



/ AUGUST 2025

MID-SOUTH LUTHERAN

Remembering St. Bartholomew

The Feast Day of St. Bartholomew is Aug. 24. We know Bartholomew also as Nathanael, which in Hebrew means “One given by God.” Bartholomew likely comes from combining the Hebrew word *Bar* (“son”) with the Greek *Ptolemy* (“furrow”). So, Bar-Ptolemy might mean “son of a furrow” or “a farmer’s son” since a furrow is plowed soil. He is the patron saint of farmers, and of the Armenian Orthodox Church.



Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola
District President

What would Bartholomew be doing way out there in Armenia? He’s only mentioned in a few places in Scripture. The synoptic Gospels — Matthew, Mark and Luke — call him Bartholomew, but in John’s Gospel he’s given his proper name, Nathanael. Jesus chose him as one of the twelve. He appeared with the others at Christ’s Ascension. But he’s mentioned in John’s Gospel as a bit of a skeptic.

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” **JOHN 1:45-46**

So Nathanael got an answer: If anyone doubts, just come to look upon the face of Jesus and see that indeed something good did come from Nazareth. It’s Jesus



A sculpture of a flayed St. Bartholomew by Marco d’Agrate (c. 1504 to 1574) is in the Cathedral of Milan, Italy.

Getty Images

Christ, God’s Son, who came to be our Lord and Savior.

John’s Gospel continues:

Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael said to Him, “How do You know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” Nathanael answered Him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” And He said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” **JOHN 1:47-51**

At Christ’s Ascension, Bartholomew indeed saw and heard the angels as Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father to prepare a place for God’s elect.

Eusebius, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, writes about Bartholomew going from Jerusalem on the day after Pentecost to India, carrying Matthew’s Gospel with him. On the way, he evangelized in Ethiopia, Mesopotamia, Parthia and Lycaonia. On his return to Jerusalem, he traveled through Armenia, a tiny land-locked country near Turkey. There he met his fellow apostle Jude. They began to preach and teach the Gospel to the Armenians.

Polymius, the king of Armenia, was so moved by the Gospel that he converted

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MESSAGE

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to Christianity. However, his brother, Astyages, was jealous of the king's attention and worship of Christ, the King of kings. So Astyages ordered Bartholomew to be executed to prove to King Polymius that Jesus couldn't save Bartholomew. Astyages had Bartholomew flayed — literally skinned alive — but he didn't die!

So Astyages ordered him to be beheaded. This is how Bartholomew became one of Jesus' 11 martyred disciples.

But King Polymius remained a loyal Christian. He led all of Armenia to become Christian. To this day, that tiny nation, surrounded by the former Soviet Union and Turkey, has a population that is more than 95% Christian.

We make such a big deal about St. Peter's confession in Matthew's Gospel that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. But in Bartholomew's confession to Christ — "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel" — we learn how God can use small, seemingly insignificant events in a person's life to open their spiritual eyes.

Bartholomew didn't do anything that moved him toward Jesus. Jesus called him. Jesus told him who He was, where He was, and what kind of person He was to become. The famous fig tree was so far removed from his meeting with Jesus that Bartholomew was convinced that he was in the presence of a great divine Man: Jesus.

That's profound proof that God does the calling. God discovers who we are, where we are, and what kind of person we are to be. When God acts, we're allowed to respond. A person can either respond with skepticism, like Bartholomew, or realize that Jesus is for real. God calls most of us in our Baptisms. He calls us by His grace and mercy to be joined in His eternal promise. He comes to us and acts. He establishes His relationship with us and preserves that relationship even when skepticism, selfish doubt, or fear become our gods.

Philip didn't let God's calling fall into immediate disuse. He called Bartholomew, saying, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote: Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Of course, Bartholomew scoffed at Philip's words — an ordinary man telling him that Jesus, the Christ, was found. Bartholomew wasn't convinced by Philip because he was some kind of a tire kicker — you know, the guy that kicks tires when he's looking to buy a car.

Is it real? We've seen other tire-kickers. They refuse to believe us when we tell them about Jesus. They don't want to believe what He's done for us redeemed sinners. Those tire-kickers go from place to place and church to church, kicking around rusted-out theology and distorted worship styles of one place or another. They see and hear, but either get excited about what they experience, or they go to another place to kick more tires. They're not inclined "to buy" a deal that doesn't fit inside their tiny little idea of what kind of church suits them best.

The theology or confessions of the church make little difference to tire-kickers. They only want what gives them a thrill and complies with their own self-centered ideas of what a god should be and do. But notice, as skeptical as Bartholomew was about what Philip had to say about the Messiah, it only took Jesus connecting with Bartholomew that made the difference.



Divine and honest discovery of the real truth embodied in Christ Jesus leads to action: Jesus acting, us responding. When we encounter Jesus for real, we're moved to action, to turn one way or another. One direction is an advancement into a life of faith in Christ Jesus; the other an outright rejection, like saying "What good could ever come out of Nazareth?"

The Spirit of God either grabs hold of us in Jesus as Lord and Savior, or one continues to cling precariously to their own thinking, making one's human reason as their god.

Have you ever watched acrobats at a circus? They are on their swings, high above the crowd, and they amaze with their precision and timing. What does it take for one person to let go of the trapeze bar and hang in midair, to be caught by another man on his trapeze?

What's the source of that kind of trust? What brings us to let go of our own reasoning and grab onto the mighty hand God extends to us? His gracious, inviting hand turns us away from being tire-kickers looking for one thrill after another. His gracious hand turns us from condemned sinners to His chosen saints, redeemed by Christ. The pierced hand of God brings His Means of Grace and forgiveness lest we fall.

His grace through faith allows us the great privilege of being His witnesses to a hostile and dying world. He calls us and grants us a full and rich relationship with Him. Despite the avenging hordes of evil who would delight in our fall, His hand of grace and mercy never fails. We learn from Bartholomew, realizing the wonderful gift of God's grace and life that He gives us for the sake of Jesus Christ.

Our earthly journey is the reality of a sanctified life in Christ on this sin-filled globe. God offers life in Jesus Christ to overcome the fiery darts Satan throws in our direction. May God lead and guide us to receive His call and share His message of grace, forgiveness and love — even with those Bartholomewian skeptics whom God placed to stumble across our path.

Lutherans Engage the World

QUIET and HUMBLE SERVICE



LCMS/Erik M. Lunsford

All around the world, there are Lutheran church workers and laypeople who are serving quietly and humbly. They reach out to people who have just moved to a new place. They care for families in turmoil. They support fellow workers going through a crisis.

The Summer 2025 issue of *Lutherans Engage the World* includes several of these stories. You'll read about two alliance missionaries — pastors who come from LCMS partner churches and serve with the LCMS Office of International Mission — who are bolstering the capacity of the Lutheran church in Spain. You'll learn about a longstanding program of LCMS Youth Ministry

that encourages young people to grow in leadership and faith. And you'll meet missionary communications specialist Jana Inglehart, who serves behind the scenes in the Synod's Latin America and the Caribbean region. This issue also includes a look at the oldest extant Lutheran congregation in the Americas: 360-year-old Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. Matthew in New York City, which has welcomed immigrants throughout the centuries.

Where the devil seeks to isolate, God uses the loving service of His people to bring comfort and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Thank you for reading the issue and for your own acts of service, whatever they may be.

◀ The Rev. Peter A.D. Deebrach, pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. Matthew, New York City, smiles while speaking to the congregation during Divine Service. The oldest congregation in the LCMS, and the oldest extant Lutheran congregation in the Americas, St. Matthew celebrated its 360th anniversary last December. The congregation is featured in the Summer 2025 issue of *Lutherans Engage the World*.



The issue began arriving in mailboxes in late June. Read it online at engage.lcms.org.

ADF offering discount

Every Gospel-centered church and ministry is uniquely called to fulfill a specific mission. But in a secular culture opposed to biblical truths, these missions — integral to the body of Christ — are facing new and complex challenges.

The Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) Church and Ministry Alliance provides legal counsel and resources to ensure that churches and ministries are free to operate, teach and serve consistent with God's call. Details about the ADF Church and Ministry Alliance are available at adfchurchalliance.org/pricing-and-benefits.

As LCMS ministries, Mid-South District congregations and schools receive a

20% discount on ADF's services and resources. If a congregation and its school ministry both join, the congregation's discount jumps to 50%.

To learn more, contact Gena McFarland at ADF — gmcfarland@adflegal.org.



Getty Images

Congregation mission commitment receipts

as of May 31, 2025 (5 months)



Anticipated amount (42% of budget)\$678,623
Actual receipts\$656,584
Over (under) anticipated amount..... (\$22,039)

Use of mission commitment receipts

Allocated to Synod for world missions ..\$186,559
Allocated to Tanzania\$10,417
Retained for district ministry/mission support (70% of receipts)\$459,609
Total receipts \$656,584

Mission commitment receipts comparison

Actual receipts as of May 31, 2025 \$656,584
Actual receipts as of May 31, 2024 \$512,621
Over (under) prior year receipts\$143,963

DISTRICT NEWS

Rev. Benjamin Heinz was ordained at his home congregation, Trinity, Lowell, Ind., on June 7. A recent graduate of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Pastor Heinz was called to serve as pastor of Athens Lutheran Church, Athens, Tenn. His father, Rev. Rich Heinz, serves as Trinity pastor. Rev. Dr. D. Richard Stuckwisch, Indiana District president, officiated the Rite of Ordination.

Pictured are, from left (bottom row) Revs Ian Heinze, Rich Heinz, Benjamin Heinz, Dr. D. Richard Stuckwisch, Julian LaMie; (top row) Patrick Bayens, Ronald Rock, Lothar Thelke and Chris Truelsen.



Perform at, or attend, Music on the Mountain

Another summer camp season is complete at Camp Trinity, the Lutheran Camp on Petit Jean Mountain. Staff are now gearing up for fall, which includes family reunions, retreats and the Outdoor Classroom for homeschool families all being on the camp calendar.

Staff are also preparing for the eighth annual **Music on the Mountain**, to be held on Sept. 27.

A stage will be set up in front of the historic Trinity Chapel, and concert-goers gather in lawn chairs, bleachers, benches, and blankets on the chapel lawn. Musicians, mostly from LCMS congregations in Arkansas, perform all day and in a variety of genres: Gospel, folk, bluegrass, pop oldies, country, blues, and contemporary Christian.

Admission is free, but Music on the Mountain is a fundraiser for Camp Trinity. The event includes concessions all day, barbecue dinners on sale while they last, outdoor games for the whole family, and a silent auction.

Musicians interested in performing are invited to text or call Aaron Davis, camp director, at 501-652-6304.



Musicians young and old alike perform at Music on the Mountain.

CONVENTION RECAP



The Mid-South District's Board of Directors, which includes six newly elected members, was installed at the conclusion of the district convention on June 14. The 2025-2028 board includes, from left, Rev. Phillip Young, Heidi Davidson, John Hofman, Karilyn Brown, Tim Hanusa, Jack Ficken, Jeff Pittman, Aaron Jackson, David Topp, Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola, Rev. Larry Peters, Rev. Joshua Willadsen, Rev. Kevin Conger and Rev. David Graves. The new board will have their first full meeting at the district office in November.

Delegates to the 22nd Regular Convention of the Mid-South District, held June 12–14 in Memphis, chose three mission and ministry emphases for consideration at the next LCMS national convention — to be held July 18–26, 2026, in Phoenix — for the 2026–2029 triennium:

1. To encourage young families and encourage the health of marriage and the vitality of the devotional life in the home.
2. Work to resolve human trafficking and raise awareness to address the challenges of a world that does not respect the value God has given to male and female.
3. Formation and spiritual strengthening of elders and lay leaders in the congregation.

Over 160 voting delegates representing 88 congregations attended the district convention and reviewed more than 20 resolutions.

Visit mid-southlcms.org/convention-2 for the complete text of the adopted and declined resolutions.



Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola, Mid-South District president, will rely on the counsel of the four regional vice-presidents for the next triennium. From left, Revs. Kevin Conger (second vice-president), Dr. Roger Paavola, Rev. Joshua Willadsen (first vice-president), Phillip Young (third vice-president) and David Graves (fourth vice-president). Pastors Young and Graves are serving their first terms.

DISTRICT NEWS

LCMS offers DISASTER RESPONSE TRAINING

LCMS Disaster Response will hold the 2025 Disaster Response and Training Conference Sept. 17-19 in St. Louis.

Meeting under the theme “Serving the Suffering: The Church’s Role in Recovery,” attendees will learn how the church can respond in crisis situations with the physical and spiritual care that is so desperately needed by those affected. Attendees will also hear practical advice and guidance from pastors, disaster response coordinators and others who have responded to significant disasters.

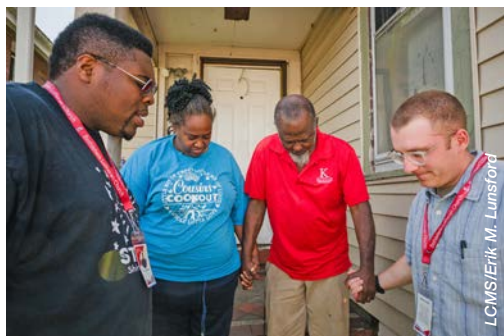
Registration, which includes five meals, is \$75 per person. To register and for more information, visit calendar.lcms.org and

scroll down to the event, or scan the QR code.



LEFT and BELOW RIGHT: At Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, LERT volunteers work to remove trees that fell during a tornado that swept through St. Louis on May 16.

BELOW LEFT: In North St. Louis, from left, the Rev. Dr. Gerard Bolling, senior pastor of Bethlehem, St. Louis, prays with members Kala and Tracey Webb and the Rev. Chris Knepper, Bethlehem associate pastor.



Henkel Conference is Aug. 21–22

The fourth annual Henkel Conference will be held Aug. 21-22 at Ascension Lutheran Church, Madison, Tenn.

The conference, devoted to Christian theology and cultural engagement, aims to provide a forum of renowned 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. Clergy and laity are invited to attend, and to bring friends, family and congregation members.

Speakers include:

- **Andrew Walker**, associate professor of Christian Ethics and Public Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville; fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, and managing editor of *WORLD Opinions*.
- **Dr. Peter McCullough, MD**, internist, cardiologist, and epidemiologist who manages infectious diseases as well as complications of COVID-19 vaccines.

- **Chad O. Jackson**, who appears in the *Uncle Tom* films and contributes to podcasts, radio shows and news programs, making the case for Christian ethics, family values, independence and intentional citizenship.
- **Joy Pullmann**, executive editor of *The Federalist* and an 18-year education and politics reporter
- **Rev. Scott Stiegemeier**, associate professor of Theology and Bioethics at Concordia University Irvine, Calif.
- **Rev. Thomas Korcok**, associate professor of Theology at Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada
- **Rev. Willie Grills**, pastor of Zion, Avilla, Ark., and podcast co-host of *A Word Fitly Spoken* and *A Brief History of Power*

Visit ascensionmadison.com/henkel.html for more information and registration. You may also send an email to henkel@ascensionmadison.com.

Volunteers are not just from Tennessee!

Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. **1 PETER 4:9-11**

If there's one thing Lutheran Women in Mission do well, it is to serve. After all, our motto is "Serve the Lord with Gladness" (based on Psalm 100:2). Each year we participate in district servant events, collecting items to help those in need — their physical needs as well as their spiritual needs. The servant events help those in domestic violence and homeless shelters, and who are in post-incarceration transitional housing. We help families and children with their school needs, and give police officers stuffed animals to give to children in traumatic circumstances. We collect items to give to crisis pregnancy centers, and we also contribute to suicide-prevention services; and services for veterans.

So, whether we are a Tennessee Volunteer, a Kentucky Wildcat or an Arkansas Razorback, we are all Volunteers in Christ! To God be the glory!

Candy Habich, Chairman

LWML Mid-South District Media and Marketing Committee



On April 27, LWML members of Peace Lutheran Church, Conway Ark., presented a Mission Grant check for \$8,160 to Dr. Phillip Fletcher, director of City of Hope Outreach. The grant will provide transitional housing for those in need. Fletcher (second from left) is pictured with, from left, Laurie Sanders, LWML Mid-South District Mission Grant Committee chairman; Stephanie Rohrer, LWML Mid-AR Zone president; and Wanda Johnston.

2026 CONVENTION



The LWML Mid-South District 2026 District Convention will be held June 12-14 in Springdale, Ark. The theme is "Look to the Hills, the Lord Reigns," based on Psalm 121:1-2.

Business sessions will be held at the Holiday Inn Springdale/Fayetteville, where lodging will be available. Opening worship on Friday will be at Salem Lutheran Church, Springdale.

The keynote speaker will be Deaconess Dr. Tiffany Manor, managing director for the LCMS Office of National Mission. Mark your calendar now!



Get registered for a fall retreat at one of three locations! The retreat Bible study, written by Miriam Maassel Neumann, is *Experience the JOY – Then SHARE IT!* For more information, visit midsouthlwml.org/district-retreats.

WEST: Sept. 5-7, Mount Eagle Retreat Center, Clinton Ark.

MIDDLE: Sept. 19-21, Camp Garner Creek, Dickson, Tenn.

EAST: Sept. 26-28, Eagle Rock Retreat Center, Tallassee, Tenn.



On March 2 (below) and May 25 (above), **St. Matthew, Conway, Ark.**, welcomed 24 new members. Rev. Kory Janneke thanks the Lord of the church for blessing His flock with these new members. "We are grateful for how the Lord has helped our congregation to rebuild over the past several years," he said.



LCEF offers sabbatical scholarships

Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) is excited to open the second year of the Grace Place Wellness Sabbatical Scholarship Program, offering \$7,500 grants to help LCMS church workers plan and take their first sabbatical. Last year, four LCMS church workers were selected to receive sabbatical scholarships, and six more will be awarded in 2025.

Visit lcef.org/grace-place-wellness (and scroll down to link) to learn more about Grace Place Wellness sabbaticals and download the application, due Oct. 31.



LHF has free Asian language materials

The Lutheran Heritage Foundation (LHF) has a wide variety of resources available to help you share the Gospel with Asian immigrants in languages like Chinese (simplified and traditional), Vietnamese, and Hmong (blue and white).

From the *Book of Concord* and the Small Catechism to children's Bible storybooks, these resources are free for our LCMS congregations.

Visit lhfmissions.org to see what LHF can send you.

SHARE YOUR NEWS WITH US!

Digital files, sent via e-mail, are preferred. Send email submissions to LW@mid-southlcms.com or send by postal mail to:

Judy Otto; 150 N. Maury St.; Holly Springs, MS 38635
Send us your stories and photos for our **October 2025** issue by **Aug. 15**.

