

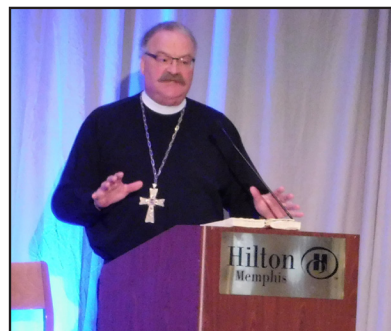
## President Harrison Surveys Synod Landscape

For convention-goers, a highlight of the sessions was the State-of-the-Synod report given by LCMS President Matthew C. Harrison. Citing Paul's invitation to Barnabas, Harrison described the role of pastors as that of "visitor," traveling here and there, overseeing their charges, just as Paul did, just as Jesus Himself during His ministry on earth. So Harrison, as visitor, posed the question "How's it going, Mid-South District?" We, in turn, ask "How's it going, President Harrison?"

To answer that question, Harrison spoke in depth about the accomplishments and challenges facing the Synod. Referring to a recent accounting report, Harrison noted that the Synod is in the best financial position it has seen in the last thirty years, due in large part to the generosity of donors, who have shown their trust in the fiduciary integrity of the Synod by giving undesignated funds, allowing the monies to be applied where needed most.

Challenges which are prevalent both locally and nationally include those presented by the proposed Equality Act, which Harrison labeled the "most un-Christian, anti-Christian measure ever passed in the House of Representatives." The passage of this act would pose a serious threat to the Concordia University system by denying the universities access to scholarship funds. Critical race theory also presents challenges by potentially curtailing suburban ministry to a diverse population in need of hearing the Gospel.

[HARRISON ADDRESS: continued on page 2](#)



## The LCC K-9 Comfort Dogs on Pandemic Duty

Lutheran Church Charities (LCC) K-9 Comfort Dog Ministry® has been sharing their love since 2008, employing the unique calming nature and skills of purebred Golden Retrievers in the increasingly famous and effective ministry that now comprises 130 dogs in 27 states.

Twelve years of Comfort Dog history have recorded the incomparable value of their gentle, compassionate presence at the darkest of times, when often a calming touch helps more than words, and opens doors for conversation about faith and Christ's mercy for all.



But as many have discovered during 2020, "the year of the pandemic," those who experience enforced isolation and loneliness are suffering as well. How can the Comfort Dogs reach out to those in need of a comforting touch when social distancing and plexiglass barriers make "touch" impossible?

The answer is another gift that has expanded their compassionate outreach far beyond 27 states—with "Virtual Visit" capabilities that continue to expand, even as personal interactive life returns to normal in the pandemic's wake.

### Comfort Dog Outreach Transcends Social Distance —

"During the past year," notes Tim Hetzner, LCC President/CEO, "people have been afraid, felt isolated, and wondering if this will ever end. Right away, we knew we had to do something since we were limited in being physically out with people. However, we know that when a door closes, God opens a bigger one! Launching the LCC K-9 Comfort Dog Ministry® Virtual Visits gave us the opportunity to stay in touch as well as provide support and love during these challenging times. When we are not physically able to be

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# GOOD TIMES at the President's Reception



## HARRISON ADDRESS: continued...

Harrison spoke positively of the strengthening of international relationships, saying "The Office of International Missions is cooking!" Other ministry areas making impact in our world include the Disaster Response relief and training efforts, and the Synod's acclaimed Life Ministry.

A Question and Answer session followed in which topics of concern included the financial strain on future pastors, closing of universities in the Concordia system, how to speak in love to those who are gay and lesbian, human trafficking, and the future of Lutheran schools in light of the scarcity of trained Lutheran teachers. Harrison and his team answered each question boldly, lovingly, and knowledgeably, with pastoral care.

The Mid-South District was one of a handful of districts within the LCMS that chose to keep to the triennium convention schedule in light of COVID19 concerns. This allowed President Harrison to spend extra time in Memphis, meeting and visiting with pastors and delegates, discovering first-hand "how it's going" in the Mid-South District.



## *Food & Fellowship* at the Pastors' Wives Luncheon

On Friday, Mrs. Pat Paavola, wife of Mid-South District President Dr. Roger Paavola, hosted a luncheon for the wives of pastors. This was the third Pastors' Wives Luncheon hosted by Mrs. Paavola at a District Convention. She has also coordinated annual retreats for the wives of pastors, providing unique opportunities for fellowship and encouragement for this special group of ladies.

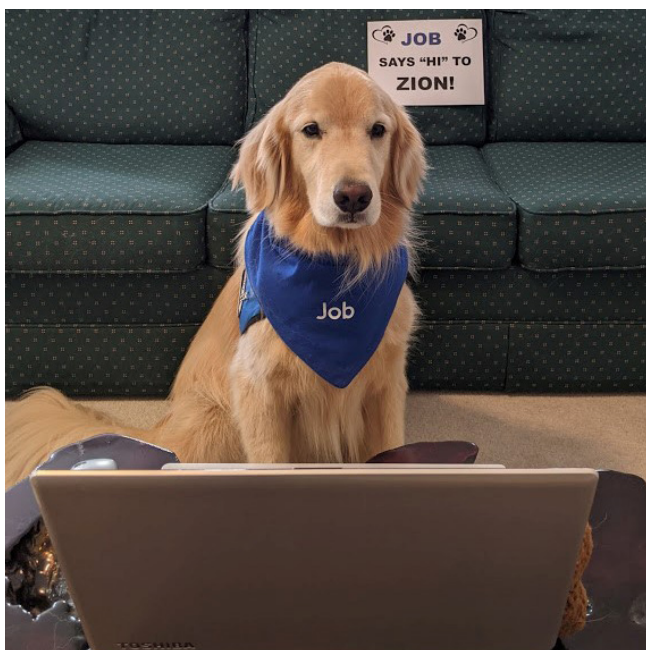


## COMFORT DOGS: continued...

present, our presence is still felt by sharing the hope and love that can be found in Jesus Christ!"

The LCC K-9 Comfort Dog Ministry Virtual Visits were launched on April 1, 2020, enabling connections and comfort across the United States, as opportunities for each ministry team to visit teachers, students, healthcare workers and other individuals were coordinated by the LCC K-9 Ministry team headquartered in Northbrook, Illinois.

So far, the LCC central office reports, Comfort Dog teams have provided pandemic stress relief through more than 400 virtual visits with people from 28 states, and the requests for such visits continue to arrive daily, as awareness spreads.



Job visited virtually with students at Zion-Alexandria, MN, in April, and joined with 20 other Comfort Dogs in similar visits during National Lutheran Schools Week in March.



In 2021, Comfort Dog ministry teams from across the U.S. joined together to connect with Lutheran and public school classrooms, largely via Zoom.

Even during a virtual visit, explains LCC's Director of Communications Debra Baran, the dog is "very present" with the handler, who can pet the dog as directed by the viewer; or the handler may direct the viewer to call the dog's name and see the dog's immediate reaction to their voice.

More than 70 heart-warming photos of virtual connections and shared love can be seen on the "K9s Staying Connected" gallery at <https://lccphotos.smugmug.com/2020-Photos/K9s-Staying-Connected/>, which illustrate the many other creative ways to connect that Comfort Dog teams developed, including window visits to locked-down nursing and assisted living facilities, sending "thinking of you" cards and photos, and posting videos and words of encouragement on Facebook.

## The Tennessee Bookends: Jewel and Job

The Mid-South District's two Comfort Dogs, Jewel and Job, serve from opposite ends of Tennessee: Jewel is based at Christ Our Savior, Loudon, and Job is based at Christ the King, Memphis.

Both Jewel and Job have an active social media presence that supported their outreach during the pandemic; each has close to 4,000 Facebook followers, while Job has additional followers on his Kare 9 page, where he connects with military personnel, veterans, and their families.

Each dog also has multiple handlers; in addition to Top Dog Genie Swan, Job is handled by 10 carefully trained humans who accompany him on four or more visits per week to assisted living, rehabilitation and hospice facilities during non-pandemic times, while Steve Schoenherr also shares handler responsibilities with others in their Christ Our Savior congregation.

Since Jewel's usual daily duties likewise involved visits to nursing homes, rehab and assisted living facilities, all of which were in lockdown during the pandemic period, Schoenherr notes that their schedule of visits was significantly curtailed, and initially limited to a presence during drive-through communion, to gladden the hearts of those who were able to wave to her friendly and familiar face. Later in the summer, when services resumed with masks, Jewel was on duty in the narthex, greeting congregants as they arrived, and school children were able to pet Jewel on their way back to a limited schedule of classes, as well.

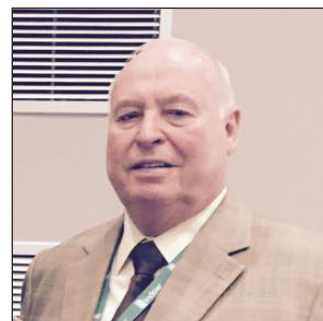
The importance of Jewel's regular pre-pandemic visits not only to patients, but to healthcare workers, became clear to Steve when he recently began taking her back to assisted living and rehab centers. Once the word spread that "Jewel's back!" the number of staff members who came running to welcome her brought tears to his eyes.

In addition to Job's Facebook and Instagram presence, he also participated in creative outreach and awareness activities during the pandemic: through Valentine gift bags to homebound members, Job Christmas cards to his supporters, and a Job calendar, as well. Job was featured on a lawn poster inviting community neighbors to join him for worship at CTK on Easter Sunday, and he even participated with other Comfort Dogs in a virtual 5-K Run for a special education class in Illinois, helping to raise funds to benefit

COMFORT DOGS: continued on page 4

# What's a Parliamentarian to Do?

An important position that the District would be remiss to not acknowledge is the role of our parliamentarian, who plays a vital part in helping our organization interpret and execute our bylaws and other governing documents. The parliamentarian advises the president, offices, committees, and members on matters of parliamentary procedure—an efficient and effective method for conducting constructive meetings. We are pleased to have Mr. Ron Stinson serving as our current parliamentarian. If you have questions or concerns about meeting procedures and order, talk to Ron and he will certainly be of aid.



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## COMFORT DOGS: continued...

the Special Olympics. (The Job calendar is an annual production; funds raised benefit the Job Comfort Dog ministry. Watch for it to go on sale in November!)

Swan pointed out that keeping this “very smart” dog occupied and engaged during the long period of relative isolation was a bit of a challenge since, like a child, Job needs daily activity even when there’s no work to do.

Initially Job was kept active and engaged by rotating him to different environments, as he spent time in the homes of his other handlers, benefiting from the change of house and scenery. The discipline of regular training also helped.

“Training is a delicate dance” explained Swan—one which reminds each of their place in the alpha (handler)-and-dog relationship. It strengthens the bond while stressing a respectful distance and polite behavior—which does not preclude Job running zoomies with his tennis ball when off duty!

Back at work again, with distancing and masking mandates largely lifted, Job is happily busy visiting a worldful of friends eager to greet him—at an American Legion Memorial Day function, assisted living and hospice facilities, and more.

On the job, these dogs “absorb” a lot, Swan notes—especially with grief-stricken and troubled people. Sometimes, however, there’s a happy surprise: when one of Job’s handlers received a heart transplant, Job was there to cheer his recovery with a special level of comfort and encouragement.

Schoenherr, too, stressed the importance of keeping Jewel active when her usual comfort visits weren’t possible. Her regular training includes mile-long walks with Steve twice a day—exercise and exposure that are essential to her health and well-being, as reflected in her glowing appearance as ‘Miss April’ in the LCC K-9 Comfort Dog Ministry 2018 calendar, Schoenherr jokes.

Now that the team is back in action again, he recalls some of the things he has experienced and observed as Jewel’s handler, and the extraordinary insights and instincts the dogs sometimes seem to possess. Handlers agree that the dogs often seem to have a sixth sense for recognizing who needs their comfort most—something LCC’s Hetzner has also acknowledged.

In “The Genius of Dogs,” researcher Brian Hare shares findings of others who confirm that, unlike any other animal, including the intelligent primates who are ostensibly our closest human relatives, it is dogs alone who respond with a unique understanding of our human perspectives and an ability to “see” through our eyes. In laboratory tests, when asked to bring the researcher a ball, dogs with a clear view of two identical tennis balls consistently chose to deliver the one which the researcher was able to see, and ignored the one which they recognized was blocked from the researcher’s view.

Researchers continue to discover that, gifted with the extension of senses we have lost or never attained, dogs are able to perceive and understand much more than we realized. It’s easy to believe that sometimes, perhaps, they’re also guided by a Voice we cannot hear.

Schoenherr notes that, in practice, it’s often the people who seem strongest and most self-contained who need and appreciate comfort—and sometimes it’s best to let the Lord lead to where the dog is most needed.

He reflects on the invitation for Jewel to sit in during a counselor’s sessions with grade school children following the Parkland High School shooting, where Jewel “just listened,” he said, while children were able to pet her and benefit from her calming, compassionate presence as they talked.

“That dog was an answer to my prayers,” the counselor later told Steve—and no doubt he was right.

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## Last DAILY DECLARER...

Read the final issue of the *Daily Declarer* at [mid-southlccms.org](http://mid-southlccms.org) (“Convention News” page). See more photos, stories and highlights from this year’s event!