

# Encourager

DECEMBER 2025

Mid-South District LCMS



A Message from  
Rev. Dr. Roger  
Paavola, President

## WHAT IS THE CHURCH “FOR”?

Bumper stickers do not often contain enough space for a good theologically complete thought. However, one that comes close is “Christians aren’t perfect. Just forgiven.” Those who do not understand the Christian religion can easily mock our faith by pointing out the sinfulness of the church’s children. I’m guilty as charged! The mockers presume that the church’s goal is to make sinners perfect. We Christians know from experience alone that that goal will never be reached.

So, what is the church “for”? The church is for proclaiming the forgiveness of sins and strengthening us for this pilgrimage. The church is about a perfect message of perfect forgiveness for less-than-perfect believers in Jesus Christ. While we do not bear the cost of forgiveness, Christ does, we are aware of its precious price. Here’s why we urge ourselves to lives of good works. We can do no less. *“We love because He first loved us”* (1 John 4:19).

Yet we have no doubt that we fail. We feel that failure in our battle against our sinful flesh every day; pulled as we are between the first Adam and the second Adam, Christ our Lord.

We will feel the tug of temptation as long as we live in the flesh, for sin and depravity adhere to our constantly crucified flesh. When we fail, we do so not intentionally, but as a failure that we lament and heartily repent. There will always be temptation to sin, we will fall into it, but it will not rule over us (Romans 6:14). This is why we Christians pray in the Lord’s Prayer every day: “Forgive us our trespasses.” If we didn’t have the Holy Spirit, sin would not be a failure, but a carnal success. Sin would never occasion a godly repentance. It would never drive us to our knees in prayers of contrition. The Spirit succeeds, however, because sin remains our failure. He comes to show us our sin (John 16:8) and lead us to repentance.

The world does not cease persecuting the church and her children. Every medium introduced to our “post-modern” society does so by pointing out not only the weakness of God’s chosen children but also the ordinariness of the church’s piety. Her piety is shaped by the Ten Commandments. She has no piety other than those things given by God. What’s more pious than a right faith, right worship of God, right

obedience to earthly authorities, and right service to our neighbor's body, goods, and reputation? Yet, the world mocks these as insignificant. After all, "anyone can do them."

These are works of good order and social structure. Yet, Christianity, if it is to be a religion of works and perfection, must strive for glorious and glittering works, not the mundane works commanded by God in the Ten Commandments. But our Lord expects us to live our lives in the mundane. We do not live by works in God's presence, but by faith. We cannot ascend into heaven to offer our works as a means to get in there. Our God given works (Ephesians 2:10) will be offered here and be for use to those on earth here, and now. Since our works gain no merit with God toward salvation, they can only be offered here and are best offered here.

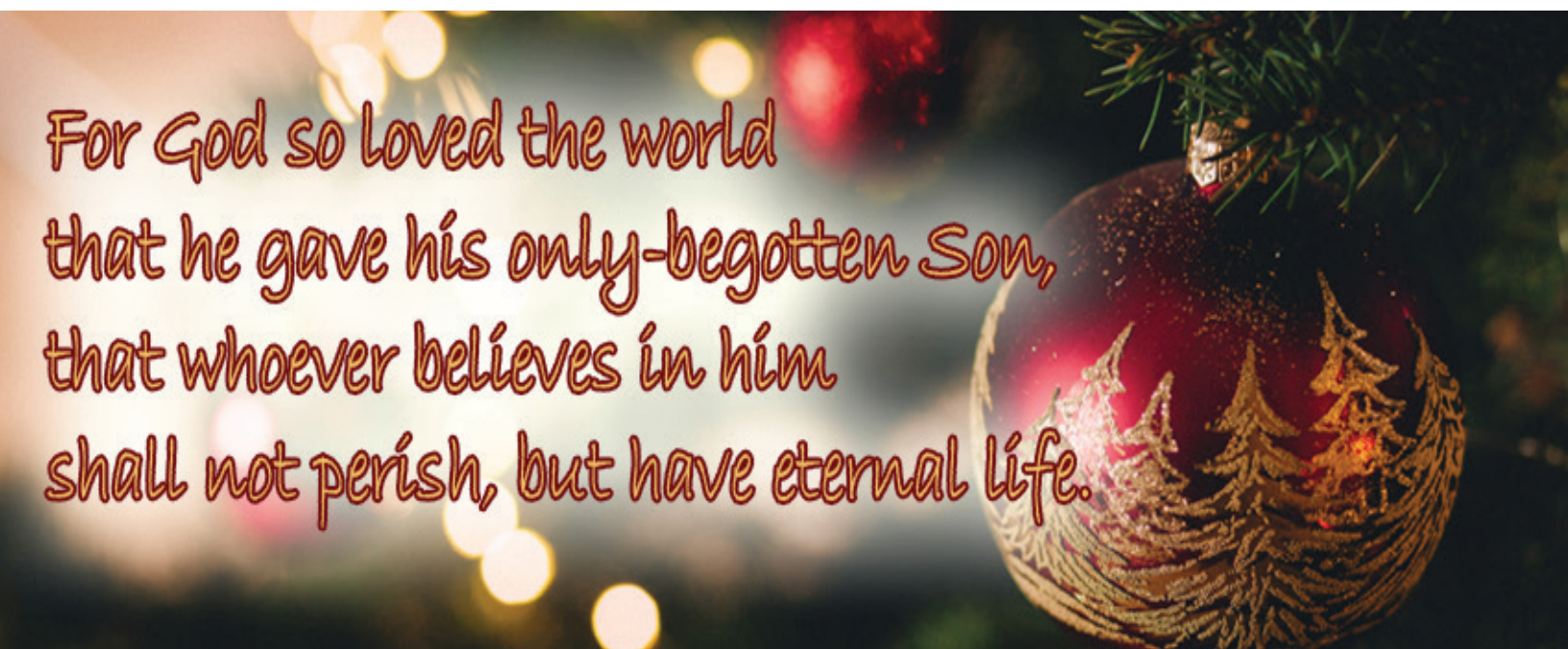
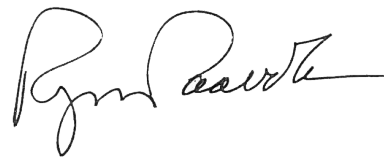
The unfortunate ladder-climbing works of self-righteousness, offered as they are for God's benefit, are truly worthless and faithless. They merit nothing before God. Being a good friend and a faithful neighbor does not sufficiently go high enough up the ladder of piety to be considered truly pious by God, or by the world. In the quiet simplicity of mundane works, the Spirit is truly working in our lives. Have no doubt.

Why all this talk about works, piety, and righteousness? It's always about Jesus. He humbled Himself to come to earth, taking on human form to become our Lord and Savior. He came to be the Lamb of God to take away the sins

of all the world. Martin Luther said of our "good works," "What makes us think our good works gave greater merit before God than the life Jesus gave to win our salvation?" For Christ, the Babe of Bethlehem lives the perfect life we cannot live.

*"He also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to a right relationship with God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which He went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to Him."* (1 Peter 3:18ff) Want to see humility and righteousness? Gaze into the crude manger and see God's great gift for the promise of our eternal life with Christ in His glorious Kingdom. Have a blessed Christmas.

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



For God so loved the world  
that he gave his only-begotten Son,  
that whoever believes in him  
shall not perish, but have eternal life.



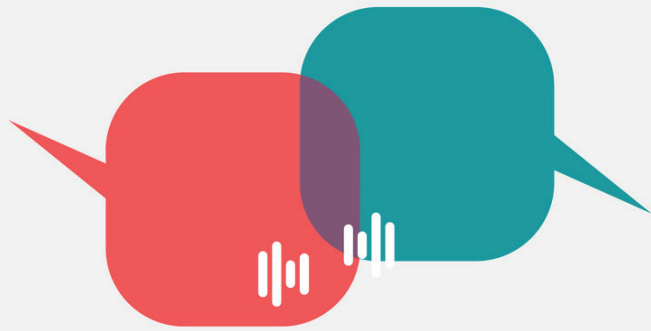


## Ordination & Installation for Rev. Keim

The Rite of Ordination and Installation for The Reverend Larry Keim took place at the Chapel of the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Sharps Chapel, TN on Saturday, November 15, 2025. Pastor Keim has been called as the Associate Pastor of the Chapel of the Good Shepherd, completing the basic requirements under the Specific Ministry Pastoral program from Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne.



*Assisting in the Rite included Bottom row (L-R) Rev. David Graves, St Paul Lutheran, Wartburg; President Paavola; Pastor Keim, Rev. Paul Kritsch, Senior Pastor; Rev. Ed Maanum, First Lutheran, Knoxville. Top Row (L-R) Rev. Danny Anderson, Grace Lutheran, Knoxville; Rev. Michael Miller, Redeemer Lutheran, Harriman; Rev. Derek Roberts, Praise Lutheran, Maryville; Rev. Adam Woldt, The Point Lutheran, Knoxville; and Rev. Chase LaFort, Faith Lutheran, Oak Ridge.*



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In a time marked by spiritual confusion and experience-driven worship, the distinct voice of confessional Lutheranism is often lost amid the noise of modern evangelical culture.

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This podcast presents the core teachings of confessional Lutheranism in a format that's both engaging and accessible. Through thoughtful conversation, scriptural teaching, and real-life application, *Anchored in Christ* introduces listeners to the unique theological and pastoral strengths of the LCMS.

It's not just another Christian podcast—it's a clear, compassionate, and uncompromising proclamation of Christ crucified for sinners, set against the backdrop of today's theological trends.

## Greetings from The Mid-South Worker Wellness Team!

As we prepare to enter a brand-new year, we are inviting you to join us as we begin a journey toward greater health in mind, body and soul in 2026. In partnership with Concordia Plan Services, we hope to bring renewed awareness to the joy of healthy living—small choices that bless our bodies, uplift our spirits, and strengthen our ability to love and serve one another. Our prayer is that this new year will open the door for all of us across the Mid-South District to consider how we can take part in simple, life-giving habits that will support us in the work God has entrusted to us.

This effort is meant to make healthy living simple, encouraging, and accessible for everyone in our Mid-South family. Because we are God's created and deeply loved children, we want to offer opportu-

nities to grow in strength, peace, and well-being—one small, meaningful step at a time. Our hope is to provide helpful information, gentle guidance, and Christ-centered encouragement that supports you and those you serve throughout the coming year.

In the months ahead, we will share resources, small incentives, and practical ideas that anyone can take part in, and who knows, we may even offer a few friendly challenges with rewards along the way. Our prayer is that every worker, family, and congregation across the Mid-South District feels strengthened, uplifted, and supported through this initiative.

As Christ walks with us into the new year, may He bless our steps with the gifts of health, wisdom, and renewed hope. We look forward to taking this journey with you.





## Steven Andrews, SMP Vicar Installed



The congregation of Christ the King Lutheran Church in Memphis, TN, was thrilled to witness the installation of Steven Andrews as an SMP Vicar on November 2, 2025. The members are looking forward to the many ways Steven will be involved in the mission and ministry of CTK as he continues his studies. Vicar Andrews will work alongside Senior Pastor Mark Goble and Associate Pastor Matthew Lynch. *Photo credit: Caroline Johnson*

## Friends In Christ Youth Group Exceed Goal!

THANK YOU to our Youth Group at Friends In Christ Lutheran Church in Bryant, Arkansas for assembling blessing boxes for Operation Christmas Child through Samaritan's Purse Ministries. Thank you to church members who donated supplies and ordered boxes online. Our goal was 20, and we have 34 to date! Grateful for the generosity of our church, and thank you Deborah Shipley for leading the youth in this wonderful service project!

*Pictured from L-R, Ellie Shipley, Sammy Cox, Hunter Dobbs, Marabeth Needler, Sam Koch*





# Hope Lutheran Church Family Life Pantry Begins!

On October 13, we finally began a long-planned outreach service into the community handing out diapers, wipes, formula, and baby food to families in the community with babies and toddlers. Twice a month (the second Monday, 5-7pm and the third Saturday, 9-11am) members from Hope Lutheran Church in Batesville and our sister church, Shepherd of the Hills in Horseshoe Bend volunteer to provide a much-needed service to our community. While open to all, our unique work certainly helps the many lower income families. (Of 75 counties in Arkansas, Independence is 29th at 19.6% below poverty line and Izard 16th at 21.1%. FYI—the National average is 12.4% and Arkansas's population has 16% below that line.)

This project began in 2023 with fundraising and just as we were about to start, in June of 2024, Hope was struck with major storm damage. When the damage was fixed in November 2024, we were preparing to get opened when the member who was going to run it moved away. This left us with the problem of an organizer. God has a funny way of answering prayers at just the right time: enter Dawn and Tim Vaughan. They moved here in January of 2025. Tim finished a career in the military retiring as a Sergeant First Class and is now able to work remotely. In a previous church, Dawn organized and served as the manager of that church's food pantry.

In May, Dawn took up the mantle to start organizing things. She has truly been a gift to Hope as she has helped organize the congregations to serve in this important work. At our last give away on November 15, we had 18 volunteers from our two small churches! There is a lot of behind the scenes work and without her dedication things would definitely fall through the cracks.

On Saturday mornings we offer breakfast to the families who come. This gives the opportunity to get to know the people and invite them to hear the Word of God. Which, of those who have come, over 60% have no church home! We have also been able to meet the significant Hispanic population in Batesville and some of our members are brushing up on their Spanish to communicate with them. We are providing a variety of the



Dawn Vaughan

CPH pamphlets, especially ones on baptism and the catechism to help teach people why it is so important that we are Lutheran, both in Spanish and English! CPH through their Gospel outreach program provides our Pantry with the classic arch books to give away and they offer this to us free of charge.

People can **give to this mission outreach** by mail to Hope Lutheran Church 2415 E. Main St. Batesville, AR 72501. memo line: FLP. An online option is coming soon through our website: [www.hopelutheranbatesville.org](http://www.hopelutheranbatesville.org).



Volunteers for Family Life Pantry



## Support District Ministry This **GIVING TUESDAY**

Since 1966, the Mid-South District has served and encouraged workers, ministries and members of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod across Arkansas, Tennessee and southwestern Kentucky. The Mid-South District serves these ministries, workers and members in a variety of powerful ways. As they share Christ's love and message of hope, the Mid-South District is their ally, supporting them through resources, services and even opportunities for financial grants. This work is made possible by both mission commitments from District congregations and support from generous donors—*people just like you*. **The global day of giving, GIVING TUESDAY, is December 2, 2025. If you are encouraged by the ministry-building work of the Mid-South District, please consider sharing a Giving Tuesday gift in support of that work:**

**BY CHECK:** Gifts payable to MID-SOUTH DISTRICT (memo IMPACT FUND) can be mailed to  
1675 Wynne Road / Cordova TN 38016



**ONLINE:** [CLICK HERE](#) to use our GIVING TUESDAY form to share a gift to the Mid-South District's IMPACT FUND.

## LSM Musical Advent Calendar

Nov 30-Dec 24  
*2025*

Join us each day this Advent for a musical meditation on Facebook, Instagram, or YouTube, with all videos available at [LSMacademy.org/acal](https://LSMacademy.org/acal).



## Enjoy the Musical Advent Calendar, from LSM!

Experience the fifth annual Musical Advent Calendar from Lutheran Summer Music!

**From November 30-December 24**, daily musical meditations will be available to inspire reflection throughout the Advent season. Follow along on Facebook, Instagram, or YouTube, with all videos archived at [LSMacademy.org/acal](https://LSMacademy.org/acal). You can also Sign up to receive each day's video directly to your inbox by completing this form: <https://forms.gle/xfPUVkvTyUffp8PH7>



# 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://mid-southlcms.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://mid-southlcms.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](mailto: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

### January 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



# Mission Trip to Tanzania 2026

— May 14-24, 2026 —

We are excited to announce that planning is underway for a Mid-South District LCMS mission trip to Tanzania in 2026. Bishop Yohana Nzelu of the Southeast of Lake Victoria Diocese (SELVD) has recommended that our mission activities take place during the week of May 18–24, 2026.

Our team will depart from the United States on Thursday, May 14, and arrive in Tanzania on the evening of Friday, May 15. Upon arrival, we will travel to Shinyanga, where we will stay throughout our mission work from May 17 through May 24.



## Mission Activities

The diocese is organizing our church-planting mission in the villages of Mwamadulu and Mihama in the Kishapu District. Each day we will drive from Shinyanga to one of the villages for church planting outreach with Pastors and members from the Kishapu district.

We will celebrate the mission trip in worship in Mwanashele, a congregation that was started through work of a district outreach team in 2011.

## Safari Extension

Some team members plan to participate in a safari adventure into the Serengeti. This group will drive to the Western Gate of the Serengeti to meet their tour guides on Monday, May 25. They will return to Kilimanjaro Airport on the evening of Wednesday, May 27 for their flight home.

Please note, participation in the safari is optional. Not all team members will be joining this portion of the trip.

## Additional Outreach Opportunities

Beyond church planting, we expect to visit the Buhangiji Albino Center in Shinyanga, the medical clinic at the cathedral, the deaconess home for young albino women, Mwadui Lutheran Secondary School, and the group homes for albino children established by St. John Lutheran Church in Bingen, IN and Mwadui Lutheran Secondary School.

We look forward to a meaningful and impactful mission experience, serving communities and sharing the love of Christ in Tanzania.

## For more information

Contact Bob Allen if you have questions or need more information, email [rjallen@prodigy.net](mailto:rjallen@prodigy.net) or call 270-535-7370.



# Prayer Summary, November 2025

Following is a list of all the people that have appeared on the Mid-South District website prayer list [www.mid-southlcms.com](http://www.mid-southlcms.com) during the month of November.

## 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)  
**REV. JOSEPH RANDRIANASOLO and LIME** (Madagascar)  
**REV. DR. JOHANA NZELU (SELVD Bishop) and REV. EMMANUAL MAKALA (former Bishop of SELVD)** and the Lutheran churches in Tanzania during this time of political and religious riots across the country.

## CALL UPDATE

### VACANT CONGREGATIONS & MINISTRIES

**PENDING:** **Rev. Christopher Howell**, Pastor to Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church, SeaTac, WA received the Call to serve as *Pastor to St. John's Lutheran Church, Stuttgart, AR.*  
**Rev. Daniel Gray**, Pastor to Martin Luther Chapel, Pennsauken, NJ, received the Call to serve as *Pastor to Concordia Lutheran Church, Kingsport, TN.*  
**Rev. Gerald Hemmingson**, Emeritus, Joplin, MO received the Call to serve as *Pastor to First Lutheran Church, Harrison, AR.*  
**Rev. Harold Ristau**, Luther Classical College, received the Call to serve as *Senior Pastor to Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Bowling Green, KY.*  
**Rev. Matthew Albright**, Pastor to Christ Lutheran Church, Little Rock, AR received the Call to serve as *Pastor to St. John's Lutheran Church, Wilcox, Nebraska.*  
**Rev. Kevin MyRenolds**, Pastor to Redeemer Lutheran Church, Mountain Home, AR has received a Call to *Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Crete, NE.*

**DECLINED:** **Rev. Nicholas Schram**, Pastor to Resurrection Lutheran Church, St. Louis, MO, returned the Call to serve as Pastor to *Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Chattanooga, TN.*

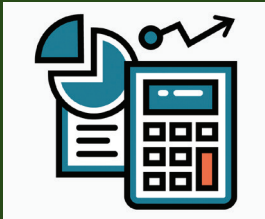
### VACANT CONGREGATIONS & MINISTRIES

**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  
**First 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 10/31/2025 (10 Months)

Anticipated Amount  
(83.33% of budget) \$1,357,247  
Actual Receipts ..... 1,321,351  
Over (under) anticipated  
amount.....**(\$35,896)**

### Use of Mission Commitment Receipts (10 Months)

Allocated to Synod for World  
Missions .....\$375,572  
Allocated to Tanzania .. 20,833  
Retained for District Mission/  
Ministry Support  
(70% of receipts).....924,946  
Total Receipts ..... \$1,321,351

### Mission Commitment Receipts Prior Year Comparison (10 Months)

Actual Receipts as of  
10/31/2025 ..... \$1,321,351  
Actual Receipts as of  
10/31/2024 .....\$1,353,661  
Over (under) prior  
year receipts .....**(\$32,310)**

*Share your news with us!*

### Encourager

#### Topics in 2026

**Note early deadline  
due to Christmas.**

We invite you to share your  
stories with us please email  
stories by **December 15th**  
to Rhonda, [webmaster@](mailto:webmaster@mid-southlcms.com)  
[mid-southlcms.com](http://mid-southlcms.com). Here's a  
look at the upcoming topics for  
2026.

January — School week;  
looking ahead  
into 2026

February — Outreach

March — Youth

### 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](mailto: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

### Staff

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