

Encourager

Mid-South District LCMS | March 2021



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

HE CAME TO MAKE US WHOLE

I heard a story that several years ago a man in Kentucky walked into a Dairy Queen, placed an order and paid for it with a \$200 bill. (Yes, there is no such thing as a \$200 bill.) The young cashier gave him \$198 in change and he drove away. Sometime later, the manager noticed something wrong in the deposit bag. The \$200 bill didn't look right. It had a picture of President George Bush on one side with a picture of the White House on the back with an oil well in front of the White House. The police were able to find the man. He was arrested for theft by deception and counterfeiting.

Real currency is designed to make it difficult to counterfeit. When you hold real currency up

to a light there are strips hiding inside the fabric (money is not paper). The strip glows under UV light, and certain marker pens will show a counterfeit bill. When the FBI trains their agents to recognize counterfeit bills, the meticulously study the real thing.

Companies have copyrights and branding ("brand identity") that is supposed to protect their products. A person can purchase a Gucci "looking" bag or a Rolex watch look-alike. Those are called knock-off products that do nothing but deceive the unsuspecting buyer. Today, consumers have problems with these copycat products. My favorite story goes back to the 1960's when the Woodstock

culture was trying to find "grass." A very enterprising farmer in North Dakota decided to sell small plastic bags of his recent alfalfa crop. The Woodstocker group descended on Zap (Zip to Zap) North Dakota smoking alfalfa "joints." It was the best return the farmer ever had on a hay crop! Most of these are rather funny but these forgeries are not always funny.

In the same way that a whole generation can be fooled by counterfeit products or money, we are also in danger of counterfeit religion as well - fake Christianity. We are seeing an entire generation in danger of worship in a knock-off Jesus. So what does this mean? What is counterfeit faith? What is fake Christianity and where

does it come from? How can we recognize a knock-off Jesus? And, how do we make sure we don't fall for it?

The first thing we need to know is that, unlike fake products, we need to know the real thing first. A knock-off Jesus is a caricature of Jesus that is not the real Jesus. It's the image created in the minds of the Jesus people think they want to believe in. Jesus is not an idol that is supposed to grind out every whim and desire thrown in His hopper.

What are these knock-off Christs? For many, Jesus is the same kind of benevolent neighbor as Mister Rogers – a gentle teacher who told stories and promised the good life. In 2005, a Christian psychologist did a study of Christian youth. He discovered that many of today's youth hold similar views about God, but views that weren't really about the biblical Jesus. He soon discovered that those distorted beliefs about Jesus were widespread in American religions.

He discovered beliefs that there is a god who exists and created the world, and watches over human life on earth – but from a distance. They described a god who wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other. That god taught morals found in the Bible and by most world religions. Their god taught and offered the central goal in life to be happy and to feel good about yourself. Because their god is off in the distance, there is no need for that

god to be particularly involved in a person's life except when a god is needed to resolve a problem. And, with over 70% of the youth making note of it, their god makes sure all good people go to heaven when they die.

This kind of faith Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, which is a complicated way of saying that God's goal is to make me happy and to help out when I can't take care of things myself. That, however is not the God of the Bible. Peeling the dross of that misguided belief ends up placing the person at the center of their "faith" (religion) and is the counterfeit "Knock-off Jesus."

Being Christ Jesus' disciple is a total commitment to study the real thing. Today's youth are influenced by their peers, by the media, by Hollywood, and the Internet. In addition, their educational foundation not only is forbidden to teach the truths about Christ, the Bible, and faith in the true and living God, precious few schools are able to teach Christian values – at least we are yet today.

Bringing up today's youth in a faith formation requires the precious time with a family that not only supports Christian youth faith formation, but takes the time to embrace the privilege and responsibility as faithful parenting. This is not a part-time job! Jesus says that being His disciple is the most important thing in any one of our lives. While the post-modern society says,

"Take care of number one;" Jesus says, "Worship the Lord with all your heart, with all you strength, and with all your life."

Jesus used an illustration saying *"If you want to build a building, do you not first sit down and figure out how much it is going to cost and whether or not you can afford to complete it?"* In another parable Jesus compared the decision to follow Him to the decision of a king to go into battle against another king. Our commitment to God and our commitment to today's youth should come from purposeful consideration of what it is that is involved faith formation.

While it is true that God does not ask us for a vow of poverty, He is also not the ATM-God who dishes out everything we desire, including prosperity. Jesus provides everything we need – just as He cares for the birds of the air and every other living thing. He wants our priorities right. In Matthew 6 He says, *"Seek first the Kingdom of God and all these things shall be added to you."*

The knock-off Jesus is easy to live with – and why not, He would give us everything our heart (soiled in sin) desires. The knock-off Jesus becomes something that a person can add to their already busy life. But the real Jesus isn't just another ingredient added to our life, He creates, sustains, promises eternal life.

The knock-off Jesus exists to meet every desire - the foundation

of a “prosperity gospel.” But, at the bottom of this is the idea that God wants me to be happy and that means He must want me to have the things that make me happy. But Jesus did not come to earth to die on a cross and then rise again just to make us happy. He came to make us whole, to redeem us from the condemnation of my sin, and bring us joy. Real joy comes from understanding what the real God has done for us in the real Jesus.

The Apostle Paul says, “Rejoice in the Lord always.” Joy comes from the wholeness and completeness of all we NEED that God graciously and mercifully provides.

How do we get rid of the “Knock-off Jesus?” Let our youth see and study the real and true Jesus. That has been our commitment in the Mid-South with Generations-2-Generations—getting family faith formation to focus on the real

Jesus who is one with us and yet fully God. Give Christ the most important place in the life of your entire family – including you. May the generations to come learn to follow the real Jesus.

Your servant in Christ +
Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola



MISSION MOMENTS

Share Your Ministry’s “Mission Moments” for the Upcoming District Convention

The Mid-South District is collecting submissions for Mission Moment video segments to be shared at the 2021 District Convention in July. How does your congregation or school participate? Simply email Renae McElwain (<mailto:rmcelwain@mid-southlcms.com>) with photos of an outreach event or project, along with a short description. The event or project can be from any year since the last convention in 2018. Please



share your submissions by **April 15, 2021.**

For an example of typical submissions and how they will be presented, check out one of the Mission Moment videos from the last District Convention at <https://vimeo.com/276968317>.



2021 DISTRICT CONVENTION UPDATES

July 1 - July 3, 2021 @ Hilton Hotel, Memphis

The official Convention Notice is posted on the District website. Christ the King Lutheran Church and School in Memphis will host the Convention's opening worship service and dinner with a Synodical Representative bringing the worship service message.

All the latest updates can be found on the dedicated event page on the District website (mid-southlcms.org/resources/convention).

MID-SOUTH SCHOOLS REPORT

All ten of the district elementary schools have been able to stay open in face-to-face format during this pandemic. There have been some short-term closures of classrooms, but not entire schools. Of the ten elementary school, Avilla Christian Academy in Alexander, AR and Heavenly Host Lutheran School in Cookeville, TN have a high school.

In the district 19 early childhood centers are currently open. Several of them have had Covid-19 related restrictions which have caused a reduction in the number of students allowed in classrooms. Six of the centers are at full capacity and four of those are considering adding another classroom. We have had three early childhood school temporarily close due to the current pandemic. We are hopeful that they can reopen this fall.

There are many opportunities available for sharing the Gospel. There were 21 baptisms associated with the schools in 2020. 70 of the students in the early childhood centers are Lutheran, 571 are non-Lutheran, and 273 have no church affiliation. 191 of the students in the elementary schools are Lutheran, 469 are non-Lutheran, and 152 have no church affiliation. We pray that the Lord guide the teachers in sharing the Good News to all their students.

Ascension Lutheran Church in Madison, TN has begun a relationship with The Edison School to serve children with learning differences and support families in need. The Edison School will operate the school using the church's facilities while maintaining the church's values in doctrine and LCMS practices. Please pray for Pastor Bauch and his congregation as they accept this ministry opportunity.

Pilgrim Lutheran Church in Jonesboro, AR has begun work toward opening a Classical school. They hope to begin serving children this coming fall. At this point they are searching for a headmaster and developing appropriate curriculum. We pray that Pastor Leigeber and his congregation have a blessed beginning of their school.

The Mid-South District has had great success in maintaining a face-to-face relationship between teachers and students. We continue to pray that the Lord guide all our administrators, teachers, students, and parents as the Gospel is shared.

Allen Piepenbrink
Education Executive
Mid-South LCMS



STUDENT FINANCIAL AID—APPLY NOW

District Now Accepting Applications for Student Financial Aid

To support the education efforts of individuals pursuing a full-time career in church work, the Mid-South District is pleased to once again offer opportunities for student financial aid. To be considered for financial assistance, a student must be a member in good standing in a Mid-South District congregation and be enrolled in a seminary or university to prepare for full-time service to the Church as a rostered worker. Rostered workers are pastors, teachers, deaconesses and Directors of Christian Education.

To be considered for the student financial assistance

program, you must first inform the Mid-South District Office that you are or will be a student enrolled at a synodical school.

All related forms, including the financial aid application, are on the [District's website](#).

**Application deadline
June 15, 2021**

This information may be sent via [email to Julie Tyler](#) or by regular mail to:

Mid-South District LCMS
1675 Wynne Road
Cordova, TN 38016
Attn: Julie Tyler



Forms

[District Financial Aid Application](#)

[Financial Aid Letter 02.03.21](#)

[Pastor's Eval Form 2021-2022](#)

[Scholarship Guidelines for 2021-2022](#)

[Agreement of Repayment for 2021-2022](#)

[SMP Scholarship Fund Application 2021-2022](#)

NOW ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS

The Take Heart Scholarship, from Lutheran Church Extension Fund

**Take Heart
Scholarship**



The Take Heart Scholarship was developed for Lutheran Church Extension Fund's (LCEF) Y.I. Club members who are high school seniors and will soon advance to the next level of higher education. During these times of excitement, anxiousness and uncertainty, "take heart!" As Christians, we

cannot anticipate that life will be perfect or familiar, but when we feel that the world has become difficult, take comfort in knowing that our God has overcome it all!

As students begin this new journey, LCEF's Young Investors Club wants to assist their transition by offering financial support through the Take Heart Scholarship with up to three awards of \$3,000, \$1,000 and \$500.

Applications close April 19, 2021

Winners will be announced on May 7, 2021. For complete details and to apply, visit lcef.org/scholarship/.

LCMS LIFE CONFERENCE

Virtual Conference March 19–20 2021

LCMS Life Ministry is hosting its first-ever virtual life conference, theme “Making Disciples: Valuing Life.”

Register now at lcms-life.org

Join us!

Dozens of experts in Life Ministry will present throughout the conference with multiple video presentations available for immediate on-demand viewing as soon as you login. Engage in live Question and Answer sessions with experts in Life Ministry.

Explore a variety of life topics for participants of all ages, with your family, congregation or on your own. A Spanish track — with sessions offered in the language — will be available as well.

Register individually, or as groups of 10 for a group registration discount. (Consider gathering a group at a local congregation to stream the conference together.) Register or learn more lcms-life.org

[REGISTER NOW](#)



Register Today for the YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID Virtual Event for Mid-South Youth Leaders

The Mid-South District would like to invite our youth ministry leaders and youth volunteers to an opportunity to strengthen mental health and reduce mental health stigma within our ministries and communities:

Youth Mental Health First Aid Certification Course

Virtual Event on April 16, 2021

9:30 am - 2:30 pm

Led by Deaconess Heidi Goehmann, LCSW, LIMHP

What is Youth Mental Health First Aid? Why should I sign up?

Similar to CPR, mental health first aid teaches participants how to identify, understand and respond to signs and symptoms of mental health challenges, particularly in the areas of youth behaviors, thoughts, emotions, and experiences. This course is trauma-informed and you will learn more about responding to youth and families around:

- anxiety and depression
- cultural and identity challenges
- suicide and self-harm
- substance use and abuse
- crisis and non-crisis mental health situations
- best practices for offering support and finding resources for individuals and families

For a closer look at the need for Youth Mental Health First Aid and other similar resources, please watch this quick [2-minute video](#) and [review this PDF](#) on mental health stats and the virtual course.

For those who complete the virtual course, your Youth Mental Health First Aid certification will last 3 years.

Online registrations due **MARCH 16, 2021**. *Before registering, please read these important [course notes and considerations](#).*

[REGISTER FOR COURSE](#)

Questions? Contact Deaconess Heidi Goehmann hlgoehmann@gmail.com or text (314) 420-2591

FREE SPANISH RESOURCES

Share the Good News!

The Lutheran Heritage Foundation (a recognized service organization of the LCMS) has a variety of FREE new resources available in the Spanish language, including Luther's Small Catechism, The Bible with Small Catechism (combined volume), A Child's Garden of Bible Stories, and "Jesus Never Fails" devotional tract. These materials are available to any LCMS church, mission or individual who wants to share the Good News with their Spanish-speaking neighbors. To order, send an email to info@LHFmissions.org or call the LHF office at (800)554-0723.



2022 LCMS YOUTH GATHERING

July 9-13, 2022 - Houston, Texas

The LCMS Youth Gathering provides thousands of youth and adults the opportunity to come together as a community of God's people to learn more about Jesus Christ, the Christian faith and their Lutheran identity.

Now is the time to begin your planning for attending the gathering. Many resources are available to assist with fundraising, commitments, budgeting and planning. If you have participated in the gathering in the past, you know what an awesome experience it is for youth and leaders. If you have never participated, prayerfully consider this amazing opportunity to spend time with a community of God's people.

Check out the gathering website (<http://www.lcmsgathering.com/>) for information about the gathering, adult leader resources, promoting the gathering and much, much more. Follow the gathering on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/lcmsgathering>

2021 NATIONAL LUTHERAN YOUTH WORKERS CONFERENCE

The 2021 National Lutheran Youth Workers Conference (NATIONAL21) is scheduled for **July 11–14, 2021**, at the Hyatt Regency in downtown Houston, Texas. The National Lutheran Youth Workers Conference is a stand-alone conference for youth ministry practitioners, but also provides a wonderful opportunity to prepare for the 2022 LCMS Youth Gathering.

Each NATIONAL21 adult registration and guest room reservation at the Hyatt Regency comes with a complimentary adult leader registration for the 2022 LCMS Youth Gathering. Information regarding hotel reservations will be released at a later date.

For updates and more information, visit lcmsgathering.com.



[Register Now](#)

LCMS NATIONAL CONVENTION DELAYED TO 2023

Many thanks to all the Mid-South District congregations who participated in the recent Synod-wide vote on a referendum to delay the upcoming Synodical Convention.

The LCMS Office of the Secretary issued an official notice announcing the result of the vote, confirming the delay of the next Synodical Convention to 2023. More than the required one-fourth (63.32%) of the Synod's member congregations registered a vote, and the majority (90.67%) of votes cast favored adopting the referendum to delay the convention. The delayed date for the Synodical Convention does not affect the upcoming Mid-South District Convention in July.



WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

Youth Discovery Bible Study

The High School Youth Ministry of Christ the King Lutheran Church, Memphis, is following their theme for the year – “Who is my neighbor?” – in an intentional, Spirit-led way, involving Bible study, discipleship, and leadership.

Using the Discovery Bible Studies (DBS) as their guide, the youth have been led by the Holy Spirit to listen, learn, and obey what God is laying on their hearts to do. A DBS consists of seven basic questions. The first three are: What are you thankful for this week? What caused you trouble this week? and How can this group help you? The Bible verses of the previous week are reviewed in light of what the Holy Spirit has led the students to do during that week. Then the next week’s Bible verses are studied, followed by the next set of questions: What do these verses teach us about God, Jesus, or His plan? What do these verses teach us about humans? What is the Holy Spirit teaching me to obey? and Who am I going to tell this week?

This approach has been very effective for our high school students as they are listening and obeying what God is laying on their hearts to do. Instead of just listening to someone talk about it, they are being invited to go and do. Most importantly, this study has empowered our youth to realize that they can lead a Bible study, too; in fact, three of our students have started Discovery Bible Studies with their high school friends.

Following the theme of “Who is my neighbor?” the students are joining in the Great Commission to go and make disciples as they are realizing that everyone is, in fact, their neighbor.

— Chris Miller
Christ the King Youth Minister

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 Crater National parks after the mission.

For more information contact the District office or Bob Allen - rjallen@prodigy.net • 270-535-7370



“AN EMPTY STOMACH HAS NO EARS”

Jesus said in Matthew 9:37, *“The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.”* How true that is in the country of Haiti, where voodoo is sanctioned as a national religion and more than 50% of the general population worships Satan through voodoo rituals. To advance God’s Kingdom, the country desperately needs to train up more “workers” in the local Christian churches. There are currently thousands of children attending Christian



schools throughout the country. When effectively trained, these children become the little missionaries God calls them to be, going home and teaching their families what they learned about Jesus Christ in school. However, there is a well-known phrase in Haiti that says, “An empty stomach has no ears!”. Think about that for a minute. Can you imagine being SO hungry that you literally cannot retain anything you are taught? One twelve-year-old girl explained how she lost her sight due to having nothing to eat for several days. Fortunately, after receiving desperately needed nutrition, her eyesight returned. This is real-life in Haiti and Trinity HOPE is helping solve this terrible challenge.



Trinity HOPE is a mission ministry, started in 1999, that partners with Christian schools to share the love of Jesus with the children of Haiti one meal at a time. We are tremendously blessed to be able to add an additional 12,000 children, teachers, and cooks to the feeding programs throughout the country this school year. Through God’s grace, we are now serving over 42,000 meals each school day to these hungry children in over 200 Christian schools throughout the country. That is over 7,500,000 meals per year! Beyond receiving a nutritious noon meal each day to sustain their life, each child is now also better equipped to hear and retain the Gospel message their teachers and pastors are sharing with them at school. Feeding a child for a day is absolutely critical, but feeding a child the True Bread of Life that gives them eternal life in Heaven with Jesus is the real goal. That is exactly why every school Trinity HOPE feeds is required to be a Christian school. If you would like to learn more

about Trinity HOPE, please visit our website at www.trinityhope.org, or call us at 615-394-4950. Help us prepare the young missionaries in Haiti to bring more to the Kingdom of God! We thank and praise God for allowing these additional children to now be part of our programs and for your continued support of Trinity HOPE.



Prayer Summary, February 2021

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 February 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.**

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 4:00 PM.

COMMISSIONED MINISTERS

ACCEPTED: 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
**Immanuel Lutheran School, Memphis, TN –
Teachers for lower and upper grades**
**First Lutheran School, Knoxville, TN – Teachers for
middle school**
**First Lutheran School, Fort Smith, AR- Teacher for
lower grade**
**Avilla Christian Academy, Alexander, AR – Teacher
for lower grade**
**St. John's Lutheran School, Stuttgart, AR – Teacher
for lower grade**

CONGREGATIONAL MISSION COMMITMENTS

Mission Commitment Receipts as of 1/31/2021 (1 Month)

Anticipated Amount (8.3% of budget)\$122,801
Actual Receipts 81,952
Over (under) anticipated amount.....(**\$40,849**)

Use of Mission Commitment Receipts (1 Month)

Allocated to Synod for
World Missions.....\$22,502
Allocated to Tanzania 2,083
Retained for District Mission/Ministry
Support (70% of receipts) 57,366
Total Receipts \$81,952

Mission Commitment Receipts Prior Year Comparison (1 Month)

Actual Receipts as of 1/31/2021 \$81,952
Actual Receipts as of 1/31/2020.....\$122,342
Over (under) prior year receipts.....(**\$40,390**)

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 by March 19, 2021. Here's a look at the upcoming topics for 2021

- April – Volunteers
- May – Small Town & Rural Ministry

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

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President

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Allen Piepenbrink,

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