



# MID-SOUTH LUTHERAN

## ASH WEDNESDAY

# A time for housecleaning

I served a summer vicarage in a small town in southern Manitoba, Canada, to help start a mission church. Similar to American farms, most of the farms in Manitoba covered thousands of acres — three to seven sections (square miles!) of land, and had huge machinery and far fewer families.



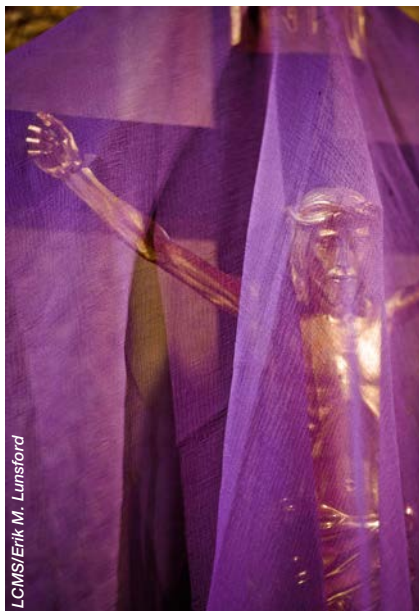
**Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola**  
District President

What happened, of course, was that there were towns and farmsteads that just closed. Ghost towns popped up across the landscape. You could travel for hours without coming to a town with people in it. The old post offices had cobwebs across the mail slots. The lawns were covered with briars. Grass grew in the street cracks, and windows were broken in every building.

There was no electricity, so the entire town was dark. The smell of rotting buildings permeated the air. Hundreds of homes were available, but no one was there to live in them.

### Trouble in God's house, too

The prophet Joel saw something similar, but with Jerusalem's temple. Centuries of disuse had caused the once magnificent temple to look more like a ghost town than God's temple.



LCMS/Erik M. Lunsford

But there was a turnaround: Chronicles describes how God's people started cleaning, refurbishing and restoring the temple. They took offerings to make the temple right and return it back to normal. Well ... almost normal.

The temple was being used again, but the refurbishing wasn't complete. Everything looked OK — spic and span — but there was still a problem: The people.

It is the same for Christianity 3,000 years later. Many churches have turned into ghost towns, and many

have done everything imaginable to get people back inside.

### Wrong priorities

In many cases there are people coming to a church building, but they only hear about a God of prosperity. They are not being fed with God's Word in good Law-and-Gospel distinction. They are not given the Means of Grace and hearing about our total dependence on God for life and salvation.

You see, God didn't send Christ to entertain us. He doesn't want us to stop talking about sin just because it might make some people feel bad.

God doesn't just want us to say all the right words while we're in worship. He isn't interested in giving us things to work on when we get home, or something to give up for Lent for the next 40 days. No, God is devoutly interested in our eternal salvation.

Giving something up or coming to worship are good things, but God wants things to change on the inside of each of us. Those abandoned buildings in Manitoba, the town no one cared about, could be what's happening in many church buildings. Take an honest look.

What do we see? Do we see examples of good or evil? Do we see grass growing in the paths that lead to our churches because of disuse? Think about it this way: Is God always in first place in the hearts of most

Continued on Page 2

## LENT

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

people, or has He slipped through the cracks behind the priorities of family, job, career and entertainment?

I know we're so used to scheduling our "me time" and making sure we keep those appointments. But what's happened to worship time? What about personal devotions? Is that "temple of the Lord" — our own spiritual building — well kept, strong and appealing? Or do we see signs of neglect, cracks of disrepair and an abandoned temple of God's Spirit, where cobwebs obstruct our view of eternity?

In those times when we lock the doors of our heart in inattentiveness to our spiritual life, we may expect our faith to remain intact. But when we really get back to it with honesty, do we see some signs of serious deterioration?

### **'Return to Me'**

Joel has something to say to us. This season of Lent, we focus on a word of instruction, one word that sums up the meaning of Lent: "Return." It means to come back to where God pleads with us and says "Return! I want you back!"

I'm not sure anyone would tear up their clothing today — even if they were saddened over their sinful life. In Joel's day, ripping one's clothing was a sign of deep sadness. But many of those people played games. When they were confronted with neglect and their sin, they'd tear their clothing to show how sad they were over their sin. They placed ashes on their foreheads to signal their sadness. They did everything to make themselves look repentant. But they'd go back home to the same old sin.

God's prophet would have said, "Hey, that ripping off your garments looks OK, but rip open your heart, where the real depravity, the real object of sinfulness lies."

The underlying problem never gets touched. The outward signs of

repentance — placing ashes on our foreheads or hands — is what happens for many of us on Ash Wednesday. We impose ashes, kneel before God, confess our sins, sing sad songs and offer penitential prayers.

These are all good things. But returning to our old lifestyle is just playing a game. "Return to Me with all your heart (Joel 2:12)," says the Lord. It's a total commitment. Partial or conditional commitment is no commitment at all. "Return to Me with *all* your heart," says the Lord.

You don't have to travel too far to hear those who say, "I don't need to return to God because I'm not that bad. Just look at the others — pedophiles, drug dealers, cheaters and thieves!"

Or there are those who say, "I don't have time to commit myself to God. I have other things that take up my time."

The sad truth is that excuses don't fly. Of course, there are those who think that everyone else needs that repentant stuff more than "I" do. When God calls people to repentance, He means everyone.

The first of Martin Luther's 95 Theses says: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."

It doesn't mean to just be sorry for our sin. Repentance means to turn around — turn from the direction of sin and return to God. Repentance is something that happens virtually every day in a Christian's life.

On Ash Wednesday and throughout Lent, we stress the deep need for repentance.

"'Yet even now,' declares the LORD, 'return to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.' Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. Who knows whether he will not

turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God?" — **Joel 2:12-14**

God wants everyone to begin a spiritual clean-up. Ash Wednesday is the time to have genuine from-the-heart passion to return to God.

Yes, I *am* a sinner. The things I say, the things I do, the thing I *am* would never allow me to stand in the presence of a perfect and glorious God. But God gave us His Word. He tells us that the wrong things we've said and done, the things we've left undone, and the sin of our human nature from the time of our conception are gone. His judgment against our sin is gone. But why?

This is what Lent is all about. We take our steps on a journey to the cross of Calvary. We learn how God's grace declares us innocent.

God placed the judgment of our sin, and the sins of all the world, on Jesus and had Him suffer and die in our place. In these next six weeks, we will watch and hear how God in a joyous exchange takes our guilt and shame and places it on the sacred shoulders of His innocent and righteous Son, Jesus Christ.

We'll learn how the mystery of Christ's deep love moved Him to willingly journey to the cross and give every bit of Himself so we could live with Him forever in glory.

Can we make this deliverance more real? Can we make it something worth celebrating every day?

God doesn't command us to give up anything during Lent — eating, drinking, entertaining, habits, nor anything else. All God wants is us.

Ash Wednesday begins this Lenten journey. We'll hear the words of Christ from the cross, fulfilling God's promise that brings us into a complete restoration to God from God. All of this happens because of the deep love, grace and mercy God wishes for you through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

# What is the significance of Ash Wednesday?

According to *Lutheran Worship, History and Practice*, the imposition of ashes on those who wish it is an ancient gesture of repentance and a powerful reminder about the meaning of the day.

Ashes can symbolize dust-to-dustness and remind worshipers of the need for cleansing, scrubbing and purifying. If they are applied during an act of kneeling, the very posture of defeat and submission expresses humility before God.

The use of ashes on Ash Wednesday

is a more recent custom among most LCMS congregations, although some have done it for decades. The ashes are usually derived from the burned palms from the previous Palm Sunday.

Experience will show, however, that in obtaining ashes this way, it doesn't take many ashes to "ash" a whole congregation. Like sin, they are very dirty and go a long way. One palm leaf will produce enough ashes for several years.

Usually the pastor takes the ashes on

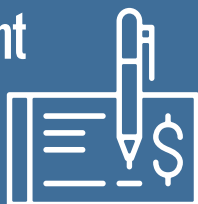


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the end of his thumb and makes the sign of the cross on the forehead of each worshiper, saying these words: "Remember: you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

## Congregation mission commitment receipts

as of Nov. 30,  
2019 (11 months)



Anticipated amount (92% of budget)	\$1,404,585
Actual receipts	\$1,392,896
Over (under) anticipated amount	(\$11,689)

### Use of mission commitment receipts

Allocated to Synod for world missions	\$394,952
Allocated to Tanzania	\$22,917
Retained for district ministry/mission support (70% of receipts)	\$975,027
Total receipts	\$1,392,896

### Mission commitment receipts comparison

Actual receipts as of Nov. 30, 2019	\$1,392,896
Actual receipts as of Nov. 30, 2018	\$1,377,474
Over (under) prior year receipts	\$15,422

## SAVE THE DATE

## 2019-20 CONCORDIA SEMINARY CONCERT SERIES

The joyful sound of acclaimed musicians and choirs from around the country will stir the senses as the 2019 Concordia Seminary Concert Series continues.

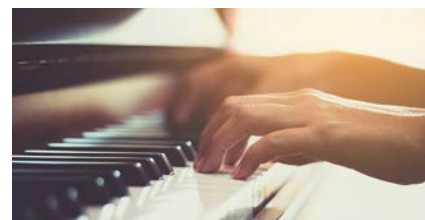
Thirteen on-campus performances (901 Seminary Place, St. Louis) remain to be enjoyed throughout the 2019-20 academic year. All performances are free and open to the public.

### VALPARAISO UNIVERSITY CHORALE CONCERT

At 7 p.m. on Sunday, March 1, the internationally acclaimed Valparaiso University Chorale from Valparaiso, Ind., will present its Spring Tour Concert in the Chapel of St. Timothy and St. Titus. This selective ensemble is recognized as one of the premier Lutheran collegiate choirs. Dedicated to performing works that celebrate the university's Lutheran heritage, the choir has been honored with invitations to perform around the world.

### ORGAN AND CARILLON CONCERT

The seminary will host a two-part or-



gan and carillon concert at 3 p.m. on Sunday, April 26, featuring Dr. Laura Ellis, professor and associate school director in the School of Music at the University of Florida. This two-part concert will be split between the outside venue of the seminary campus for the carillon portion of the event and the Chapel of St. Timothy and St. Titus for the organ recital.

**After Chapel Concerts:** Featuring a variety of artists and instruments, these six performances will be held from 9:55 to 10:15 a.m., directly following morning services, in the balcony of the Chapel of St. Timothy and St. Titus:

- **Feb. 18:** Erica Mertz, saxophone
- **March 10:** Laudamus, Concordia Seminary's premier touring choir
- **April 14:** Ryan Edinger, piano/organ



# Faith development ... at home and school

By Allen Piepenbrink,  
Mid-South District  
Executive Director for Schools and Early Childhood

**T**he Mid-South District has schools that work together with parents to build children's faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We support one high school, 10 elementary schools and 22 early childhood centers. So the question that I would like to address is: "How does faith at home improve the effectiveness of the schools?"

Teaching children and teenagers to develop Christian values and character takes the entire community of believers.

► **AT HOME**, the children's parents need to give positive support, communicate well and set responsibilities and boundaries.



► **THE COMMUNITY** itself should be caring, value the youth and have positive peer influences.



► **THE CHURCH** should have positive adult role models, be honest in everything, and engage the youth in the work of the church.



► **THE SCHOOL** must have a caring climate, set boundaries and high expectations, and involve the parents.



Ben Freudenberg, in his book *The Family Friendly Church*, states four family practices that are particularly important in helping young people grow in their faith:

1. Talking about faith with your mother.
2. Talking about faith with your father.
3. Having family devotions or prayer time.

4. Doing family projects to help other people.

Building positive relationships is key to all humans. Parents are, of course, the key faith developers for their children, both positively and negatively, and it's important for church and school to help parents understand their role in helping children grow in their Christian faith.

Rev. Dr. Todd A. Biermann states it quite clearly in his book *Handing Out Life* when he points to Jesus as our number one priority in building relationships. And what follows, you might ask? As we order our priorities, they should be spouse, family, other believers and the world. You see, that is where we often go astray because we put worldly relationships too far to the top.

In terms of faith development in children, parents have always been given the primary role to instruct and be an example. Today's busy lives make it difficult to prioritize schedules and resources, but engaged Christian parents are to be consistent in their church attendance, prayers, family



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LCMS/Erik M. Lunsford

devotions and reading the Bible.

As it says in 3 John 1:4:

"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth."

Statistics have shown that parents are willing to provide spiritual leadership for their children, but often feel ill-equipped to do so. This is where the church and school can aid parents in being the spiritual leaders for their children. The school and church can help the children and youth understand their lives as forgiven sinners with the promise of eternal life because of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The schools in our district not only offer a great curriculum, but also offer the care and nurturing needed by the children whom God has put into their midst. The number one goal has always been and will always be to see each and every child in heaven one day.

Schools and churches are meant to support the parents by developing short- and long-term relationships. May the Holy Spirit guide us all to that end.

# Conference to focus on religious liberty

**By David Cox**  
Director, Camp Trinity

Rev. Dr. Gregory Seltz, executive director of the Lutheran Center for Religious Liberty (LCRL), is the scheduled speaker for the Champions of Religious Liberty conference March 28 at Camp Trinity, the Lutheran Camp on Petit Jean Mountain. The camp is working with the LCRL to organize the event.

Seltz was speaker of "The Lutheran Hour" (2011-17) before becoming the first director of the LCRL, which is located in Washington, D.C.



**Seltz**

Seltz said the center exists to "serve all of our churches, schools and universities by ensuring that their voices continue to be heard, serving the cause of religious liberty for all of our people so that God's Word will indeed not be bound, but go forth and bear much fruit."

A gifted and popular speaker, Seltz will present in the morning and afternoon, with a break for lunch served by Camp Trinity staff.

Following the conference, Pastor Seltz will lead a wor-

ship service. Guests who want to stay overnight at camp Friday or Saturday night in either cabins or the RV campground can make separate arrangements with the camp. Send an email to [director@lutherancamp.org](mailto:director@lutherancamp.org).

The LCRL mission is to ignite and fuel a uniquely Lutheran response to increasing intrusions, limitations and challenges by the government in the life of the church, while educating, encouraging and equipping LCMS members and organizations to take informed action in support of marriage, life and religious freedom.

The camp is seeking sponsorships to help defray expenses for bringing Dr.

Seltz to the conference. Those who can help are asked to contact the camp.

Details of the conference, including registration information, can be found at [lutherancamp.org](http://lutherancamp.org).



## Wanted: summer staff

Camp Trinity is looking for mature young people to lead campers at summer camp 2020. The camp, located atop Petit Jean Mountain in West Central Arkansas, is seeking cabin counselors to oversee cabin groups of children and youth from second grade through high school, and general staff members to work primarily in the kitchen.

Employment starts May 28, and most positions run through July, but the camp is looking for a couple of counselors to work just through June.

The ideal candidates for cabin counselors are between the ages of 19 and 25 who have finished at least one year of college. They must love Jesus and enjoy working with children and youth. And they must be able to communicate the



**Summer staff help children learn new skills at Camp Trinity, the Lutheran Camp on Petit Jean.**

faith in accord with the teachings of the LCMS. The ability to lead singing is a plus.

The job includes leading devotions and Bible studies, which the staff will work together to produce during staff training. Counselors will be trained to lead activities such as hiking, canoeing,

swimming, archery, large-group games, challenge course, craft projects and servant events.

Applicants for general staff should be at least 18 years old and in good physical condition. In addition to preparing and

**Continued on Page 6**



# Seltz presents at Our Savior, Nashville

Rev. Dr. Gregory Seltz, director of the Lutheran Center for Religious Liberty (LCRL) in Washington, D.C., was the guest preacher and Bible class presenter at Our Savior, Nashville, on the first Sunday in Advent.

Previously the voice of “The Lutheran Hour” radio broadcast, Seltz explained how, through LCRL, he serves as an LCMS voice on Capitol Hill — dedicated to the protection of religious liberty, the sanctity of life, traditional marriage and private and parochial education.

He strongly encouraged the congregation to learn more about this vital voice and get involved. For more information, visit [lcrfreesdom.org](http://lcrfreesdom.org).



The Advent season began at Our Savior, Nashville, with a strong message about religious freedom from guest pastor Rev. Dr. Gregory Seltz (center), shown here with Rev. Lane Reuter (left), Our Savior senior pastor, and Rev. Erik Christensen, associate pastor.

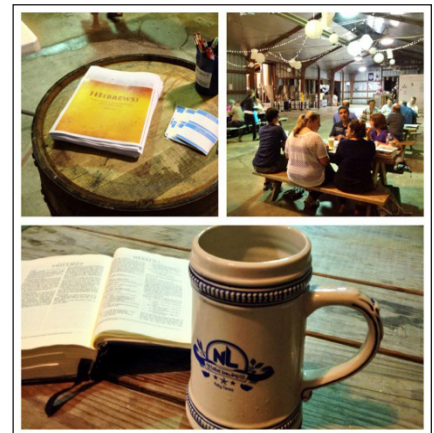
## Bible study — with a pint

**Outreach goes creative!** Maybe we could take a lesson in original thinking from this example of opportunistic evangelism, which first appeared in the October 2014 issue of the *Texas Messenger*, the *Lutheran Witness* insert of the Texas District.

**K**en Chitwood, outgoing vicar at Memorial Lutheran Church, Katy, Texas, said “Love Jesus. Love Others. Love Beer. That’s the mantra of The Publicans, a rag-tag group of disciples seeking to follow Jesus and bless the beer-enthusiast crowd of Katy.”

Chitwood saw an opportunity for missional movement when he was at a tasting at No Label Brewing Co. in Katy. There were about 800 people gathered together and Chitwood thought, “If these are the people we are trying to reach, why force them to come to us when they are already gathering here?”

The Publicans decided to host a Bible study called He-Brews at the brewery, which focused on what God has been brewing over the ages and how all of history came to a head in the work and life of Jesus Christ. More than 45 people attended the study, in-



cluding 16 people who were not part of Memorial.

The Publicans’ number increased to include individuals who had no spiritual home other than this community. They were reaching out!

## CAMP

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5)

serving meals, general staff members also lead some activities and give devotional messages from time to time.

All staff members will be trained and certified in CPR and first aid through

the American Red Cross.

The hours are long and the activities physically demanding, but the rewards are great for those who love seeing children grow in faith, confidence, skills and relationships with others.

Most hiring at Lutheran camps occurs in February. Interested candidates

should visit the website for the National Lutheran Outdoors Ministry Association (NLOMA) early and complete a profile: [nloma.org/employment/summer](http://nloma.org/employment/summer).

Applicants can also learn more about Camp Trinity at [lutherancamp.org](http://lutherancamp.org).



By Frances Bacic  
Media/Marketing,  
LWML Mid-South District

I teach first grade and here are a few words of wisdom from my kids. Love is:

- My mom and dad.
- My family.
- When my mom gives me the last bite.



- Hugs and kisses.
- Sharing when I don't want to share.
- Jesus dying on the cross for us.

The list goes on.

Such wisdom from children. No, my children are not perfect and don't come with a filter, but some days I see the love of God burst forth out of them. At such times I am awed by their perfect truths.

My perfect truth comes from John 3:16:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

Jesus died on the cross because of His great love for us. Such a love we cannot fathom. Such a love we need to mirror — His pure, blameless, righteous, perfect love.

And this is my prayer:

"That your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God."

— Phil. 1:9-11



**SAVE THE DATE**

## LWML District Convention

"Life  
Together"  
(1 Cor. 12:27)

June 12-14

Paragould, Ark.

## About Paragould

Established on March 3, 1883, Paragould, Ark., grew up around the junction in northeast Arkansas, where the St. Louis and Iron Mountain Railroad (later the Missouri Pacific RR) crossed the tracks of the Texas and St. Louis railroads (later the Cotton Belt RR).

The new town was named to honor the presidents of the two railroads, Jay Gould and J. W. Paramore, by combining their last names.

A thriving and welcoming community, Paragould takes pride in its reputation as "the Friendly City" and looks forward to making LWML convention visitors feel right at home.



“Now you are the body of Christ,  
Each one of you is a part.”





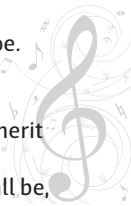
LCMS/Frank Kohn

## CLASSICS OF LENTEN WORSHIP FROM LUTHERAN SERVICE BOOK

### "Christ, the Life of All the Living" (LSB #420) Lyrics – 1659 • Music – 1637

Christ the Life of all the living,  
Christ the Death of death, our foe.  
Who, Thyself for me once giving  
To the darkest depths of woe,  
Thro' Thy suff'rings, death and merit  
I eternal life inherit:  
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,  
Dearest Jesus, unto Thee.

Thou, ah, Thou, hast taken on Thee  
Bonds and stripes, a cruel rod;  
Pain and scorn were heaped upon Thee,  
O Thou sinless Son of God!  
Thus didst Thou my soul deliver



From the bonds of sin forever.  
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,  
Dearest Jesus, unto Thee.

Thou hast borne the smiting only  
That my wounds might all be whole;  
Thou has suffered, sad and lonely,  
Rest to give my weary soul;  
Yea, the curse of God enduring,  
Blessings unto me securing.  
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,  
Dearest Jesus, unto Thee.

Heartless scoffers did surround Thee,  
Treating Thee with shameful scorn

And with piercing thorns they crowned  
Thee.

All disgrace Thou, Lord hast borne  
That as Thine Thou mightest own me  
And with heav'nly glory crown me  
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,  
Dearest Jesus, unto Thee.

Thou has suffered men to bruise Thee  
That from pain I might be free;  
Falsely did Thy foes accuse Thee—  
Thence I gain security;  
Comfortless Thy soul did languish  
Me to comfort in my anguish.  
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,  
Dearest Jesus, unto Thee.

Thou hast suff'rest great affliction  
And hast borne it patiently,  
Even death by crucifixion,  
Fully to atone for me;  
Thou did choose to be tormented  
That my doom should be prevented,  
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,  
Dearest Jesus, unto Thee.

Then, for all that wrought my pardon,  
For Thy sorrows deep and sore,  
For Thine anguish in the Garden,  
I will thank Thee evermore,  
Thank Thee for Thy groaning, sighing,  
For Thy bleeding and Thy dying,  
For that last triumphant cry,  
And shall praise Thee, Lord, on high.

## April issue deadline is Feb. 15



Digital files, sent  
via e-mail, are  
preferred. Our  
submission dead-  
line is the 15th of each month,  
two months before publication.

Send email submissions to:

**LMW@mid-southlcms.com**

or send by postal mail to:

**Judy Otto**

**150 N. Maury St.**

**Holly Springs, MS 38635**



## Tune in to Sent Radio online!

Access inspirational messaging any  
time you need it by listening to Sent  
Radio, the online radio stream from  
Lutheran Hour Ministries.

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Jesus Christ worldwide 24 hours a  
day, seven days a week.

Discover uplifting Scripture, devo-  
tions, music, and relevant sermons  
from "The Lutheran Hour" at  
[lhm.org/sentradio](http://lhm.org/sentradio).