

The VOICE

November 2020

Missouri District Newsletter

In This Issue: Witnessing in all Things



From the President's Desk: Praying with Martin Luther in a Chaotic World

In 1529, Martin Luther published German and Latin versions of what is sometimes called "The (Great) Litany," a revision of the Roman "Litany of the Saints" with all of the invocation of the saints removed. An English translation is found in Lutheran Service Book on page 288. It is a model prayer that includes petitions for the spheres of family, church, and state, rooting all in God's gracious providing. During these challenging times, it would be good to place Luther's action in historical context.

In May 1521, following the Diet of Worms, Martin Luther went into hiding at the Wartburg Castle. Emperor Charles V issued the Edict of Worms which declared him an outlaw. While in hiding at the Wartburg Castle, chaos began to ensue in Wittenberg. At the end of 1521, one of his colleagues, Andreas Karlstadt, sought radical reforms to the Wittenberg church which led to riots and violence. Luther would finally be forced to return and address the insurrection. Just two years later, the German Peasants' War would lead to the deaths of as many as 100,000 in Germany. Luther would respond with his "Admonition to Peace," which criticized the German nobility for their abuse of the peasants, but then condemned the violence of the peasants. Luther saw firsthand the effects of "sedition and rebellion."

In 1527, the Plague came to Luther's own doorstep as it began to spread in Wittenberg. Some 20 people died within the first two weeks of the outbreak in the town of less than 5000. Elector John encouraged Luther to flee like so many of his university colleagues. The plague would last for less than six months but would claim the lives of friends and associates. Luther and his pregnant wife Katharina dealt with the fear of the epidemic and his own illness at the time. This was the time period when he wrote the letter, "Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague" and also the hymn "A Mighty Fortress is Our God."

In Luther's lifetime he dealt with false teaching within the Church, political strife, insurrection, an epidemic, physical ailments, depression, betrayal, grief, and a seemingly endless list of other hardships. When Luther encourages the praying of "The Litany," it is a prayer that addresses all of life's challenges in view of God's mercy.

- For the election of our nation's president for the next four years. O Lord, have mercy.
- For our communities as COVID-19 numbers continue to rise. O Lord, have mercy.
- For our nation as violence and unrest continues. O Lord, have mercy.
- For our congregations as they experience separation due to COVID-19. O Lord, have mercy.

In 2020, we are experiencing some of the same types of hardships that Luther faced in his day. As your congregation or family gather for worship on Thanksgiving, consider praying "The Litany" from Lutheran Service Book. It is a fitting time to remind our families that we face each day and hardship only by the mercy of God. This prayer appropriately includes in the petitions every facet and season of life under heaven for the people of God. Now is the time to remind us all to implore our good Lord to hear us for the sake of Jesus.

O Lord, have mercy.
O Christ, have mercy.
O Lord, have mercy. Amen.

Fraternally in Christ,



President Lee Hagan





TELL THE NEXT
GENERATION
PSALM 78:6-7

Plans Continue for the 2021 Missouri District Convention

The Missouri District Convention is scheduled for June 13-15 at the Holiday Inn Executive Center in Columbia. Though the last few months have made planning such an event far more complicated, we anticipate that the convention will be able to take place at the location and dates. The theme for the convention is "Tell the Next Generation," based on Psalm 78:6-7 and will feature Rev. Dr. Mark Kiessling, LCMS Director of Youth Ministry as the convention essayist.

Nominations for President and First Vice-President are due to December 11, 2020. Nominations for Secretary, Board of Directors, Council on Mission and Ministry and Committee on Nominations are due January 4, 2021. The forms can be found at <https://mo.lcms.org/district-convention/>. Contact Michelle Christ (michelle.christ@mo.lcms.org or 314-590-6210) in the District Office if you have any questions.

Registration for delegates opens on December 1, 2020. Regular updates will be provided on the District website, through social media and the monthly newsletter *The VOICE*. Please pray for the convention plans. Also, please encourage your congregation to participate in the nomination process.



President Hagan at the 2018 Convention

EVERYONE HIS WITNESS "20/20" VISION

At our last District convention, we encouraged all our congregations to make use of "Everyone His Witness", an educational resource for personal witness developed by our Synod. Little did we know how valuable it would be for the changes of 2020! Today's limitations right now actually free us up to refocus on relationships and equipping our members to engage their personal relationships from home in the neighborhood, on the phone and internet.

Published by CPH (www.cph.org/everyonehiswitness), this resource includes a two-part process, training individuals in a six lesson basic "core module" followed up by online self-study "context modules" (<http://www.everyonehiswitness.org>) for witnessing in specific settings where understandings of faith backgrounds, value systems and life experiences will be helpful.

20/20 Outreach

Is 2020 a year for outreach opportunities? The short answer is, **"Yes!"** His Church has always been witnesses both corporately and as individuals. For decades the trend has favored the Church's corporate witness through groups, events, activities, and programs (e.g. Servant Events, VBS, LWML, Youth and Senior Ministries). Outreach may look a lot different in 2020 than it has in decades, but the Ascension promise of Jesus remains unchanged in 2020: "You will be my witnesses!"

COVID-19 has Shifted the Focus of Outreach

Public worship gatherings are resuming, while often other activities remain highly limited. The sweet spot for outreach is shifting from "church programs" to "individual witness." The need for this shift was happening even before the pandemic. We were praying for younger generations missing from our churches. These generations tell us they are not seeking programs and attractive activities, but rather, they are crying out for authentic personal relationships. God opened the door!

A District "20/20" Vision

The Missouri District Commission on Mission and Ministry is providing the core module training online for everyone. Our vision is to support healthy congregations, schools, and church workers with online learning experiences across the Missouri District. Groups and individuals can take these classes via the online Zoom meeting platform in just two 90 minutes sessions. The first of several offerings of these training opportunities will be offered in January. We will keep adding classes and dates as need. Register online at <https://cutt.ly/MD-EveryoneHisWitness>.

**EVERY
ONE
HIS WITNESS**
LUTHERAN EVANGELISM™

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

1 Peter 2:9

For more information about "Everyone His Witness" and equipping people for personal outreach, contact Bill Geis.

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WITNESSING IN WORSHIP



Rev. Dr. Jon Furgeson, Peace's Senior Pastor, serving in outdoor worship.

COVID-19 has brought a host of challenges in all aspects of life. One major challenge for church leaders has been trying to balance how to host corporate worship safely in a pandemic. Churches across Missouri worked hard to stay connected with their community of believers. Immanuel in Honey Creek, Peace in South County St. Louis, and Immanuel in St. Charles found an alternative method to sanctuary worship: drive-in services.

Starting back in March, these churches found the technology, airwaves, and volunteers to make such a service possible. Most use a combination of radio frequency as well as microphone/speaker sound systems to bring audio to those in attendance. Each church has a "pulpit" area, which often requires set-up and take-down for each service. Those participating are able to gather together, heard the Word of God preached, and give offering – all from the safety of their own vehicle.

While most sanctuaries have resumed in-person services with increasing capacity, these churches have decided to keep offering their drive-in services. "The drive-in services have continued to be popular for both our regular Saturday laity as well as persons who are not yet ready to enter the building," explains Rev. Dr. Jon Furgeson, Senior Pastor at Peace in South County. Rev. Scott Schmieding of Immanuel, St. Charles has seen similar results, "Our drive-in services at Immanuel St. Charles have been a huge blessing to help keep many members active at in-person worship during the pandemic," says Schmieding, "We are currently averaging over 150 vehicles (with about 500 people total) every week...we are also blessed to have several visitors from the community at each drive-in."



The two story "pulpit" area at Immanuel Honey Creek sits next to their cross.

Dan Sommerer, Lay Leader at Immanuel Honey Creek, realized they had something special back in April. The congregation replaced their temporary trailer (used as the "pulpit" area) with a more permanent scaffolding and a large cross, which couldn't have come at a better time. "It was right before Easter, and we built this 27 foot cross," explains Sommer. "It was really emotional for people to come at a time where we didn't know if we would be able to continue worship, and then there was this cross wrapped in white cloth...it's pretty amazing really."



A special friend comes along for the ride at Immanuel St. Charles.

While these services take quite a bit of set up and take down effort, all churches agree they are an amazing blessing for their congregation and outreach into the community while also providing a great opportunity for unique engagement. "We've had people drive up in their four wheelers, SUVs, ride horses, come up on tractors, and had boats on the back of their truck, then get out of their trucks and listen in groups in the boat," says Sommerer of Immanuel Honey Creek. Immanuel St. Charles often get four legged friends to join in attendance! Keeping community is also important at Peace in South County. "Overall, the drive-in service has been a successful bridge between keeping up the concerns for social safety and still gathering as God's people," Furgeson states, "As a pastor, it gives me a personal connection before and after services to greet folks and keep in touch with my flock at Peace."

CAMPUS MINISTRY IN COVID-19

Below are snippets from how some campus ministries are adapting during COVID-19. For more on their stories, visit us online at <https://mo.lcms.org/voice/nov-2020-witnessing/nov-campus-ministry>

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI—COLUMBIA

Despite COVID-19 related challenges and an open position for their full-time student ministry staff person, Campus Lutheran at University of Missouri (Columbia) are continuing to successfully inspire their students through Jesus Christ. From small groups to worship to weekly lunches, adjustments are in place to keep people socially distant while still bringing people together in Christ. "The students have really stepped up," Pastor Pierce said, "We invest in our students as leaders and raise them up to do exactly what they're doing right now. It's wonderful to see." Students help fill in as volunteers on Sunday morning and even arrange community outreach events.



INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MINISTRY

ISM (St. Louis) keeps busy trying to balance drawing people together to celebrate American customs while witnessing about Christ. Instead of hosting their annual dinner inside, ISM hosted an outdoor speaker event in a church's parking lot. Director of ISM, Sharon Riordan, also hosted a food drive with local churches to give to international students who had to live off campus this year. Riordan says that a great socially distant program is the Friendship Family Program, where local families partner with an international student, "Students may feel particularly isolated at this time, so it would be great for them to look forward to talking with new American friends," Riordan clarified. "And the closeness that develops between students and their American 'families' can easily lead to sharing your faith."



SPRINGFIELD LUTHERAN STUDENT CENTER

Springfield has also found ways to gather safely. "We've resumed our Tuesday evening meals," said Becky Edwards, Director of Campus Ministry. "We eat outside and in keeping with safety restrictions. It's not ideal, but it still gives us a chance to interact. We're making the best of it." Students are also hosting a monthly socially distant outdoor movie night and bonfire complete with individually wrapped hot dogs and smores.



A PLACE NOT FORGOTTEN

A Collection of Essays on Urban Ministry

In Rev. John Schmidtke's 30+ years as pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in St. Louis, numerous students and church workers whom he mentored encouraged him to share his experiences in a book. "I by no means have all the answers," Schmidtke said, "but after 30 years, I can anticipate most of the questions."

Published on July 10th of this year, Schmidtke composed a collection of 90 essays specifically with urban ministry in mind. But these essays also offer practical and inspired advice in any context for those who want to spread God's Word. It isn't simply a textbook or an inspirational book – Schmidtke encourages reading each scriptural-based essay one at a time and then reflecting on it.

One of Schmidtke's goals when he sat down to write this book was to equip new urban ministry pastors and church workers with the essential knowledge they need including "the issues, the questions, and the joys of being in an urban parish." *A Place Not Forgotten* provides ideas to bring about change, and it challenges thinking in new ways to cultivate greater understanding. Other topics include leadership, interpersonal relationships, fundraising, how to create engagement, how to nurture potential partners in urban ministry (including sister church relationships), and more. Comprehensive indices list the specific themes covered in each essay and pertinent scriptural references.

One of the most popular essays, entitled "A Tangled Web," illustrates how people have multiple complex situations that intersect, as told through the story of a single mother. "No person has one issue. In ministry, you have to learn how to help people and realize that you can't fix every problem," Schmidtke said. "*A Place Not Forgotten* gives an inside view of what urban ministry entails. On one of our mission Sundays in a suburban church in St. Louis county, an individual who has been involved in our ministry for 20+ years had just read the book and said, 'I never knew what all you've faced there, and I thought I knew everything.'"

Church groups are utilizing the essays as discussion starters to improve their ministry effectiveness. Concordia College in New York is also using the 392-page book this semester, reading particular essays and engaging in discussion. "That's really valuable," Schmidtke reflected, "to push Christians into talking about issues and what life is really like."



***A Place Not Forgotten* is available in Kindle or paperback form on Amazon. For group discounts or adjusted rates, contact Rev. Schmidtke at schmidtkestuff@gmail.com.**

UPCOMING EVENTS AT THE MISSOURI DISTRICT OFFICE

"MEET THE MISSIONARIES"

A Missouri District Virtual Series

Our fall series wraps up with our November event featuring Light of Christ in Olivette. This free event is offered in the evening, so you and your family can enjoy. You can watch past events and find the Zoom link for this event at mo.lcms.org/missionaries.

NOV 24
7PM CST
**CHINESE OUTREACH
IN OLIVETTE**



LUTHERAN YOUTH
MEGA **SPRING**
GATHERING **2021**

JR HIGH / SR HIGH

APRIL 9-11, 2021



Missouri District

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH — MISSOURI SYNOD