

Encourager

SEPTEMBER 2025

Mid-South District LCMS



A Message from
Rev. Dr. Roger
Paavola, President

FEAST OF THE HOLY CROSS

Each September, the Christian Churches around the world set aside September 14 as the Festival of the Holy Cross. It seems the way St Paul writes in his epistles, he can be a bit wordy at times. But in his letter to the Corinthians Paul makes two points: First, it's foolish NOT to follow God, even when it may seem foolish to the rest of the world. Second, there's a general objection to an object in this world – it's the cross.

Apparently, things haven't really changed that much in the last 2,000 years. The majority of the world still thinks it's foolish to believe that the way to eternal life is accomplished by the death of a Man on a cross. Why did the people of Paul's day think Christ's cross was foolishness? Perhaps it's the same two reasons people think it's foolishness today. Back then, Paul said the cross was a stumbling block. Part of it was because Jesus wasn't the kind of Savior most people expected or wanted. They thought the Savior was supposed to be a strong warrior who would liberate Israel from their Roman oppressors. So, according to their rationale, a Savior dying on a Roman cross seemed to be foolishness.

He was supposed to triumph over the enemies of God's people and should not be crucified by Romans.

Skeptics today still stumble over the cross, while others are offended by it. They're still looking for a god who will knock out all of their enemies, take care of all their problems, and give them every kind of prosperity their hearts desire. They look for a god who will do things in their way and in their timing. So, if God doesn't answer their prayers when and how they want Him to respond or looks the way they think a Messiah should look... they reject Him and His cross.

They wonder why God doesn't heal cancer, wipe out the pandemic, or fix the strife in our cities; wondering why God doesn't change one person's attitude and make another person to be more like them? They wonder why God doesn't swoop down, wipe away all those sinners, and just leave the good people? Well, if God DID come to wipe away all of the sinners... He'd have to wipe me away as well.

You see, the cross of Christ's didn't happen just to defeat our enemies. One of old hymn says,;

“From the cross Thy wisdom shining, breaks forth with conquering might! From the cross forever, beams all Thy bright redeeming Light.” That last word should be capitalized! That beaming Light from the cross is the eternal Light of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! The glorious eternal Light of God is seen most clearly when He was raised upon the throne of the cross to bring life, salvation, and our eternal peace with God.

Paul described all non-Jews as “Greeks.” So, for those who had never heard about the promised Messiah, the cross was folly. It didn’t fit into their platonic thinking. Greeks prided themselves on their wisdom and their ability to be able to philosophically and rationally explain things. But their philosophy just couldn’t grasp how God would sacrifice Himself for us simple, sinful human beings. It just didn’t make sense! They wondered, “How could His death bring forth life for us?”

Philosophy and worldly religions teach that people have to earn their way to a god. They reason that a person must do something to earn salvation by their works. That’s the way worldly religion operate - their idol gods supposedly reward by a person’s self-works. But they can’t wrap their heads around the truth that the only way to be made right with the true and living God is to receive His sacrifice on a cursed but Holy cross and have His righteousness given to them by God’s grace. A crucified Savior was just utter foolishness to them.

According to their philosophical thinking, what good would a dead Savior be?

We still hear that today. Our post-modern culture won’t admit that no one is capable of doing any works to earn God’s favor. Our good works count for nothing when it comes to earning God’s favor. We’ve all sinned and fallen short of His glory. Martin Luther once wrote, “What is it about your own miserable works and doings that you think you could please God more than the sacrifice of His own Son.” Unfortunately, some people can’t commit to anything they can’t completely understand or fully explain by human wisdom. As a result the Holy Cross of Christ is just plain foolishness.

But St Paul makes it clear that there are only two options when it comes to subject of the work of Christ and His cross: Those who treat the word of the cross as foolishness and folly will perish. But to those who embrace the Word of God and His grace accept the mystery of the cross, as the wisdom of God and the power of God, for us who are being saved and will be returned to a peace with God.

Why did the Church make September the date for the Feast of the Holy Cross? After all, it’s been few months since Good Friday and Easter. Why bring up Christ’s cross now? We should understand St Paul is reminding us that Easter isn’t a single day. Easter candy, new outfits, ham dinners, and Easter egg hunts don’t make it Easter!

It’s because of Easter and the cross that we can celebrate! Every Sunday and every day for that matter... is our peace and joy because of what happened on that first Easter over 2000 years ago – the glorious resurrection of Jesus from the dead. When Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty of our sins, He also arose in human flesh!

Jesus Christ’s resurrection proved God was satisfied with His sacrifice to earn our redemption. In His act of grace, God gave Christ’s death and resurrection in a joyous exchange – Christ’s goodness and glory exchanged for our wretchedness, sin, and condemnation. You see, without



Credit: Erik M. Lunsford. Copyright: © 2022 The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection, the cross – any cross – really would be foolishness.

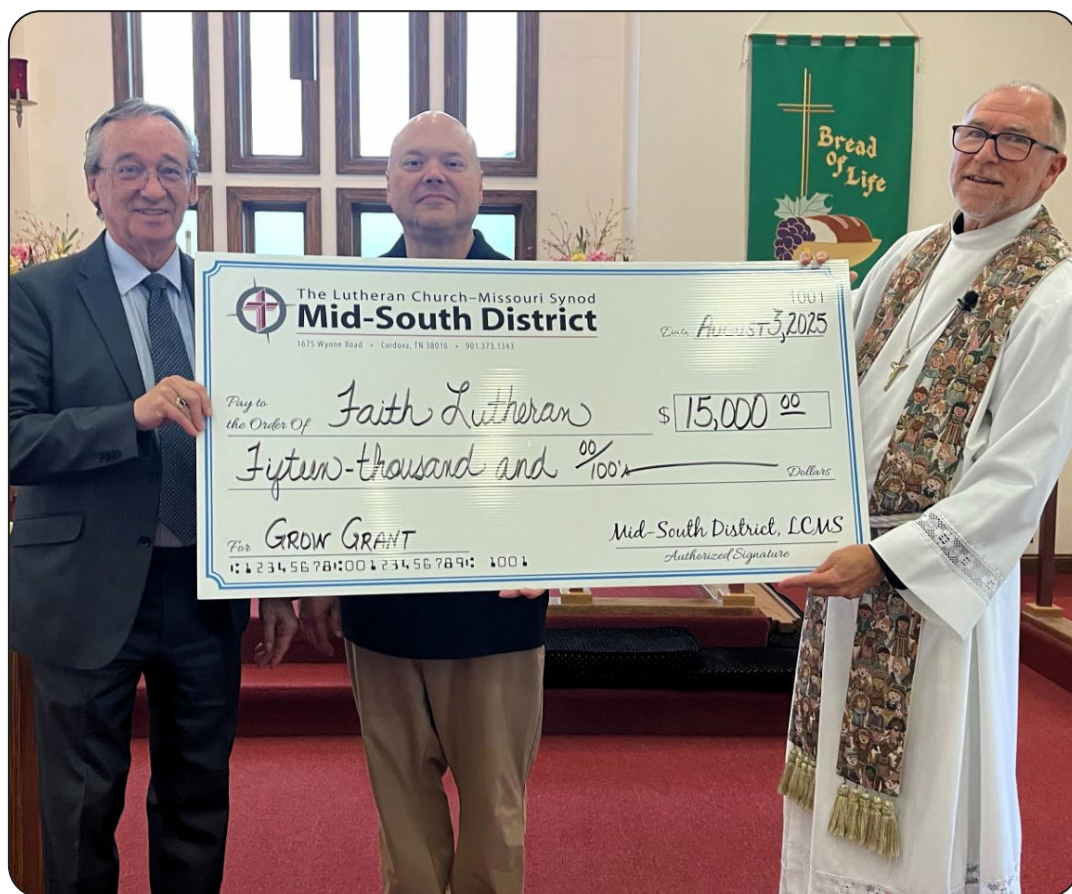
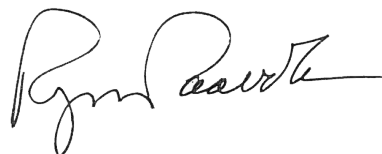
Jesus' death on a cross wasn't unique – at least as far as the world was concerned. But it is totally different, even though real death happened, real burial took place. But none of those other victims on other crosses did what Jesus did. For you and me, He rose from the dead.

According to our confessions in the Evangelical Lutheran Church, we proclaim Christ and Him crucified... which may be foolishness to the world, but for us, it is the promise of grace, mercy, peace, and life from our gracious Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We boldly confess the resurrection that proves everything Jesus claimed as being the Son of God, who came to earth to die for our sins, and

that we are justified in the sight of God, proves that the Christ's cross is not foolishness at all.

We reject philosophical things that regard the cross as just not making sense. But the cross of Jesus isn't foolishness. The Person of Easter, our risen and glorious Lord Jesus serves us each day, knowing we can celebrate every day in Easter joy and our blessed assurance of life everlasting.

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



Pictured at the services in Faith Lutheran Church include President Roger Paavola, Doug Hannah, FLC Podcast Directors, and Rev. Curt Hoover, Pastor.



The Mid-South District has provided funding for another Grow Grant. This time, **Faith Lutheran Church, Thompsons Station, TN** received support for their Confessional Lutheran Podcasting.

If your congregation has a great ministry idea to share the Gospel within your community, consider applying for a GROW Grant. Visit the Mid-South District website today for details on GROW Grants and how to apply: <https://mid-southlcms.org/grow-grants/>



The **Rite of Installation for The Rev. Mark Rhoads** was held on Sunday, July 29, 2025 at **Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church, Loudon, TN**. Pictured for the Rite of Installation (Front L-R) Rev. Kent Dockery, Emeritus; Rev. Cliff Herd, Emeritus; Rev. Ed Rosser, Good Shepherd, Chattanooga; Rev. Don Welmer, First, Chattanooga; Rev. Mark Rhoads, Rev. Benjamin Heinz, Athens; Rev. Patrick Cox, Cross of Christ, Chattanooga; Rev. Barry Hildebrandt, Emeritus; Rev. David Graves, St Paul, Wartburg. (Back L-R) Rev. Joe Jacks, St Philip, Chattanooga; Rev. Gilbert Pingel, Emeritus; Rev. Derek Roberts, Praise, Maryville; Rev. Chase LeFort, Faith, Oak Ridge; Rev. James Watson, Emeritus; President Roger Paavola.

Welcome to the Mid-South District!



The **Rite of Installation for The Rev. David Buchs** was held on Monday, August 18, 2025 at **Grace Lutheran Church, Little Rock, AR**. Those assisting in the installation were: (Front L-R) Rev. Kevin Conger, Jacksonville; Rev. Sawyer Meyer, Olive Branch; President Paavola; Rev. Buchs; Rev. Stewart Marshall, Pine Bluff; Rev. John Mathis, Emeritus; Rev. David Appold, Paducah. (Back L-R) Rev. Shawn Found, Little Rock; Rev. Josh Ralston, Augsburg; Rev. Don Hefta, Fairfield Bay; Rev. Emil Woerner, Bryant; Rev. David Witte, Little Rock; Rev. Tom Bartzch, Lamar; Rev. Robert McCanless, Stuttgart; Rev. Josh Willadsen, Fort Smith; Rev. Korey Janecke, Conway; and Rev. Matt Albright, Little Rock.

DON'T MISS THE 3L SUMMIT

Perfect for both lay people and pastors, the 3L Summit is a free ministry event coming to Grace Lutheran Church in Little Rock, AR (5124 Hillcrest Avenue) on **Saturday, September 20 from 8:30 AM-3:45 PM**. Presented by the Mid-South District, the 3L Summit features speakers Rev. Chris Paavola and Rev. Karl Vaters who will share ministry insights on topics like:

- BIG CHURCHES SMALL CHURCHES — WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?
- REDEFINING SUCCESS IN MINISTRY
- DISCOVERING WHAT YOUR CHURCH DOES WELL
- HELPING WELCOMING CHURCHES BECOME INVITING CHURCHES
- THREE WAYS A SMALL CHURCH CAN BE AN EFFECTIVE CHURCH, and more.



Lunch will be provided for all attendees. In addition to the Saturday ministry event, **Friday evening, September 19 will feature a "meet & greet" time with the speakers from 7-9 PM** at Delta Hotels by Marriott Little Rock West (201 S. Shackleford Road). Attendees who would like accommodations at the hotel for Friday night can make a reservation directly with Delta Hotels by Marriott.

To learn more, see the complete event agenda, and reserve your seat at the 3L Summit, please visit <https://mid-southlcms.org/3-l-summit/>.

LINK'T JR. HIGH FALL RETREAT



Spend a weekend up on the Mountain with Youth across Arkansas and Tennessee. The weekend will be filled with Bible Studies led by Pastor Janneke, hiking, a servant event, games, and other fun camp activities!

Cost is \$125 for the weekend.

PETIT JEAN MOUNTAIN
WWW.LUTHERANCAMP.ORG

It's Time for the LINKT Fall Retreat!

The LINKT Fall Retreat for Jr. High students is coming up **October 17-19** at Camp Trinity, the Lutheran camp at Petit Jean Mountain in Arkansas. LINKT retreats bring young people from across the Mid-South District together for games, hikes, service projects, meals, campfires, worship, music and fellowship—all to the glory of God. The upcoming Jr. High retreat is \$125 per person if paid by October 6. Find out more about the LINKT Fall Retreat on the Camp Trinity website at <https://www.lutherancamp.org/linkt-youth-retreats>. You can also reach out to the camp office directly at 501-652-6304 or director@lutherancamp.org to ask questions and make plans to participate in the upcoming retreat.

PRINCE OF PEACE NURSING HOME MINISTRY

White House, TN




A rewarding outreach event into the community was developed by several women from Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in White House, TN.

Once a month some of our kind loving women have been going into White House Healthcare Nursing Facility to interact with the residents by providing manicures.

The women and some men love the attention, interaction and being pampered.

We enjoy the blessing of sharing Christ's love.





**Join Trinity Lutheran Church in
Celebrating Our 170th Anniversary
with a night of**

Spaghetti, Sweets & Silent Bids

Proceeds going towards updating Trinity's HVAC System

Sunday November 2nd from 5pm – 8pm

**Dinner includes a variety of Pasta, Salads, Bread,
Sweets and access to Grazing Table while you bid**

Adult plate \$20

Child plate \$15

Under 3 Free

Silent Auction Bidding will end at 7:30pm

We Can Accept – Cash or Check

**Reserving a Ticket is Strongly
Encouraged**

Call Trinity Office (901) 525-1056

"We Believe..."

HYMNS TO CONFESS THE FAITH

HYMN FESTIVAL

Sunday, October 5, 2025

3:00 PM

GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

5124 Hillcrest Ave

Little Rock, AR 72205

www.gracelutheranlr.org

Rev. Dr. Stephen Starke, commentary

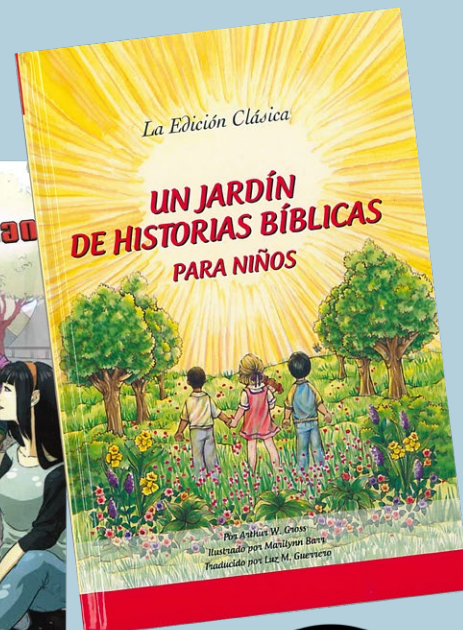
Kantor Jacquelyn Magnuson, organist



All are invited to attend the fourth annual hymn festival at Grace Lutheran Church in Little Rock on Sunday, October 5 at 3:00 p.m. This year we are celebrating the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, which formed the basis of the Nicene Creed that the Church still confesses today. The hymn festival will trace the doctrine outlined in the Creed through hymns from all ages, including a few penned by our guest pastor, Rev. Dr. Stephen Starke, who will provide commentary. Come and sing with us, and hear how our beloved hymns help us to confess the one true faith. A light reception will follow the hymn festival. There is no cost to attend.

LHF Offers FREE Resources

Does your church or school have families whose first language isn't English? Why not share a Lutheran book about Jesus with them in their heart language? Get FREE resources from the Lutheran Heritage Foundation, including children's Bible storybooks and Luther's Small Catechism in more than 180 languages! Visit www.LHFmissions.org for more information.



Prayer Summary, August 2025

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 August.

PRAYER CONCERNS

REV. RONALD HALAMKA (Waxahachie, TX)
REV. PAUL DONNER (Emeritus, Paducah, KY)
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. TOM MOORE (Emeritus, Cordova, TN)
REV. ALBERT EICHELBERGER (Emeritus, Knoxville, TN)
REV. DARRELL KOBBS (Emeritus, Russellville, AR)
REV. PAUL KRITSCH (Chapel of the Good Shepherd, Sharps Chapel, TN)
REV. DR. LEE HAGAN (District President, Missouri District)
MR. JERRY SCHEER (Lafe, 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)
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)
Our deepest sympathies to Mrs. Anne Laury (Principal, Christ the King Lutheran School, Memphis, TN) and family on the loss of her mother, Irene Lopez who recently passed away.
Our deepest sympathies to Rev. Kevin Conger (Pastor, Hope Lutheran Church, Jacksonville, AR) and family on the loss of his brother, who recently passed away.

CALL UPDATE

IN THE CALLING PROCESS – CONGREGATIONS

ORDAINED MINISTERS

ACCEPTED: **Rev. Robert McCanless**, IIM, accepted the Call to serve as Intentional Interim Pastor to St. John's Lutheran Church, Stuttgart, AR. *Installation planned for September 21, 2025.*
Rev. Daniel Suelzle, Pastor to Wittenberg Lutheran Chapel, Grand Forks, ND accepted the Call to serve as Associate Pastor and Teacher to All Saints Lutheran Church, Jonesboro, AR. *Installation took place August 3, 2025.*
Rev. David Buchs, Pastor to Concordia Lutheran Church, South Haven, MN accepted the Call to serve as Pastor to Grace Lutheran Church, Little Rock, AR. *Installation took place August 18, 2025.*
Rev. David Vandercook, Pastor to Shepherd of Peace Lutheran Church, Maumelle, AR & Trinity Luther Church, North Little Rock, AR accepted the Call to serve as Pastor to a dual parish in the Wyoming District.

PENDING: **Rev. Mark Mouldenhauer**, Pastor to Faith Lutheran Church, Madison, AL received a Call to serve as Senior Pastor to Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Bowling Green, KY.

DECLINED: **Rev. Wille Grills**, Pastor to Zion Lutheran Church of Avilla, Alexander, AR, returned the Call to serve as Pastor to Immanuel Lutheran Church, Waterloo, IL.

Rev. David Vandercook, Pastor to Shepherd of Peace Lutheran Church, Maumelle, AR & Trinity Luther Church, North Little Rock, AR returned the Call to serve as Pastor to a four-point parish in the North Dakota District.

COMMISSIONED MINISTERS

ACCEPTED: **Ms. Claire Hall**, Commission Minister (Teacher) to Concordia Christian Academy, Tacoma, WA has accepted the Call to service as Middle School Math and Science teacher to Belvoir Christian Academy, Chattanooga, TN. *Installation took place August 10, 2025.*

Ms. Kayla Johnson (Graduate, Concordia Nebraska) accepted the Call to serve as a teacher to the Early Childhood Center at Christ the King Lutheran Church & School, Memphis, TN. *Commissioning and Installation took place August 3, 2025.*

VACANT CONGREGATIONS & MINISTRIES

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Bowling Green, KY – Senior Pastor
Concordia Lutheran Church, Kingsport, TN – 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
Christ the King Lutheran School, Memphis, TN – Director of Christian Education
Christ Lutheran School, Little Rock, AR – Early Childhood Director
1st Lutheran School, Knoxville, TN- Middle School Math; Several part time teaching positions
Grace Lutheran Church, Knoxville, TN – Director of Christian Education



Congregational Mission Commitments

Mission Commitment Receipts as of 7/31/2025 (7 Months)

Anticipated Amount (58.33%
of budget)..... \$952,173
Actual Receipts 926,719
Over (under)
anticipated amount .(**\$25,454**)

Use of Mission Commitment Receipts (7 Months)

Allocated to Synod for World
Missions\$263,432
Allocated to Tanzania .. 14,583
Retained for District Mission/
Ministry Support (70% of
receipts).....648,703
Total Receipts\$926,719

Mission Commitment Receipts Prior Year Comparison (7 Months)

Actual Receipts as
of 7/31/2025 \$926,719
Actual Receipts as
of 7/31/2024\$928,329
Over (under) prior year
receipts.....(**\$1,610**)

Share your news with us!

Encourager Topics in 2025

We invite you to share your
stories with us please email
stories by 20th to Rhonda,
webmaster@mid-southlcms.com. Here's a look at the
upcoming topics for 2025
Sep. — Stewardship
Oct. — Lutheran Tradition
Nov. — Thankful Hearts
Dec. — Highlights of 2025

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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Contact

1675 Wynne Road
Cordova, TN 38016
PHONE: 866.373.1343 /
901.373.1343
FAX: 901.373.4826

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