Encourager



Mid-South District LCMS | May 2020

May's Focus: Small Town & Rural Ministry

In this issue of the *Encourager*, we give thanks for the many ministries in the Mid-South District that serve small congregations and rural communities. We lift these congregations up and are grateful for the many ways they serve their communities by sharing Christ's love, especially during these challenging times.

Message from Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola, President



Would it make any difference if a miracle happened every time we came together in worship? Miracles are not some unexplained event. Real miracles are something that is impossible for man and only possible for God. A number of years ago, I heard a pastor bemoaning his congregation's woes. Church attendance was down, the finances were off, and there were no new prospective members. He listed the sad state of affairs and simply stated, "What we need is a few miracles, then people would believe." I was never sure what kind of miracles he had in mind, but he didn't think of miracles given by Christ.

Do miracles really make a difference? Would his place be filled to standing room only if he had a few real miracles? Maybe a

few legs straightened, a few pains gone, a person cured of cancer or heart disease would have "done the trick." Did Jesus' miracles of His divine powers and fulfillment of prophecy ever convert every person? St John's Gospel states these words: "All these things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing, you may have life in His name." That should have been the final verse in John's Gospel. But, then John added the twenty-first chapter. Why? What's the miracle? Where's the Gospel?

Remember that John was a fisherman. Fishermen like to tell their fishing stories. John, Peter, Andrew, and James would have counted every one of those huge fish because it was such a remarkable number - 153 big fish - enough to tear their nets. But even their nets didn't tear. John had to add a fish story because, the rest of his story was filled with miracles.

Was the large number of fish the miracle? Not exactly. 153 fish is not the miracle. It's possible to catch that many fish. But, the professional fishermen were skunked all night. The miracle is that Jesus - a Carpenter - told professional fishermen to throw their nets on the other side of the boat – no more than 10 to 12 feet farther from where they had fished all night. The miracle isn't the fish, or that the fish were on the other side of the boat. The first miracle is that Jesus told them there were fish beneath their boat; from hundreds of yards away, on the shore! It's impossible! But possible with God.

But, there's another miracle we might overlook if we read this lesson too fast. Peter, James, John, and Andrew were back doing what they knew best - fishing. Earlier they received the gift of the Holy Spirit in the upper room. What are they doing out fishing? Jesus gave them the task of fishing for men - making disciples, baptizing, and teaching the Gospel.

It's like anyone else, we get excited about Easter (even though it didn't happen the way we wanted it this year!). Most people make sure they're with Jesus on Easter. But then, it's back to business as usual. The disciples went back to their boats and

Mid-South District completes first Generation to Generation Network



The first Mid-South District Generation to Generation Network seminar was held on February 22, 2020. Pictured above are Ben Freudenburg of Concordia Center for the Family-Family Friendly Partner Network, and leaders from Bella Vista Lutheran Church in Bella Vista, AR, Peace Lutheran Church in Conway, AR, Pilgrim Lutheran Church in Jonesboro, AR, Salem Lutheran Church in Springdale, AR and St. John's Lutheran Church, in Lafe, AR. Downloadable resources from Ben Freudenburg, Concordia Center for the Family; https://www.concordiacenterforthefamily.org/blog

nets. We go back to our old routines. But the disciples needed an exclamation point on the whole Easter account - something to get excited about! Then, there's a Figure who appeared on the shore and shouted out to them. Suddenly their fruitless night turned into fishing story they would never forget. John blurted out, "it is the Lord!" Usually we'd think Peter would be the first to say something, but he jumped into the water and swam to Jesus leaving the others to struggle with the nets and the big catch of fish.

This wasn't business as usual. Jesus reminded them that three years earlier He called them from their boats and said, "From now on you will become fishers of men." Jesus had things for them to do. He already had a fire going to serve them breakfast with fish and bread. Where did Jesus get the fish since the other 153 fish were still coming ashore? It was early in the morning and Galilee's Wal-Mart wasn't open yet. This is the same kind fish and bread meal when Jesus fed the 5000. This is a miracle - not only the meal - but that Jesus placed Himself into their routine lives, into the business as usual attitude, and showed His almighty presence. You see, it is the Lord! It means that even in our routine life, Jesus meets us. He intervenes to remind us of the work He gives us to do for His kingdom.

The actual day of Easter is over. It was a memorable one for us - perhaps in a sad way. But, Easter is not bound to a single day! Every day should remind us of Easter, that when we return to business as usual, Jesus is still there. The message of new life and forgiveness that only comes from God surrounds us and strengthens us every day. We know that Jesus died on the cross to offer forgiveness of sins for all who are in Christ. We know that He lives and will come to gather us into our heavenly Father's mansions. Easter is a daily joy that gives us an eternal hope.

Because the disciples slipped back into business as usual within a couple of days after Easter, John writes to remind us what Easter means each day, in routines and in business as usual. In other words, John is shouting to us, "WAKE UP!" Look at the Easter miracle! Christ is standing right in front of us! He gives us new life! Easter is all about forgiveness and everlasting peace with God! That's a real miracle! How can things from Easter be anything less than an exclamation point? The biggest miracle in the Gospel is the living Christ, who even comes to us in our routine and mundane. Like the disciples, we should shout for joy, it is the Lord!

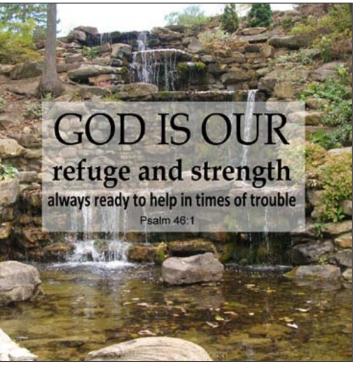
There is a dream of every pastor that the

regalia, the joy and the beauty of Easter would continue each week. But, as in years past, we went back to the salt mines or we go fishing. We face report cards, deadlines, struggles to make ends meet, put up with teachers, teachers put up with children, congestion, traffic extra homework, yard work, back aches, fastfood and long check out lines, and this year, an unseen virus that crushed our everv routine. Everything we

encounter seems to dampen the Easter spirit. The Easter day is gone! Long gone - 2000 years ago gone. But the reality of Easter joy is alive today!

Just as Jesus did with the disciples, He comes to our salt mines and our routines to be with us, even if we're tucked away in our homes to avoid a virus contact with others. But, Jesus demonstrates His love and caring wherever we are. We matter to Him. He brings us innumerable blessings each day to remind us of the Easter joy and the great commissioning to which He has called us. It's the miracle of our Risen Christ coming into routine and tradition and showing His disciples what it means to be His fishers of men.

Jesus continues to feed us with a miracle with a foretaste of the feast to come is where He offers His true spiritual food of His true body and true blood. He comes right where we are in business as usual. He doesn't skimp on those who only want just enough of Jesus to get into heaven. He brings the whole living Christ. He knows we live with disappointment and doubt; fears and wrongs. He wants us as children of almighty God to be witnesses to His forgiveness, love, and grace. When He feeds us by the miracle of His pure grace, He wants us filled to overflowing. Whether we fish, raise cattle, milk cows, work in a bank, work on an assembly line, work with people in the service industries, or



raise a family and care for a house, it makes difference, Jesus continues to be with us in each honorable vocation to bring praise and glory to His name. inspired God John to know how to write his Gospel with this unusual fishing story at the end. John knew the abiding presence of Jesus in the most basic existence. 2000 years ago His disciples were transformed from "business as usual" into a miraculous reminder of Easter joy. Today, He

wants all people of the earth to know the peace and joy of salvation and grace that comes from the risen Christ... so that in all things, people will see the miracles of Christ and say, it is the Lord! In our routine we are changed by John's reminder for all to see that we live in the ever-present joy and hope of Easter each day through Jesus Christ.

Your Servant in Christ + Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola

Ryn Carolle



Small Town Ministry through the lens of COVID-19

St. John's Lutheran Church in Lafe, AR has served our community of less than 500 by providing various food and social opportunities throughout the years. We have also recently completed the Mid-South District's first Gen2Gen network along with 4 other congregations from West Region. As the reality of COVID-19 hit home, our ability to reach members and our beloved community was forced to change. We had posted events on Facebook in the past, almost as a calendar, but never livestreamed worship nor used video for family ministry. St. John's and Redeemer Paragould, AR are now working together to bring a message of hope to the Northeast Arkansas community while involving family ministry. As our nation begins to reopen, several new ministry opportunities emerged that we hope to continue.

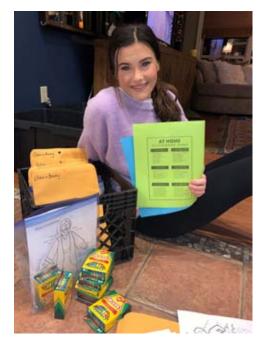
Each week Pastor Kirk Neugebauer of Redeemer does a Monday Morning Encouragement on Facebook. Pastor Aaron Neugebauer of St. John's has a devotion - with the help of his children - talking about Bible stories, how to read the Bible (context, context, context) and what this means in our everyday lives. On Wednesdays, both Pastor Aaron and Pastor Kirk partner to answer questions live from the NEA community. Pastor Kirk then does "Thank God It's Thursday Prayer Night!" to pray together and to teach the Lord's Prayer.

Sunday morning worship services continue at both St. John's and Redeemer. We are thankful for the skeleton crews at both congregations who make this possible with technology and musical talents. Children of both congregations created art to use at all of our services during Holy Week. Their creations were displayed during the hymns. We even put together a video of children with their "palms" for Palm Sunday, "butterflies" for Easter Sunday, and "He is Risen" multigenerational video from both congregations.

So how have we connected with families during social distancing? We deliver activity packets to front porches/mailboxes (hand sanitizer and face masks used!) each week to support the conversations that would happen in the home as a result of Facebook Live posts. Forty family bags are delivered across Greene county to members and non-members who have requested them. My daughter Belle and I do videos to introduce art activity, read Bible stories to children, teach the parents to use resources, and do sing-a-long posts to St. John's Parent Page. We also did 12-day Resurrection Egg Hunt leading up to Easter. Also included are talk sheets or activities to help parents cope and help their children adapt to fear, anxiety and so much change in our current state. Stacie Reddick from Redeemer has arranged Zoom activities to continue our once per

month Youth Night and communication through GroupMe.

The life of the church looks different through the COVID lens. We are thankful to God for what He continues to do through our small community, the opportunity to focus on intentional family ministry, and pray for His protection and guidance as we modify and adjust.





Resources and Activities for Families



The Mid-South District is pleased to share a variety of resources and ideas to help families build their faith—together! Check the <u>District website page</u> frequently for new additions to our resource list:

Activities for Children:

• https://www.luthed.org/ reformation-a-z-coloring-book/

Youth & Family

 Bible study, devotionals, activities and more https://www.youthEsource.com/

Activities for the Whole Family:

- "At Home" Scavenger Hunt" (link to PDF)
- Free downloads from <u>Concordia Publishing House</u>, including a family devotion
- https://www.youthEsource.com/

Encouragement for Parents:

- https://thrivingkidsconnection.com/
- https://www.seedsfamilyworship.com/steps-to-finding-peace-for-your-family-during-coronavirus/

Resources on the District Website

The Mid-South District has several webpages dedicated to COVID-19. This information is updated frequently, so please check back often.



Messages form President Paavola, Resources for Congregations, Individuals and Church workers. https://mid-southlcms.org/coronavirus-preparedness/

Dial-In Worship Wednesday & Sunday https://mid-southlcms. org/mid-south-district-hosting-dial-in-worship-devotions/



Listing of churches with Online Worship Services https://mid-southlcms.org/mid-south-congregations-offering-online-worship-lenten-services/

The District Facebook page is posting encouragement and news https://www.facebook.com/MidSouthDistrict



Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) is blessed to partner with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) to provide financial assistance through our Synod's Soldiers of the Cross program to church workers in crisis situations. LCEF funds, administered by each LCMS district office, will help ordained or commissioned ministers and laity serving congregations, schools and Recognized Service Organizations who find themselves with immediate unmet financial needs stemming directly or indirectly from the spread of the pandemic.

Together, LCEF and the LCMS seek to raise \$5 million for Soldiers of the Cross, purely to address the needs

of church workers facing a crisis situation. The need is urgent. Please support the Soldiers of the Cross COVID-19 Response Initiative through a gift of any amount. Learn how you can give at https://lcef.org/product/give. May our Lord richly bless your generosity.

<u>Learn more</u> about Lutheran Church Extension Fund's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Student Financial Aid Apply Now!

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. This information may be sent via email to Julie Tyler (jtyler@mid-southlcms.com) or in a written letter (Attn: Julie Tyler / 1675 Wynne Road / Cordova, TN 38016). All related forms, including the financial aid application, are on the District's website. The application deadline is June 15, 2020.



Tornado Response Fund Helping Mid-South

Congregations and Communities



addition to the difficulties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 has been an active year for severe weather in our region. A number of areas across the Mid-South District have been impacted by tornadoes this spring—with some storms leaving a path of death and destruction in their wake. Most recently, the Chattanooga area was damaged by a tornado over Easter weekend.

Dealing with the destructive aftermath of a tornado is difficult

under any circumstance. But when set against the background of a global pandemic creating widespread job loss and an already strained emergency response system, storm victims can feel even more hopeless as they try to navigate the recovery process.

To help restore hope and provide aid for those impacted by storms in our area, the Mid-South District has established a Tornado Response Fund. Many generous

aifts have already been contributed to this fund, providing aid to congregations and their communities that have been hit hard by tornadoes this year. If you would like to contribute to the Tornado Response 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 "Tornado Response Fund" on any gifts sent by check.

Concordia Continuing Education Workshops Going Online

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, announces their Prof Insights: Faculty-Led Workshop Series (formerly Summer Workshop Series) will now be online. These workshops were originally scheduled across the country this summer. Due to concerns about the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, the classes have moved to an online platform.

With this new format, workshop participants will have the

opportunity to interact with faculty from the comfort of their homes. We know these workshops will give people wonderful opportunities to learn and grow in their faith this summer with an online community.

Get the full list of faculty-led workshops at <u>csl.edu/</u> workshop-series



Remember Whose You Are

POBLO International Ministries

America is considered a melting pot of cultures and nationalities. In turn, it is a melting pot of belief systems, which makes Christian missionary work in America an endeavor far closer to home than many first realize. That was perhaps the major takeaway from Cynthia Khan's presentation on behalf of People of the Book Lutheran Outreach (POBLO International; https://www.poblo.org) at Ascension Lutheran Church in Madison, TN on Saturday, February 29, 2020. Ms. Khan shared her own story of being born and raised in Pakistan, spending ten years in Saudi Arabia under Sharia law, and finally immigrating with her family to North America. Christian attendees from varied denominations and ethnicities learned the basic tenets of Islam as well as techniques to engage adherents to diverse eastern religions. The presentation itself segued between knowledge transfer and practical application in a way that seemed to benefit everyone in attendance, whether novice or expert on the topics. The question and answer sessions were doubly helpful in drawing out related questions from inquiring minds.

The ministry of POBLO has undertaken a compelling, multifaceted approach to outreach that includes training for cross-cultural missions, establishing "International Friendship Centers" with churches to serve immigrant communities, and most ambitiously, placing and supporting missionaries within native-language communities in order to confess Christ. One of these missionaries described her conversion to Christianity, which led to her fleeing community, country, and family she now serves the Lord in the melting pot of America where missionary work remains just as urgent, yet does so in relative safety. Ms. Khan ended her profitable presentation in the certain truth that Christ is working to save His own from false belief and spiritual separation throughout the world—those in attendance would concur that this happens in America in part through the good efforts of POBLO.

— Rev. Gregory Bauch



Tanzania Missions



The Coronavirus has shut down travel to Tanzania for the foreseeable future. This has resulted in the cancellation of the mission trip for the Christ the King in Memphis group that was to take place in late May. The second team, scheduled for late June has not yet made a decision. This will be made in a couple of weeks.

Tanzania experienced its first COVID-19 case in late March and now has close to 300. The government has shut down

schools and worship services. Bishop Emmanuel Makala expressed his concern about how to pay the pastors of the Southeast of Lake Victoria Diocese with no offerings coming in. Where will he find \$12,000, the amount needed to pay the pastors for one month? In Shinyanga, all offerings given in the worship services are cash, they do not have the option of sending a check or paying online as we do here in the USA. Your prayers are encouraged.



Congregational Mission Commitments

Mission Commitment Receipts as of 3/31/2020 (3 Months)

Anticipated Amount (25% of budget)
.....\$384,743
Actual Receipts349,034
Over (under) anticipated
amount(\$35,709)

Use of Mission Commitment Receipts (3 Months)

Mission Commitment Receipts Prior Year Comparison (3 Months)

Actual Receipts as of 3/31/2020.....\$349,034 Actual Receipts as of 3/31/2019......\$400,443 Over (under) prior year receipts (\$51,409)

COVID-19 Impact in Haiti

Our prayers were that the Coronavirus would not arrive on the small island of Haiti but it has arrived. Schools and churches are closed and essential business hours have been greatly reduced. First-world practices during this pandemic include stockpiling items such as toilet paper, cleaning supplies and food, social distancing, face masks, gloves, frequent hand washing with soap, and working from home when possible. These practices are almost impossible for a thirdworld country like Haiti. Social distancing is very difficult in a country the size of the state of Maryland with over 11 million people. Their daily routine consists of finding something to sell at the markets so they can use that money to buy food for the day. Stockpiling food and storing it in freezers and refrigerators is almost impossible. Most of the country has no electricity or at best intermittent power so refrigerators are rare.

God Provides

Trinity HOPE depends heavily on the infrastructure of the schools to feed the 30,000 children, teachers and cooks each day and to maintain strict accountability and controls. Being unable to provide them their daily meal is difficult to accept. As the body of Christ, we felt we could not just stand by and watch the hunger pains grow. We have established an emergency food relief effort for these children and their families.

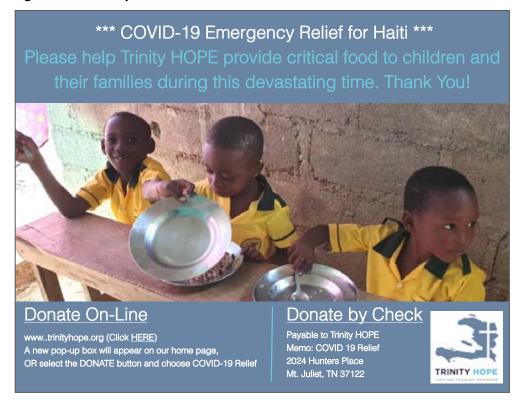
In the month of April, uncooked food was distributed from the schools to all the students and their families. Praise God for His many provisions!

The response from families has been overwhelming, with comments including, "This food aid arrives on time, at a time where the entire humanity faces an acute food crisis", "This proves you love us a lot", "It is a gesture of generosity and love", "Thank you to have thought of us", "We appreciate the food", and "We are very thankful to you."

As we wrestle with the uncertainty caused the bv COVID-19 throughout the world, may we hold on to the comforting words found in Isaiah 41:10 "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." If you would like to help Trinity HOPE provide critical food to children and their families during this devastating time, you can donate by check to Trinity HOPE, Memo: COVID-19 Relief, 2024 Hunters Place, Mt Juliet, TN 37122 or donate online at our website https://www.trinityhope.org/covid19-relief.

May God bless and protect you and your families during this difficult time.





Prayer Summary, April 2020

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 April 2020

PRAYER CONCERNS

MR. TODD BARINGER (former principal at Immanuel Lutheran, Memphis)

MS. AMY BROWN (eldest daughter of Rev. Dan McDougall and his wife Lucy)

MS. EVELYN DOUGLAS (friend of Julie Tyler, Mid-South District Office)

MRS. SARA FEUERSTEIN (daughter of Pastor Donley Hesse, Emeritus, Mena, AR)

MR. MARK GUDLIN (spouse of Denise with Trinity Hope)

MRS. ALISON HAWKINS (Mid-South District Office)
REV. DONLEY HESSEE (Emeritus, Mena, AR)
MRS. SUSAN JONES (volunteer, Mid-South District
Office)

MRS. MEGAN NAVRATH (daughter of Rev. Carl and Gwen Wenck, Grace Lutheran Church in Murfreesboro, TN)

REV. MERLIN SEPMEYER (Crossville, TN) **REV. HERBERT SWANSON** (River Valley Grace, Lamar, AR)

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

REV. DR. ROGER PAAVOLA, President, Mid-South District, as he continues to lead our staff and the Pastors and congregations of our District during this very difficult time.

ROWAN, the brother of a District dial-in worship attendee, who is hospitalized.

All those affected worldwide by the Coronavirus; hospital workers; doctors; nurses; our government leaders; pastors and the citizens of our country as we work within this ever changing situation.

For Rev. Joseph Randrianasolo; LIME; and the churches, schools and universities in Madagascar as they are closed by Presidential order due to concerns over COVID-19.

All affected by the tornados on Sunday, April 12th, especially in East Brainerd and Chattanooga, TN – those dealing with loss of life and property and the first responders traveling to assist these communities.

Our deepest sympathies to:

The family and friends of CHLOE GAMMEL (friend and SBA classmate of Claire McElwain) who recently passed away.

The family and friends of HERB KALKITIS, (member of Praise Lutheran Church, Maryville, TN) who recently passed away.

CALL UPDATE IN THE CALLING PROCESS – CONGREGATIONS ORDAINED MINISTERS

ACCEPTED: Rev. Edward Maanum, Pastor, Our Savior's Lutheran Church (Dual Parish with Bethany Pueblo) Pubelo West, CO, has accepted the Call to serve as Pastor at First Lutheran Church, Knoxville, TN. *Installation date pending

Rev. Paul Leigeber, Pastor, Shepherd of the Bay Lutheran Church, Lillian, AL has accepted the Call to serve as Pastor to the Dual Parish of Faith Lutheran Church, Union City, TN & Trinity Lutheran Church, Dyersburg, TN. *Installation date pending

PENDING: Rev. Kevin McReyonlds, Pastor, St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Central City, NE, has been issued a Call to serve as Pastor to Redeemer Lutheran Church, Mountain Home, AR.

CONGREGATIONS-IN THE CALLING PROCESS

Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church, Olive Branch, MS – Pastor

First Lutheran Church, Chattanooga, TN – Pastor **Mid-South District** – Executive Director for Missions and Ministry

Pilgrim Lutheran Church, Jonesboro, AR – Pastor **Redeemer Lutheran Church, Mountain Home, AR** – Pastor ** A Call has been issued

COMMISSIONED MINISTERS-IN THE CALLING PROCESS

Zion Lutheran Church of Avilla, Alexander, AR – Director of Parish Music

Our Savior Lutheran Church, Nashville, TN – Director of Christian Education

Christ Lutheran School, Little Rock, AR – Principal Christ the King Lutheran School, Memphis, TN – Kindergarten Teacher

First Lutheran School, Ft. Smith, AR – Kindergarten Teacher

Immanuel Lutheran School, Memphis, TN – 1st Grade Teach

District Introduces New Policy for Sharing Photos and Other Media

The Mid-South District is grateful for the photos, videos and other visual media contributions it receives to share in publications and online outlets. Please note that effective immediately, the Mid-South District is operating under a new policy regarding usage of pictures received for publication that include minors. Specifically, the policy requires the following acknowledgement for image submissions:

"By providing the Mid-South District with this picture, video, or multimedia, you are stating to the Mid-South District affirmatively that you have obtained verifiable consent from the parent or legal guardian of anyone pictured under the age of 18."

Encourager Topics in 2020

We invite you to share your stories with us please email it by **May 20, 2020** to Rhonda, webmaster@mid-southlcms.com

- June Leadership
- July Veterans
- August Stewardship
- September Church Planting
- October Celebrating Lutheran Heritage
- November Thankfulness
- December Highlights of 2020

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: <u>LW@mid-southlcms.com</u> phone: 662-252-1004. Judy will always acknowledge receipt of your submission if it is sent directly to her.



Mid-South District, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod

Staff

Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola, *President* **Angela Fowler**, *Executive Director for Business*& Finance

Paul Reaves, Executive Director for Development & LCEF Vice President

Allen Piepenbrink, Executive Director for Schools and Early Childhood

Missy Washburn, Administrative Assistant to the District President

Renae McElwain, Communications & Marketing Specialist

Carolyn Metzger, Finance Assistant **Julie Tyler**, Administrative Assistant for Missions

and Education

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Contribute

If you would like your article or event published in the next *Encourager*, please email it by **May 20, 2020** to Rhonda, webmaster@mid-southlcms.com