



/ FEBRUARY 2024

MID-SOUTH LUTHERAN

LENT



A time of repentance – and rejoicing

The Four Seasons sang “Big Girls Don’t Cry.” As kids we were told “Men don’t cry.” An old adage says “Don’t cry over spilled milk.” But the best one of them all is “For crying out loud!”

Scripture is loaded with instances about tears. Some of them are from really significant people. Job wept agonizingly in his suffering. David wept over his son, Absalom, and Joseph wept for joy when he was reunited with his brothers. Solomon says there is a time for weeping and a time for joy. The psalmist says “Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy!” (PSALM 126:5). It’s more than just emotions.

Can we get back to being honest about our feelings? The words we will hear during our Ash Wednesday worship



Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola
District President

services are “For you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (GENESIS 3:19). That reality of death often brings tears to the eyes of those of us who have lost a loved one. But we’re reminded that God really did send His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins and rise from the dead, so we will rise again as well. Even though we are condemned in our sins, we repent and place our trust in Christ as our only Savior

to forgive us of our sins. For those who trust in Him, there’s really a wonderful eternity ahead, filled with rejoicing and no more tears of sorrow; only real tears of joy.

Lent tells such a profound story. The Passion season really focuses on a strong feeling of pain and suffering. Sometimes there were tears from the disciples. Sometimes women wept.

Sometimes even Jesus wept. I guess real men do cry! This season has a lesson on the time Jesus wept for His grief over Jerusalem. His grieving actually began around Palm Sunday. It should have been a joyous occasion, with all the palm branches and the shouts of “Hosanna to the King.” But it wasn’t.

Jesus approached the city with sorrow:

“Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. ... You did not know the time of your visitation.”

LUKE 19:42, 44

What He meant, of course, is that most of the people didn’t recognize what the time really was — the coming of the Messiah. They didn’t realize this was a time of repentance. They didn’t believe, so Jesus wept.

On the Tuesday after Palm Sunday, Jesus was busy. He knew what the rest of the week meant to Him as He came into the city amid the throng of people. He cleaned the temple court, driving out the money changers. He commended the widow for her two mites of offering and spent countless hours discussing theology about the Messiah and End Times with those thick-headed Pharisees and Sadducees.

Jesus was the clear winner in those debates. From our point of view the Scriptures looked like things were going pretty well for Jesus. The religious hypocrites were publicly humiliated, so the throne of David seemed like it was His for the taking. You’d think He’d be rejoicing, but He wasn’t. He wept.

What was wrong? Was Jesus just being

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MESSAGE

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a sour puss? It wasn't Jesus who had the problem. It was the people. They still rejected Him for who He really was and is — the promised Messiah. The people wanted a military king, which saddened Jesus.

We like to win arguments. We feel good about ourselves when we win a debate. Not Jesus. He didn't come to win a debate or compete in a popularity contest. He came to call people to faith and repentance. He came to save them by His death and resurrection. He came to win souls for life everlasting. To some of the common folks, Jesus was the messianic king, but not the Son of God. They saw Him as a miracle worker, but not the redeemer of their souls. To the leaders of the church, however, Jesus was a rival who had embarrassed them. Even His own disciples couldn't quite figure out who He really was. In other words, the heart and soul of Jerusalem was lost, so Jesus grieved:

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem ... How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" **MATTHEW 23:37**

Can we sense His deep pain? Many of us have lost loved ones, so we know the numbness and pain. That's what Jesus was feeling as He sorrowed over Jerusalem. He saw the utter destruction of everything that the holy city had in store for it. And just because religious leaders couldn't see Jesus — the God and Man who stood directly in front of them — He knew what was about to happen to Him, and what was eventually going to happen to Jerusalem and her people.

Jesus didn't just grieve over a city. He grieved at the loss of souls to an eternity of darkness apart from God. Created by God, nurtured by God and loved by God, God's chosen people rejected Him as their savior, the One who came to save them and us. Jesus pleaded with them to be saved. But they didn't, so He wept.

Is Jesus sorrowing over the Christian church today? Is it like those rebellious and unbelieving leaders in Jerusalem?



Ash Wednesday — a day set apart for the express purpose of repentance — gives us a time to reflect on our personal church life. Are we merely doing church instead of really being church? Ash Wednesday is a day when we're supposed to resolve our calling and move back toward God in repentance.

Like Jerusalem, we've heard Jesus' teachings. In fact, we've heard more about Jesus and what He accomplished than the people of Jerusalem ever heard during Holy Week. They, like us, heard of His suffering and death. Unlike the people of Jerusalem during Holy Week, however, we've read about His rising from the dead and ascension into heaven to prepare a place for us. We've heard Jesus say that the time is fulfilled — all things are complete. We've heard the testimony of eyewitnesses of His life, death, ministry and gracious mercy toward us.

So in a formal and liturgical way, shouldn't we acknowledge that Jesus has called us to faith? We hear His yearning for us to receive His gracious love, peace and tender mercy. We've publicly confessed our sins and received absolution with the ashes as an outward symbol of our repentant hearts. We're even prepared to receive the true body and blood of our Savior for the forgiveness of our sins.

Christianity is a whole lot more than the people of Jerusalem ever had. Will we be different tomorrow? Will we love God above all things? Will we forgive those who hurt us? Will we love our neighbor as ourselves? Will we apply ourselves to Word and Sacrament with greater devotion. Will there be rejoicing in heaven because of the repentance we have truly done in our lives and in our hearts? Or will Jesus still weep over chicks that refuse to be covered by His gracious wings?

Let's not overlook the hope and blessings of what Jesus said. Not all of what Jesus said is Law, guilt and damnation. There's a tremendous joy attached to the Gospel that we mustn't overlook. Look at the last verse:

"For I tell you, you will not see Me again, until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.'" **MATTHEW 23:39**

Jesus comes in the name of the Lord. He comes to save sinners like us. That's what the crowd sang about on Palm Sunday:

"Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest."
MATTHEW 21:9

Hosanna — Lord save us!

So Jesus provides us with another moment to welcome Him as our Savior and King on our Palm Sunday. Lent is a new opportunity to embrace what we've heard and accept the calling of the Holy Spirit in God's Word. May we use this time to bless Jesus, to trust Him, to let Him gather us onto Himself.

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem" was a cry of sorrow from Jesus. But the same words can just as easily express a cry of joy as we hear Christ's Word and receive Him in faith. May this season be a time of repentance and rejoicing. Our sins are washed away in the loving sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. Out of His grace Jesus offers us life; that we may be embraced in the shelter of His wings forever.

Have a blessed and repentant
Lenten journey to the foot of the cross of Christ.

Still time! Become a **MinistrySafe** member

The LCMS Office of National Mission recommends Synod congregations and schools strongly emphasize awareness and prevention of child sexual abuse. To help with these efforts, National Mission is pleased to announce fully funded memberships with MinistrySafe, a national organization that equips congregations and ministries to better protect children from sexual abuse.

All LCMS congregations and schools have access to the online MinistrySafe resources

at no cost through 2024.

For more information about the training, contact Missy Washburn at mwashburn@mid-southlcms.com or 901-373-1341, ext. 3101.

Visit ministrysafe.com/lcms to activate your ministry's membership under this special offer. After selecting "Start Your MinistrySafe Membership," select "Organization Membership \$250." The billing page will allow you to enter the access code LCMS2023, which covers the cost of the membership.



Educational debt relief available for church workers

*Ministry*FOCUS, a Recognized Service Organization (RSO) of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) that provides student loan relief to LCMS workers, is accepting applications for 2024 grants. Since 2015, *Ministry*FOCUS has awarded grants to LCMS pastors, missionaries, school-teachers and other rostered LCMS workers to help relieve the burden of educational debt and empower workers to focus on their ministry.

Applications for 2024 grants are now open and will be accepted until the end of the year. Rostered LCMS church workers with \$20,000 or more in student loan debt are invited to apply online at ministryfocus.org/apply.

"*Ministry*FOCUS recognizes that individuals often assume educational loans in order to serve the Lord and that,



Photos: LCMS/Erin M. Lunsford

for some, such loans often distract from or even undermine their very purpose," states the organization's website. "As such, *Ministry*FOCUS has established a loan repayment assistance program so that these servants of the Lord can focus more on ministry, and less on money."

Learn more at ministryfocus.org.

**SHARE
YOUR NEWS
WITH US!**

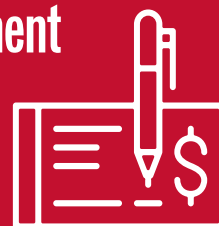
Digital files, sent via e-mail, are preferred. Send email submissions to LW@mid-southlcms.com or send by postal mail to:

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

Send us your stories and photos for our **April 2024** issue by **Feb. 15**.

Congregation mission commitment receipts

as of
Nov. 30, 2023
(11 months)



Anticipated amount (92% of budget)	\$1,434,373
Actual receipts	\$1,430,538
Over (under) anticipated amount	(\$3,835)

Use of mission commitment receipts

Allocated to Synod for world missions	\$406,245
Allocated to Tanzania	\$22,917
Retained for district ministry/mission support (70% of receipts)	\$1,001,377
Total receipts	\$1,430,538

Mission commitment receipts comparison

Actual receipts as of Nov. 30, 2023	\$1,430,538
Actual receipts as of Nov. 30, 2022	\$1,403,669
Over (under) prior year receipts	\$26,869

Mid-South District Wall of

HONORED WORKERS



In October 2023, the Mid-South District observed District Ministry Month, emphasizing professional church workers and the numerous ways they are supported and encouraged through the ministry of the district. From recruiting efforts to tuition assistance, and from professional development to valuable grants for outreach, the ministry of the Mid-South District is strongly invested in its workers, current and future.

As such, LCMS members across the district were invited to also invest in our workers by sharing a gift to the district IMPACT Fund. Where so moved, donors were invited to give those gifts in honor or memory of a cherished Professional Church Worker—or even a future worker. The Mid-South District thanks all those who shared gifts in support of district ministry. As gifts were received in honor of specific workers, those names were displayed on a virtual “Honored Worker Wall” at mid-southlcms.org/honored-worker-wall.

The following professional church workers were honored or memorialized through donor gifts received in honor/memory of a worker, as part of District Ministry Month emphasis, which totaled \$11,730.

IN HONOR OF:

Rev. Andrew Abraham
Shepherd of the Hills, Crossville, Tenn.

Rev. John Beabout
Shepherd of the Hills, Crossville, Tenn.

Rev. Robert Benke
Faith, Hot Springs Village, Ark.

Rev. David Callies
emeritus

Rev. Kevin Conger
Hope, Jacksonville, Ark.

Rev. Paul Donner
emeritus

Rev. Dan Elkins
emeritus

Rev. James Evers
emeritus

Alane Evers
Music Program Director,
Faith, Oak Ridge, Tenn.

Michelle Fischer
Principal, Immanuel, Memphis

Rev. Mark Goble
Christ the King, Memphis

Rev. Tim Henning
Trinity, Mena, Ark.

Rev. Kenneth Lampe
emeritus

Rev. Ed Maanum
First, Knoxville

Rev. Charles Neugebauer
Christ the King, Memphis

Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola
District president

Rev. Larry Peters
Grace, Clarksville, Tenn.

Rev. George Smith
Faith, Oak Ridge, Tenn.

Rev. Andy Toopes
Holy Trinity, Bowling Green, Ky.

Rev. Philip Young
Redeemer, Nashville

Rev. JD Zischke
Restoration, Fayetteville, Ark.

John Carpenter
Student, Concordia Theological
Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.

IN MEMORY OF:

Judith Bailey
Director of Parish Music

Al Behnke
First District Business Manager,
District Vice-President for
Lutheran Church Extension Fund

Rev. Al Boysen

Rev. Dr. Wilbert E. Griesse

Rev. Norman Groteluschen

Rev. Clarence Helmich

Rev. Paul Martens

Rev. John and Margie Reimold

Rev. Paul Henry Schmidt

Rev. Henry Stoll

Rev. Bruce Zager

2025 Gathering headed to New Orleans



Planning is underway for the next LCMS Youth Gathering, to be held July 19–23, 2025, in New Orleans. The theme will be “ENDURE” and is based on Heb. 12:1–3.

The Gathering office has been very busy preparing for the 2025 event. There is already a significant amount of information available on the Gathering website for adult leaders, volunteers, participants and their families. To see the latest news and information, visit lcmsgathering.com



ENDURE

JULY 19-23, 2025; NEW ORLEANS, LA

or facebook.com/lcmsgathering.

The LCMS Youth Gathering provides thousands of youth and adults the opportunity to come together as a community of God’s people to learn more about Jesus Christ, the Christian faith and their Lutheran identity. During the five days of the Gathering, youth spend

time together in God’s Word, worship, service, and fellowship with others from across the Synod. This event is organized by LCMS Youth Ministry.

NATIONAL24 is July 21-24

The National Lutheran Youth Workers Conference (NATIONAL24) will be held July 21-24 in New Orleans.

NATIONAL24 is a standalone youth ministry practitioner conference, but also provides an opportunity to prepare for the 2025 LCMS Youth Gathering. The four-day conference is a great opportunity for:

- ▶ Adult leaders planning to take a group to New Orleans in 2025 and wanting to familiarize themselves with area hotels, facilities and restaurants.
- ▶ First-time adult leaders desiring to connect with other new and seasoned adult leaders.
- ▶ Adult leaders looking for training and net-

works which support your service as a youth ministry practitioner.

- ▶ Youth (high school) leaders in congregations looking for an opportunity to sharpen their skills and meet other LCMS young leaders through YouthLead training.
- ▶ Young adults (ages 18-25) looking to serve their congregation and the opportunity to serve the community of New Orleans through a young-adult servant event.

Adult participants will receive a complimentary registration to the 2025 LCMS Youth Gathering in New Orleans.

Registration for NATIONAL24 will remain open until the event fills or on July 1. Visit lcmsgathering.com/national24 for more information.



‘There is clear teaching’

A handful of church workers building a church body in Cambodia. A missionary pastor reaching out to Mormon country. A refugee who was ordained as the first Lutheran pastor from his community. This issue of *Lutherans Engage the World* highlights a few of the ways that God is calling and equipping His people to serve in unique contexts, in the United States and around the world. The issue also includes articles about the ongoing disaster response on the island of Maui, Hawaii, following a devastating fire in August; the rollout of the new Spanish-language hymnal, *Himnario Luterano*; and Mission Central in Mapleton, Iowa, a hub for telling the church about the work of the Synod’s international missionaries.

Thanks be to God for faithful Lutherans around the world, such as Cambodian Pastor Bun (Peter) Phanna, who reminds us that “with Luther’s Small Catechism, with the Augsburg Confession, ... there is clear teaching. There is no doubt.”

Read the issue online at engage.lcms.org. If you aren’t currently receiving the magazine but would like to, visit engage.lcms.org/subscribe to sign up for a free subscription. Both individual and bulk subscriptions (for congregations) are available.

SPIRITUAL but NOT RELIGIOUS



Getty Images

If friends mention that they are “spiritual but not religious,” you have a great opening for a spiritual conversation. It is a time to ask questions, because we can’t relate to people if we don’t know where they are on their spiritual journey.

Start by asking them what they mean by “religious.” They may see no need for organized religion, which means churches, denominations, doctrine, other faiths ... any system that impinges on their personal freedom and asks something of them.

They may see Christian doctrine as paternalistic, authoritarian and oppressive, in contrast to true spirituality and freedom.

In response, be sure to listen and ask questions in a non-judgmental manner in order to clarify issues they raise. When you start judging them, the spiritual conversation is over.

To learn more about their religious viewpoints, you might ask if they have had bad experiences in church.

Note that you are not defending Christianity as an organized, historic religion — because it has a lot of baggage, much of which contradicts Christ’s teaching — but rather as a personal relationship with the sovereign, living God of the universe.

You might share that if they expect churches to be places where perfect, loving people gather (rather than a hospital for sinners), they will be disappointed.

Perhaps mention that you have found attending a church to be liberating. As you set aside a special time devoted to the Lord, your relationship with Him deepens and you enjoy fellowship with other believers.

Then ask them what they mean by “spiritual.” Our Lord created us with a spirit and desire to have a relationship with Him, so we shouldn’t be surprised if someone says they are spiritual. However imperfectly, they are expressing that desire. Usually they are not referring to the God of the Bible, but to one of two religious worldviews:

1. God is a God of love and everyone is going to heaven. This view departs from historical Christian doctrine in that it claims everyone is going to heaven, regardless of beliefs or behavior. Different religions have different paths to heaven — this is universalism.

In contrast, Jesus said:

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” JOHN 14:6

Universalism denies the holiness, justice and mercy of God — the God who has revealed Himself through the prophets, Christ, His Word, the Holy Spirit, saints throughout history and fulfilled prophecies. They are rejecting the necessity for Christ to die on the cross because everyone is going to heaven anyway.

It also means there is no ultimate justice in life. Hitler, Mao and other mass murderers — all unrepentant, evil people — are going to heaven, paying no price and suffering no consequence for their evil deeds. Is that the kind of heaven you hope for?

2. We are all one and we are all spiritual. This view sees you, me and the entire universe as sacred, holy and spiritual (that is, we are all god). It acknowledges that there is something transcendent about the material universe and claims we can experience this divine reality and live a transcendent life of connectedness with all that is. And when we die, we become one with all that is — the ultimate oneness. This is pantheism.

How can we develop a personal rela-

Continued on next page



tionship with an impersonal god-that-is-all-that-is? Pantheism teaches that in death we lose our identity forever, like a drop of rain that falls into the ocean.

In contrast, when we repent and receive Christ as our Savior, we become indwelt by the Holy Spirit and develop a personal relationship with the God who created us in His image and seeks to have a loving relationship with us into eternity.

Although God has revealed Himself in nature, which He created, He is separate and distinct from it, just as we are separate and distinct from some work of art that we create. We see that in the first verse of the Bible:

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. **GENESIS 1:1**

IN SUMMARY, while being spiritual but not religious sounds liberating, it rejects historic, biblical Christianity, which has been proven by multiple fulfilled prophecies and provided meaning, purpose and joy for millions of people in their lives and into eternity.

It also leads to lives that are devoid of a personal relationship with our Lord, that worship a false god and are on the broad path that leads to the lake of fire forever. They may be in touch with the spirit world, but it is not the Holy Spirit.

So let us go forth to reach people with the love and truth of Christ, for time is short, eternity is a very long time, and we are not guaranteed tomorrow.

To God be the glory
The Board of Evangelism,
First Lutheran Church, Little Rock



LCMS/Erik M. Lunsford

Add **LWML CONVENTION** to your summer schedule

What has 600 legs, 600 arms, 300 hearts and is purple all over?

It must be the convention body of the LWML Mid-South District! The ladies will gather for convention June 7-9 in Memphis.

The district convention is held every two years. Members gather to carry out the business of the district. But these ladies are not all business. They also spend much of their time in praise and worship, Bible study, fellowship and laughter.



An LWML convention is open to all, and many husbands attend, too. Young women between the ages of 18 and 35 should consider attending as Young Woman Representatives (YWRs). Those ages 14 to 17 may attend as Junior YWRs. Special activities are planned for both YWR groups.

The theme for the upcoming convention is “Holy Spirit, Flow Through Me” and is based on Rev. 22:1-2a:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city.

For more information and to register, visit midsouthlwml.org/district-convention.

Henkel Conference returns in August

The third Henkel Conference will be held Aug. 19-20 at Ascension Lutheran Church, Madison (Nashville). The following speaker lineup has been confirmed:

- ▶ **Mary Eberstadt**, Panola chair in Christian Culture at the Catholic Information Center and senior research fellow at the Faith and Reason Institute.
- ▶ **Paul Kengor**, editor of The American Spectator and professor of political science at Grove City College.
- ▶ **Dr. Gene Veith**, professor of literature emeritus at Patrick Henry College, Purcellville, Va.
- ▶ **Donna Harrison**, Charlotte Lozier Institute scholar and former chief executive officer of the American

Association of Pro-Life Obstetricians.

- ▶ **Rev. Hans Fiene**, pastor of Prince of Peace, Crestwood, Mo., and creator of the “LutheranSatire” channel on YouTube.
- ▶ **Rev. Sean Daenzer**, LCMS director of worship.
- ▶ **Rev. Dr. Christian Preus**, senior pastor of Mount Hope, Casper, Wyo., and chairman, Luther Classical College Board of Regents.
- ▶ **Noah Hahn**, philosophy instructor at Fordham University, Bronx, N.Y.

Presentations from the 2023 conference are available on YouTube. Watch for more information and registration details, coming soon.

You may also visit ascensionmadison.com/henkel.html.

Setting records on the mountain



Pictured are some of the record number of summer campers at Camp Trinity in 2023.

The year 2023 marked the 40th anniversary of Camp Trinity, and the ministry celebrated decades of Gospel proclamation, Christian fellowship and outdoor adventure on Petit Jean Mountain.

It also happened to be a record year for attendance. The number of campers and guests served — more than 4,000 — shattered the previous record of 2,955 set in 2022. This number includes camp users at all functions: summer camp, retreats, reunions, Outdoor Classroom, community breakfasts, worship services, meetings and special events.

2023 records by the numbers:

- 12** first-time retreat groups and family reunions
- 14** events in the new retreat lodge at camp
- 18** teams that competed at Trivia Night, the camp's spring fundraiser
- 99** students who attended at least one session of the Outdoor Classroom for homeschoolers
- 200+** in attendance at Music on the Mountain
- 273** summer campers
- 714** camp users in October, topping the record 592 set the previous month
- 4,000+** campers and guests in a calendar year (the precise number was not known at press deadline in December)

Summer Camp

Registration is well underway for Summer Camp 2024. The season will include six sessions of youth camps and three family camps in June and July.

Summer campers will explore God's Word and hear staff-led campfire messages on the theme:

Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. **PHILIPPIANS 4:8**

Jesus embodied all these qualities, but He was not merely an example for us to follow. He was the Savior whose substitutionary death on the cross and victorious resurrection were necessary to ransom us from the grip of sin and death, and set us free to a life of loving service to others.

Parents can visit lutherancamp.org to learn more about sessions and dates and to register. Click the "Summer Camp" link at the top of the page.

Staff Wanted

Camp Trinity is in the process of hiring summer staff. Lutheran young adults, ages 18–25, looking for summer jobs in which they can make an impact on the lives of children, youth and families can email the camp office to request an application: director@lutherancamp.org.

Linkt Senior High Retreat

It's not too late to register senior youth groups for the Linkt retreat. For congregations of the Mid-South District, the retreat is scheduled for Feb. 23-25.

The theme is "Love & Serve." Messages and Bible study will focus on Philippians 2:1-11.

Pastors and youth leaders can learn more at lutherancamp.org. Click on the "Linkt Youth Retreats" button at the top of the page.