

# Encourager

Small Town  
&  
Rural Ministry

Mid-South District LCMS | May 2018

## 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*



Rural and Small Congregation Ministries have a huge advantage: They know their community! But, there may be things that stand in the way of that advantage. Hans Christian Andersen wrote the story "The Ugly Duckling." It told about a strange-looking bird raised by a duck, looking for other creatures who would befriend him. Not until the ugly duckling grew up as a swan did the ducks realize how beautiful the Ugly Duckling could be.

We can be in the middle of the busiest city in the world, scanning the endless expanse of an Arkansas rice field, or take in the vista of our many mountain-scapes, yet a person can be lonely. "Three Dog Night" sang

a song years ago called, "One is the loneliest number that you'll ever do..." But, we're not wimps! We don't have some strange flaw in our human character. God said, "*It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a companion for him.*" God created us as creatures of community. When God said, "*Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground,*" He's talking to us. The Triune God created birds, fish, animals, reptiles, and bugs with companions. But Adam was all alone in a chirping, buzzing, whirring, busy world. God said, "*It's not good...*"

We each have a built in need for deep, satisfying relationships within the human community. There are times when we deny that functional need and hide from it. Harvard's Dr. Robert Putnam studied over 29,000 communities around the nation to discover the basic needs of basic fellowship. He found that the vast majority of people today don't volunteer, join clubs, know

their neighbors, or trust each other. Our nation is becoming more isolated, alienated, crime-ridden and increasingly unhappy. People's participation in bowling leagues, clubs, church, social groups, and other venues has dropped to a dramatic all-time low. His study shows Americans stockpile their "social capital" because trust, cooperation, and working collegially is going bankrupt. According to Dr. Putnam, what the people said is: Computers, TV, longer work hours, the rise of the two income family problem, and ethnic diversity make almost two-thirds of the people say they would take a pet or a computer along with them if they were stranded on a desert island, rather than a family member or a friend!

But, we need each other! Thinking otherwise robs us of the fullness of what God designed within us. Like any battle or war, the only way to combat this growing isolation is to go on the offensive. Unless we have a caring for someone else, there is no foundation to build the kind of relationships God created in us. So, according to Putnam's study, a church is the best place for the building of a relationship that makes for lasting friendships. It's the one social organization where people look for incarnational interaction. Unfortunately, the disease of isolation has crept into the church as well.

Dr. Richard Bliese, a theologian in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) spent ten years studying the trends of church attendance, trying to figure out their plummeting drop in church membership and attendance. He laments that all the things their body did to try "modernize" the church and its doctrines has done *just the opposite* of what was hoped. As a result, their entertaining, high energy contemporary worship watered down worship, sin and forgiveness aren't mentioned anymore, and the social Gospel left Christ's atonement and resurrection far back in the field of things in their sermons.

The three Persons of the Holy Trinity are indivisible, unchangeable, immutable, eternal, and perfect. God gave us this strength to hold our human relationships together. Another survey, conducted in our own area by Lutheran Hour Ministries, discovered that there are over 30% of our neighbors, classmates, or co-workers (maybe a friend) who are unchurched. One of every three people we know do not have a place where they can begin to build a meaningful relationship like the one Dr. Putnam uncovered that exists even in our smallest congregations.

We all have an opportunity to bring a friend, neighbor, or relative to worship to hear the proclamation of God's Word. There are a number of reasons we hear why others won't bring new acquaintances to worship. "I don't want to!" "I am afraid to talk religion with my friends." "If they want to come, they know where we are." "I don't want to bother." "I'm just too busy." Or, there's the other one we've heard lately, "I don't want this church to grow."

What are we doing for the Great Commission: "Go, therefore, and make disciples, teaching them all that I have given you..."? Are we so unfamiliar with our Bible and Confessions

that we'd rather not be asked some tough questions? Do we think we have too many things to do already? Read the first chapters of the Book of Acts. We see there were eleven men in Jerusalem when this Holy Christian Church was in its infancy. After the Holy Spirit came to them on Pentecost, and because they were following Christ's instructions, thousands of people were converted to Christianity. They may have been like many modern churches that say, "We better wait here for a while, because we have too much to do here." But, they didn't.

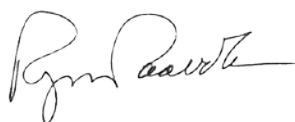
From Jerusalem they traveled to Samaria, Judea and all the known nations of the world to enlarge the Church. Why? Because the Church is the means by which God brings His blessings, grace, mercy,



and promise of eternal life where the people are gathered together!

We must continue to support (and grow where the Lord enables us) and grow our rural and small congregations' ministries. We need them where our Lutheran "footprint" can be preserved and enhanced. Who would benefit if we do NOT go about the work Jesus gave to His Holy Christian Church? Let it never be said, "You never even tried!" Instead, let us all hear, "*Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Come and enter the kingdom that has been prepared for you.*" May God continue to bless and keep our Rural and Small Town Ministries of our Mid-South District.

Your Servant in Christ +  
Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola



## Congregational Mission Commitments

### Mission Commitment Receipts as of 03/31/18 (3 Months)

Anticipated Amount (25% of budget) ...\$395,353  
Actual Receipts ..... 390,610  
Over (under) anticipated amount..... **(\$4,743)**

### Use of Mission Commitment Receipts (3 Months)

Allocated to Synod for World Missions . \$110,933  
Allocated to Tanzania ..... 6,250  
Retained for District Mission/Ministry Support  
(70% of receipts)..... 273,427  
Total Receipts .....\$390,610

### Mission Commitment Receipts Prior Year Comparison (3 Months)

Actual Receipts as of 03/31/18 .....\$390,610  
Actual Receipts as of 03/31/17 ..... \$378,480  
Over (under) prior year receipts.....\$12,130

## Spots are still available for the mission trip to New Orleans

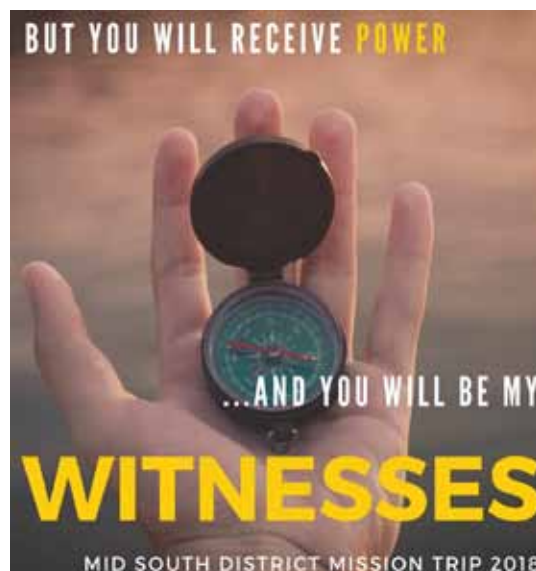
All High School Youth are invited as well as their adult chaperones! Dates are July 22nd-25th and the cost is \$95 for the first 50 people to register, \$120 for everyone after. Bring a few or your whole youth group to New Orleans, joining youth groups from across the district for a mission trip opportunity! This includes food and lodging! Transportation is not included.

The theme for this year comes from Acts 1:8, "*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my WITNESSES in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.*"

### Register Online Today!

<https://mid-southlcms.org/youth-mid-south-missiontrip/>

Agenda [available online](#)







On Saturday, April 21, **Chapel of the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Sharps Chapel, TN** helped to pick up the litter along Sharps Chapel Road, including the section which is in front of the property where their first church building will be built. Jeff Garretson from the congregation organized the event and heads this service ministry. Deputy Brett (on the left) from the Union County Sheriff's Department is in charge of the ongoing effort to keep the county roads litter free.

On April 23, Union County, TN posted the sign on Sharps Chapel Road, Sharps Chapel which states that Chapel of the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church has adopted a section of the main road through their community. This part of the road runs past the site where the church will build its first building.

## Student Financial Aid Apply Now!

Students who plan to attend an LCMS seminary or university during the 2018-19 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, 2018.**

This information may be sent via email to Julie Tyler or by regular mail to: Mid-South District LCMS, 1675 Wynne Road, Cordova, TN 38016

All related forms, including financial aid application, are on the [District's website](#).



## Adult Confirmands April 15, 2018



On Sunday April 15, 2018 six adults became members of Grace Lutheran Church in Murfreesboro, TN through the Rite of Confirmation.

Front row: Suzanne Hildebrandt, David Mendicino, Emilia Suggs, Jennifer Suggs, Tray Suggs  
Back row: Jonathan Carter, Pastor Thoe and Pastor Wenck

### 2018 National RSTM Conference

The 2018 National Rural & Small Town Mission Conference will be held Nov. 8–10 in Kansas City, Mo., at the Hilton Kansas City Airport.

LCMS Rural & Small Town Mission hopes you'll join us by registering now and reserving your spot! **And did you know you can earn Continuing Education credits by attending the 2018 National RSTM Conference?**

The conference will address blessings and challenges facing rural and small town congregations today. Congregations will be encouraged in becoming healthy churches, eager to bear witness for Christ and able to show mercy to those in need in communities and develop a robust life together with fellow members. This conference is meant for anyone living, serving or interested in rural or small-town areas, with topics and resources specifically suited for this unique mission field.

Online Registration, lodging and more information are available at [lcms.org/rstm/conference](http://lcms.org/rstm/conference).

**The June Encourager newsletter will take a closer look at the topic of leadership.** Do you

have some outstanding examples of Christian leadership in your congregation or school?

Are there members of your youth organization who are taking the lead in serving others? If so,

tell us about it with an article or photos in the June Encourager. Please submit items for the June issue to [webmaster@mid-southlcms.com](mailto:webmaster@mid-southlcms.com) by

Wednesday, May 23.

It is our pleasure to **welcome two Vicars to the Mid-South District** from Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana. Jon Carpenter, Faith Lutheran Church, Tullahoma, Tennessee and William Zwick, First Lutheran Church, Harrison, Arkansas.



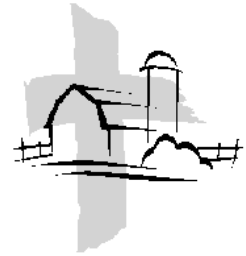
Jon Carpenter, Shannon Carpenter, Mrs. Roger Paavola, President Roger Paavola, Carrie Zwick, William Zwick



Pictured are President Roger Paavola with Pastor-elect Mauricio Franco, a graduate of the Concordia Seminary Ethnic Institute for Pastoral Ministry. Pastor-elect Franco lives with his wife and family in the Springdale, AR, area and has been taking classes toward ordination at St Louis since 2013.



## Redefining the Graying Church: The Mission Field of Older Adults



Reaching Rural  
America for Christ

The rural and small-town churches in America are poised to become the spiritual renewal center for older adult ministries. How's that for a challenging goal and opportunity for each of us in the years ahead? Jeremiah 29:11 says it so well: "For I know the plans I have for you ... plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."

The reality is that the Lord is allowing us to live longer in order to bring His hope of love, peace and forgiveness in Christ to more people! There are more people over 65 years old on this earth now than ever before. Over 10,000 of us are turning 65 today, and this includes many of us in rural and small communities. Rural and small-town congregations are in the position to be leaders to help people of all ages celebrate God's gift of aging, if — and this is the challenge — if our congregations are willing to change the climate of how our society perceives growing older.

It is time that we, the Church, become more intentional about enabling people to see aging as a blessing to celebrate rather than a burden to endure! God's people do not need to "get over it." We need to "get on with it" as we celebrate and serve people of all ages! The new frontier for the Church is longevity, and longevity is getting longer all the time. Where else but in rural America is the best place to make this statement to the whole Church, as the rural/small-town churches around us become a spiritual renewal center for older adults, and at the same time, for those of all ages as well?

Rural and small communities are aging. Metropolitan areas are generally getting younger. Rural and small-town congregations are being positioned by the Lord to serve as renewal centers as they equip and model how God's people of all ages care for people, love people, serve people and pray for people throughout the U.S. and the world! Pastor Brad Roth, author of *God's Country: Faith, Hope, and the Future of the Rural Church* says, "Leaders in the early monastic movement envisioned their monasteries as special houses of prayer sustaining the global church. They went out into the country not as a flight but as a vocation — to pray on behalf of the city."

Our rural and small-town churches can be laboratories for all generations by teaching and modeling what the Church is all about! They can model preaching, teaching, serving and relating to people of all ages, at home, school and in the community. They can teach parents to teach their children the Word of the Lord. They can unite people, young and old, as people of all ages worship and receive the Sacraments together. They can model that families are called to care for one another and to bring generations together again in the common bond of unity in Christ Jesus. They can once again connect people of all ages to come together and complete the ministry God has created for them to do!

Are we ready, rural and small-town congregations? Are we ready to reunite God's people of all ages as we serve, care and celebrate together? Are we ready to see aging as a "natural resource" that is a gift from God instead of a tsunami ravaging the countryside?

Maybe, just maybe, becoming a spiritual renewal center of prayer and teaching for the younger and for the older, locally and throughout the world, is our hope and our future in the Lord!

Contributed through the LCMS Rural & Small Town Mission monthly newsletter by Dr. Rich Bimler. Dr. Rich Bimler serves as the Ambassador of Health, Hope and Aging! (AH-HA!) for Lutheran Life Communities, and as a ministry consultant for Lutheran Church Charities.

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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. Learn more about RSTM at [lcms.org/rstm](http://lcms.org/rstm) or by calling 888-463-5127.

## Mission Trip April 2018

*A team returned this weekend from Haiti and one team member shares pictures and captions. The team member is Ashley Owen from St. John's Lutheran Church in Effingham, IL.*



On Wednesday morning we visited a small inner-city school, Jubilee. The students at this school truly had jubilant hearts. Though small in number, the children praised God with gusto. Everyday I would say that this is my favorite school... each one made a mark on me. Jubilee was located in the poorest neighborhood that we had been in. None of the children's families could afford the tuition. It was all paid by an American sponsor. The Pastor did not take a salary, the teacher/principal did not take a salary. The 3 young teachers were actually high school age and were teaching the children for free just to gain some experience to hopefully be able to obtain a paid teaching position in the future. We heard no complaints. These adults taught because they loved the children and they wanted them to have a better future. The mission of Trinity Hope is feed the children, the teachers and the cooks in Haiti. Other Christian organizations support and run some of the schools while others are self supported. All schools help support their feeding program!



Play time. The children enjoying bubbles, balloons and jumping with the "cord". (Holly Bray from Effingham, IL and Brenda Martens from Nashville, TN)



These kids need your help. Please help support Trinity HOPE so more children can be fed. Go to [TrinityHope.org](http://TrinityHope.org).





# Prayer Summary, April 2018

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 April 2018

## PRAYER CONCERNS

**MR. BOB ASLINGER** (Dayton, TN)  
**REV. PETER AVE-LALLEMANT** (Fairfield Bay, AR)  
**MS. SHERRY COSTELLO** (secretary at Trinity, Pine Bluff, AR)  
**MRS. PAT ELLIS** (Memphis, TN)  
**MS. SARA FEURESTEIN** (daughter of Rev. Donley Hesse, Mena, AR)  
**MRS. NANCY HERD** (wife of Rev. Cliff Herd, EM, Chattanooga, TN)  
**REV. DONLEY HESSE** (Emeritus, Mena, AR)  
**MRS. VALERIA MARCH** (mother-in-law of Rev. John Gierke, Conway, AR)  
**MR. RICHARD MEYER** (Bella Vista, AR)  
**MRS. MEGAN NAVRATH** (daughter of Rev. Carl and Gwen Wenck, Grace, Murfreesboro, TN)  
**REV. DAVID RUBKE** (Tullahoma, TN)  
**MR. TERRY SCHMIDT** (LCMS Director of Schools & Accreditation)  
**REV. MERLIN SEPMEYER** (Crossville, 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)  
**THE MOTHER OF MS. MICHELE LAYNE** (ECE Director, St. John's, Fayetteville, AR)

**Our deepest sympathies to the family and friends of Rev. Paul Lehenbauer** (grandfather of Mikaela (Rev. JD) Zischke, Fayetteville, AR) who passed away on Sunday, April 1, 2018.

**Praise and thanksgiving on the birth of Jacob Donald to Scott and Heidi Jerry** (principal at Christ Lutheran School, Little Rock, AR) on March 27, 2018.

## CALL UPDATE

### IN THE CALLING PROCESS – CONGREGATIONS ORDAINED MINISTERS

**DECLINED:** Rev. Andrew Smith, Heavenly Host Lutheran Church, Cookeville, TN, has declined the call to serve as pastor at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Enid, OK.

**PENDING:** The Mid-South District has extended a call to Rev. Dr. Kevin Wilson to serve as the Executive Director for Missions & Ministry.

### CONGREGATIONS

Trinity Lutheran Church, Memphis, TN – Pastor  
Mid-South District – Executive Director for Missions and Ministry

### COMMISSIONED MINISTERS

**ACCEPTED:** Mr. David Topp, Houston, TX, has accepted the call to Belvoir Christian Academy, Chattanooga, TN to serve as Principal.

**PENDING:** First Lutheran Church and School, Knoxville, TN, has issued a call to Mr. Joel Rachow, North Branch, MI, to serve as Principal.

### IN THE CALLING PROCESS - COMMISSIONED MINISTERS

First Lutheran Church and School, Knoxville, TN – Principal  
Immanuel Lutheran Church and School, Memphis, 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

### Stay Connected With Us

ON THE WEB -  
"mid-southlcms.org"

ON FACEBOOK -  
"Mid-South-LCMS"

ON TWITTER -  
"@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 **May 23, 2018** to Rhonda, [webmaster@mid-southlcms.com](mailto:webmaster@mid-southlcms.com).