Encourager

Mid-South District LCMS



A Message from Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola, President

LUTHERAN TRADITION

What is the very thing we celebrate on October 31 each year? Halloween? Ghosts and Goblins? Unlike most of the world, we Lutherans celebrate an event that took place way back in 1517. On that day, a professor of theology, a Monk named Martin Luther nailed 95 Theses on the door of the Wittenberg Chapel. No big deal, right? Except one might say that the sound of a hammer striking a nail started a revolution that changed the world. A revolution began because God's Word had been, hidden, twisted, and perverted so that a zealous Monk wanted to return to God's Word with a proper understanding of His grace toward us, for the sake of Christ Jesus.

Luther's theses had gigantic implications in the Church, as we acknowledge in our worship more than 500 years later. The Reformation made all sorts of changes to take place in the world because of Luther's stand against the false doctrine. Cultural, social, and political changes came along. Even, God's Word became available to common people in their own language. It was an awakening that may have seemed like a revolution to some, but for all of God's people it became a Reformation that restored the centrality of God's Word. The main point of the

Reformation wasn't about politics, sociology, or culture. The Reformation was simply about returning to the Gospel of what it is that Christ accomplished for us poor sinners. That's what it is yet today!

There's one of the Ninety-Five Theses that Luther nailed to the door that stands out to me: Number 62. Luther states, "The true treasure of the Church is the Most Holy Gospel of the glory and the grace of God." It might not sound like anything profound for us today. Because we Lutherans talk about the Law and Gospel, and we proclaim God's grace all the time, Gospel talk makes sense. But go back to see things through the eyes of this troubled young monk. He was troubled because, as a young man, his father wanted him to be a lawyer. But much to his father's dismay, Martin told him he wanted to become a monk.

Without his father's blessings, Luther took to his studies with an insatiable appetite for spiritual peace. That's when the problems started. Luther searched tirelessly to fill a deep undefined hole in his life. He struggled mightily with the sin in his life, grabbing seemingly endless hours from teachers and professors like von Staupitz. Luther was trying to find a

peace with God by the ways and means he learned from the teachers in the Church. How many "good works" did he need to do to embrace the completion of enough good deeds to satisfy a perfect and holy God?

The Law of God is clear. But the problem is that in the Sixteenth Century Church, it failed to mention the other half of the equation of God's Word - the Gospel. No one was teaching what the Bible tells us about our peace with God by God's grace and our faith in Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection. The more Luther agonized about his sin, the more he wanted to find ways for him to fix the problem of his sin. He didn't just confess his sins. He'd sit in the confessional for hours trying to recall every single sin he did. He was deeply troubled since it was an impossible task... for him. The more he tried to please God by his actions, the more he realized how foolish his attempts were. He fell into deep depression and became angry at God, asking, "How could God set up such strict rules, all the while knowing we would never be able to satisfy Him, that we would always fall short."

But then Luther read Psalm 51. He started to see that there is another side to God. He saw that God does give us standards of holiness and purity, things we cannot attain on our own. The first verse of Psalm 51 was especially powerful for Him: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions." It made Luther realize that God's love, grace, and mercy are offered in the central message of the Bible. God loves, forgives, and offers us poor miserable sinners His righteousness for the sake of Christ Jesus. Luther had tried all his life to have peace with God by being good, doing penance, visiting holy relics, and punishing himself, but none of it worked. He was still a poor miserable sinner!

The Gospel message changed all of this. God gives salvation, not as a prize, but as a free gift. God offers righteousness, forgiveness, and the promise of eternal life. Luther was finally freed from his troubled conscience when he read the verses in the book of Romans. We're never told what went through his mind when he read those words, but he knew exactly where they led him. He suddenly realized no good works earn our justification before God. Good works are the fruits of faith in God's grace: "Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who

are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin."

This is what we celebrate each year, but also every day. The Law points to our sinfulness, our hopelessness, and the righteous anger of a God against sin. But the Gospel gives us the promise that God alone is the answer to soothe our troubled spirit. God sent His Son as the substitutionary sacrifice for all our sins. His Son's death removes the guilt of our sins, placing them on His Son, thereby returning us to God's grace, mercy, and peace.

I love how reading Romans 3 spells out the central theme of the Reformation so beautifully: "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith."

THIS is GOSPEL! This is a gift we receive, not through what we do, what we deserve, or what we earn! It is, "...received by faith!" But our work for the Reformation continues. The message of the Gospel is so different from anything else in the world. But Jesus said, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?"

Jesus was telling the First Century Pharisees about His grace, the Gospel, and how the truth can free them. They lied! Because they had overlooked the history of the Israelites as slaves to alien nations. They thought they were saved by their heritage, their rules, their way of life, and all other sorts of law-laden reasons. But Jesus said, "Nothing apart from Me can offer you forgiveness, life, and freedom... if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." Luther once reflected on this Gospel, saying, "What makes us think we can please God by our good works, more than the sacrificial lifeblood of His Son?"

The Reformation message is simple. It's not about us. It's all about Jesus. All of us still need a

Reformation. We need to return to what it is God says, does, and reveals to us in His Word. We can never lose sight of what is most important. We might treat God like He's there when we need Him, but do we afford Him a daily walk with Him and His Word? He's already accomplished everything needful for us and for our eternal peace when He suffered and died on the Cross. He willingly shed His blood and died for our sins on that horribly wonderful cross. He has given us what no one else could ever do: Hope, rooted solidly in His redemption and resurrection.

I love to picture a tiny child walking with his father. The father and child are holding hands. When the child becomes tired, or there is an obstruction to difficult for him to go over, the father takes the child in his arms and carries him. It's a picture of God's way to deal with us, His beloved children. We can't reach high enough to grab His hand, He reached down to touch ours. We can't get over all our certain obsta-

cles, so we get tired. He carries us. As His children, we can rely on God to walk with us, to hold onto us, to protect us, and to save us. That's what we celebrate on Reformation Sunday, and every day. This is exactly what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. He promises us the Kingdom of Heaven, and doesn't allow anything to pluck us from His hand. Thank God for guiding Luther toward a Reformation that returns people to the Good News of Christ's love.

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

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Front Row: Interim Principal Kim Ballard, ECE (Early Childhood Education)
Director Michelle Gerlach, Board of Elders Chair Rob Schmidt, President
Paavola, Board of Christian Education (BCE) Member Laurie Davenport.
Middle: BCE Chair Mike Ellig, Property and Maintenance Chair Randy
Coleman, BCE Member Sally Coleman, President of the Congregation Mark
Hass. Back: Pastor John Merrill, Property and Maintenance Chair Jim Parker,
BCE Member Sue Wendte. These are the leaders in the picture who were
present from First Lutheran Church and School for the GROW Grant.



First Lutheran School, Fort Smith received a Grow Grant for their expansion of the Panther Pre-School program. The program has grown substantially and is joined together with the K-8 program First Lutheran, Fort Smith has offered the city for many decades.

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/

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 - 8 210 Washington Ave, Memphis, TN 38103

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

Sílent Auctíon Bídding will end at 7:30pm We Can Accept - Cash or Check

Reserving a Ticket Encouraged

Call Trinity Office (901) 525-1056

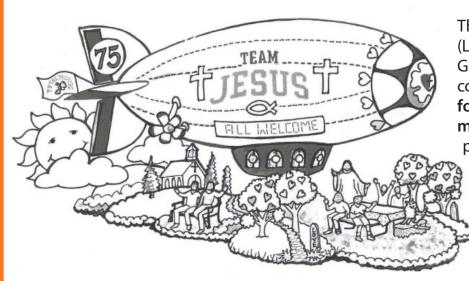
Scan the QR code to see our Facebook Event page to get a peek at auction items





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 quest 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.

Lutheran Llour Ministries Announces Coloring Contest to Celebrate Upcoming Rose Parade Float



The Lutheran Hour Ministries Float Committee (LHMFC) invites children (ages Preschool - Grade 8) to participate in the 15th annual float coloring contest. This 2026 float is a milestone for The Lutheran Hour Float, as it marks the ministry's 75th year of participation in the parade! Share a colorful design using the colors from GOD'S beautiful creation.

Note that all entries must be postmarked by November 1, 2025.

<u>Click here to download Coloring Sheet</u> <u>Click here to download Contest Rules</u>

The Lutheran Tradition

Fall is a season that draws us together. The crisp air, colorful leaves, and harvest gatherings remind us of God's goodness not only in creation but also in community. As a longtime Lutheran Educator, autumn is deeply shaped by the celebration of the Reformation. Each October 31, we remember Martin Luther nailing the Ninety-Five Theses to the church door in Wittenberg in 1517—an act that God used to spark a return to the truth of His Word. In worship, we lift our voices with hymns like *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*, give thanks for the rediscovery of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone, and rejoice that the Gospel continues to be preached

clearly in our churches and schools. These traditions connect us to our Lutheran heritage while reminding us that the Reformation is not just history—it is the living proclamation of God's unchanging truth for every generation.

Scripture reminds us, "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens" (Ecclesiastes 3:1). In this season, we rejoice that God raised up reformers to call His people back to the Word, and we celebrate how He continues to bless our congregations, schools, and early childhood centers with the same Gospel witness. As we gather in worship, teach the next generation, and walk together in faith, we confess with confidence that Christ alone is our salvation. Autumn—with its reminders of change and renewal—points us to the eternal certainty of God's promises and the enduring hope we have in Jesus.

— Michelle Fischer

Executive Director for Education, Youth & Family

Getting Ready for CareVan 2025!



It's time once again for CareVarı wıuı Luureran World Relief (LWR)! Many congregations in the Mid-South District are long-time participants in CareVan projects, which aid the outreach efforts of LWR. Through CareVan, congregations create, pack and ship "Kits of Care" and quilts to help LWR provide aid to people impacted by disasters and other catastrophic circumstances. LWR kits are specifically designed to help people coping with poverty, disaster, conflict and more. Whether a kit helps someone to maintain good hygiene, care well for a newborn baby, keep education going during a crisis or learn a new vocation, LWR kits provide dignity and hope in the direst situations. In 2024, Lutheran World Relief delivered quilts and kits to 689,814 beneficiaries in 16 countries—including over 34,000 in the United States following natural

disasters like Hurricane Helene. That's an incredible impact and it's made possible through the collective efforts of Lutheran congregations just like yours!

A number of Mid-South District congregations are currently preparing their bulk shipments of care kits and quilts for the upcoming CareVan collection dates, which will be November 7-8. Information was recently mailed to all previously participating congregations, with details regarding this year's regional collection sites and instructions for packing boxes of prepared kits and quilts. This information is also available on the district website at https://mid-southlcms.org/care-van/. If you would like to know more about CareVan, please visit the district website or contact this year's CareVan coordinator, Diane Reimold, at volunteer@mid-southlcms.com.

Treasurers' Workshops

Mid-South District

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH - MISSOURI SYNOD

REGISTER ONLINE

Congregational treasurers are urged to mark their calendars to attend one of the Mid-South District's free Treasurers' Workshops, coming up in January of 2026.

Complete details and online registration are available on the District website at https://midsouthlcms.org/2026-treasurers-workshop.

Each half-day workshop is divided into two sessions. From 9:00 AM-11:00 AM, presenter Charlie Rhodes, retired Executive Director of Synod Accounting, covers Volume 1 of the Synod Treasurer's Manual. Lunch is provided from 11 AM-11:30 AM, followed by a second session on Church treasurer "best practices," which is led by the District's Executive Director for Business & Finance, Angela Fowler. The workshop concludes at 1 PM.

Please note that attendees are encouraged to have either a printed or digital copy of the Treasurers' Manual - Volume 1 with them at the workshop. To access the online manual or request a copy, please visit https://midsouthlcms.org/business-finance/.

To Register

- 1) Register Online
- 2) Or, download the Treasurers Registration 2025 form and return it to the District Office

For additional information/questions

Angela Fowler

E-mail afowler@mid-southlcms.com Telephone (866-373-1343)

Dates and Locations

January 3, 2026 — Knoxville, TN

9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. Treasurer's Manual – Volume 1 11:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. Lunch (provided) 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Church Treasurer Best Practices Grace Lutheran Church 9076 Middlebrook Pike Knoxville, TN

January 10, 2026 — Nashville, TN

9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. Treasurer's Manual – Volume 1 11:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. Lunch (provided) 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Church Treasurer Best Practices Our Savior Lutheran Church 5110 Franklin Pike Nashville, TN

January 17, 2026 — Jacksonville, AR

9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. Treasurer's Manual – Volume 1 11:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. Lunch (provided) 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Church Treasurer Best Practices Hope Lutheran Church 1904 McArthur Blvd. Jacksonville, AR

January 24, 2026 — Springdale, AR

9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. Treasurer's Manual – Volume 1 11:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. Lunch (provided) 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Church Treasurer Best Practices Salem Lutheran Ministries 1800 W. Emma Ave. Springdale, AR

Janauary 31, 2026 — Cordova, TN

9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. Treasurer's Manual – Volume 1 11:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. Lunch (provided) 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Church Treasurer Best Practices Mid-South District Office 1675 Wynne Road Cordova, TN



On Saturday, September 20, the Mid-South District welcomed pastors and lay people from the central Arkansas region to the 3L Summit ministry event at Grace Lutheran Church in Little Rock. Featured speakers for the full-day event were Rev. Karl Vaters and Rev. Chris Paavola, who shared insights on a range of topics related to ministry—in particular, the ways that we measure its "success." Special thanks to all who attended and to our friends at Grace Lutheran for hosting this important ministry event. Watch for another 3L Summit announcement in 2026!

SPECIAL NOTICE Regarding Nominations for Synod Positions

The 69th Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod will take place July 18-23, 2026. Officers, agencies, ordained and commissioned ministers, and member congregations of the Synod and their lay members are all invited to submit nominations for the Synod positions listed below. The nominations are to be received by the

69TH REGULAR CONVENTION

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Committee for Convention Nominations no later than October 18, 2025. Nominees are sought for:

- Secretary of the Synod
- LCMS Board of Directors (at-large and regional)
- LCMS Boards for National and Intl. Mission (regional)
- Commission on Theology and Church Relations
- Concordia Historical Institute Board of Governors
- Concordia Publishing House Board of Directors
- Lutheran Church Extension Fund Board of Directors
- LCMS Foundation Board of Trustees
- Concordia University System Board of Directors
- Synod University and Seminary Boards of Regents

Important information, including an explanatory memorandum, a detailed description of the offices to be filled (with present terms and incumbents), and instructions for use of the new online nomination system, is available at **lcms.**org/nominate. Any member of a member congregation with a valid email address will be able to establish an account and submit a nomination.

FREE WEBINAR for Those Interested in Teacher Colloquy

For educators interested in teacher colloquy, a free webinar will be held on **Wednesday**, **October 15**, **from 7-8 PM (CDT)** to go over the process, requirements and benefits of becoming rostered as an LCMS Minister of Religion—Commissioned.

The webinar, brought to you by *Set Apart* to *Serve*, will be hosted by the Rev. Dr. Paul Philp, executive director of Concordia University Education Network (CUEnet), and Wendi Murphy, CUEnet office operations manager and registrar.

Interested teachers can register for the webinar by clicking the link below:

REGISTER

for the Teacher Colloquy Webinar





Wives of pastors from across the Mid-South District gathered just outside of Memphis in mid-September for a special retreat at St. Columba Camp & Retreat Center. Hosted by Pat Paavola, wife of district president, Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola, the wives' retreat included speakers, small group discussions, great music and singing—and of course some fun activities like line dancing and relaxing around a firepit with s'mores! Rev. Jim Belles of Grace Celebration Lutheran Church in Cordova, TN helped close the special weekend with Bible study and worship on Sunday morning. Thank you to all who attended this special weekend and to Pastor Belles, keynote speaker Wendysue Fluegge, and speakers Jennifer Schmidt and Michelle Reuter for their special contributions to the retreat!

Lutheran Family Service to Host Virtual Miscarriage & Stillbirth Support Group

Each year, more than one million women and families endure the heartbreak of miscarriage or stillbirth. Yet, many grieve in silence, feeling isolated in their pain. For those who have experienced this loss, Lutheran Family Service is here to walk alongside them—to provide a space for processing, sharing, and healing. **Their mission is to bring awareness, healing, and hope through the Miscarriage & Stillbirth Support Group.** This virtual support group connects women and parents who have experienced miscarriage or stillbirth, offering understanding and companionship. Two virtual meeting options for the Miscarriage & Stillbirth Support Group are coming up in October:



Saturday, Oct. 11 – 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM (CT) Wednesday, Oct. 15 – 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM (CT)

For more information on this support group, or to register for either of the virtual sessions, please visit Lutheran Family Service at **lutheranfamilyservice.org/mssg/.**



Immanuel-Memphis Receives District GROW Grant

On Sunday, August 31, Mid-South District president, Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola, presented a generous GROW Grant check for \$12,000 to Rev. Jon Petering and the congregation of Immanuel Lutheran Church for its new Hispanic ministry, Trinity Luterana Ministerio Hispano. The new ministry at Immanuel was formed in partnership with Trinity Lutheran Church in downtown Memphis.

The Mid-South District's GROW Grant program provides start-up funding for innovative new ministries of existing LCMS congregations in the Mid-South. Learn more at mid-southlcms.org/grow-grants/.



Prayer Summary, September 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 September.

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. TOM MOORE (Emeritus, Cordova, TN)

REV. ALBERT EICHELBERGER (Emeritus, Knoxville, TN)

REV. MYLES SCHULTZ (Pastor, Grace Lutheran Church, Holiday Island, AR)

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)

MRS. DIANA BARTSCH (wife of Rev. Thomas Bartzsch, River Valley Grace, Lamar, AR)

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 took place September 21, 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

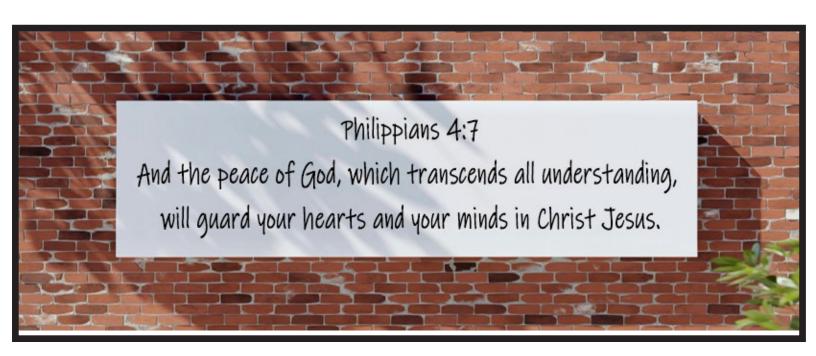
Our Savior Lutheran Academy, Nashville, TN — Full-time PreK Teacher; Full-time and Part-time Preschool Teachers and Aides **Christ the King Lutheran School, Memphis, TN** — Director of

First Lutheran School, Knoxville, TN- Middle School Math;

Christian Education

Several part time teaching positions

Grace Lutheran Church, Knoxville, TN — Director of Christian Education





Congregational Mission Commitments

Mission Commitment Receipts as of 8/31/2025 (8 Months)

Anticipated Amount (66.67% of budget)......\$1,085,797 Actual Receipts......... 1,057,928 Over (under) anticipated amount.........(\$27,869)

Use of Mission Commitment Receipts (8 Months)

Mission Commitment Receipts Prior Year Comparison (8 Months)

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

Nov. — Thankful Hearts Dec. — Highlights of 2025 Jan. — School week; looking ahead into 2026

Lutheran Witness Supplement

The monthly deadline is the 15th. Please email your original high resolution digital photo (.pdf or .jpg files only) and a short paragraph, to The Lutheran Witness Supplement editor, Judy Otto.

Email: <u>LW@mid-southlcms.</u>

phone: 662-252-1004. Judy will always acknowledge receipt of your submission if it is sent directly to her.

Mid-South District, Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod

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Michelle Fischer,

Executive Director for Education, Youth & Family

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