



MID-SOUTH LUTHERAN



Joseph **believed God**, and faithfully raised the **Savior of the world**

Have you ever had a feeling of deep vulnerability? There was a classmate of mine, who we will call Joe, who suffered from these feelings, but in total silence. No one seemed to be susceptible to more foibles and follies than my friend Joe. If the chemistry lab had a fire, the teachers went to look for Joe. If toilets overflowed, the janitor went to Joe.

One time Joe, who played football, worked so hard that the coaches decided he had earned a starting position in a key game. But Joe had horrible eyesight and unfortunately, the day of the game, he broke his glasses, which were as thick as Coke bottles. Joe was forced to sit out the game. He couldn't see a thing! If Joe was ever going to



Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola
District President

catch a break, it was usually going to be his arm or leg.

But he was filled with compassion for other people. When one of our classmates, who we will call Tammy, ended up in a "motherly way," she faced the scorn of our small-townpeople. She was rejected by most of her friends.

But Joe was concerned for Tammy. He took it upon himself to befriend her. Joe knew how scorn, blame and guilt felt. After she had her baby, Joe did the unthinkable: He asked Tammy if he could take care of her and her little boy, at least as long as she was willing. Eventually, Joe ended up marrying Tammy. Some of the town's grumblers and gossips jumped

to the conclusion that the baby must've been Joe's in the first place. Joe and Tammy eventually left town, looking for a home where they wouldn't face finger pointing, lies and supposition.

Advent wouldn't be complete without another humble and compassionate character — another Joe! In the Christmas story, Joseph has a small cameo. We read nothing about him after the incident of the 12-year-old Jesus being left behind by His parents in Jerusalem after the Passover.

We know Joseph was a carpenter. He probably went about his work with dedication and silent respect, caring for people's needs. He lived in traditional Israelite society, where the oldest son was named after the father, like "the son of John, the son of Jonas" as we read in the Bible. But the first son in Joseph's family wasn't named after Joseph. Only once in Scripture is Jesus called the son of Joseph — and not in a flattering way! Mostly, we hear that Jesus was the son of Mary. So when He was named Jesus, the tongues in town wagged, once more convinced Mary's fidelity had faded into disgrace.

If the ways in which Joseph handled the whole baby situation doesn't confuse us enough, a passage from Matthew's Gospel is a little more than confusing. Some translations say Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph. Others say she is his betrothed. In our 21st-century thinking, we quickly go over those words and are left wondering if Joseph married Mary sometime after the birth of Jesus.

Our western way of thinking about marriage is different than first-century

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JOSEPH

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Jewish marriage. It was a three-phase deal: First was the engagement, usually arranged by parents. The woman's parents ended up paying another family to have their son marry her. Second was the betrothal. For one full year, the couple ratified their parents' arrangement. During this time, the couple was known as husband and wife under Jewish law. Yet they lived apart in complete fidelity.

Third was the marriage ceremony, after which the couple would take up their residence together. The bride's family brought lavish gifts to the groom's family — compensation for taking a woman into their family. We can imagine not only the backyard gossip, but Joseph's confusion and hesitancy toward the final step when he found out Mary was with child.

The understanding of "divorce" indicated the marriage was categorically complete. But Joseph loved her and wanted to protect her from humiliation and scorn. He could've done the traditional thing and presented her with divorce papers. But she would've been left to beg for the rest of her life. He could've taken Mary to synagogue elders and had her publicly stoned to death for adultery. He could've had a pity-party for himself, wondering why such a terrible thing had happened to him. Instead, Joseph quietly took Mary to be his wife, leaving them in a life filled with whispers and condemning looks.

Joseph rose above the scorn, accusations and finger-pointing. He was unwilling to have Mary put to shame — alone. Joseph swallowed any confusion or pride and refused to dwell in self-pity. He resolved to withstand the gossip and acted in the will of God, and out of love for his young wife.

Joseph wouldn't have planned the Christmas story this way. First, he would never have taken Mary on a 100-mile trip when she was nine months pregnant! He wouldn't have gone to tiny Bethlehem, where there was very little likelihood of finding accommodations for his pregnant wife

in a town of 300 people. But Joseph himself became a part in this unfolding of the greatest event in human history. Joseph didn't fully understand the extent of what was happening. But because the Lord spoke to him in a dream, he broke with tradition to follow a new direction — because it was God's plan.

Come to think about it, the shepherds in Bethlehem broke with tradition. They left their flocks and ran into town to see the baby the angels had announced to them. Even the Magi, who found the Christ-child in the town of Bethlehem, broke tradition. Instead of being disappointed for not finding Him in a royal castle, they went on to Bethlehem to find Him lying in the tiny town of David, being cared for by His mother and her husband, Joseph.

Then there's the people of Nazareth. They were a lot like the whispering people in my hometown when Joe decided to take care of Tammy. The Nazarenes, and even later the Scribes and Pharisees, didn't like this whole arrangement. But they didn't see a guiding star or hear angels proclaim the Savior's birth. The Pharisees defined life's standards by their rules. They didn't connect the idea of a humble carpenter, his marriage to a young Jewish girl, or their required journey to Bethlehem to have any significance. They'd never connect all the dots about the prophetic town of Bethlehem, the Magi, or the lineage of Mary's son to be the fulfillment of the promised Christ. After all, they would protest, saying "doesn't Holy Scripture say, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?'" But yes, something good did come out of Nazareth — our Savior and Lord, Jesus the Christ and His dedicated earthly parents.

Can we be a little more like Joseph? When God's Holy Word speaks His truths, can we accept it for exactly as He gives it? Can we put our faith

in God, even if it doesn't conform to reason? Wouldn't it be better to figure out what we can do to share this Good News, His promises and His blessing?

Our heavenly Father knows best. The mysteries of Christ's incarnation is all a part of the plan He laid out for us — sending His Son, God incarnate as a human child, just so He could suffer and die to take away our sin, and be our Savior and eternal King.

Joseph was as human and rational as any of us. He could have been just as easily hurt and confused as anyone might have been under his circumstances. But Joseph was a righteous man, chosen by God for his humble acceptance and dedication to a purpose of God's love and promise — just for us! He trusted God in the most profound and silent simplicity and by that, God found favor with him.

In this Advent and Christmas season, God brings us the joy of our salvation through the forgiveness of sin and eternal grace that came to us in a tiny baby. The angel said, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins." If Joseph was willing to face the scorn for the sake of Christ, can we more boldly be God's witnesses?

After all, on this side of Christ's birth, we know why He was born — to save us from our sins and bring us with Him to His Kingdom. We know He suffered, died and rose again so that we can live beyond this temporal life and be raised with Him to eternal peace. Christ is real! We have the privilege to share God's unchanging love in Christ Jesus with everyone in our small towns and cities, in humble boldness of faith in Christ Jesus, our newborn King and Lord. Have a blessed Advent and Christmas season.



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Register now for 2025 Treasurers' Workshops

Congregational treasurers, business managers and pastors are encouraged to attend one of the Mid-South District's free educational workshops in 2025. Workshops are currently scheduled for:

- ▶ Jan. 4 in Knoxville, Tenn.
- ▶ Jan. 11 in Jacksonville, Ark.
- ▶ Jan. 18 in Nashville, Tenn.
- ▶ Jan. 25 in Russellville, Ark.
- ▶ Feb. 1 in Memphis, Tenn.

The presenter for the treasurer's manual (Volume 1) sessions will be Charlie Rhodes, who retired as executive

director of LCMS accounting. Angela Fowler, Mid-South District executive for business and finance, will lead the church treasurer best practices session in the afternoon.

For details on the Treasurers' Workshops and to register for an event in your area, please visit mid-southlcms.org and click the link on the home page. The workshops are open to anyone who would like to attend. **Register by Dec. 31.**

If you have questions, email Fowler at afowler@mid-southlcms.com.



March for life in Washington, D.C.

You are invited to join Rev. Kevin Conger, district Board of directors chair; Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison, LCMS president; and other Lutherans at the National March for Life in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 24. Your presence will help provide a public witness to the sanctity of life and God's design for marriage and family.

First, join your brothers and sisters in Christ for Divine Service at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Alexandria, Va., followed by brunch in the church fellowship hall. Then, everyone will make their way into the nation's capital for the March for Life.

To LEARN MORE and REGISTER, scan the QR code or visit thelc.ms/march-for-life-2025.



Join the 75th anniversary celebration!

First Lutheran Church, Cleveland, Tenn., will celebrate its 75th anniversary with a 10:30 a.m. service on Dec. 15, led by Rev. Richard "Kipp" Smith, emeritus and former First pastor.

A reception will follow — all are welcome! First is located at 195 McIntire Ave. N.E.



Photos: LCMS/Errik M. Lunsford



Congregation mission commitment receipts as of Sept. 30, 2024 (9 months)

Anticipated amount (75% of budget)	\$1,229,659
Actual receipts	\$1,220,153
Over (under) anticipated amount	(\$9,506)

Use of mission commitment receipts

Allocated to Synod for world missions	\$347,296
Allocated to Tanzania	\$18,750
Retained for district ministry/mission support (70% of receipts)	\$854,107
Total receipts	\$1,220,153

Mission commitment receipts comparison

Actual receipts as of Sept. 30, 2024	\$1,220,153
Actual receipts as of Sept. 30, 2023	\$1,160,954
Over (under) prior year receipts	\$59,199



Knoxville Circuit members **GATHER FOR FIRST CONVOCATION**

By **Gretchen Roberts**

Praise Lutheran Church, Maryville

Ten of the 12 Knoxville Circuit congregations gathered at Praise, Maryville, on Sept. 28 for their first convocation. Rev. Derek Roberts, pastor of Praise Lutheran Church, described it as “a larger gathering of circuit congregations during a year without national or district conventions ... providing a chance to celebrate each congregation’s ministry.”

Rev. David Graves of St. Paul, Wartburg, and Knoxville circuit visitor, opened the convocation with a devotion. “This idea began four years ago. The LCMS *Handbook* specifies that it should be held on a non-convention year, so 2024 was the first opportunity,” Pastor Graves said, factoring the delay caused by COVID.

Throughout the day, congregational representatives shared updates on their ministries. Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola, Mid-South District president, addressed the decline in seminary graduates and the growing need for church workers, urging attendees to identify and encourage potential candidates for ministry.

The convocation concluded with Divine Service in the new Praise Lutheran sanctuary.

Ministry highlights

Jessie Irwin, principal of First Lutheran School, Knoxville, presented a brief his-

tory of First Lutheran, founded in 1869 and is still offering Christian education for students from age 1 through eighth grade. “We educate the whole student, from God’s Word to academics to the physical body and the arts,” Irwin said.

Deaconess Christina Childers of Grace, Knoxville, shared how the role of a deaconess is defined within the Lutheran church. “I think of a deaconess in pursuit of her biblical role as a helper, as a career,” she said. She encouraged congregations to prayerfully consider the role of women in their church and connect with the deaconess programs at our two seminaries.

Shelli Haynes, director of Christian education (DCE) at Praise, shared her journey into Christianity and Lutheranism in California, as well as the history of DCE ministry in the LCMS. At Praise, DCE Haynes works with families and volunteers to administer and teach youth and Sunday school programs, family events, and church activities.

On behalf of Karen Barkley, parish nurse of St. Paul, Wartburg, Kim Kennedy explained that typically, a parish nurse is a registered nurse who helps fulfill the healing function within the church, caring for the physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of members. The Faith Community Nursing Certificate is offered at Concordia University Wisconsin.



Jessie Irwin, principal of First Lutheran School, Knoxville, shares the joy of Lutheran education. Pictured above are the rostered church workers who appeared at the convocation.

Brian Strobel described how the Holy Smokers at Grace, Knoxville, reach out and connect with members of both church and community through food events, serving groups like the Day Reporting Center corrections facility, Water Angel Ministries, and church events. “The food is an entryway to sharing the Gospel of Christ in new places,” said Rev. Danny Anderson, senior pastor of Grace, Knoxville.

Members of Chapel of the Good Shepherd, Sharps Chapel, fed senior citizens in need with wrapped boxes

Continued on next page

of food — in some cases the only gifts they receive at Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving. They also give gift bags to school children and have collected over 2,000 rolls of toilet paper to serve families who can't purchase it with food stamps.

The Point, Knoxville, has partnered with a former Baptist minister to provide low-cost food and free produce to low-income families in Knox County via a mobile grocery store. The Point's pastor, Rev. Adam Woldt, quoted a fellow pastor, saying, "In a time of crisis, you need something free. In a time of need, 'free' robs you of your dignity."

When disaster strikes, Rich Cole and the Grace, Knoxville, Lutheran Early Response Team (LERT) serve the needs of churches, communities and people. "I don't know what hurts more at the end of the day: my arms from working, or my cheeks from laughing and crying with those we've come to help," Cole said.

Fueled by generous member donations, Faith, Oak Ridge, started an endowment fund that provides financial gifts to support local and non-local ministries (such as St. Paul Sevierville, and Praise, Maryville) for special projects.

The Pregnancy Resource Center (PRC), with offices located in Maryville and Sevierville, offers life-affirming alternatives to abortion in East Tennessee via a mobile clinic. The PRC served 287,000 families last year, impacting lives here on earth and forever in eternity. Many LCMS members support the PRC, and Grace hosted a circuit-wide fundraiser in 2023. "There is hope," said Valerie Millsaps, executive director. "Pray, give, serve and connect with us. We need you."

The end or the beginning?

Convocation attendees were enriched by the presentations and the Divine Service, in which all the circuit's clergy participated in the worship. Circuit Visitor Graves noted, "Even though the next year to hold a Convocation according to the LCMS handbook isn't until 2027, I heard feedback that we should get together yearly."

Tidings of Great Joy



I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. **3 JOHN 4**

By Candy Habich
Media and Marketing Chairman,
LWML Mid-South District

During this season of Advent, we greatly anticipate Christmas day and the overwhelming joy that comes from knowing that our Savior, Jesus Christ, arrived in human form to save us from our sins. We marvel at how the angels announced the birth of the newborn King to lowly shepherds, and how those shepherds went on to find the baby in the stable.

Just think about it. That same message has been repeated countless times for over 2,000 years — from poor to rich; from gentiles to Jews; from parents to children, and so on. And now we bear the responsibility to share that message.

And we pray that our God in heaven

could say the same thing to us as John wrote to his dear friend Gaius. That our Great God would find joy in knowing that His children — we — are walking in the truth of His Word. So as we celebrate all things Christmas, let's be sure we share the real truth about Jesus' birth.

Endowment Fund gift ideas

We all know those family members and friends who don't need or want Christmas gifts, right? Retirees are downsizing, young folks have their own tastes and styles, and nobody needs another knick-knack!

You can give the gift of joy by honoring someone with a gift to the LWML Mid-South District Endowment Fund. This fund was established to provide scholarships for women in our district to attend leader development training or other Christ-centered training. You can learn how to provide a gift at

midsouthlwml.org/endowment-fund.



Lutheran Women in Mission
MID-SOUTH DISTRICT

YWR deadline is Dec. 31

The LWML Mid-South District would like to send up to four young women to the 41st LWML Biennial Convention, to be held June 26–29 in Omaha. The deadline for applications is Dec. 31.

Instructions for applying may be found at midsouthlwml.org/ywrs. Information about the convention is available at lwml.org/convention. Send questions contact@midsouthlwml.org.

STAY CONNECTED

On the web

- midsouthlwml.org
- facebook.com/msd.lwml

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- contact@midsouthlwml.org

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FALL 2025 RETREATS

- **West Retreat:** Sept. 5-7, Mount Eagle Retreat Center, Clinton, Ark.
- **Middle Retreat:** Sept. 19-21, Camp Garner Creek, Dickson, Tenn.
- **East Retreat:** Sept. 26-28, Eagle Rock Camp, Tallassee, Tenn.

OFFICIAL NOTICE
The 22nd Regular Convention
Mid-South District of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
Memphis, Tennessee

Dates: Thursday, June 12 (mid-afternoon), to Saturday, June 14, 2025 (mid-afternoon)

Location: The Hilton Hotel
939 Ridgelake Blvd., Memphis, TN 38120; Phone: 901-684-6664

Theme: "Christ: The Church's One Foundation" - 1 Corinthians 3:10-11

Opening Service with Holy Communion:
Thursday, June 12, 2025, at 7:30 p.m.
Christ the King Lutheran Church
5296 Park Avenue, Memphis, TN 38119
Preacher: *Synod Representative*

NOTICE TO ALL CONGREGATIONS

Please remember the following deadlines to submit nomination ballots and convention resolutions:

NOMINATION BALLOTS FOR DISTRICT PRESIDENT
NOMINATION BALLOTS FOR DISTRICT REGIONAL VICE PRESIDENTS
NOMINATION BALLOTS FOR BOARD OF DIRECTORS (Commissioned and Lay)

Deadline: **February 1, 2025**

To be sent to the Mid-South District Secretary

Rev. Larry Peters
Mid-South District – LCMS
1675 Wynne Road, Cordova, TN 38016

NOMINATION BALLOTS FOR DISTRICT SECRETARY
NOMINATION BALLOTS FOR DISTRICT NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

Deadline: **February 1, 2025**

To be sent to the District Nominations Committee c/o Mid-South District President

Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola
Mid-South District – LCMS
1675 Wynne Road, Cordova, TN 38016

REPORTS, MEMORIALS AND OVERTURES TO BE PRESENTED TO THE DISTRICT CONVENTION

Deadline: **March 15, 2025**

To be sent to the Mid-South District President

Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola
Mid-South District – LCMS
1675 Wynne Road, Cordova, TN 38016

NOMINATION BALLOTS FOR CIRCUIT VISITORS

Deadline: **One day before the Circuit Forum**

To be sent to Each Congregation's Respective Circuit Visitor

(Each Circuit Forum will be held at the District Convention or as scheduled by the individual Circuit per Synod Bylaw 5.2.2 [a])

Congratulations!

We share with you the Mid-South District pastors who have celebrated ordination anniversaries in 2024. We rejoice and give thanks to God for the gifts these men provide to His church.



65 YEARS

Rev. Stanley Jones (*emeritus*)
Bella Vista, Ark.

60 YEARS

Rev. Marvin Otto (*emeritus*)
Kingsport, Tenn.

55 YEARS

Rev. Clifford Herd (*emeritus*)
Hixson, Tenn.

Rev. Robert Mader (*emeritus*)
Clarksville, Tenn.

Rev. Louis Trebus (*emeritus*)
Maryville, Tenn.

50 YEARS

Rev. Albert Quoss (*emeritus*)
Bella Vista, Ark.

45 YEARS

Rev. Richard Elseroad (*emeritus*)
Knoxville, Tenn.

Rev. Martin Nutter
Tulahoma, Tenn.

40 YEARS

Rev. Dennis Bennett (*emeritus*)
New Market, Tenn.

Rev. Duncan Cox (*emeritus*)
Pea Ridge, Ark.

Rev. James Dunn (*emeritus*)
Kansas City, Mo.

Rev. Donald Hefta
Faith, Fairfield Bay, Ark.

Rev. Robert Kellerman (*emeritus*)
Topeka, Kan.

Rev. Andrew Toopes (*emeritus*)
Bowling Green, Ky.

35 YEARS

Rev. Richard Graves
U.S. Navy Chaplain, Sigonella, Sicily

Rev. Mark Kophamer
Redeemer, Elizabethton, Tenn.

Rev. Dr. LeRoy Leach (*emeritus*)
Conway, Ark.

Rev. Michael Miller
Redeemer, Harriman, Tenn.

Rev. Brian Pummill
Peace, Cherokee Village, Ark.

30 YEARS

Rev. Daniel Hawkins
Redeeming Grace/GracePoint,
Atoka, Tenn.

Rev. Nathan Jensen
St. John, Burns, Tenn.

25 YEARS

Rev. Fasil Alemayeh
Faith, Thompson's Station, Tenn.

Rev. Timothy Henning
Trinity, Mena, Ark.

Rev. Hiram Nunez (*emeritus*)
Grandbury, Texas

20 YEARS

Rev. Joshua Willadsen
Bethel, Fort Smith, Ark.
Trinity, Sallisaw, Okla.

15 YEARS

Rev. Ronald Bacic
First, Little Rock, Ark.

Rev. Richard Dockery (*emeritus*)
Maryville, Tenn.

Rev. Timothy Matthew (*candidate*)
Dayton, Tenn.

Rev. John Merrill
First, Fort Smith, Ark.

Rev. Edward Rosser
Good Shepherd, Chattanooga, Tenn.

Rev. Emil Woerner
Friends in Christ, Bryant, Ark.

10 YEARS

Rev. David Appold
St. Paul, Paducah, Ky.

Rev. Amos Gray (*candidate*)
Hot Springs, Ark.

Rev. Andrew Lehman
All Saints Church and School,
Jonesboro, Ark.

Rev. Eric Phillips
Concordia, Nashville, Tenn.
Hope, Smyrna, Tenn.

5 YEARS

Rev. Matthew Albright
Christ, Little Rock, Ark.

Rev. Craig Fiebiger
Faith, Thompson's Station, Tenn.

Rev. Raymond Krieg
Celebration, Seymour, Tenn.

Rev. John Mathis
Christ, Little Rock, Ark.

Rev. Joshua Ralston
Zion, Augsburg, Ark.

Well done,
good and
faithful
servants

Register for senior retreat

Youth groups in the Mid-South District can start planning now for the Linkt senior high retreat, to be held Feb. 21-23 at Camp Trinity, the Lutheran Camp on Petit Jean Mountain.

The theme, “Be Anxious for Nothing,” is from Phil. 4:6-7: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Registration is by congregation and the discount deadline is Feb. 1. The regular cost is \$150 per person, but churches that submit registration forms by Feb. 1 can take \$25 off fees for each person, dropping the price to \$125. The cost covers food, lodging and activities for the weekend. Youth from congregations without youth groups attending can register separately and be assigned to another congregation’s youth group.

Registration forms have been emailed to district congregations. Individuals can also request forms

by emailing the Camp Trinity office at director@lutherancamp.org.

Financial assistance is available for youth in need of aid that their home congregations cannot provide.

More details can be found at lutherancamp.org/linkt-youth-retreats.

Summer Camp 2025

Registration opens Jan. 1 for summer camp at Camp Trinity. Over the past few years, many sessions have filled; parents are urged to register the children early to ensure a spot.

The camp is also looking for cabin counselors and kitchen staff to serve this summer. Lutheran young adults, ages 18-25, are invited to apply. The period of service runs from late May through the end of July. College students looking for summer jobs in which they can positively impact the lives of children are encouraged to apply.

The camp is also looking for high school students to work one or two weeks alongside senior staff.

To receive an application for either senior or junior staff, send an email to director@lutherancamp.org.



Rev. Dr. Leroy Leach, emeritus, baptized Dakota Cotton, during Voyagers camp at Camp Trinity in July.

Petal Pushers need you!

The annual Tournament of Roses Parade is will be held Jan. 1, 2025. The theme of the parade is “Best Day Ever!”, and the theme of Lutheran Hour Ministries (LHM) float is “Behold, Jesus the Savior Is Born.” The float will be part of LHM’s 74th year of witnessing the Gospel at the Rose Parade.

The LHM team dedicated to the parade effort is known as the Petal Pushers — and they would love your help! Visit shop.petalpushers.org today to support the only Christian float in this globally televised event. You can volunteer to help decorate the float, donate to the effort, or even offer support through Petal Pushers merchandise.

The Petal Pushers welcome individuals, families, seniors, youth groups, fellowship groups, school classes and boy/girl scout troops. Volunteers must be at least 13 years old, and youth groups must be accompanied by adults at a ratio of one adult per five youth.

Share your news with us



Digital files 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
The deadline for the February issue is Dec. 15.