

Encourager

FEBRUARY 2025

Mid-South District LCMS



A Message from Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola, President

I'm fascinated by the lists of grouping nouns. A group of geese is a gaggle. But if the geese are flying, it's called a skein. They're not a flock. A pack of wolves, a brood of chicks, a pride of lions, a herd of cows, a murder of crows, a school of fish, a colony of ants, and a phalynx of umbrellas is a collection of several unclaimed umbrellas. Some of the list of collective nouns make sense.

But why do birds and animals come together in a collective unit? Mostly for protection, right? They're a collective group for the purpose of hunting for food, for protection against predators, and warmth and security. National Geographic programs shows what happens to the wildlife in Africa when an animal gets separated from the herd. The gathering of

wildebeest is nothing more than protection and preservation of the herd, or flock.

But get back to the phalynx of umbrellas most of our churches have at their front entrance. These umbrellas are all folded up and left there by their owners. The owner needs one when it rains, but they won't be able to use the one they left at the church!

Storms and rains happen around the Mid-South in the Spring and late Fall. Umbrellas are meant to offer some kind of protection so we and our clothing don't get wet. We open umbrellas and hold it over our heads so the rain doesn't bother us.

In a small way, God's love is like an umbrella. The gathering of the First Century Christians was a kind of umbrella. Peter's

sermon to the congregation in Jerusalem called for the congregation to gather together; gather for worship each week; to gather together for the common good of the family of believers; and to gather together for the mutual prayer and support of the family of God's people.

God calls, strengthens, and protects His people. He gathers us together in the common union when He serves us, feeds us and makes us His own in the one, true, and Holy Christian Church. His love and grace is bigger than an all-encompassing umbrella. God's grace guards us against the storms of our life that are caused by the evil and sin in this world. Sin and temptation are the way that Satan tries to get us out of God's family and

to erode away our faith. But God doesn't let that happen. He sends His love and grace to us in as many ways as we will need for each day.

When we are covered with the filth of sin, God baptizes us, cleanses us and brings to us faith through the means of the rite of Holy Baptism. When our faith is shaken and we need to hear about His continuing presence with us, God offers us His Supper of Holy Communion. The proclamation of His forgiveness and mercy come through the preaching of His Word in the proper balance of the Law and Gospel. And prayer - the great weapon given to the company of believers - is our way to keep in constant communication with God for our strength, our protection and our offerings of praise to Him for all His blessing toward us. God's Word, His Church, His sacraments and His people are kind of like an umbrella, but much more by protecting us from the eroding works of Satan.

But, as strange as it may seem, sometimes God's umbrellas don't work. Why? Because we don't use it. We forget it and let it lie around. God's umbrella of grace and forgiveness are always there, but they have to be used in the way they were designed to be used.

If we don't want to read the Bible and are led by the living, active Holy Spirit, it's not God who isn't acting, it's us! If we don't come to worship to be

served by God with His Word and Sacraments, it isn't God who is gone away, it's us. If we don't say our prayers, don't do our devotions and study His Word we can't blame God for lack of protection and comfort. We just haven't opened up the umbrella of His grace the way He meant it to be.

An unopened umbrella is worthless in a rain storm. An umbrella left in a place where we can't find it when we need it, is as good as no umbrella at all. It's not the umbrella's fault. It's ours. It's our responsibility and our privilege to open the umbrella of God's grace, just as much as it's our responsibility to open those umbrellas left in a phalynx - unused - when it rains.

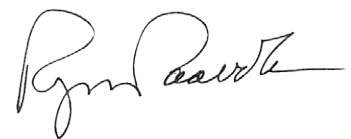
A gathering of umbrellas is called a phalynx. A gathering of lawyers is called a conspiracy. A gathering of angels is called a pinhead and a gathering of turtles is called a creep. The gathering of God's people is called the church. Jesus called His people together for comfort, nourishment, and spiritual food. He showed how He cares for our physical and our spiritual needs. He showed His compassion for the sick and the disadvantaged. He demonstrated compassion on the needy. He told us never to worry about anything that transpires in our life that may seem like a storm.

Jesus calmed storms! In the middle of our biggest storms, He offers His protection of

grace and mercy for everyone He brings into His fellowship. He reminds us, "Give up that which is counting on material riches, and provide yourself with moneybags that will never grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches or moth eats away. For where your treasures is, there your heart will be also."

Treasure this Gospel message with your life! It's not some discarded and forgotten umbrella left at church, but God's grace through Jesus Christ, the company of His people gathered together in worship and prayer, and the strength and grace that He offers through His Word and Sacrament. It's yours to use. It's yours to keep. It's yours forever. Don't forget to use it the way God intended for us.

Your servant in Christ +
Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola



Welcome Rev. Gerald Heinecke

The **Rite of Installation** was held at **Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church, Horseshoe Bend, AR** for **Rev. Gerald Heinecke** on Sunday, January 12, 2025. Pastor Heinecke was installed after a dual parish agreement was reached with Hope Lutheran in Batesville, Ar.



Included in the installation were (L-R) Rev. David Vandercook, Trinity and Shepherd of Peace, North Little Rock and Maumelle; Rev. Jerome Leckband, All Saints, Jonesboro; President Roger Paavola; Rev. Gerald Heinecke; Rev. Joshua Leigeber, Circuit Visitor, All Saints, Jonesboro; Rev. Andrew Lehman, All Saints, Jonesboro, and Crucifer, Zachary Heinecke.

Immanuel Lutheran School in Memphis Welcomes New Principal

Mrs. Amy Kurtz was installed as principal of Immanuel Lutheran School in Memphis on Sunday, January 12 by the church's Senior Pastor, Rev. Jon Petering. Mrs. Kurtz taught Spanish at Immanuel before departing nearly a decade ago to serve as principal of a Lutheran school in Illinois. After a number of years, she then accepted a call to serve as principal in Marietta, Georgia. The church and school family of Immanuel are so happy that God's path for Mrs. Kurtz has led her back to Memphis once again! At the installation service, many faces from Immanuel's present and past were on hand to welcome Mrs. Kurtz and her family back to the church and school.



Immanuel Lutheran Church and School Senior Pastor, Rev. Jon Petering and new Immanuel Lutheran School Principal, Amy Kurtz.



Several members of Mrs. Kurtz's family were on hand for the January 12 installation. Pictured R to L are husband Mike Kurtz, daughter Emma Kurtz, Amy and mother, Sarah Starks, and youngest daughter Penelope Kurtz in front. Amy and Mike also have 4 adult children living in other states who were not able to attend.

New Ministry Ideas Flourish Through District GROW Grants

The Mid-South District encourages innovative and creative new ministry initiatives of its existing congregations and schools through the GROW Grants program. Since the program was introduced in 2022, over \$156,000 in GROW Grants has been awarded to Mid-South congregations, helping them establish exciting new ministry programs focused on reaching new hearts for Jesus.

Two of the recent grant recipients were presented “giant checks” for the funds that will help them establish and build their unique new ministry programs. On December 22, 2024, Grace Celebration Lutheran Church in Cordova, TN received a \$15,000 GROW Grant for its impactful ministry reaching local public-school students. The ministry, called LifeWise Academy, provides students with weekly instruction that connects Biblical truth with practical application in their daily lives and interactions with others. The district GROW Grant was presented to Grace’s pastor, Rev. Terry Tieman and his wife, Becky Tieman, a teacher who is very involved in the new ministry. Mid-South District President, Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola and Michelle Fischer, the district’s Education Executive, presented the grant funds and congratulated the congregation on their great work through the LifeWise Academy ministry.

On January 5, 2025, President Paavola was on hand to present Rev. Timothy Henning and the members of Trinity Lutheran Church in Mena, AR with a \$15,000 GROW Grant for the congregation’s new Gospel Connections and Engagement Program. This multi-faceted ministry includes:

- a new community youth ministry called Way Seekers
- expanded weekday Bible study and discussion groups
- home fellowship gatherings called Life Groups
- a community door-to-door prayer & service outreach effort

Several members of Trinity’s Way Seekers community youth ministry were also in attendance for the presentation of the GROW Grant. The funds will go a long way in establishing Trinity’s bold new Gospel Connections and Engagement Program.

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: <https://mid-southlcms.org/grow-grants/>



A GROW Grant for the LifeWise Academy ministry of Grace Celebration Lutheran Church in Cordova, TN was presented to the church’s pastor, Rev. Terry Tieman and wife Becky Tieman (both pictured center) on December 22, 2024. Mid-South District President, Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola (pictured right) and Michelle Fischer, the District’s Education Executive (left), were on hand to present the grant funds.



On January 5, 2025, President Paavola (center) visited Trinity Lutheran Church in Mena, AR to present a GROW Grant to Rev. Timothy Henning (left) for the congregation’s new Gospel Connections and Engagement Program, which includes a community youth ministry called Way Seekers. Several participants and leaders from Way Seekers were in attendance for the presentation of the GROW Grant “giant check”—and excited for how the funds will help the new ministry grow!

Mid-South District Memories from the

MARCH FOR LIFE



On January 24, 2025, thousands from all faiths, walks of life, and corners of the country gathered in Washington, D.C. for the 51st March for Life. Unified by their passionate belief in the sanctity of life, crowds braved bitter cold temperatures—and protesters with opposing views—to lend their voices on behalf of those who have no voice. LCMS President, Rev. Matthew Harrison, was a featured speaker for the 2025 event, along with other prominent pro-life advocates such as US Vice President, JD Vance; Florida Governor, Ron DeSantis; and motivational speaker Bethany Hamilton (the shark-attack surviving *Soul Surfer*).

Mid-South District pastors Rev. Philip Young (Redeemer Lutheran in Nashville, TN) and Rev. Kevin Conger (Hope Lutheran in Jacksonville, AR and 2nd VP of the Mid-South District) and family members were among the thousand of marchers for this year's event. "Thank you" to both for sharing images from this powerful day for life. If you or someone in your congregation attended the 2025 March for Life, the Mid-South District would love to share more images from the day. To submit your March for Life photo, email the file and a short description to rmcelwain@mid-southlcms.com.



Rev. Philip Young of Redeemer Lutheran in Nashville (center) with daughter Anna and her fiancé, Asher Thompson (of Cornerstone Lutheran in Fishers, IN) stand among the tens of thousands gathered to march



LCMS President, Rev. Matthew Harrison rallies the Lutheran marchers



Rev. Kevin Conger (Hope Lutheran in Jacksonville, AR) and wife Lois with President Harrison



Rev. Kevin Conger, preparing to march

2024/2025 Treasurer's Workshop

Join us for one of the remaining workshops. The Presenter for the Treasurer's manual (Volume 1) session will be Mr. Charlie Rhodes, Executive Director of Synod Accounting (Retired). The District's Executive Director for Business & Finance, Angela Fowler, will be the presenter for the afternoon Best Practices session.

It would be helpful for you to have a copy of the manual with you, either the CD, hard copy or online version. The Treasurer's Manual is available on the LCMS website.

NOTE: Because the morning session will be devoted to updates in the Treasurers' Manual (Vol. 1), with time reserved for specific questions and answers, attendees are recommended to have copy of the manual available (either the CD, hard copy or online version).

To Register

- 1) REGISTER ONLINE
- 2) Or, download the [Treasurers Registration 2025 form](#) and return it to the District Office

For additional information contact Angela Fowler by e-mail afowler@mid-southlcms.com or telephone (866-373-1343)

Dates and Locations

February 1, 2025 — Cordova, TN

9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. Treasurer's Manual – Volume 1
11:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. Lunch (provided)
11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Church Treasurer Best Practices
Mid-South District Office
1675 Wynne Road
Cordova, TN

February 8, 2025— Jacksonville, AR

9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. Treasurer's Manual – Volume 1
11:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. Lunch (provided)
11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Church Treasurer Best Practices
Hope Lutheran Church
1904 McArthur Blvd.
Jacksonville, AR



The Mid-South District's 2025 Treasurers' Workshops have been very well-attended.

Presenter Charlie Rhodes is shown here with workshop attendees in Knoxville, TN (left) and Russellville, AR (below).



**REGISTER ONLINE
TODAY**

Congratulations to Deaconess Robin Moyer!

The Mid-South District is pleased to announce that former intern, Robin Moyer, is now a Deaconess! Robin and three other students have the unique distinction of being the first to receive certification through Concordia Seminary, St. Louis's new Online Deaconess Studies Program. Robin and her fellow students were recognized for their program completion and certification on January 17 in the beautiful Chapel of St. Timothy on the Concordia campus. Mid-South District 1st Vice President, Rev. Lane Reuter, and his wife, Michelle, were in attendance at the chapel service to offer personal congratulations on behalf of the District.

May God bless Robin in her new ministry journey!



Deaconess Robin Moyer (center) with Mid-South District 1st VP, Rev. Lane Reuter, and his wife, Michelle.



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.

*New look,
same great Mission!*



LUTHERAN CHURCH EXTENSION FUND

FINANCIAL SOLUTIONS. TOGETHER IN FAITH.

Visit lcef.org today to see what's new

MID-SOUTH DISTRICT DISASTER UPDATE

On January 15, 2025 our Mid-South District Disaster Response Coordinator, Kurt Ludwig (a member of Grace Lutheran Church in Clarksville, TN), met with local county officials and nonprofits at the Washington County, TN Long Term Recovery Group. At this meeting Kurt met with people and agencies that were in need of the assistance we could provide. Because of the overwhelming generosity of God's people who sent donations to assist victims of Hurricane Helene, the Mid-South District dispersed generous financial aid through grants. In addition to working alongside the Washington County, TN Long Term Recovery Group we have been in regular communication with Pr. Shemwell at Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Johnson City, TN. At this time the Mid-South District has dispersed grants to families of members of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Johnson City.

What are these grants going toward? These grants have provided aid in various capacities. One family lost everything: house, vehicles,



barn, and animals. The aid offered by insurance and FEMA fell hundreds of thousands of dollars short of what they lost.

The Mid-South District provided a generation donation to help jump start the cost towards rebuilding their home. Another family that lost their home also lost the only road granting them access to their property. They are living in a camper on the property and driving through a mud hole that used to be a driveway (above). We were able

to cover the cost to rebuild their driveway. These are only a few of the stories where we have been able to share the gifts that were first given to us by those



who donated to our District's Hurricane Helene Relief Fund. To follow more of the stories and work we are doing, you may follow our Facebook page "Faith In Action Disaster Response." As of the first of the year, we have received \$210K to distribute to our neighbors in eastern Tennessee. God's people answered the call to care for their neighbors in need. Thanks be to God!

—Rev. Trae Fistler, Pastor, *Faith Lutheran Church Hopkinsville, Kentucky*



Bus prevented the flood waters from destroying the home

DISTRICT NOW ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS FOR STUDENT FINANCIAL AID



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

Life Coordinator News

Two fantastic resources I recently became aware of are the Education Resource Fund (erf.science) and an app for our smart phones: "see baby grow". Here is a brief summary of what ERF has made available: "The Education Resource Fund (ERF) recently announced an extraordinary new series of pregnancy-related science documentaries which illustrate the biology of prenatal development using sophisticated medical imaging technologies and procedures which enable researchers to visualize embryos and fetuses, alive in the uterus, with never-before-seen clarity.

ERF is a science foundation which produces films and other curricular materials that are now

available in an app for mobile devices titled See Baby Grow. The app can be downloaded without charge from both the Apple App Store and the Google Play Store (for Android). The materials in the app can also be accessed at www.ERF.science for streaming into classrooms and viewing on larger screens."

EFF will equip Pastors and teachers to talk about the beautiful mystery of human life, how God designed us perfectly and why every baby needs our respect, love and protection



without ever mentioning abortion. These images we can share with our congregations, communities and children will change hearts and minds for life.

— Pastor Paul Becker

Lutheran Summer Music Deadline Is Fast Approaching!

Youth musicians from across the country are headed to Valparaiso University this year for the 2025 Lutheran Summer Music Academy & Festival (LSM). Students in grades 8-12 will be immersed in a supportive community that nurtures their musical growth, and invites them to share their musical gifts in performance and in worship. With the Standard Enrollment deadline approaching on **March 1**, now is the perfect time to nominate students so their families can directly receive information and an invitation to apply. Do you know young musicians who would thrive at LSM? Nominate them today at <https://www.lsmacademy.org/nominate>.

LSM LUTHERAN SUMMER MUSIC ACADEMY & FESTIVAL

Enrollment Deadlines

Deadline	Enrollment Type	Application Fee
December 1, 2024	Priority Enrollment	\$25 Application Fee
March 1, 2025	Standard Enrollment	\$50 Application Fee
May 1, 2025	Late Enrollment	\$75 Application Fee

Nominate Students: LSMacademy.org/nominate

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.



“...As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me”



Following the tenets of Christ, Trinity HOPE has been providing a noon meal to children in Christian schools in Haiti for the past 25 years. Through all this time, we have watched God work in the lives of those with whom we come in contact. In a country rife with poverty and malnutrition, where the worship of voodoo is loud, these school lunches demonstrate God’s mercy and open the door for the Gospel message to be heard and retained.

Things in Haiti have been hard for many generations, and most recently have been getting more difficult as the ongoing political climate has deterioration has made way for active and dangerous gangs. Yet God still paves a path that allows us to serve over 1.1 million meals each month. Last week, we were reminded of why this work is so important.

We received a message from a feeding program director in Jeremie. It had been raining for 2 days and the torrential rains caused mudslides. The images of the water coming into the homes and people getting caught up in the currents were reminiscent of what we saw in East Tennessee and Western North Carolina during the September Hurricane. However, in Haiti there are no emergency management systems ready to deploy and their homes are not constructed to withstand these kinds of issues. On this day, we received the terrible news that a 10-year-old boy at a school with a Trinity HOPE feeding program had passed away in the mudslides.

As the images and videos came in, we continued to witness the devastation that took place in this rural community. Other children had died and the grief and loss were evident on the faces of those in the images. As we watched and prayed and felt the pain of our brothers and sisters in Haiti, we were reminded of one truth. At least one of those precious children attended a school where he heard about the Light, Love, and HOPE of Jesus Christ. This young man who had endured so much in his brief life is now sitting beside his Savior because he knew Him well. His funeral took place in a church, and that means those who loved him heard about Christ as well.

No matter if there are gangs, natural disasters, corrupt governmental situations, or any other travesties our Haitian friends have faced, Trinity HOPE will continue to share the Gospel with over 65,000 children each school day through a noon meal. Until God tells us to stop, we are there doing the work. Even as 7 of our 36 Feeding Program Directors have been displaced from their homes, they show up every day to their schools and they share devotionals with those precious young souls.

We may not be able to protect them from their daily strife, but we can share with them a God who loves them. To learn more about the Trinity HOPE Haitian Feeding Program, visit us at trinityhope.org.



Sending Hope. Sharing Christ. One Care Package at a Time.

A cancer diagnosis was the last thing Concordia University student Phil Zielke expected to receive at the age of 22. But he did. Stage 4 Hodgkin's Lymphoma. And not just once, but twice.

By God's grace, Phil survived and, now at age 43, is cancer free, married to his lovely wife Carrie, and is the father of two young sons, Hudson and Graham.

Phil founded Phil's Friends in 2006, inspired by a thoughtfully curated care package he'd received during his cancer treatments. That care package meant the world to Phil, and he wanted to pay it forward.



The nonprofit began in the basement of Phil and Carrie's townhome, with three mom-volunteers assembling the care packages. Each care package contained items a cancer patient could use during their hospital stays and treatments: lotion, a toothbrush and toothpaste, playing cards, a puzzle book, a water bottle, a journal, a fleece blanket, a knitted hat, socks, a stuffed animal (for children).

Most importantly, though, Phil was uncompromising in that each care packages must contain a spiritual element above all else, and so each recipient got a Gospel letter and a Bible, the only true source of hope and salvation.

That first year, the tiny ministry sent 100 care packages.

Eighteen years later, Phil's Friends sends on average 250 care packages and 8,000-plus Cards of Hope a month, totally close to 60,000 care packages and more than one million Cards of Hope sent to cancer patients across the United States, including Alaska and Hawaii.

These small gestures of Christ-like love and hope

cannot be underestimated. Their impact has been tremendous in the lives of the recipients. Almost daily, we receive messages of gratitude about how much a care package or Card of Hope meant to them.

"Thank you so much for the care package that was sent to me. Your kindness, thoughtfulness, and prayers are much appreciated. May God bless you all," wrote one recipient.

Our care packages and Cards of Hope are sent free of charge. It is our way of serving those who are sick and suffering, and of bringing the love, compassion, and hope of Jesus Christ into their lives.

Because we are a nonprofit, we rely heavily on donations—both in-kind and monetary—to offset the costs of purchasing supplies and postage. It costs \$150 to support a cancer patient for one year with a care package and 12 Cards of Hope.

We are also blessed to have volunteers—thousands every year from schools, churches (many of them Lutheran), corporations, and civic organizations—lend their time and talents to decorating boxes, coloring Cards of Hope, assem-

bling the care packages, and praying.

To that end, we invite churches and schools to join us in our mission of providing Christ-like support, hope, and love to cancer patients. We offer a variety of ways to do so, large and small.

- **Host a Pack Event:** These are fun and engaging events that can bring your community and congregation together, to assemble care packages with a variety of items that cancer patients can use.

- **Color Cards of Hope:** These can be downloaded directly from our website and colored by children in classrooms, Sunday School, or during VBS. Even adults love this fun and therapeutic pastime!

- **Tie fleece blankets:** These take a bit more time and are great for a rainy afternoon project at your church or school.

- **Collect Care Package Items:** This is a great opportunity for adults and children to bring items to church or school during Missions Week or as a special outreach project.

- **Join our Prayer Team:** We are always in need of prayer warriors who will lift the sick and suffering up to the Lord with petitions and supplications.

- **Contribute monetarily:** Ninety-one cents of every dollar donated goes to supporting cancer patients. Every penny makes an impact!

For more information about how you can get involved, please visit our website at philsfriends.org, or contact us directly at info@philsfriends.org.

Thank you very much, and God bless!

The Phil's Friends Team



Care package recipient

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](#)



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



CONCORDIA
CENTER FOR THE
FAMILY

Prayer Summary, January 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 January 2025.

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)

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 the family and friends of Mrs. Dolores Bernthal (wife of Rev. Hubert Bernthal Emeritus, Bella Vista, AR) who recently passed away.

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

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

ACCEPTED: Pastor-Elect 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 are scheduled for Sunday, February 9, 2025, 3:00PM.*

Rev. Amos Gray (Candidate) accepted the Call to serve High Impact Ministries, Inc. as *Director of Spiritual Life. The installation took place January 26, 2025, at Faith Lutheran Church, Hot Springs Village, AR.*

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

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

DECLINED: Rev. Dr. Philip Rigdon, Senior Pastor to St. John Lutheran Church, Kendallville, IN, has returned the Call to serve as *Senior Pastor to Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Bowling Green, KY.*

VACANT CONGREGATIONS & MINISTRIES

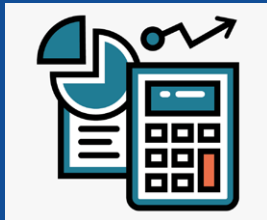
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Bowling Green, KY
– Senior Pastor

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Hermitage, TN – Senior Pastor ***Pending Call*

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 12/31/2024

Anticipated Amount
(100% of budget)\$1,639,545
Actual Receipts 1,682,132
Over (under) anticipated
amount..... \$42,587

Use of Mission Commitment Receipts (12 Months)

Allocated to Synod for
World Missions\$479,640
Allocated to Tanzania 25,000
Retained for District Mission/
Ministry Support
(70% of receipts)..... 1,177,492
Total Receipts \$1,682,132

Mission Commitment Receipts Prior Year Comparison (12 Months)

Actual Receipts as
of 12/31/2024..... \$1,682,132
Actual Receipts as
of 12/31/2023.....\$1,605,837
Over (under) prior
year receipts \$76,295

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

- March – Youth
- April – Volunteers
- May – Small Town & Rural Ministry

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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President

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Executive Director for Business & Finance

Michelle Fischer,
Executive Director for Education, Youth & Family

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