



# MID-SOUTH LUTHERAN

## THE INCREDIBLE!

We're indebted to St. Luke the physician for a lesson that we don't often get to hear during the season of Pentecost. But don't be alarmed, the calendar hasn't left us behind. It isn't Advent. Christmas is several months away.



**Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola**  
District President

But the lectionary for Aug. 15 focuses on Mary as we celebrate her festival day.

St. Luke details the record of Elizabeth and Zechariah who, though advanced in age, are promised the birth of a son, John the Baptizer. Incredible!

This reminds us of the promise made to Abraham, that he and Sarah would have a son even though they are far beyond the time of child bearing. Luke's greatest contribution — this even more incredible announcement — is that of a physician who likely delivered the promise of our Savior into this world.

He pronounced scientific proof of the fulfillment of God's (almost unbelievable) prophecy ... "a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son."

Thanks to St. Luke, we can place these words in our creeds:

Conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

Skeptics may choke on those words. But what an impact that has on the next chapter of his Gospel:

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. — **Luke 2:11**

What happens if all this is true?! A world that doesn't look saved *is* saved!

A world reeling in sin and evil *is* freed. Every child's footsteps in the valley of the shadow of death is light and springy because we have no cause, no reason to fear because Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Mary is our Lord and our God.

Luke reflects on the time when Mary visited her cousin, Elizabeth, who was already six months pregnant. Zechariah wasn't saying much those days because he was muted by the angel of the Lord. This is called the Visitation — the visit of the angel Gabriel to Mary and Mary's subsequent visit to Elizabeth. Another event is called the Annunciation — our day of announcement when an angel appeared to Mary that she (a virgin) would bear a Son, and that His name would be Jesus, which means "He will save His people." He would be called the Son of the Most High. Incredible!

This mystery and miracle was confirmed by a physician, who was chosen by God to pen the accuracy of these accounts.



What would you think if you were in Mary's sandals that day? We'd be more like Zechariah than Mary. But her response is a statement of faith:

"Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." — **Luke 1:38**

But unravel her statement and we will discover three distinct miracles. First, in the Child of Mary, God and man are joined together to make two natures of Christ — God in the flesh!

The second miracle is that the mother of our Lord remained a virgin after she conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit!

And third — perhaps the most unbelievable of all — Mary actually believed the mystery was to be accomplished in her as the Lord said.

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## SERVANT

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

Martin Luther writes: “The virgin birth is a mere trifle for God; that God should become man is a greater miracle; but the most amazing of all is that this maiden should believe the announcement that she, rather than some other virgin, had been chosen to be the mother of God.”

But believe it she did, and she arose and went to report the message to her cousin. Each Gospel writer finds his own unique way to pen God’s words, fulfilling God’s purpose in giving us His Holy Scriptures. St. Luke (probably a Gentile) accentuates that Christ is born for all the world.

His emphasis on detail is meant to be from his eyewitness account to give us tangible proof of the facts we accept beforehand by faith. Luke lets us pin down any doubt in our minds.

Again, Luther writes, “This is the hardest point for us—not to believe He is a virgin’s Son and God Himself, but to believe that He is our Savior, as well.”

Luther’s point is that despite the hardships and worries we pile on ourselves or are piled on us, we can believe that Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of Mary, came to be our brother and Savior and Lord. We may as well admit there is a thread of doubt — greater men of faith than any of us struggled with it too. In his old age, Abraham doubted and took things into his own hands when he was promised a son. Elijah doubted God’s timing and took things in his own hands.

Zechariah, a high priest, doubted the angel’s message announcing the birth of his own son, John, a forerunner of the Christ. Even John the Baptizer, seeing his cousin surrounded by a band of hopeless misfits, sent word to Jesus asking, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” (Luke 7:19).

Yes, Mary’s conception is a miracle at work. She said, “Let it be to me



according to Your Word.” So how about us? “Let it be according to Your Word?” Indeed, these are incredible words.

Jesus said, “Go, my son, your sins are forgiven,” and, at another time, “O woman, great is your faith. Be it done to you as you desire.” What He brings and offers to each one of us are not facts we can empirically point to, but facts of faith.

Did Jesus look like the Savior? Did Jesus look like the conquering warrior who snuffed out sin, punishment and death when He Himself was a miserable, bloodied figure on the cross?

Can the King of kings actually wear a crown of thorns and be enthroned on a bloody cross? Would it be better if it was different in some way, so it might be a little more believable?

How long would it be if we were to live in the joy of a promise fulfilled if it happened our way, rather than the way God brought His plan of salvation to mankind?

How long would the thrills of Christmas or the elation of Easter last if God wasn’t in control and we still needed to receive it by faith?

Listen again to the words from Luke’s Gospel: “Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

That’s the blessing that is conjoined with our faith ... the joy that springs from faith ... the joy that rises to belief to respond, to know: “For God’s own Child, in mercy mild, joins thee to Him, how greatly God must love thee!” (*Lutheran Service Book* #372).

In the womb of Elizabeth, her baby leaped for joy at the announcement of the coming of the Christ. Elizabeth jumped up and proclaimed, “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the Fruit of your womb.”

Joy. Faith. Hope. Blessing. May that joy, faith and blessing be for us also.

The eyewitness accounts of men and women — not of the improbable, but the impossible performed by God — have wound their threads of truth even through this tangled up, disturbed and confusing world. Believe it by faith so that we may all live in the joy of God’s blessings that are incredible, beyond our greatest expectation.

## Update your congregation’s profile



It is time again to review and update your congregation’s information for *The Lutheran Annual*. Much of this information is also published on the LCMS Locator found at [locator.lcms.org](http://locator.lcms.org).

Go to [lc.lcms.org](http://lc.lcms.org) and use the same login information used earlier this year to submit your congregation’s year-end statistics and lay leaders. Once there, select “Congregation Profile” from the navigation panel to view and update your congregation’s information.

For more information, or to receive a paper version of the form, email [rosters.stats@lcms.org](mailto:rosters.stats@lcms.org) or contact the LCMS Church Information Center at 888-843-5267. The deadline for submitting your 2020 Congregation Profile updates for publication in the 2021 *Lutheran Annual* is Sept. 1.

You may, however, log in and make changes any time throughout the year.

# ADF Church Alliance provides legal help

Alliance for Defending Freedom (ADF) Church Alliance ([adfchurchalliance.org](http://adfchurchalliance.org)) is a membership program that provides legal help so you can freely preach and operate your church in accordance with Christian principles.

Benefits of membership include:

- ▶ **Religious liberty document review**  
ADF reviews your church's documents to minimize threats to your religious freedom.
- ▶ **Direct access to attorneys**  
Consult ADF attorneys with religious liberty questions.
- ▶ **Pro bono legal representation**  
ADF can represent your church in

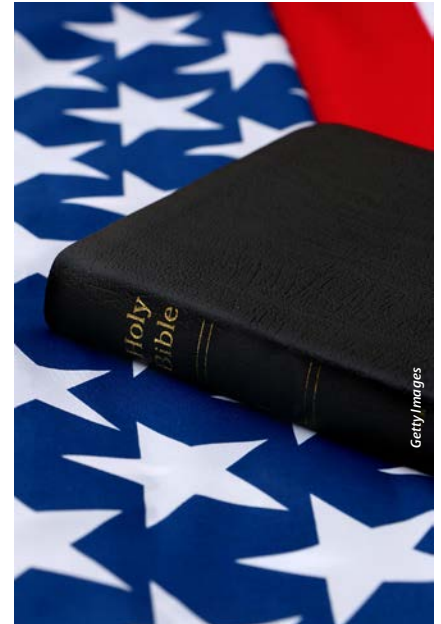
cases involving its religious freedom.

▶ **Legal resources**

Access resources to help you and your congregation navigate religious liberty issues.

Because of the Mid-South District's existing partnership with ADF, you will receive a 20-percent discount on your membership (use promo code *MidSouthLCMS* when you apply).

For the ADF/Mid-South District partnership page, visit [thelc.ms/adf-lcms-mid-south](http://thelc.ms/adf-lcms-mid-south). For more information, contact Sherri Huston of ADF at [shuston@adflegal.org](mailto:shuston@adflegal.org) or 480-206-9164.



# FPU offers rebates!

The Mid-South District is pleased to continue in partnership with our congregations to bring Financial Peace University (FPU) to their members and guests through a special rebate program.

For those congregations that offer FPU between now and the end of 2020, the Mid-South District will offer a rebate of the \$93 it costs for individuals to complete the nine-week program.

The rebate program is on a first come, first served basis until budgeted funds have been exhausted.



All materials must be purchased through the Mid-South District prior to the start of any classes.

Please contact Angela Fowler at [afowler@mid-southlcms.com](mailto:afowler@mid-southlcms.com) if your ministry is interested in hosting this class for your congregation.



## MID-SOUTH DISTRICT 2020 FALL PASTORS CONFERENCE

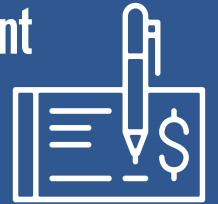
Oct. 19-21 • Hilton Hotel, Memphis

Register online now!

[mid-southlcms.org/2020-fall-pastors-conference](http://mid-southlcms.org/2020-fall-pastors-conference)

## Congregation mission commitment receipts

as of May 31, 2020 (5 months)



Anticipated amount (42% of budget) .....	\$641,238
Actual receipts .....	\$596,435
Over (under) anticipated amount .....	(\$44,803)

### Use of mission commitment receipts

Allocated to Synod for world missions .....	\$168,514
Allocated to Tanzania .....	\$10,417
Retained for district ministry/mission support (70% of receipts) .....	\$417,505
Total receipts .....	\$596,435

### Mission commitment receipts comparison

Actual receipts as of May 31, 2020 .....	\$596,435
Actual receipts as of May 31, 2019 .....	\$635,023
Over (under) prior year receipts .....	(\$38,588)



## Thank you teachers

Teacher Appreciation Week in May was a well-deserved acknowledgement of the many things our teachers had accomplished during the year.



I personally would like to thank all the teachers in the district for the extraordinary work that has been done during this unprecedented time. I show my bias when I say that teachers are among the most passionate and dedicated workforces of any occupation.

Teachers' commitment to their students is unequalled. It's hard to imagine how stressful it must have been to begin a totally new way of teaching in such a short period of time after the stay-at-home orders were given.

And now that parents are back to work and the end of the school year has passed, it will be an interesting summer trying to figure out how the fall semester will begin. Will the teachers be able to teach in a face-to-face environment, or will online learning continue?

Thanks to all the teachers for all you are doing to keep the lines of communication open with parents and students and for continuing to share the love of the Lord with those whom the Lord has sent to you to serve.

Be that good servant and continue to help those children grow spiritually and mentally.

### In His Service

**Allen Piepenbrink**

Mid-South District Education Executive



## Blessings in Knoxville

Rev. Edward Maanum was installed as pastor of First Lutheran Church, Knoxville, on May 31. The congregation met in the sanctuary, complying with safety measures to protect its members, and enjoyed a picnic-style reception in the school parking lot following the service. Clergy present at the installation included, from left (first row) Revs. Dr. Roger Paavola (Mid-South District president), Maanum, Larry Rockemann (First vacancy pastor), John Schultz (First pastor, 1982-98); (second row) Robert Portier (circuit visitor), Lou Trebus, Phil Bohlken, David Graves; (third row) Derek Roberts, Paul Becker, Paul Muench and Adam Woldt.



Photo/Mike Elling

## Welcome Pastor Leigeber!

Rev. Paul Leigeber, who accepted the call to serve as pastor of the dual parish of Faith, Union City, Tenn., and Trinity, Dyersburg, Tenn., met with Faith council members on June 3. Paul and his wife, Kara, have moved from Lillian, Ala. (near Mobile), to the Faith location in their travel trailer. They anticipate purchasing property for a permanent residence in Obion County, Tenn.

Faith began their Sunday services at the new time of 8:30 a.m. on June 7.

The Faith council welcomed Pastor Leigeber at its June meeting. From left, Kimberly Elliott, David Miesner, Malcolm Koch, Ted Blackwell, Leigeber, Bobby Richardson and Jim Holford.

# Getting to know you

## Meet the *new* LWML district president

By **Candy Habich**

President, Mid-South District LWML

**HI THERE!** I'm the newly elected president of the Mid-South District LWML. While many of you reading this may already be involved in LWML, maybe some of you are still wondering what it's all about. I thought I'd share the story of how I became involved in the LWML and how it has been hugely beneficial to me.

As a teenager, I knew my mom "did stuff" with the ladies at church, like making cancer bandages. That was my first inkling that the ladies did important things to serve others. After graduating from college, I lived a couple of hours from home so I sought out the nearest LCMS church. The LWML there totally adopted me. I was very shy and insecure in those days. (OK, no laughing from those of you who know me now.)

So these ladies were truly a Godsend. I enjoyed participating in service projects and fellowship with them. And, of course, since I was the new kid in town, off they sent me to the Northern Illinois District LWML convention! Wow, what an eye-opener! All those ladies doing so many things to serve our Lord and Savior, and "with gladness!" as the LWML motto states.

Fast forward to a move to Dallas, marriage and a new church. The first Sunday I attended church there, I felt like people were pulling on my arms, begging me to join this or that group. By the next Sunday I was singing in the choir — and I'd *never* done that before!

Of course the LWML was there to adopt me once again — this time as a newlywed and maybe not quite as shy. I will never forget a Christian Life Workshop when I had a part in a skit called "The Chrysalis and the Cocoon." Do any of you remember that one?

They wrapped me in plastic wrap! Yep, I was the butterfly in its chrysalis, waiting to come out all transformed and beautiful.

Next stop, a move to East Tennessee, where I've lived for 34 years now. No worries choosing an LCMS church — there aren't so many in our neck of the woods. And just to be sure I found it, my pastor in Texas called the pastor here and told him to be on the lookout!

Once again the LWML ladies were ready and waiting. This is where my real "growth spurt" took place. Many LWML mentors asked me to do small tasks such as leading a devotion at a meeting, then leading a portion of a Bible study at a retreat and so on.

Before I knew it, I was writing materials for retreats and accepting leadership roles at the zone and district levels. Not only was my faith growing, but my



confidence and communication skills were too. What I was learning through the LWML was also improving my professional career. I was writing and presenting papers at conferences using my newfound skills.

So here I am today, the Mid-South District LWML president — who would have ever guessed that from the painfully shy young woman who was once wrapped in plastic?

I can see God's hand in every single step of that progression and I am incredibly thankful for that. And I am especially thankful for the countless LWML members who He used to prod and encourage me.

I hope and pray that if you are not involved in the LWML, you will seek to learn a little bit more about it. You never know where that might lead you!

**Love and blessings,  
President Candy**

## School moms need prayer

By **Frances Bacic**

Media Marketing, LWML Mid-South District



Show me Your ways, LORD, teach me Your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for You are God, my Savior, and my hope is in You all day long.

— Ps. 25:4-5 NIV

Doesn't seem that it's been a year since I last wrote to you about school starting. Remember that feeling of a new

school year? New pencils, new folders, glue, shoes, backpack — and every other item that was deemed necessary to be in that new grade.

For elementary school, it was the fun erasers, stickers and folders. Don't forget your jump ropes and marbles for recess each day! In middle school, gym clothes and musical instruments were added to our backpacks. For high school, we added scientific calculators and, soon enough, car keys were there too. New classmates, teachers and subjects at the start of a brand-

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# CHOOSE LIFE!

The following is from a sermon given by Rev.

Charles Neugebauer, senior pastor of Christ the King, Memphis, and Mid-South District first vice-president, Region 3



Today is a day to talk about the theology of choices. It's a tough subject, so let's all of us, right now, pause and take a deep breath and hold it in. Ready — now! Now let it out. Great.

You just had a choice to either do what I asked you or not do it. But you have no choice for the rest of this message in terms of your continuing to breathe. Either you will breathe involuntarily as God created you to do, or you will die. Now, another direction for you: Everyone please stop your heart from beating for a minute. Ready — now!

Oops, you can't choose to do that, can you? You have no choice in terms of your heart beating. It either beats by God's grace on its own or you die. No choice in the matter.

You will now choose to either carefully listen to the rest of this message or you will choose to daydream and think about other things. That is your right to choose. You cannot choose, however, what everyone else in this sanctuary is doing. If someone's cell phone rings because they chose not to turn it off, or someone chooses to talk right now, or a precious baby gets restless in the pew behind you, you will hear those things and be distracted whether you choose to or not. You have lost your right to choose.

God has given us free will in small choices we make, but we do not have free will in terms of the moral, ethical and spiritual decisions life forces upon us. He has given us certain things we can choose,

and other things that we have no right or ability to make a choice about. The Old Testament lesson for this special Sunday morning is Deut. 30:19-20 (NIV), when God clearly commands us to make a choice according to His will:

This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land.

We have the freedom today to make more choices in various aspects of our lives than ever before. We are inundated with choices that can stress us out.

When I was conceived, my mother was very young and not ready to be a mom. She had real pressure to choose what others thought proper and best, even way back then. If she had chosen to impose the wrong one of her two choices upon me, I would have had to deal with the consequences of her choice in a very big way, whether I had chosen to or not. I had no choice. Her choosing would have caused me and generations after me to have lost our right to choose. I obviously would not be your pastor and the thought of that makes me very sad.

Think of all the generations, relationships, family trees our choices affect. I have four children and nine grandchildren who are all Lutheran Christians making a difference in God's kingdom. They might not have been here. How many others are in the same circumstance? One right to choose under pressure long ago would have ruined generations of others' right to choose and to know and share with others their Savior Jesus.

This is where theologically most people are mistaken about choices we make. When it comes to moral, ethical, spiritual choices you make, you do not — I



LCMS/Erin M. Lunsford

repeat, you do *not* — have free will in making those choices. It may feel like you do, but every one of your moral, ethical and spiritual decisions are in bondage either to God or Satan. In other words, every single choice you make according to your conscience is motivated or bound either to your sinful nature or to your new nature in Christ.

When by your own authority you choose something over against God's authority in His Word — that is not a free choice you have made. It is motivated and instituted by your natural self, which is corrupted by sin. When you choose to follow God's commands — that choice is motivated and instituted by the Holy Spirit given to you at your baptism. When your choices conform to and are in agreement with God's will, you and those around you are blessed. When your choices are not, the consequences affect not just you, but others around you. Your right to choose does not always bring freedom; sometimes it brings chaos.

Marriage, family, sexuality, education, politics, finances, worship — under God's leading, great blessings. Outside of His will, the consequences can clearly be seen in the world so often choosing what God would not choose for us. Over and over and over again — choices are made according to our sinful nature

Continued on next page

when we're taught over and over again that God has a better way.

Living freely by faith in Christ, we have the power, the freedom and the right to choose to love others that Jesus honored with the term "the least of these." Those given to us for us to care and even suffer for as an act of worship and praise to God: the handicapped, special-needs children and adults, the nursing home elderly, preborn children, the poor, the homeless, the victims of injustice, refugees, and so forth. What God does not give us is the right to choose what life is worth keeping and what life is not worth keeping. His Word clearly says:

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. — **1 Cor. 6:19-20**

A woman's body is not her own. A man's body is not his own. It is God's, who made you and redeemed you as His own.

Your right to choose stops when that right infringes on another's right to choose. Our laws say that we have the right to drink, we have the right to drive, but we don't have the right to drink *and* drive because that infringes on the rights of others: I could hurt somebody.

Our laws say that a woman has the right to choose what they want to with their own bodies, which I agree with 100 percent — until it involves another's body: It could hurt somebody.

Genetic science has confirmed that pre-

born babies have their own DNA distinct from their mother. We now have technology that clearly reveals ultrasound images of formed babies. Not just theologically, but scientifically, medically. We know that these babies are not the woman's body; they are their own body with their own soul protected or in danger within their mother's body. God made them and each one of you uniquely His.

God's love compels and commands us to choose life in every decision we make. Death is never God's choice. Even in war or when a policeman has to use his weapon, death is a horrible, necessary choice between the lesser of two evils, two sins. Death is never God's chosen answer for anything or anyone. The wages of sin is death. Death is Christ's last enemy.

"For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God."  
— **Ezek. 18:32**

God's love redeemed us from our own death by our Savior's choice to go to the cross and to suffer death as our substitute. In fact, Holy Scripture makes it clear: We did not and could not choose to know and love God. He chose by his grace to know and love you. Hear Jesus in John 15:

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last." — **John 15:16 NIV**

There may have been a time in your life when you thought you had no choice in terms of having an abortion, and

perhaps you still remember that hard and terrible choice you felt you had to make in a way that makes this message hurt more than heal. Don't let it.

Listen carefully to me now. Your sins, all of them, whatever they were, whatever they are — including this one — have been completely paid for in the blood of Christ, taken away from you, the Bible says, as far as the east is from the west. He now owns them, paid for them in full and you can't have them back!

God chose to forgive you for that sin and all sins in the wonder and power of His miraculous will. I promise you by God's Word and authority: Your sins are forgiven. It is to His glory and fills Him with joy to forgive and restore you completely into His grace. Forgiven and free, you now have peace with your Savior in all circumstances. God loves you. It was His great choice to do so. No take-backs.

So let's all take a deep breath again, and give thanks for every breath of life God grants to all of us, His children. Jesus came to give us life, life abundantly. Jesus calls Himself the bread of life. In Him is life, and that life is the light of men. He is the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Him shall not perish, but will have everlasting life. So by His Spirit and with joy, do what God always has done: Choose life! Amen.

Pastor Neugebauer's full sermon, titled "Choices," can be found at [thelc.ms/ctk-lutheran-sermon-choices](http://thelc.ms/ctk-lutheran-sermon-choices).

## MOMS

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5)

new year were always a cause for excitement mixed with jitters.

This year we need to remember to start with prayer, prayer and more prayer. Prayer for the students, teachers and parents. Kids will be coming back after six months out of the classroom with their peers and teachers. All will be nervous. Can we keep each other safe from harm? Safe from the dreaded virus that forced us

all home for so long. But as of now, praise God that teaching will be live in the classroom with my kiddos.

But you know what? God has a plan and our hope is in Him. We may not know all the answers and will still continue to monitor and adjust. But we will continue to work toward His goal for our lives and the lives of those we touch in our daily lives.

LWML or LLL member, clerk, airplane pilot, teacher, pastor — our title doesn't matter. Our job is to listen to God's guidance on our path.



LCMS/Erin M. Lunsford



# Congregation ready to build

On the Day of Pentecost, May 31, Chapel of the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Sharps Chapel, Tenn., celebrated the fifth anniversary of its first worship service by officially breaking ground for its first church building, which will be located at 681 Sharps Chapel Road.

“Normally a groundbreaking occurs before construction begins,” Rev. Paul Kritsch said. “However, these last several months have been anything but typical.”

The day began with the congregation gathering inside what will be the lower level of their building. Officers and members took turns turning over shovels full of dirt “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” From there they proceeded to the Norris Shores Pavilion for a worship service



Rev. Paul Kritsch and the congregation of Good Shepherd, Sharps Chapel, stood ready on May 31, just before breaking ground for their new building.

followed by a church picnic, all while observing safe distancing practices.

The congregation’s members are all at or near retirement age. Their vision is to provide a permanent place for worship and community service for themselves and for those who will follow.

The church’s motto is from Dietrich Bonhoeffer: “Christ leads the way, stay close to Him.”

While waiting for the building to be completed, hopefully late this fall, the congregation continues to hold Sunday worship services at 10:30 a.m. on Zoom.

# Seamstresses become master mask-makers

Squares with Prayers, the sewing group at Friends in Christ Lutheran Church, Bryant, Ark., came together last year to make quilts and quilted lap blankets and start the Kids’ Closet ministry. But when the pandemic crisis rocked the world, they turned their skills to meeting the need for protective masks.

The group meets every Friday and begins with a devotion before sewing. The meetings were suspended at the outset of the pandemic, but recently resumed when they began making masks. The masks will be used for worship services when they resume, and also donated to those in need.

The sewing ministry will continue, and the members will return to making quilts when the pandemic subsides.



From left, Annette Queck, Kay Fletcher, and Virginia Rupe are engaged in making masks. The group included Peggy Hill, Barbara Hamm, Susan Clausing and Sheril Cooper.

## Deadline for the October issue is Aug. 15

Digital files, sent via e-mail, are preferred. Our submission deadline is the 15th of each month, two months before publication. Send email submissions to [LW@mid-southlcms.com](mailto:LW@mid-southlcms.com) or send by postal mail to:

Judy Otto  
150 N. Maury St.  
Holly Springs, MS 38635