



/ JUNE-JULY 2025

MID-SOUTH LUTHERAN

Freedom to choose?

On June 25 every year, our congregations celebrate the presentation of the Augsburg Confession, one of the most important documents of the Reformation. It is the primary confession of faith of the Lutheran church.



Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola
District President

In an attempt to restore religious and political unity in the Holy Roman Empire, Emperor Charles V appealed to the princes of the German free territories to explain their religious concerns. The importance of Charles' plea was designed to rally united support against the Ottoman invasion after the Siege of Vienna. The Augsburg Confession was presented at the Diet of Augsburg on June 25, 1530. Within the document, Article XVIII deals with the subject of free will. It begins:

Our churches teach that man's will has some liberty for the attainment of civil righteousness and for the choice of things subject to reason. However, it does not have the power, without the Holy Spirit, to attain the righteousness of God — that is, spiritual righteousness — because natural man does not perceive the gifts of the spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:14); but this righteousness is wrought in the heart when the Holy Spirit is received through the Word.



The issue of free will and predestination has created endless animated discussions among every generation of Christians. What is free will? Can free will be separated from God's predestination of believers? St. Paul writes:

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ. **EPH. 1:4-5 NIV**

God's election is based on His Word. St. Paul writes:

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

ROM. 10:14-15

He continues in Ephesians:

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. **EPH. 1:13-14**

In the history of the Christian church, no doctrine has been as hotly debated as predestination. If, as is the case, predestination is true, what happens to the concept of free will? Are we like puppets, dancing on a string to what God fixed for us to be before creation? Does God predestine some to go to heaven and others to hell? Even more troubling in this purely tainted view of election, why should we even bother with evangelism if whoever God predestines

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FREE WILL

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timed to be saved will be saved and the lost can never be saved?

These are difficult questions, so what were the Lutheran reformers trying to accomplish?

We hear of those who are convinced fully that we have unlimited free will. When we wake up in the morning, we choose to stay in bed or get up. Do I wear a white or blue shirt? When I get in my car, I'm free to drive to work or not. The decision I make is my free choice. I'm not constrained.

By natural free will, we choose according to our human inclinations. We have reasons for the choices we make. There's a reason we sit where we sit. Maybe we like to be closer to the nearest door. It's our choice. The pew I choose in church is always my seat! But something else can affect our choices like, "You're in my pew!"

Adam and Eve didn't choose to disobey God until Satan tempted them to make their bad choice. Even St. Paul says:

For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. **ROM. 7:19**

Why? Because of my sinful flesh, the world I live in and Satan's temptations, I may be tempted to choose bad things. Our confession says the Holy Spirit enables us to overcome those temptations. It's a battle!

The bondage of my free will forces me to either choose to obey God or to succumb to sinful temptations. St. Paul writes:

For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ... If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. **ROM. 8:6-7, 11**

There's a huge difference between civil righteousness, in which natural man has free will to choose, and spiritual righteousness. It's impossible for natural

man to choose to be acceptable to God, to believe in God, to obey God or to choose good without the work of the Holy Spirit. Above it all, we confess God's predestination of His elect simply means God chose to love us first.

Although Adam and Eve and all mankind were created sinless, the bondage of our free will after the Fall could never have chosen God. But rather than creating puppets, free will was given to them with the accompanying ability to also choose to disobey God. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, our free will was irreparably fractured. Since the Fall, all mankind, born of natural means, is not able to not sin. (Yes, I know it's a double negative!) It simply means that natural humanity lost its freedom not to sin. St. Paul affirms that "we are slaves of sin" (Rom. 6:20).

The bondage of our free will to sin means our natural "free will" elevated our human autonomy above God's divine authority. The bondage of our will chooses sinful selfishness rather than submitting to God's authority.

So if God's only goal had been to create a "puppeting" mankind without free will, He would have bypassed both the Garden of Eden and the Garden of Gethsemane, just making puppets that dance on His pulled strings. When God placed Adam in Eden's garden and gave him free will, Satan seized an opportunity. In the choice between the Tree of Knowing Good and Evil and the Tree of Life, Satan's successful temptation of Adam and Eve brought sin and death to God's people and into His otherwise perfect creation.

There are those who deny the idea that God could create humanity with free will. To them, God's majesty means He decides everything. Yet even in the state of the bondage of the will, Scripture assures us of God's mercy, promising "that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him" (Rom. 8:28 NIV).

Does natural man have the freedom to choose God? No! By our own effort we cannot make ourselves holy. Our own feeble efforts can't stop us from breaking God's commandments (actual sin). What is more, as Adam's descendants, we're stained with the indelible inclination to

sin (original sin). Salvation is beyond man's natural power and, therefore, our salvation must depend entirely on God's will, grace and mercy. St. Paul writes:

God ... desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all.

1 TIM. 2:3-6

In his book *On the Bondage of the Will*, Martin Luther writes:

Justification by faith alone is itself a gift of God, by grace, and not of self (Eph. 2:8). As Paul writes in Romans: "Just at the right time, while we were powerless to save ourselves from God's wrath. ... Jesus died for the ungodly in order that we might have peace with God" (Rom. 5:6). "For it was God Himself who decided to nail all our broken commandments on the cross and leave them there. He Himself has brought us into His presence by His own blood shed on the cross" (Acts 20:28) "to see us holy, without spot and blemish" (Col. 1:21-22).

Our natural free will can reject God's gift. However, we're assured that when we receive God's gift of forgiveness and eternal life, it's totally because God's Spirit has enabled us to receive and believe. By God's grace, our broken commandments no longer weigh us down. Satan's accusations of sins are silenced. When God the Father sees us, He sees us as Christ's redeemed people.

Luther:

Since salvation is totally of God's doing, the doctrine of election comforts those who believe. We can say, "I belong to God! I have been chosen by God. I am one of His sheep!" We rest firmly on God's promise that our sins are forgiven. Jesus Christ, our gracious, loving Savior offered His sacrifice for us. God desires all people to be saved and enter Heaven's gates on the merits of His Son, Jesus Christ. God has chosen us and wants no one to snatch us out of His hand (John 10:29-30).

That's just one of the many nuggets found in our Lutheran Confessions, which we celebrate June 25.

CELEBRATING FIRST RESPONDERS

On March 23, during their regular Bible study time, children of Faith, Union City, Tenn., were invited by neighboring Union City Baptist Temple to share in a special celebration of the first responders who serve their community.

Community service was a major theme as the children learned how modern machines and well-trained personnel help to save lives and make Union City and surrounding communities safer.

Helicopter service, fire engines and police cars were on display, while guests enjoyed the opportunity to explore the interior of an ambulance.

Union City Baptist Temple, served by Rev. Tony Keeton, and Faith, served by Rev. Paul Leigeber, share their properties on the east side of town.



From left, Helena Bennett, Clara Richardson, Sawyer Richardson and Blaze Bennett of Faith, Union City, enjoy an inside view of an ambulance in Obion County, Tenn.

District offers scholarships for church work students



To support students pursuing full-time church work, the Mid-South District is pleased to once again offer financial aid. To be considered for financial assistance, a student must be a member in good standing in a Mid-South District congregation and be enrolled in a Synod seminary or university preparing for full-time service to the church.



Rostered workers are pastors, teachers, deaconesses, directors of Christian education, music directors, family ministry directors and other vocations.

Students must first inform the district office that they are or will be a student at a Synod school. All related forms, including the financial aid application, and instructions on submitting are available at mid-southlcms.org/student-financial-aid.

The application deadline is June 15. It may be emailed to Lisa Pennington at lpennington@mid-southlcms.com or sent by postal mail to:

Mid-South District LCMS
Attn: Lisa Pennington
1675 Wynne Road
Cordova, TN 38016



Congregation mission commitment receipts

as of March 31, 2025 (3 months)



Anticipated amount (25% of budget).....	\$407,174
Actual receipts	\$392,673
Over (under) anticipated amount.....	(\$14,501)

Use of mission commitment receipts

Allocated to Synod for world missions	\$111,552
Allocated to Tanzania	\$6,250
Retained for district ministry/ mission support (70% of receipts)	\$274,871
Total receipts	\$392,673

Mission commitment receipts comparison

Actual receipts as of Feb. 28, 2025	\$392,673
Actual receipts as of Feb. 29, 2024	\$392,364
Over (under) prior year receipts	\$309

DISTRICT NEWS

Rev. Jonathan Holmes was installed as pastor of **St. Paul, Gillett, Ark., and St. Luke, DeWitt, Ark.,** on March 29. The service was held at St. Paul. Pictured are from left (front) Revs. Stewart Marshall, Trinity, Pine Bluff, Ark.; Sean Smith, Grace, Clarksville, Tenn.; Jonathan Holmes; Dr. Lannan Martin, King of Glory, Williamsburg, Va.; Kevin Conger, Hope, Jacksonville, Ark.; (back) Gerald Heinecke, Hope, Batesville, and Shepherd of the Hills, Horseshoe Bend, Ark.; Dr. Roger Paavola, district president; Steven Teske, Immanuel, Alexander, Ark.; Emil Woerner, Friends in Christ, Bryant, Ark.; and Don White, St. John, Stuttgart, Ark.



Register for Henkel Conference

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 Fittingly Spoken* and *A Brief History of Power*

For more information and registration, visit ascensionmadison.com/henkel.html. You may also send an email to henkel@ascensionmadison.com.

WELCOME!

Call and vicarage/deaconess intern assignment services were held at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind., and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (CSL), in April. The Mid-South District was blessed to receive one pastoral candidate and one vicar, both from CSL.



Benjamin Heinz
Pastor
Athens Lutheran Church,
Athens, Tenn.



Michael Saxton
Vicar
Grace Lutheran Church,
Knoxville

Christ awarded grant for community outreach

Christ Lutheran Church and School, Little Rock, was recently presented a \$14,000 GROW Grant for the congregation's 10:2 Ministry, inspired by Luke 10:2: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." The engaging new ministry seeks to increase the reach of the Gospel through outreach at community festivals and fairs. We pray for God's blessings on the ministry and look forward to sharing more on how Christ Lutheran is connecting with the Little Rock community.

From left, Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola, district president, presented the grant to Christ's Logan Brown, director of Worship Arts and Music Education; Cara Steely, principal; and Rev. Matt Albright, senior pastor.



CAMP TRINITY

Summer camp fills June and July at Camp Trinity. While the camp is buzzing with activity, camp staff is also preparing for the fall, especially the fall semester of the **Outdoor Classroom** for homeschoolers, for which registration is now open.

The Outdoor Classroom assists parents with subjects outside the core curriculum of reading, math and language arts. The spring 2025 semester included trips to the Historic Arkansas Museum, the Morrilton Archeology Station and Petit Jean State Park. Students learned about forest habitat, weather, storytelling and early settlement in Arkansas. Speakers from the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission and Petit Jean State Park taught about archery and fishing.

The fall 2025 class schedule is in the works. Homeschooling parents interested in learning more can visit lutherancamp.org/for-home-schoolers.

Music on the Mountain, Camp Trinity's fall fundraiser, is Sept. 27. The festival includes music of many genres: Gospel, bluegrass, country, folk, contemporary Christian and oldies — all performed from a stage on the lawn in front of historic Trinity Chapel.



Outdoor Classroom students hiked to Cedar Falls in Petit Jean State Park.

Also included are barbecue pulled-pork dinners and other food; a silent auction; outdoor games like cornhole, giant Jenga and giant checkers, and more.

Admission is free, but contributions are welcome. Guests can come and go throughout the day, with music starting at 11 a.m. and continuing into the late

afternoon. Cornerstone Lodge and the campground will both be available Friday and Saturday night for guests who want to arrive early or stay longer.

Musicians and musical groups that are interested in performing can email the camp office at trinitypetitjean@gmail.com or director@lutherancamp.org.



We share with you the pastors of the Mid-South District who are celebrating milestone ordination anniversaries in 2025. Congregations are encouraged to observe these ministry milestones with an appropriate recognition.

We rejoice and give thanks to God with these gifts to His church. Well done, good and faithful servants!

65 YEARS

Rev. Albert Eichelberger
Emeritus, Knoxville, Tenn.

Rev. Frank Zirbel
Emeritus, Harrison, Ark.

60 YEARS

Rev. David Callies
Emeritus, Brentwood, Tenn.

Rev. Larry Marhenke
Emeritus, Hot Springs Village, Ark.

Rev. Donald Neiswender
Emeritus, Paducah, Ky.

Rev. Gilbert Pingel
Emeritus, Chattanooga, Tenn.

55 YEARS

Rev. Linsey Dettmer
Emeritus, Sevierville, Tenn.

Rev. John Freitag
Emeritus, Rogersville, Tenn.

Rev. Roger Reckling
Emeritus, Knoxville, Tenn.

Rev. Kenneth Taglauer
Emeritus, Brookline, Mass.

50 YEARS

Rev. Darrell Kobs
Emeritus, Russellville, Ark.

45 YEARS

Rev. Dean Clausing
Emeritus, Benton, Ark.

Rev. David Cloeter
Emeritus, Bella Vista, Ark.

Rev. Larry Peters
Grace, Clarksville, Tenn.

40 YEARS

Rev. Robert Alexander
Emeritus, Bella Vista, Ark.

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

Rev. Jonathan Beyer
First, Hot Springs, Ark.

Rev. Wayne Schuett
Emeritus, Russellville, Ark.

Rev. John Treude
Emeritus, Fort Smith, Ark.

35 YEARS

Rev. James Burns
First, Benton, Ark.

Rev. Myles Schultz
Grace, Holiday Island, Ark.

30 YEARS

Rev. David Lampman
Emeritus, Crossville, Tenn.

25 YEARS

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

Rev. Jerome Leckband
All Saints, Jonesboro, Ark.

20 YEARS

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

Rev. David Schmidt
Faith, Bentonville, Ark.

15 YEARS

Rev. Michael Croom
Trinity, Memphis

Rev. Michael Edwards
Candidate, Nixa, Mo.

Rev. Gerald Heinecke
Hope, Batesville, Ark.
Zion, Waldenburg, Ark.

Rev. David Witte
Grace, Little Rock, Ark.

10 YEARS

Rev. Eric Longman
Holy Trinity, Rogers, Ark.

5 YEARS

Rev. Sawyer Meyers
Beautiful Savior, Olive Branch, Miss.



A **Mission Grant** of \$10,000 was awarded to First Lutheran School, Knoxville, on April 4. The funds will be used for roof repairs.

Pictured are, from left, Melanie Bartholomay, board member; Jessie Irwin, principal and middle school teacher; Becky Grese, East Tennessee Zone President; and Rev. Ed Maanum, First pastor.

Visit midsouthlwml.org/mission-grants to learn more about the ministry and all other district Mission Grants



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. 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!



Dr. Tiffany Manor

Doing 'good' to everyone

And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. **GAL. 6:9-10**

The passage from Galatians makes me think about summertime as an opportunity to slow down a bit.

We may tend to cook more simply, using the bounty of the summer harvest. We may take a vacation to the beach or to see family. Even those who must go to work each day may feel a little more relaxed.

However, we shouldn't get so relaxed that we tend to omit regular worship from our lives. Nor should we let our prayer time suffer in favor of time at the community pool. And we do not want to forget the ill, the grieving or the shut-ins we know.

Let's be sure to invite Jesus to join in our summer plans — especially when it involves doing good to everyone.

Candy Habich, Chairman

LWML Mid-South District Media and Marketing Committee



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.

The Gospel in our words and deeds

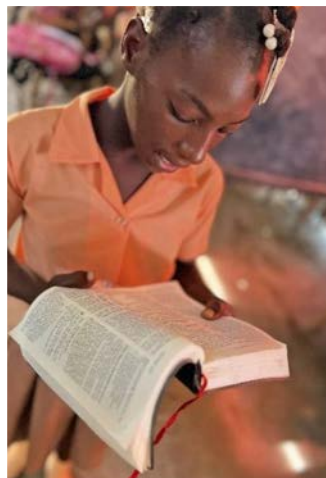
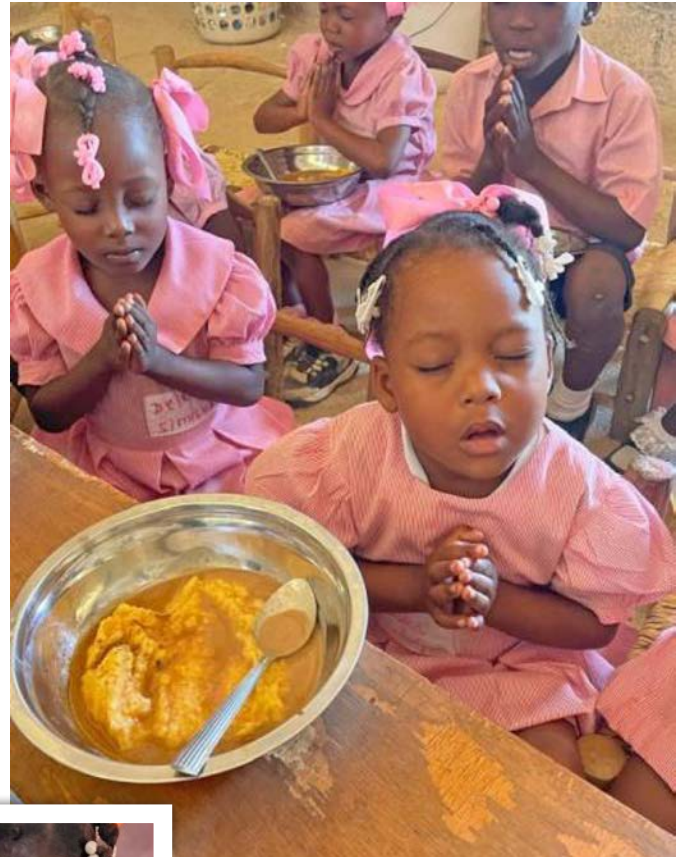
Many times, our actions speak louder than words. 1 John 3:18 says, “Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.” The ears of the skeptic are opened when they know we sincerely care for them in our deeds.

This idea is the basis of how Trinity HOPE — a ministry that feeds thousands of hungry children, teachers and cooks each day in Christian schools in Haiti — was created. As the parents of many children in Haiti are practicing voodoo, Trinity HOPE initially shares the love of Jesus Christ with students through a nutritious bowl of beans and rice. This satisfies their hunger and opens their ears to the education the teachers are providing.

However, as Jesus told Satan when He was being tempted in the wilderness, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God’” (Matt. 4:4). Because every school where Trinity HOPE provides a meal is a Christian school, the teachers combine their lessons of reading and math with lessons of forgiveness and redemption from God’s Word.

Although each of the Trinity HOPE feeding program directors (FPDs) have been directed to share Bible stories with the children during their school visits, over the last year we have been asking ourselves, “How can we do even more?”

Through prayerful guidance, and the help of numerous pastors both here and in Haiti, we have now developed a structured Gospel teaching program in which all 35 of our FPDs are dedicating one of their school visits each month to formally sharing God’s Word around one specific biblical topic. In addition, to help prepare our FPDs who are not ordained pastors, our Haitian supervisor, Rev. Willy Dieudonne, records a five- to 10-minute sermonette on the topic of the month and sends it to each FPD. This allows for continuity and biblical accuracy in the message that students in all 280-plus schools are hearing each month. The team of pastors that generated these materials developed lessons on 45 biblical topics, enough to create a four-year educational



cycle. This school year, topics have included “The Bible,” “Sin and Salvation,” “Children in the Eyes of Jesus Christ,” “Prayer” and “Eternal Life.”

Over the course of the 40-plus lessons from our FPDs, and in combination with the faith lessons from their classroom teachers, the children will be far better equipped to grow into the missionaries God has called them to be. With their bellies full and their hearts and minds prepared, they will be able to expand God’s Kingdom by sharing the truth of God’s love and redemption with their families, friends and communities.

We thank God for blessing Trinity HOPE with this Gospel teaching program. God is good!

To learn more about what we do, visit is at trinityhope.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 **August 2024** issue by **June 15**.

