

Encourager

FEBRUARY 2022

Mid-South District LCMS



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

Where Is Your Umbrella?

We have all at one time watched a National Geographic program about the wildlife on the African continent. We watch what happens to the animals that get separated from their herd. The gathering of the wildebeest and the gathering of zebras or any other type of animal is nothing more than protection and preservation of the herd, or flock.

The gathering of things together have some interesting names. Some of them are quite interesting, such as what is a gathering of lawyers called? A conspiracy. A gathering of prisoners is called a gang. A gathering of lions is a pride. A gathering of angels is called a pinhead. A gathering of geese is called a gaggle. A gathering of turtles is called a creep. What is a gathering of umbrellas called? A phalynx. The gathering of God's

people is called a worshipping congregation. Think about the last place you might have seen a phalynx of umbrellas. Outside of many sanctuaries, we are likely to find a phalynx of umbrellas - a collection of several unclaimed umbrellas.

If you take a look at the lists of collective nouns, most collections of animals or birds that make sense. Why do birds and animals come together in a collective unit? Mostly for protection, right? They travel in a collective group for the purpose of hunting for food, for protection against predators, and for warmth and security.

But, have you never heard anyone ever talk about a phalynx of umbrellas? What's so fascinating about the container holding several umbrellas at many church entrance is that they are all folded up and left here by their owners.

It was raining when they came to church, but forgot about the umbrella if the rain stopped and the sun was shining afterwards. When their owner needs them for the next rainfall, they won't be able to be used because they're there at the church's front door.

We know there are storms and rains that happen around here. Umbrellas offer some kind of protection so we, and our clothing, don't get wet. We open the umbrella up and hold it over our heads and the storm and the rain don't bother us.

In a certain sense, the love of God is like an umbrella. The gathering of the First Century Christians was also a kind of umbrella. Peter's sermon to the congregation in Jerusalem called for the congregation to gather together...gather together for worship each week...to gather

together for the common good of the family of believers...and to gather together for the mutual prayer and support of the family of God's people.

God's grace calls, strengthens and protects His people. His love gathers us together in the common union when He serves us, feeds us, and makes us His own in the one, true, and Holy Christian Church. His loving grace is like an all-encompassing umbrella that guards us against the storms of our life that are caused by the devil and sin in this world. Sin and temptation are the way that Satan tries to get us out of God's family and to erode away our faith. But, God sends His love and grace to us in as many ways as we will need for each day.

When we are covered with the dirt of our sinful nature, God baptizes us, cleanses us, and brings to us faith through the means of the Rite of Holy Baptism. When our faith is shaken and we need to hear about His continuing presence with us, God offers us His body and blood in Holy Communion. The proclamation of His love, forgiveness, and mercy come through the preaching of His Word in the proper distinction of the Law and Gospel. And prayer - the great weapon given to the



company of believers - is our way to keep in constant communication with God for our strength, our protection, and our offerings of praise to Him for all His blessing toward us. God's love comes through His Word, His Church, His sacraments, and His people - kind of like an umbrella, protecting us from the eroding works of Satan, the world, and our own sinful flesh.

But, as strange as it may seem, sometimes, God's umbrellas don't work because they aren't opened. We forget His love and mercy and leave them to lie around or get stacked with other umbrellas other people have absent mindedly left behind. God's umbrella of grace and forgiveness is always there for us. But His gifts are given to be used in the way they were designed to be used. If we don't read the Bible and aren't led by the living, active Holy Spirit, it's not God who isn't acting. It's us. If we don't come to worship to be served by God with His Word and Sacraments, it isn't God whose gone away. It's us. If we don't say our prayers, don't do our devotions, or don't study His Word we can't blame God for lack of protection and comfort... we just haven't opened the umbrella of His grace the way He meant it to be.

An unopened umbrella is worthless in a rainstorm. An umbrella left in a place where we can't find it when we need it, is as good as no umbrella at all. It's not the umbrella's fault. It's ours. It's our responsibility and our privilege to open the umbrella of God's grace, just as much as it's our

responsibility to open this umbrella outside when it rains.

Jesus called His people together for nourishment and for spiritual food. He showed how He cares for our physical and our spiritual needs. Out of His divine love and compassion He showed His compassion for the sick and the disadvantaged. He demonstrated compassion on the children and the widows. He told us never to worry about anything that transpires in our life that may seem like a storm.

Out of love Jesus calmed the storms and in the middle of the storms, He offers His protection of grace and mercy for everyone. He brings into His fellowship, saying. "Give up that which is counting on material riches and provide yourself with moneybags that will never grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches or moth eats away. For where your treasures is, there you heart will be also."

Treasure this - not some discarded and forgotten umbrella left at church, but the umbrella of God's love through Jesus Christ, the company of His people gathered together in worship and prayer, and the strength and grace that He offers through His Word and Sacrament. It's yours to use. It's yours to keep. It's yours to share. It's yours forever. Let the unbounded love of God in Christ cover you every day on the life's journey.

Your servant in Christ +
Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Roger Paavola'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

LERT update from Paducah



It was Friday, December 10th, 2021. We were all set to host a Christmas party for the board of elders at our home here in Paducah. My wife and I had heard that the conditions would be ripe for a tornado. Should we cancel the Christmas party? We figured that this time would be like so many other times we had heard of tornado conditions. No need to cancel.

So we went ahead, and after the final guests left we cleaned up the place and put the kids to bed. Then we sat there on the couch listening to the weathermen tracking the path of the tornado. On the screen we could see an angry looking red blob that they were calling the “debris ball.” Just a blip on the screen but in reality, “a mile wide.” We heard how they said they had never seen anything this big before. It was clear that it was going to be about 30 miles south of Paducah, which was a relief. But that meant it was passing right through Mayfield and from there further east and north along the I-69 corridor.

I quickly thought through my members who lived along that path. I hurriedly sent messages to those whose numbers were in my phone. Some quickly responded that they were okay. Others said they were huddled in basements and closets, praying that the Lord would protect them.

Thankfully all of our members in the path were protected through the storm. Two had damage to their homes; one of which was quite significant. But no harm was done to their bodies. Not all were so fortunate. It is likely that by now you have seen many images of that damage.

The next morning I was at a loss. What can I do? What can we at St. Paul do? It is a very humbling thing to realize that there are times when nothing much can be done. So we turned to the Lord in prayer, trusting that in Him there is no lack and no shadow of change. “Cast your burdens on the Lord for He cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:7)

Sunday morning brought more of the same question: What can be done? And again we experienced something of that humbling as there was no clear answer. We used the first 20 minutes or so of our Bible Study time to check in and hear if anyone had family or friends in trouble. That night we were able to put together an impromptu potluck for survivors who were now homeless and other first responders who were being sheltered at a local Baptist church. They told us they needed food for 100, but in Lutheran potluck lingo that translated into enough for 300.

Then on Monday I got a phone call from President Paavola. He told me that he and Ross Johnson, the director of the Synod’s Disaster Response wanted to assess the situation with me and see if St. Paul could be a possible host site for LCMS volunteers. I didn’t know what all that entailed but I quickly agreed. What a relief to have someone who had done this before and who maybe could answer our question.

That afternoon a rough sketch of a plan came together. We would host trained volunteers from across Synod who would also bring heavy equipment to show mercy to those who were suffering. We quickly assembled a four person committee to help prepare to receive all these visitors but we had no experience with the Lutheran Early Response Team (LERT) or

Lutheran Church Charities (LCC). We didn't know if we would need to host them in our homes, to provide cots and bedding, or how we were going to feed everyone. What had we gotten ourselves into?

In my mind I figured this would all take a while. After all, we were approaching Christmas and New Year's, and surely no one would come to Paducah, Kentucky at this time of year to help out, right?

Thankfully I was wrong! In no time our congregation resembled Bethlehem at that first Christmas. No room in the inn! By that Sunday, Dec. 19th we had all kinds of people from all kinds of places setting up cots and inflatable mattresses. It looked like a church lock-in, but with grown-ups. Jan Simko from Shepherd of the Hills in Crossville, TN came as the District Disaster Relief Coordinator (DDRC) along with her Pastor, Andrew Abraham, who made assessments and pastoral visits with her. Brian Mead from the Kansas District helped Jan learn the ropes as she was baptized by fire (this was her first disaster response).

That Sunday morning we had about 30 men wearing highlighter yellow volunteer shirts belting out the liturgy with us and receiving Holy Communion alongside our members. Just as if they were right at home. Just as if they were of one body with us... because we are.. "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it." (1 Cor. 12:26).

United in faith we are also one in witness and in mercy. Those first few days the crews



From left to right: Front row – Jim Morris, Christine Brandt, Paul Keller, Brian Mead, Johnny Hartig; Back row – Pastor David Appold, Jan Simko, Phil Justice, Ray Musgrave, Mary Legendre, Mike Legendre, Sue Doering, Walter Doering

were largely getting to know the area and passing out cards with contact information. Slowly but surely we started getting calls at the church. "These people connected to your church who called themselves Lutherans said they could help us. Is this real? They have equipment? And they'll do it for free? Ok, well, sign me up." With each house that was shown mercy a neighbor or two saw and inquired and got added to the list. The local sheriffs and FEMA people started making referrals to the Lutheran team as well. And always, in every case, the men and women who showed mercy were able to point the survivors to the hope of Jesus Christ and the local congregation where they could receive His mercy in the communion of saints.

As of writing this the total number of homes cleared is 62.

We will still be hosting volunteers through the end of this week, with Jan Simko saying that it is very likely that LERT will set up weekend opportunities for service in the coming months. Great work has begun, but it is by no means finished.

What can we do? That question still hangs in the air here. 8 of our members were able to go through the LERT basic training which gives us a good base of understanding and ideas for future projects. Removing tree limbs and debris is certainly important. But removal will eventually give way to rebuilding. And it is that work that will last much longer. So many congregations and individuals have contributed either directly to our congregation or to the Mid-South District's disaster relief fund. An initial \$10,000 were used to purchase gift cards for Lowe's,

Walmart, and Amazon. We passed out a number of these in the week before Christmas.

The outpouring of generosity and love have been truly amazing to behold. On behalf of our congregation here in far western Kentucky and also the surrounding counties I want to thank everyone who has helped. Our congregation has had the privilege of both receiving your encouragement and being able to pass that Christian charity on to our hurting neighbors. What a great testament to our life together in Christ that we are able to respond with wisdom, time, energy, and financial aid to show mercy to those who need it.

— Rev. David R. Appold,
St. Paul Lutheran Church (Paducah)



Marty Johnson uses the LCC lift to cut down hanging limbs from a tree in Mayfield, KY (above)

For more information on volunteering contact Jan Simko at janetsimko73@gmail.com

Disaster Relief Fund—
Donations directed to this fund will be used for relief efforts in the tornado-ravaged communities. To contribute

to this fund, you may make a gift online or by check payable to the Mid-South District Office / 1675 Wynne Road / Cordova TN 38016. Please note "Disaster Relief Fund" on any gifts sent by check. When donating online, please designate your gift as "restricted" for the Disaster Relief Fund.



2022 TANZANIA MISSION TRIP

We are making plans for a team from the Mid-South District to return to Tanzania, Africa in May of 2022. To communicate to the people of Tanzania the life-changing power of Jesus Christ in a practical and understanding way; to develop them into responsible, productive, successful Christians, and equip them for their ministry in the church and world.

We plan to visit the city of Shinyanga, home of the Southeast Lake Victoria Lutheran District. The main emphasis of the trip will be to share the Good News of Jesus with the Sukuma people, located in Northwest Tanzania. We will also visit other areas

of past ministry; such as food ministry to albino children, Mwadui Lutheran secondary school, widows ministry. Team members will go door-to-door in villages to spread the Word of God and the wonderful news of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. The team will be accompanied by local ministers and lay persons who will act as translators. We will be using simple techniques such as: an Evangecube or Bible story telling. So, if you can share a 4th-grade level Sunday school lesson in your own words, you are qualified! Please contact, Bob Allen for more information 270-535-7370 or rjallen@prodigy.net

Last Date Treasurers' Workshop

There's one Workshop left, if you are interested in attending please contact Angela Fowler by e-mail afowler@mid-southlcms.com or telephone (866-373-1343)

February 5, 2022
9:00 a.m. – 11:30 p.m.
St. John Lutheran Church
500 N. Cumberland Avenue
Russellville, AR

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.



Over 96% of every dollar donated goes directly to the Haitian Feeding Program

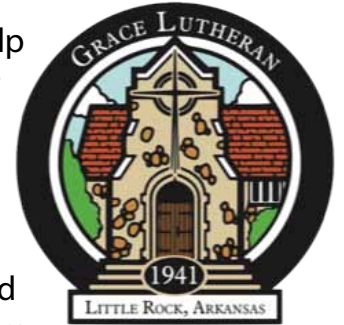
Trinity HOPE is passionate about following God's lead to serve a noon meal to over 52,000 children each day in Haiti. Visit us at www.trinityhope.org for more information. You can also follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/trinityhopehaiti. Here, we share information regarding our schools, our mission work, and any updates out of Haiti.

Grace Lutheran is Hosting Seminary Extension Class

Grace, Little Rock will be hosting a seminary extension class from June 8-10th. They will be welcoming the Prof. Scott Steigemeyer from Concordia University in Irvine and the topic is "What It Means to be Human". Registration is open now.

Grace will be able to help with lodging, meals or other costs involved for attendees, but on a limited basis. A detailed introduction to the speaker and course is included [here](#).

For more information contact Rev. Kent Schaaf at 501-663-3631 or kent.schaaf@glclcr.org



With a mighty hand
and outstretched
arm;
His love endures
forever

Psalm 136:12

JOB COMFORT DOG—COLLIERVILLE

At Christ the King, Memphis, congregants are accustomed to seeing the wagging tail and friendly eyes of Job Comfort Dog every Saturday and Sunday before and after worship. Children line up to pet this beautiful, well-trained golden retriever, and adults come by to get their weekly dose of that silky fur and calm countenance.

Out in the community, however, Job's appearance at places and events is anything but normal or routine. His extensive training as an LCC comfort dog makes him welcome wherever he goes. Eyes light up in the common room of a nursing home as Job enters, children having a bad day at school immediately are soothed, frail hands in a hospital bed reach out to touch his soft fur. The comfort Job brings is unmistakable and calls to mind the peace that passes all understanding that Jesus imparts to all believers.

In September of 2021, a lone gunman terrorized people shopping and working at a Kroger located in Collierville, TN, a town outside of Memphis, killing one person and injuring many others, before committing suicide. The peaceful Town of Collierville was in shock and many in the community and surrounding areas gathered in support. Job Comfort Dog's Top Dog (ministry coordinator) Genie Swan contacted the Shelby County Crime Victims and Rape Crisis Center to offer Job's presence to those who were affected by the tragedy.

Subsequently, Job and his handlers were invited to several gatherings of the survivors of the



shooting and were welcomed at the private tour given to survivors of the store as it was in the process of being remodeled. Job also was an invited guest at the press conference announcing the opening of the Kroger Associates Resource Center and was a regular fixture at the counseling center in the weeks following.

At the press conference marking the opening of the remodeled store, Job was invited onstage to receive a special dog bed in thanks for his continuing commitment to bring comfort to the Collierville community. Before the shooting, Job was already making regular visits to organizations and facilities in Collierville, including Bailey Station Elementary,

Baptist Reynolds Hospice House, the Burch Library, and The Langford Assisted Living. He continues to make friends in the Collierville community, as well as in other parts of the Mid-South area.

For more information on Job Comfort Dog, or to schedule a visit, please contact Genie Swan at gswan@ctkmemphis.com.



PRAYER SUMMARY, JANUARY 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 January 2022.

PRAYER CONCERNS

MRS. SUSANNE ELSEROAD (wife of Rev. Richard Elseroad, Grace Lutheran Church, Knoxville, TN)
KNOX (3 year old son to the cousin of Sabrina Gunderson, Early Childhood Director, Crossville, TN)
REV. RONALD HALAMKA (Waxahachie, TX)
MRS. ALISON HAWKINS (Mid-South District Office)
REV. DONLEY HESSE (Emeritus, Mena, AR)
REV. CHAD PHILIPP (Pastor, St. Luke Lutheran & St. Paul Lutheran, DeWitt/Gillett, AR)
REV. GIL PINGEL (Emeritus, Chattanooga, TN)
REV. JOSEPH RANDRIANASOLO; the city of Fianarantsoa (Madagascar) and LIME as they continue to deal with a devastating drought.
MR. CHARLES TAYLOR (husband to Pat Taylor, Church Administrator, Our Savior Cabot, AR)
MR. MARC HIGGINS (Treasurer, Mid-South District Board of Directors) Maumelle, AR
REV. NATHAN JANSEN (Pastor, St. John Lutheran Church, Burns, TN)

We lift up all those affected by the devastating tornadoes in Arkansas, Tennessee, and Kentucky and send prayers for those assisting in the recovery and clean-up efforts.

Our deepest sympathies to the family and friends of Mrs. Valeria March (mother of Mrs. Tonya Gierke – wife of Rev. John Gierke, Conway, AR) who recently passed away.

Our deepest sympathies to the family and friends of Rev. Don Schmidt (Pastor, Messiah Lutheran Church, Memphis, TN) who passed away January 12, 2022.

Our deepest sympathies to the family and friends of Rev. Dr. Wesley Toncre (Pastor Emeritus, Conway, AR) who passed away January 13, 2022.

Our deepest sympathies to the family and friends of Mr. Chuck Winterstein (former Part-Time Executive of Education, Mid-South District Office) who recently passed away.

CALL UPDATE

IN THE CALLING PROCESS – CONGREGATIONS ORDAINED MINISTERS

ACCEPTED: Rev. Michael Edwards, Pastor to Faith Lutheran Church, Springfield, MO, has accepted the Call to serve as Pastor to Our Savior Lutheran Church, Cabot, AR. Installation took place January 30, 2022.

continued

Rev. Mark Bushuiakovish, Associate Pastor to Christ the King Lutheran Church, Southgate, MI has accepted the Call to serve as Associate Pastor to Our Savior Lutheran Church, Nashville, TN. Installation is planned for February 6, 2022.

Rev. William Zwick, Pastor to First Lutheran Church, Harrison, AR, accepted the Call to serve as Executive Director of Missions & Ministry to the Mid-South District Office, Cordova, TN. Installation is planned for February 8, 2022.

VACANT CONGREGATIONS & MINISTRIES

Hope Lutheran Church, Batesville, AR & Zion Lutheran Church, Waldenburg, AR – Pastor
First Lutheran Church, Blytheville, AR – Pastor
Peace Lutheran Church, Conway, AR – Pastor
St. Matthew Lutheran Church, Conway, AR – Pastor
Trinity Lutheran Church, Columbia, TN – Pastor

IN THE CALLING PROCESS- COMMISSIONED MINISTERS

Avilla Christian Academy, Alexander, AR – Teachers (Middle School Grades 5th&6th)
Christ Lutheran School, Little Rock, AR – DCE
Christ the King, Memphis, TN – Teachers (Pre-K; 1st grade and PE/Athletics)
First Lutheran School, Fort Smith, AR – Teachers for 3rd and 4th grades
First Lutheran School, Knoxville, TN – Part-Time Teacher (Early Childhood)
Grace Lutheran Early Childhood Development Center, Little Rock, AR – Early Childhood Teachers and Aids
Holy Trinity Lutheran School, Bowling Green, KY – Teachers (Preschool) and Classroom Aids
Immanuel Lutheran School, Memphis, TN – Teachers
St. John's Lutheran School, Stuttgart, AR – Teachers (Early Childhood and Extended Care)
Zion Lutheran Church of Avilla, Alexander, AR – Director of Parish Music

CONGREGATIONAL MISSION COMMITMENTS

Mission Commitment Receipts as of 1

2/31/2021 (12 Months)

Anticipated Amount (100%
of budget).....\$1,473,615
Actual Receipts 1,572,598
Over (under)
anticipated amount ... \$98,983

Use of Mission Commitment Receipts (12 Months)

Allocated to Synod for World
Missions\$446,779
Allocated to Tanzania .. 25,000
Retained for District Mission/
Ministry Support
(70% of receipts)..... 1,100,819
Total Receipts\$1,572,598

Mission Commitment Receipts Prior Year Comparison (12 Months)

Actual Receipts as
of 12/31/2021\$1,572,598
Actual Receipts as
of 12/31/2020..... \$1,559,221
Over (under) prior
year receipts\$13,377



Share your news with us!

Encourager Topics in 2022

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 2022](#)

- March – Youth
- April – Volunteers
- May – Small Town & Rural Ministry
- June – Leadership
- July – Veterans
- August – Stewardship
- September – Church Planting
- October – Celebrating Lutheran Heritage
- November – Thankfulness
- December – Highlights 2022

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

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