

Encourager

JUNE 2026

Mid-South District LCMS



A Message from Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola, President

One of the constant phenomena I encountered in family counseling was the sense of belonging. From the very beginning of our lives, we seek and lean toward belonging to things worthwhile. Marriage, family, neighborhoods, social organizations, and churches are organizations that, in part fulfill that longing within our human spirit. The sense of belonging goes back to our first parents - Adam and Eve - created in the image of God, they fractured their sense of belonging when they fell into sin. St. John of Chrysostom wrote in the Third century, "My soul will not be at rest, until it finds its rest in You, O God." That's the difference between the Church and any of the other organizations people turn to in order to find their sense of belonging. Belonging to the Church is a fulfillment of the seminal need within our soul that can find no rest, until it finds its rest in God. So, why the Church? There's long lists of names on church rosters, keeping our names as belonging. Is it a place of convenience or an elitists club? The Bible describes the true Christian Church quite differently.

We pray for and receive many new members throughout the years, not the same life-long members as in the past, but a huge variety of individuals, families, and couples who have found their way inside our doors. We need to understand what their membership with us means to them and what impact

it has on our lives, as well. We can never be the same as we were in the years past. This is a dynamic, ever-changing world. When we place our lives in the hands of almighty God, (and only by His means) will people join us to belong to a Church that has blessed our lives.

Notice how St Paul says this for the Corinthian Church, somewhat ordinary people like us. He writes, "We have this Gospel treasure in earthen vessels," clay pots... ordinary ground up dirt. We're ordinary people. Like everyone, we sin, we get hurt, and we struggle with the Old Adam. But we're all clay pots - some made so finely - like fine China who might crack easily if handled in a not-so-gentle manner. Others are like sun-dried bricks, hardened dirt by a blazing sun, but subject to crumble easily if bumped. We're all clay pots who have the same limitations, the same problems, and the same cracks who yearn for a sense of belonging. Paul's being realistic.

It's humbling to realize that our beginning and belonging starts with the same basic ingredients as everyone else. Our God-given purpose, according to St. Paul isn't to make ourselves great, but to be of service to God and others. Our first purpose, as clay pots, is to be filled by God with all His blessings, so we can spill over and serve God and build up His kingdom. So, Paul says, "We have this all sufficient

power in us, so that people will see that the power for our life comes from God." If a pot is made out of dirt, then it stands to reason that the value of what it represents lies within it as it serves.

Some people describe their lives, "Empty without Jesus," because that's what we are, mere empty clay pots that serve no purpose. The world suffers from a lack of belonging and emptiness because there is no peace or purpose without Jesus Christ. When purpose disappears, our very meaning disappears. When meaning is gone, our worth diminishes. When our worth is gone, life is dead. Emptiness and despair run over the top of those who struggle trying to find identity and belonging. It's that little "Forrest Gump" in all of us, asking, "What's my destiny?"

Some people find no purpose or relevancy in their lives. They "try church" somehow drawn by culture, social standing, friendship, or family. But that emptiness still can remain because the sufficiency and purpose of their lives is hollow - nothing inside because they didn't seek Jesus but anything else to fill their empty clay pot. God created us as clay pots to receive, hold, and share something. That "something" is the breath of life given in the image of God. His light and life within us by His means of grace. Without God, our lives will only remain hollow and meaningless. When God created us from the dust of the earth, He breathed life into our souls. So, when the Holy Spirit call us to belong to Christ, as clay pots our gracious God brings us to life.

He IS the life within us Christians. But don't be confused. There are people who have an idea that they come to Jesus after some class, go through some ceremony, or they've "made a decision for Jesus." But then there are those who have been around for such a long time that everyone considers them to be members because they've just always been here. But being a member of the true Christian Church means opening ourselves up to Christ, being nourished by God's grace, and spilling His overflowing love for us to others. But notice St Paul says there are cracked pots. In fact, anyone born of natural means has cracks. He writes, "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed, sometimes in doubt, but never in despair, persecuted, but not forsaken, badly hurt at times, but not destroyed. At all times, these mortal bodies of ours face the struggles of life and death, just as Jesus did - so that everyone can see the life of Jesus revealed in our bodies." Not only do we sin, but because of our human nature, we are born into sin.

It's hard to admit we're a cracked pot. But we know

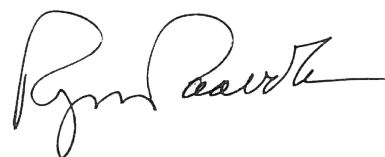
it, but try glaze over it, glue broken parts by our works, or cover them up to hide them in our secret places. The world teaches us to find our own self sufficiency and find for our inner self. But ultimately without God, we find nothing but emptiness and the reasons why so many crumble under the burden.

St Paul says afflictions, doubts, persecutions, and hurt are examples of the burdens that can shatter family, relationships, and even the person. But Paul reminds us, that for Christians, those kinds of things don't have power over us. Jesus took the chains of sin and afflictions, removes the shadows of doubt, lifts us above the persecution. God reminded Paul in a similar way, "My grace is sufficient for you." Christ's victory over sin, death, and Satan is our victory. So, our ego, our pride, or filling ourselves up in hollow self-righteousness are crucified in Christ; putting the sinful self to death, so that the life of Jesus can fill us with life, heal our cracks, and let His grace, mercy, and peace shine in a new life for us.

Paul concludes, "For while we live we are always given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be revealed in our mortal flesh." Through Baptism, we die with Christ to sin. We become living members of His body, belonging to Him when He fills us with the Holy Spirit who calls and, gathers, enlightens, and keeps us in our new life. He transforms our ordinary lives into vibrant, extra-ordinary lives of service to Him and to those He has entrusted to our keeping. We confess our weaknesses. But by belonging (and regularly attending) in the Church, we also declare the wonders of the mystery of the life we share in common union with our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Our church membership isn't something to be taken lightly. It's not like just another social organization. Our church membership and church attendance is our honest, sincere desire to be filled anew by God's marvelous grace and mercy. Even if we might have some cracks, and some imperfections that we've tried to glazed over, God's Spirit lets us know of His love, forgiveness, mercy, and grace that is ours through Jesus Christ. That's truly belonging!

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



WELCOME REV. FRANDLE

The installation of the Reverend Andre Frandle as a chaplain in the US Army Reserves was held on May 10, 2026 at Grace Lutheran Church, Clarksville, TN.

Order from left to right: Rev. Larry Peters (Pastor Emeritus at Grace), Rev. President Roger Paavola, Rev. Chaplain Andre Frandle (Army Reserves, member at Grace), Rev. James Martin (Associate Pastor at Grace), Rev. Dr. Steven Hokana (Assistant Director, LCMS Ministry to the Armed Forces)



CALL DAY 2026 NEWS



Vicar Baumbach shared, "I want to be a pastor because I love Christ's Church, I am saddened by the fact that so many people are not saved, and because I believe God has provided me with enough to do something about it. We are blessed and very excited to serve at St. Paul, Paducah in the Mid-South District!"

The Mid-South District is pleased to announce the placement of Ethan Baumbach to serve as Vicar to St. Paul Lutheran Church in Paducah, KY. Ethan is a third year student at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne (CTSFW). His call was announced at CTSFW's service on April 28.

Vicar Baumbach is pictured with his wife, Miranda, and their children Gideon (3 years old) and Asaph (10 months old). The Baumbach family is from Southern California. Prior to entering seminary, Vicar Baumbach earned a Bachelor's Degree in Mechanical Engineering from Cal Poly in Pomona and worked as a Process Engineer. Miranda also attended Cal Poly where she earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Psychology, followed by a Master's of Social Work from Campbellsville University online. The family enjoys exploring nature, being active outdoors, playing board games, and reading. The son of an LCMS pastor, Vicar Baumbach is a lifelong Lutheran, while Miranda became Lutheran after they met. The two married in 2020.



A BAPTISMAL AND NEW MEMBER BLESSING!

Sunday, May 10th was a true blessing as seven beautiful souls were baptized at Messiah Lutheran! On top of that, three more wonderful Christians entered into membership at the church! It was an incredible gift of God to bring faith and salvation in the Sacrament of Baptism and for the ten people in all who joined our church.

Afterwards we had a great celebration with food and fellowship. We praise God for His marvelous grace!



Great News from the Fayetteville Circuit

The Fayetteville Circuit's Divine Service had 121 people gather together from eight LCMS congregations at Holy Trinity Lutheran in Rogers to celebrate the Ascension of our Lord. They joyfully gave over \$600 to support the seminarians in their circuit.

STUDENT FINANCIAL AID

Supporting Future Church Workers

Application deadline June 15, 2026

To support the education efforts of individuals pursuing a full-time career in church work, the Mid-South District offers 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. This district program, which is bolstered by a grant from the Lutheran Women's Missionary League (LWML), has helped many Mid-South students prepare for full-time careers in church work as they've attended a Concordia seminary or university.

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 available on the [District website](#). **The 2026-2027 application period is now open.**

This information may be sent via [email to Lisa Pennington](#) or by regular mail to: Mid-South District LCMS
1675 Wynne Road
Cordova, TN 38016
Attn: Lisa Pennington



2026 Early Childhood Educator's Conference

July 9-10, 2026 ~ Memphis

Join us for an incredible opportunity to celebrate your ministry to children through sharing, supporting one another, and discovering innovative methods to connect with those cherished young ones.

The theme for this year's event is "Speaking Wisdom, Teaching Kindness," from Proverbs 31:26. Featuring our keynote speaker, Dr. Annette Anschutz (Tinkering with Steam, Created to Play), this conference will also include a lineup of outstanding speakers and engaging breakout sessions. You won't want to miss the wealth of valuable insights awaiting you!

LOCATION: Christ the King Lutheran Preschool (5296 Park Avenue / Memphis TN 38119)

REGISTRATION: \$50 per attendee. **Due on or before June 8. NO REFUNDS after Friday, June 15.** No registration discount for attending one day. The travel costs will be the responsibility of the congregations/preschools.

QUESTIONS: Contact April Jones, [email](#) or call 901-373-1343

MORE INFO: [District website](#)

REGISTER ONLINE NOW



Help Lutheran Family Service Care for Pastors' Wives

*Get a Special Gift Sent to
YOUR Pastor's Wife!*



Lutheran
Family Service

Earlier this year, the Mid-South District announced a partnership with Lutheran Family Service (LFS) as part of the Worker Wellness initiative. LFS is a unique, Lutheran non-profit organization that walks with those experiencing difficult times through mental health counseling, marriage counseling, crisis pregnancy counseling, and adoption services. **A current focus of LFS is responding to the needs of LCMS pastors and churches by strengthening its ministry to pastors' wives.** LFS is blessed to provide safe, confidential, supportive places for these women to be encouraged, understood, and cared for in Christ. But they can't do this important work without support from people like you!

From now until June 30, LFS will send a VISA gift card to present to your pastor's wife, along with your own appreciation, when at least 10 households from your congregation make a gift of \$10 or more to Lutheran Family Service. This is a great way to show your pastor's wife some love *and* help grow Lutheran Family Service's ongoing, Christ-centered care for her and many others like her. Your gifts will be used by LFS to extend the ministry of love, mercy, and care we are called to accomplish together—growing support created especially for women who are married to our pastors within the LCMS, including projects like **Koinonia Support Groups, Marriage Enrichment, and Individual Counseling.**

From now until June 30, LFS will send a VISA gift card to present to your pastor's wife when at least 10 households from your congregation make a gift of \$10 or more to Lutheran Family Service.

Be one of 10 households from your congregation to join us in this important extension of Christ-centered mission and ministry through LFS. The 2026 LFS Spring Grow & Go Challenge provides a fun and unique way for you and other LCMS members to remind your current pastor's wife how important she is to you and to the ministry, while growing Christian care for these special women throughout our Synod—a double blessing!

[CLICK to Share a Gift
with LFS!](#)

Join the Conversation on Facebook!

BODY

MIND

SPIRIT

SOUL

Worker Wellness

in the MID-SOUTH DISTRICT





The Mid-South District turns 60 this year! To highlight this great ministry milestone, the monthly Encourager is sharing a look at the faces, places and moments that have shaped our district over the last six decades.

The Mid-South District's International Mission Partnerships

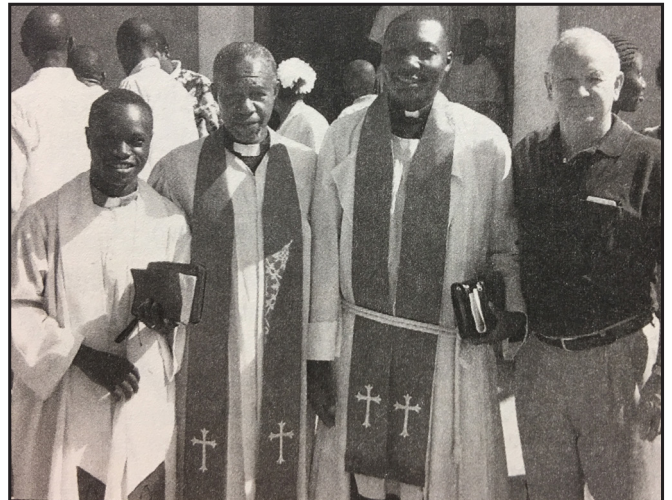
In the 1990s, the Mid-South District began to explore partnerships that would provide opportunities to actively share the Gospel in mission fields far from the borders of its own three-state region. The District's first international mission partnership was finalized in 1995 to provide support for ministry in the west African country of Côte d'Ivoire.

Through the partnership, the Mid-South District provided financial support for the work of missionaries in the region and was also able to connect local LCMS members with opportunities to serve through mission trips to the area. The partnership was maintained for several years and served as a foundation for additional international support arrangements in the District's future.

Since entering into its first international mission partnership in the mid 1990s, the Mid-South District has been blessed to have similar arrangements with Lutheran ministries in Tanzania, Haiti and Madagascar. In addition to helping share the Gospel in these far away places, the partnerships have allowed the District to support pastoral training opportunities, secondary Lutheran education and daily meals for school children in areas with scarce nutrition resources. The District's international mission partnerships have been an important part of its 60-year history—and will continue to be a vital part of Mid-South District ministry for many years to come.



In 1996, Mid-South District representatives traveled to Côte d'Ivoire to meet people impacted by the work of LCMS missionaries. Over 100 active Lutheran congregations had been established in the area over a 3-year period.



In 2007, a Mid-South District mission team journeyed to Tanzania to work in a medical clinic and share the Gospel. Over 600 Tanzanian people were baptized during the visit! Shown here are Tanzanian pastors (L to R) Ezyran Ng-weshemi, Earnest Ambarang'u and Yohana Nzelu with Mid-South District Director of World Missions, Bob Allen.

Watch for more District history in the July Encourager. If you missed the previous months' installments, visit our website to see the collection of monthly history features: mid-southlcms.org/category/60-anniversary/.

2026 NEA ORGAN RECITAL

A Musical Journey
Through the Small Catechism



Join us for dinner
in the fellowship hall following the organ
recital.



Hope Lutheran Church
2415 E Main St. Batesville, AR
Sunday, June 21st 4 P.M.

CHRIST IS RISEN

1 corinthians 15

..... INDEED

Preparing for the 2026 Synodical Convention: REGIONAL CIRCUIT MEETINGS FOR DELEGATES SCHEDULED

LCMS 69th Regular Convention JULY 18-23, 2026

Regional Circuit Meetings Set for Mid-South Delegates to the Upcoming Synodical Convention

The 69th Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod will take place July 18-23, 2026 in Phoenix, AZ. In preparation, Circuit meetings have been scheduled for all Mid-South delegates to the Synod Convention. At these meetings, Mid-South District President, Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola, will review the Synod Convention process and workbook overtures, as well as answer questions regarding the role of a delegate. Delegates may choose from the following meeting dates and locations:

- **Wednesday, June 10, 2026; 7-9 PM in Russellville** - St. John's Lutheran Church (500 N Cumberland / Russellville AR 72801)
- **Thursday, June 25, 2026; 7-9 PM in Nashville** - Ascension Lutheran Church (610 W. Old Hickory Blvd / Madison TN 37115)

Delegates to the upcoming Synodical Convention are asked to contact Missy Washburn at the District Office (mwashburn.contact@mid-southlcms.com) regarding which Circuit Meeting session they will attend.

Get Ready for LSM 2026!

Lutheran Summer Music returns to St. Olaf College for its 2026 season, June 21–July 19, featuring more than 40 free concerts, recitals, worship services, and special events free and open to the public.

Highlights include the inaugural LSM Choral Gathering, guest performance by Cantus, Bach's St. Matthew Passion, the Bach Cantata Eucharist, and Festival Week concerts featuring LSM's Festival Band, Choir, and Orchestra. Most events will also be available online via Live from LSM.

View the season brochure, explore events, and reserve free tickets at LSMacademy.org/2026season

LSM LUTHERAN SUMMER MUSIC ACADEMY & FESTIVAL

2026 SEASON

June 21-July 19, 2026
St. Olaf College • Northfield, MN
LSMacademy.org

LUTHERAN SUMMER MUSIC
LIVE FROM LSM

VIII National Hispanic Convention - LCMS

July 28-31, 2026

Concordia University Irvine
1530 Concordia West, Irvine, CA

*Celebrate 100 years of LCMS
Hispanic Ministry in the USA*



*Registration
is open!*

100 AÑOS
celebraZion
MINISTERIOS HISPANOS LCMS
SALMO 145:4

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MISSIONARY
LEAGUE**
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www.hispanoslcms.com

Mid-South & Southern District LCMS Educators

It's Your Time to Recharge!



Join fellow Lutheran educators October 8–10 in beautiful Shalimar, Florida for an inspiring conference centered on this year's powerful theme: Salt & Light.

- Dynamic keynote speaker: Ted Neitzke
- Practical, engaging breakout sessions
- Encouragement for your ministry and vocation
- Meaningful fellowship with LCMS educators from across the Mid-South & Southern Districts
- Time to refresh, reconnect, and reignite your purpose

Whether you're in the classroom, leading a school, or supporting ministry in other ways, this conference is designed to equip and encourage you to shine brightly where God has placed you.

Register now and make plans to join us!

LOCATION: Good Shepherd Lutheran Church (1 Meigs Dr, Shalimar, FL 32579)

REGISTRATION: \$100 per attendee. **Due on or before August 15, 2026.**

NO REFUNDS after September 5, 2026. No registration discount for attending one day. The travel costs will be the responsibility of the congregations/schools.

HOTEL: Hampton Inn Fort Walton Beach, FL (1112 Santa Rosa Blvd. / Fort Walton Beach, FL)

- The group rate for the hotel per night is \$170.00
- These spacious guestrooms include two queen beds
- Deadline for room reservations is Saturday, September 5, 2026
- All unreserved rooms will be dropped after that date and you will be responsible for the regular cost of the room and any taxes they include.

If you have any questions, please contact April Jones (ajones@mid-southlcms.com) at the Mid-South District Office.

REGISTER ONLINE NOW!



BEST PRACTICES for Ministry | Heartland

AUGUST 9 - 11, 2026

Frankenmuth, Michigan

Register Today!

Attendees by June 30

Breakout Leaders by May 31

Exhibitors by May 31



PASTORS

MUSIC LEADERS

WORSHIP LEADERS

TEACHERS

ADMINISTRATION

CHURCH STAFF

VOLUNTEERS

LEADERS



WORSHIP

BREAKOUTS

KEYNOTES

FELLOWSHIP



bph@stlorenz.org



St. Lorenz
LUTHERAN CHURCH & SCHOOL

Prayer Summary, May 2026

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 May.

PRAYER CONCERNS

REV. RONALD HALAMKA (Waxahachie, TX)
MRS. ALISON HAWKINS (Mid-South District Office)
MRS. MARY ANN HERD (wife of Rev. Clifford Herd, Hixson, TN)
REV. TOM SAYRE (Emeritus, St. John's, FL)
REV. ALBERT EICHELBERGER (Emeritus, Knoxville, TN)
REV. MYLES SCHULTZ (Pastor, Grace Lutheran Church, Holiday Island, AR)
REV. DR. LEE HAGAN (District President, Missouri District)
MRS. NANCY CALLIES (wife of Rev. David Callies, Emeritus, Former District President MDS)
MRS. FLORENCE EICHELBERGER (wife of Rev. Albert Eichelberger, Knoxville, TN)
MRS. NORMA MOORE (wife of Rev. Tom Moore, Emeritus, Cordova, TN)
MRS. JUNE WIESE (wife of former MDS Pastor, Rev. Ron Wiese)
MS. STEPHANIE ELSEROAD (daughter of Rev. Rich Elseroad (EM) Knoxville, TN)
MR. ROBERT NERGER (Former Mid-South District Board of Directors, Wartburg, TN)
MRS. DONNA MARSHALL (wife of Rev. Stewart Marshall, Trinity, Pine Bluff, AR)
MR. JEREMY HOWE (Huntsville, AL)
MR. DAVID TOPP (Belvoir Christian Academy, Chattanooga, TN)

CALL UPDATE

VACANT CONGREGATIONS & MINISTRIES

PENDING: Rev. Russell Belisle, Pastor to Cross of Calvary, Memphis, TN received a Call to serve as Pastor to a congregation in the Florida-Georgia District.

ACCEPTED: **Rev. Gary Boye** (Emeritus) Mountain Home, Arkansas accepted the Call to serve as IIM Pastor to Immanuel Lutheran Church, Lockwood, MO.

DECLINED: **Rev. Mark Bushuiakovish**, Associate Pastor to Our Savior Lutheran Church, Nashville, TN returned the Call to serve as Senior Pastor to Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Collinsville, IL.

Rev. Mark Bushuiakovish, Associate Pastor to Our Savior Lutheran Church, Nashville, TN returned the Call to serve as Senior Pastor to St. Paul Lutheran Church & School, Stevens Point, WI.

Rev. Willie Grills, Pastor to Zion Lutheran Church of Avilla, Alexander, AR returned the Call to serve as Pastor to Salem Lutheran Church, Taylorsville, NC.

Rev. JD Zischke, Pastor to Restoration Lutheran Church, Fayetteville, AR & Vacancy Pastor to St. John Lutheran Church, Fayetteville, AR returned the Call to serve as Pastor to Trinity Lutheran Church, Sterling, CO.

Rev. John Hallock, Pastor to Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Lexington, KY returned the Call to serve as Pastor to Peace Lutheran Church, Cherokee Village, AR.

VACANT CONGREGATIONS & MINISTRIES

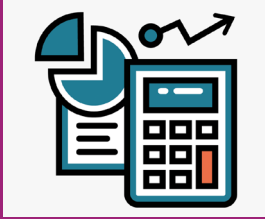
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Chattanooga, TN – Senior Pastor

IN THE CALLING PROCESS - COMMISSIONED MINISTERS

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

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





Congregational Mission Commitments

Mission Commitment Receipts as of 4/30/2026 (4 Months)

Anticipated Amount (33.33% of budget)	\$550,040
Actual Receipts	545,845
Over (under) anticipated amount	(\$4,195)

Use of Mission Commitment Receipts (4 Months)

Allocated to Synod for World Missions	\$155,420
Allocated to Tanzania	8,333
Retained for District Mission/Ministry Support (70% of receipts)	382,092
Total Receipts	\$545,845

Mission Commitment Receipts Prior Year Comparison (4 Months)

Actual Receipts as of 4/30/2026	\$545,845
Actual Receipts as of 4/30/2025	\$528,867
Over (under) prior year receipts	\$16,978

Share your news with us!

Encourager Topics in 2026

We invite you to share your stories with us please email stories by 20th to Rhonda, webmaster.contact@mid-southlcms.com. Here's a look at the upcoming topics for 2026.
 July — Veterans
 August — Church Planting
 September — Stewardship

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.contact@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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