



/ NOVEMBER 2023

MID-SOUTH LUTHERAN

Thanks for everything!

What was the first sound after God created this universe? The Book of Job's creation account says, "The morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy." That was the beginning. The Book of Revelation says we'll hear the elders around the throne of God, praising Him day and night. Almost everywhere you look in the Bible, it speaks of praise to God from the beginning of time to when we're all in heaven.



Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola
District President

"Give thanks in all things, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus," writes St. Paul to the Thessalonians. First of all, Praise Him that He is our God. Praise Him that He is the God who gives us life. And through His Son, He brings us back to life out of death, joy out of sorrow, and victory out of what seems a defeat. Praise God for His presence in the times of our illnesses and accidents, our loneliness and our grief. Praise God that even though we have many burdens, He uses them for the ultimate and good purpose for our lives.

Therefore, on Thanksgiving Day we pause to think, since we have cause to give thanks.



L CMS/Erik M. Lunsford

Scripture speaks about how God tested Israel in the desert. He needed to prove to them that He was and will remain their strength. As they stood on the banks of the Jordan River, waiting to go into the Promised Land, Moses encouraged the people to humble themselves before God, to give thanks and remember His faithfulness through the 40 years of their journey; pause to think — we have a cause to thank. Moses recorded God's words, "Think: Your feet did not swell during these 40 years. Your shoes did not wear out."

We may gloss over these words — our feet didn't swell. But of course, we haven't been walking in the wilderness for 40 years! Swollen feet happen to people who consume the same thing every day in their diets. If a person doesn't get a variety of vitamins and nutrients for a balanced diet, they'll become ill. For example, beriberi is caused from an

improperly balanced diet. It's one of several diseases common to eating the same thing each day. When it hits, the victim's feet swell so large they can't wear shoes.

But that didn't happen to the Israelites. They received all their required vitamins and nourishment in a strange food on the desert floor, called manna — which means, in Hebrew, "What is it?" (Kind of sounds familiar when an unfamiliar food is set in front of our children.) It was miracle food that God provided every day for 40 years — 15,000 meals! — which is enough food to fill a freight train five miles long, and enough to feed at least 3 million people every day, in the desert, where there was no other food. Just imagine the logistics of that journey! Stop and think. We will also have cause to thank.

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MESSAGE

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

The Lord God said to them:

"And you shall eat and be full, and
you shall bless the LORD your God
for the good land he has given you."

DEUT. 8:10

Thanking God is a privilege reserved for His people. When we think of the thousands of tons of food and the complexities necessary merely to move all those people; when we have read the Exodus account, we have to come to one conclusion: It could only be by the gracious hand of a living and almighty God that they were able to flourish, let alone survive for 40 years, walking by faith alone!

"Remember your God," Moses urged the people. Remember and believe. St. Paul put it this way:

And I am sure of this, that he who
began a good work in you will bring
it to completion at the day of Jesus
Christ. PHIL. 1:6

As the modern-day Israelites, we also remember our God. By the power of the Holy Spirit, He's led us from a wilderness of our separation from Him into His promised inheritance of everlasting paradise. He's fed us, too, through His Holy Word and with His blessed Sacraments. Think about His grace and goodness. Today, we have cause to offer Him thanks.

When our lives are filled with all the goodness from God's abundance, we start to feel pretty good about things. We start to feel better about ourselves. There's a bounce back in our step. But the sad reality is that when that happens, self-confidence and feelings are uplifted. We do something strange: We don't stop to think. We forget how we got that walk, how we got that spring to our step, and we sometimes forget to give thanks and praise to God.

On the other hand, it's pretty easy to turn our eyes toward heaven when we're in some kind of despair. One time after another, He gets our attention and causes us to turn to Him in prayer because something's gone wrong again. But then

there are some times when just too many bad things happen, and we find it hard to thank God for them and for His strength. Secretly we're angry. Isn't that right?

Here's what I mean: Martin Rinkhardt, who wrote the Thanksgiving hymn, "Now Thank We All our God" (*Lutheran Service Book* #895), lived in Germany at the time America was just being settled by the pilgrims. Rinkhardt and his fellow Germans were caught in the middle of the Thirty Years' War (1618-48), when thousands of people were crammed inside the city where he lived.

Adequate sanitation was seriously lacking. Food and water supplies became contaminated. As a result, a cholera plague broke out in his city, taking hundreds of lives in its wake. Rinkhardt was the only Christian clergyman left alive in the village. According to his daily diary, Rinkhardt buried over 4,000 bodies, and as many as 50 in a single day. This provides us with the background to Rickhardt's great hymn:

Now thank we all our God; with
hearts and hand and voices,
Who wondrous things has done, in
whom His world rejoices;
Who from our mothers' arms Has
blest us on our way
With countless gifts of love And still
is ours today.

How could Rickhardt write those beautiful words as he struggled in the midst of war, disease, death and desolation? Stopping to think gave Rickhardt cause to thank God for the good days as well as the deliverance from the bad. It was his privilege and it's ours also.

God has so richly blessed us! But more than all the things for which we give praise and thanksgiving to God, we're eternally grateful to Him for life and salvation. Through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ, our slavery to sin was exchanged for an inheritance as the sons and daughters of God. Our just punish-



ment before God was paid for when the Son of God shed His blood and died on the cross in our place.

Just like the Israelites He freed from captivity in Egypt and sustained each day, we're also set free from the captivity of our sin and sustained by Christ's almighty power.

It's amazing to think that Jesus was chased out of towns, had His life threat-

ened, and was betrayed by His closest friends and abandoned in His darkest hour. However, His compassion for His people took Him through the bloody sweat in the garden and carried Him to Calvary. He was executed by the very people He came to save. Yet despite all these evil things, Jesus never ceased praising and thanking God. He knew that after the darkness there is light, after the defeat there is victory, after the sorrow there is joy, and after the death there is resurrection.

Christ Jesus willingly suffered the agonizing pain for all our sins. He is the sacrifice that is the foundation of our thanksgiving to God. Jesus is God's thanksgiving offering for you and me. Forgiveness of sins is ours. The Resurrection is ours! Eternal life with God is ours! Food sent from heaven today is ours because of the love and grace that comes from our almighty and gracious Father.

Isn't it ironic — for as much as our country has been blessed and, indeed, for as much as each and every one of us has been blessed by our gracious and loving God — that our nation had to set aside a single day to remind us to pause to think?

Offer sacrifices of thanksgiving to God. On Thanksgiving Day, pause to think about the blessings from God. We will always have cause to thank God. Stop to pause and think since we have cause to thank.

Thanks be to You, O God. We remember. Thank you, Jesus. We give You our praise.

Healthy bodies, along with souls

By Mark Peterson
First, Little Rock

Christians know that we are indwelt with the Holy Spirit — which is incredibly humbling. So we need to nourish our bodies (temples of the Holy Spirit) with good food and exercise, just as we nourish our souls with the Word of God, prayer and worship.

A workshop and demonstration on preparing healthy, low-cost meals was held at Faith Lutheran Church, Little Rock, on Sept. 6. Laura Anne Warren, Family and Consumer Science agent of the Pulaski County Extension Office in

Little Rock, was the presenter.

Warren said that we are often overfed and undernourished, consuming a high number of calories with a low amount of nutrition. She provided tips on cooking healthy food, reducing food costs and sources for simple recipes.

Key points from the workshop are available at firstlutheranlr.com. Go to “Articles” at the top of the page, and select “Reaching Out” from the drop-down menu. Scroll down to the “Healthy, Low-Cost Meals — Key Points” entry.



Laura Anne Warren of Pulaski County Extension Office shared tips for preparing healthy meals during a September workshop.

‘CREATED MALE AND FEMALE’



Parents to aid in resource development

This coming April, the LCMS will offer a retreat for parents of children who have experienced difficulties related to sexual orientation and gender identity. Details are still being confirmed, but the retreat will serve as a pilot project for developing materials for the Synod’s *Created Male and Female* project, an out-

growth of 2019 Resolution 11-03A, “To Encourage Synod to Develop Resources to Aid Congregations and Schools regarding Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Issues.”

Parents interested in participating in the pilot project are being sought, and parent referrals will be welcomed. Their participation will help leaders in developing the program.

Interested parents should fill out the questionnaire located at lcms.org/parents-retreat.

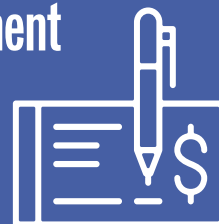
The first retreat will be limited to a small number, but future events are planned. If you are interested in holding a retreat in the Mid-South District, please contact Deaconess Dr. Tiffany Manor, managing director of Human Care and Ministerial Support for the LCMS Office of National Mission, at tiffany.manor@lcms.org or 314-996-1085.



An appropriate retreat venue would be a district or congregation property with space for overnight lodging and meals, meeting rooms, and a chapel for prayer and worship services.

Congregation mission commitment receipts

as of
Aug. 30, 2023
(8 months)



Anticipated amount (50% of budget)	\$1,042,847
Actual receipts	\$984,868
Over (under) anticipated amount	(\$57,979)

Use of mission commitment receipts

Allocated to Synod for world missions	\$278,794
Allocated to Tanzania	\$16,667
Retained for district ministry/mission support (70% of receipts)	\$689,408
Total receipts	\$984,868

Mission commitment receipts comparison

Actual receipts as of Aug. 30, 2023	\$984,868
Actual receipts as of Aug. 30, 2022	\$984,614
Over (under) prior year receipts	\$254



30 years of GRACE

By Rev. Jim Belles

Pastor, Grace Celebration, Cordova

On Aug. 27, Grace Celebration Lutheran Church, Cordova, Tenn., celebrated its 30th anniversary of ministry.

Grace Celebration began its journey as a Mid-South District mission development church.

Rev. Dr. Roger Theimer was called to plant the church and was joined by a small group of “church planting” young adults, some of whom had recently graduated from Concordia College, Bronxville, N.Y., and volunteered to relocate to Memphis.

Bouncing around from one facility to another for seven years, Grace Celebration found its current home in 2000, and was dedicated in June that year. At the service the children sang “the church is not a building ... the church is the people,” and God has demonstrated His love and commitment to Grace Celebration.

Along with the current congregation,

members from the church’s beginning were able to attend. It was a wonderful mix of generations as Pastor Theimer returned for the anniversary celebration to share a message titled “The Good Ole Days ... Are Yet to Come!” The sermon inspired the congregation to give thanks for the blessings and abundant love that God has provided through the years, and also to anticipate and trust God’s love and blessings yet to come. Theimer now serves as associate pastor of King of Kings Lutheran Church, Omaha, Neb.

After the service, the celebration continued with a luncheon, in which many shared fun stories and heartfelt sentiments of love and appreciation.

“It was an enthusiastic reflection of God’s faithful hand through the last 30 years and a hopeful look for the future,” said Rev. Dr. Terry Tieman, Grace Celebration senior pastor.

The future is bright for Grace Celebration. God is blessing minis-

tries that serve a wide range of people and partnerships, including our Early Learning Childhood Center Summer Camp, recovery groups, food ministries and Lifewise Academy, in which we will teach public-school children about Jesus during school hours.

Through it all the love of our gracious God and the Gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ has nourished us through Word and Sacrament.

Come, ye thankful people, come;
Raise the song of harvest home.

All be safely gathered in Ere the
winter storms begin;

God, our maker, doth provide For our
wants to be supplied.

Come to God’s own temple, come;
Raise the song of harvest home.

LUTHERAN SERVICE BOOK #892

Or, simply:

O give thanks unto the LORD, for He is
good; And his mercy endureth forever.



Living its name, Grace Celebration celebrated with its family, and invited the community to share the joy.



Rev. Tardelli Voss (left), planter and the first pastor of *Iglesia Luterano Cristo Para Todos*, joins Rev. Brandon Martin in celebrating the church's 15th anniversary.

Blessings in Springdale

Fifteen years ago, the Hispanic congregation *Iglesia Luterana Cristo Para Todos* arrived at Salem, Springdale, Ark. For a few years we shared facilities until we realized that we would do better as a unified church. Praise God for His work to unite our congregations! Today Salem Lutheran Ministries is a bilingual, multiethnic church.

In Latino culture, a 15th birthday is a huge celebration, called a *quinceañera*.

Since this was our church's 15th anniversary, we celebrated in a large way. On Aug. 27, Rev. Tardelli Voss, the church planter and first pastor of the congregation, preached at our divine services.

After the services, we enjoyed a large lunch and celebration, which gave us the opportunity to remember God's goodness, celebrate His grace given to us through Jesus Christ, and praise Him for his faithfulness!

— Submitted by Rev. Brandon Martin, Associate Pastor, Salem Lutheran Ministries

Synod will cover MinistrySafe member costs



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 ministriesafe.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.

WANTED: Future church workers

District has programs to help

The ministry of the Mid-South District has many facets, but one major emphasis is professional church workers — especially encouraging current workers and helping new workers answer the call to serve. This was the district focus for October as congregations were invited to host a special *Set Apart to Serve* Sunday to celebrate professional church workers.

An invitation was also extended for individuals to honor specific church workers with a gift to the Mid-South District and its numerous programs that benefit these workers. Many thanks go out to the generous donors who shared gifts! Watch for a list of the honored and memorialized professional church workers on the Mid-South District website (mid-southlcms.org) and in the February *Lutheran Witness* insert.

So what are some of the district ministry programs that benefit professional church workers? One of the most significant is the Student Financial Aid program. For many who hope to serve as an LCMS pastor, teacher, director of Christian education, music director, or other worker, the cost of tuition for the education may make it difficult to answer God's call. That is why the Mid-South District supports the educational efforts of future LCMS professional church workers through student financial aid. This district program is bolstered by a grant from the LWML and has helped many district students prepare for full-time careers in church work. Since 2015 alone, this program has disbursed over \$567,000 in financial aid, benefiting more than 110 students in the Mid-South District. What a blessing!

Another important district initiative is the church-worker recruitment program. The LCMS is currently facing a critical shortage of new church workers. In the Mid-South District, this important issue is being addressed head on through the *Set Apart to Serve* Task Force. Comprised of professional church workers from across the district,

this dedicated team is using resources provided by the LCMS national initiative to reach people in our local communities — especially those who the Lord may call to a life of service in ministry. As this effort to connect hearts for service with opportunities to serve gets underway, watch for news and resources to be shared in your congregation. You can also learn more at lcms.org/sas.

These programs — and all district ministry efforts — are made possible by mission commitments from Mid-South District congregations, grants from partner organizations and support from generous individual donors. District ministry is truly a cooperative effort! If you missed last month's invitation to partner in district ministry (and honor a special church worker), please visit mid-southlcms.org/give or call the Mid-South District office at 901-373-1343.



Photos: LCMS/Erin M. Lunsford





Many ways to give thanks

By Lauren Robertson

Media and Marketing Chair, LWML Mid-South District

Thanksgiving is a reminder of why we should be thankful for who we are and what we have. Here is a list of ideas to celebrate Thanksgiving this year a little differently than is traditional:

- Serve at a homeless shelter.
- Serve at a food pantry.

- Drop off a box of food for a needy family.
- Drop off a hot meal for a shut-in.
- Deliver a meal to fire, police or ambulance personnel.
- Don't forget the hospital staff. Bring dessert, too.
- Invite the single person at church to your family's Thanksgiving.

Kids can show their thankfulness generously, too:

- Make a Thanksgiving card for someone special. (LWML offers free printable cards at lwml.org/coloring-resources; scroll down to Thanksgiving.)
- Help set the table without being asked.
- Make sure that everyone feels welcome; saying 'Hi!' is a good start.
- Help cook in the kitchen (make sure you have an adult around).
- Remember when it's time to clear the table, help make a to-go box for someone.
- Wash or help put the dishes away

There are many thoughtful ways we can show we are thankful this year, but most importantly don't forget to pray and thank our Lord. It is up to us to show God's love to others — and what a great way to start, with one item on this list and continue that love year-round.

MISSIONS

A word of gratitude

The Mid-South District and its donors again received thanks for their continuing support of the Lutheran Institute for Management and Entrepreneurship (LIME) in Madagascar.

Rev. Joseph Randrianasolo, LIM director, sent many pictures with a note of gratitude: "That very brotherly gift has allowed LIME to paint the wall facing the road and to buy computers. Thank you and thank you very much. May Jesus Christ from Nazareth bless you all!"

Pictured are painters constructing a makeshift platform.





Students learned to spot pictographs (ancient Native American cave paintings) and petroglyphs (Native American stone carvings) on Petit Jean Mountain during the session "Pictures of the Past."



Camp Trinity's Outdoor Classroom students explore the canyons, creeks and caves of Petit Jean Mountain.

Fall outdoor classroom wrapping up, plans underway for spring semester

The seventh semester of Camp Trinity's Outdoor Classroom for homeschooling families is about to wrap up. The Outdoor Classroom debuted in fall 2020 when many families started homeschooling for the first time amid COVID restrictions. The original purpose was primarily to help first-time homeschooling families, but families that had already been homeschooling their children signed up as well.

The Outdoor Classroom provides instruction in topics not part of the core curriculum of reading, math and language arts. Sessions over the past six semesters have included history, zoology, anthropology, archeology, geology, ornithology, engineering, orienteering, botany, animal husbandry, sculpture, music, dance, emergency services, pioneering and old-time games.

The first class met once a week for 10 weeks. When the Outdoor Classroom continued to grow after

restrictions were ended, Camp Trinity added a second class in fall 2022 to accommodate the increased demand. One class meets on Wednesdays and the other meets on Thursdays.

The fall 2023 semester has more than 60 students and runs through the end of November. Registration for the spring 2024 semester is now open.

The Outdoor Classroom also serves as an informal homeschool co-op in which parents can offer mutual encouragement, share ideas and plan outings together.

The fall 2023 lineup included fascinating topics with guest speakers:

- Jim Biggs gave a falconry demonstration.
- Trent Powell of the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission presented on reptiles of Arkansas.
- Petit Jean State Park interpreters B.T. Jones and Jake Curry led nature hikes in the park.

- Veterinarian Dr. Jennifer Ballard of the Game and Fish Commission taught on the anatomy, health and ecology of Arkansas animals.
- Camp Trinity's Heidi Cox, a Red Cross CPR and first-aid instructor, taught basic first aid; and Operations Manager Aaron Davis taught sessions on frontier skills and leadership training through games.

To finish out the semester, Dr. Leroy Leach will teach on creation science, and a C-130 flight crew will talk about their humanitarian and military support operations (including a tour of the aircraft at Little Rock Air Force Base). And during "Old-Time Christmas," students will create Christmas crafts, bake goodies and share family holiday dishes and traditions.

Topics for the spring semester will be posted on the website as they are finalized. Visit lutherancamp.org and click the "Home School" link at the top of the page."

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 **January 2024** issue by **Nov. 15**.



And be sure to thank our veterans on Nov. 11!