



# the VOICE

**"The Reason for the Season"**



*December, 2024*  
*Missouri District Newsletter*

# From the President's Desk

## “ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS OPPORTUNITIES”



Lutheran churches, schools, and early childhood centers across Missouri will welcome many visitors throughout the seasons of Advent and Christmas. Concerts, children's programs, and a variety of other events provide opportunities for proclaiming the Gospel of God's love for us in the person and work of Jesus. These events also provide opportunities to show hospitality to our guests and extend invitations for them to return.

Our congregations and schools often spend months getting ready for the events with great attention to printed materials, audio-visual needs, and refreshments. While the most important concern is the content of our message (in word and song), it is also critical that we consider how to interact with and follow up with our visitors. It is a wonderful thing that guests come to our events and hear the glad tidings of great joy that unto us is born a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. However, our prayer is that they will continue to hear the Gospel even after these seasons end.

We pray that God will give many opportunities to share the Gospel with visitors throughout the Advent and Christmas seasons. However, it is good for us to prepare for such opportunities and intentionally interact with our visitors to extend invitations to come and hear the Gospel again (without waiting until next December).

May God bless all the choir concerts, Christmas programs, parties, carolers, festivals, markets, and, most of all, worship services, so that we may clearly confess Christ to all who come to these events. The birth of Christ is the reason for our celebration and the source of our eternal hope!

Fraternally in Christ,

President Lee Hagan

# Building & Strengthening Disciples for Jesus Christ

It is said that something like 92% of all New Year's Resolutions aren't accomplished. Either the goals were unrealistic to begin with, or the person attempting the effort simply lost interest. My Church—the Missouri District's church plant in Ozark—doesn't know what it's like to be part of that statistic!

"God is on the move," says My Church's pastor, Rev. Jim Bartok. "You're just trying to keep up!" The group started 2024 with three goals: conduct 10 baptisms, collectively complete 250 community service hours, and have 75 people in worship. As this article is being written, two of the three are already complete, and the third is expected to be finalized by Christmas. The baptism goal got a boost this fall and was completed in a big way. Pastor Bartok shares, "On one beautiful September afternoon, five teenagers, a child, and an infant received God's gift of salvation through the waters of baptism." Members of My Church commit themselves as individuals and small groups to the "Prosper the City" project—blessing their neighbors in a variety of ways. Yard work, clothing drives, visits and games for the elderly, and adopting families in need are just some of the ways these members have wrapped up 250 hours of service.

Christmas worship is the time My Church is praying to complete their third and final goal of having 75 people in worship. Members of the congregation continually invite neighbors, friends, and co-workers to join them for services. "We are unwavering in Jesus' mission to the church to make disciples.

We have, and by God's grace, will continue to make new disciples of Jesus for generations to come here in Ozark, Missouri," concludes Pastor Bartok. Thank you, friends, and supporters of the Missouri District, for the way God used you in these goals for this worshipping community.

Through your generosity, you've walked with My Church over the last several years in planting and sustaining the ministry efforts of this thriving church plant! Indeed, building and strengthening disciples for Jesus Christ is key for mission and ministry throughout the Missouri District. Be it through church plants like My Church, welcoming and serving those new to America, caring for those on military bases, or providing a church home for college students, we're grateful to God for leading the way and including you in these efforts.

**This Christmas season, would you please prayerfully consider making a gift to the mission efforts of the Missouri District?**

**Gifts may be made online at <https://mo.lcms.org/donate/> or sent to:**

**Missouri District LCMS  
660 Mason Ridge Center Drive, Suite 100  
St. Louis, MO 63141**

Resolutions set at the beginning of a calendar year may not always come to fruition, but God's plans certainly do. Whatever He has in store for His children is always bigger and better than any of us could imagine. We look forward to expanding ministry in 2025 and thank God for your partnership in these efforts.



# LCEF Services



LCEF offers many services to assist congregations beyond lending and investments. We have worked with numerous churches and schools in the areas of ministry clarity, strategic planning, capital campaigns, worker wellness, and real estate and construction management. Additionally, we have significant demographic resources at our disposal to assist congregations with understanding their community.

Most of the congregations we speak with are looking for ways to grow in membership and searching for opportunities to reach the community around them. The LCEF has a straightforward approach to assisting churches in the Missouri District with this effort that is as much a science as it is an art. It starts with a review of demographic information—we can identify everything from household income to education levels and family structure within a specified radius of a congregation. This can be done by their unique zip code or simply within a certain amount of travel time. Additionally, the information available to us can provide details about the typical religious beliefs and practices for groups that mirror the makeup of said community.

We then plot all the members of the church on a map to help identify the reach of the church beyond the sanctuary and campus.

In addition to the hard data found in demographics, LCEF can work with congregations to help identify the right approach in learning the needs of each community and identifying how the ministries and resources at their churches can best influence those around them. This is not always an easy task, but it is one that I encourage congregations to undertake. All of this is provided to our district churches—at no cost—as part of our effort to help build ministries in the Missouri District and beyond. If your congregation is interested in reviewing demographics for your area or exploring ways in which you can better understand how to serve your community, please reach out to *Mike Wadley at 314-885-6489*.

Lastly, I would like to encourage you during this season of Advent to invite someone to worship with you. People are most likely to join a church or participate in worship when they are invited to do so. My prayer is that God will put someone in front of you that desires a relationship with Jesus, and that you will have the courage to simply invite them into God's house.

Peace,  
Mike Wadley - LCEF Missouri District Vice President

# Equip & Encourage

## “EMPOWERING LUTHERAN EDUCATORS AT THE 2024 CONFERENCE”

The 2024 Educators’ Conference brought together over 490 Lutheran school leaders, speakers, and educators to the Lodge of the Four Seasons in Lake Ozark under the inspiring theme of “Equip and Encourage”. Over the two-day event, attendees were immersed in an environment filled with collaboration, innovation, and spiritual renewal—all designed to empower them to meet the challenges of Christian education with confidence and purpose.

The conference started with an exuberant keynote speaker in Tim Clue, who delivered a humorous and heartfelt address titled “The Unlikely Teacher.” Tim’s message resonated with attendees as he celebrated teachers’ essential role in cultivating lifelong learners. His stories highlighted how educators can embrace challenges to create environments of curiosity and engagement. Clue’s mantra, “When minds of all kinds find places to fit and not quit, we all succeed!” set the tone for the next two days of impactful sessions designed to build skills and nurture faith.

The schedule featured a diverse range of sectional workshops tailored to meet the unique needs of Lutheran educators across all grade levels and roles. These sessions combined practical tools with a strong faith focus, offering actionable insights for immediate classroom use. Whether learning strategies to implement restorative practices, exploring the benefits of micro-schools, or discovering and creating classroom activities, participants are left with new ideas to strengthen their teaching and leadership.

More than just a professional development event, the 2024 Educators’ Conference served as a powerful reminder of the transformative impact of Christ-centered education in the lives of students, families, and communities. For those who attended, the takeaway was clear: Christ has called and equipped each of them to reflect the light of Christ in their community.



# "New Start Spotlight"

At the new Spanish Lake mission plant, a beautiful story of growth and joy is unfolding! What started as a small children's ministry of Bethlehem Lutheran Church is blossoming into the rebirth of a new church plant in Spanish Lake. The remnant of St. Peter's Lutheran Church shares their facilities with this new mission. Every week, children from different backgrounds gather, not just for fun and games, but for something deeper—a chance to encounter God's love in a personal way.

One of the most heartwarming signs of growth is seeing how these young lives are being transformed. Children who were once shy or unsure are now confidently participating in Bible studies, asking thoughtful questions about Jesus, and praying with their friends. The EAC afterschool program is filled with laughter, excitement, and, most importantly, a genuine hunger for God's Word. These children are growing spiritually, learning what it means to be followers of Christ, and taking those lessons home to share them with their families. Parents have shared stories of how their kids come home talking about the Bible verses they've memorized and how they want to pray at dinner or bedtime.

One of these children is little Montrell, a seven-year-old who first walked into the Spanish Lake mission plant with wide eyes and a curious heart. At first, Montrell was a bit shy and unsure of what to expect. He would quietly sit in the back of the room, watching as other kids sang songs and listened to Bible stories. But slowly, something began to change.

During one lesson about Jesus calming the storm, Montrell's eyes lit up. He couldn't stop talking about how amazing it was that Jesus could calm the wind and the waves with just a word. That week, Montrell's leader noticed a spark—he was starting to ask more questions and engaging with the lessons in a new way. As the weeks went by, Montrell became a regular attendee at the mission's activities, where he soaked up every word of the Bible like a sponge.



One day, during a group prayer time, Montrell raised his hand. He wanted to lead the prayer! His small voice was filled with sincerity as he thanked God for his family, his new friends, and for the stories he was learning about Jesus. The teachers were amazed at how far he had come from the quiet, unsure boy who first entered their doors.

At home, Montrell began sharing the Bible stories he learned with his parents, and soon, his whole family became connected to the ministry. His mother said that Montrell had started asking to pray before meals “like they do at camp” and would even gather his younger siblings to tell them stories about Jesus and the miracles He performed. His story of growth and faith is a testament to how God is working through this new mission plant, not only transforming Montrell but spreading that transformation to his family and beyond.

# Christmas Community Engagement

Christmas provides a time when congregations across Missouri often engage with their communities in creative ways. From young to old, attendees fill the churches of Missouri District to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ in different ways each year. This year, we highlight a few of those events both past and present below:

Boar's Head festivals are held yearly at Peace Lutheran in St. Louis and at Immanuel Lutheran in St. Charles. Held this past weekend, this year marked the 28th year of Peace's Christmas Festival and the 38th year for Immanuel continuing their celebration into this Sunday. At Peace, the good news of Christ's birth, including a portrayal of the Nativity, was celebrated with instrumental and choral music while colorfully costumed actors depicted their joy with a medieval Christmas Festival. A reception then followed as the congregation and community continued the celebration with joyful fellowship and Christmas treats. Peace's festival involves over 350 members of all ages and proclaims the good news of Christmas to over 1,500 attendees each year.

In Columbia, on Dec. 6-7, 2024, Campus Lutheran will host their own annual Christmas get together, called "Meet Me at the Manger," a unique event showcasing hundreds of Nativity scenes from around the world. The event is a gift to the community, where they invite everyone to come see how different cultures depict Jesus' birth. Members volunteer for setup and takedown, serving refreshments, and providing music and hospitality for all guests.

Inspired by the popular German Christmas markets, Timothy Lutheran in St. Louis put on their annual "Weihnachtsmarkt" for their community this past Saturday on Dec. 7, 2024. The church invited their neighbors to come enjoy food and beverages with display booths on the enclosed church parking lot. All ages of members were encouraged to set up and help run the event. Stephen Ministers, staff, and comfort dogs from Timothy Lutheran were present to greet guests and take prayer requests, which are then brought to services the rest of December. Every year, it is a joyful and considerate space for kids to run, play, and drink hot chocolate as they celebrate the season alongside friends and family. Members noted that it's a welcoming event to invite non-Christian friends to attend and interact with the church as well.

On Dec. 14, 2024, two different churches will host Christmas events geared toward the children in their communities. St. Paul in Jackson joyfully brings the wonders of Christmas to young ones with "Celebrate Jesus" each year—a fun-filled sensory event for ages 6 months to 3rd grade. Similarly, St. Paul in Des Peres will sponsor their annual "Breakfast in Bethlehem." Breakfast is provided for community children where they can interact with costumed characters from the Christmas story. Gabriel's Gift Shop provides them with Christmas gifts for family members, which they can have gift wrapped. Often, there is also a petting zoo with live animals typically seen in the Nativity.



# Upcoming Events

2025

**Mar. 15:** *Tell the Next Generation Conference*  
*Lutheran High School, St Charles*

**Apr. 4-6:** *District Youth Gathering*  
*Cross Pointe, Rocky Mount*

**June 22-24:** *Missouri District Convention*  
*Columbia, MO*

**July 19-23:** *LCMS National Youth Gathering*  
*New Orleans*

