



/ SEPTEMBER 2026

MID-SOUTH LUTHERAN

THE SAME OLD STORY



LCMS/Erik M. Lunsford



Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola
District President

I read a story about a pastor who, on one Christmas Eve, was greeted by a man at the end of a service. The man shook the pastor's hand with a strong grip and said, "Pastor, you never seem to preach anything new. Every time I come here, I hear the same old stories. You only preach about the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem and what that means." So the pastor replied, "Do you think it might be because you only come here on Christmas Eve?"

Many congregations have C&E members — those who show up only on Christmas and Easter. It's unfortunate that they'd like to hear something new and different. But according to the first chapter of Hebrews, we learn that there are no further divine revelations coming since Jesus, the Son of God, has revealed Himself to us in these last days.

Our liturgy quotes Hebrews 1:1-2: "In days of old, God spoke to His people by the prophets. But now in these last days, God has spoken to us by His Son."

This is why the church — in her preaching, teaching and confessing — is focused on what some might call "saying the same old thing."

However, we Christians don't mean this phrase in its usual way — a complaint about the same old story. It's like when we might hear, "Oh gracious! You're not going to wear that worn-out old sweatshirt again!"

Do people really yearn for something new? What would that new thing be? What could it offer that God's Word doesn't already cover? What "new thing" is it that the church just can't live without? Should we proclaim something different than the birth of Jesus at Christmas, as if there's something other than the birth of the Christ to Mary? How could we possibly improve on what God's Word teaches us about the glorious resurrection of Christ and what it means for us? Who could ever hold claim that they have the ability to improve upon the Word of God?

It's no one else but our enemy, Satan, who twisted God's Word and caused Adam to sin, thus bringing death to everyone born of natural means. But this wily foe has been completely overthrown by the second Adam, Christ Jesus. We preach, teach and confess that Jesus was born for us to become our Savior and Lord. So if anyone claims to have any kind of new Word from God, they'd be telling God that His Son, who is God's Word in the flesh, is no longer good enough for them. A sin of this sort simply replaces the radiance of God's glory and the Word's exact imprint of God's nature.

This flawed supposition that something new must to be added to God's sacred Word is blatant blasphemy! It violates the very substance of the First Commandment! Something different, something new, something else to replace the story of the Child born for us poor sinners and His suffering and death for a sinful world — redacted with puffed-up reason and

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MESSAGE

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zealous piety — would be presented in a human-reasoned version that is regarded as good (or better) than God's Word! This would be tantamount to suggesting that, inspired by their own god, their additions or deletions from God's Word are as good or perhaps even better than what God revealed to us in His Holy Word.

Martin Luther apparently heard similar wanton desires in his days. He wrote:

How does freedom from sin come about? When we hear His Word — for instance, that Christ was born of Mary, suffered, was crucified, died, was buried, rose from the dead on the third day — “Oh” it is said, “I know all this very well! It is an old story. The pope, cardinals and bishops are also familiar with it.” Indeed, they do know it. But learn this lesson of the children, for these words tell us how we are redeemed and set free. “Yes,” they say, “these sayings and words are so common that they do not do the work.” The children are to be highly commended for praying these words and also for understanding them sooner; for the more learned and the smarter we old fools claim to be, the less

we know and understand about this subject.¹

But the story of life and salvation that lives within God's Word isn't about our doing. God's Word is for us. Can we see the difference? God is entirely the subject of His holy Word. It's not about us; it's for us! God's Son is the object and source of the worship of angels. Nowhere in Holy Scripture is worship directed toward us — at least not among the faithful — nor should it ever replace Christ at the center of our own worship. Any time someone tries to rewrite the Word of God, it ends up a complete mess! All we have to do is read the account of Satan's attempt to rewrite what God intended for Adam, which ended up a gigantic mess.

The way Satan twisted God's message of Law and Gospel would only send us deeper into the quagmire that began with Adam and Eve hearing “something new” from Satan in the Garden of Eden. We should never venture into the direction of Adam's fall from generations back then and to this day.

As confessing Christians, we need to turn our backs on any of this false pseudo-revelation refuse that is spoken by our adversary and was believed by our first parents. This is nothing less than a

blasphemous desire to talk God out of proclaiming the same old saving story in Christ born, Christ crucified, Christ ascended and Christ coming again.

Here we are somewhere around the midpoint between Easter and Christmas. Lest we ever forget, the story at the center of God's Word zeros in on the purpose for which Christ became incarnate. He came to make His perfect sacrifice for our sins. He gave us His gifts of grace to wash away sins through God-in-Flesh, who gave Himself to be God's Lamb as a sacrifice for our sin. The God who is born of Mary in a smelly animal's stable in Bethlehem is the same God who paid the price for the forgiveness of our sins by being crucified on a cross.

We're in these last days. These are the days when we continue to hear His Word speaking from the heart of God about Jesus Christ, the pinnacle of His love for us in His Son. There is nothing greater or more to hear, at least until we hear the trumpets announce Christ returning in glory to receive us and all His elect into His glorious and eternal Kingdom. So in these last days, be assured, God has spoken to us by His Son.

¹365 Devotional Readings from Martin Luther, Faith Alone, October 11, James Galvin, General Editor, Concordia Publishing House, St Louis, 1998.



LCMS/Erik M. Lunsford



The LCMS Mid-South District is celebrating its 60th year in 2026! That amounts to 60 years of gratefully serving, supporting and encouraging LCMS ministries, workers and members across Arkansas, Tennessee and southwestern Kentucky.

A 60th Anniversary page was added to the district website and will feature highlights of the Mid-South District's history, with a different facet explored each month. Learn more at mid-southlcms.org/category/60-anniversary.

Be sure to watch for announcements about the special 60th anniversary Oktoberfest celebration taking place next month!

ATTENTION EDUCATORS



The 2026 Educators Conference for the Mid-South and Southern districts will be held Oct. 8–10 in Shalimar, Fla.

The featured speaker will be Ted Neitzke, a dynamic educator and leader who has dedicated his career to helping individuals and organizations grow stronger, more compassionate and more effective. Educators are encouraged to check out Ted's podcast, *The Smart Thinking Podcast*.

Learn more and register at mid-southlcms.org (click the link on the page).



Congregation mission commitment receipts

as of June 30, 2026 (six months)

Anticipated amount (50% of budget)	\$825,061
Actual receipts	\$806,858
Over (under) anticipated amount	(\$18,203)

Use of mission commitment receipts

Allocated to Synod for world missions	\$229,557
Allocated to Tanzania	\$12,500
Retained for district ministry/mission support (70% of receipts)	\$564,801
Total receipts	\$806,858

Mission commitment receipts comparison

Actual receipts as of June 30, 2026	\$806,858
Actual receipts as of June 30, 2025	\$791,013
Over (under) prior year receipts	\$15,845

SHARE YOUR NEWS WITH US!

Send us your stories and photos for the November issue by Sept. 7.

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 mail via U.S. Postal Service to Judy Otto; 150 N. Maury St.; Holly Springs, MS 38635



CTSFW to hold confirmation retreat

Students are invited to Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (CTSFW), Sept. 18-20 for the Christ Academy Confirmation Retreat — a formative weekend of confessional catechesis, liturgical worship, and life together.

Rev. Christian Schultz, director of Christ Academy and CTSFW admission counselor, will lead sessions on Baptism to supplement students' confirmation instruction. Attendees will also spend time in worship and Christian fellowship.

The retreat costs \$120 for each individual (whether student or chaperone), which includes food, housing, classes and activities. For more information and to register, visit ctsfw.edu/cacr.



A new resource for learning the catechism

LCMS Family Ministry supports the teaching of the faith with resources to help families pass down the faith to the next generation, nurture the spiritual formation of children, and be Christ-bearers to the culture at large and their local communities. Newly available from LCMS Family Ministry are free, downloadable and printable catechism



memory cards designed to help children learn Scripture and Luther's Small Catechism by heart.

Children can practice memory work with cards containing questions with answers

taken verbatim from Scripture and the catechism. There are also cards intended to inspire further discussion. The cards, which are available in both black and white and color, may be printed double-sided, flipping on the long edge. It is recommended that they be printed on cardstock, then hole-punched and kept on a key ring.

For more information and a link to the resource, visit resources.lcms.org/general/catechism-memory-cards.

THE MID-SOUTH DISTRICT INVITES YOU TO
SAVE THE DATE FOR

OKTOBERFEST

**SATURDAY
OCTOBER 24
11 AM - 3 PM**

**Immanuel Lutheran Church
in Memphis** (6325 Raleigh LaGrange Rd.)

FOOD • BEER • MUSIC • MORE

A Celebration of the Mid South District's 60th Anniversary!



You are invited to join in the celebration on Sunday, Oct. 18, as **Faith Lutheran Church, Tullahoma, Tenn.** (101 Bragg Circle), marks its 75th year of ministry! The theme for the milestone anniversary is "Celebrating God's FAITHfulness" (based on Psalm 89:1).

Worship services will be held at 8 and 10:30 a.m., with a banquet to follow the second service. If you plan to attend the celebration banquet, Faith requests an RSVP by Sept. 20 at faithsecretary@lighttube.net or 931-455-3510.

Learn Spiritual First Aid

Rev. Chris Singer, president and CEO of Lutheran Church Charities, will lead a training workshop on Spiritual First Aid (SFA) **Sept. 18–19** at Christ the King, Memphis.

SFA offers a biblically informed, field-tested structure to guide you in serving those who have been impacted by trauma or grief — aiding and supporting them as a spiritual first responder. SFA training prepares pastors, teachers, lay leaders and others to provide compassionate care to those who are stressed and hurting.

The Friday session begins with a light dinner; the Saturday session includes lunch and refreshments. You must complete both sessions to receive SFA certification.

The registration fee is \$25. To register, go to <https://lcc.ccbchurch.com/goto/forms/1474/responses/new>; or scan the QR code. CTK invites all to services on Sunday, Sept. 20. Pastor Singer will preach.



Trauma is complex.

Helping doesn't
have to be.



Christ the King Lutheran Church
5296 Park Avenue, Memphis, TN 38119

SEPT. 18-19,
2026



Singing the Life of Christ

A HYMN FESTIVAL FOR THE CHURCH YEAR



Sunday, September 27
3 PM



FEATURED ORGANIST:
Dr. Samuel Eatherton
Kantor & Assistant Professor
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

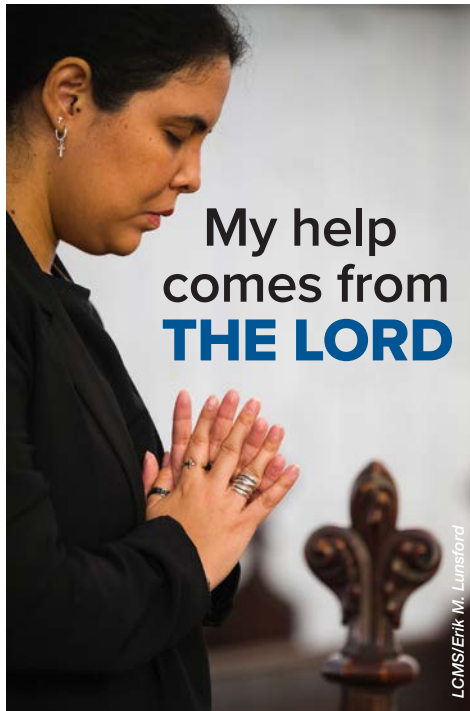


GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

5124 Hillcrest Ave | Little Rock, AR 72205

www.gracelutheranlr.org

Free to attend. Reception to follow.



After almost two years of planning and anticipation, the ladies of the LWML Mid-South District gathered June 12-14 in Springdale, Ark., for their 29th biennial convention. And, of course, we had a fabulous time! Our theme verse seems like the appropriate subject for this month's article. It's a straightforward question and answer.

First, the question: From where *does* our help come from? Help might come in a variety of ways depending on the need.

Personally, I could use a housekeeper because I'm terrible at housekeeping. A student might request a tutor to help with geometry. Simple enough, right? But what if the need is more complicated? Sometimes difficult decisions must be made. Perhaps an aging parent needs skilled nursing care, or you need to find a better job, or a spouse is unfaithful. These are times when we need to acknowledge what the psalmist tells us — our help comes from the Lord.

So then, in what form does our help come? First, our help should come as an

answer to prayer. We go to our Father with our supplications after confessing our sins. God knows what we're going through and He will answer, but in His time and not necessarily ours. Often, God will answer through a friend, a family member or a pastor who is wise and can provide guidance. Other times, God provides an expert such as a doctor, a therapist or a legal advisor. We must be patient and trust in the Lord.

Finally, the last phrase in verse 2 reminds us that our Father made heaven and earth. This puts things in perspective. We are not asking for help from just anyone; we are asking our great, mighty, powerful God. Sometimes that help is in the form of others who have received a nudge from our great God. He not only loves us, but provides others with opportunities to serve Him.

May God bless you with His infinite peace.

Candy Habich

Chairman, LWML Mid-South District Media and Marketing Committee



I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. **Psalm 121:1-2**

For a full recap of convention activities, access the summer issue of the *League Letter* at midsouthlwml.org/league-letters-2 and click the "2026 Issue 3 July (Summer)" link.

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).



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

Our district would like to 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.

STAY CONNECTED



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- midsouthlwml.org
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- contact@midsouthlwml.org
- or president@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 Gadbow
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.

READY FOR FALL

Outdoor classroom

As another exciting summer of ministry filled Camp Trinity guests with laughter, worship and adventure, staff members are already looking ahead to a busy and exciting fall season.

One of the highlights of the fall calendar is the return of Outdoor Classroom for homeschool families on Wednesdays or Thursdays each week. Registration is now open for the Fall 2026 semester.

Outdoor Classroom is designed to complement a family's core curriculum by providing hands-on learning experiences that bring God's creation and Arkansas history to life.

During the spring semester, students learned about forest habitats, weather, outdoor cooking, Ozark music, early settlers and much more, all in an outdoor, hands-on environment.

Families interested in joining Outdoor Classroom this fall can learn more and register at lutherancamp.org/for-home-schoolers.



Students meet nature during Outdoor Classroom, which returns this fall.

Music on the Mountain

On Sept. 26, we will host the Ninth Annual Music on the Mountain. This free community event serves as Camp Trinity's annual fall fundraiser and welcomes guests from across Arkansas and beyond for a day of Christian fellowship, great food and outstanding live music.

Throughout the day, musicians from around the region will perform gospel, bluegrass, country, folk, contemporary

Christian music and oldies from a stage set on the lawn in front of historic Trinity Chapel. Visitors are encouraged to bring lawn chairs or blankets and enjoy the beautiful mountain setting while listening to these live performances.

Music begins at 11 a.m. and continues throughout the afternoon, allowing visitors to come and go as they please. In addition to the music, guests can enjoy barbecue pulled-pork dinners and spend time with family and friends playing outdoor games.

Admission is free, although donations to support Camp Trinity's ministry are always appreciated. For those wanting to make it a weekend getaway, lodging at Cornerstone Lodge, cabins and campsites will be available on both Friday and Saturday nights.

Musicians/musical groups interested in performing are encouraged to contact the camp at trinitypetitjean@gmail.com or director@lutherancamp.org.

Youth Retreat

Our LinkT Retreat is Oct. 16-18. This is an event hosted by Camp Trinity for junior and senior high students in the Mid-South District and is comprised of faith-building and outdoor activities. More details are coming soon!



We invite everyone to join us this fall as Camp Trinity continues its mission of sharing Christ through outdoor ministry, music, Christian fellowship and opportunities for families to grow together in faith. For a full schedule of events or to see about scheduling your event at Camp Trinity visit lutherancamp.org or scan the QR code.

