

The VOICE

December 2021

Missouri District Newsletter



In This Issue: Christmas Around Missouri

From the President's Desk

Jesus Christ is the Light that Scatters the Darkness

L: Jesus Christ is the Light of the World,
C: the Light No Darkness Can Overcome
L: Stay with us Lord for it is evening
C: and the day is almost past.
L: Let your light scatter the darkness
C: and Illumine Your Church.



The season of Advent takes place when the days are short and the darkness lingers. It is good for us to be reminded that Jesus Christ is the Light of the World, the Light no darkness can overcome. Our hope and prayer during this gray and latter days is the Gospel that we proclaim would truly scatter the darkness and would bring hope.

This issue of the Voice focuses on how various ministries carryout their mission work of proclaiming Christ during the Advent and Christmas seasons. From choir concerts to community service projects, our congregations and schools actively proclaim Jesus Christ, the true Light in the midst of all flickering lights we find in our world today. The true Gospel message is that of which we bear witness in Word and song across our land.

The celebration of our Savior's birth is not a nostalgic event, by which we long for simpler days of the past, but rather the understanding that Christ continues to come among through His Word still today. He still scatters the darkness of despair as His love is announced by young children and to older adults. This Gospel message is also a light for the nations as people from different tribes and nations see the salvation of God in the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ. Once again this Advent and Christmas season, we give thanks to God for nativity of our Lord, that Christ came to be our Savior. We also praise God that this message is truly for all people and that our congregations, schools and campus ministries are reaching people from more than fifty countries. Please join us is giving thanks for the great work that our Lord is doing among us as His light scatters the darkness and illumines His Church!

Fraternally in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "R. Lee Hagan".

President Lee Hagan



The Light of Friendship

For many, Christmas is filled with joy, laughter, and being surrounded by friends and family. But what happens if a home is thousands of miles away or a new home and new traditions are being started? In the St. Louis area, the District sponsored Christian Friends of New Americans' mission is to shine the light of friendship to new immigrant and refugee families.

"The main Bible verse for our mission model is John 15:15— wanting to be a friend, because Jesus calls us a friend as well and he send us out to do the job that he, himself has been given by the Father," explains Rev. Dr. Stanish Stanley, Executive Director at Christian Friends of New Americans, "That's our mission model as well. We intend to be a friend to our new neighbors, to the stranger who is among us, so they can be welcomed and be shared with the love of Jesus."

Christian Friends of New Americans serve people that come from many and varied countries. This means that not everyone they serve is Christian. For example, many of the women in their sewing class are Muslim Afgani refugees, and many of the children participating in their after school tutoring classes are unchurched. But relationships and connections are being built through the efforts of the volunteers of Christian Friends of New Americans.

Many of these volunteers are Lutherans from the surrounding area. "Like 98% [of volunteers] are from surrounding Lutheran congregations," notes Pastor Stanley. Lutheran organizations, churches, and schools also give their time, talents, and treasure. During Christmas, churches will often donate presents for the much anticipated Children's Party for the kids in the after school program. It's a full evening of festivities: a nativity story to be acted out, a Christmas devotion to be shared, food is served, and presents are exchanged. There is another Christmas giveaway for families which includes items like toiletries, clothes, and blankets and normally reaches around 130-140 families.

"Through all this," shares Rev. Stanley, "the intention is to share, of course, the spirit of Christmas, the spirit of God's love in Christ Jesus. His Incarnation into the world. To be with people, to bless people. And we also try and highlight the fact that our volunteers are Christian people who just want to be a shining light of Christ for the nations."

Pictured below: Students learning from volunteer tutors; Rev. Stanish Stanley (center)



Military Missions

In south central Missouri, lies Faith Lutheran Church in St. Robert. Faith is located very close to army base Fort Leonard Wood, and whether a member at Faith is a civilian or military personnel, service to the military is a top mission. "It's literally written in the DNA of the church," says Faith's senior pastor Rev. John Perling. This strong military culture serves as a huge blessing and resource to those at Fort Leonard Wood or in the St. Robert community.

Over his years of service at Faith, Pastor Perling has built relationships with those on the base at Fort Leonard Wood. Like when he was asked to lead some seminars on the 500th anniversary of the reformation. He notes a key aspect to working on base that it's all about becoming a part of their standard operating procedure; building a relationship without compromising doctrine,

Pastor Perling has also started a podcast, which has served as a great way to stay connected with the community at Faith. Local members listen while jogging around base and international members have an avenue to hear a familiar voice while away. The current subject is the book of Romans, which you can find by searching "Romans Perling" on your podcast listening services.

There is a wide age range of military personnel that are connected with Faith, from new enlistees to high ranking officers. Pastor Perling notes that "when we think about young people, [the military is] probably a population that we don't think about right away. So often our focus is on high school and college experiences, but these are 18 and 19 year olds that are away from home for the first time." Opposite to young people starting their careers, Pastor Perling has found a special aspect to the ministry: recruiting retiring military members to become pastors. "You can have fully retired military members at 38, the prime of their life" says Perling, "So what we encourage them to consider is to serve under a different mantle, building off of their experience and know-how. And leverage all that for the sake of the Gospel, not the Law."

Rev. Justin Cullens, former military member, now called to serve as chaplain, being ordained at Faith.



One of the biggest differences for military members at the holidays is just the basic question of "will I be home?". If one is in a deploying unit, it is one of the first questions people look to see. Even if not deployed, may or may not be able to go to hometown, so it is just different. Being in the military, it helps one appreciate all the 'little things' that much more.

Prayers are always appreciated and needed. When have the opportunity, reach out to those away from home. Through Operation Barnabas or Ministry to the Armed Forces or local connections, a place to go or any touch of home is appreciated.

Chaplain Carl Muehler
Commander in the US Navy Chaplain Corps

Saint Paul Lutheran High School— An International Celebration of Christmas

International students have been part of the student population at Saint Paul Lutheran High School in Concordia since the 1980s. The campus generally includes students from approximately a dozen different nations, but that number has risen to 26 according to Rev. Paul Mehl, Executive Director. Some international students come from Christian and even Lutheran homes, while other students come from non-Christian backgrounds. The celebration of Christmas provides an opportunity to intentionally teach and explain who Jesus Christ is and His purpose in coming.

Saint Paul hosts a “Thanksmas week” to celebrate both Thanksgiving and Christmas with a series of daily activities, including decorating classrooms, singing Christmas carols at the nursing home and in the community and donating the Thanksmas banquet and dance admission fee to charity.

Another significant event during the Advent season is the observance of St. Lucia’s day on December 13. This festival is celebrated broadly in Scandinavia and engages the Norwegian students on campus through the procession of girls with holding candles or wearing a wreath of candles on their heads. A special chapel is held where one of the pastors explain the history of St. Lucia and the symbolism of the lights pointing to Christ the Light of the world. At the end of the chapel service, freshly baked bread is shared with everyone, as in Norway.

Another way that the high school has introduced the Gospel to students is through the rich choral tradition of the Singing Saints choir. The choir has traveled around the country and even internationally over the years. Choir Director, Dr. Jerrode Marsh notes how the anthems serve as a witnessing tool for international students. She writes, “One of the ways that I use Christmas choral anthems is, ironically, to sing carols in the native language of those international students who are in the choir. They often don’t even understand the meaning of the traditional

carols that they sing—especially if they are not Christians. We get the chance to discuss the true meaning of Christmas, and that Christ came for the whole world, and that carols all over the world proclaim the significance of Christ’s birth. ”

Smiling faces from Concordia’s Christkindlesmarkt



Last year, Saint Paul began a new tradition on campus, but one with rich history in central Europe – hosting Christkindl Market. The market featured entertainment, hot drinks and food, and booths with a variety of goods. Saint Paul is hosting the Christkindlesmarkt again on Saturday, December 10 from 4-9 p.m. and 11 from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. This year’s home Christmas concert for the Singing Saints will be December 12 at 3:00 p.m. at St. Paul’s Lutheran Church in Concordia.

Meeting the Neighborhood this Christmas

Most mornings, Pastor Geordie Denholm walks to work at Emmaus Lutheran in south St. Louis so that he can meet people along the way. "I never thought I would fall in love with STL when I moved to Seminary, but I cannot wait to work alongside the city as we build up our communities together!"

Pastor Denholm's installation in July 2021 was an answered prayer for a ministry opportunity of the Missouri District that had been put on pause. Emmaus had been without a pastor or even regular worship services for several years. And while the ministry is starting anew, Pastor Denholm clearly sees the similarities between where things are today and where they were in 1889 when a small group of worshippers first started gathering. Today's members have even taken on the original name, "Jefferson Avenue Mission."

"We find a lot of ourselves in the journey of those who came before. So, we take their historic mantle while we explore how best to serve and reach our neighbors," says Pastor Denholm. "We open our doors to the community to see what they need and hear what they value." To start building relationships and engaging others in conversation, Emmaus produced and hosted a play for the neighborhood in November. "For me personally, theatre has always been ministry. It's been a hobby, a love, a vocation. It has been an opportunity for a community of people often marginalized by the church to see Christ's love through the words and actions of his disciples."

Jefferson Avenue Mission is now a house church of 15 members. Twice a month, the group gathers to hear the Word of God, have Communion, and even share a meal. The Sermon on the Mount has been their most recent topic of study. A potluck and candlelit hymn sing are planned for December 12.

"Please pray for the conversations I will be having, especially these first few years," says Pastor Denholm. "Pray that the challenges be opportunities for growth relationally and spiritually. And pray that the Lord would bring about good fruit in the work that Jefferson Avenue Mission is doing!"

Pictured below: Rev. Geordie Denholm and the sanctuary at Emmaus.



Partnerships for Advent...And Beyond

Throughout this season of Advent, a number of Missouri District congregations are preparing for Christmas together—forming partnerships that will strengthen ministry for everyone involved.

Three congregations in the Bootheel—Concordia in Sikeston, Faith in Dexter, and Zion in Poplar Bluff—are all using the same sermon series, ending Advent with a joint potluck and service on December 22. “The hope is that all three congregations have a similar focus for Advent so they can come together for the potluck and hymn sing as one congregation,” shares Pastor Matthew Berry of Concordia. “The organists, pianists, and musicians (including youth) from all three congregations will help lead the congregation in song.”

Working together is not a new concept for this group, as Concordia and Faith started the practice of holding VBS together in July 2021. “VBS worked out very well between our two congregations. The kids and volunteers seemed to enjoy having more people to share the experience with,” says Pastor Justin Sponaugle of Faith. He encourages churches to explore partnership opportunities for themselves. “For smaller congregations considering working together, I think it may seem like an inconvenience at first, mainly due to travel and scheduling but well worth it.

A group of congregations in the Kansas City area have also been looking for ways to work together and have come up with a unique opportunity for members. “This Advent season, Messiah—Independence, St Paul’s—Independence, and Ascension—Kansas City will be doing a unique round robin for their Wednesday nights. Instead of rotating pastors, they will be rotating congregations!” says Pastor Mark Martin of St. Paul’s in Independence. He notes that these joint efforts just make sense. “These three make a natural partnership as many family and other associations tying the congregations together exist. The members have been excited to be able to worship, fellowship, and get to know each other.”

The model for working together is biblical. “When St Paul in Ephesians 4 talks unity and one body, he is not only talking about relationships within congregations, but relationships between our LCMS congregations,” notes Pastor Martin. “Hopefully this is the beginning of a partnership that will extend into 2022 and beyond.”

Pictured left: Shared VBS of Concordia and Faith. Pictured right: Rev. Mark Martin installed at St. Paul.



What a year. What a God.

Worship services in more than 12 languages. A statewide servant event with more than 5,100 participants. All Lutheran schools within Missouri going a full year with in-person learning. Welcoming immigrants and refugees from around the world. A focus on increasing the number church workers for the harvest field. The return of conferences and fellowship. Calendar Year 2021 was a time of perseverance in challenging circumstances—made possible by our good and gracious God. The Missouri District is blessed to be able to do this work with you all. Thank you for your support this year!

If you are interested in including the Missouri District in your end-of-year giving, doing so is as easy as:

- Giving online at mo.lcms.org/donate
- Calling 314-590-6200 and using a credit card
- Using your own envelope and directing a gift to:

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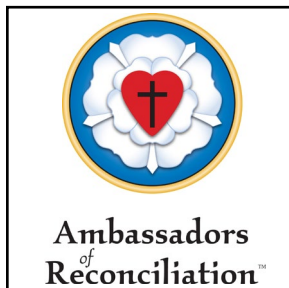


My Church's BBQ event in Ozark

God's guidance throughout the last year is evident, leaving all of us excited about the paths He'll lead us down in 2022. Thank you for walking with us on this journey. Merry Christmas and God's blessings in the new year!

Coming in 2022

Visit mo.lcms.org/upcoming-events to register for these events.



Conflict Seminar
Sign up by Jan 5



E2 Conferences
Early Spring



SHINE!
April 22 - May 1



Convention
June 12-14

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