

APRIL 2025 Mid-South District LCMS



A Message from Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola, President

"The Three Nails"

It'S tough to see someone die. In the past, I've buried dear friends, in-laws, attended dozens of funerals and have visited several others in the hospital who are gravely ill. Death is a welcomed visitor to those who have struggled so severely with their illnesses. Welcomed, because as one of my dear friends put it, he was tired and was excited about going at home to be with Jesus. The last words and last wishes - despite the desire of all these people to stay with their loved ones - were all about wanting to leave behind the pain and be at home with Jesus. But left behind those of who love them, with eyes that were burning in tears.

The death of Jesus was even more difficult to understand for those who loved Him. He was so young and so good. His death came immediately on the heels of that glorious, triumphant entrance into Jerusalem just a few days earlier. His violent, tragic death wasn't much of a welcomed visitor to relieve any long-term suffering. His end wasn't aided with oxygen or medication to ease the pain and breathing, but an agonizing, suffocating, naked tragedy on the cross.

St. John declares: "So they took Jesus, and He went out, bearing His own cross, to the place call the place of the skull, which is called in Hebrew - Golgatha. There they crucified Him, and with Him, two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them." There's no mention of Simon of Cyrene, the spectator pressed into service to help Jesus carry His cross, no mention of the conversations Jesus had with the criminals, there is not mention of the cry of despair of being forsaken by God, nor is there mention of the dramatic earthquake and the ripping open of the Temple curtain mentioned in Matthew's Gospel. All we hear from John's Gospel is the stark reality of a young man, walking toward a hill outside of Jerusalem to be tragically nailed to a cross and left to die naked and alone.

Consider the nails in the cross of Christ as the silent witnesses of that tragic day: *"There they crucified Him."* It means they stretched Him out on a rough wooden beams, impaled His hands and feet with spikes and raised Him above the ground to hang until He died of suffocation and shock. Johann Sebastian Bach wrote in one of his symphonies, *"In the death of my heart; Your name and cross, Shine at all times and in every* hour. Because of these I can be happy. Let this picture appear to me; As comfort in my time of stress, as You, Lord Christ, so freely; have sacrificed Your life for me!" I guess that's why we call this Good Friday.

But take a long, hard look at His death and realize, we didn't help... we didn't offer comfort or seek relief. Instead, realize He died for you and me... I too nailed Him to the cross. John's Gospel is unique, saying, "standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, His mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene"... women who were closely related to Him. They stood - intimately related to Jesus - hearts broken and grieving in the scene of despair and ugly suffering. Jesus, on fire with pain and suffering. He looked over these women and said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then to the disciple whom He loved, He said, "Behold your mother." And from that hour, the disciples took her to his home."

In spite of the circumstances, or perhaps because of the circumstances, Jesus sealed Christian relationships... loving relationships to Him. Termination of relationships is what causes grief. Absence of relationships is what causes loneliness. Estrangement of relationships is what causes frustration and emotional injury. But enjoyment of close relationships is what gives contentment, peace and meaning in life.

Christ's words from the cross shows that loving, responsible, and caring relationships are most important to Jesus. It's why He offered to us the words, *"Follow Me!"* It was in their relationship with Him that His followers found their greatest joy and purpose. It was for the continuation of the relationship of love and forgiveness that Jesus died. Jesus didn't die so we can join something, or to give some kind of intellectual assent. He died for us in order to have us live together with Him in a loving and forgiving - a personal relationship with Him and all His followers. He died so we could be restored to a personal relationship with God forever. It's the reason He came. It's the reason He died on the cross for you.

The second word from the cross unique to John is a word of humiliation: "Jesus said, 'I thirst.' A bowl of wine vinegar stood there, so they put a sponge filled with vinegar on hyssop and held it to His mouth." What a horrible statement. Listen! He hangs on a cross – the image of God's perfect love for us. The picture is a statement of divine love. But of how awful that the world takes offense to perfect love, and imposes deep suffering on those who would offer perfect love.

Being followers of Christ means that, when we see the perfect image of love, we're drawn to resemble His image in our own lives. Suffering becomes imposed - not because we seek it - but because perfect love is offensive to the world. But turn to the cross and see the cost of perfect love: <u>I</u> also nailed Him to the cross.

The final words in John's Gospel is a declaration of a completed mission: "When Jesus received the wine vinegar, He said, "It is finished!", and He bowed His head and gave up His spirit." Tetellestai... it is finished, a Greek emphatic proclamation. It means there is a goal accomplished and ended successfully; nothing more needs to be done!

It's the reason Jesus was born in Bethlehem, raised in Nazareth, and baptized by John. It's the reason He called disciples, healed the sick, and raised the dead. It's the confirmation of questions He asked, "Who do people say that I am?" It's the reason for the time at the Mount of Transfiguration and why He said He must go to Jerusalem that "All the things said about the Son of man may be fulfilled." It's the reason why He celebrated the Last Supper, prayed in the garden, why He met the soldiers who came to capture Him, and why He was silent before the chief priest and Pontius Pilate. Tetellestai... it is finished.

Jesus passed the test of divine obedience that led to His atoning sacrifice for fallen mankind. Death was swallowed up in His death, so that we may have life! The rupture of mankind against God was repaired when God's own Son was pierced open. Our sins were left on the cross when God's wrath made Jesus the forsaken sacrifice of God. It is finished. It was my sin, my nail, my scourging and mockery He suffered. I too, nailed Him to the cross. Do we all have a nail you have to hammer into the cross too? No, those nails aren't needed. The three nails that pierce the sacred hand of our Savior were enough. It is finished. Have a blessed Holy Week and joyous Easter.

Your servant in Christ + Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola

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Expanding Faith Formation to Develop Life-long, Multiethnic Disciples

Salem Lutheran Ministries and Christo Para Todos, Springdale AR received a \$6000 Grow Grant from the Mid-South District for their development of life-long catechesis and Faith formation for the next generation. The grant works directly into the Mid-South District's initiative to bring Generation-to-Generation awareness of faith formation for generations to come. Their efforts could become a template for other congregations to address the need to keep our young people active and involved in the church.

Rev. Brandon Martin, Associate Pastor, Salem Lutheran Church, explains further. "We are evaluating, revising, and expanding our faith formation to utilize the strengths of Lutheran doctrine and practice in order to develop mature, life-long disciples in our multiethnic congregation.

In other words, we want ALL our youth to trust and follow Jesus ... with ALL their heart ... and for ALL their life!

We lament that we have lost many youth following confirmation. So for several years,

we have evaluated how to revise our faith formation (youth catechesis) in order to be more enduring. This past year, we sought the help of two experts in this field and began to implement some of their recommendations.

The results so far have been fantastic. We are now partnering with parents, equipping and encouraging them to be spiritual leaders in their home. We have also centered our faith formation on the Divine Service, where God gives the gift of faith and nurtures that faith for life.

Yet we still face various challenges in our multiethnic context. The Grow Grant is helping us to gain further feedback from our coaches, developing a long-term plan, implement further changes, and



Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola, Mid-South District President, Rev. Adam Gless, Senior Pastor to Salem Lutheran Ministries, Rev. Brandon Martin, Associate Pastor, Salem Lutheran Church & Pastor Asociado, Iglesia Luterana Salem (Cristo Para Todos)

then share what we learned with other multiethnic congregations."

If your congregation has a great ministry idea to share the Gospel within your community, consider applying for a GROW Grant. Visit the Mid-South District website today for details on GROW Grants and how to apply: <u>https://</u> <u>mid-southlcms.org/grow-grants/</u>

> **GROW** Grants

Tornado Relief in Many Ways from Known and Unknown Lutherans

Rev. Gerald Heinecke, Hope Lutheran Church, Batesville, AR

"Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." (Matt. 25:40) On the night of March 14, nine tornadoes streaked across Northeast Arkansas (including 2 F4 and 2 FE), hitting communities all over. While members are safe and property damage very minimal, thousands of people situated between the congregations of Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church in Horseshoe Bend and Hope Lutheran Church in Batesville have been affected. Houses completely gone, like the one shown to the right.



The communities came together very quickly to help their neighbors.

By midmorning, roads were clear of debris and the lineman were hard at work restoring power. The members at Hope responded to one member's house where a dozen trees had fallen across his driveway (the tornado missed their home by not more than 200 yards). Because of the quick response, the power company was also able to come in and restore power to their home that afternoon.

The challenge of natural disasters in rural America is the limited resources to manage volunteers and donations. Men and women of the communities volunteered to coordinate the relief and the massive influx of help that poured in immediately. They worked 12+ hours every day providing generously of their time as they cared for their fellow neighbors.

Mid-South District LERT responded immediately with sending our DDRC, Kurt Ludwig, on Monday, who went right to work finding homes in need of help. Kurt and I traveled to the small towns of rural Arkansas making contacts. Starting on March 24, LERT teams came to Hope Lutheran Church to help in the clean-up, especially the rural areas of the small town of Cushman.



While Kurt and I were out, we were spotted by a couple of men in Cave City who saw Kurt's vehicle with the LERT logo and the LCMS cross on it. Three men from Grace Celebration Lutheran Church in Cordova, TN had come up with a group on Monday. They are part of group called Operation BBQ Relief (OBR) and have been providing thousands of meals to people in the Cave City area each day. We had the opportunity to visit with Steve Carney. (Dale Collins and Ivan Bost were out serving meals while we visited with him.) Their church runs a local group called Holy Smokers who serve their community delivering food to the needy. These men have also joined OBR who travel all over the US serving in disaster relief. Part of their group even went out to California to help with the fires. They served over a million meals last year!

This was a great reminder that the men and women of our churches serve the Lord in a variety of ways, both in organizations and individually. They do so, rejoicing in the gift of salvation freely won for us by Christ. It reminds me of our Gospel text from Ash Wednesday, "When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing." (Matt. 6:3)

Every member has the opportunity to serve their neighbor around them and we do it not for the recognition but because the Lord has prepared beforehand works for us to do (Eph. 2:10) since the faith that we have received drives us to works (James 2:17ff). Steve, Dale, Ivan and members at Hope don't do this for publicity, but from a servant's heart, not even realizing how precious is the work of God's people in the eyes of those who are suffering (Matt 25:31ff). I cannot help but give thanks for these men and the members of my church who are helping in many unknown ways. Such generosity is truly a blessed gift as we love our neighbor who suffers and will need help in the coming months.

LCMS Disaster Response Thank You for Bobcat



Thank you to all our generous donors and a grant from LCMS Disaster Response, we received our second Bobcat MT100 mini track loader on March 4! This will greatly increase our capacity and efficiency when we respond to disasters. This mini skid steer will be in the possession of the LERT team at Grace Lutheran Church in Knoxville, TN. Team leader, Jim O'Hatnick, shared his gratitude and excitement when we received our new machine. Rev. Trae Fistler, our District Disaster Coordinator that oversees our heavy equipment and chainsaw operations, will deliver the mini skid steer to the team in Knoxville in the upcoming weeks. At that time, they will receive instruction on how the Bobcat operates, how to maintain and repair simple parts on the machine, and how to efficiently move brush and logs with the root grapple attachment. Our teams have truly been blessed and that makes us a blessing to those we help!

-Rev. Trae Fistler

Special Cross in Prayer Garden





Our Savior Lutheran Church in Cabot Arkansas has been blessed by one of our members.

Rick Talik, used his metal working talent to make a LCMS cross for our Prayer Garden. Rick donated this cross as a memorial for his son, Wyatt Christian Talik. Pictured above is the Cross lit up at night and below Rick and his son, Dakota in the Prayer Garden.



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.

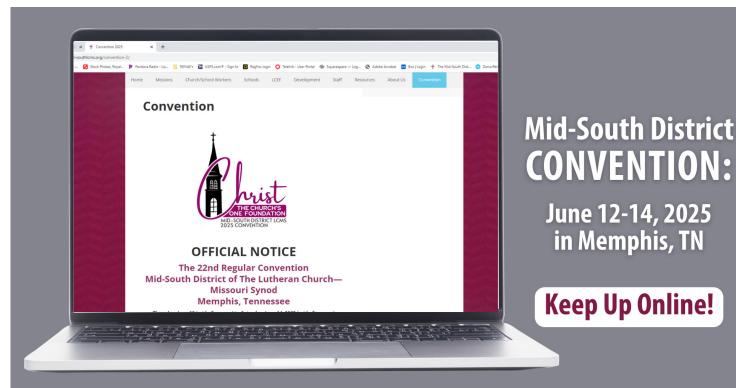
To be considered for the student financial assistance program, you must first inform the Mid-South District Office that you are or will be a



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



Visit mid-southlcms.org/convention-2/ for Updates, News & Information Regarding the 22nd Regular Convention

Office Manager Needed at Camp Trinity, the Lutheran Camp on Petit Jean Mountain

Camp Trinity, the Lutheran Camp on Petit Jean Mountian in Arkansas, is looking for a full-time office manager and general assistant to Director Aaron Davis. The ideal candidate will have knowledge of and experience with office software (Quickbooks, Intuit, Word, Excel, Google Workspace, website design/maintenance) and a love for outdoors ministry. The office manager must be a Christian with a heart for service and sharing the love of Jesus. **For a complete job description and information on applying, visit the camp website at https://www.lutherancamp.org/summer-camp-c38.**

LUTHERAN SUMMER MUSIC TO HOST SUPPORT DRIVE APRIL 10th

Lutheran Summer Music (LSM) is the nation's premier faith-based music academy for high school students. In addition to advanced musical instruction and numerous performance opportunities, LSM students form an intentional community, living together for four weeks on a Lutheran college campus. Since 1981, this unique and immersive program has guided the lives of thousands of young musicians, many of whom credit LSM as the starting place for their future careers and vocations.

Lutheran Summer Music (LSM) is stepping into its biggest season yet—and they need your help to make it possible for every student to attend. **On April 10, LSM is hosting a 24-hour donor drive to raise \$44,000 for scholarships.** If you would like to help LSM reach their goal—*and reach more students*—please visit their "Step Up for LSM" website to learn more and share your support: https://www.lsmacademy.org/news/2025/stepup.

Know Someone Interested in Ministry? Tell Them About Vocatio: Retreat

Spread the word about Vocatio: Retreat, a three-day opportunity geared especially for college students or second-career adults who are interested in serving as a pastor, deaconess, missionary or chaplain. Hosted by Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, this retreat offers an introduction to life as a seminarian, time to spend in God's Word and the opportunity to learn from some of the brightest theologians in the church. The retreat is coming up **April 6-8, 2025**. Space is limited and registration closes March 21. If you know someone who would benefit from this experience as they consider ministry, please encourage them to share the information and register at csl.edu/vocatio-retreat.

CONCORDIA SEMINARY

The Henkel Conference

August 21-22, 2025

Rev. Gregory Bauch and the members of Ascension Lutheran Church in Madison, TN are pleased to announce the dates of the 2025 Henkel Conference: August 21-22. The Henkel Conference is a gathering devoted to Christian theology and cultural engagement. The purpose of the conference is to provide 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, the event seeks to host a strong mix of clergy and laity. Pastor Bauch requests your aid in reaching friends, family, and congregation members who may wish to attend.

For complete details and online registration, please visit <u>https://www.ascensionmadison.</u> <u>com/henkel.html</u>.

Spread the Word About Christ Academy Summer Program at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne

More than ever, now is the time to pray that God would raise up pastors and deaconesses to share God's grace and mercy in our increasingly secular culture. You have a part to play in our Lord's life-giving ministry by encouraging high-school-aged men and women to attend Christ Academy High School at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana (CTSFW), June 15–28, 2025.

Christ Academy High School is a two-week program focused on worship, confessional catechesis, and fun times together. In worship, we gather around the person and work of Jesus Christ four times a day in Kramer Chapel. Classes with Seminary faculty will challenge and strengthen students' understanding of the Holy Scriptures, while service projects and free time with other likeminded Lutherans will remind students that they are not alone in their faith.

If you know a young person who would benefit from this experience, encourage them to register today! Details and online registration are available <u>HERE</u>.





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













concordiafamily.org 1-888

1-888-553-5133

toddbiermann @concordiafamily.org

Prayer Summary, March 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 March.

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 (Former District President, Southern Illinois District – LCMS)

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. 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)

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, Arkansas and Mississippi.

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.

Our deepest sympathies to the family and friends of the Rev. Dr. Paul Maier (former LCMS Vice-President) who recently passed away. Funeral services took place on Thursday, March 14, 2025.

Our deepest sympathies to the family and friends of the Rev. Roger Schoolcraft (former pastor to St. John's Lutheran Church, Fayetteville, AR) who recently passed away. Funeral services took place on March 8, 2025.

Our deepest sympathies to the family and friends of The Rev. John Schulz (Emeritus, Knoxville, TN) who recently passed away. Funeral services took place on Monday, March 17, 2025.

Our deepest sympathies to the family and friends of Dan Hesse

(Greers Ferry, AR) who recently passed away. Funeral services took place on Saturday, March 22, 2025.

CALL UPDATE IN THE CALLING PROCESS – CONGREGATIONS ORDAINED MINISTERS

ACCEPTED: 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 took place Saturday, March 29, 2025, 2:00PM at St. Paul Lutheran Church, Gillett, AR.*

PENDING: Rev. Brennick Christiansen (Candidate) Menomonee Falls, WI has received a Call to serve as *Associate Pastor to All Saints Lutheran Church and School, Jonesboro, AR*.

DECLINED: Rev. David Appold, Pastor to St. Paul Lutheran Church, Paducah, KY, has returned the Call to serve as *Pastor to Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Leland, MI.*

COMMISSIONED MINISTERS

ACCEPTED: Ms. Sarah Morris, DCE, serving Crown of Life Lutheran Church, Colleyville, Texas has accepted the Call to serve as *Family Life Minister to Bella Vista Lutheran Church, Bella Vista, AR*.

Ms. Claire Hall, Commission Minister (Teacher) to Concordia Christian Academy, Tacoma, WA has accepted the Call to service as *Middle School Math and Science teacher to Belvoir Christian Academy, Chattanooga, TN.* **PENDING: Mr. Samuel Fishburn, Principal** to First Lutheran School,

Fort Smith, AR has received a Call to serve as *Principal to Hope Lutheran Church & School, Shawnee, KS.*

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

Christ the King Lutheran School, Memphis, TN – Director of Christian Education; 3rd Grade Teacher; PE/Athletic Director; Art Teacher (Part-time)

Immanuel Lutheran School, Memphis, TN - 5th grade Teacher 1st Lutheran School, Knoxville, TN- Middle School Math; Several part time teaching positions

Grace Lutheran Church, Knoxville, TN – Director of Christian Education



Congregational Mission Commitments

Mission Commitment Receipts as of 2/29/2025 (2 Months)

Anticipated Amount (16.67	% of
budget)	\$271,449
Actual Receipts	<u>228,991</u>
Over (under) anticipated	
amount	(\$42,458)

Use of Mission Commitment Receipts (2 Months)

Allocated to Synod for		
World Missions	\$64,531	
Allocated to Tanzania	4,167	
Retained for District Mission/Ministry		
Support (70% of receipts)	<u>160,294</u>	
Total Receipts	\$228,991	

Mission Commitment Receipts Prior Year Comparison (2 Months)

Actual Receipts as	
of 2/25/2025	\$228,991
Actual Receipts as	
of 2/29/2024	<u>\$242,335</u>
Over (under) prior	
year receipts	(\$13,344)

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

- May Small Town & Rural Ministry
- June Leadership/District Convention
- July Veterans

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: <u>LW@mid-southlcms.</u> <u>com</u>

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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