

Encourager

AUGUST 2026

Mid-South District LCMS



A Message from
Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola,
President

THE PRICE OF CHRIST'S CROSS

There's an extremely interesting book, *The Gulag Archipelago*, by Alexander Solzhenitsyn. He was held prisoner in Russia on hard labor and slow starvation for his opposition to the Soviet regime. One day he felt like giving up since he felt his life would no longer be of any value. He decided to sit down on a bench, waiting to be seen by a guard who would order him back to work. If he failed to respond, the guard would beat him to death.

With his head down waiting for the attack, he felt a presence and he lifted his eyes to see a wrinkled old man. The old man said nothing but merely pulled a stick through the sand at Solzhenitsyn's feet. He deliberately marked the sign of a cross and walked away. Solzhenitsyn stared at the cross as his entire perspective changed. He realized any hope for mankind was the reality of the cross. He lifted himself up, picked up his shovel and went back to work. At that moment, he had no idea that his writings on truth and freedom would one day enflame the whole world by that old man's silent statement.

How many of us can identify that one experience that made our life take a complete turnaround? When we see the world differently than our assumptions, we change and live life differently. It's a new perception in reality. A dear friend of ours told

of how her 40th birthday "bucket list" included sky diving! She signed the waiver saying the company was not responsible for the unlikely event that she would be injured or die as a result of her 6-minute descent to the earth. After she was safe and back on the ground, she said the emotional rush of a thrilling free-fall and the absolute horror of seeing the ground speeding toward you was unlike anything she had ever experienced. I guess it all depends on how you perceive it.

Jesus invited his disciples to see life from a different perspective. He told His disciples that they were about to experience life without Jesus' physical presence. They would be tempted to return to the old way of life. They wouldn't have Jesus as He was returning to our Heavenly Father. Yet, Jesus told them they would have the Holy Spirit to lead and guide them on the mission of the Church, even in the midst of the persecution they would suffer for their faith in Christ.

Life was not easy for them, as they weren't accustomed to angry opposition to the work of the Gospel. They were fishermen and laborers. And, the Church on earth Jesus gave to them wasn't the Church that should have been a reflection of the sacred gathering of the saints in heaven. They endured separation from their families; they experienced

persecution from the Roman and Jewish authorities. The Church struggled with divisions from the Jewish Christians and Gentiles. There were voices within the Church over how the Church should evangelize in the Gentile segments of the areas surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. Those disciples and many of the converts to early Christianity would view their new life as extremely thrilling at the prospect of bringing new souls to Christ and the contrasting overwhelming fear that their work for the Church of Christ could cost them their life.

Are we anything like the early Christian Church and its disciples? It is very tempting for us to keep Church life to ourselves. It's challenging in a world where there are so many – sometimes conflicting – views on what it means to be a Christian. Not only is the Christian Church somewhat divided on basic doctrines, but there are growing numbers in our American society who want to have nothing to do with Church or Synagogue, and present aggressive active opposition to any religion.

People across our country bring protests into the streets in our cities and towns about how unfair life is because 1% of the population is enjoying gigantic wealth while the rest of us oftentimes struggle to make ends meet. This is happening in American - a land of abundance, with incredible wealth and resources. To the rest of the world, we Americans are the 1% and they are the 99%. We enjoy our prosperity while they struggle just to survive.

I don't have to drive too far these days to see the scarcity of life rather than the abundance. I see people on nearly every stoplight with a cardboard sign asking for help. Many of them scribble the words at the bottom, "God bless you!" Would we ever be tempted to plop down a few dollars on the Lottery to help them, maybe help pay off the congregation's mortgage, or perhaps send a few million to the seminaries or one of the several foreign missions we support? Well, not really! The American dream might be based on a \$750 million jackpot, but is that the

option Jesus left as instruction to His disciples on His Church? No! Jesus said He was giving all of His disciples the keys to the Kingdom of God, the Church, and the gates of Hell would not prevail against Her. In every aspect of His Church, Jesus placed the emphasis on temporal scarcity rather than on the abundance of earthly treasures.

There is a different perspective on the life of Christ's Church. In the parable of the three servants, Jesus tells of a master who entrusted his wealth to his servants. Not only did he trust them with his wealth, he did so over a long period of time. Our culture, which places so much value on instant gratification, almost even instantaneously, is willing to wait. Yet, the results of the master's gifts, took a "long time," in order to allow each servant to live faithfully in his abundance.



They each received an abundance of his wealth. A talent of "money" was worth about five years of wages. This was the abundance that superseded the economic conditions and physical situations of their lives. The parable will eventually connect us to the abundance of God's overwhelming grace, unending love, and unconditional forgiveness toward us, His servants. If the modern use of talents (think about Time, Talents, and Treasures of Christian stewardship) has any relation to Matthew's text, it's going to be about having God's life do its purposes in us and putting our proper application of Christian stewardship at God's work of salvation. The talents of the parable are really about God's life and power. But the proper understanding of the parable is about our privilege and response to the Gospel God has graciously offered us all.

The servants who used their talents wisely and increased them are invited to experience the joy of the master. The joy of the master is the joy of the feast that is selfless giving, sharing, being distributed into the world. Stewardship in the Christian perspective is never just about money. Money, abilities, giftedness, and all other things that come by God's grace to us.

In this sense the interest gained on the talents is like the hundred-fold that the disciple receives when he or she gives everything away to follow Jesus. The ultimate stewardship is the precious Gospel God has entrusted to us, His servants, until He returns. That is our focal point on every mission objective and every effort of Church planting!

However, one of the servants didn't see the abundance (Gospel grace) that was his. If the master is inviting, continually inviting into abundant grace and joy (which is nothing more than inviting into discipleship), then the only conclusion that can be drawn is the third servant was not able to hear or accept the invitation or choose to share. The third servant not only hid the talent, he buried himself. He condemned himself to a life that knew not of joy but acquiesced to only darkness and wailing and grinding of teeth. That place is self-centered and self-created.

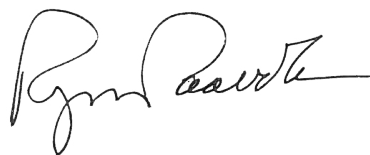
We do missions and ministries because we believe God to be gracious, giving, and forgiving. For those who believe in a god who is hard, demanding, and judgmental, that's the god they choose. We are servants of God who share the image of a God who has had compassion on us, sent His Son to save us, who died in our place, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven to prepare a place for us in His eternal and glorious Kingdom.

We interpret the "talents" as the Gospel, the great

treasure God has given to us in the Church. By trying to protect it, or save it only for ourselves, we risk losing it. This is why we do mission, ministry, and church planting. The fruits of the Gospel are meant for those who are still living in fear and darkness that they may come to the glorious Light of Christ Jesus.

Think about the last Christmas Eve worship service when one candle shared is light to another person. The first person's light wasn't diminished. But now, there is twice as much light in the place. Couldn't the same thing be said about sharing the love of Christ in the Gospel? Our ability to love isn't diminished by sharing! As a result of sharing the Gospel of Christ, there will be more love, peace, and forgiveness to share in the world. The power of the Gospel isn't diminished by sharing it. And, when it is shared, there will be more believers in the world. Christ Jesus already paid for the Gospel on the cross. Like Solzhenitsyn discovered in that Soviet prison camp, the cross was the price, it can lead us to be faithful servants and share its wealth.

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



ACTSFW CHRIST ACADEMY CONFIRMATION RETREAT

September 18-20, 2026

at Concordia Theological Seminary Fort Wayne



Scholarships Available
from the Mid-South District!

District Scholarships to Upcoming Confirmation Retreat at CTSFW

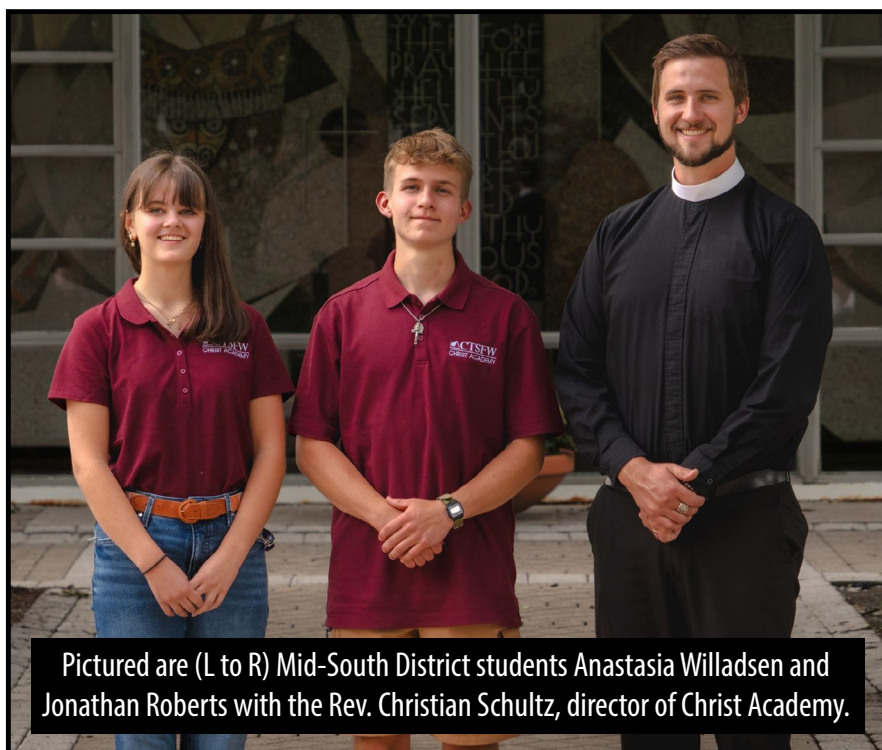
The Mid-South District is pleased to offer scholarships for students attending the upcoming Christ Academy Confirmation Retreat at **Concordia Theological Seminary in fort Wayne (CTSFW)**, September 18-20, 2026. The retreat is for all youth preparing for confirmation and includes catechetical sessions, time in worship, and great Christian fellowship. Rev. Christian Schultz, director of Christ Academy, will lead sessions on baptism to supplement students' confirmation instruction. For more on the retreat, visit <https://shorturl.at/IR8Ge>. For more on District scholarships, contact the Mid-South District Office at 901.373.1343 or Angela Fowler at afowler.contact@mid-southlcms.com.

Mid-South District Youth Attend Christ Academy in Fort Wayne

Two students from the Mid-South District attended Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne's (CTSFW) Christ Academy, which took place June 14-27 on the seminary campus. Anastasia Willadsen from Fort Smith, AR (Bethel Lutheran Church) and Jonathan Roberts from Maryville, TN (Praise Lutheran Church) joined about 90 other high school students from across the country for two weeks of classes, worship and community.

The annual Christ Academy High School gathering consists of three important elements: confessional catechesis, liturgical worship, and Christ-centered community.

This tradition of learning, worship, and community provides a high-impact two-week experience for young men and women, especially for those considering a future in church work. Watch for information on Christ Academy 2027, scheduled for June 20-July 3, 2027.



Pictured are (L to R) Mid-South District students Anastasia Willadsen and Jonathan Roberts with the Rev. Christian Schultz, director of Christ Academy.

Another Great Early Childhood Conference with the Southern District!

Early Childhood Educators from the Mid-South and Southern Districts came together July 9-10 for the 2026 ECE Conference in Memphis. Christ the King Lutheran Preschool did a phenomenal job of hosting this year's event, which gathered attendees under the theme "Speaking Wisdom, Teaching Kindness," from Proverbs 31:26. Designed to inspire our Lutheran ECE workers for the upcoming school year, the conference was enhanced by the contributions of Ann Laury and Ellen Denning of Christ the King and Dina Foshee of Faith Lutheran Preschool in Collierville. Special thanks are also extended to Lutheran Church Extension Fund District Vice President, Scott Roberts, for donating great prizes for our attendees! The Mid-South and Southern Districts look forward to collaborating again in October for the 2026 Educators Conference in Shalimar, Florida.



Representing the Mid-South District at the 2026 LCMS Convention in Phoenix

The 69th Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod took place July 18-23 in Phoenix, AZ. For the over 1,300 delegates and other representatives who attended, the packed week was not only about elections and adopting key resolutions, but also sharing fellowship and worship with fellow Lutherans. The convention theme, “Christ Is Risen Indeed” (from 1 Corinthians 15:20-22), was reflected throughout the gathering, especially in hymns and essays.



The Mid-South District is most grateful to the delegates and other representatives from our region who traveled to Phoenix to represent our District at the 69th Regular Convention of the LCMS. Those attending on behalf of the Mid-South District included 20 voting delegates, 1 advisory delegate and 2 advisory representatives. Mid-South District President, Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola, chaired the Floor Committee on Finance (Vice Chair, Rev. James Rockey, Florida-Georgia District President), with Angela Fowler, the District's Finance Executive, serving as Secretary. One of ten Floor Committees at the 2026 Convention, the Finance Committee presented several resolutions that were quickly adopted by the delegation.

For details on all resolutions presented at the 2026 LCMS convention—along with election results, essays presented, and recordings of each day's proceedings—visit <https://www.lcms.org/convention/national>.



The 2026 LCMS Convention in Phoenix wasn't all work! Delegates and representatives from the Mid-South District had a moment to share dinner and fellowship—and admire a beautiful sunset! “Thank You” to all who attended on behalf of the Mid-South District! Our District's group included (L to R standing) Rev. Adam Woldt, Kevin Herweck (Concordia Plans CEO, District dinner guest), Jack Ficken, David Topp, Rev. JD Zischke, Thomas Bathe, Mikaela Zischke, Rev. Eric Phillips, Amy Holmes, Rev. Jonathan Holmes, Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola, Rev. Addison Pope, Angela Fowler, Rev. Larry Peters, Missy Washburn, Scott Stuewe, Heather Cox, Rev. Patrick Cox, Charles Holcomb, Levi Nunnick, Claudia Bauch, Bob Morris, Rev. Gregory Bauch, Amanda Bauch, Gideon Bauch, Craig Stroh, Leona Stobaugh, Susie Allen, Bob Allen, Gary Thomas, (L to R kneeling front) Rev. Emil Woerner, Rev. Sean Smith, (L to R standing rear) Rev. Gerald Heinecke, Richard Jackson, and (not pictured) Rev. Sawyer Meyers.

REGISTER TODAY for Conferences Across the District

THE HENKEL CONFERENCE August 17-18

*Ascension Lutheran
in Madison, TN*

Ascension Lutheran Church in Madison, TN is pleased to once again host The Henkel Conference—a presentation and discussion event devoted to Christian theology and cultural engagement. The Conference will take place August 17-18 at Ascension's campus (610 Old Hickory Blvd.). With a slight change to prior years, this year's conference will conclude with a panel discussion on free speech. **Registration for this event is \$165 for those who sign up by August 10.** For event details, including the speaker line-up and online registration, [visit the conference page HERE](#).

CTSWF CONTINUING ED August 3-5

*Redeemer Lutheran
in Nashville, TN*

Redeemer Lutheran Church in Nashville, TN is pleased to welcome Dr. David Maxwell for the CTSWF Continuing Education course "The Theology of St. Cyril of Alexandria," coming up **August 3-5**, this course introduces students to Cyril of Alexandria's theological system as he presents it in his Commentary on John. **Registration for this event is \$175 (1.5 CEU for Pastors & Prof. Church Workers) and \$125 for retired Pastors and laypersons.** For the complete course description and registration, [visit the course page HERE](#).

CTSWF CONTINUING ED SEPTEMBER 22-24

*First Lutheran
in Chattanooga, TN*

First Lutheran Church in Chattanooga, TN is pleased to welcome Rev. Prof. John Pless for the CTSWF Continuing Education Course "Lutheran Missions Lead to Lutheran Churches: Keeping Confession and Mission Together," coming up **September 22-24**. This course will look at the theology of mission from the perspective of the Lutheran Confessions with an eye toward how this linkage works out in evangelical outreach both locally and globally. **Registration for this event is \$175 (1.5 CEU for Pastors & Prof. Church Workers) and \$125 for retired Pastors and laypersons.** For the complete course description and registration, [visit the course page HERE](#).

*Trauma is complex.
Helping doesn't
have to be.*



LUTHERAN CHURCH CHARITIES

TRAINING WORKSHOP

Our world is stressed and hurting. People around you need spiritual and emotional care. Join Lutheran Church Charities (LCC) for a unique workshop to learn how you can become an effective spiritual first aid responder, right where God has placed you. In this two-day workshop, you will:

- Learn the basics of **Spiritual First Aid™**, a biblically-based framework for emotional and crisis care
- Gain practical helping skills through applied activities and role-playing
- Understand research-backed tactics, trauma care practices, and field-tested tools

Registration for this two-day workshop is \$25, which includes dinner for the Friday session and lunch/snacks for the Saturday session. To earn SFA certification, you must attend both sessions of the training. The **Spiritual First Aid™** workshop will be offered at two Mid-South District congregations this fall:

**PEACE LUTHERAN CHURCH in
CONWAY, AR** 1905 Dave Ward Drive /
Conway 72034

**Friday, September 11 (6-9 PM) -
Saturday, September 12 (9 AM-4 PM)**

**CHRIST THE KING LUTHERAN
CHURCH in MEMPHIS, TN** 5296 Park
Ave. / Memphis 38119

**Friday, September 18 (6-9 PM) -
Saturday, September 19 (9 AM-4 PM)**

[CLICK to register](#) for the workshop with LCC and select your desired location/date on the form.



Singing the Life of Christ

A HYMN FESTIVAL FOR THE CHURCH YEAR



Sunday, September 27
3 PM



FEATURED ORGANIST:
Dr. Samuel Eatherton
Kantor & Assistant Professor
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis



Free to attend. Reception to follow.

Grace Lutheran Hymn Festival

All are invited to attend the 5th annual hymn festival at Grace Lutheran Church in Little Rock on Sunday, September 27 at 3:00 p.m.

This year the program will walk through the Church Year, featuring a hymn from each season. We are pleased to welcome Dr. Samuel Eatherton from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, as our guest organist. Commentary will be given by Rev. Kory Janneke of St. Matthew Lutheran Church, Conway. Come and sing with us, and hear how our hymns help us to sing the life of Christ. There is no cost to attend, and a light reception will follow the hymn festival.

GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH
5124 Hillcrest Ave | Little Rock, AR 72205
www.gracelutheranlr.org

Missed LSM This Summer? Watch on Demand

The LSM 2026 season may be over, but the inspiring music continues online.

Watch more than 40 concerts, worship services, recitals, and special events from this summer whenever it's convenient for you. Catch up on the performances you missed or experience your favorite moments again with LSM On Demand.

Enjoy the Bach Cantata Eucharist, Festival of Hymns, plus performances by the Festival Band, Choir, and Orchestra, and many more joyful moments from this summer's season.

Visit LSMacademy.org/on-demand to browse the replays and start watching today!



**LSM on Demand Brings
Joyful Music Right to You!**

FAMILY MINISTRY *Workshop*

Equipping Congregations for
Home-Centered, Church-Supported Discipleship

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2026 • 8:30 AM - 4:00 PM

Hope Lutheran Church | Jacksonville, Arkansas



Join Family Ministry leaders from across the Mid-South District for a day of practical teaching, discussion, and encouragement as we equip our homes and congregations to disciple the next generation.

FEATURED PRESENTERS



Mr. Larry Yochum

Associate Director of Coaching and Implementation, Concordia Center for the Family

"It Starts with Me!"

Shifting the Paradigm
through Tweaks

Proven Tweaks toward
Family Discipleship



Rev. Andy Becker

Director of Family Ministry, Office of National Mission

Developing a Culture of
Family Discipleship

The Mission Field
of the Family

This workshop will be a valuable opportunity for pastors, teachers, youth leaders, parents, and anyone passionate about growing family ministry.

NO COST TO ATTEND LUNCH INCLUDED

*Hosted by Hope Lutheran Church – Jacksonville, AR
Mid-South District, Lutheran Church Missouri Synod*

Register Online - <https://midsouthdistrictlcms.regfox.com/family-min-wkshp-jacksonville2026>



The Concordia Deaconess Conference

Dublin, OH June 15th-18th, 2026

— Deaconess Amanda Mumm

As The True Deaconess Spirit by Wilhelm Loehe reminds, "What is my want? I want to serve." But even deaconesses need time to rest, and that is one offering the annual Concordia Deaconess Conference (CDC) provides for her members.

This year, the CDC was so graciously hosted and cared for by St. John's Lutheran Church in Dublin, OH, near Columbus. Oftentimes, it can be difficult for caregivers to slow down and become the recipients of such selfless care. Being at St. John's was such a gift, as the people there cared for the deaconesses (and their guests) in many and various ways. This was done via meals, childcare, and providing spaces for worship and learning. Ultimately, this year's conference site was perfectly equipped to naturally nurture these women so that they do not conform to the wicked and wily ways of the

world, but instead are being continuously transformed by the renewal of their minds, most profoundly, *In View of God's Mercy: The Devotional Life in Christ*. The aforementioned was this year's conference theme, and the theme verses were Romans 12:1-2. Plenty of opportunities to worship in BOTH of St. John's sanctuaries for Evening Prayer, Matins & Deaconess Litany, a Hymn Sing, chapel, and the Divine Service.

This annual conference allows sister deaconesses to gather for community worship and fellowship, confession and absolution, celebration, conversation, and collective rest. The Deaconess Litany by Rev. Dr. Kenneth Korby encourages the women to give thanks to God for the opportunity to "unite our hearts to praise Your name" and in allowing them to meet together in-person, He "make(s)

The Mid-South District is blessed to have Deaconess Robin Moyer as part of its staff. Robin is a member of St. John's Lutheran Church in Lapeer, AR. She completed her Deaconess studies through Concordia Seminary St. Louis in the fall of 2024. Her primary role in the Mid-South District is overseeing the Worker Wellness Program, resourcing our many professional church workers with tools and encouragement for their physical, mental and spiritual health. Robin can be reached at rmoyer.contact@mid-southlcms.com.



us grateful for the companionship of other people...satisfy(ing) with Your own gracious gifts those of our sisters who work in isolated places."¹ What a blessing it was to bring nearly 100 deaconess sisters from all over the world together from June 15th-18th, in Dublin, OH.

Here, they studied the book of Psalms together with Dr. Reed Lessing and were fed in Word

and Sacrament ministry by CDC Spiritual Counselor, Pastor Adam Steinbrenner. The group met for their business meeting and enjoyed various social events. A truly special opportunity was the variety of the Breakout Sessions offered this year from sister deaconesses.

Thanks be to God for LCMS Deaconess ministry, the Concordia Deaconess Conference, and the

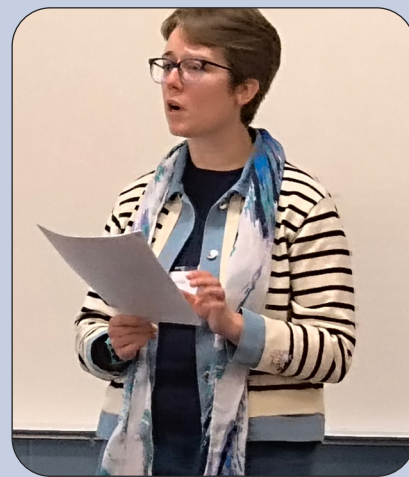
Deaconess training programs at Concordia University Chicago, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne. To learn more about Deaconess Ministry and the Concordia Deaconess Conference, please visit <https://concordiadeaconessconference.org/>



Spiritual Counselor Pastor Steinbrenner



Dr. Reed Lessing at CDC 2026



Deaconess Amanda Mumm

Mid-South & Southern District LCMS Educators

It's Your Time to Recharge!

October 8-10 Shalimar, Florida

LOCATION: Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

REGISTRATION: \$100 per attendee, due August 15

NO REFUNDS after September 5, 2026.

HOTEL: Hampton Inn Fort Walton Beach, FL

QUESTIONS: Contact April Jones

(ajones@mid-southlcms.com) at the Mid-South District Office.



REGISTER ONLINE NOW!

Lutheran Family Service
WEBINARS
Lutheran
Family Service

WHEN: Thurs., Sept. 10 @ 9 AM CT

TOPIC: Artificial Intelligence
& Authentic Wisdom

REGISTER: Register Online and
share the link!

[https://lutheranfamilyservice.dm.networkforgood.com/
forms/lfs-mid-south-webinar-artificial-intelligence-
authentic-wisdom](https://lutheranfamilyservice.dm.networkforgood.com/forms/lfs-mid-south-webinar-artificial-intelligence-authentic-wisdom)

Faith Lutheran Church
75th Anniversary Celebration

Sunday, October 18

WHERE: Faith Lutheran Church
101 Bragg Circle
Tullahoma, TN 37388

WORSHIP 8am & 10:30am

SERVICES: Banquet to follow 2nd service

RSVP by September 20th

Email: faithsecretary@lighttube.net

Call: 931-455-3510

THE MID-SOUTH DISTRICT INVITES YOU TO
SAVE THE DATE FOR
OKTOBERFEST



SATURDAY
OCTOBER 24
11 AM - 3 PM

Immanuel Lutheran Church
in Memphis (6325 Raleigh LaGrange Rd.)

FOOD • BEER • MUSIC • MORE

A Celebration of the Mid-South District's 60th Anniversary!





Oktoberfest CLASSIC 2026

1st Corinthians 1:23

Supporting families in need
through the Hope Lutheran Church Family Life Pantry.

FOUR PERSON SCRAMBLE GOLF TOURNAMENT

**DATE:**

Friday, October 2nd, 2026

**TIME:**

Check-in: 8:00 am
Shotgun Start: 9:00 am

**PLACE:**

The Course at Eagle Mountain
800 Gap Rd
Batesville, AR 72501

**QUESTIONS:**

Contact David Goodwin
Email: dtgood1990@gmail.com

CONTESTS

- Longest Drive
- Closest to the Pin
- Putting Contest
- Chipping Contest

SPONSORSHIPS

Ace: \$5,000
Eagle: \$2,500
Birdie: \$1,500
Hole: \$500

*In-Kind Support
Helps, Too!*

**REGISTER
YOUR TEAM
TODAY!**

Be a Part of Hope Lutheran - Batesville's OKTOBERFEST CLASSIC *Proceeds Support Hope's Growing Family Life Pantry Ministry*

Hope Lutheran Church in Batesville, AR invites you to be a part of their OKTOBERFEST CLASSIC Golf Scramble on **Friday, October 2** at The Course at Eagle Mountain in Batesville. The event will raise funds for Hope's growing Family Life Pantry ministry. Hope's Pastor, Rev. Gerald Heinecke, describes the ministry's rapid growth and role in the community:

"Since we launched the Family Life Pantry in October of 2025, the community response has been staggering, and the local need has grown exponentially. Our pantry just wrapped up a highly active month of June. In a single four-week period, our volunteers supported 142 local families (including 14 new families) and provided critical health and wellness resources for 216 babies and toddlers. In June alone, we distributed:

- Diapers: 7,110 • Pull-Ups: 1,350 • Laundry Detergent: 80 bottles • Packs of Wipes: 266
- Canisters of Infant Formula: 63 • Children's Books: 59 (English, Spanish, and coloring books)

The proceeds from the Oktoberfest Classic will go directly toward purchasing these exact supplies, ensuring that infants and young children in our area have a healthy start. To give you an idea of how fast this need is growing, at our event this past Monday night (July 13th), the turnout was historic. Our shelves are now running critically low, and our funding is being stretched to its absolute limit. Just one year ago, we served 12 children on a single pantry day. Today, that number skyrocketed to 128 babies and toddlers in a single day. We now have 203 registered families who rely on us for support."

There are several ways to get involved, from team entries to formal sponsorships and high-impact in-kind donations. **Player entry is \$600/team or \$150/individual.** Sponsorships range from \$500 "Hole Sponsorships" to \$5,000 "Ace Sponsorships." The event will also feature "Prost" Mulligans for players and a "Fill the Stein" donation challenge to drive further support for the Family Life Pantry on the course. Whether through a traditional corporate sponsorship or by sponsoring a high-traffic station, your involvement will directly keep local babies and toddlers healthy and cared for. **Ready to be a part of the OKTOBERFEST CLASSIC? Email David Goodwin (dtgood1990@gmail.com) or [CLICK HERE!](#)**

Church Planting in the Southeast of Lake Victoria Diocese (SELVD)

May 2026 mission

Planting churches and connecting those who are lost and separated from Christ through Word and Sacrament is the foundation of ministry of the South East of Lake Victoria Diocese (SELVD). Each year the SELVD identifies villages that are without a church that has a population to support one and earmarks that village for the annual Mid-South district mission trip. The reason there was no church may be due to the difficulty in reaching the area because of roads and lack of transportation, especially during the rainy season. The people walk or ride bicycles with little public transportation available.

This year it was decided that our mission would be in the Kishapu District and specifically to the villages of Mihama, Mwamadulu, and Nyahwa. Each day began with a long drive over rough roads to reach the designated outreach areas. Upon arrival we met with pastors from the district and local people familiar with the trails. We would divide into teams which would include one or two Americans, and SELVD pastor and locals who could interpret and lead us.

The team would walk through the villages in the assigned direction to share the gospel message sometimes in the homes called bomas or along the road to people walking or riding their bicycles, driving ox carts to market, women peeling potatoes, men making bricks. As we introduce ourselves and became acquainted with them, we began sharing the Good News of Jesus and His love. As a result, many people came to faith and were baptized.

At each baptism, a member of our team would record the names of the person who is baptized on a form. This form would list tribal name and the new Christian baptized name. This critical information would be used by the evangelist or pastor assigned to that area to follow up to begin teaching and catechizing the new Christians at the church being planted in that area.

This year we spent two days in the village of Mihama and donated money to purchase materials



to build a church. The people started the process and built a temporary facility with a roof, temporary pole structure and chairs. Later they would make bricks and put up permanent walls. We were invited to worship in this temporary structure the following Sunday. The chairs filled quickly and the men put together rudimentary bleachers in the back with extra lumber to handle the overflow. Bishop Nzelu led the service and consecrated the new worship area. The team presented them with Bibles and Hymnals in Swahili.

In the village of Mwamadulu, they had a very old and small church that needed to be expanded to accommodate the new Christians, and money was allocated to be used to expand the facility and to purchase additional land. In Nyahwa, the District Pastor Ignace will identify a location for a church building. The team also aided these new congregations through the Diocese office by providing support for an evangelist to be assigned to Mihama

and Mwamadulu and a motorbike for his travel to this remote area.

This year our team was made up of 14 men and women, representing churches in Tennessee, Arkansas, Missouri and Kansas. **We baptized 1236 people and planted 3 new churches.** To God be the glory.



FAITH IN THE MOUNTAINS: Campfirmation 2026 Bridges Districts and Builds Foundations

By Rev. Derek Roberts, Pastor at Praise Lutheran Church in Maryville, TN and Campfirmation Director at Camp Linn Haven, NC.

For over 80 years, Camp Linn Haven has provided a sanctuary of faith, fellowship, and Christian community along the Linville River in Avery County, North Carolina. Nestled 3,600 feet up in the Blue Ridge Mountains, this 52-acre retreat center has long been a crown jewel of outdoor ministry. While historically affiliated with our neighbors in the Southeastern District, it has also been a vital regional resource for the Mid-South District—particularly for congregations in East Tennessee looking for a driveable retreat location in the mountains.

This summer, from July 5–11, 2026, youth ages 12 and up gathered at Camp Linn Haven for Campfirmation 2026. Note that the word “campfirmation” is a portmanteau, combining *camp* and *confirmation*. They joined their peers from Florida,



Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee for an intensive week of catechesis, liturgical worship, and communal life.

Catechesis in Creation: The Apostles' Creed

Unlike a standard recreational summer camp, Campfirmation operates with a distinct Biblical and confessional Lutheran theology. The curriculum brings *Luther's Small Catechism* to life. The theological anchor for the 2026 season directly addressed the core confession of the ancient Church: "I believe in the Triune God" and the focus was the three articles of the Apostles' Creed.

Throughout the week, a dedicated team of LCMS pastors, DCEs, teachers, and laymen led students through plenaries and breakout sessions about gender, family, technology, redemption, the end times, and God-pleasing vocations. This rigorous study wasn't left on the whiteboard; it was immediately woven into the rhythm of daily life. Campers framed their days with corporate Matins, Evening Prayer, and Compline along with two Divine Services. Campers talked about the sermons and the teachings as they hiked and when they met in small groups at family time. Private Confession and Absolution was offered daily so that students could fully experience all aspects of the means of grace that they learn about at church and at home.

A Story of Multi-District Resilience

For Mid-South workers and parents who monitored the devastating regional impact of Hurricane Helene, the very fact that Campfirmation 2025 and 2026 ran smoothly is a profound cause for thanksgiving. The mountain facility suffered catastrophic floodwater and structural damage during the storm.

However, the body of Christ rose to the occasion. Intensive recovery deployments throughout late 2024 and early 2025—heavily supported by LCMS Lutheran Early Response Teams (LERT) and volunteer networks across multiple districts—cleared debris, stabilized the waterfront, and repaired the camp's infrastructure. Thanks to these tireless servants, the camp's 18 modern cabins, dining hall, and Mountainside Lutheran Church were fully operational, safe, and ready to welcome youth by the time summer arrived in 2025 and now again in 2026.

Fellowship Without Borders

For young people in the Eastern side of the Mid-South District, the benefits of a regional camp are immeasurable. Worship, study, hiking, and campfires alongside other Lutheran youth and church workers reminds catechumens that they are part of a larger, vibrant confession of faith that extends far beyond their home pews.

Furthermore, the camp provides an exceptionally low-barrier financial framework for individual and



congregation budgets. It is one of the most accessible and affordable week-long summer youth retreats available.

Because the camp handles all meal preparation and facility maintenance, the visiting pastors, DCEs, and laymen can focus on teaching and interacting with the youth. They spend the week doing what matters most: proclaiming Christ crucified and risen and building deep, lasting pastoral relationships with the students during a pivotal time in their lives. Leaders from the participating churches note how Campfirmation inspires more youth towards church vocations than any other activity they plan throughout the year.



Mid-South District representatives and pastors at Campfirmation include Rev. David Graves (4th Vice President and Pastor of St. Paul Lutheran, Wartburg) who served as the Dean of Chapel for the week, Rev. Chase Lefort (Knoxville Circuit Visitor and Pastor of Faith Lutheran, Oak Ridge) who taught and preached during the week, Rev. Ed Maanum (First Lutheran, Knoxville) who taught Middle School Plenaries and preached at camp, and Rev. Derek Roberts (Praise Lutheran, Maryville) who served as the Camp Director for the week.

Looking Ahead to 2027: Loved and Loving Others (The Ten Commandments)

Campfirmation week has consistently hit capacity over the last several years with approximately 10 churches participating, nearly filling every

bed available. Though Campfirmation leaders would certainly love to share the teachings and life together with more people, they currently cannot invite any more and provide sufficient accommodations. They do, however, covet prayers as they prepare for 2027 and for the LCMS youth (and adults) who are impacted by Campfirmation.

Next year's theme is *Loved and Loving Others*—teachings on The Ten Commandments with Luther's explanations.



MINISTRY CARE EXPANDS

Shepherd's Canyon has launched a new Missouri retreat site, expanding its ministry of care for pastors, missionaries, teachers, DCEs, deaconesses, chaplains, worship leaders, and other full-time church workers and their spouses. This is in addition to the site in Arizona.

Shepherd's Canyon Retreat is a Christ-centered ministry that provides weeklong counseling

retreats for pastors, missionaries, teachers, DCEs, deaconesses, chaplains, worship leaders, and other full-time church workers and their spouses. Founded in 2009 and a Recognized Service Organization of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Shepherd's Canyon serves church workers through professional Christian counseling, chaplain care, rest, and encouragement.



Those interested in learning more, referring a church worker, volunteering, or supporting the ministry may visit www.ShepherdsCanyon.org.

Prayer Summary, July 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 July.

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. RICHARD MAYER (Messiah Lutheran Church, Peas Ridge, AR)
REV. LAURENCE KEIM (SMP, Chapel of the Good Shepherd, Sharps Chapel, TN)
REV. PAUL LEIGEBER (Faith Lutheran Church, Union City, TN & Trinity Lutheran Church, Dyersburg, TN)
REV. GERALD HEMMINGSON (First Lutheran Church, Harrison, AR)
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)
MS. STEPHANIE ELSEROAD (daughter of Rev. Rich Elseroad (EM) Knoxville, TN)
MR. ROBERT NERGER (Former Mid-South District Board of Directors, Wartburg, TN)
MR. JEREMY HOWE (Huntsville, AL)
MRS. JODICE BELISLE (wife to Rev. Russell Belisle, Cross of Calvary Lutheran Church, Memphis, TN)

2027 Rose Parade

The theme for the 2027 Lutheran Hour Ministries (LHM) Float is *God's Promises Welcome All*.

Using imagery from the biblical story of Noah's

Ark, the float celebrates the truth that God's promises are for everyone and serves as a joyful reminder that we are all invited to follow God.



For the float test drive video, go to: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1V20x_5lpa-BE0IPtYCgSn47KECmQ7db6/view?usp=sharing

If you would like to participate this Luther Tour is available in 2027: [Rose Parade and Float Decorating Package](#).

CALL UPDATE

ORDAINED MINISTERS

ACCEPTED: **Rev. Mark Bushuiakovish**, Associate Pastor to Our Savior Lutheran Church, Nashville, TN accepted the Call to serve as *Pastor to Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, Birmingham, MI*.
Rev. Dr. LeRoy Leach (Emeritus, Conway, AR) accepted the Call to serve as *Assistant Pastor to St. Matthew Lutheran Church, Conway, AR*. *Installation date pending*.
Rev. Michael Saxton, Seminary Graduate Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO, accepted the Call to serve as *Associate Pastor-Church Planter to Grace Lutheran Church, Knoxville, TN*. *Ordination & Installation took place July 19, 2026*.
PENDING: **Rev. Matthew Albright**, Pastor to Christ Lutheran Church, Little Rock, AR received a Call to serve as *Senior Executive Pastor to Redeemer Lutheran Church, Peoria, IL*.
Rev. Matthew Albright, Pastor to Christ Lutheran Church, Little Rock, AR received a Call to serve as *Pastor to St. Paul Lutheran Church, Beatrice, NE*.
Rev. Andre Frandle, Chaplain US Army Reserve, Clarksville, TN received a Call to serve as *Pastor to St. John's Lutheran Church, Stuttgart, AR*.
Rev. JohnDavid Zischke, Pastor to Restoration Lutheran Church, Fayetteville, AR received a Call to serve as *Pastor to St. Paul Lutheran Church, Albion, MI*.

DECLINED: **Rev. Lane Reuter**, Senior Pastor to Our Savior Lutheran Church, Nashville, TN returned the Call to serve as *Senior Pastor to Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church in Sarasota, FL*.
Rev. Matthew Albright, Pastor to Christ Lutheran Church, Little Rock, AR returned the Call to serve as *Pastor to Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Collinsville, IL*.

VACANT CONGREGATIONS & MINISTRIES

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Chattanooga, TN – Senior Pastor
St. John's Lutheran Church, Stuttgart, AR – Pastor ***Pending Call*
Peace Lutheran Church, Cherokee Village, AR – Pastor
Trinity Lutheran Church, Columbia, TN – Pastor

IN THE CALLING PROCESS - COMMISSIONED MINISTERS

Pending update for the upcoming academic year.



Congregational Mission Commitments

Mission Commitment Receipts as of 6/30/2026 (6 Months)

Anticipated Amount (50% of budget)	\$825,061
Actual Receipts	<u>806,858</u>
Over (under) anticipated amount	(\$18,203)

Use of Mission Commitment Receipts (6 Months)

Allocated to Synod for World Missions	\$229,557
Allocated to Tanzania	12,500
Retained for District Mission/Ministry Support (70% of receipts)	<u>564,801</u>
Total Receipts	\$806,858

Mission Commitment Receipts Prior Year Comparison (6 Months)

Actual Receipts as of 6/30/2026	\$806,858
Actual Receipts as of 6/30/2025	<u>\$791,013</u>
Over (under) prior year receipts	\$15,845

Share your news with us!

Encourager Topics in 2026

We invite you to share your stories with us! Please email stories by the 20th of the month to Rhonda at webmaster.contact@mid-southlcms.com.

Here's a look at the upcoming topics for 2026:

- September — *Stewardship*
- October — *Lutheran Heritage*
- November — *Thankful Hearts*
- December — *Highlights of 2026*

Lutheran Witness Supplement

The monthly deadline is the 7th, 2 months prior to production. Please email your original high resolution digital photos (.pdf or .jpg files only) and a short paragraph to *The Lutheran Witness* Supplement editor, Judy Otto at lw.contact@mid-southlcms.com or by calling 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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