

The VOICE

January 2021

Missouri District Newsletter

**In This Issue:
Spring Semester in our Schools**



Student at St. Paul, Des Peres practicing safe learning.

From the President's Desk

Lutheran Schools: Opportunities Amidst the Challenges

The challenges that COVID-19 has brought to our congregations, schools, and church workers are many. Pastors, church staff members, and lay leaders can quickly identify all of precautions that they have taken and ways that they have adapted to these circumstances so that the Church's ministry might continue. School administrators, teachers, and board members have also been forced to shift to online learning and make "in-time" adjustments like never before. It has been a stressful few months for those leading and serving in our congregations and schools.

However, God has provided great opportunities for our Lutheran schools in the midst of these significant challenges. This issue of *The Voice* focuses on how our educational ministries are serving during the pandemic. Consider this, approximately 1/3 of our Lutheran schools (elementary and secondary) saw enrollment increases this year in spite of the pandemic. Many of these families that are new to our schools have come as a result of the current crisis, but it is still evidence of God's gracious hand providing open doors for the Gospel to be proclaimed with new students and families.

The uncertainty of our times gives churches and schools openings for proclaiming the certainty of the Gospel. For a nation thrown into division and disarray, fear and frustration, the saints of God step forward to speak a word of hope in Christ for all people. Bringing the one thing needful (the Gospel) is why our congregations started Lutheran schools and early childhood centers, nursing homes and counseling services. Faithful proclamation of God's Word even in difficult times is what we can provide and what is most needed.

Please pray for our Lutheran Schools as they make the most out of the opportunity to reach new students and families. Also, pray for our school administrators and teachers as they adapt to ever changing circumstances. Our ultimate prayer is that through these difficult times the Holy Spirit would continue to call, gather, enlighten, and sanctify those who we serve through our schools. For generations, this has been the purpose and focus of Lutheran schools in Missouri. What a blessing to see how God is at work in our schools this year.

If your congregation supports a Lutheran school or if there is one in your area, please get to know the teachers and staff so that you can pray for them by name. They are great blessings from God as they serve in this important role. This year in particular they covet your prayers! We hope you are encouraged by what you see that is happening in our schools across Missouri and how the District continues to provide support, counsel, and encouragement for these challenging times.

Fraternally in Christ,



President Lee Hagan



Giving Thanks for Lutheran Schools

As the New Year kicks off our Lutheran Schools are preparing for National Lutheran Schools Week celebrations January 24-31, 2021 under the theme Sent to Serve! National Lutheran Schools Week is a great opportunity to give thanks for our school ministries, those who serve in our Lutheran schools, to highlight our Lutheran schools to the greater community, and a time to give thanks to God for Lutheran schools! Nationally the LCMS has a network of over 1,900 LCMS preschools, elementary schools, and high schools. The Missouri District has 50 Early Childhood Centers, 52 elementary schools, and nine high schools!

I am frequently asked, “why a Lutheran school,” and “what makes a Lutheran school different than a public or private school”?

Lutheran schools are top performing academically, provide social, emotional, and spiritual growth in a Christ-centered environment. Lutheran schools design curriculum, present lessons, disciple kids, and partner with parents in a completely different way than public or private schools. Because our Lutheran schools believe and teach that God is the author of life and the creator of everything that is, this means that God is revealed in everything that happens at our Lutheran schools—relationships, languages, math, science, and music, athletics, drama— every aspect of a Lutheran school and our lives. In Romans 12:2 the Apostle Paul says, “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” In this passage Paul does not want us to know facts about God; he means let what you know about God— revealed in His Word and through creation— transform the way you look at everything in life. This is what Lutheran schools provide that public and private schools do not.

We give thanks to God for those who support Lutheran schools through gifts of time, talent, treasure, and prayer; to those who serve in a Lutheran school and bring the Joy of Jesus; to the families that choose to send their children to Lutheran schools; for the opportunity to provide the Gospel message to those who believe and those who may be hearing it for the first time! Please join me in celebrating Lutheran schools, not just during Lutheran schools week, but each and every day as we give thanks to God from whom all blessings flow!



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“Blessings & Baptisms”

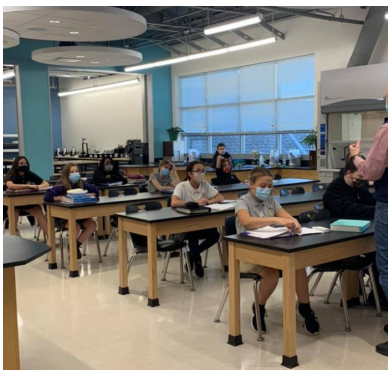
While COVID-19 has seemed to slow or delay progress for many areas of life, St. Paul’s Lutheran School in Des Peres actually saw a great increase in student enrollment, a growth which has led to an amazing blessing of a substantial rise in baptisms and confirmations. Of St. Paul’s 188 students enrolled for the 2020-2021 year (in the K-8 program), 54 students were from new families. Johanna Hoeltge, who serves in marketing and admissions for St. Paul’s Lutheran School, notes that while the pandemic was the biggest instigator of new student inquiries, there were a few factors that contributed to the enrollment change. One of these includes the state-of-the-art new building expansion for the school which houses a brand new science and STEM lab, media center, library, art studio, and more. “I think that it was kind of a perfect storm for us,” explains Hoeltge, “that we had this brand new gorgeous facility and that we were coming back in-person [for classes] which was a rarity in the area. And that we provide such a solid, Christian education. We’ve been around 171 years... so I think that families trusted coming here knowing that they would get a really good education.”



Rev. Tanner Wade baptizing a St. Paul student.

Rev. Tanner Wade, assistant pastor at St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, points out that the new families to the school were a mix of those that had a church home, those who were currently unchurched, and those that had no Christian background at all. “Once they came in the doors, the children were so enthusiastic.” Hoeltge expounds, “Some of them just haven’t even heard of Jesus or opened the Bible. So the level of curiosity and excitement about learning these great things– they would bring that home to the parents.”

The significance of a Lutheran education is clear. “Truly I cannot be more blown away by the efforts of these teachers,” states Wade, “The teachers are the day to day interaction in the classroom; they have hours with these students. And teaching them the love of Christ and using that throughout all kinds of subject matters– God’s Word works.” And what a blessing sowing those seeds of faith has seen. St. Paul’s has welcomed 13 unchurched families via baptism and adult confirmation, with more student baptisms on the way.



PULPIT SUPPLY

Missouri District Announces Epiphany & Easter Respite for Pastors



One of the greatest blessings that a congregation has is its pastor. It is fairly well known that preaching and teaching the Word of God and proper distribution of the Lord's Supper is a role that carries much responsibility and stress, even under the best of circumstances. It is also widely agreed that 2020 brought a whole new set of stressors. Many pastors need a break; a chance to reset and then continue leading their congregation. The Missouri District would like to help with that.

"The devil is on the move, but so is God in the Missouri District. We know that ministering in isolation— especially under additional pressures of the pandemic— renders the chief caregiver of the congregation with fewer resources and abilities to proclaim the Gospel. Cutting through the challenges by adding support of others in this way makes an opportunity for our spiritual leaders to feel the love of God and gain spiritual strength." Rev. Marty Hasz, PLPC, Assistant to the President: Church Worker & Congregational Health

The Missouri District is partnering with retired pastors to offer pulpit supply for those currently serving their calls. Rev. Jacob Mueller, pastor at Holy Cross in Emma knows the blessings some respite can give:

Last year, Holy Cross graciously agreed that I should take a Sunday or Wednesday at the birth of our daughter. She was born at the end of March at the time when all our services went online due to COVID. As you know, online services can much more work, and we weren't in a position to take have anyone else step in and help just yet. I am thankful that my congregation is encouraging me to take advantage of this kind offer from the Missouri District. Our church is thankful they can support us in this way and our family is thankful for the rest. It really is a blessing.

How does it work? A pastor or congregation can complete a form requesting pulpit supply for weekend services during the Epiphany and Easter seasons. The retired pastors will be donating their time and the only expense to the congregation will be mileage (though congregations may apply for grants to assist with those expenses if needed). After the request is submitted, a member of a team of retired pastors working with the President's Office will be in touch to connect your congregation with a retired pastor who is available to serve as a guest preacher.

Requests for can be made via email at pulpitsupply@mo.lcms.org.

"Our prayer is that the Epiphany and Easter Respite project is a simple, but tangible way that the Missouri District can support our pastors, their families and ultimately the congregations by providing them a break. We pray that this is a blessing!" Rev. Dr. R. Lee Hagan, President of the Missouri District

The Lutheran High School of Kansas City

An in-depth look at a Lutheran school operating during COVID-19.

Like so many schools across the country, The Lutheran High School of Kansas City has had to navigate how best to operate under the one of the strangest set of circumstances: COVID-19. After spring break in March of 2020, LHSKC switched to online only classes, 8a.m.-3p.m., five days a week. After much summer planning and preparation, though, LHSKC decided to start in-person classes on August 17, 2020. Dr. Cary Stelmachowicz, principal of LHSKC, states they planned for precautions, such as installing hand washing stations, temperature checks upon entering the building, with students, faculty, and all in the building required to wear a mask. A great advantage that LHSKC has is the size of their facility. "We have a huge facility," explains Stelmachowicz, "so we easily can keep it to 12-13 a classroom. And that's what we've done, just spread it out."

To date, there has been no schoolwide closures and no one has been infected from a school lead function. Stelmachowicz states that parents are very conscious about keeping kids home if there has been a risk of exposure, and also cites that involving students in the implementation of safety measures helps to ensure successful procedures. (For example, at LHSKC student leadership helps with the daily temperature checks.) The school also has built off of virtual learning from the spring, as teachers can now use Zoom or direct live-feed their lessons to keep students connected and engaged should they have to be home for quarantining. LHSKC also finds a balance to keep extracurricular activities going. They've been able to have choir, band, performances, dance, sports, and more. They are careful to wear masks and keep distancing measures in place (even something as simple as taking two buses instead of one for travel so that students can have more space between them.)

And while LHSKC has seen the overwhelming success of hosting in-person classes and activities, Dr. Stelmachowicz notes that the changes in technology have helped in some ways too. Since The Lutheran High School of Kansas City is the only Lutheran high school for many miles, often families and school leadership have to travel great distances. Zoom meetings have been very helpful in increasing productivity. "Why drive 45 minutes when we can get it done face to face [over Zoom]. I have more parent meetings now than ever!" Dr. Stelmachowicz notes that the attendance is very good, there is better interaction, and more feedback. "So that's been a real positive and I've grown as an administrator...this is much better communication," says Stelmachowicz. Another example is the May 2020 graduation which was held in-person, but also streamed virtually so that in-person attendance could be smaller. "What we learned was that we should always be streaming our graduations," acknowledges Stelmachowicz, "because there are folks that can't come: grandparents, people that are disabled... some said 'that's the first time I've been able to see one of my grandchildren graduate!'"

Finding a blend of technology and safety measures has allowed The Lutheran High School of Kansas City to provide a strong, Lutheran education. Stelmachowicz notes, "If you know anybody in the Kansas City area looking for a quality Christian education, that is dependable, reliable, does what it says it's gonna do, and promotes the Gospel—we're here."



Dr. Cary Stelmachowicz leads a class. | The campus of The Lutheran High School of Kansas City

District Helps Fund Principal 360

The Missouri District is blessed to have three principals participate the Principal 360 program from the Chicagoland Lutheran Education Foundation (CLEF). This yearlong program is dedicated to building thought leaders in Lutheran education through a new style of professional development. Hear from the principals starting this journey.

I am thankful to have the opportunity to take part in the Principal 360 program. In my previous Masters and Ed. Specialist programs I have desired a class or program that would provide skills, content, and coaching related to administration in a Lutheran or private school. This program will provide opportunities to learn from and build relationships with other leaders within the Lutheran Church. Our Lutheran schools continue to be blessed with teachers, students, and families that value Lutheran education, but we continually face challenges as we seek to grow and meet the needs of our community. I am looking forward to the process of creating a new strategic plan that will guide SPLHS in the future.



Meredith Marsh, Principal, Saint Paul Lutheran High School, Concordia



I am so excited to learn through the CLEF Principal 360 program. I am looking forward to the opportunity to continue to grow as an administrator alongside a number of other Lutheran principals. At St. Paul's in Concordia, MO, I plan to implement what I learn to help my teachers grow and serve God even better. In the end, all of this learning would be futile if students do not come away with a better understanding of God and His wonderful creation. So, I am looking forward to all that I learn through the program and how it makes me and St. Paul's a better place to learn!

Nathanael Poppe, Principal, St. Paul's Lutheran School, Concordia

Upon being asked to participate in this program I was excited for the opportunity to collaborate with other principals to identify the threats and overcome them. Lutheran Schools continue to be a blessing to families in our broken world. This program will help me develop the tools to strategically lead Immanuel - Olivette's school ministry with an entrepreneurial mindset and to provide a path for innovative thought leadership.



Some of the topics covered are Lutheran leadership in the 21st century, school business management, school finances and financial planning, leading academic excellence, and innovation in the Lutheran school. The topic modules are taught by innovative leaders from Lutheran schools across the country as well as instructors from Concordia University Chicago.

Wendy Morris, Principal, Immanuel Lutheran School, Olivette

Blessings on your learning!

UPCOMING EVENTS AT THE MISSOURI DISTRICT OFFICE



Tell the Next Generation March 13, 2021 Virtual Conference

Learn from experts top ways to equip families in faith formation in the home (especially for primary grade children and adolescents). Visit mo.lcms.org/ttng for more information.



MEGA Gathering Youth Event April 10, 2021

The Mega Gathering is moving to an online format on Saturday April 10th. Senior and Junior Youth can join together to hear from a main speaker, participate in Bible Studies and break out sessions, and jam out to some music. Stay tuned for announcements about how to get together to make this our biggest gathering in MO!



SHINE! Servant Event April 16-25, 2021

We're just three months away from the first ever statewide servant event of the Missouri District. Has your church, school, or group signed up? We would love to have you join us in shining the light of Christ throughout the state from April 16-25, 2021. Simply form a group and identify a project in your community. Be sure and register with the District and get some free t-shirts to wear while serving. Head to mo.lcms.org/shine for all the details.