



/ SEPTEMBER 2021

MID-SOUTH LUTHERAN



LCMS/Erik M. Lunsford

FACING DESPAIR WITH FAITH

It's time to start re-thinking what happens at church now that the kids are back in school and we can get back to the routines that we took off for the summer. The school children are faced with the depression of nine more months of sitting in classes (thank you post-COVID practices). Adults and parents are faced with the extra expenses of everything attached to the school year. And the empty-nesters start thinking of what we can do for Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas and every other event that requires us to recog-



Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola
District President

nize the grandkids in some unique way. It might even become depressing when we see things piling up around us.

Depressing times have happened to everyone — at least once in their life. For some, it gets deeper.

When we think of Martin Luther, we think of a man who was fiercely dedicated and who fought for truth and life with vigor. During his lifetime, Luther had been struck by lightning, thrown into prison, lived under house arrest, had numerous attempts taken on his life, lost some of his children to deadly diseases and suffered from a serious heart condition. Most of the time, Luther was relentless in his determination to stand up to every adversity and put the brightest outlook on everything.

On one occasion, however, Luther was completely down. We don't know exactly why that was, but Luther was depressed because things were going badly. He stayed up most of the night sulking over his problem in his study.

As he sat there in the wee hours of the morning, he looked up and saw his wife, Katy, standing in the doorway. She had a look of despair on her face, too.

"What's wrong?" Luther asked her.

"Haven't you heard the terrible news?" she asked. "God is dead!"

Luther soon realized Katy was play acting. He scolded her for such a terrible thing to say about God. But Katy wasn't impressed.

She lectured him right back: "And if God isn't dead, what right do you have, His servant, a Christian man, to be depressed and downcast?"

She was right. No one who believes in our faithful God has the right to be downcast and depressed. Yet it happens all the time. If anyone slips into despair, they're living as though God *was* dead — unable to hear our prayers and respond to our needs.

As long as God is alive, however, we have no need to despair. The same living God who brought us to this day is the same God who loves us and cares for us in days we don't even know about yet.

But like Luther, St. Paul, St. Francis, St. Ambrose, Moses or many of the disciples, we all sometimes get down. We forget to keep our eyes on Jesus and, like St. Peter, we sink into the stormy seas of depression and despair.

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FAITH

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Jesus Christ died for our human race and this world. He now lives at the right hand of God! We can't be regarded as hopeless. Through faith, we're reminded of what Jesus Christ has done for us and for what purpose God sent Him into this world.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

There's a church I passed by on some country road in our district. The marquee said "God will be faithful if we only trust in Him."

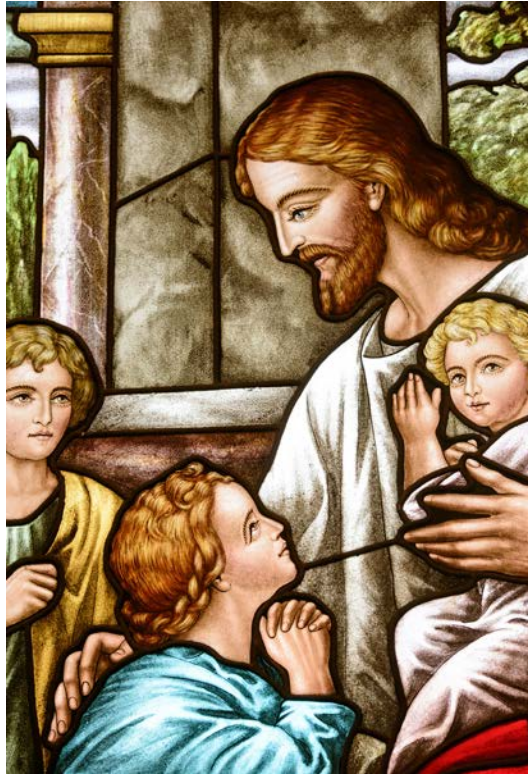
But is God faithful because we trust Him? God is always faithful! His faithfulness doesn't depend on us, but is solely based on His unending and unchanging faithfulness and love for us in Christ Jesus.

If indeed He is faithful, He also cares for us. Hearing Jesus say "I will be with you to the end of the age" means we should trust Him. Even if our faith in Him falters, His faithfulness is new to us every day.

If we worry, as we often do, we show signs that we no longer fully trust Jesus. It's like taking His promise that He will always be with us and care for us, with all the evidence of how He has cared for us up to this day, and throwing it back in His face and saying, "That promise is just not good enough for my troubles today!"

Holy Scripture reminds us that God is faithful and just. He does forgive our sins. We can always depend on His welcoming grace.

Even the children of Israel grumbled that they were facing a wilderness where there was no food or shelter. They were actually willing to trade their new-found freedom and hope of the Promised Land in exchange for the certainty of full bellies in slavery if they returned to Egypt. Bondage and a full belly in exchange for the freedom they had from the almighty hand of God



showed their faithless consideration of our faithful God, even though He always showed just the opposite — that He is faithful.

God didn't forget. He didn't abandon even the harshest of grumblers, the most chronic of complainers or even the most rebellious of scoffers among the Israelites. He preserved them all!

Each day, without fail, for 40 years — over 15,000 times — God faithfully supplied enough food to feed millions of freed Israelites, gave them water from a solid rock, gave them victory over every enemy and led them to the Promised Land.

Where did Moses get the strength to withstand the whiners and complainers by the millions out of the nation of Israel? Where did St. Peter eventually get his strength to stand up against the threats of death, rather than deny his God in Christ? Where did Martin Luther get his strength to stand on the truth of Scripture alone, or any of the saints for that matter?

Through faith, confession and prayer, strong men of faith realize that God is always close by and is always faithful.

God's Word assures us that fears, doubts and depression are driven away by the power of His Word and through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Without God's Spirit's guidance and presence, we might have the right to be depressed and in fear. But the power of God's children is not in their own ability. Through faith, we have access to God's faithful providence and can withstand the combined powers of people, the sin-filled world, the fiery darts of Satan and our own fragile human flesh.

The presence of God and the assurance which comes from the sacred cross of Jesus Christ lifts us above hopelessness and despair to the joy of forgiveness of our sins and victory unto life everlasting through Jesus Christ our Savior.

It isn't an absence of faith that lets us slip into worry and doubt or

depression. It's the constant barrage of those unseen attacks from the world, Satan and our own flesh that try to erode away our gift of faith and send us to deep despair. Mighty men of God suffered with the same doubts and fears, but through faith they drew on the strength that is beyond their understanding — the strength that comes from God's Word to claim a miraculous victory over all things.

May we be led to always draw on the power of the faithfulness of our God, to stand tall in the face of wrongs, to give power in the midst of what seems impossible and to shine as a bright light in a dark and depressed world that needs to know that God is *not* dead. He is alive and He is with us in Word, Sacrament and worship to serve us, and to serve us continuously each day until He finishes the job of leading us to His eternal Promised Land through the same Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our ever-living Redeemer.

Maybe, even in this truth from God, we might be able to face the next school year or whatever else the world might throw in our path. God is faithful and He will do it!

Mid-South students attend Christ Academy

By Rev. Matthew Wietfeldt
Director, Christ Academy

Christ Academy High School's June 20-July 3 session was blessed with the participation of 39 young men and 26 young women in the 22nd annual Christ Academy: Timothy and Phoebe School at Concordia Theological Seminary (CTSFW), Fort Wayne, Ind.

Mid-South District students **Andrew Abraham II, Gabriel Abraham and Alyssa Vandercook** were among those who participated in the two-week discernment program, designed for high-school-aged men and women who are interested in theology and considering pastoral and diaconal work.

Students were immersed in the daily life of the seminary, especially through confessional catechesis in the classroom. They learned from 14 CTSFW seminary professors, a guest lecturer and a panel of local pastors and deaconesses. Along with daily classes in the study of the Word, the students also worshiped with the seminary community in Kramer Chapel four times a day. They even had opportunities to form lasting friendships through group activities like bowling, a TinCaps baseball game and various team sports. Students also participated in service projects on campus and beyond.

We thank and praise God for keeping these young men and women steadfast



in the true faith. We pray that the Lord would continue to work through the pastors, teachers and workers of the Mid-South District to continue to send out laborers into his harvest. To God be all the glory!

FOCUS on EVANGELISM

Divine appointments

Shared by the Board of
Evangelism of First, Little Rock

When we meet another person, whether it is a friend, neighbor, co-worker or the fresh produce guy at your grocery store, the following would be helpful to consider.

- ▶ It might be a divine appointment from the Lord, for you to minister to that person, or for that person to minister to you.
- ▶ This person is unique and special, created by God in His image.
- ▶ What are they experiencing in their life? Are they happy? Sad? Fearful? Angry? Joyful?
- ▶ Relate to them where they are, and with non-judgmental acceptance and love.
- ▶ Seek to relate to them at the soul level. What is the status of their soul?
- ▶ Do they know the Lord?
- ▶ Are they producing the fruit of the Spirit in their lives?



- ▶ Do they know the Lord's calling on their life?
- ▶ Are they fulfilling God's calling on their life? If not, what is holding them back?
- ▶ How can you minister to them?
- ▶ What do they need you to pray for?

You can then tell them about Jesus — how He died for our sins and invites us to repent of our sins and receive Him into our lives as Lord and Savior with the gift of salvation. And you can invite them to your church, to join a fellowship of believers who love the Lord and seek to share His love and truth with the world.

Congregation mission commitment receipts

as of June 30, 2021 (6 months)

Anticipated amount (50% of budget)	\$730,187
Actual receipts	\$735,660
Over (under) anticipated amount	\$5,473

Use of mission commitment receipts

Allocated to Synod for world missions	\$208,198
Allocated to Tanzania	\$12,500
Retained for district ministry/mission support (70% of receipts)	\$514,962
Total receipts	\$735,660

Mission commitment receipts comparison

Actual receipts as of June 30 2021	\$735,660
Actual receipts as of June 30, 2020	\$728,989
Over (under) prior year receipts	\$6,671

Mid-South District Convention recap

JULY 1-3 | MEMPHIS

A convention highlight was the **State of the Synod report** given by LCMS President Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison. He spoke in depth about Synod's accomplishments and challenges, noting that Synod is in the best financial position it has seen in the last 30 years. This is due in large part to the generosity of donors, who have shown their trust in the fiduciary integrity of the LCMS by giving undesignated funds to be applied where needed most.

Addressing the challenges, Harrison labeled the proposed Equality Act as the "most un-Christian, anti-Christian measure ever passed in the House of Representatives." The passage of this act would pose a serious threat to the Concordia University System by denying the universities access to scholarship funds. Critical race theory also presents challenges by potentially curtailing suburban ministry to a diverse population in need of hearing the Gospel.

Harrison spoke positively of the strengthening of international relationships, saying: "The Office of International Missions is cooking!" Other LCMS ministries making an impact in our world include Disaster Response and training, and Life Ministry.



The **opening worship service** for the 21st Regular Convention of the Mid-South District drew 300 people to Christ the King (CTK), Memphis, to praise God for the "Marvelous Works," noted in the convention theme.

Dr. Harrison delivered an inspiring sermon, and the service was accompanied by beautiful choral music enhanced by piano, organ and a brass quartet.

Congregational delegates presented an offering designated for the district scholarship fund, which helps pastors and other church workers who are burdened with significant educational debt.

Harrison also served as proclaimer. Chuck Neugebauer, CTK senior pastor, served as celebrant and Rev. Mark Goble, CTK associate pastor, served as liturgist. Helping with communion were Revs. Dr. Roger Paavola (district president), Michael Croom (Trinity,



Photo courtesy of Caroline Johnson

Memphis), Clayton Sellers (Faith, Collierville, Tenn.) and Sawyer Meyers (district missionary).

The service was preceded by a dinner underwritten by Lutheran

Church Extension Fund and the Mid-South District, and was held in the new Fellowship Hall at CTK. The convention was held at the Hilton Memphis.

The opening service began with the processional.

Elections



Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola was elected to his fourth term as district president. Vice-presidents elected to serve were:

- **The Rev. Lane Reuter**, pastor of Our Savior Lutheran Church, Nashville, Tenn., as first vice-president (first term);
- **The Rev. Kevin Conger**, pastor of Hope Lutheran Church, Jacksonville, Ark., as second vice-president (first term);
- **The Rev. Robert Portier**, pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church, Sevierville, Tenn., as third vice-president (first term); and
- **The Rev. Joshua Willadsen**, pastor of Bethel Lutheran Church, Fort Smith, Ark., as fourth vice-president (first term).

Rev. John Gierke, pastor of Peace, Conway, Ark., was re-elected as district secretary.

Elected to the Board of Directors were:

- **Charles Russell** (commissioned, Grace, Little Rock)
- **Shirley Piepenbrink** (commissioned, Immanuel, Memphis)
- **Jeff Pittman** (lay, Pilgrim, Jonesboro, Ark.)
- **Karilyn Brown** (lay, Hope, Jacksonville, Ark.)
- **Dr. Fred Guengerich** (lay, Redeemer, Nashville)
- **Robert Nerger Jr.** (lay, St. Paul, Wartburg, Tenn.)

(Piepenbrink, Pittman and Guengerich were re-elected.)

From left,
Revs. Joshua
Willadsen,
Dr. Roger
Paavola; Dr.
Matthew
C. Harrison
(LCMS presi-
dent); Robert
Portier, Lane
Reuter and
Kevin Conger.



Delegates
tend to
business
at the
Hilton
Memphis
hotel.

Resolution highlights

To reject racism and advance the Gospel

By an 85-percent majority vote, delegates supported addressing and rejecting the world view of critical race theory and doctrines that promote racial division. It also encouraged congregations to conduct conversations on race and diversity to strengthen unity within the congregation, and to engage members of their communities in these conversations in the light of the Gospel.

It also commended those within the district who intentionally proclaim and work to reach out with the Gospel of Jesus to those who are different from themselves.

To support international missions

By votes of 98, 99, and 98 percent, respectively, three separate resolutions directed continued financial and mission support from the district. These resolutions support Trinity HOPE in Haiti (which provides low-cost meals for children as they are spiritually fed at the Lutheran schools); and also support continued relationships with the Southeast of Lake Victoria Diocese (SELVD) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania and the Confessional Malagasy Lutheran Church in Madagascar and its Lutheran Institute of Management and Entrepreneurship (LIME).

Video greetings were presented from Bishop Emmanuel Makala (SELVD) and Rev. Dr. Joseph Randrianasolo (LIME).

To encourage financial support for professional church workers

By a 99-percent majority vote, delegates supported encouraging professional church workers by continued assistance in reducing educational debt. The resolution emphasized a 2016 Synod resolution regarding the challenges and burdens of educational debt while serving the church, and for finding funds to lessen future workers' debt to aid in recruitment.

This resolution commits the district to fund designated contributions to MinistryFocus for professional church workers in the district who are burdened with significant educational debt, and to establish additional funding from District Sunday and designated convention offerings.

For more convention information, visit mid-southlcms.org/convention-news-2021.

‘Music on the Mountain’ is Sept. 25



The Nix family from First Lutheran Church, Fort Smith, Ark., performs traditional favorites at Music on the Mountain 2020. The annual music festival falls on the last Saturday in September.

Music lovers are invited to enjoy “Music on the Mountain,” to be held Sept. 25 at Camp Trinity, the Lutheran Camp on Petit Jean Mountain. This is the fourth annual music festival at the camp.

The stage will be set up in front of Trinity Chapel. The historic church building was erected in 1886 by charter members of Trinity Evangelical German Lutheran Church, and is a reminder of the heritage of faith that is the foundation for the Lutheran camp’s mission.

The event will include music by some of the most talented musicians from Mid-South District congregations, who will perform both new and traditional songs across a wide spectrum of genres: Gospel, praise and worship, bluegrass, country, oldies and maybe even blues.

Benches will be set up in front of the stage, but guests are encouraged to bring lawn chairs and blankets.

The first set will kick off around 10 a.m., and the music will continue until late afternoon.



Vicar Daniel Bodemann and Samantha Ferguson of Christ, Little Rock, also performed in 2020.

Concessions will be available most of the day, with barbecue dinners sold until they’re gone. Picnic tables are set up not far from the stage, so listeners can enjoy music while they eat.

Families can play games like cornhole, disc golf, 9-square, spike ball, sand volleyball, horseshoes and giant checkers while listening to the music. A silent auction will also be set up outside the chapel.

Campsites and lodging will be available for those who want to stay overnight Friday or Saturday. Overnight guests can book their site or cabin by emailing the camp office at director@lutherancamp.org.

The event is free, but donations are welcome as the event is the camp’s fall fundraiser. Visit lutherancamp.org and click the “Events” tab to learn more.



Construction has begun on the retreat lodge at Camp Trinity. The camp Board of Directors invites anyone who has been blessed by the camp and who wants to make it possible for others to receive the same blessing to join them in this mission adventure with a pledge toward construction.

Pledges and gifts can be made at lutherancamp.org/retreat-lodge.

The website also includes more details about the lodge, and the camp encourages congregations to start thinking about booking the facility for family retreats, women’s retreats, men’s retreats, confirmation retreats and other events.

New shepherd IN LAMAR

Rev. Thomas Bartzsch was installed as pastor of River Valley Grace Lutheran Church, Lamar, Ark., on June 20. From left, Revs. John Truede, John Merrill, Dr. Roger Paavola, Thomas Bartzsch, Dr. Richard Davenport, Joshua Ralston, Timothy Henning and William Ringer.



All in the family

By Rev. Paul Hass, Senior Pastor,
Bella Vista Lutheran Church,
Bella Vista, Ark.

On June 13, the Mid-South District welcomed its first chaplain, Rev. Mark C. Hass, who received a call to serve as chaplain at Mercy Hospital, Fort Smith, Ark., through the district and the LCMS Board for National Mission.

Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola, district president, was unable to be present to accommodate this installation, so as Region 1 vice-president, I was asked to connect with this other Rev. Hass to enable the installation.

What a joy and honor it was to serve by asking my brother to recite again those familiar pastoral vows as he took on this new role. And in this instance, the term “brother” has many meanings. Mark is not only my biological brother — both sons of Wesley and Nancy — we are brothers by baptism, brothers in the pastoral office in service to our King, and we are also brothers and fellow servants in the Mid-South District.

It was a great privilege to lead the Rite of Installation and say those familiar words used in pastoral installations, but which, on this occasion, had special levels of meaning: “Dear brother...”



From left, brothers Rev. Mark Hass and Rev. Paul Hass, are pictured at Bella Vista Lutheran Church, Bella Vista, Ark., following Mark’s installation as chaplain. Mark will serve at Mercy Hospital in Fort Smith.

This amazing and humbling opportunity to serve is but one of many memorable events I will cherish as I finish my term as a district vice-president. I thank President Paavola for this unique opportunity.

Please rejoice with me and our entire district family in Christ’s special care and provision for His family as Chaplain Hass serves our district in and through Mercy Hospital, Fort Smith.

LWML

Celebrate LWML Sunday

The first Sunday in October is traditionally set aside for the observation of LWML Sunday, but it may be celebrated at any time.



“Our Hearts in His Hand” is the theme for LWML Sunday 2021 and is based on Peter’s first letter to persecuted Christians in Asia Minor. In 4:8, Peter tells them:

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly.

The heart of the LWML is its members; our hearts have been made holy by God. We are fully dedicated to serving Him by serving His church at home and abroad. Our hearts for Christ are in His hand of service, wherever and when He has need of us.

LWML Sunday materials were authored by Rev. Dr. Dale A. Meyer, who recently retired as president of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. To download, visit lwml.org/lwml-sunday.

HOPE through Christ

Between Puerto Rico and Jamaica lies the island of Hispaniola, which is shared by two countries, Haiti and The Dominican Republic. Haiti is struggling with great turmoil. Not only is it the poorest and most illiterate country in the western hemisphere, but it has been in a great deal of political strife for several years. When you also consider the hurricanes, tropical storms and now a pandemic, the country is struggling to find footing.

But we know there is hope, and we know where hope is found! There is nothing more important than sharing the grace and love of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Trinity HOPE helps provide lunch to more than 42,000 children in Christian schools in Haiti. These children often do not eat unless they are in school, and at times have been malnourished to the point of blindness.

While the food is the tangible resource, our biggest gift is the insurance that the children receiving this vital nourishment are hearing the Good News of the Gospel, and they know this gift comes from Christ. This year, we are excited to announce that we are adding the small Haitian island of La Gonâve to the Trinity HOPE family. The 17 schools we will serve on the island will feed about 4,300 children. We previously had not been able to serve this island because of the topography and logistics of delivering food. The addition of these schools means we further the spread the Gospel.

Trinity HOPE grows because of the blessings God provides through the generosity of our donors. We recently attended the Mid-South District Convention and we were surprised with a major gift. The district awarded us a recurring donation of \$10,000! To God be the Glory!

We are always astounded by new donations, grants and gifts no matter the amount. However, \$10,000 translates to



Pictured are, left, feeding-program directors who will serve La Gonâve island and, below, children enjoying lunch at Colminy School in Arcahale.

40,000 served meals. This is a big deal, and one we have been celebrating since the announcement. Even better, since it is a recurring donation, we receive a matching gift. That means 80,000 meals for children because of your generosity!

Did you know that you can be a partial school sponsor for as little as \$2,000 a year? That equates to \$167 a month, which is a lot of money to most of us, but here's some perspective. Many Americans spend up to \$6 a day on coffee. The monthly \$167 equates to \$5.50 a day. The price of that coffee could spiritually and physically feed 24 children every day.

From the quarters given by our youngest donors in summer VBS programs to the large donations we receive, over 95 percent of every dollar we raise goes to Haiti. We provide children with nourishment of body and soul, and we employ Haitians to feed them.



Trinity HOPE genuinely seeks to serve God by following the guidance given in Matt 25:35, 40:

"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink. ... 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'"

November issue deadline is Sept. 15

We love to feature a wide variety of news occurring in our district congregations. If you have any announcements, special events or human interest stories, please share with your brothers and sisters in Christ of the Mid-South District.

Digital files, sent via e-mail, are

preferred. Our submission deadline is the 15th of each month, two months before publication. Photos must be sent in high resolution.

Send email submissions to LW@mid-southlcms.com or send by postal mail to: Judy Otto; 150 N. Maury St.; Holly Springs, MS 38635