

Encourager

Small Town
&
Rural Ministry

Mid-South District LCMS | May 2019

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*



The prophet Zechariah once said, *"For who despises the day of small things?"* (Zechariah 4:10) We know the answer to this question: Many people in the church mistakenly think that because a congregation is small, anything it does is tiny and mundane. But, the story of the widow's small gift (Mark 12:41-44) should forever diffuse that notion. God loves little things, chooses nobodies, and gathered a small group as His closest friends. He must love small churches, because He has made so many of them!

They're making a difference for the kingdom. As the Lord said of the woman who anointed Him, *"She has done what she could."* (Mark 14:8) That's all He asks. Don't be too hasty to write an obituary for small and

rural ministries. Those churches may be small, but it's still God's people working in the vineyard for the Master and Him in them.

In 1 Samuel 14:6, Jonathan says, *"Nothing can keep the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few."* But some folks don't actually believe it. For many who have never had a small church experience, the common perception is that small churches are failures, ingrown, or too small, weak and ineffective. Their Pastors are thought of not being flashy enough to bring in multitudes. But, in reality, they experience real community, real discipleship, and a genuine communion with Christ's flock. They're changing the world from where they are. When Jesus said His church was to go to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth, He did not exclude the rural and small towns!

Yet, a shrinking population is just one of many factors that have contributed to the complications of rural and small town ministries. In addition to a smaller populace, narrow roads, weather-hampered travel conditions, and

church attendance becoming less and less of a priority, small and rural churches are feeling a pinch. Smaller numbers of church-goers, usually decreases fiscal soundness. Because of this, many churches cannot afford a full-time Pastor. Many Pastors have to find other jobs in order to “get by.” It depends on the individual church but many churches scratch their heads about how try to keep its doors open.

In addition, people in general have fallen away from church. All of America is in a decline in church attendance. Work, school functions, and other activities, have switched from a church that is no longer the social center of a community. Many of our neighbors feel the church has a “nothing-there-for-me” attitude. But, God hasn’t changed. He calls us all to come together and worship.

A Pew Research report found poor white Americans in the South (where many of our rural communities exist) are prone to skip church. One third of white Southerners (32 percent) making less than \$30,000 a year seldom or ever go to church. That drops to 27 percent for those who make more than \$100,000 a year. (*Christianity Today*, June 2018.) Yet, the Pew Research reports that after years of population decline, rural areas have begun to make a comeback: In 2017, they grew by about 33,000 residents nationwide after losing more than 15,000 residents in 2016.



In his book, *Transforming Church in Rural America: Breaking All the Rurals*, Shannon O’Dell writes, “For centuries, the rural church has been isolated and insulated from the greater Body of Christ by the sheer realities of geography. Those days are gone. There’s absolutely no reason that we cannot be networking together as leaders — those who are resisting the urge to settle — by sharing resources, encouragement, wisdom, and vision. We do not have to do it alone anymore; together we can do so much more and do it so much better.”

Small and rural churches have more of a “family atmosphere.” People there help each other out. Everyone comes together. If anyone needs anything, someone is there to help. Yet, the number of people living below the poverty line in rural areas grew by more than two million from 2000 to 2016, according to

Pew Research. The increase of poverty means churches often have more needs to meet in their communities, while, at the same time, there is less money in the collection plate.

Yet, when a newer Pastor who comes from suburbia sets out to head to a rural church, he finds that when he preached his first sermon or performs his first funeral, he finds himself embraced in the love, in the experience of community, and the giving nature of people who live there. One Pastor put it this way, “As long as Jesus is resurrected from the dead, we ought to be hopeful for rural and small-town churches.”

Yet, with more than 48 million people in rural America, there’s an emerging and encouraging movement to plant and re-plant churches in rural areas. Recently, the greater church has been partnering with community leaders, organizations, and

churches to provide ways to meet the needs of small and rural ministries. The determination and grassroots solutions in small towns may lack some of the essential resources, but they provide a compassion that is highly relevant and deeply needed.

Christians belong in this rural and small town space. We can carry a message of hope that is vitally needed there. The rural environment provides a much smaller footprint but where a life-giving church can work to help a community find life again. The Holy Spirit is directing us to His divine purpose for rural and small town ministries. We must love them as Jesus loves them. We must see the challenges and acknowledge the people in their setting. To deliver the message of Jesus, we must be where the people need Him.

Even though many people may see small and rural churches like the minor leagues, these are great places for ministry to grow. Rural churches matter much more than we've been led to believe. Here are three reasons why:

UNREACHED: We soon realize that we don't have to go very far to find the unchurched or uninvolved. In the Bible Belt, the Mid-South District is that shiny Hank Williams Jr. buckle on the belt. We have county fairs, big water towers, guys who drive big trucks, and a church on every street corner. If you throw a rock, there's a good chance that you'll either hit a church, a Waffle

House, a Dollar General, or a guy wearing a Hank Williams Jr. belt buckle. We have friends who live in these towns. Their Sunday morning options may seem bleak. There's a church where you're sure to hear a rousing sermon, or hear another Pastor share a few tidbits he picked up from a conference in Little Rock, Atlanta, or Johnson City about communing with nature.

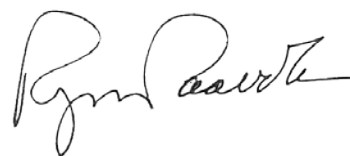
UNDISCIPLING: Most "Bible-belters" who find their way into a typical rural church don't exactly have a passion for the lost. If they make it to church, they want to eat lunch – on time. Other than trying to live a good, moral life, they don't usually give Jesus' life, words, death and resurrection a whole lot of thought during the week. Going to church might be a lot like going to the football game last Friday night: They watch other people do their thing.

UNMOTIVATED: Some towns are still divided by railroad tracks - a right side and the wrong side. Those tracks may as well be a 50-foot wall. Despite all of the talk on love and acceptance, a lot of people like finding the place where the tracks cross in front of lives, "People ought to stay on their side of the tracks."

This is why Pastors in a rural church are not in the minor leagues. They're on the front lines. God is more honored by faithfulness than numbers. The Gospel compels us to bring Christ's Gospel to a farmer in

his rice field as much as the businessman in our cities, or our neighbor wearing a Hank Williams Jr. belt buckle. Pastors of small churches can be happy and content and yet challenged every day. Because they know their members intimately, small-church Pastors see their spiritual growth up close and share in the joys and heartaches of the people.

Small is not the same thing as unhealthy. Smallness can be an asset. No one gets lost or overlooked in the small congregation. When a family is out, everyone notices. When a few people join, the church becomes stronger. Give thanks to God for our small and rural churches that are doing great things for Him. We need all the churches – big, small, city and rural. We will never discount the small church down the street or the one in the little town across the county. God is using them for His Kingdom.



Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola

The Encourager's June focus will be Leadership

Please submit all photos/
captions, and news stories
by May 22, 2019 to Rhonda
webmaster@mid-southlcms.com

New Members Welcomed at First Lutheran



First Lutheran Church (Harrison, AR) welcomed 7 new members via confirmation class on April 14, 2019 and 1 by affirmation of faith (not pictured).

Congregational Mission Commitments

Mission Commitment Receipts as of 3/31/19 (3 Months)

| | |
|---|----------------|
| Anticipated Amount (25% of budget)..... | \$383,069 |
| Actual Receipts..... | <u>400,443</u> |
| Over (under) anticipated amount | \$17,374 |

Use of Mission Commitment Receipts (3 Months)

| | |
|---|----------------|
| Allocated to Synod for World Missions | \$113,883 |
| Allocated to Tanzania | 6,250 |
| Retained for District Mission/Ministry Support (70% of receipts)..... | <u>280,310</u> |
| Total Receipts | \$400,443 |

Mission Commitment Receipts Prior Year Comparison (3 Months)

| | |
|--|------------------|
| Actual Receipts as of 3/31/19..... | \$400,443 |
| Actual Receipts as of 3/31/18..... | <u>\$390,610</u> |
| Over (under) prior year receipts | \$9,833 |

RSTM Events Update

Don't forget that Rural & Small Town Mission provides free monthly webinars on topics important to congregations in town and country settings.

Up next is **Outreach Through Lutheran Braille Workers** on May 23, followed by **Witness & Outreach Resources** on June 13.

Find past webinars in our archive. Watch for information on all our upcoming events!

To see our calendar, visit lcms.org/rstm.



A SPECIAL EVANGELISM EVENT FOR LAYPEOPLE

PRESENTED BY THE
MID-SOUTH DISTRICT, LCMS

3L Summit is a FREE dynamic evangelism event for laypeople, hosted by the Mid-South District, LCMS. Laypeople from across the Mid-South District will be encouraged in their personal evangelism efforts by two LCMS pastors who are powerful speakers on the topic of gospel-sharing:



Rev. Zach Zehnder
The Cross Church
- Mount Dora, FL



Rev. Chris Paavola
All Nations Church
- University City, MO

3L Summit will be hosted in two great locations in May. Both events will feature a "meet & greet" with the speakers the evening before, followed by a day of engaging talks and fellowship; lunch will be provided. For those requiring an overnight stay to attend the "meet & greet" event, special hotel pricing is available (cost to be covered by attendee).

REGISTER FOR THE 3L SUMMIT NEAR YOU:

[HTTPS://MIDSOUTHDISTRICTLCMS.REGFOX.COM/3L-NASHVILLE](https://MIDSOUTHDISTRICTLCMS.REGFOX.COM/3L-NASHVILLE)
[HTTPS://MIDSOUTHDISTRICTLCMS.REGFOX.COM/3L-LITTLE-ROCK](https://MIDSOUTHDISTRICTLCMS.REGFOX.COM/3L-LITTLE-ROCK)

MAY 9-10, 2019 IN NASHVILLE

- **MAY 9, 7-9 PM**
Meet & Greet w/ Speakers
@ Hampton Inn
(5630 Franklin Pike Cir.)
- **MAY 10, 8:30 AM-3:15 PM**
3L Summit
@ Our Savior Lutheran Church
(5110 Franklin Pike)

MAY 10-11, 2019 IN LITTLE ROCK

- **MAY 10, 7-9 PM**
Meet & Greet w/ Speakers
@ Crowne Plaza
(201 S. Shackleford Road)
- **MAY 11, 8:30 AM-3:15 PM**
3L Summit
@ Grace Lutheran Church
(5124 Hillcrest Avenue)

Youth Event - Party in the Park - NYG 2019

FRIDAY, JULY 12 AT 4:30P-7:30P

Minnehaha Falls Park | Wabun Shelter D
4655 46th Ave S, Minneapolis, MN 55406

Cost: \$40/person—including taco buffet dinner, carnival activities, and a t-shirt.

Please join us for a afternoon of food, carnival games, inflatables, splash pad and fantastic scenery while we connect with one another. All students and chaperones from the Mid-South District are welcome to attend.

Register online

Fill out the registration form online, payment to be mailed to the District Office

Contact Info

Tabitha Wildhirt, NYG District Coordinator
Phone 501-414-4726
Email wildhirtsing@yahoo.com

More Info [District website](#)



Lutheran Youth Retreat Summer 2019

JUNE 4-8, 2019

University of North Alabama, Florence
Lutheran Middle School and High School
Fun, Worship & Study!
\$250-300, last year under \$200 per

Fun highlights

- Cane Creek Canyon Nature Preserve
- Muscle Shoals-record music for our retreat
- Rattlesnake Saloon

Worship and Study

Worship at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Florence, Alabama. Study: Acts of Mercy, Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan

Theme - Hymn "LSB 849" - adapted to the genre of the Muscle Shoals Sound for our in-studio recording session.

Contact Info

Rev. William Parsons, Redeemer, Fairhope, AL
Phone (251) 591-0602
Email w.a.parsons.3@protonmail.com

Rev. Curt Hoover, Faith, Thompson's Station, TN
Phone (615) 533-4636
Email pastorcurthoover@gmail.com

[Download flyer](#) (pdf)





CHAMPIONS FOR LIBERTY EVENT



featuring our guest speaker

Rev. Dr. Gregory Seltz

Executive Director
Lutheran Center for Religious Liberty

"I thank God for the two liberties that He provides for us as Christians in America. He freely gives eternal liberty from sin, death and the power of the devil, by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. And, what a blessing it is to live in a country with freedoms such as those listed in the First Amendment, including religious liberty. This temporal freedom allows us all to live joyfully for others, putting our earthly freedoms to work to share the eternal liberties of Christ."

Please join us as Rev. Seltz speaks to the current issues of assaults on our religious freedoms.

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- CHRIST OUR SAVIOR LUTHERAN CHURCH
260 Wade Road West - Loudon, TN
 - June 1, 2019 - 9am until 2pm (please arrive 30 minutes prior for check-in and refreshments)
 - Entry is FREE and includes a light lunch
-

Register (for food planning) with Mark Roeder - (770) 891-3978
or email ROOANDSUE1313@gmail.com

For further details, please contact Walter Roessler - (423) 252-7090

District Now Accepting Applications for Student Financial Aid

Application deadline is June 15, 2019

To support the education efforts of individuals pursuing a full-time career in church work, the Mid-South District is pleased to once again offer opportunities for student financial aid. To be considered for financial assistance, a student must be a member of good standing in a Mid-South District congregation and be enrolled in a seminary or university to prepare for full-time service to the Church as a rostered worker. Rostered workers are pastors, teachers, deaconesses and Directors of Christian Education.

To be considered for the student financial assistance program, you must first inform the Mid-South District Office that you are or will be



a student enrolled at a synodical school. This information may be sent via email to Julie Tyler (jtyler@mid-southlcms.com) or in a written letter (Attn: Julie Tyler / 1675 Wynne Road / Cordova, TN 38016). All related forms, including the financial aid application, are on the [District's website](#).

2019 Synod Convention Updates: It's Nearly Time to Elect the President of Our Synod

The 67th Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod will take place July 20-25, 2019 in Tampa, FL. Complete, up-to-date information for congregations is available on the Synod website at <https://www.lcms.org/convention>, including the most recent reminder regarding the upcoming Synod President election. The election, conducted by Election-America, will take place by electronic ballot (via the Internet) between June 22-25, and if necessary, June 29-July 2.

About one week prior to the election, Election-America (E-A) will send (via U.S. mail) information to all voters regarding the voting process, the candidates, and the code numbers needed to participate.

Your congregation should make certain that your voter(s) will be available to participate. Accurate mail and email addresses are essential to provide this necessary election participation information. For a "Voter Update Form" go to [lcms.org/convention/nominations-and-elections/president](https://www.lcms.org/convention/nominations-and-elections/president) and follow the instructions on the form.

For more information on the upcoming LCMS Presidential election, please see POSTCARD #13 at [lcms.org/convention/postcard-mailings](https://www.lcms.org/convention/postcard-mailings).



Prayer Summary, April 2019

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 2019.

PRAYER CONCERNS

MS. EVELYN DOUGLASS (Memphis, TN friend of Julie Tyler, Mid-South District)
MRS. SUSAN ELSEROAD (wife of Rev. Richard Elseroad, Grace Lutheran Church, Knoxville, TN)
REV. NORM GROTELUSCHEN (Germantown, TN, MDS President – Emeritus)
MRS. ALISON HAWKINS (Mid-South District Office)
MR. RICHARD KLINE (father-in-law of Rev. Ron Basic, First, Little Rock)
MRS. DOROTHY KRITSCH (Chapel of the Good Shepherd, Sharps Chapel, TN)
MR. PAUL KRITSCH (Chapel of the Good Shepherd, Sharps Chapel, TN)
MS. MICHELE LAYNE (ECE Director, St. John's, Fayetteville, AR)
MR. JIM MONTGOMERY (of Telelink, Memphis, TN)
MR. RICHARD MEYER (Bella Vista, AR)
MRS. MEGAN NAVRATH (daughter of Rev. Carl and Gwen Wenck, Grace Lutheran Church, Murfreesboro, TN)
MR. PAUL MUENCH (Knoxville, TN)
MAMISOA RANDRIANASOLA (Rev. Joseph Randrianasola's daughter, Lutheran Church Madagascar)
REV. DAVID RUBKE (Tullahoma, TN)
REV. MERLIN SEPMAYER (Crossville, TN)
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)
SOON KYOUNG KO (mother-in-law of Vicar William Zwick, First, Harrison, AR)
AMELIA SHEWMAKER (Philip Shewmaker's daughter, Faith, Bentonville, AR)
DOLORES VOSS (mother of Rev. Dan Hawkins, GracePoint Lutheran Church, Munford, TN)
REV. NEIL VANDERBUSH (Former Pastor in Bentonville, AR)
MR. RAY VESTER (Deacon, St. John's Lutheran Church, Stuttgart, AR)
REV. DR. LUCAS WOODFORD (District President, Minnesota South)

Our deepest sympathies to:

The family and friends of Mrs. April Berg (niece of President Roger and Pat Paavola) who passed away on April 11, 2019.

The family and friends of Mary Brune (Mother-in-Law of Rev. Larry Peters, and Amy's step-mother of 40 years) who passed away on March 30, 2019.

The family and friends of Tom McWilliams (Former Deacon, Faith, Union City, Tennessee) who passed away on March 25, 2019.

CALL UPDATE

IN THE CALLING PROCESS – CONGREGATIONS

ORDAINED MINISTERS

PENDING: **Rev. William Ringer**, Pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church, New Ipswich, NH and Christ Lutheran Church, Troy, NH has been issued a call to serve as **Pastor at St. John's Lutheran Church, Russellville, AR**

DECLINED: **Rev. John M. Busman**, Pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Cullman, AL, has returned the call to serve as **Pastor at First Lutheran Church, Knoxville, TN.**

CONGREGATIONS

Faith Lutheran Church, Bentonville, AR – Pastor
First Lutheran Church, Knoxville, TN – Pastor
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Rogers, AR – Pastor
Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church, Horseshoe Bend, AR – Pastor
St. John Lutheran Church, Russellville, AR – Pastor
St. John's Lutheran Church, Lapeer, MI – Associate Pastor
Mid-South District – Executive Director for Missions and Ministry

IN THE CALLING PROCESS - COMMISSIONED MINISTERS

ACCEPTED: **Ms. Sarah Koch**, Kindergarten teacher at Christ Lutheran School, Little Rock, AR has accepted a call to serve as **Preschool Director at Zion Lutheran School, Bethalto, IL.**

Mrs. Renee L. Scott, Commissioned Minister Candidate, Lakeland, TN, has accepted a call to serve as a **6th Grade Teacher at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Dallas, TX.**

DECLINED: **Mr. Corey Brandenburger**, returned the call to serve as **Principal at Immanuel Lutheran Church & School, Memphis, TN.**

IN THE CALLING PROCESS - COMMISSIONED MINISTERS

Avilla Christian Academy, Alexander, AR – Director of Parish Music
Immanuel Lutheran Church & School, Memphis, TN – Principal
Heavenly Host Lutheran School, Cookeville, TN – Principal
Heavenly Host Lutheran School, Cookeville, TN – DCE

Church Interpreter Training Institute Announces Summer Session

Registration is now open for the 2019 Church Interpreter Training Institute (CITI). CITI is a distinctive program, teaching students to interpret the Word of God into sign language accurately, which is God's means of life and salvation for His people. This year's program, June 13-16, 2019, will once again take place on the beautiful campus of Concordia Theological Seminary (6600 N. Clinton St., Fort Wayne, IN.)

All levels are welcome, beginner to certified, and RID CEUs are available (2.0) for nationally certified interpreters. Staff includes co-directors Pastor Thomas Dunseth and Deaconess Heidi Sias, each with more than 20 years of experience in Deaf ministry, as well as a Deaf deaconess, two nationally certified interpreters, and a seminary professor. The cost of the program is \$200 for commuters and \$350 for students needing lodging in the dorm.



To register online, visit lutheranfriendsofthedeaf.org/citi or contact Deaconess Heidi Sias (hsias@millneck.org) for more information. Please feel free to download and print the event poster to share within your ministry. The registration deadline for the summer training session is May 24, 2019.

Mid-South District, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod

Staff

Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola, *President*

Angela Fowler, *Executive Director for Business & Finance*

Paul Reaves, *Executive Director for Development & Executive Director for LCEF Vice President*

Allen Piepenbrink, *Executive Director for Schools and Early Childhood*

Missy Washburn, *Administrative Assistant to the District President*

Renae McElwain, *Communications & Marketing Specialist*

Carolyn Metzger, *Finance Assistant*

Julie Tyler, *Administrative Assistant for Missions and Education*

Contact the Mid-South District

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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

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 22, 2019** to Rhonda, webmaster@mid-southlcms.com