

Our district has been richly blessed this year through the work and dedication of everyone's ministries.

Pastors, educators, church workers, volunteers and those behind the scenes who are not mentioned, each come together, daily, to show the love of Christ to those around us.

May everyone have a blessed Christmas in Christ Jesus.

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



### See the Face of Jesus and the Heart of God

Our December *Encourager* articles were supposed to be about the accomplishments of the Mid-South District this year. Let me list them: Generation to Generation is being launched; we're doing re-plants of congregations with the assistance of the Center for US Mission; we've made arrangements for training more lay workers for our congregations with the Concordia University system; we've celebrated the 50th anniversary of the District and the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation with

phenomenal events; we celebrate receiving dozens of new church workers and filling six of our six requests for pastoral candidates from the seminary; we've welcomed a new congregation to the Mid-South family (Beautiful Savior, Olive Branch, MS), offered Quick-Book assistance and Financial Peace University to all congregations and members; launched "Funding the Ministry" that has raised over \$1.5 million for new ministry initiatives; four new church planting efforts; eight visits by Dr. Mark Wood to the District explaining *Each 1-Reach 1* and *Everyone His Witness*; four separate times the Rural and Small Town Ministry has brought ideas on strengthening our smaller congregations; we are preparing twenty-two men for a first-ever transition in the Synod from deacons to ordained pastors; we've expanded our C.A.R. project, extending our COMPASS resources to more than two dozen congregations. That's quite a list.

What's this all about? As I went looking for Christmas gifts last year, I was in line at one of the department store, where a woman, with arms overflowing

with bulky packages about three people ahead of me, started to complain to anyone who'd listen to her. She snarled and said, "I tell you, I just can't stand this frantic mess. There's ornery people everywhere! Whoever came up with this holiday should have been tarred and feathered." The man in front of me turned to me and whispered loud enough for her to hear, "They've already taken care of that when they hung Him on a cross."

Christmas is more than parties and decorations. Christmas means more than a gifts or plastic Christmas trees. We hear commercials saying Christmas is about family and loving friends... kindness, peace and charity... about loving and giving to others, being kind to others around us. But, isn't that what we're supposed to do all the time - not just at Christmas? It must be that one time when we really try to find life's real meaning or search for real joy. It's supposed to be when we

make an effort to look into the heart of God. "Maybe **this** is the year," people say.

But, is that Christmas? Think about the world at the time of Jesus: Imagine what Mary saw. Look at the dusty roads between Nazareth and Bethlehem filled with grumpy travelers, dusty roads packed with folks going to their hometowns to be taxed by Rome. They weren't any happier than the woman in the line with me last year. Mary was one of the travelers. In fact, so many people went to Bethlehem that Mary and Joseph didn't find a place to sleep. So, like most men, Joseph didn't ask for directions. He's like many of us today who was *certain* there was a room at the nearest Super 8. He and Mary had to make do at the Bethlehem Holiday Inn's parking garage (stable). That's where Mary gave birth to her firstborn Son. She didn't plan it that way, but that was the way God saw fit to fulfill another of the many prophecies about the Savior. No one really noticed. It's not that people weren't interested in God. It's just that a poor couple having a baby in a barn didn't seem to have much to do with God.

Has the world really changed much since then? It's still a busy place. Most folks would want to tar and feather the guy who came up with this holiday. But, does that mean they're not interested in God? No - not really. Deep down, most folks want to look into the Baby's eyes and find the heart of God. We speculate, try to figure out, and try to unwrap the mysteries of God in our minds. Interest in spirituality is growing. It's never been higher. Go to "Books A Million" and you'll find several rows of books on spirituality. If last year's trendiest book on spirituality was too confusing, this year it's been replaced by another Hollywood diva's attempt to discover the "inner self." Christmas shows on TV are nice and heart-warming, but they don't give us a good look at the heart of God. No matter how busy we are, we'd love to be "Touched by an Angel," see the Grinch become loving, or have a face to face visit with God. Maybe that's why Christmas leaves some people a little down in the dumps... disappointed... looking for God. Our souls aren't at rest until they find their peace with God. But books on spirituality

**IMPORTANT STUFF!!**

**Deadline  
Friday, December 15, 2017**

**Get Ready to Highlight Your School In  
January's Encourager**

With Lutheran Schools Week coming up in January, it's a perfect time to highlight all the great things happening in our Lutheran schools across the Mid-South District. If you have news to share about your school ministry in the January Encourager, please be prepared to submit it before December 15 of this year.

Simply email submissions to [webmaster@mid-southlcms.com](mailto:webmaster@mid-southlcms.com) and note "for JANUARY Encourager" in your subject line.

and TV shows won't do it. Society may be looking for God, but won't find Him in the places where society has stuffed Him.

Take a trip to another time and place. Stand inside a stable – next to a young woman named Mary. See what she sees. What is it? Straw? A contented cow chewing its cud? A donkey or maybe a few sheep? Yes, those things are there, but Mary sees a Baby. She recalls God's promise given to her by an angel. She remembers the things she and Joseph talked about - how His name would be Jesus, because He would save His people from their sins. She stares into the Baby's face and realizes she's looking at the heart of God. The magnitude of this moment leaves her almost frozen, afraid to move. But, listen: the creaking of the stable door interrupts the flurry of her thoughts. Total strangers cautiously peer by the door. It's some men. Are they coming to clean the stable? No. They're shepherds who quietly walk through the door and tell Mary in excited whispers what the angels said. They hurry their story because they want to see the Child lying in the manger.

They marvel: It is a Baby. But if He's the promised Savior, why's He lying in straw? Why is He in a barn instead of a King's Castle. Because of the message that shook them from their dreamy night's work while tending sheep, they stare at the face of Jesus and realize that they are gazing in the heart of God. Yet, we watch as they leave quietly, but with excited steps. Mary ponders these things in her heart. Everything her world needs is right there... lying in the straw – beautiful yet seemingly helpless. The key to understanding God is right there as a tiny Newborn Baby, lying in a manger.

Watch Mary go to the manger and lift her Baby and give Him to you. Stand there, your arms locked in terror over holding a fragile, precious new life. Look down at His face. You're also looking into the



heart of God. You hold what everyone in America or in the world needs. While the rest of the world hustles and bustles, snarls at the tangled confusion, channel to one the next Christmas special, or while the rest of the world reads books on spirituality and sings about chestnuts, snowflakes, and reindeer, they're all looking for God. But, you're holding Him.

Why did God do this? Why did God who created the heavens and the earth; the God who keeps the stars and planets in balance - stuff Himself into a 7 pound, 6 ounce baby? Look outside the stable and see a shadow coming through the crack in the stable door. It's a bright night, but you see a shadow cast across the bluish darkness of a moonlit night. So, now, you understand why God humbled Himself to become a fragile Baby. The shadow is the shadow of a cross.

One day, this God will even stoop lower than just being born in a stinky barn. He stooped to take on human flesh, so another day He would stoop to cover Himself with all our sins and all the sins of the world. But, even in that, we also know that He rose from the dead in flesh providing our peace with God. All of our mistakes, every rotten thing that's happened to us or rotten thing we've done has been taken away by Him. It's because of this Baby that God loves us and gives us eternal life. But,

before we walk away from the stable, take one last look. See God's love for us. This night, God touched us with something better than angels. Rejoice because we know God isn't a God who is far off, but One with us. We don't have to drift and wander through strange spirituality, looking for some undefined god. God came looking for us and has found us in a barn. Ponder this night. Enjoy the time. Why? Because we know that we don't have to rely on gifts, gatherings, or parties to find true blessings. God gives things to enjoy, but we can also rejoice because God came to us and to give life pure joy and purpose. Hold the Baby of Bethlehem. This is what we do in partnership with you in the Mid-South District. We look together into the face of God and now receive new life from the heart of God. A blessed Christmas to you all.



## CONGREGATIONAL MISSION COMMITMENTS

### Mission Commitment Receipts as of 10/31/17 (10 Months)

Anticipated Amount (75% of budget).....	\$1,310,953
Actual Receipts.....	<u>1,266,192</u>
Over (under) anticipated amount .....	(\$44,761)

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

Allocated to Synod for World Missions .....	\$359,024
Allocated to Tanzania .....	20,833
Retained for District Mission/Ministry Support (70% of receipts) .....	<u>886,334</u>
Total Receipts.....	\$1,266,192

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

Actual Receipts as of 10/31/17 .....	\$1,266,192
Actual Receipts as of 10/31/16.....	<u>\$1,293,745</u>
Over (under) prior year receipts .....	(\$27,553)

## St. John, Fayetteville, Celebrates Reformation



The members of St. John in Fayetteville celebrated the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation with a joint worship service with members of Living Savior (Bethel Heights) followed by a German-style potluck. During the Reformation Day service, two

children were baptized and ten adults were received into membership at St. John. After the service, those who had joined St. John Lutheran in the past twelve months posed for a photograph.

## Battery Giveaway, Peace Lutheran, AR



What 500 batteries look like in raw form.



Assembly of placing the batteries in small baggies with a note explaining the event's purpose and invitation to the Luther movie.



Table at entrance to Walmart and the giving out of the batteries (at right).



Peace Lutheran Church (Cherokee Village, AR) commemorated the 500th Reformation anniversary with a two-prong approach: first, they gave away 500, 9 volt batteries on Oct. 28, at their local Walmart, to the community in generous celebration, encouraging everyone to make sure their smoke alarms are functioning properly at the usual daylight savings time.

Smoke alarms “sound the alarm” when danger is present, just as Martin Luther and Christians valuing God’s Word still today “sound the alarm” to their communities to take God’s Word seriously and heed its healing message.

The giveaway opened the door to invite the community to attend the Luther movie showing the following weekend in their fellowship hall.

The result — many people refused to accept the batteries because they didn’t believe people truly gave something away for free! It took a great deal of encouragement for some to receive the gift. In the end all 500 batteries were given away within 90 minutes, bringing Christ’s love and interest in people to their comfortable turf rather than waiting for them to come to church.

*“We pray the Lord will encourage the recipients with His love and interest, and that God will especially keep working on the hearts and lives of those who do not yet know and trust in Him.”* Pastor Brian Pummill

## Our Savior, Nashville, Celebrates Anniversaries

Rev. Lane Reuter, Senior Pastor of Our Savior Lutheran in Nashville, is standing at a replica of the Castle Church door in Wittenberg, Germany where Luther posted his 95 theses for academic debate. The door was made by several men in the congregation on the occasion of the Reformation's 500th anniversary. The celebration also coincided with the 50th anniversary of Our Savior, a daughter mission start 5 decades ago by Concordia, the LC-MS mother church in Nashville. Mid-South District President, Roger Paavola, delivered the anniversary message at two morning services on the theme "Living, Serving and Giving", based on Philippians 3:8-14.

In the afternoon President Paavola also spoke at a 4:00 p.m. Reformation Hymn sing celebration and a video with highlights of Our Savior's 50 years in the ministry of the Gospel. A buffet banquet meal for congregation and friends concluded the festive day with almost 300 in attendance. Each family present received a color historical brochure to remember Our Savior's 50 years. The October 29th event concluded a yearlong celebration of monthly community outreach activities.



## Sharps Chapel, TN Receives Font



Several weeks ago, Pastor Paul Sand and Mrs. Dorothy Kritsch presented a pottery bowl to Chapel of the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Sharps Chapel, TN. The bowl serves as a reminder of Holy Baptism as the people come forward for Holy Communion. The rim of the bowl reads: The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control [Galatians 5:22-23]. At that time, Pastor Kritsch mentioned that it would be great for our new church to someday have a stand which could be combined with the bowl to make a baptismal

font. He explained that baptismal fonts are traditionally eight-sided: Christ died on the sixth day and rose on the eighth. Baptized into Him, we are living the eighth day of a brand-new creation.

On Sunday, November 12, the church surprised their pastor with the stand! It was made and donated by a neighbor who obviously is a gifted craftsman. "I am blessed to pastor a congregation which listens and then also does!" noted Pastor Kritsch. "Now we are praying for the person whom the Lord is sending to be the first to be baptized in our church!"

## October Highlights from Christ the King

On Sunday, October 29, Christ the King Lutheran Church, Memphis, celebrated the 500th anniversary of the Reformation with full choral and instrumental participation in the morning worship services led by Pastor Chuck Neugebauer and Pastor Mark Goble which, along with powerful Word and the Sacrament of Holy Communion, created a beautiful background against which the treasure of the Five Solas was revealed in the liturgical setting. Following the 11:00 service, the congregation and guests gathered in the gym for

a Reformation Oktoberfest with brats, sauerkraut, and homemade sides and desserts. The crowd enjoyed a skit entitled "At Home with Martin and Katie," with Matt Adler as Luther and Genie Swan as his wife Katherine. Martin held forth from his "Luther's Famous Quotes" podium while Katie added reminders ("feed the chickens", "take rye bread to Melancthon") to the door covered with 95 post-it notes. It was a memorable day filled with great friends, good food, and an appreciation of our Lutheran heritage.



Katie, played by Genie Swan, explained her 95 post-it note reminders.



Matt Adler as Martin Luther offered witticisms and advice through famous Luther quotes.



Over 250 people gathered to enjoy traditional German fare of brats and sauerkraut.

## St. Paul, Wartburg, Celebrates Two Anniversaries

**I**t was a busy year for St. Paul Lutheran Church in Wartburg, TN. Not only did the congregation celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation it also celebrated its own 170th anniversary. The 170th anniversary celebration was held on June 4 the day of Pentecost 2017. Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola preached and presided at a divine service of thanksgiving in which the entire church was filled to capacity. On July 20-23 forty members of the congregation traveled to St. Louis to mark the anniversaries and visited both Concordia Seminary and the International Center of the LCMS as well as many other sites in the city. A special divine service was held at the chapel of St. Timothy and St. Titus to conclude the trip. Finally the congregation celebrated the 500th anniversary of the Reformation with a special concert on October 29th led by Mrs. Mary McDonald and a special vespers service of thanksgiving on October 31st.



Members of St. Paul Lutheran Church traveled to St. Louis to mark the anniversaries and visited both Concordia Seminary and the International Center of the LCMS as well as many other sites in the city.





**LOVE**  
**SAVES LIVES**

### 45th Annual "March for Life" Event Coming to Little Rock

The 45th annual March for Life rally in Washington, D.C. will take place on January 19, 2018. While you may not be able to participate in this historic event, you will have an opportunity to join fellow Lutherans in a local "March for Life" event right here in the Mid-South District. The event will take place on Sunday, January 21 in Little Rock, AR. To learn more, please visit [artl.org/march-life](http://artl.org/march-life). You can also learn more about LCMS "March for Life" events at [lcms.org/life-ministry/march-for-life](http://lcms.org/life-ministry/march-for-life).



Get  
**\$20,000**

of institutional aid to become a church worker in the LCMS!

Is God calling you into church work in the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod? Are you concerned about how you are going to pay for the high cost of college? Receive \$20,000 to become a church worker in the LCMS!

At Concordia University Irvine we value the formation of future leaders for our church. Therefore we are pleased to announce that, starting with the 2018-2019 school year, we are offering qualified church work students a guaranteed total of \$20,000 in institutional aid per year, plus a housing grant.

Ready to begin? To start the application process, go to [www.cui.edu/app](http://www.cui.edu/app).

To learn more about the church vocations scholarship, who is qualified, and additional application requirements for church work programs, go to [www.cui.edu/churchworkscholarship](http://www.cui.edu/churchworkscholarship).



## Have a blessed and joyful Christmas!

Good news from heav'n the angels bring,  
Glad tidings to the earth they sing:  
To us this day a Child is giv'n,  
To crown us with the joy of heav'n.

— Martin Luther

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## Life Ministry Continues



The fall issue of the Synod's *Notes for Life* is out: <https://blogs.lcms.org/2017/notes-for-life-news-letter-fall-2017>. In this issue Rev. Kevin Robson, Chief Mission Officer, answers the question, "Is the LCMS still involved in life ministry?" Robson reports that while the position of Life Ministry Director is currently unfilled, yet life ministry remains strong. He writes,

Now more than ever, LCMS Life Ministry continues to sustain a path begun in Christ's life of love and excellence, offering a multitude of resources and tools ([lcms.org/life-ministry](http://lcms.org/life-ministry)) that reflect and uphold life-affirming programming, advocacy and teaching. Earlier this year, the LCMS Life Conference, Life 360°, attracted several hundred participants in Washington, D.C., who heard from a stellar lineup of nationally renowned speakers.

Furthermore, the Synod's "Eyes of Life" campaign is spreading its beautiful story from one individual to the next, giving voice to what millions of others believe as well: that all life is sacred, valued and a gift from God ([eyesoflife.org](http://eyesoflife.org)). The LCMS Office of National Mission, pressing on within the framework of seven mission priorities formally established by the LCMS in convention, currently is forging an even stronger working partnership with Lutherans For Life and is driving forward a landmark study of procreation, fertility and care of the unborn through a convention-mandated task force (2016 Resolution 3-04). All these initiatives (and more) are expected to be under the supervision of a new director of LCMS Life Ministry, anticipated in the first half of 2018.

Please read the rest of Rev. Robson's comments, as well as the other articles, in *Notes for Life*.

If you haven't yet started planning for a Life Sunday observance in January, please visit Lutherans For Life ([www.lutheransforlife.org](http://www.lutheransforlife.org)) and check out the new materials for 2018. The theme is "Hope for Life" based on 1 Peter 3:15-17. The suggested date for Life Sunday is January 21, 2018.

Rev. Philip Young  
Mid-South District Life Coordinator

# Prayer Summary, November 2017

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 2017.

## PRAYER CONCERNS

**MR. BRAD BINGHAM** (Cookeville, TN)  
**MS. SHERRY COSTELLO** (secretary at Trinity, Pine Bluff, AR)  
**MS. SARA FEURESTEIN** (daughter of Rev. Donley Hesse, Mena, AR)  
**THE GEMEINHART FAMILY** (Christ the King, Memphis, TN)  
**MRS. NANCY HERD** (wife of Rev. Cliff Herd, EM, Chattanooga, TN)  
**REV. DONLEY HESSE** (Emeritus, Mena, AR)  
**MR. ADAM JANSEN** (brother of Rev. Nathan Jansen, Burns, TN)  
**MR. RICHARD MEYER** (Bella Vista, AR)  
**MRS. MEGAN NAVRATH** (daughter of Rev. Carl and Gwen Wenck, Grace, Murfreesboro, TN)  
**REV. DAVID RUBKE** (Tullahoma, TN)  
**REV. MERLIN SEPMEYER** (Crossville, TN)  
**REV. KEN SHAW** (Gallatin, TN)  
**REV. GORDON SMITH** (Morristown, TN)  
**MRS. CHLOE SWANSON** (wife of Rev. Herb Swanson, Lamar, AR)  
**MRS. SUE ANN TOOPES** (wife of Rev. Andy Toopes, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Bowling Green, KY)  
**MRS. MARGARET WENCK** (mother of Rev. Carl Wenck, Grace, Murfreesboro, TN)

**Our deepest sympathies to President Barrie Henke (Oklahoma District)** and family as they mourn the loss of his brother, Bennie Henke on Saturday, November 25th.

## CALL UPDATE ORDAINED MINISTERS

**ACCEPTED:** **Rev. Edward Rosser**, Flat Rock, AL, has accepted the call to serve as **Assistant Pastor at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Chattanooga, TN.**

**DECLINED:** **Rev. Chad Kendall**, Lowell, IN, has declined the call to serve as **Pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church, Memphis, TN.**

**IN THE CALLING PROCESS – CONGREGATIONS**  
**Trinity Lutheran Church, Memphis, TN – Pastor Mid-South District – Executive Director for Missions and Ministry**

**COMMISSIONED MINISTERS**  
**PENDING:** **Mr. David Manning**, Staunton, IL, has been issued a call to serve as **Principal at Belvoir Christian Academy, Chattanooga, TN.**

**IN THE CALLING PROCESS**  
**Belvoir Christian Academy, Chattanooga, TN – Principal**  
**First Lutheran Church and School, Fort Smith, AR – Principal**  
**First Lutheran Church and School, Knoxville, TN – Principal**

# Staff of the Mid-South District, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod



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## Stay Connected With Us

ON THE WEB -  
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## Contribute to *The Encourager*

*The Encourager* is a monthly newsletter from the Mid-South District LCMS. If you would like your article or event published in the next *Encourager*, please email it by **December 15, 2017** to Rhonda, [webmaster@mid-southlcms.com](mailto:webmaster@mid-southlcms.com).

January 2018's focus will be on  
*Lutheran Schools/Lutheran Schools Week*.

