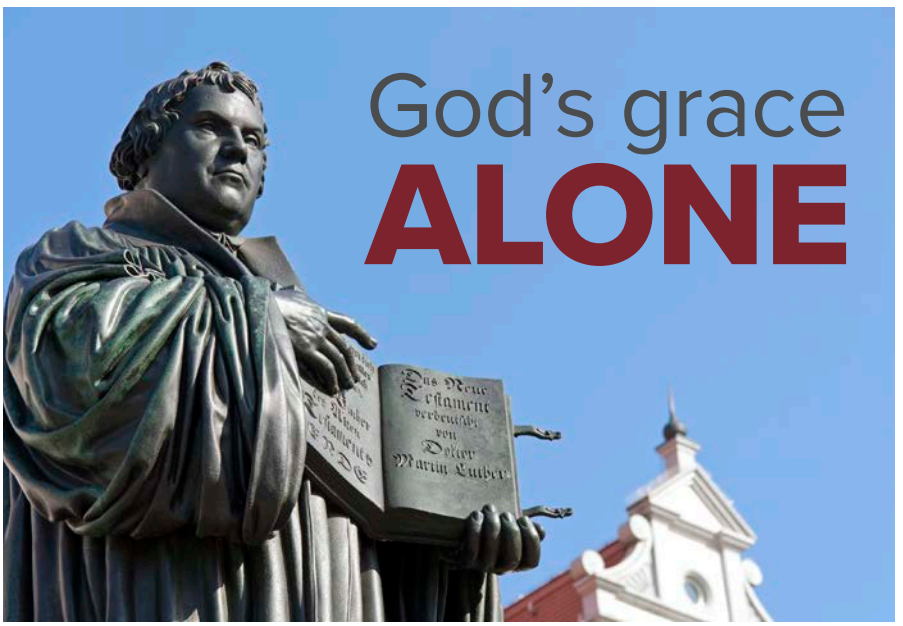
/ NOVEMBER 2026

MID-SOUTH LUTHERAN



November starts with All Saints Day (Nov. 1). The eve of All Saints Day is Oct. 31, the day most of our Lutheran congregations celebrate the Reformation, the day Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses on the door of the Wittenberg Chapel.



Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola
District President

The two days are inseparable when it comes to our Lutheran doctrine. Luther had finally uncovered the foundation of our Christian faith — we are saved by God's grace through faith, and this is not a work of ourselves, but a gift of the Holy Spirit who leads us in faith (Eph. 2:8-10). Our works (Law) lead to nothing. God's grace (Gospel) leads to forgiveness and eternal life. To return to the Law for our vindication in God's sight would make Christ's incarnation, suffering, death, resurrection and return in glory cruel and utterly useless.

Why did Luther make such a big deal about the proper distinction between Law and Gospel? Both of these sacred teachings are necessary, right? Law and Gospel: They are a big deal!

When we suffer during a crisis of faith, or if we fall into some spiritual struggle, we find ourselves casting doubts on the foundation of our faith and whether or not we've sinned too many times for God to render His judgment of forgiveness. But it's not about us! The foundation of our faith and God's forgiveness is His Son, Jesus Christ, who paid the price (or penalty) for the sins of the whole world (John 3:16).

Our works (good or not good) are in the world. If we're struggling between our good works and sin's sentence of death, then we've capitulated to the unfortunate heresy that we can (must) restore our right relationship with God.

The onset of the Reformation was Luther's attempt to reform the erroneous teachings that crept into the 15th-century church. Any attempt to "reach" righteousness with God through the observance of the Law will crush the most pious under the imperfection of our works and by our very human nature. Unfortunately, not only does Satan continue to throw those questions on righteousness into our path, but in the 15th century, the church taught that as the truth.

Martin Luther wrote:

> Let us remember this [the righteousness apart from works] well in our personal trials, when the devil accuses and terrifies our conscience to bring it to the point of despair. He is the father of lies (Jn 8:44) and the enemy of Christian freedom. At every single moment, therefore, he torments us with false terrors, so that when this freedom has been lost, the conscience is in continual fear and feels guilt and terrors. I say, when that great dragon, the ancient serpent, the devil, the deceiver of the whole world, who accuses our brethren day and night before God (Rev 12:9–10) comes to you and accuses you not only of failing to do anything good but of transgressing against the Law of God, say: 'You are troubling me with the memory of past sins; in addition, you are telling me that I have not done anything

See **MESSAGE**, Page 2

MESSAGE

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

> good. This means nothing to me. For if I either trusted in my performance of good works or despaired because I failed to perform them, in either case Christ would be of no avail to me. Therefore whether you place before me my sins or my good works, I do not care; for I put both of them out of sight and lean solely upon the freedom for which Christ has set me free. This I know to be useful to me! Therefore I shall not render Him useless to me, which is what would happen if I either presumed that I shall attain grace and eternal life because of my good works or despaired of my salvation because of my sins. ***LUTHER'S WORKS*, LECTURES ON GALATIANS**

If we think about it, what could we beg God concerning the summary of our life as we near our life's end? How many times did we go to church? Did we raise our families to be faithful church members? Were we exceptionally generous for the works of the church? Did we always do good for our neighbors?

No! None of these things can do anything for us as we stand before almighty and holy God! Our works would have to have been perfect in every aspect, without spot or blemish — pristine thoughts, words and deeds and not one single "oops!" In God's judgment those acts of the Law would never pass for perfect, and I speak for myself. I've (unfortunately) heard eulogies for loved ones that catalogue faithful church membership, Sunday school teacher, generous benefactor and the like. Never mind that I've heard how those "attributes" have earned the person their "wings in heaven."

Faced with this conundrum, Luther tormented himself because he realized his own works, efforts and virtues left him with no hope. Thanks be to God that the thorough study of God's Word brought Luther peace. He was led — by reading Holy Scripture and the guidance of the Holy Spirit — to the realization that our salvation is in Christ alone.

We have no other choice! We live our lives in faith in the Son of God, who died for us and gives us the freedom from the worthless, tangled burden of our own works. We are justified before God for the sake of Christ Jesus our perfect righteousness.

When Satan tries to accuse us of the sins of our doing and of our fallen nature, we confess that we haven't done anything worthy of God's grace. But Christ has done everything — perfectly and completely. Jesus has done it all for you, me and everyone born of natural means.



Lutherans Engage the World

The 'living water'



New Mexico and northwest Kenya may not seem to have much in common. Yet both have hot, dry landscapes where water can be scarce. More importantly, both have experienced a drought of Word and Sacrament ministry in recent years. Thanks be to God, Lutherans in these locations are now being served by pastors and other church workers.

The Fall 2026 issue of *Lutherans Engage the World* magazine includes these stories and more. You will also read about how a church in Springfield, Mo., is encouraging families to build intentional practices of faith formation in their homes; how congregations and individuals are caring for those around them in Illinois and Florida; and how a Lutheran jazz singer's trip to South Africa 20 years ago has now resulted in the production of a new album — created in partnership with the LCMS — on mercy.

The fall issue started arriving in mailboxes in late September. Read it 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.

Congratulations, April!

The Mid-South District is pleased to announce that April Jones has been named as executive assistant to the district president for Education. April joined the district staff in July 2025 as administrative assistant for Education, Youth and Family. A seasoned education professional and commissioned worker, April taught in Lutheran schools for over 16 years, and also served as the admissions director for Immanuel Lutheran School, Memphis, prior to joining the district staff.



April Jones

Over the last year, April has worked closely with our district's school administrators, teachers and early childhood staff, building relationships that have prepared her for this expanded role. She transitioned to the new position following the recent departure of the district's executive director for Education, Youth and Family, Michelle Fischer, who accepted a call to serve in the Southern District as executive assistant for Congregation and Educational Services.

The Mid-South District is grateful for Michelle's contributions while serving here and wish her much success in her new district home. We likewise pray for blessings upon April as she continues to serve our education ministries and workers of the Mid-South District.



The new Shepherd's Canyon retreat site is located in Canton, Mo. (about 150 miles north of St. Louis).

Church workers:

Retreat site now much closer

Shepherd's Canyon has launched a new retreat site in Canton, Mo., expanding its ministry of care for pastors, missionaries, teachers, DCEs, deaconesses, chaplains, worship leaders and other full-time church workers and their spouses. This is in addition to the site in Arizona.

Founded in 2009 by Dave and Barb Anderson, Shepherd's Canyon provides week-long intensive counseling retreats for church workers experiencing burnout, stress, compassion fatigue, grief, conflict, life changes, sabbatical preparations and more to help them reclaim the joy of life and ministry. Shepherd's Canyon, an LCMS Recognized Service Organization, has served over 1,000 church workers and spouses in the past 17 years.

Each Shepherd's Canyon retreat is intentionally small, serving up to eight participants at a time. Participants receive professional Christian counseling in both group and individual settings, along with participating in daily devotions, rest, fellowship and spiritual care from a chaplain. Retreats are designed to provide a confidential and restorative setting where church workers and spouses can receive help, hope and healing.

The new Missouri site is located less than 30 minutes from Illinois and Iowa and less than a day's drive from a dozen other states. This new location will allow Shepherd's Canyon to serve more church workers while also holding retreats at its Arizona site (near Wickenburg).

Those interested in learning more, referring a church worker, volunteering or supporting the ministry, may visit **shepherdscanyon.org**.

Congregation mission commitment receipts

as of Aug. 31, 2026 (eight months)

Anticipated amount (67% of budget)	$1,100,081
Actual receipts	$1,075,433
Over (under) anticipated amount	($24,648)

Use of mission commitment receipts

Allocated to Synod for world missions	$305,963
Allocated to Tanzania	$16,667
Retained for district ministry/ mission support (70% of receipts)	$752,803
Total receipts	$1,075,433

Mission commitment receipts comparison

Actual receipts as of Aug. 31, 2026	$1,075,433
Actual receipts as of Aug. 31, 2025	$1,057,928
Over (under) prior year receipts	$17,505



Campfirmation 2026 bridges districts and builds foundations

By Rev. Derek Roberts
Pastor, Praise Lutheran Church, Maryville, Tenn.; and Campfirmation Director, Camp Linn Haven, N.C.

For over 80 years, Camp Linn Haven has provided a sanctuary of faith, fellowship and Christian community along the Linville River in Avery County, N.C. Nestled 3,600 feet up in the Blue Ridge Mountains, this 52-acre retreat center has long been a crown jewel of outdoor ministry. While historically affiliated with our neighbors in the Southeastern District, it has also been a vital regional resource for the Mid-South District — particularly for congregations in East Tennessee looking for a drivable retreat location in the mountains.

This summer (July 5–11), youth ages 12 and up gathered at Camp Linn Haven for Campfirmation 2026. (Note that the word "campfirmation" is a portmanteau, combining camp and confirmation.) They joined their peers from Florida, Georgia, North Carolina and Tennessee for an intensive week of catechesis, liturgical worship and communal life.

Catechesis in creation: The Apostles' Creed

Unlike a standard recreational summer camp, Campfirmation operates with a distinct Biblical and confessional Lutheran theology. The curriculum brings Luther's Small Catechism to life. The theological anchor for the 2026 season directly addressed the core confession of the ancient church: "I believe in the Triune God," and the focus was the three articles of the Apostles' Creed.

Throughout the week, a dedicated team of LCMS pastors, DCEs, teachers and laymen led students through plenaries and breakout sessions about gender, family, technology, redemption, the end times and God-pleasing vocations. This rigorous study wasn't left on the whiteboard; it was immediately woven into the rhythm of daily life. Campers framed their days with corporate Matins, Evening Prayer, and Compline along with two Divine Services. Campers talked about the sermons and the teachings as they hiked and when they met in small groups at family time. Private Confession and Absolution was offered daily so that students could fully experience all aspects of the Means of Grace that they learn about at church and at home.

A story of multi-district resilience

For Mid-South District workers and parents who monitored the devastating regional impact of Hurricane Helene, the very fact that Campfirmation 2025 and 2026 ran smoothly is a profound cause for thanksgiving. The mountain facility suffered catastrophic floodwater and structural damage during the storm.

However, the body of Christ rose to the occasion. Intensive recovery deployments throughout late 2024 and early 2025 — heavily supported by LCMS Lutheran Early Response Teams (LERT) and volunteer networks across multiple districts — cleared debris, stabilized the waterfront and repaired the camp's infrastructure. Thanks to these tireless servants, the camp's 18 modern cabins, dining hall and Mountainside Lutheran Church were fully operational, safe and ready to welcome youth by the time summer arrived in 2025 and now again in 2026.

Fellowship without borders

For young people in the eastern side of the Mid-South District, the benefits

Continued on next page



of a regional camp are immeasurable. Worship, study, hiking and campfires alongside other Lutheran youth and church workers reminds catechumens that they are part of a larger, vibrant confession of faith that extends far beyond their home pews.

Furthermore, the camp provides an exceptionally low-barrier financial framework for individual and congregation budgets. It is one of the most accessible and affordable week-long summer youth retreats available.

Because the camp handles all meal preparation and facility maintenance, the visiting pastors, DCEs and laymen can focus on teaching and interacting with the youth. They spend the week doing what matters most — proclaiming Christ crucified and risen and building deep, lasting pastoral relationships with the students during a pivotal time in their lives. Leaders from the participating congregations note how Campfirmation inspires more youth toward church vocations than any other activity they plan throughout the year.

Mid-South District representatives and pastors at Campfirmation include Rev. David Graves (St. Paul, Wartburg), who served as the dean of chapel for the week; Rev. Chase Lefort (Faith, Oak Ridge), who taught and preached; Rev. Ed Maanum (First, Knoxville), who taught middle school plenaries and preached; and yours truly, who served as the camp director.

Looking ahead to 2027: "Loved and Loving Others"

Campfirmation week has consistently hit capacity over the last several years with about 10 congregations participating, nearly filling every bed available. Though Campfirmation leaders would certainly love to share the teachings and life together with more people, they currently cannot invite any more and provide sufficient accommodations. They do, however, covet prayers as they prepare for 2027 and for the LCMS youth (and adults) who are impacted by Campfirmation.

Next year's theme is "Loved and Loving Others" — teachings on The Ten Commandments" with Luther's explanations.

Trinity HOPE



Protecting what comes from God

Stewardship [noun]: recognizing that God owns everything and that we are chosen managers, trusted to carefully and responsibly care for what He has placed in our hands.

Stewardship is a commitment Trinity HOPE takes extremely seriously. God continues to bless this ministry greatly, and we never forget that those blessings come with great responsibility. Jesus reminds us in Luke 12:48: "Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required."

Over the past six months, Trinity HOPE has added feeding programs in 68 more Christian schools. Thanks be to God! Today, we are serving about 80,000 meals every school day, more than 1.5 million meals each month. With that growth comes increased giving, increased purchasing, and an even greater responsibility to consider the scale for a moment.

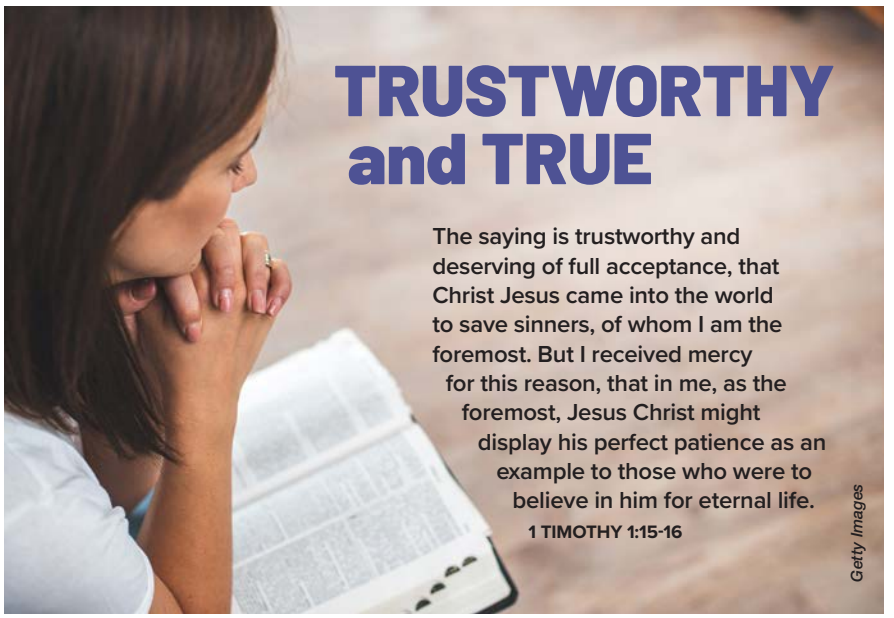
Each month, Trinity HOPE purchases about 300,000 pounds of rice and 200,000 pounds of corn, along with beans, oil, seasonings and other supplies needed to feed children throughout Haiti. When we are purchasing food at that volume, even small improvements in pricing and accountability matter. Every penny we can protect is a penny that can help put food into the stomach of a hungry child.

That is why, as Trinity HOPE grows, our systems of accountability must grow with us.

Beginning this school year, we are strengthening our operations in Haiti with purchasing agents who will manage a new competitive bidding process for food purchases, as well as eight internal auditors strategically located throughout the country. These auditors will make unannounced visits to schools and vendors, providing another layer of accountability and helping ensure that food, funds and program resources are being used as intended.

And this ministry reaches beyond the children we feed. Trinity HOPE operates in the United States with only two full-time and two-part time American employees, while employing 55 Haitian staff

See **TRINITY HOPE**, Page 8



While reading (mostly listening to) the entire New Testament this summer, I was intrigued with the number of times St. Paul used the phrase "trustworthy and true."

And in the verse from 1 Timothy, I found interesting the phrase "of whom I am the foremost." If St. Paul wanted to enter a contest to claim who the foremost sinner of all time is, I think he'd be in the running for first place. But he'd have plenty of company! In fact, every single person on the planet could claim a prize.

But let's move on to the part about receiving mercy, especially the part about Jesus' display of perfect patience. He knows that we will continue to sin while on this side of Heaven, yet He patiently waits to give us time to repent of our sins.

May we also show patience and forgiveness to those who have sinned against us.

All glory to God!

Candy Habich, Chairman
Chairman, LWML Mid-South District
Media and Marketing Committee



A note from our president

We have started a new biennium in the LWML Mid-South District. I would like to share from Scripture what I have chosen as my motto verse for the 2026–2028 biennium.

> Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. **2 TIMOTHY 2:15 (NIV)**

We are all working to serve the Lord and the LWML. When we are tired and sometimes frustrated, please look at this verse and ask the Lord for the strength to complete the job you have been called to do.

In Christ,
Sandie Harjala
LWML Mid-South District President

42ND BIENNIAL LWML CONVENTION

The LWML 42nd Biennial Convention will be held July 8–11, 2027, at the Oklahoma City Convention Center. Visit **lwml.org/convention** for more information.

Transformed in CHRIST
Romans 12:2

We have an estimate for a district charter bus to the convention — go to **midsouthlwml.org/flyers** and click the "Charter Bus Flyer.pdf" link. If you are interested, send an email to **contact@midsouthlwml.org** with your name, email address, phone number and preference for straight through or overnight stops.

Also, we encourage young women (ages 22-35) in our district to apply to be a Young Woman Representative. Our district can send up to four young women to a national convention, and the district covers the cost. For more information, contact Kathy Bolhken, YWR Committee chairman, at **youngwomen@midsouthlwml.org**.

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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 Gadbaw
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.



For generations, Camp Trinity on Petit Jean Mountain has been a place where children, youth, families and congregations gather around God's Word, grow in Christian fellowship and make memories that often last a lifetime. Now, as we look toward the future of this Christ-centered ministry, Camp Trinity has begun a new ministry expansion campaign: "Renew, Restore, Revive."

Launched in September 2026 and continuing through August 2028, the campaign is rooted in the words of Psalm 127:1: "Unless the LORD builds the house…" Our desire is not simply to improve buildings, but to strengthen the facilities that support the proclamation of the Gospel and the ministry that takes place on the mountain.

The campaign will address several important needs, including associate director housing, renovations to the bunkhouse bathrooms, roofing repairs and replacement on the bunkhouse cabins, and other facility and ministry needs. These projects will help Camp Trinity continue to welcome campers, families, congregations and retreat groups for years to come.

We ask the congregations and members of the church to partner with us first and foremost in prayer — that the Lord would continue to use Camp Trinity to strengthen faith in Christ and serve His people. We also invite those who are able to prayerfully consider supporting the campaign financially.

Together, we can renew what time has worn, restore what is essential and revive opportunities for Gospel-centered ministry for generations to come.

To learn more or support the Renew, Restore, Revive campaign, visit *lutherancamp.org*.

TRINITY HOPE

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5)

members. In addition, more than 600 Haitian cooks and food vendors earn income through the feeding program. We have a responsibility not only to the donors who entrust their gifts to Trinity HOPE, but also to the hundreds of Haitian families whose livelihoods are connected to this ministry.

Our expectation is that competitive purchasing will generate enough savings to more than cover the additional accountability staff and help lower our overall cost per meal. In other words, stronger stewardship does not simply protect the ministry. It helps us feed more children with the resources God provides.

We give God thanks for every resource He has entrusted to Trinity HOPE and for each person who makes this work possible. As He allows the ministry to grow, we remain committed to growing responsibly, protecting what He provides and using it faithfully for His purposes.

Thanks be to God that we get to serve Him together.

Learn more at **trinityhope.org**.



SHARE YOUR NEWS WITH US!

Send us your stories and photos for the January 2027 issue by Nov. 7.

Digital files, sent via e-mail, are preferred. Our 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