what it was to be a good, moral and ethical person. They were conscious to teach us.”

A mission statement at a hospital in St. Louis helps motivate Graves to continue in his path.

“The best mission statement I ever heard was at a St. Louis hospital,” Graves said. “It said it was for the greater glory of God and the health of God’s people and for the service for the people of God. I believe that the gospel is the most

real thing that we can have. It is not just mirror philosophy or a statement it gives real meaning and hope to peoples’ lives. I want to bring that to people so their lives may be free. That is why my monthly letter is called Freedom.”

Graves feels the community could benefit from being more open to younger peoples ideas and more open to outsiders to benefit the county and have a broader reach.

Graves enjoys spending time with family and friends. “I love to visit Knoxville,” Graves said. “I am a people person and I like spending time with people in the area as friends, through the ministry or different avenues. I am a collector of a lot of things too, especially comic books.”

Graves family still resides in Missouri and his brother and his family live in Minnesota. One of Graves favorite moments recently was the birth of his nephew, Henry, 16 months ago and the opportunity to baptize him. Graves is also an avid Cardinals and Blues fan.

To be honored Graves said he is humbled. “It is very humbling but not the reason I am here,” Graves said. “I don’t seek recognition and if people feel I am serving them well then that is a greater reward than anything else. By provenance of being a public figure, I am here on a mission to preach the gospel and deliver the sacraments to the people.”

## MEMPHIS CIRCUIT EPIPHANY DIVINE SERVICE

Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church-Olive Branch, MS had the pleasure of hosting the Memphis Circuit Epiphany Divine Service on January 6, 2021. Thank you to all who attended and assisted! A blessed Epiphany season to all. (Pictured L-R) Rev. Eric Rudsenske, Rev. Jim Belles, Rev. Sawyer Meyers, Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola



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## CONGRATULATIONS MR. BROWNING



Browning has been recognized as the 2020 National Distinguished Principal by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP). Mr. Browning spent many years here in the Mid-South District before moving to Texas. He was called to the district in 1997 by Christ Lutheran School in Little Rock, AR where he served as a teacher and coach and then as a director of relations and development until 2005. In 2005 Mr. Browning was called to Immanuel Lutheran School in Memphis, TN where he served as principal from 2005 until 2013. Scott currently serves as principal of St. Paul Lutheran School in Fort Worth, Texas. Congratulations Mr. Scott Browning, and may the Lord continue to guide you in ministry. (See the December issue of [Reporter](#) for more details.)

— Allen Piepenbrink, *Education Executive Mid-south District LCMS*



## UPDATE FROM CHAPEL OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD



A concrete driveway, has been poured that will make access easier for drivers, as well as help people with mobility concerns to get to the steps and the ramp. Lord willing, we hope to someday expand the concrete driveway so that it also includes the main entrance. The rest of the parking will be gravel. We always are amazed at the ample room our church lot allows for parking. Thank you, Lord! (Pictured are workers scoring the concrete.)



Furniture builder Tommy Aslinger, and his wife Pat, delivered the lectern, the first of the chancel furniture for our new church. Pat and Tommy are both members of St. Paul Lutheran Church, Wartburg, TN. The lectern, pulpit, altar, and

communion rail have been donated by various donors. More steps taken by God's grace working through the generosity of His people!

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## TREASURER'S MEETINGS 2021



**January 2, 2021 Knoxville Treasurers Workshop.** There were 8 faithful attendees in spite of COVID. After this meeting there was a spike in COVID numbers so the remaining Treasurers Workshops were moved to ZOOM. We are thankful for all those who participated in-person and online.



A Youth Mental Health First Aid Workshop for Commissioned Youth Workers is being held virtually Friday, April 16th from 9:30 am to 2:30 pm, sponsored by the Mid-South District. No cost to attend; all materials will be provided. Participants will receive certification upon completion. For more information contact Tessa Brasher [brashert@csp.edu](mailto:brashert@csp.edu)



## 2021 NATIONAL LUTHERAN YOUTH WORKERS CONFERENCE

The 2021 National Lutheran Youth Workers Conference (#National21) is scheduled for **July 11-14, 2021 in Houston, TX.** #NATIONAL21 is a standalone Youth Ministry practitioner conference that is geared toward those who serve youth in a professional, lay, full-time, part-time, or volunteer capacity. The conference provides the participants an opportunity to explore the LCMS Youth Gathering host city the year before the 2022

Gathering as well as connect with other leaders and encourage each other. Adult participants will receive complimentary registration to the 2022 LCMS Youth Gathering in Houston.

More information available here: [2021 National Lutheran Youth Workers Conference - LCMS Calendar](#)

For updates and more information, please visit [lcmsgathering.com](http://lcmsgathering.com).

## TANZANIA MISSION TRIP 2021



We are making plans for a mission trip to Tanzania from the Mid-South District in 2021. We have a mission team from Christ the King Memphis who will be leaving at the end of May 2021 returning home on June 10. A second team from the Nashville area will be leaving on June 10 returning home on June 24th. The trips will consist of outreach and church planting in rural villages of the Southeast of Lake Victoria Diocese (SELVD) and safari into the Serengeti and Ngorongoro National parks after the mission.

For more information contact the District office or Bob Allen [rjallen@prodigy.net](mailto:rjallen@prodigy.net) • 270-535-7370



# LUTHERAN WORLD RELIEF CARE-VAN DRIVE 2020



2020 has been a year of challenges, but that didn't slow down our congregation ladies from stepping up to the plate! Even with several congregations/quilters unable to meet due to COVID-19 we had another great ingathering.

At this year's Lutheran World Relief CARE-VAN ingathering the Mid-South District once again had seven drop sites where we collected handmade quilts, school kits, personal care kits, baby care kits, and fabric kits. Our drop sites included Christus Victor, Knoxville, TN.; Cross of Christ, Chattanooga, TN.; Our Savior, Nashville, TN.; Immanuel, Memphis, TN.; First, Fort Smith, AR.; Grace, Little Rock, AR.; and Salem, Springdale, AR.

At the time of this report (12/21/2020), the top three quilt-producing congregations that dropped off their work at an LWR CARE-VAN ingathering site were Zion Lutheran Church, Alexander, AR (195 quilts), St. Paul Lutheran Church, Gillett, AR (116 quilts), and Faith Lutheran Church, Hot Springs Village, AR (110 quilts). A total of 2,025 quilts (580 were from several area ELCA congregations) were donated.

To date we had 42 congregations participate (7 ELCA), collecting over \$4,400 for shipping costs. We also collected 2,017 personal care kits, 64 fabric kits, 904 school kits, 433 baby care kits, and 85 face masks were also donated. The CARE-VAN trailers were loaded up with 621

boxes (weighing approximately 13,731 pounds!) of offerings from District congregations for Lutheran World Relief. Way to go Mid-South District!

Many of the congregations' efforts are coordinated by LWML groups and longstanding quilting groups in the congregations. They participate in this effort to share the love of Christ in a personal way. The tireless efforts of those who share their talents and the generous contributions of many make this a successful ingathering.

**Thank you to all who participated in this year's annual LWR CARE-VAN drive!**

— Julie Tyler, *Mid-South District CARE-VAN Coordinator*

## NEW SSEL C CONGREGATION

*South Sudan Evangelical Lutheran Church [South Sudan]*

Hello Brothers in Christ

Attached is a picture of our newly established Nimule congregation taken during this year Christmas. Its Christmas attendance was 250 souls. The church building space was not enough for them, so some attended the service from outside.

This congregation was established in July last year and God has just blessed it to grow to that number. Nimule town where this congregation is established is located at the South Sudan-



Uganda border, 250 miles South of Bor town. We thank God for His wonders.

Pray for the growth and sustenance of this SSEL C brand

new congregation. It is new and needs many things to support its mission.

— Rev. Nathaniel Bol

# Prayer Summary, January 2021

Following is a list of all the people that have appeared on the Mid-South District website prayer list [www.mid-southlcms.com](http://www.mid-southlcms.com) during the month of January 2021

## PRAYER CONCERNS

**REV. NATHANIEL BOL** (of the SSELCC) and daughter, **APAR BOL** (South Sudan)

**REV. RONALD HALAMKA** (Waxahachie, TX)

**MRS. ALISON HAWKINS** (Mid-South District Office)

**REV. DONLEY HESSE** (Emeritus, Mena, AR)

**MRS. SUSAN JONES** (Volunteer, Mid-South District)

**MS. MICHELE LAYNE** (Director, St. John Lutheran Child Care, Fayetteville, AR)

**REV. NEIL VANDERBUSH** (Chaplain\*U.S. Army through the Board of International Missions\*Our Savior, Searcy, AR)

**We pray for all affected by the Coronavirus as we continue to navigate within this ever changing pandemic and the work to distribute the vaccine.**

## OUR DEEPEST SYMPATHIES TO:

**The family and friends of Mr. Eugene Droop** (Father in Law to Rev. Joshua Willadsen, Fort Smith AR) **who recently passed away.**

**The family and friends of Rev. Jack Gilliam** (served as Pastor to St. John Lutheran Church 2002-2009 Stuttgart, AR) **who recently passed away.**

**The family and friends of Rev. Richard Krogen Coon Rapids, MN** (Father of Rev. Joel Krogen, Batesville, AR) **who recently passed away.**

Rev. Dr. Mark Press and family as they mourn the loss of his Mother in Law, who recently passed away.

## CALL UPDATE

### IN THE CALLING PROCESS – CONGREGATIONS ORDAINED MINISTERS

**ACCEPTED: Rev. Dr. Richard Davenport, Candidate,** Cincinnati, OH, has accepted the Call to serve as Pastor to Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Fort Smith, AR. Installation planned for February 28, 2021 at 3:00 PM.

### COMMISSIONED MINISTERS

**PENDING: Eileen Esget** (Candidate) has been issued a Call to serve as Deaconess to Grace Lutheran Church, Little Rock, AR.

### VACANT CONGREGATIONS & MINISTERIES

**Mid-South District – Executive Director for Missions and Ministry**  
**Christ Lutheran Church, Little Rock, AR – Pastor**  
**Trinity Lutheran Church, Columbia, TN – Pastor**  
**River Valley Grace Lutheran Church, Lamar, AR – Pastor**  
**Zion of Avilla Lutheran Church, Alexander, AR – Pastor**

### IN THE CALLING PROCESS- COMMISSIONED MINISTERS

**Zion Lutheran Church of Avilla, Alexander, AR – Director of Parish Music**  
**Belvoir Christian Academy – Teachers**

## CONGREGATIONAL MISSION COMMITMENTS

### Mission Commitment Receipts as of 12/31/2020 (12 Months)

Anticipated Amount (100% of budget) .....	\$1,538,970
Actual Receipts .....	<u>1,559,221</u>
Over (under) anticipated amount.....	\$20,251

### Use of Mission Commitment Receipts (12 Months)

Allocated to Synod for World Missions.....	\$442,766
Allocated to Tanzania .....	25,000
Retained for District Mission/Ministry Support (70% of receipts) .....	<u>1,091,455</u>
Total Receipts .....	\$1,559,221

### Mission Commitment Receipts Prior Year Comparison (12 Months)

Actual Receipts as of 12/31/2020 .....	\$1,559,221
Actual Receipts as of 12/31/2019 .....	<u>\$1,576,515</u>
Over (under) prior year receipts .....	(\$17,294)

## Encourager Topics in 2021

The monthly Encourager features news from across the Mid-South District. If your congregation, school or ministry group has a story to share please email the articles and photos to [webmaster@mid-southlcms.com](mailto:webmaster@mid-southlcms.com) by February 19, 2021. Here's a look at the upcoming topics for 2021

- 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](mailto: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

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**Allen Piepenbrink,**

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ON FACEBOOK - "Mid-South-LCMS"

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