



MID-SOUTH LUTHERAN

A Nation Under God



In 2002, the U. S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit ruled that the words “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance were an endorsement of religion and thus a violation of the First Amendment to the U. S. Constitution.



Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola
District President

President George W. Bush said the ruling was “ridiculous judicial junk.” The U.S. House and Senate passed non-binding resolutions affirming inclusion of the words. The Supreme Court eventually overturned the Ninth Circuit’s ruling.

Was this something God allowed for His purpose?

“You have meant this for evil, but God has used this for good,” says the prophecy of God in Genesis 50.

This summer we will celebrate the 250th anniversary of our nation’s birth. What does God’s Word say about “one nation back to God?”

“Righteousness exalts a nation,” writes Solomon in Proverbs 14:34. It literally means that a nation is lifted up, head and shoulders above others morally. Righteousness is purity. We know we aren’t pure by our human nature. We don’t become righteous by doing good. We are made righteous through Christ.

St. Paul says:

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. **2 Cor. 5:21 (NIV)**

Our nation was founded on religious principles. Religious freedom was our foundation because many of the settlers fled religious persecution from the Church of England, desiring to establish communities where they could practice their faith without interference.

Men like Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton and John Hancock re-wrote portions of the Bible that were objectionable to them. You can still buy a copy of “The Jefferson Bible.” These forefathers also wrote: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among them are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

As Unitarians and Freemasons, not all our founding fathers acknowledged fundamental Christianity. Our one-dollar bill has numerous symbols of the Unitarian and Freemason sects. But one fundamental truth remains: It’s religious freedom and the expression of a person’s faith that founded our nation. Our forefathers may not have named the Creator, nor did all acknowledge God as revealed in Jesus Christ. It wasn’t until June 14, 1954, that President Dwight D. Eisenhower added the phrase “one nation under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance.

The first pilgrims at Plymouth Rock wrote: “We came here for the glory of God, and for the advancement of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.” In 1643, in an acknowledgment of faith in God, the New England Confederation Constitution stated: “Whereas we all came into these parts with one and the

See **MESSAGE**, Page 2

MESSAGE

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

same end and aim, namely to advance the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to enjoy the liberties of the Gospel in purity and peace.”

But liberty always comes at a price. Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness cannot come from a government. They come from God. In the Declaration of Independence, the next line states: “and that to secure or protect these rights, governments are instituted among men.” They’re saying the same thing Paul said in his epistles: There is no government on earth that God has not allowed to stand.

Tyrannical dictatorships notwithstanding, no government stands — regardless of the chaos it creates or the dangers it exhibits — without God’s allowance. God grants government to protect their people. What a government does with its responsibilities may unfortunately be dominated by one’s human nature and tendencies.

Debating the Declaration of Independence at the first Continental Congress, Benjamin Franklin said, “Gentlemen, if it is true that not one single petal from any flower falls to the ground without escaping God’s attention, will the distress of this nation go unheeded? Let us, therefore, determine to seek His face.” At his words, men all fell to their knees and began to pray and ask for God’s guidance. What would happen today if one senator asked the Congress to come to their knees and pray, “Almighty God, what do You want us to do as one nation under God?”

Of the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence, 36 died in defense of their beliefs before our nation gained her hard-fought liberty. In 1821, John Quincy Adams wrote: “From the time of the Declaration of Independence, the American people were bound by the laws of God and the laws of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which they all acknowledged as the root of their conduct. We all came together to obey the Word of God.”

George Washington wrote in his farewell address to Congress: “Do not let

anyone claim tribute of American patriotism if they even attempt to remove religion from our political foundation.” Even Thomas Jefferson wrote: “The First Amendment has created a wall of separation between church and government, but that wall is a one directional wall. It keeps government from running the church but makes sure that Christian principles will always stay as a fundamental part of this government.”

Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.

Proverbs 14:34

Sin is missing the standards set by God for His people. Sin’s cure is beyond our own ability.

The Pledge of Allegiance was first written in 1892 by Francis Bellamy, a Baptist minister. Bellamy designed the Pledge as a brief, inspiring recitation for schoolchildren to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus’s arrival in the Americas. President Benjamin Harrison soon endorsed the Pledge as part of Columbus Day observances in schools. Bellamy wrote: “I pledge allegiance to my flag and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

On Flag Day, June 14, 1954, the pledge included, “to the flag of the United States of America.” In 1954, Congress unanimously passed President Eisenhower’s request to add the words, “one nation under God.” Eisenhower wrote, “This shows the transcendence of religious faith in America’s history and heritage and in her future.”

But look at our history since that time: In 1963 the Supreme Court ruled that state-sponsored Bible reading and recitation of the Lord’s Prayer in public schools were unconstitutional. In 1964, a Supreme Court decision ended mandatory Bible reading in public schools, even as literature. Courts have removed any reference to God in public buildings. The Supreme Court in 1995 declined to hear the appeal of a student who received a zero for a research paper on Jesus Christ.

There have been numerous attempts to remove God from our money, and prayers before Congress and the

Supreme Court. Recently, someone in California didn’t just want to take God away from us; he wanted to remove God from every part of our nation’s history because it’s objectionable to him.

Blessed is the nation whose
God is LORD, the people whom
he has chosen as his heritage!

Psalms 33:12

God is real. His laws are meant to guide and to protect. His blessings flow to those who fear and acknowledge Him. The minority voice must be heard, but when that voice dictates a direction that erodes the foundation of our history and Christian doctrines, the fabric of our nation will eventually be destroyed.

Joshua stood before his people to challenge them:

“Choose this day who you will
serve. ... But as for me and my
house, we shall serve the LORD.”

Joshua 24:15

Pray for God’s guidance and wisdom for our nation’s leaders. Pray that you may be a witness of your new life in Christ Jesus. Pray that God will remove the walls people have created to divide us and that our hands can be joined in power and love through our Savior Jesus Christ. Pray that we can live in a nation where one person’s choice will not destroy the life of another. Pray that God would protect us as His people so that we may share our prosperity and combat oppression wherever it exists. Pray that God would protect young, innocent minds from every source that might erode the integrity of their childhood. Pray that God would raise up His people in America to give witness that He is our only source of comfort, inspiration, direction and life.

Pray that God would allow us to live in liberty and freedom to worship without fear, to worship our God who gave us our liberty at the price of the death of His only Son, Jesus Christ. Pray God would bless our commitment to ensure that the history and the dedication of our forefathers will not be lost.

And pray that we may always be “one nation under God” for the sake of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.



Grace Lutheran Church, Little Rock, was the latest recipient of a Mid-South District Grow Grant, which Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola, district president, presented to the congregation on March 22. The grant supports Gideon's Sword, a ministry initiative designed by Rev. David Buchs (left) to engage the men of the congregation to be a part of the faith formation of their families, using Bible studies and interaction with the children of their family and the congregation. The grant is for \$6,500.

CHURCH-WORK STUDENTS:

Financial aid available

To support students pursuing full-time church work, the Mid-South District is pleased to 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 and directors of Christian education, music directors, family ministry directors and other vocations.



Students must first inform the district office that you 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.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS:

Register for conference by June 8

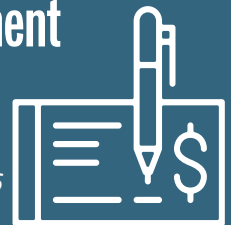
Attend the Early Childhood Educators Conference, July 9-10 at Christ the King Lutheran Preschool, Memphis, and celebrate your ministry to children through sharing, supporting one another and discovering innovative methods to connect with those cherished young ones.

The conference theme is "Speaking Wisdom, Teaching Kindness," based on Proverbs 31:26, and includes a lineup of inspiring speakers and engaging breakout sessions. Dr. Annette Anschutz, program director for the graduate early childhood programs at Concordia University, Nebraska, will be the keynote speaker.

Registration is \$50 per attendee, due by June 8. For more information and registration, visit midsouthdistrictlcms.org/2026-ecce-conference.

Congregation mission commitment receipts

as of
March 31, 2026
(3 months)



Anticipated amount (25% of budget)	\$412,530
Actual receipts	\$398,867
Over (under) anticipated amount	(\$13,663)

Use of mission commitment receipts

Allocated to Synod for world missions	\$113,410
Allocated to Tanzania	\$6,250
Retained for district ministry/mission support (70% of receipts)	\$279,207
Total receipts	\$398,867

Mission commitment receipts comparison

Actual receipts as of March 31, 2026	\$398,867
Actual receipts as of March 31, 2025	\$392,673
Over (under) prior year receipts	\$6,194



Happy Ordination ANNIVERSARY

We share the Mid-South District pastors who will celebrate milestone ordination anniversaries in 2026. We rejoice and give thanks to God with these gifts to His church.

70 Years

Rev. Hubert Bernthal
Emeritus, Bella Vista, Ark.

60 Years

Rev. Luther Hasz
Emeritus, Jackson, Tenn.

50 Years

Rev. Roger Sterle
Living Savior, Springdale, Ark.

45 Years

Rev. David Anderson
Emeritus, Newport, Tenn.

Rev. Edward Fehskens
Emeritus, Bristol, Tenn.

Rev. Daniel McDougall
Emeritus, Benton, Ark.

Rev. Ronnie Oldenettel
Emeritus, Bella Vista, Ark.

Rev. Lynn Spencer
Emeritus, Bentonville, Ark.

Rev. James Watson
Emeritus, Ooltewah, Tenn.

Rev. Carl Wenck
Emeritus, Murfreesboro, Tenn.

40 Years

Rev. Paul Becker
Emeritus, Kingsport, Tenn.

Rev. Brian Bibler
Emeritus, Bella Vista, Ark.

Rev. Wayne Krohe
Emeritus, Lewisburg, Tenn.

Rev. Gerald Meyer
Emeritus, Crossville, Tenn.

Rev. Thomas Sayre
Emeritus, St. John's, Fla.

35 Years

Rev. David Gadbad
Emeritus, Mountain Home, Ark.

Rev. Donald White
Emeritus, Lakeview, Ark.

30 Years

Rev. Mark Hass
Candidate, Sallisaw, Okla.

Rev. Lane Reuter
Our Savior, Nashville, Tenn.

25 Years

Rev. Kevin Conger
Hope, Jacksonville, Ark.

Rev. Alebachew Teshome,
Faith, Thompson's Station, Tenn.

20 Years

Rev. Curtis Hoover
Faith, Thompson's Station, Tenn.

Rev. Michael Meyer
Holy Trinity, Rogers, Ark.

Rev. Jonathan Petering
Immanuel, Memphis, Tenn.

Rev. Derek Roberts
Praise, Maryville, Tenn.

15 Years

Rev. Thomas Bartzsch
River Valley Grace, Lamar, Ark.

Rev. Cullen Duke
Emeritus, Kingsport, Tenn.

Rev. Seth Korte
St. Paul, Sevierville, Tenn.

Rev. Joshua Leigeber
All Saints, Jonesboro, Ark.

Rev. William Ondracka
Christus Victor, Knoxville, Tenn.

Rev. Sean Smith
Grace, Clarksville, Tenn.

Rev. Daniel Suelzle
All Saints, Jonesboro, Ark.

10 Years

Rev. Gregory Bauch
Ascension, Madison, Tenn.

Rev. Kirk Neugebauer
Redeemer, Paragould, Ark.

Rev. Joshua Schooping
St. John's, Russellville, Ark.

5 Years

Rev. Anthony Johnson
First, Hot Springs, Ark.

Rev. Trae Fistler
Faith, Hopkinsville, Ky.

A Walk of HOPE

Cleciantha's story

Each morning, 15-year-old Cleciantha Compere begins her day with simple responsibilities at home. She sweeps, washes the dishes, prepares for school and leaves her house.

“Every day I walk to school, it takes me about 30 minutes,” she says.

That daily walk leads her to something far more than a classroom. It leads her to hope.

Life outside of school requires hard work. After classes end, Cleciantha returns home to help her family. She studies, does her housework and, on “tub days,” makes two trips to collect water as she prepares for a bath. When the opportunity arises, she also helps her mother prepare a meal.

Yet even in the midst of these responsibilities, she still finds moments of joy. In the afternoons she jokes with her friends, and sometimes they play games together. Cleciantha dreams of cooking. She says she loves preparing food and enjoys hearing people say that what she has made is delicious.

School itself is important to her because it allows her to learn something new



each day. Like many students, she admits that, at times, learning can be difficult when lessons are hard to understand, but she continues to try.

For Cleciantha, one of the most meaningful parts of the school day is the meal she receives through the Trinity HOPE feeding program.

“I receive school meals,” she says. “Food is very important to me because the food is good and sometimes I don’t eat at home. I don’t worry because I know I will get food at school.”

Trinity HOPE provides not only nourishment for her body, but also peace of mind that allows her to focus on learning.

At school she is also learning about Jesus. In her own words she explained that Jesus died for us so our sins could be forgiven, and that He performed miracles — healing the sick and making the lame walk. Through the daily meal and the Gospel message shared alongside it, children like Cleciantha are being fed both physically and spiritually.

For students like Cleciantha, the Trinity HOPE meal is more than food. It is stability, encouragement and a reminder that God sees them and provides for them each day.

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat.”

Matthew 25:35

Her story is one example of the thousands of children whose lives are touched every school day through Trinity HOPE.

To learn more about the ministry, visit us at trinityhope.org.



615-394-4950

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Lebanon, TN 37088

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CONTINUING EDUCATION

Bringing the seminary to you

Prof Insights, a faculty-led workshop series from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (CSL), will offer “**Reading and Preaching the Gospel of Mark**” Aug. 3–5 at St. Paul, Wartburg, Tenn.

Rev. Dr. David Lewis will be the presenter. He is CSL associate professor of Exegetical Theology, director of the Master of Divinity and Residential Alternate Route Programs, Student Association adviser, and the Dr. Jack Dean Kingsbury Professor of New Testament Theology.

Questions? Contact Rev. David Graves, St. Paul pastor, at rev.davegraves@gmail.com.

Designed for pastors, church workers and lay people, the annual CSL series offers in-depth study on contemporary topics that influence the practice of ministry and worship.

Registration should be made no later than July 20. Register at csi.edu/workshop-series.

The Continuing Education program of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (CTSFW), offers short, faculty-led classes on a variety of topics worth a deeper dive. CTSFW prays that these opportunities are a blessing to you as you continue on your journey to grow in “wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Luke 2:52).

“**The Theology of St. Cyril of Alexandria**” will be held Aug. 3–5 at Redeemer, Nashville.

This course introduces students to Cyril of Alexandria’s theological system as he presents it in his *Commentary on John*. It covers topics such as Christology, exegesis, justification,



theosis, creation and sacraments, all of which are encountered in the context of Cyril commenting on specific scriptural texts. These topics will be compared and contrasted with Lutheran theology to give the participants a better sense of how the Lutheran church relates to its patristic ancestors.

Rev. Dr. David Maxwell, CSL Louis A. Fincke and Anna B. Shine professor of Systematic Theology and chairman of the Department of Systematic Theology, will be the presenter.

Questions about the course should be directed to Rev. Gregory Bauch at pastorgregbauch@gmail.com. For more information and registration, visit ctsfw.edu/ce.

“**Lutheran Missions Lead to Lutheran Churches: Keeping Confession and Mission Together**” will be held Sept. 22–24 at First Lutheran Church, Chattanooga.

The last few decades have witnessed a schism between those who identify themselves as confessional and those who label themselves as missional. When confession and mission are divorced, both suffer. This course will look at the theology of mission from the perspective of the Lutheran Confessions, with an eye toward how this linkage works out in evangelical outreach both locally and globally.

Rev. Dr. John Pless, CTSFW assistant professor of Pastoral Ministry and Missions, will be the presenter.

Questions about the course should be directed to Rev. Donald Welmer, First pastor, at pastor@first4u.org. For more information and registration, visit ctsfw.edu/ce.

Students at the **Lutheran Institute of Management and Entrepreneurship (LIME)** in Madagascar celebrated graduation on March 15. Rev. Dr. Joseph Randrianasolo, LIME president (pictured in center) offers thanks for the continuing support and partnership with the the Mid-South District



SHARE YOUR NEWS WITH US!

Send us your stories and photos for the September issue by July 7. Digital files, sent via e-mail, are preferred. **Our new submission deadline is the 7th of each month**, two months before publication. Photos must be sent in high resolution. Send email submissions to LW@mid-southlcms.com or mail via U.S. Postal Service to Judy Otto; 150 N. Maury St.; Holly Springs, MS 38635

MISSION GRANTS



Praise the Lord! We have paid all 16 of our 2024–2026 Biennium Mission Grants: a total of \$13,000! You can review the list at midsouthlwml.org/mission-grants.

Now we look forward to voting at our June convention on a new set of Mission Grants. Please pray for wisdom for the voting body, that they will be guided by the Holy Spirit as they cast their votes.

DISTRICT CONVENTION

This month!

Our convention theme, “Look to the Hills. The Lord Reigns,” based on Psalm 121:1-2, is a great reminder of who is in control as we travel to Springdale, Ark., for the LWML Mid-South District 29th Biennial Convention, to be held June 12-14.



Please pray for:

- Safe travels and angels to watch over us.
- Spiritual inspiration through our guest speakers and missionaries.
- Guidance for the voting body as we elect officers, adopt bylaws and vote on Mission Grants.
- The courage to be witnesses for Christ to those who serve us.
- Making a joyful noise as we sing praises to our great God.
- Laughter as we join in fellowship and fun.

Watch for a post-convention recap via our *eNews*! Visit midsouthlwml.org/district_convention for convention information.

STAY CONNECTED

On the web

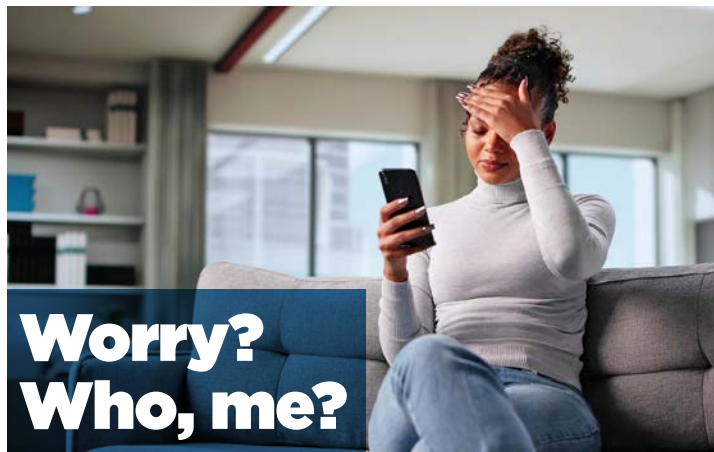
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Worry?
Who, me?

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?” **Matthew 6:25-27**

I am not the worrier I used to be. I learned from an expert worrier, my mom. She’d pray, but she’d still worry.

Over the years, I have been blessed to be surrounded with so many faith-filled women as examples that I’ve learned to conquer most of the worries. All I need to do is recall my favorite passage from Matthew 6 above.

I don’t worry so much about bad things happening. It’s more like discomfort over the things outside of my control. But James puts everything into perspective:

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”— yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” **James 4:13-15**

Let’s not forget the wonderful Serenity Prayer either! It’s so simple and spot-on. Attributed to theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, it says:

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.”

Repeat as often as possible.

And then there’s my no-worries husband, who is a gift from God. When I fret about the crisis of the day, he tells me that zombies are already surrounding the house. Of course, that makes me laugh and, most importantly, helps me realize how silly I am to worry.

So don’t worry, don’t fret, just pray, pray, pray and pray some more.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. **Romans 15:13**

God’s peace • **Candy Habich**

Chairman, LWML Mid-South District Media and Marketing Committee

CAMP TRINITY



Outdoor Classroom students are pictured learning spear-throwing.

Refresh and renew!

Camp Trinity is a place where campers of all ages can step away from their busy lives and find rest and renewal through their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Summer campers can bask in the glory of God's creation as they learn about the sacrifice Jesus made for all.

Our nine camp sessions include three in which whole families can experience summer camp together.

For more information or to register for one of the sessions below, visit lutherancamp.org, or contact Aaron Davis, camp director, at director@lutherancamp.org.

If you are unable to join us for summer camp, consider attending one of our Outdoor Classroom sessions in the fall. The 2026 class schedule is not finalized. However, homeschooling parents interested in learning more can visit lutherancamp.org/for-homeschoolers.

SCHEDULE

June 7–12: Trailblazers (campers entering grades 5–8 in fall 2026)

June 14–19: Adventure (grades 9 and above in fall 2026)

June 24–29: Explorers (grades 4–6 in fall 2026)

June 28–July 1: Pathfinders (grades 2–4 in fall 2026)

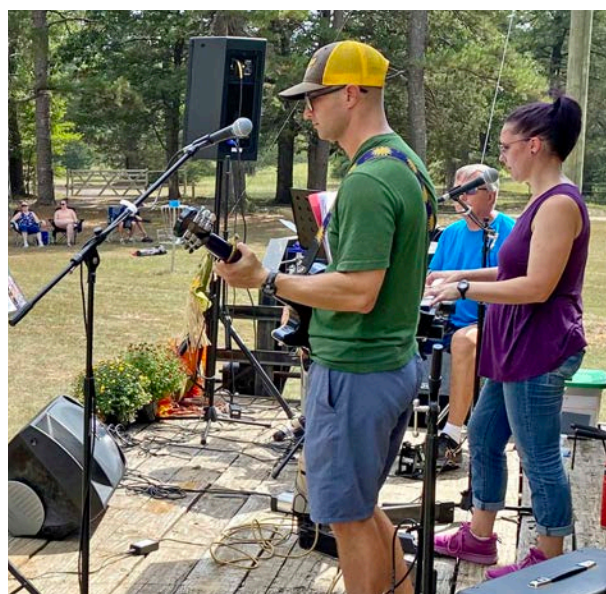
July 5–10: Voyagers (grades 7–9 and 10–12 in fall 2026)

July 12–16: Wilderness (grades 5–8 in fall 2026)

July 17–19: Family Camp I

July 20–22: Family Camp II

July 24–26: Family Camp III



Join us for our ninth annual **Music on the Mountain** fundraiser, to be held Sept. 26.

Enjoy great music, games, fellowship, and a barbecued pulled pork dinner and other concessions.

Music starts at 11 a.m. and continues throughout the afternoon. Admission is free, but contributions are welcome.