



/ OCTOBER 2025

# MID-SOUTH LUTHERAN



**M**artin Luther's seal is a familiar symbol in our Lutheran circles, isn't it? Inside our churches, it is likely displayed prominently on banners and paraments, on church signs and bulletin boards and walls. Outside the church, it is proudly displayed on coffee cups and wine glasses and beer mugs, on T-shirts and necklaces and water bottles, on car windows and bumper stickers and laptop computers.

In a letter Luther wrote to his friend Lazarus Spengler, dated July 8, 1530, Luther stated that his seal was a sort of visible summary of his theology, a visible summary of what he believed, taught and confessed. Therefore, whether we realize it or not, Luther's seal is likewise a visible summary of what *we* believe, teach and confess still today.

Just as familiar as Luther's seal is the question that figures so prominently in his Small Catechism — "What does this mean?" So let's ask this question regarding Luther's seal. What does this symbol mean?

We begin with the focal point, the cross at the heart and center of this symbol. And while this symbol does very often appear in a form that is not color specific, the colors do matter in its true and original form. And therefore, it is no coincidence that the cross at the heart and center is black.

Black, of course, is often the color associated with death. The

black color of the cross, therefore, is a reminder of what St. Paul writes in Romans 6:23, that "the wages of sin is death." Death is sin's wage, the wage we all must pay, for as Paul also writes, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). And the death that is sin's wage is not just physical death, but also spiritual death, eternal damnation, eternal separation from God in the pit of hell.

So the blackness of the cross is a somber reminder of our sin, a somber reminder of the eternal death we deserve because of that sin. And yet its shape is a reminder that someone else has already paid sin's wage for us. Its shape is a reminder that we have a Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ, who suffered the wrath and punishment of God that you and I rightly deserved. He suffered it all in our place and for our sakes so that we never have to. The cross reminds us that we have a Savior, that God's own Son has set us free from the power of sin, death and Satan. It reminds us that we are forgiven. It reminds us that God's Son has set us free and that we are, therefore, free indeed!

The second part of the seal is where that black cross is placed, which is in the middle of a red heart. And Luther specifically wanted that heart to retain its natural color, red, as a reminder of the blood Jesus shed for us on that black cross of death, and so a reminder that "the blood of Jesus, [God's] Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Furthermore, it serves as a reminder that the heart that has the cross of Jesus at its center is a heart that has been made alive again.



**Rev. Michael Miller**  
Pastor,  
Redeemer,  
Harriman, Tenn.

See **SEAL**, Page 2

## SEAL

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

And this red heart with a black cross in the center stands in the middle of a white rose. Luther's family coat of arms contained a crossbow, a shield, a helmet with horns, and a rose. And the rose was the only part of that family coat of arms that Luther kept for his seal. Why? Because for Luther, the rose was a symbol of joy.

If you have ever listened to *A Prairie Home Companion*, then you know that humorist Garrison Keillor liked to describe the Lutherans of his fictional Lake Wobegone as folks who never seemed to feel good unless they were miserable.

Martin Luther's household, on the other hand, was anything but a dreary and somber place. If we can judge from the conversations that were written down around his table, the Luther house was a most lively place, filled with fun and food, with drink and song, with children and laughter. Yes, Luther knew well that a life of saving faith in Jesus is a life filled with great joy.

In fact, Luther said his seal "places the believer into a white, joyous rose, for this faith does not give peace and joy like the world gives. That is why the rose should be white and not red, for white is the color of the spirits and the angels." Christian joy, Luther knew, is not dependent on the earthly circumstances of our lives. It is rooted in the cross that is at the heart and center of our lives, so that even when life's thorns stick us, even then we have that joy, comfort and peace. "But take heart!" Jesus says. "I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

The black cross, in the center of a red heart, set in a white rose, has a blue background. And there is a reason why the cross and heart and rose are set against a sky-blue field. That sky-blue background serves as a reminder that, as the old hymn says, "I am but a stranger here, heaven is my home" ("I'm But a Stranger Here," *Lutheran Service Book* #748).

Yes, the sky-blue background points us ahead to heaven, points us ahead to the better world we will one day enjoy because Jesus died for us on that black cross of death. It points us ahead to that great and glorious day when our God will restore all things, to that great and glorious day when we will once again enjoy



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Here I stand!" That  
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where we stand  
still today, on  
the Word of the  
Lord that endures  
forever!**

the fellowship of those who have gone before us in faith.

It points us forward to that great and glorious day when our God "will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

And finally, surrounding the black cross and the red heart and the white rose and the sky-blue background is a golden ring. With no beginning and no end, a ring or a circle is a symbol of eternity. It symbolizes, therefore, that the blessed life Jesus won for us on that black cross of death lasts forever. It simply has no end. And that blessed life, Luther said, is "exquisite ... beyond all joy and goods ... just as gold is the most valuable, most precious and best metal."

And here is one last thing. Sometimes, you will see Luther's seal with four capital letters around it — V, D, M and A. And what do those four letters stand for? VDMA stands for the Latin phrase, *Verbum Dei Manet in Aeternum*. It means what St. Peter writes in 1 Peter 1:25, that "the Word of the Lord endures forever."

"My conscience is captive to the Word of God," Luther famously said at the Diet of Worms. "I cannot and will not recant. Here I stand!" That is where Luther stood, and that is where we stand still today, on the Word of the Lord that endures forever!

Luther's seal, consisting of a black cross, a red heart, a white rose, a sky-blue background, a golden ring and the letters VDMA, is and remains a symbol of our salvation. This symbol that figures so prominently in our Lutheran circles tells the old, old story of Jesus and His love, of a Savior who died on a cross for us and for our salvation, of a Savior who fills our hearts with faith and with new life, of a Savior who brings joy to this life in every circumstance. It tells the old, old story of a Savior who gives us new life in a new heaven and a new earth — life with Him that never ends!

As Luther himself closed that letter to his friend Lazarus Spengler on July 8, 1530, "May Christ, our beloved Lord, be with your spirit until the life hereafter. Amen."

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*Pastor Miller recently finished his term as Mid-South District fourth vice-president.*





The Mid-South District has provided **Grow Grant funding** for Faith Lutheran Church, Thompsons Station, Tenn., to support the “Anchored in Christ” podcast. From left, Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola, district president, is pictured handing a check to podcast hosts Doug Hannah, a Christian radio personality, and Rev. Curt Hoover, Faith pastor.

Anchored in Christ presents the core teachings of confessional Lutheranism in a format that’s engaging and accessible, introducing listeners to the unique theological strengths of the LCMS. For more information, visit [anchoredpod.org](https://anchoredpod.org).

## Welcome, April!

The Mid-South District is pleased to welcome April Jones as its newest staff member! April is stepping into the role of administrative assistant, working with Michelle Fischer, the district’s executive director for Education, Youth and Family Ministry.



A seasoned education professional, April taught in Lutheran schools for over 16 years, most recently teaching and serving as the admissions director for Immanuel Lutheran School, Memphis. We are excited to have April join our team!

Reach April with a “welcome” message at [ajones@mid-southlcms.com](mailto:ajones@mid-southlcms.com).

## Congregation mission commitment receipts

as of July 31, 2025 (7 months)



Anticipated amount (42% of budget) ....	\$952,173
Actual receipts .....	\$926,719
Over (under) anticipated amount .....	(\$25,454)

### Use of mission commitment receipts

Allocated to Synod for world missions ..	\$263,432
Allocated to Tanzania .....	\$14,583
Retained for district ministry/mission support (70% of receipts) .....	\$648,703
Total receipts .....	\$926,719

### Mission commitment receipts comparison

Actual receipts as of July 31, 2025 .....	\$926,719
Actual receipts as of July 31, 2024 .....	\$928,329
Over (under) prior year receipts .....	(\$1,610)

Join Trinity Lutheran Church in  
Celebrating Our 170<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
with a night of

## Spaghetti, Sweets & Silent Bids

Proceeds going towards updating Trinity’s HVAC System

Sunday November 2<sup>nd</sup> from 5pm – 8  
210 Washington Ave, Memphis, TN 38103

Dinner includes a variety of Pasta, Salads, Bread,  
Sweets and access to Grazing Table while you bid

Adult plate	\$20
Child plate	\$15
Under 3	Free

Silent Auction Bidding will end at 7:30pm

We Can Accept – Cash or Check

Reserving a Ticket Encouraged

Call Trinity Office  
(901) 525-1056

Scan the QR code to see our Facebook  
Event page to get a peek at auction items





## Fostering connections, sharing ideas

Over 90 educators from both the Mid-South and Southern districts attended the **Early Childhood Conference** at Faith Lutheran Church and Preschool, Collierville, Tenn., in July. The theme was “Don’t Stop Believing,” inspired by Hebrews 10:35-37. Presenters covered topics such as parent communication, avoiding educator burnout, and understanding student anxiety.

The conference also offered an opportunity for early childhood educators to meet April Jones, the Mid-South District’s new administrative assistant for Education, Youth and Family (see Page 3). Attendees were also able to share well-wishes with Julie Tyler, the former administrative assistant who is entering retirement.

The Mid-South District thanks Dina Foshee, Faith preschool director, and Faith staff for hosting this year’s conference!



Pictured at the conference are Mid-South District Education, Youth and Family staff, from left, April Jones (administrative assistant), Michelle Fischer (executive director) and Julie Tyler (retired administrative assistant).

## Loving Hands outreach touches hearts

Once each month, several women from Prince of Peace, White House, Tenn., have been sharing their skills with love by interacting with residents of the White House Healthcare nursing facility, and providing manicures.

The residents — women and some men — enjoy being pampered, and the attention and opportunity for social interaction.



## ‘One Nation Under God’ devotional for women available Nov. 11

Christians disagree on many issues, but one thing we all agree on is that prayer works. And what better way to serve our country and our fellow Americans than to pray for them?

*One Nation Under God: 40 Devotions for Patriotic Women* (available Nov. 11) encourages believers to pray for our nation’s citizens and leaders, regardless of who occupies positions in government. Each devotional focuses on a Bible verse that speaks to an issue facing America, discusses how the text relates to us today, and includes inspirational prompts, reflection questions, and journaling space to capture your thoughts.

The author, Amanda C. Bauch, is a writer and editor whose creative nonfiction and short fiction has appeared online and in print anthologies. As an editor, she has worked on many books, including several bestsellers. Her husband is Rev. Gregory Bauch, pastor of Ascension, Madison, Tenn., and they are raising a son and daughter.



Amanda Bauch

To preorder the book and learn more about her work, visit [AmandaBauch.com](http://AmandaBauch.com).





**Rev. Mark Rhoads was installed as pastor of Christ Our Savior, Loudon, Tenn., on July 29.** Pictured are, from left (front) Revs. Kent Dockery, emeritus; Cliff Herd, emeritus; Dr. Ed Rosser, Good Shepherd, Chattanooga; Don Welmer, First, Chattanooga; Mark Rhoads, Benjamin Heinz, Athens Lutheran, Athens; Patrick Cox, Cross of Christ, Chattanooga; Barry Hildebrandt, emeritus; Rev. David Graves, St. Paul, Wartburg; (back) Joe Jacks, St. Philip, Chattanooga; Gilbert Pingel, emeritus; Derek Roberts, Praise, Maryville; Chase LeFort, Faith, Oak Ridge; James Watson, emeritus; and Dr. Roger Paavola, district president.



**Rev. David Buchs was installed as pastor of Grace, Little Rock, on Aug. 18.** Pictured are, from left, (front) Revs. Kevin Conger, Hope, Jacksonville; Sawyer Meyers, Beautiful Savior, Olive Branch, Miss.; Dr. Roger Paavola, district president; David Buchs; Stewart Marshall, Trinity, Pine Bluff; John Mathis, emeritus; David Appold, St. Paul, Paducah, Ky.; (back) Shawn Found, emeritus; Josh Ralston, Zion, Augsburg; Don Hefta, Faith, Fairfield Bay; Emil Woerner, Friends in Christ, Bryant; David Witte, Grace, Little Rock; Tom Bartsch, River Valley Grace, Lamar; Robert McCannless, St. John's, Stuttgart; Steven Teske, Immanuel, Alexander; Josh Willadsen, Bethel, Fort Smith; Kory Janneke, Conway; and Matt Albright, Christ, Little Rock.



# Junior high retreat is Oct. 17-19

Rev. Kory Janneke, pastor of St. Matthew, Conway, Tenn., will be the speaker for the two Linkt retreats of the 2025-2026 school year. The retreat theme is “Because He Lives,” based on John 14:19 — “Because I live, you also will live” — words that Jesus spoke to His disciples in the upper room the night of His betrayal. His resurrection three days later — victory over sin, death and the grave — assures we too will rise again on the last day.

And even in this life, we have been set free from slavery to sin by the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross. Pastor Janneke will address the youths’ ideas about redemption, heaven and eternity, with a focus on the resurrection of all believers.

**The junior high retreat, for students in grades 6-8, is Oct. 17-19.**

Registration is by congregation. Youth leaders can get registration forms from their church office or request the forms from the Camp Trinity office at [trinitypetitjean@gmail.com](mailto:trinitypetitjean@gmail.com).

Youth without a church home or from a congregation with no youth group participating can still attend and will be assigned to another youth group. Contact the camp office to arrange this.

**The early registration deadline is Oct. 6.** A \$50 nonrefundable deposit is required to reserve a spot. The cost is \$125 for those registered by **Oct. 6**. The cost is \$150 for those who register after that date.

The senior high Linkt retreat is in February.

Linkt retreats for youth in congregations of the Mid-South District began in 2015. Thousands of youth and adult leaders have participated. The retreats include worship, singing, hikes, games, service projects, Bible study, campfires and fellowship.

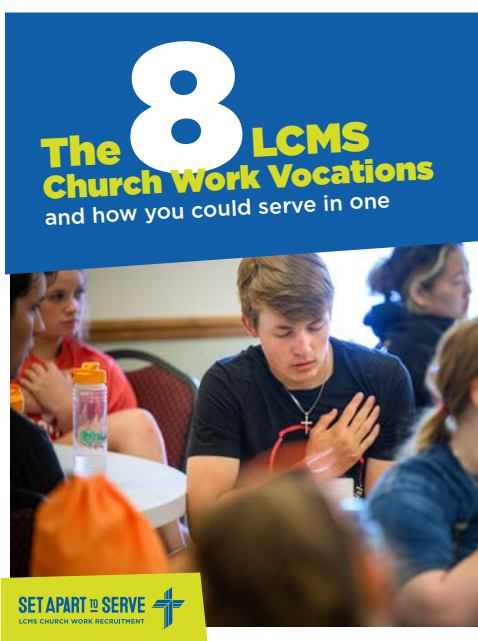


Rev. Kory Janneke

## Raising up CHURCH WORKERS

*Set Apart to Serve (SAS)*, the LCMS initiative to recruit church workers, has a valuable resource for those who want to explore professional church work — a booklet titled “8 LCMS Church Work Vocations.”

Along with descriptions of the eight vocations, the resource also looks at the steps to pursue them and highlights some of the people currently serving. To view, download or share the booklet, go to [lcms.org/sas](https://lcms.org/sas) and scroll down to click “View resources” and scroll down to the [link](#).



God gives His church pastors and church workers for the sake of the Gospel. Pastors proclaim Christ and administer the Sacraments, means through which people receive Christ’s saving work. Church workers assist the pastoral office in service to the Word, witnessing to Christ daily in various roles. Christ’s church will continue until He returns, and that church will continue to need workers.

Parents/grandparents, pastors, professional church workers, Sunday school teachers and others in your congregation help influence children to consider serving the church in these sacred and joyful vocations. Since church work is rooted in Baptism and a lifetime of hearing the Word, SAS encourages young people to consider church work vocations primarily through their continued and faithful involvement with their congregation.

For more, visit [lcms.org/sas](https://lcms.org/sas).

# Plan your Gifts of Love

By Diane Reimold

LWML Mid-South District  
Gifts of Love Advocate

Have you ever delayed planning a vacation? Maybe there will be a better price, or the weather will be better at another time of the year. What if my health takes a downward turn and I am unable to go? The bliss of a vacation will never happen if you continue living in paralysis of the unknown.

The same kind of paralysis can keep the Lord's people from putting estate plans in place and carrying out faithful stewardship of God's gifts once He calls you home to heaven. In the barrage of "what ifs," we choose to do nothing. If you have been procrastinating in putting a gift plan together or maybe reviewing an existing plan that was made years ago because of the work involved, there is free help available through LWML Gifts of Love Ministry.

There are many options for making meaningful charitable gifts through estate planning, and an LWML gift planning counselor can guide you in

creating the best plan to meet not only your needs, but also the needs of your family and/or the ministries you wish to bless based on your goals.

Some options are a Bequest, Donor-Advised Fund, Personal Endowment Fund, Charitable Gift Annuity, or a Charitable Remainder Trust. You can also include a Statement of Faith or Family Blessing with your plan to express your Christian faith to your loved ones.

Don't wait until it's too late to set up a plan to share your blessings with

your family and ministries in the way you want! By creating your estate plan ahead of time, you won't leave these decisions to your heirs in their time of grief. God has made us stewards of His blessings and it is our job to put a plan in writing that faithfully guides how financial assets should be handled through our estates.

Don't let the fear of this task keep you from acting. To get the process started, contact Linda Gage, LWML gift planning counselor, at [linda.gage@lfnd.org](mailto:linda.gage@lfnd.org) or 800-741-4138.



Getty Images

## LWML Mid-South District Convention

June 12-14 • Springdale, Ark.

Lodging and business sessions will be 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, LCMS Managing Director, Human Care and Ministerial Support.

Get the dates on your calendar!



Deaconess  
Dr. Tiffany  
Manor

## Grant applications due

Don't delay! Mission grant applications are due to zone presidents by Nov. 1. Zone presidents must submit grants by Dec. 31 to Laurie Sanders, district third vice-president.

All the information you need is available at [midsouthlwml.org/mission-grant-request-forms](https://midsouthlwml.org/mission-grant-request-forms). Any questions may be directed to Sanders at [missiongrants@midsouthlwml.org](mailto:missiongrants@midsouthlwml.org).

## STAY CONNECTED

On the web

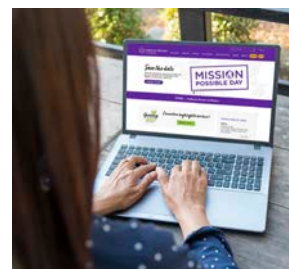
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# Augsburg Fall Fest is Oct. 11

**T**he 18th Annual Augsburg Fall Fest, sponsored by Zion Lutheran Church, Augsburg, Ark., will be held from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 11, at Zion. Admission is free.

Begun in 2008 as a community outreach to celebrate Zion's 125th anniversary, the Fall Fest has grown every year, bringing people from all over Arkansas as well as Oklahoma, Iowa, and even California and Hawaii.

Musical entertainment is provided from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m., and German food will be served all day.

Guests can enjoy arts and crafts; educational and display booths; a Daisy BB gun shooting booth; bump-and-jumps; a petting zoo; a cake walk; free kids' games; bingo; and a dunking booth.

The "Anything with Wheels Show and Shine Contest" invites the entry of any vehicle that has tires and an engine. The best and most unusual will be decided by people's choice, and first, second and third place trophies will be awarded at 2 p.m.

For "Show and Shine" entry information, contact Tony Waldo at 479-264-4549.

Bid at the silent auction on donated and handcrafted items, or purchase a similar variety from the Country Store.

A drawing for a fully processed locally grown hog will be held at 2 p.m. Tickets may be purchased for the drawing at the festival or by calling Rusty Dorn at 479-747-6676 or Joe Villalobos at 479-970-0484. Tickets are \$2 each; 3 for \$5; or 15 for \$20. You need not be present to win.

All proceeds from the festival are divided equally between the River Valley Christian Clinic in Russellville and the Augsburg Food Pantry. Last year, the festival raised \$41,548.

The River Valley Christian Clinic provides free medical, dental, optical and prescription services (as well as smoking cessation counseling) to people who otherwise cannot afford them.

Since it opened in 1995, the Augsburg Food Pantry has grown exponentially, and now provides food to over 2,400 people in the Arkansas River Valley each month.

The festival committee invites everyone to enjoy a family outing with great food, entertainment, games and fellowship. Zion Lutheran Church is located at the intersection of Highway 333 and Augsburg Road.



**SHARE  
YOUR NEWS  
WITH US!**

Digital files, sent via e-mail, are preferred. Send email submissions to [LW@mid-southlcms.com](mailto: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  
**December 2025 issue by Oct. 15.**

