

Encourager

FEBRUARY 2025

Mid-South District LCMS



A Message from Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola, President

In the earthly ministry of Jesus, St Luke records Jesus expressing deep sorrow while He looked over the city Jerusalem. His sorrowful cry went out, *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing."* (Luke 13:33–34).

His agony had nothing to do with His knowledge that He would be turned over to Roman officials by His own people and be put to death. Instead, what weighed on Jesus as He gazed upon the once-blessed city of God's design was that His own people, the beloved children

of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were wishing Him dead. He came from His heavenly glory to bring God's means of reconciliation to the world's inhabitants. He wanted His message of peace with God to bring joy to the people who were to benefit from His death for their redemption.

St John says Jesus Christ did come to His own people but His own people not only would not receive Him, but rejected Him and wanted Him gone! His compassion, led by godly love, was for His people – that is, people like us. Despite years of fulfilling the specific prophecies of the promised Messiah, the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and seemingly every other sect of leaders ignored the signs of

fulfillment in order to protect their simple worldly positions. Instead of greeting Jesus like the common folks with shouts of "Hosannah," the leadership plotted ways to catch Jesus in a slip-up, perhaps to humiliate Him, or gathering enough evidence against Jesus to have Him killed.

He must have wondered what else He could do to let them hear the words of redemption and reconciliation with God. Like the antetypical form of Moses, Jesus came to set the people free; but not from earthly oppression and slavery, but from mankind's slavery to sin and its eternal consequences. He came to raise up all of God's children above sin and death. His message was clear,

but His people brought Him before the Roman Governor on trumped up charges of treason and insurrection.

That was His agony. He wasn't thinking about Himself. No, in His agony Jesus was thinking about us! He never wearies from His work of bringing us the Gospel's peace. When His people suffer, He suffers with them. If He was gladly giving Himself to be offered as the perfect sacrifice, the only sacrifice acceptable to God for the sins of all the world, why didn't the people embrace Him with redemptive joy? Why would His own people reject Him... especially if they knew the purpose of His Calling?

In His final days before He was crucified for our sakes, He explains the agonizing journey that was before Him, *"I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem."* (Luke 13:33). Jesus knew His destination. His voice burned from the bush on Mount Moriah generations before, foretelling us all that God would offer the perfect Lamb of Sacrifice for the sins of the world.

Looking over that same mountain and the city that God planted in that location, Jesus wasn't concerned about Himself. He was thinking about us and His deepest desire for us to remain with Him in an eternal Jerusalem. Our Lord

Jesus, who himself suffered, is with us! His ultimate passion, was not for His own good, but for us – to know us, to give us every means of His grace, and give to us the promise of life everlasting, saved by our salvation in His blood and sacrificial death.

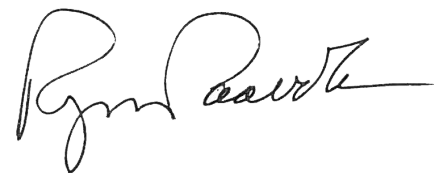
"We have no other king than Caesar," the churchly leaders bellowed. "The One whom I kiss is He that you are seeking," said Judas as he agreed to betray Jesus. "Save us and Yourself," screamed one of the criminals being crucified with Jesus. By that time on that horrible Friday afternoon, Jesus never responded to the skeptics and naysayers. His last seven words from the cross place an exclamation point on His salvific work. His only words to those gathered around the cross were to His beloved mother, Mary and to the disciple Jesus loved. Yet, the other words were to the criminal who begged for mercy and to our Heavenly Father as He willing bore the punishment our sins deserve.

Jesus came to save sinners. He was scolded by the churchly men when He sat down to dine with sinners. He spreads out a celebratory meal with us sinner in the foretaste of the eternal feast in His Kingdom. Through the means of grace that joins us with Christ's righteousness, sinners like us become His own inheritors of a glorious Kingdom.

As the evidence shows, the world in which we live has become more and more hopeless. Some mainline denominations are experiencing double digit decline in membership and attendance. Children are no longer afforded the parental necessity of being brought to the Lord's House for worship. This is a path in the opposite direction God wishes His people to go.

How different God's way is! Because of what Jesus did for us in His earthly ministry – taking the path of suffering, even suffering death on the cross – God in His mercy continues to offer repentant sinners forgiveness. He still calls sin a sin. But He covered the consequences of our sin with His blood that blotted out all our sins. His love covers a multitude of sins. Our sins of commission (that we do) and the sins inherited by our human nature are no longer on us. They are gone. God, whose mercies are new to us each morning, sees to it that they're gone and paid for by Himself. That makes our Lenten journey to the foot of the cross taking the right path. Have a blessed Lent.

Your servant in Christ +
Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola



Grace Lutheran Receives Grow Grant

A GROW Grant was presented on February 2, 2025, to Grace Lutheran Church in Clarksville, TN, for enhancement of their music ministry. The GROW Grant will not only provide funds for important repairs and upgrades to key instruments (such as the sanctuary organ), but it will allow them to expand offerings that connect Grace to the community through music—especially through the church’s concert series and private music lessons in voice, organ and piano. Present for the grant presentation were (pictured L to R) Dr. Jonathan Rudy, Grace’s Cantor; Rev. James Martin, Grace’s Associate Pastor; Dawn Thomack, Treasurer; Frank Luppe, Congregation Chairman; and Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola, Mid-South District President.



Welcome to the District Rev. Pope

The Rite of Ordination and Installation was held on Sunday, February 9, 2025 for the **Rev. Addison Pope at Our Savior Lutheran Church, Cabot, AR.** He is a recent graduate from Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne. Participating in the Rite included (Front I-R) Rev. Kevin Conger, Regional Vice-President, Jacksonville; President Roger Paavola; Rev. Addison Pope; Rev. Gerald Heinecke, Hope, Batesville and Shepherd of the Hills, Horseshoe Bend; Rev. David Witte, Grace, Little Rock. (Back L-R) Rev. Jeremy McDonald, Ulm and Brinkley, AR;



Rev. Steven Teske, Alexander; Rev. Emil Woerner, Friends in Christ, Bryant, AR; Rev. Corey Janecke, St Matthew, Conway; Rev. David Vandercook, Circuit Visitor, Trinity, North Little Rock and Shepherd of Peace, Maumelle.



LUTHERAN EARLY RESPONSE TEAMS (LERT)

Deer Lodge & Lancing in Morgan County, TN

On February 6, 2025 severe weather swept across the Mid-South. Later that evening Rev. Trae Fistler received word from Rev. David Graves that the communities surrounding St. Paul Lutheran Church in Wartburg, TN had been hit by a deadly and destructive nocturnal EF-2 tornado. The tornado claimed the lives of two individuals, a mother and daughter. Three others were injured in the county. Winds were estimated at 135 mph. 39 homes were damaged or destroyed. Our DDRC, Rev. Trae Fistler documented all reports and traveled to Wartburg, TN the following Monday to assess the damage and set up a deployment for our LERT volunteers.

We received a dozen requests for assistance with tree clean up and removal from the tornado. Rev. Fistler, Rev. Graves, Paul Keller, and Beth Keller (members of Shepherd of

the Hills Crossville, TN) toured the damaged communities and assessed properties. That day we received eight work orders for tree removal. Due to flooding concerns the following days, a deployment was scheduled for one week later.

On February 16, six of our LERT chainsaw trained volunteers traveled to St. Paul Lutheran Church Wartburg, TN to begin work. The congregation provided housing and meals for our volunteers. Thanks to their generosity in hosting our volunteers, we were able to clean up eight properties and over two dozen trees in just two days. Continue to pray for Deer Lodge and Lancing in Morgan County, Tennessee as they recover and rebuild.

— Rev. Trae Fistler



**DISTRICT NOW
ACCEPTING
APPLICATIONS
FOR
STUDENT
FINANCIAL AID**



Deadline June 15, 2025

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 in 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. All related forms, including the financial aid application, are on the District's website. The application deadline is June 15, 2025.

This information may be emailed to Lisa Pennington (lpennington@mid-southlcms.com) or submitted by regular mail to:

Mid-South District LCMS
Attn: Lisa Pennington
1675 Wynne Road
Cordova, TN 38016



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Missouri Synod

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Get Together Before We Gather: Don't Miss The Huddle!

NYG 2025 in New Orleans will be here before we know it! To help LCMS youth groups of the Mid-South make the very most of the upcoming Gathering experience, **the District is hosting a pre-NYG "Huddle" at Our Savior Lutheran Church in Nashville on Friday, March 28 through Saturday, March 29.** The fun starts at 6 PM on Friday and runs until 3 PM on Saturday. This special "get-together before we gather" will include:

- NYG Bible studies with Dave Reuter, Director of Discipleship with Our Savior Lutheran Ministries in Livermore, CA
- A Group Servant Event
- Fun & Fellowship Time

The cost for this weekend of fun and fellowship is \$50 per attendee. **Group registration** and more information is available on the [District website](#). **Groups need to register by March 15!**

LCMS Mid-South District

The Huddle

**Our Savior Lutheran Church
Nashville, TN**

**March 28-29, 2025
6:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.**

**\$50/person
For 9th-12th Graders**

**Pre-Gathering Event
Bible Study | Service | Food & Fellowship**



ENDURE
JULY 19-23, 2025; NEW ORLEANS, LA

LAST CALL FOR LUTHERAN SUMMER MUSIC 2025 NOMINATIONS!

Nominate music students for LSM 2025



LSMacademy.org/nominate

Enrollment for Lutheran Summer Music 2025 is over 80% full, but there's still time for young musicians to apply, and for you to nominate students. **Lutheran Summer Music is the nation's premier faith-based music academy for high school musicians.** Students come together from around the country for a joyful summer of music-making through large ensembles (band, choir, orchestra), chamber music, private lessons, elective classes (conducting, composition, jazz, musical theatre, handbells, pipe organ) and use their musical gifts in performance, and in worship.

LSM 2025 | Valparaiso University, IN
June 22-July 20 | Grades 8-12
LSMacademy.org/program

Register Today for the LCMS Mercy: Love Throughout Life Conference

The Mercy: Love Throughout Life conference, hosted by the LCMS Office of National Mission, will take place **March 14–15, 2025**. Conference sessions—all of which will be livestreamed—will take place in three different locations. Participants may attend in-person at one of these locations, or they may watch online.

The three in-person locations will focus on the following subject areas:

- Concordia University, Irvine, Calif., will host sessions on **marriage, life and the family** at its Concordia – Spectrum Campus.
- Grace Lutheran Church in St. Petersburg, Fla., will host sessions on **spiritual care**.
- The LCMS International Center in St. Louis, Mo., will host sessions on **advocating, teaching and caring for human life**.

A Spanish track will also be available. The sessions conducted in Spanish will be made available to watch online. Both in-person and online attendees will have access to recorded sessions for 60 days after the conference. [Online registration](#) for this event is now open.



Considering Church Work? Join CTSFW for the Next Prayerfully Consider Visit!

The Spring 2025 Prayerfully Consider Visit (PCV) at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (CTSFW), is scheduled for **March 20-22**. If you've been considering becoming a pastor or deaconess, now is the time to learn more about the vocation. Visit the CTSFW campus during PCV to meet with admission counselors about discerning whether this path is right for you. In addition to learning more about the pastoral and deaconess programs at CTSFW, you'll also learn more about life at the Seminary.

Your visit will include:

- Worship in Kramer Chapel
- Classes with faculty
- Informational talks from staff
- A campus tour
- A tour of Fort Wayne

On-campus room and board are complimentary during your stay. Learn more and register online by visiting the [CTSFW website](#).

If you have any questions regarding the Prayerfully Consider Visit, please contact Deac. Katie Aiello, PCV Coordinator, at katie.aiello@ctsfw.edu.





FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP FACILITATOR TRAINING

What is Family Discipleship?
Christ's gifts nurturing faith in God's children through the partnership of home and congregation.

Building on our Lutheran heritage, Concordia Center for the Family (CCF) is training **pastors**, other **church workers**, and qualified **lay leaders** to help us ignite new zeal for Family Discipleship in our LCMS. As homes and congregations work together to disciple the next generations, our LCMS and **Christ's Kingdom will flourish!**

Would you like more **training and resources** to support this vision? CCF would love to have you join us! Scan the QR Code to learn more!



Our next training events:

April 22-26 - Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

May 12-16 - Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne



CCF is an
LCMS RSO



concordiafamily.org



1-888-553-5133



toddbiermann@concordiafamily.org





SUMMER CAMP REGISTRATION NOW OPEN

The new year at Camp Trinity (the Lutheran Camp on Petit Jean Mountain, AR) is packed full of activity, with amazing opportunities for youth in our district to connect with each other, God's creation, and the Word.

Registration is now underway for Camp Trinity's summer camp, with six sessions for youth and three for entire families. Learn more and register at lutherancamp.org/copy-of-summer-camp. High school students who are interested in serving as counselors-in-training (CiT) are also encouraged to apply. CiTs serve one or two weeks assisting senior staff. Application requests may be emailed to the camp office at director@lutherancamp.org.



SAVE THE DATE SAVE THE DATE SAVE THE DATE SAVE THE DATE

THE HENKEL CONFERENCE

August 21-22, 2025

Ascension Lutheran Church, (Madison TN) invites you to attend our fourth annual Henkel Conference, devoted to Christian theology and cultural engagement.

Our aim is to provide a forum of the best theological and cultural speakers within the Christian faith in order to educate and encourage in the midst of the present

assaults on God's eternal truth. With this in mind, we hope to host a strong mix of clergy and laity; and we request your aid in reaching friends, family, and congregation members who may wish to attend.

[More Information on Ascension's website](#)

[Registration Available Online](#)

SAVE THE DATE SAVE THE DATE SAVE THE DATE SAVE THE DATE



Email update from Rev. Joseph Randianasolo of Lutheran Institute of Managerial Enterprise (LIME), to President Paavola.



Religious opening ceremony of 2024/25 school year (left) and diplomas of 2023/24 school year (above).

The Lord be with you!
Big thanks to Jesus Christ our Good Shepherd, the Head of the Church. Warm thanks to you, to your staff, to the Mid-South District and to your family.

LIME UPDATE



The Director of EMIT shakes the hand of a student who received his diploma.



Christians shake the hands of students with their diplomas.



Lady responsible of the distribution of the diplomas, myself and the Director of EMIT



Some students in polo are standing in joy outside the Church.



Share the HOPE



SCAN ME 



APRIL 24-29, 2025
Online Virtual Auction

Help us feed these
precious souls

The Lutheran Heritage Foundation

Free Ukrainian resources for sharing the Gospel: Great news! The Lutheran Heritage Foundation (a recognized service organization of the LCMS) has just gotten a huge shipment of books carrying two FREE new resources available in Ukrainian, including the classic children's Bible storybook A Child's Garden of Bible Stories and Best of Portals of Prayer. These materials are available to any LCMS church, mission or individual who wants to share the Good News with their Ukrainian-speaking neighbors. To order, send an email to info@LHFmissions.org or call the LHF office at (800)554-0723.



Prayer Summary, February 2025

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 February.

PRAYER CONCERNS

REV. BOB BENKE (Faith Lutheran Church, Hot Springs Village, AR)

REV. RONALD HALAMKA (Waxahachie, TX)

REV. PAUL DONNER (Emeritus, Paducah, KY)

MRS. ALISON HAWKINS (Mid-South District Office)

MRS. MARY ANN HERD (wife of Rev. Clifford Herd, Hixson, TN)

REV. TOM SAYRE (Emeritus, St. John's, FL)

REV. TOM MOORE (Emeritus, Cordova, TN)

REV. ALBERT EICHELBERGER (Emeritus, Knoxville, TN)

REV. JD ZISCHKE (Restoration Lutheran Church, Fayetteville, TN)

REV. ROGER STERLE (Living Savior Lutheran Church, Springdale, AR)

REV. TIMOTHY SCHARR (District President, Southern Illinois District – LCMS)

REV. JOHN SCHULZ (Emeritus, Knoxville, TN)

MRS. DONNA LONGMAN (wife of Rev. Eric Longman, Rogers, AR)

MRS. FLORENCE EICHELBERGER (wife of Rev. Albert Eichelberger, Knoxville, TN)

MRS. NORMA MOORE (wife of Rev. Tom Moore, Emeritus, Cordova, TN)

MRS. JUNE WIESE (wife of former MDS Pastor, Rev. Ron Wiese)

MS. STEPHANIE ELSEROAD (daughter of Rev. Rich Elseroad (EM) Knoxville, TN)

MRS. ALICE MAYER (wife of Rev. Richard Mayer, Messiah Lutheran Church, Pea Ridge, AR)

MR. ROBERT NERGER (Former Mid-South District Board of Directors, Wartburg, TN)

MR. MARK MCELWAIN (brother-in-law to Renae McElwain, Mid-South District Office)

MR. SAMUEL FISHBURN (Principal, First Lutheran School, Fort Smith, AR)

MRS. RACHEL PREUS (wife of Mr. Samuel Preus, Director of Development, Lutheran Classical College, Wyoming District)

Our deepest sympathies to Rev. Don Welmer (Chattanooga, TN) and family on the loss of his Uncle Nick, who recently passed away.

Our deepest sympathies to the family and friends of Mrs. Dolores Bernthal (wife of Rev. Hubert Bernthal, Emeritus, Bella Vista, AR) who recently passed away. Funeral services were held on February 1, 2025.

All those continuing to recover and rebuild from the flooding and damage of Hurricane Helene and Hurricane Milton.

All those affected by the recent tornadoes in NE Tennessee.

Rev. Trae Fistler and Kurt Ludwig, Mid-South District Disaster Relief Coordinators and all teams deployed in recovery efforts.

All those affected by the wildfires in California.

CALL UPDATE

IN THE CALLING PROCESS – CONGREGATIONS ORDAINED MINISTERS

ACCEPTED: Rev. Addison Pope (Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, IN) accepted the Call to serve as *Pastor to Our Savior Lutheran Church, Cabot, AR*. Ordination and Installation took place February 9, 2025.

Rev. Jonathan Holmes (Candidate) accepted the Call to serve as *Pastor to dual parish congregations St. Paul Lutheran Church, Gillett, AR & St. Luke Lutheran Church, DeWitt, AR*. Installation is planned for Saturday, March 29, 2025, 2:00PM at St. Paul Lutheran Church, Gillett, AR.

DECLINED: Rev. David McMinn, Pastor to Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church, McMinnville, TN returned the Call to serve as *Pastor to St. Paul Lutheran Church, Stover, MO*.

Rev. Clayton Sellers, Associate Pastor to Faith Lutheran Church, Collierville, TN returned the Call to serve as *Senior Pastor to Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Hermitage, TN*.

VACANT CONGREGATIONS & MINISTRIES

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Bowling Green, KY – Senior Pastor

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Hermitage, TN – Senior Pastor

IN THE CALLING PROCESS - COMMISSIONED MINISTERS

Our Savior Lutheran Academy, Nashville, TN – Full-time PreK Teacher; Full-time and Part-time Preschool Teachers and Aides
Grace Lutheran Church Early Childhood Center, Little Rock, AR – Director



Congregational Mission Commitments

Mission Commitment Receipts as of 1/31/2025 (1 Month)

Anticipated Amount (8.3% of budget)	\$135,725
Actual Receipts.....	<u>94,837</u>
Over (under) anticipated amount	(\$40,888)

Use of Mission Commitment Receipts (1 Month)

Allocated to Synod for World Missions	\$26,368
Allocated to Tanzania	2,083
Retained for District Mission/Ministry Support (70% of receipts).....	<u>66,386</u>
Total Receipts.....	\$94,837

Mission Commitment Receipts Prior Year Comparison (1 Month)

Actual Receipts as of 1/31/2025.....	\$94,837
Actual Receipts as of 1/31/2024.....	<u>\$83,125</u>
Over (under) prior year receipts	\$11,712

Share your news with us!

Encourager Topics in 2025

We invite you to share your stories with us please email stories by 20th to Rhonda, webmaster@mid-southlcms.com. [Here's a look at the upcoming topics for 2025](#)

- April – Volunteers
- May – Small Town & Rural Ministry
- June - Leadership/District Convention

Lutheran Witness Supplement

The monthly deadline is the 15th. Please email your original high resolution digital photo (.pdf or .jpg files only) and a short paragraph, to The Lutheran Witness Supplement editor, Judy Otto.

Email: LW@mid-southlcms.com

phone: 662-252-1004. Judy will always acknowledge receipt of your submission if it is sent directly to her.

Mid-South District, Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod

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