

Encourager

Small Town
&
Rural Ministry

Mid-South District LCMS | May 2017

May's Focus: Small Town & Rural Ministry

With this issue of the *Encourager*, we give thanks for the many ministries in the Mid-South District that serve small congregations and rural communities. Though many of these congregations may be small in size, their love for God is anything *but* small! We lift these congregations up and are grateful for the many ways they serve their communities by sharing Christ's love.

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



When I grew up, there were three Lutheran congregations (with over 500 members in each congregation in our town of 800 people!), and dozens of others within a half hour of town. The public school allowed "Religious Release Time" every Wednesday, and no one scheduled any secular activity on Sunday mornings. Visiting neighbors and friends in the evenings was a common practice. Friday night was a time for townspeople and farmers to come for weekly groceries and supplies. Farmers made a living on 280 to 360 acres of land and had up to 12 children on the farm to help with chores. Our small town was bustling!

However, now the vacant storefronts on Main Street make it clear that the town is no

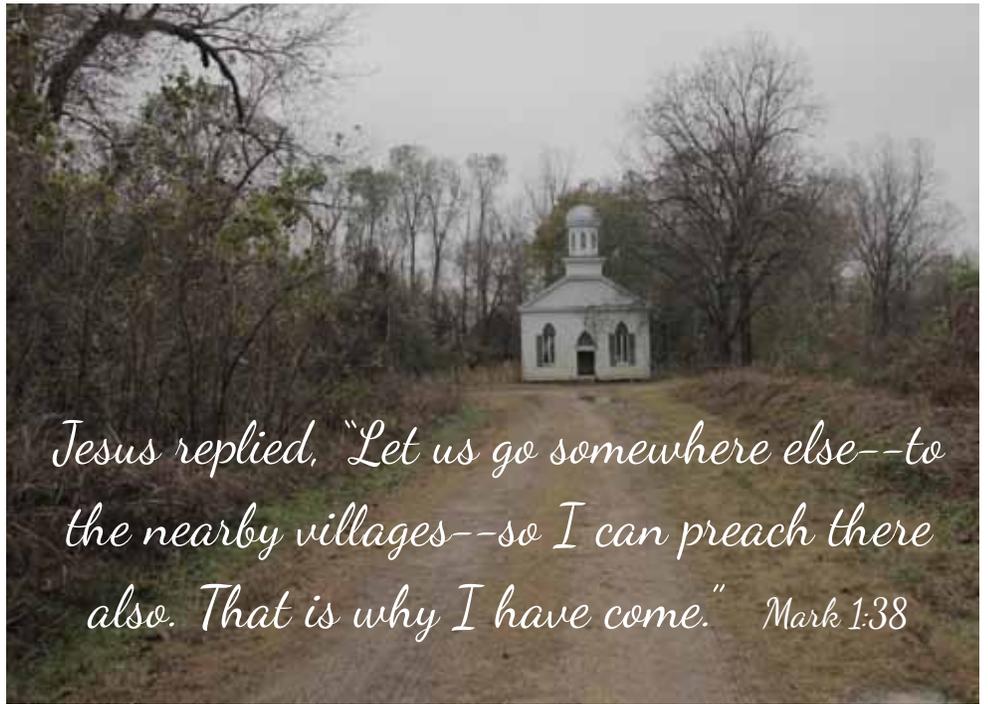
longer in its prime. Boarded up windows and vacant buildings are a common sight. Like many rural towns, my home town's top economy in decades past was agriculture and retail. While those businesses still exist today, each has taken a hit. The car dealerships have dried up and moved to the Big Towns. The town lost its clothing store. The railroad station is gone. And farming doesn't support a family of 12 on 360 acres. Now, one farmer has two or three children, and farms several thousand acres of land. The young people from decades past have moved to the cities. Senior Citizen centers and Antique stores fill Main Street where thriving businesses once existed.

This story is the same for thousands of towns across rural America. The number of farm jobs in the U.S. plummeted by 14% between 2001 and 2013, according to the US Department of Agriculture. What does that mean for a rural community? There's a ripple effect. How are you going to sell insurance if those people aren't there? How are you going to have a bank

if those people aren't there? How are you going to have a grocery store? We're left with small towns that just seem to fade away. What's the future of rural development for these farming-dependent towns? Winston Churchill said many years ago that when the family farm disappears, grass will be growing on the middle of Main Street.

Do rural communities have to reinvent themselves to stay alive? Ultimately, encouraging people to collaborate and work together is key. What about the rural and small town churches? Are they a part of the solution or another statistic of a dying town? *In The Purpose Driven Life*, Rick Warren tries to offer a "solution" with a new "gospel" which entices the unbelieving "seeker" looking for something substantial into watered down Biblical truths. Hence, mission and outreach and communal life, no longer do outreach or assimilation, but the whole church embrace the idea of gathering in new members, to be lived out within the families, small groups, and enclaves that make up the church community.

Yet, if denominations and the historic, traditional church cannot respond to the post-modern man, (as Rick Warren suggests) what would explain the increasing attraction of the Millennial generation toward the traditional service setting? Yet, he argues that in order to "compete" with the changing church environment radical



Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else--to the nearby villages--so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." Mark 1:38

"rebooting of mission objectives will be needed and, sacrifice rather than concern about style." He charges that the church isn't spiritually equipped to reach out to a culture, and that "street evangelism is the *only* answer to the erosion of the church." Meanwhile, we acknowledge that most North American denominations began when immigrants packed their brand and style of religion with them before they arrived in America. In order for someone outside of the ethnic or racial group to get into a church, they were required to adapt to the practices inside, rather than bringing their new style inside. Germans, Finns, Swedes, and Norwegian Lutherans filled their new neighbors with perogies, smorgasbords, lutefisk, lefse, flat bread, and bratwurst, along with their cultural heritage of music and style.

However, the unity of the Holy Christian Church is founded in her foundation - the Chief Cornerstone, Jesus Christ. Our Christian unity is based, therefore, on the Confession of her Christ, her One foundation. Jesus said, "*Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by My Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock [of your confession of Me as the Christ] I will build My Church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.*" (Matt 16:17-18)

Not all the "Evangelical" trappings of the earthly church - the good works, the piety, the orders of worship, the singing - will necessarily fall under the pure and precious elements given by Christ to His true and holy Church. There are "Warning Symptoms" we've seen for the last five decades where critics of the Church charge:

1) The ministries are only for the members; 2) The budget is used almost exclusively to meet the needs of the members; 3) The times of worship and are geared primarily for members; 4) Conflict takes place when members don't get things their way; 5) Attempts to minister to the community is nearly invisible; 6) The church is conducted like a business; 7) The past becomes an idol; and 8) Cultural diversity is seen as the enemy.

But, there is Hope... hope in Christ. I don't have my head in the sand. Times are tough for many churches. Congregations die every day. But we serve the God of hope. Decline of our churches doesn't have to be a reality.

The people from The Rural and Small Town Ministries for The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod have done tremendous work in sharing what has worked well in other RSTM congregations. We have partnered with them to bring information about "Best Practices" from other congregations that have strengthened, thrived, grown, and sustained their ministries. The Mid-South District is working with RSTM and Synod to bring about engaging, equipping and encouraging our 25,000 Lutherans in the District to be witnesses of the hope we embrace in the Gospel.

Our District's *Each 1-Reach 1* is founded on God's message to the Church, *"According to His great mercy, [God] has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead... And, this word is the good news that was preached to you... As you come to Him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to*

God through Jesus Christ... But, you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession; that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness

into His marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people..." (I Peter chapter's 1 and 2).

The LCMS' Rural and Small Town Ministry's (RSTM) goal is to train pastors and lay church leaders to understand their role in rural culture, to make their outreach more productive and, most importantly, to lead dynamic change by being in God's Word. RSTM emphasizes the importance of working in partnership with districts and other congregations to strengthen ministry to the extent God wills. The Rev. Todd Kollbaum, director of RSTM,

states, "Rural and small-town congregations are positioned wonderfully by our Lord to be His hands and feet to an increasingly troubled world. I give thanks to God that through the Office of National Mission, the LCMS is focusing on strengthening and revitalizing this most important part of our church body. It is my humble joy to work alongside district and congregational leaders as we share the love of Christ where God has planted us."

Thanks be to God that He has blessed our Synod with a specific organization that has recognized the changing demographics of the American landscape and how we can continue go about the work Christ entrusted to us. Two-thirds of our Mid-South congregations fall into the category of "Rural and Small Town" ministries. Our continuing efforts with RSTM gives our District a great advantage and blessing for our missions and ministries.

Your servant in Christ +
Rev Roger Paavola



The Encourager's June focus will be Leadership

Please submit all photos/captions, and newstories by May 24, 2017 to Rhonda webmaster@mid-southlcms.com



Clinical Pastoral Education

A new, all LCMS Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) program is being offered online to ordained and commissioned ministers.

The program includes 14 hours per week of required ministry, seven of which must be in one-on-one pastoral care. The ministry context may include one's current place of ministry. A ministry covenant with one's place of ministry will be among the requirements.



Tuition: \$1,500.00. Scholarship assistance is available up to \$1,000.00 from the Office of SPM, LCMS. Apply by completing and submitting a SPM Scholarship Form linked at www.lcms.org/spm.

To apply for the E-CPE program, go to <http://lssliving.org/pastoral-care/clinical-pastoral-education/>. An online interview using the Zoom platform will be part of the application process.

For more information, please contact Rev. Jeffery Scheer at Jeffery.Scheer@LSSLiving.org, 314-446-2425, or Rev. Joel Hempel at Joel.Hempel@lcms.org, 314-996-1388.

Congregational Mission Commitments

Mission Commitment Receipts as of 03/31/17 (3 Months)

Anticipated Amount (25% of budget).....	\$393,286
Actual Receipts.....	378,480
Over (under) anticipated amount	(\$14,806)

Use of Mission Commitment Receipts (3 Months)

Allocated to Synod for World Missions	\$107,294
Allocated to Tanzania	6,250
Retained for District Mission/Ministry Support (70% of receipts).....	264,936
Total Receipts	\$378,480

Mission Commitment Receipts Prior Year Comparison (3 Months)

Actual Receipts as of 03/31/17	\$378,480
Actual Receipts as of 03/31/16.....	\$405,552
Over (under) prior year receipts	(\$27,072)

Planning a Reformation Event? Let Us Know

The Mid-South District will soon launch a web resource to serve as "information central" for Reformation-related events and news happening in celebration of the 500th anniversary. One page of the site will feature links to events being hosted by our district's congregations. If your congregation has an event to be included on the site, please email webmaster@mid-southlcms.com with a link to the event on your church website. We look forward to seeing and sharing the variety of Reformation events planned across the Mid-South!

Kids Feeding Kids



VBS Mission Program

By
Trinity/HOPE

VBS Mission Project to share Jesus and food with the hungry students in Haiti!

This Mission Program can be used with any VBS curriculum as the mission project and will enable your children:

- To share the love of Jesus with children in Haiti
- Make a difference in others' lives

Mission Package includes the following:

- Overview video - Click to watch the video or visit our web page (www.trinityhope.org)
- A video for each day of VBS
- Teacher instructions/supply list
- Activities for each day
- Booklets about the children in Haiti
- Customized posters for your church with date and address

The best part is it is all free!

We may even be able to provide a Trinity/HOPE speaker if you are interested.



Reviewed and recommended for consideration by President Paavola and the district staff!

This program was used by several Mid-South District churches last year in a pilot program and it was well received. Read some of the reviews.

*"This is to give you a quick update on how our church received Trinity/HOPE's VBS program. Needless to say it was a **SMASH HIT, HOME RUN**. I had made up my mind to not teach VBS in 2013, but you & God changed my mind.The children were so motivated to give and also the adults. The children still talk about it 6 months later. It was hard for them to understand how some parts of the world lives. How the Haitian children have so little but are happy and love to talk about God, the one and only God and Jesus His Son. Thank you for the GREAT program." — Connie*



"We loved the video and information you provided. It connected our kids to those in Haiti and it was a beautiful thing to see!" — Linda

"This is all GREAT! I can't think of a time (over 45+ years) that we've had so much great material on a VBS Mission project." — Fredrica

CONTACT

Denise Gudlin
615.400.4918
trinityhope.dg@gmail.com



Theme Verse: Matthew 25:35,40 – "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink..." 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'



**REFORMATION
2017** It's *Still* All About
Jesus



Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church
Saturday June 24, 2017

500TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LUTHERAN REFORMATION
(Why the reformation still Matters)

Guest Speaker

Rev. A. Trevor Sutton

Sutton's work has appeared in

- ▶ Faith & Leadership (Duke Divinity School),
- ▶ The Cresset (Valparaiso University), and
- ▶ Concordia Journal (Concordia Seminary).



He has published multiple sermons, Bible studies, and devotional books with various Christian publishers.

He previously served as managing editor of Relief Journal: A Christian Literary Expression. He speaks at academic conferences, retreats, and congregations.

- 9:00 - 9:30 Registration (beverage and refreshments)
- 9:30 - 10:45 SESSION 1 Being Lutheran: Today
- 10:45 - 11:00 Coffee Break
- 11:00 - Noon SESSION 2 Being Lutheran: 500 Years Ago (Part 1)
- 12:00 - 1:00 **Lunch***
- 1:00 - 2:00 SESSION 3 Being Lutheran: 500 Years Ago (Part 2)
- 2:00 - 2:15 Break
- 2:15 - 3:00 SESSION 4 Why The Reformation Still Matters/Q&A/Book Signing
- 3:00 - 3:05 Closing

*** Cost is \$5 for Lunch. Teens free. Please call Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church office by June 19th to confirm your attendance so committee can insure all attendees are provided lunch.**



Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church
260 Wade Road, West
Loudon, TN 37774

865-458-9407
www.coslctn.org





TEACHING THE FAITH: Sunday School



the importance of a lifelong faith that requires learning, studying, praying and fellowship with other believers. God created us to be in fellowship with one another, but as fallen human beings we think we can do it entirely on our own.

There is also a lack of volunteers to teach Sunday school for a variety of reasons. What if we developed a ministry

that would involve the whole family? We could provide an opportunity for families to learn about Jesus together and provide education/resources for this to spill over into every day of their lives. We could connect the widow with the young family, the single mom with the empty-nest parents whose grandchildren live in other states, or the military wife with the family who is living far away from their own family.

Another challenge is creating excitement. Excitement is contagious, so it is important to find leaders who are excited about Sunday school ministry. This can be an even bigger challenge, but if people know the responsibility will not be entirely on them, maybe they will be more willing. God's Word provides us with amazing curriculum, but how do you develop this in your congregation? Plan to join me in the conversation about Sunday school curriculum, creating excitement, intergenerational ministry and lifelong faith during the LCMS Rural & Small Town Mission webinar on Thursday, May 25 at 1:00 p.m. CST.

Contributed by Angela Kollbaum, youth director, St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Concordia, Mo.

LCMS Rural & Small Town Mission supports and encourages rural and small town congregations in engaging their communities and growing together in Christ through Word and Sacrament. If you have a good idea for outreach or a story you'd like to share so that we can share it with others, please email Amy Gerdts at amy.gerdts@lcms.org. Learn more about us at www.lcms.org/rstm, by calling our office at 888-463-5127, by email at rstm@lcms.org or "like" us on our facebook page at www.facebook.com/lcmsrstm.

Does your church offer "drive-by" Sunday school? Gone are the days of the little ones attending Sunday school and their parents attending a Bible class of some sort during that hour before or after church. Too often, if they are brought at all, children are dropped off for Sunday school. What can we do? How do we reach out to the young families who are getting their children, if not themselves, to Sunday school? How do we reach out to those who don't even try? The most important thing is to give them an opportunity to learn about Jesus, but wouldn't it be great if we could also connect to them in other ways?

Most rural congregations struggle with small attendance numbers. Maybe instead of seeing this as a struggle we should see it as an opportunity. Imagine the relationships that can be built when we can talk about the lesson and how it applies to our daily lives! Here are some thoughts on how to get children and families excited about Sunday school.

We are directed in Prov. 22:6: "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it." The best way to do this is to lead by example. When we drop our children off for Sunday school we are sending an important message, but is this the message we want to convey? Do we want to train them to only be in God's Word for an hour on Sunday or worse yet, teach them that once you can drive you do not need to be in the Word for even that hour? It is imperative to teach

Apply Now for Student Financial Aid

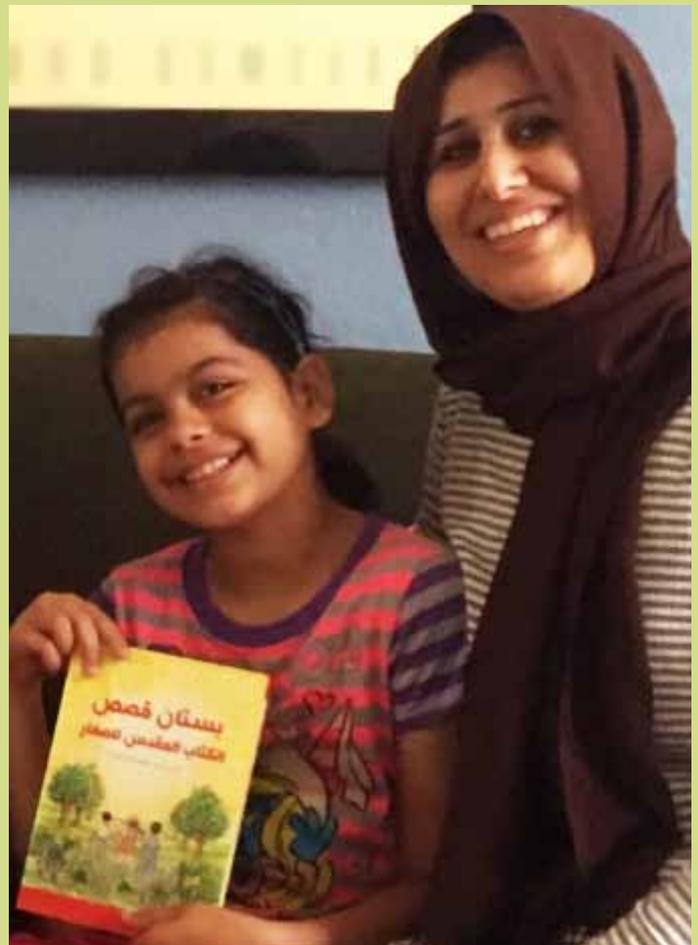


Students who plan to attend an LCMS seminary or university during the 2017-18 academic year in order to prepare for full-time church work may apply for financial aid through the Mid-South District office. Financial aid amounts are granted for a period of one year, and a new application must be made each year. **Applications for the coming school year must be postmarked by June 15, 2017.**

For forms, please contact the district office by phone (toll-free) at 866-373-1343, by email to jtyler@mid-southlcms.com, or by regular mail 1675 Wynne Road, Cordova, TN 38016.

New Free Resource for Arabic Outreach

Open doors to conversation with Arabic-speaking immigrants or exchange students in your community with a new, free resource from the *Lutheran Heritage Foundation: A Child's Garden of Bible Stories*, translated into the Arabic language. Available in hardcover and paperback, this colorfully illustrated collection of 60 Old and New Testament Bible lessons is available free of charge to the ministries that need them. Call LHF at (800)554-0723 or email info@LHFmissions.org to order your copies.



Prayer Summary, April 2017

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 April 2017.

PRAYER CONCERNS

MR. DAVID BRUGGE (Memphis, TN)
MS. SARA FEURESTEIN (daughter of Rev. Donley Hesse, Mena, AR)
MR. GLENN GOERES (Former Education Executive, Central Illinois District – LCMS)
MRS. NANCY HERD (wife of Rev. Cliff Herd, EM, Chattanooga, TN)
REV. DONLEY HESSE (Emeritus, Mena, AR)
MRS. NANCY HUGO (Mid-South District Volunteer)
MRS. DOROTHY KRITSCH (wife of Rev. Paul Kritsch, Sharps Chapel, TN)
MR. RICHARD MEYER (Bella Vista, AR)
MRS. MEGAN NAVRATH (daughter of Rev. Carl and Gwen Wenck, Grace, Murfreesboro, TN)
REV. KURT REINHARDT (Stratford, ON)
REV. PHIL SCHMIDT (Emeritus, Memphis, 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)
MR. PAUL WILKEN (father-in-law of Rev. Russell Shewmaker, Pilgrim Lutheran, Jonesboro, AR)
REV. PHILIP YOUNG (Redeemer Lutheran Church, Nashville, TN)

Our deepest sympathies to:

The family and friends of Rev. Al Boysen (Emeritus – Cordova, TN) who passed away on Saturday, March 25th.

Renaë McElwain (District Office) and family on the loss of her father-in-law, Roy McElwain, on Saturday, March 25, 2017.

The family and friends of Rev. Dean Bauer (Emeritus – Hot Springs Village, AR) who passed away on Monday, March 27, 2017.

The family and friends of Jana and John Greer (daughter and son in law of Rev. Carl and Gwen Wenck, Grace, Murfreesboro, TN). John's dad, Lewis Greer, was killed in an automobile accident on Friday, April 14, 2017.

The family and friends of Rev. Herbert Klepatz (Emeritus, Chattanooga, TN), who passed away on Tuesday, April 18, 2017.

The family and friends of Rev. Edward Goehner (Emeritus, Franklin, TN), who passed away on Friday, April 21, 2017.

President Matthew Harrison (LCMS) and family as they mourn the loss of his brother, Daniel Harrison, on Saturday, April 22, 2017.

Rev. Greg Rachuy (former pastor at Prince of Peace, White House, TN) and family, as they mourn the loss of their son.

CALL UPDATE

IN THE CALLING PROCESS – CONGREGATIONS

ORDAINED MINISTERS

ACCEPTED: **Rev. Mark Bushuiakovish, Associate Pastor at Grace Lutheran Church, Knoxville, TN,** has accepted the call to serve as Associate Pastor at Christ the King Lutheran Church, Southgate, MI.

DECLINED: **Rev. Michael Croom, Pastor at Faith Lutheran Church, Hopkinsville, KY,** has declined the call to serve as Pastor at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, LaGrange, KY.

PENDING: **Rev. Christopher Waldvogel, Fargo, ND,** has been issued a call to serve as pastor at Faith Lutheran Church, Bentonville, AR.

CONGREGATIONS

Faith Lutheran Church, Bentonville, AR – Pastor
First Lutheran Church, Knoxville, TN – Pastor
Grace Lutheran Church, Knoxville, TN – Associate Pastor
Grace Celebration Lutheran Church, Cordova, TN – Pastor
Immanuel Lutheran Church, Memphis, TN – Associate Pastor
Redeemer Lutheran Church, Mountain Home, AR – Associate Pastor
Trinity Lutheran Church, Memphis, TN – Pastor

IN THE CALLING PROCESS - COMMISSIONED MINISTERS

First Lutheran Church and School, Fort Smith, AR – Principal
First Lutheran Church and School, Knoxville, TN – Principal
Grace Lutheran Church, Little Rock, AR – Director of Parish Music
Heavenly Host Lutheran School, Cookeville, TN – Principal

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



Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola
President

Paul Reaves
*Executive Director for LCEF Vice President
and Executive Director for Development*

Angela Fowler
*Executive Director for
Business and Finance*

Allen Piepenbrink
*District Education Executive for
Education and Preschools*

Carolyn Metzger
Finance Assistant

Rena McElwain
LCEF Communications & Marketing Specialist

Julie Tyler
*Administrative Assistant
for Missions and Education*

Alison Hawkins
*Administrative Assistant
to the District President*

Contact the Mid-South District

1675 Wynne Road
Cordova, TN 38016

PHONE: 866.373.1343 / 901.373.1343
FAX: 901.373.4826

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"@midsouthLCMS"

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 Wednesday, **May 24, 2017** to Rhonda, webmaster@mid-southlcms.com