



/ OCTOBER 2026

MID-SOUTH LUTHERAN



Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola
District President

One of the lesser known feast days we celebrate in our Lutheran circles is Holy Cross Day. It falls on Sept. 14 every year and gets lost somewhere in between Labor Day and Reformation Day. But for us and the writers of Holy Scripture — from Isaiah to John — the cross spells out the abundant joy we should celebrate on that day.

The whole world should share this one thing — the cross — because of what one very specific cross means for us. We share in the cross of Christ because of its loving and saving power. We need to share the cross with the whole world because of our sinfulness and what our Savior Jesus Christ did there.

The cross is the most important symbol of Christianity. Most churches in the past were built in the shape of a cross (cruciform) to remind us in worship how we are blessed to be in Christ's church. We see people wearing all sorts of crosses. Some are silver, some are made of gold or are jeweled to symbolize how precious and valuable Christ's suffering and death on the cross was for us. Other crosses are made of wood, some of which are very knotted, twisted and rough to symbolize the folly, offensiveness and ugliness of Jesus dying on the cross. Others are stylized with the name of Jesus scrolled out on its beams. On some of my travels, I've even seen crosses made out of barbed wire, long spikes and nails.

In our Lutheran church and many other denominations, there's some sort of cross hanging in the front of the church, framed by the altar and candles to set our eyes on the cross. A cross is seen on our altars and baptismal fonts. Many Christians have crosses hanging on the walls of their homes. What this all shows is that Christians are fascinated with the cross.

But not every cross is as important as the one that figured in the crucifixion of Christ. Christians have written countless poems, hymns and books on the crucified Christ. Many Christians speak of the importance of bearing their cross. Others — Christians and non-Christians alike — speak of having reached a crossroads in their lives. Even Michelangelo's famous drawing of the man shows how the human body has been created in the shape of a cross.

For us Christians, the cross reminds us of our sinfulness. It is the place where God suffered excruciating pain to pay the price for our salvation and promise of life everlasting. The prophet Isaiah makes this point when he tells of how Jesus the Suffering Servant "was despised and rejected by men ... as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (ISAIAH 53:3).

We are born sinners because of the fall of mankind. Because of the sin in the world, Christ Jesus was despised and rejected. Faces were hidden as He suffered on the cross. Jesus Christ would never have gone to the cross if it wasn't for our sin and the sinfulness of the whole world.

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CROSS

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There's never been a more cruel instrument of torture and death than the cross. Anyone who doesn't believe we're all sinners or that there is no sin in the world only has to see the tragic events that pop up on our TV news programs every day. Mankind's acts of violence for centuries have legitimized persecutions, expulsions and destruction of people and property, seemingly without end.

The pictures of wars, poverty, torture, environmental devastation and political exploitation are only a few of the harsh realities we see at work in our world every day. Countless riches have been spent on weapons of war that have been used in unspeakable ways. Yet most of the world's population struggles each day to scrape enough together to feed themselves and their families.

Did Christ's suffering on the cross bring an end to this? No, sin crucified Jesus Christ. Despite dying for all of humankind, there are countless numbers of nations from ancient history to today that continue in a direction that seems opposite of the direction to which the Cross of Christ points. We live in a world that has despised and rejected the very One whom God the Father sent to love and save us.

Many names are tied to the Cross of Christ: Peter in denial, Judas in his betrayal, Pilate in his injustice, the disciples who ran from the cross in fear, and all the others, including me, who had a hand in the reason Jesus went to Golgotha and the ugly beams of His cross.

But the Cross of Christ also reminds us of its glorious, loving, saving power. All of us have something of that precious treasure. Like family and close friends who wish to demonstrate their love for someone, they oftentimes give a very special gift to such a loved one. On a cosmic scale, God's love was demonstrated

to us and the whole world by giving us Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son to suffer and die on the cross for us. His love isn't only for our friends or family members. God's love and mercy are for everyone — the greatest sinners, the worst enemies and those who even still deny Him.

John's Gospel hints at this by telling us that two members of the Jewish Sanhedrin, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, took Christ's body from the cross for burial. They were two influential Jewish leaders who were followers of Jesus because of His love for them. They were so moved by Christ's love that they willingly took the risk of asking Pilate for Christ's body for a proper burial. If they had been found out, they could have been dismissed from the Sanhedrin. Pilate could have arrested, or worse, sentenced them to their crucifixion as Christ's disciples.

Isaac Watts, in his hymn "When I Survey the Wonderous Cross," put it this way: "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all!" The Cross of Christ is the saving power of God. Jesus has saved us from the eternal punishment of sin, death and hell. He has won the terrible battle over these powers on the cross.

John's Gospel tells us that our Savior's last words were: "It is finished." Then, "He bowed His head and gave up His spirit."

Amazingly, this picture of Christ's death is one of victory and accomplishment. The Cross of Christ is God's saving power because in Christ we receive the benefits of His victory over sin, death and Satan. The Cross of Christ proclaims to us that we need not fear sin, the devil or death. The Cross of Christ paid the price of our salvation. Christ's glorious, victorious Resurrection guarantees that we too will share our Savior's victory, when on the great and Last Day, He will return to take us and all His elect to His glorious, eternal Kingdom. Thanks be to God!



Institute headed to Mequon

It's time to mark your calendar for the 2027 LCMS Institute on Liturgy, Preaching and Church Music, set for July 12–16, 2027, at Concordia University Wisconsin (CUW), Mequon, Wis. The theme will be "Holy Week" and will encompass Palm Sunday to Easter and everything in between.

The LCMS Worship Institute brings chancel, loft and pew together to sing Christ's great work of salvation. Watch for more information to come.

INTENT TO SERVE

Concordia University, Nebraska (CUNE), Seward, Neb., welcomed more than 110 incoming church work students for the 2026–2027 academic year — the largest incoming class of future church workers in the university's history.



"We praise and thank God as He continues to raise up people for lives of service to their neighbors near and far," said Aaron Rohde, CUNE's LCMS church work recruiter and admissions counselor. "To share the love of Jesus through a church work vocation carries eternal significance. It is humbling and exciting to see strong numbers as we enter this new school year."

To encourage and celebrate students answering God's call to church work, CUNE launched its Church Work Letter of Intent program in 2024. Through the program, admitted church work students receive a letter affirming their commitment, and their home congregation is invited to pray for and celebrate their journey into church work.



Rev. Trae Fistler led the LERT chainsaw team from Chattanooga congregations in serving communities impacted by disasters. From left, Nyssa Hunt, Jim Reisenbuechler, David Topp, Larry O'Neil, Jon Sonntag, Dick Sonntag, Pastor Fistler and Rick Niswonger. Not pictured are Rev. Barry Hildebrandt and Rev. Donald Welmer.

Serving our neighbors after disaster

And let us not grow weary of doing good. GAL. 6:9

Lutheran Early Response Teams (LERT) across the LCMS have remained busy serving communities affected by disasters. The Mid-South District had fewer storms than in previous years, allowing our teams to engage in mercy work for our local neighbors in need.

Mid-South District Disaster Response coordinators (DDRC) Kurt Ludwig and Rev. Trae Fistler traveled to Belvoir Christian Academy in Chattanooga late in June to lead basic disaster response and basic chainsaw training for the congregations within that circuit. We had a great training and welcomed new LERT volunteers to our ranks.

Rev. Fistler, who serves as pastor of Faith, Hopkinsville, Ky., has been working in coordination with LCMS Disaster Response and six senior chainsaw instructors from across the LCMS to update and expand the chainsaw cur-

riculum. They now offer three different levels of chainsaw instruction:

Basic: Introduces new sawyers to the LERT chainsaw program, focusing heavily on how to safely operate and maintain a chainsaw.

Intermediate: Treads into the mechanics of safely felling (cutting down) a standing tree. Each operator has the opportunity for more saw time and they get to fell a tree with one-on-one instruction.

Advanced: This three-day training dives deeper into bucking, limbing and felling storm-damaged trees, which are significantly more dangerous than standing trees and why tree services charge emergency rates.

The LERT teams and trainers thank you for all prayers and support as they continue to serve, in Jesus' name, those affected by storms.

Congregation mission commitment receipts

as of July 31, 2026 (seven months)

Anticipated amount (58.33% of budget).....	\$962,571
Actual receipts	\$944,290
Over (under) anticipated amount.....	(\$18,281)

Use of mission commitment receipts

Allocated to Synod for world missions	\$268,704
Allocated to Tanzania	\$14,583
Retained for district ministry/ mission support (70% of receipts).....	\$661,003
Total receipts	\$944,290

Mission commitment receipts comparison

Actual receipts as of July 31, 2026	\$944,290
Actual receipts as of July 31, 2025	\$926,719
Over (under) prior year receipts ..	\$17,571

DISTRICT NEWS



Ready for the new school year

A huge thank you to all the early childhood educators from the Mid-South and Southern districts who attended the 2026 ECE Conference in July.

Christ the King (CTK) Lutheran Preschool, Memphis, did a phenomenal job of hosting the event, which gathered attendees under the theme “Speaking Wisdom, Teaching Kindness,” (based on Proverbs 31:26).

Designed to inspire our Lutheran early childhood workers for the upcoming school year, the conference was enhanced by the contributions of Ann Laury, CTK principal; Ellen Denning, CTK early childhood director; Dina Foshee, director of Faith Lutheran Preschool, Collierville; and Scott Roberts, LCEF vice-president, Mid-South and Southern districts.

The Mid-South District is grateful to them all!

A taste of seminary life

Two Mid-South District students attended Christ Academy High School (CAHS), held June 14-27 at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne. Anastasia Willadsen, who attends Bethel Lutheran Church, Fort Smith, Ark., and Jonathan Roberts, a member of Praise Lutheran Church, Maryville, Tenn., joined about 90 other high school students from across the country for two weeks of classes, worship and community.

Designed especially for students considering church work (but open to anyone with an interest), CAHS gives young men insights into pastoral ministry in Timothy School, while young women learn more about diaconal service in Phoebe School.

Each day, the students enjoyed four hours of classes with seminary professors, guest lecturers and area pastors and deaconesses. For fun, students went to a Fort Wayne TinCaps baseball game, enjoyed country line dancing, and deepened friendships. The students also participated in service projects. The men did yard work at Camp Lutherhaven while the women visited residents of Lutheran Life Villages for games and singing.

The next Christ Academy is scheduled for June 20–July 3, 2027. Visit ctsfnw.edu/about/events/christ-academy.



From left, Anastasia Willadsen and Jonathan Roberts are pictured with Rev. Christian Schultz, director of Christ Academy at CTSFW.

Celebrate 150 years with Salem, Springdale

A year of festive special events celebrating the 150th anniversary of Salem Lutheran Church, Springdale, Ark., concludes on Oct. 4 with a combined congregational bilingual worship service in the Salem sanctuary at 10 a.m., followed by a picnic style meal in the Family Life Center, and an outdoor carnival with games, live music and goodies for the entire family.

The public is invited. Salem is located at 1800 W. Emma Avenue.

Officially chartered in the summer of 1876 in the Shiloh/Springdale area, Salem Lutheran Church was a charter member of LCMS and one of the first English-speaking Lutheran congregations in this part of the country.

Since its inception, Salem has stressed childhood education, estab-

lishing Springdale's first kindergarten in 1949. When Springdale public schools founded a kindergarten in 1973, Salem established a preschool program that still thrives.

As a missionary congregation, Salem served as the mother church for younger Arkansas congregations St. John's, Fayetteville (1944); Holy Trinity, Rogers (1962); and Siloam Lutheran (1964), and mission congregations in Eureka Springs, Lowell and Prairie Grove. In 2008, Salem held its first Hispanic worship service in addition to the two Sunday services in English.

The practice continues as Salem is a multi-ethnic family of faith offering ESL classes and instructional classes for those seeking U.S. citizenship.



God bless our nation

On July 5, members and friends of Christ the King Lutheran Church, Memphis, gathered to celebrate the birthday of our beloved country with an All-American Cookout and Concert. With plenty of flags to wave and nostalgic tunes being played, the crowd of almost 200 cheered and sang along.

A special thank you to those behind the scenes decorating, grilling burgers, working the soundboard and solving logistical puzzles. It was red-white-and-blue fun for all.



Photos: Caroline Johnson

I've gotta be good, but I can't be good'

We know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. **ROMANS 7:14-20**



Getty Images

The headline is a lyric from a song titled “The Churchianity Blues.” I’ve forgotten the artist’s name and can’t even find the lyrics, but you can understand what is being sung. We can try and try again to “be good,” but, as we confess on Sunday, we still fail to love God with our whole heart and our neighbors as ourselves.

And there’s no solution. It’s just how life is on this side of heaven. We can never be “good enough.” Enter the Hero, the Savior, the Son of God who provides the solution to our problem.

As we read from Galatians 3:13–14:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—

so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

So we are redeemed through Christ Jesus. And, not only that, but we also receive the promised Holy Spirit!

Humanly, we can’t always be good, but we can ask the Holy Spirit to guide us and keep us on the right path. Now that’s something to sing about! In fact, go to *Lutheran Service Book*, hymn #650, “Holy Spirit, Ever Dwelling,” and sing it out loud!

Trying to be good,

Candy Habich

Chairman, LWML Mid-South District
Media and Marketing Committee



Mid-South District

- Group presidents should send **Lutheran Woman’s Quarterly** magazine counts to their zone president before Nov. 15.
- The deadline to submit news for the Jan. 1 issue of *League Letter* is Dec. 15. Send to editor@midsouthlwml.org

42ND BIENNIAL LWML CONVENTION

- July 8–11, 2027
- Oklahoma City Convention Center

Theme verse: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2).



Romans 12:2

We just finished one convention and now we are thinking of the next one.
Stay updated at lwml.org/convention.

Our district would like know if you would like to ride to Oklahoma City on a charter bus. We are currently evaluating options for either going straight through or with overnight stops to and from the convention.

If you are interested, email contact@midsouthlwml.org with your name, email address, phone number and preference of straight through or overnight stops.

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The joy of ‘Back to School’

Cast your burden on the LORD, and He will sustain you; He will never permit the righteous to be moved. **PSALM 55:22**

By Jay Brinkmeyer

Trinity HOPE Ambassador Board of Directors

Back in the day, when you were in elementary school, were your class photos in black and white? Mine were. Were you jumping for joy when you were told it was time to get new clothes for school? I wasn't. After eating home-cooked meals all summer, were you excited to go back to eating school food? It wasn't high on my list.

The four Haitian children in the above photo have a very different reason to be excited about being back to school. They are excited about the blessing of a noon meal.

Take a closer look at the photo. The four children are sitting at their desks in a building that is about the same temperature inside as it is outside. They are eating a hot meal of beans and rice, most likely their only substantial meal of the day, using spoons they brought from home. During my time in Haiti, I saw siblings

sometimes share the same spoon as they sat next to each other enjoying their meal.

During my visits, I've been blessed to spend time in many Haitian schools, and none of them had yearbooks filled with individual and class photographs. Many of the children wear hand-me-down uniforms and shoes. During the summer, when school is not in session, food can be especially scarce.

So, yes, these children are happy to be back to school. They have returned to their classrooms, their friends and a hot lunch provided through Trinity HOPE.

Thankfully, as they have returned, the fire under the cooking pot is burning again. We serve an incredibly awesome God.

As another school year has begun, imagine the joy on the faces of children sitting down to that plate of food, the warmth in their hearts, and the sincere thankfulness in their mealtime prayers. Through the generosity of people like you, children are being fed, prayed with, and reminded that God has not forgotten them.

They place their trust in God. We place our trust in Him, too.

Thank you for going back to school with them. Ain't God good?

LEARN MORE AT [TRINITYHOPE.ORG](https://trinityhope.org)

Junior High Retreat is Oct. 16-18

Junior high students will explore their Christian calling to love and serve others within the Body of Christ during the LinkT Retreat, scheduled for Oct. 16-18 at Camp Trinity.

Congregations throughout the Mid-South District are encouraged to bring students in grades 6-8 for a weekend of Christian fellowship, outdoor experiences surrounded by the beauty of God's creation, and meaningful opportunities to hear the life-changing message of the Gospel. Students will also have the opportunity to connect with youth from other Lutheran congregations across the district.

Pastors and youth leaders can find additional information by visiting lutherancamp.org and selecting the "LinkT Youth Retreats" link at the top of the homepage. Registration is completed by congregation. Church offices throughout the district have received registration forms and additional details. Congregations that do not receive the email are encouraged to contact the Camp Trinity office at director@lutherancamp.org.

2027 summer staff needed

We had an amazing 2026 summer here at Camp Trinity, where the Gospel was faithfully proclaimed and children and adults grew closer to Jesus.

Applications for 2027 summer staff positions open this month. Lutherans between the ages of 18 and 25 who are seeking meaningful summer employment and an opportunity to positively impact children, youth and families are encouraged to apply. Positions are available at Camp Trinity and at about two dozen LCMS camps across the country. Interested applicants can complete an employment profile at nloma.org, the website of the National Lutheran Outdoors Ministry Association.



Thank you to (above) the 2026 summer camp staff and (right) Rev. Joshua Ralston, who is pictured with his wife, Rachel.

Thank you Pastor!

October is Pastor Appreciation Month, and Camp Trinity is honored to recognize our camp pastor, Rev. Joshua Ralston. Pastor Ralston has faithfully served as Camp Trinity's pastor since 2024. Shortly after graduating from Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, in May 2019, he was installed as pastor of Zion Lutheran Church, Augsburg, Ark., where he continues to serve. Thank you for your faithful service, spiritual leadership and dedication to our camp community. We appreciate you and pray that you have a wonderful Pastor Appreciation Month!



SHARE YOUR NEWS WITH US!

Send us your stories and photos for the December issue by Oct. 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