

Encourager

Mid-South District LCMS | August 2020



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



The assignment for this month's Encourager is "Church Planting." It's a subject I am totally committed to serving in our Mid-South District and in many of the locations where I have had the privilege to serve as a church planter. Yet, when I view the subject, it's fairly obvious that we can't go to Best Buy, purchase a program, and plug in some fancy dangled thing that will make church planting work. The history of most of our Districts, (including the Mid-South District) have a track record in church planting that is a batting average that wouldn't make it in the major leagues. In fact, from 1974 when church planting and Church Growth became the buzz words in the church world, the number of successful church plants has been a "batting average" that most pitchers in the major leagues wouldn't want (American League

pitchers do not normally bat. It's left to the Designated Batter.)

The Mid-South District's church planting projects that have been able to sustain themselves beyond the three years shows a tremendous relationship between the "mothering church" and the church plant. First Lutheran in Hot Springs and Grace Lutheran in Knoxville are examples of that relationship. In the places where the church plant has been parachuted into a location or are without the "mothering church" to give it leadership, financial, and visionary support, our results and the results in other Districts has been less than stellar. Most Districts have a "batting average" similar to Tim Lincecum when he was brought up to the "Bigs" by the New York Mets. Other districts are much more fortunate in their efforts to fostered sustainable mission plants.

But, Church planting began in the First Century! God's Spirit move hundreds and thousands of people to convert to Christianity in remarkable numbers. *"And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they*

arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.” (Acts 4:1-4, ESV)

Why isn't that happening 2100 years later? That brings up several important data points for our consideration. First, the number of people who do not identify with any church in the United States exceeds 22% of our population. A July 23, 2020, Pew Report states that 57% of Americans do not see God as necessary to live a moral and wholesome life. The report went on to say that 70% of the people believe religion is “somewhat important,” the majority does not see God as an essential element in a moral life. Perhaps they missed the point of the God we worship and serve is a God that goes far beyond moral guidance as our God is the God of life and salvation! That makes church planting a difficult undertaking, to say nothing of the added ingredients of COVID shut downs!

Yet, on the global front, people in economically emerging countries consider God to be necessary. For example, people in Russia and the Ukraine are more inclined to embrace a strong preference for God and worship than their counterparts in other parts of Western Europe. The explanation for this phenomenon is that after the lifting of the Iron Curtain, the public in “liberated” Russia and Ukraine found Christianity a refreshing departure from Communist rule and state-mandated atheism. Our neighbors to the north in Canada are even more dramatic in their disbelief in an essential God with a whopping 73% of Canadians who think God is not necessary for moral good (to say nothing about God as necessary for salvation). Since 2002, the opinion in the United States on the necessity of God has dropped by 14%, a number that is roughly parallel to the increase of the number of “nones” (over 22%) – those without any church affiliation.

What makes the difference? In one particular study, Pew Research (Global 2020) indicated an inverse proportion of a country's economic well-being correlated to the belief in a necessary God for Christians. For example, Kenya which has a very low per capita income (\$4,509 annually) has 95% of its population express a view that belief in God is an integral part of a person's goodness and moral standards. On the other end of that spectrum, Canada, the United States, and the Netherlands have per capita incomes well above \$50,000 to \$60,000 and a dependence on God below 25% expressed by the general

population. Prosperity economically may affect spiritual poverty. [See “The Global God Divide” Pew Research]

As we dissect the LCMS and its history, we have to first note that the birth rate in the LCMS membership went from 4% of the church-active population in the 1960's to just under 1% in the first decade of the Twenty-First Century. That “natural church growth” of the past isn't happening anymore. What is more, the retention rate of children from their Baptism to Catechism age is 60-70%, while the retention rate of those who make it from Catechism to adulthood is only 33%. Translation: Out of 100 children baptized in the LCMS, 60 to 70 of those children will come to and complete Catechism. Of that 60 to 70 who came to and were catechized, only 33% have remained in the church – 20 to 23 out of the 100 children baptized!

We have seen reports that indicate every mainline denomination in America is in decline. There are a few pockets in each denomination that are exceptions to this data. Yet, many studies have verified that the emergence of the non-denominational church bodies (actually micro-denominational bodies) has not answered or curtailed the decline in overall Christianity decline.

So, let's bring it closer to home: The Mid-South District was one of two districts that not only did not see a decline in its total membership between 2015 to 2018, but actually saw a slight increase in membership! To God be the glory. The joint effort of the Mid-South District and the Mid-South District LWML sponsored a program called *Each 1 – Reach 1*.

It was a program that was not designed for church growth, but designed around the Great Commission and the encouragement St. Peter offers us as Christians. *“As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” and “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” (I Peter 2:4-8)*

But, then Peter continues, *“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of*

darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." (1 Peter 2:9-10) To whom does Peter refer? He answered that question in the first chapter, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you." (1 Peter 1:3-4) Everyone who has been baptized in the Triune God is called to be a witness of God, that we "may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."

We will continue to work with congregations and circuits that are engaged in church planting. We will encourage church planting and mission development. We have several "mission sites" that are being or will be developed in this year and next. In addition to the mission sites already underway in Munford, TN with Rev. Dan Hawkins, and in Fayetteville, AR with Rev. JD Ziske, we will be adding a mission re-plant in Olive Branch, Mississippi with Rev. Sawyer Meyer as planter, West Little Rock with Vicar Dan Bodemann, Smith Grove, KY with Rev. Dr. Mark

Press, and Hohenwald, Tennessee with Rev. Douglas DeWitt as planter.

People are hungry for the life and salvation that is offered in Christ and wish to come to worship Him in truth and purity. On top of that, we have 23,000 or more people who can be encouraged, engaged, and equipped for giving witness to the saving truth of Christ Jesus. If we were to understand our own data, if only 20% of our catechized members were equipped to spread the Good News that would mean 4,600 new souls could be led by God's Spirit's gift of faith to apprehend the overflowing grace of God. If only 2% were able to proclaim their new life in Christ to those God would entrust to their role in the priesthood of believers, it would still be 460 new souls won for the Kingdom of Christ. Now, that would be a great plant! May God continue to grant His blessings on our church planting efforts.

Your servant in Christ +
Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola



JULY BLESSINGS

Faith Lutheran Church, Hopkinsville, KY



Faith Lutheran is blessed with new members and a baptism during the month of July. Above, new members brought into fellowship on July 19th. From left to right there are John Schlei, Carol Heilman, the Di Giovanni family, Pastor Neely Owen, and Adam & Katie Eatherton.



The baptism took place on July 16th. From the left to right are Kyliee Snead (mother of the baby baptized), Vickie Moats (great-grandmother and sponsor holding the baptized child), Pastor Neely Owen, and Rex Cole (great-uncle and sponsor of the child).

The **Installation of Rev. Kent Schaaf** took place on Sunday, July 19, at Grace Lutheran Church, Little Rock, AR. Pastor Schaaf was called by Grace Lutheran Church after the retirement of their long-term pastor, Rev. Jim Walter. Two pictures were included for future reference of how the COVID pandemic has affected the rites of the Church. Hopefully, years from now, we will scan these pictures and recall what COVID forced us to do, and how it was quickly eliminated. Participating and pictured for Pastor Schaaf's installation are (Seated L-R) Rev. Michael Schleider, President Paavola, Rev. Kent Schaaf, Rev. John Mathis, and Rev. Dr. Leroy Leach. Standing (L-R) Rev. Jon Beyer, Rev. David Vandercook, Rev. Jim Walter, Rev. Tom Bartzsch, Rev. Dan Hauser, Rev. Emil Woerner, Rev. John Gierke, and Rev. Shawn Found.



Welcome Pastors



The **installation of Rev. Paul Leigeber** as pastor for Trinity Lutheran Church, Dyersburg, TN, and Faith Lutheran Church, Union City, TN was held on Sunday, July 26. Pastor Leigeber returns to the Mid-South District after several years. He formerly served as pastor of Zion Lutheran Church in Waldenburg, AR. Pictured are (L-R) President Roger Paavola, Rev. Daniel Ulrich, Rev. David Appold, Pastor Leigeber, Rev. Bill Stevenson, and Rev. Larry Peters.



The **Rite of Ordination and Installation for Rev. Sawyer Meyers** was held on Saturday, July 25, 2020, at Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church, Olive Branch, Mississippi. Pastor Meyers is originally from the Mid-South District before attending Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana. Pictured below are (Front L-R) Rev. Jim Belles, Rev. Meyers, Rev. Dr. Adam Koontz, Rev. Dan Elkins. Top row (L-R) Rev. Terry Tieman, Rev. Chuck Neugebauer, Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola, Rev. Dan Hawkins, and fourth year seminarian, Ian Kinney.

2020 Fall Pastors Conference

Registration Open

The Mid-South District is pleased to announce that it will host the 2020 Fall Pastors Conference in Memphis October 19-21 at the Hilton Hotel. Online registration (<https://mid-southlcms.org/2020-fall-pastors-conference/>) for the conference is now available on the District website, along with more details about the event. Please note the conference dates in your calendar and register to attend this special gathering!



Rose Bowl Parade Cancelled Due to Pandemic Concerns

For the first time in its 70-year history, the annual Tournament of Roses Parade in Pasadena, CA has been cancelled due to public safety concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic. As you know, the Petal Pushers of Lutheran Hour Ministries regularly participate in the parade, designing and constructing the only Christian-themed float in the event. Although they will not be engaging in their usual activities and festivities this fall in preparation for the parade, the Petal Pushers are looking forward to resuming planning in 2021. Many thanks to all who have supported this effort in previous years. Let's all pray for a safe return to this — and many other — beloved traditions very soon!



Financial Peace University Program Is Available

The Mid-South District is pleased to continue to partner with our congregations to bring Financial Peace University (FPU) to its members and guests through a special rebate program. For those congregations that offer FPU between now and the end of 2020, the Mid-South District will offer a rebate of the \$93 cost to individuals who complete the 9-week program. The rebate program is on a first come, first serve basis until budgeted funds have been exhausted. All materials must be purchased through the Mid-South District prior to the start of any classes. Please contact Angela Fowler (afowler@mid-southlcms.com) if your ministry is interested in hosting this class for your congregation.



Keeping HOPE Alive During Extraordinary Times

Life in Haiti is hard with many unable to find food daily for their families. Then a pandemic hits this already vulnerable country, making it even worse and those who were hungry are now on the verge of starvation. Since March 19 when the first case of COVID-19 hit Haiti, large gatherings were closed which included shutting schools, churches and markets where many sell what they can to buy the little food they can afford. This is overwhelming to me, but I know we serve an awesome God who will use people like you and me to help our brothers and sisters in Haiti.

Here are some of the ways God is working through Trinity HOPE in Haiti during these extraordinary times:

- Provided \$375,000 to purchase over 1.7 million emergency meals of rice, beans and oil for these children and their families
- Will be providing meals a month earlier this 2020-21 School year with school starting mid-August
- Adding at least 8 new schools this upcoming school year
- Adding two new feeding program directors - one in Jacmel and one in Port-au-Prince

Will you join us as we walk with Jesus and be the physical hands and feet in Haiti? Sharing the Gospel has never been more important than right now. The meals provided are meeting the physical need as well as the spiritual for the children, teachers and cooks in our schools. As little missionaries, our children in Haiti are sharing the Love of Christ they experience at school with others as they commute in their tap-taps singing "Jesus Loves Me"!

Learn more about how you can give and get involved and share this very important mission with others by visiting our website at trinityhope.org.

— Denise Gudlin



2020 LIME Graduates Madagascar

"January 2020 was graduation day and took place at the church close to the Lutheran Graduate School of Theology at Ivory Avaratra where the Rev. Dr. Rakotonirina David studied to get his Master in Theology. I have been the President of that graduate school for 17 years before being appointed to preside LIME. The Rev. Dr. Rakotonirina David was my student for 5 years.

Thanks for your steady support for LIME. Praise be to Jesus, the professor of all teachers. And may bless you, the Mid-South District and the LCMS as a whole!

Your brother across the ocean,
Joseph Randrianasolo"



Prayer Summary, July 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 July 2020.

PRAYER CONCERNS

MRS. SARAH ANDERSON (wife of Rev. Danny Anderson, Grace Lutheran, Knoxville, TN)

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

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

REV. RICH ELSEROAD (Pastor of Grace Lutheran, Knoxville, TN)

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

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

REV. RONALD and CLAIRE HALAMKA (Waxahachie, TX)

MRS. ALISON HAWKINS (Mid-South District Office)

REV. DONLEY HESSE (Emeritus, Mena, AR)

MRS. SUSAN JONES (volunteer, Mid-South District Office)

MRS. NANCY LEE (Retiree, Mid-South District Office)

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

REV. TIMOTHY SCHARR (District President, Southern Illinois – LCMS)

REV. MERLIN SEPMAYER (Crossville, TN)

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

With prayers of thanksgiving we celebrate the arrival of Eleanor Jean Anderson (Ellie) to Rev. Danny Anderson and wife, Sarah.

We pray for our country and government leaders at this overwhelming time of public unrest.

We pray for all affected worldwide by the Coronavirus; all healthcare workers; pastors; state and city governments and the citizens of our country as we work within this ever changing pandemic.

Our deepest sympathies to:

The family and friends of REV. DR. DAVID RAKOTONIRINA (President, Malagasy Lutheran Church) who recently passed away from COVID-19.

The family and friends of JOHN STEVENS (grandfather of Rev. JD Zischke, Restoration Lutheran Church, Fayetteville, AR) who recently passed away from COVID-19.

CALL UPDATE

IN THE CALLING PROCESS – CONGREGATIONS ORDAINED MINISTERS

ACCEPTED: **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.** **Installed July 26th, 2020*

Rev. Joshua Leigeber, Pastor, Trinity Lutheran Church, Leesville, LA has been accepted the Call to serve as **Pastor to Pilgrim Lutheran Church, Jonesboro, AR.** **Installation planned for August 9th 2020*

Rev. Kevin McReynolds, Pastor, St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Central City, NE, has accepted the Call to serve as **Pastor to Redeemer Lutheran Church, Mountain Home, AR.** **Installation planned for September, 2020*

Rev. Kent Schaaf, Pastor, Mt. Olive Lutheran Church & School, Milwaukee, WI has accepted the Call to serve as **Pastor to Grace Lutheran Church, Little Rock, AR** **Installed July 19th, 2020.*

PENDING: **Rev. Donald Welmer** Associate Pastor, Messiah Lutheran Church, Plano, TX has been issued A Call to serve as **Pastor to First Lutheran Church, Chattanooga, TN.**

DECLINED: **Rev. Dean Herberts**, Pastor to Dual Parish Trinity Lutheran Church/Zion Lutheran Church, Sheldon/Gilman, WI has returned the Call to serve as **Pastor to Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Fort Smith, AR.**

SEMINARY: **PASTOR-ELECT Sawyer Meyers**, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, IN, has accepted the Call to serve as **Missionary-At-Large to the Mid-South District and will be placed as Pastor at Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church, Olive Branch, MS.** **Ordained and Installed July 25th, 2020*

COMMISSIONED MINISTERS

ACCEPTED: **Mr. Matthew Fischer**, Principal, Faith Lutheran Academy, Las Vegas, NV, has accepted the Call to serve as **Director of Family Life Ministries, Our Savior Lutheran Church & Academy, Nashville, TN**

DECLINED: **Ms. Samantha Brown**, DCE, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & Early Childhood Center, Saginaw, MI, has been issued a Call to serve as **Director of Children and Youth Ministries at Our Savior Lutheran Church & Academy, Nashville, TN**

CONGREGATIONS-IN THE CALLING PROCESS

Mid-South District – Executive Director
for Missions and Ministry

COMMISSIONED MINISTERS-IN THE CALLING PROCESS

**Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Fort
Smith, AR** – Pastor

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

**Our Savior Lutheran Church &
Academy, Nashville, TN** – Director of
Children and Youth Ministries

Congregational Mission Commitments

Mission Commitment Receipts as of 6/30/2020 (6 Months)

Anticipated Amount (50% of
budget) \$769,485
Actual Receipts 728,989
Over (under) anticipated
amount **(\$40,496)**

Use of Mission Commitment Receipts (6 Months)

Allocated to Synod for World
Missions \$206,197
Allocated to Tanzania 12,500
Retained for District Mission/
Ministry Support
(70% of receipts) 510,292
Total Receipts \$728,989

Mission Commitment Receipts Prior Year Comparison (6 Months)

Actual Receipts as
of 6/30/2020 \$728,989
Actual Receipts as
of 6/30/2019 \$771,909
Over (under)
prior year receipts **(\$42,920)**

Encourager Topics in 2020

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

- September – Stewardship
- 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: 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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