

April 2025

# The VOICE



## OUR MISSION

The Missouri District is to serve and encourage congregations to fulfill the Great Commission and to promote unity of the true faith. Pictured above, a student serving April 4 during *SHINE!* at St. Paul Lutheran School in Saint Joseph, Mo. More photos can be found on the District's social media accounts and in an article coming in the May edition of *The Voice*. Photo: Leah Sieveking.

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# FROM THE PRESIDENT



*Dear friends,*

Easter is only one Sunday of the church year or at best a season. For Christians, the resurrection of Jesus is more than a Sunday with special music and higher attendance. It is more than just an occasion for families to gather together and for the church to print more bulletins. The celebration of our Lord's victory over death and the grave is what gives every day hope and what fills every heart with joy.

The church pews will be filled this year with many Christians who are struggling with grief or pain. There will be widows and widowers who mourn their loved ones. There will be individuals who are hurting because of broken relationships. There will be many who are weighed down by the guilt over their sins. If happiness is based on circumstances, then there are often times when we are unhappy. Joy is not based on our circumstances. Christ's resurrection means that every broken and hurting person can have joy through faith in the victorious King.

The circumstances do not have to be individual either. Some congregations have experienced the loss of a pastor through retirement or his acceptance of a call. Some congregations have experienced conflict between members. Some congregations are struggling financially or feel like their best days are behind them. We do not sing Easter hymns because the church is in the black or because we love our pastor. We lift our voices in song because our Savior suffered on the cross for our sins and rose triumphant from the grave. The resurrection brings joy to heavy hearts. This is the joy that fills each school classroom. This is the joy that flows from every choir. This is the joy that we all carry with us through this life. No matter what things we face in life, we have the hope and joy of Jesus Christ, our resurrected Lord, in our hearts.

May your heart and your congregation be filled with joy as you celebrate His resurrection on Easter Sunday and every day!

Fraternally in Christ,

*R. Lee Hagan*

President Lee Hagan





BY DCE DAN KREIENKAMP

We were thrilled to welcome over 380 participants—Junior High, Senior High, and adult leaders—from across the Missouri District to the 2025 District Youth Gathering, held April 4–6 at Cross Pointe Retreat Center in Rocky Mount, Mo.

This annual event brought together students in grades 6–12 for a weekend filled with worship, learning, service, and fellowship. The theme of the weekend, centered on John 20:31, invited students to deepen their belief in Jesus as the Son of God and to grow in faith as followers of the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Junior high youth participated in several hands-on projects to share God's love with others. Together, they: created 300 Christian bookmarks with prayers and Bible verses for children and teens in Hooper Bay, Alaska; made 80 salvation bracelets; prepared cross craft kits; wrote encouraging cards and thank-you notes; and stuffed 1,100 Easter eggs to bless children in need.

High school students participated in YouthLead breakout sessions, where 98 peers explored how to support struggling friends using the LOAP (Listen, Observe, Ask, Pray) model through peer-led discussion and practical tools.

The weekend offered a powerful combination of spiritual growth, leadership development, and meaningful connection. It was a blessing to see students live out their faith and return home equipped to shine the light of Christ in their communities.

*DCE Dan Kreiekamp is director of family life and youth at the LCMS Missouri District.*

**"But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."**

**— John 20:31 (ESV)**



**PASTOR  
BRIAN KING**

The message was brought to life through the engaging leadership of Pastor Brian King from Webster Gardens Lutheran Church in St. Louis. Reflecting on the experience, Pastor King shared: "I was blessed to be with so many great leaders and students this weekend—God worked as we worshiped together, encouraged one another, and grew in knowing God and in what we believe."



# MOScholars

HAS A BANNER YEAR IN 2024

BY LEAH SIEVEKING

The end of 2024 wrapped up the third year of MOScholars—Missouri's tax credit program providing scholarships to families of children attending private institutions—and it was our biggest year yet! Thank you to all the taxpayers who participated in this endeavor that has made an impact that will last for eternity. Children throughout the state are now receiving a quality education and hearing the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ at Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) schools.

The Missouri District was able to distribute \$1,088,906 in funds in 2024, resulting in 193 children receiving a full MOScholars scholarship for the current school year. This total amount given, when combined with the funds from the previous two years of the tax credit program, means that more than \$2.3 million has now been awarded to LCMS students by the Missouri District through MOScholars. Praise God!

"As demand for these scholarships continues to increase, so does taxpayer participation," says Leah Sieveking, director of mission advancement for the Missouri District. "What an encouragement to see many new households direct their tax dollars towards Lutheran education. Thank you!"

**"What an encouragement to see many new households direct their tax dollars towards Lutheran education."**

— LEAH SIEVEKING

The Missouri District looks forward to expanding the reach of MOScholars in 2025. Along with this group of 193 recipients, we'll add additional students and their families for the 2025-26 school year. We welcome your participation in the MOScholars program and thank you for walking with these students. The tax credit reservation system for this current calendar year is up and running once more.

Again, thank you for walking with the Missouri District and using your tax dollars to change the life of a child.

*Leah Sieveking is director of mission advancement at the LCMS Missouri District.*

If you haven't already started the process this year, you can begin at [mo.lcms.org/mo-scholars](https://mo.lcms.org/mo-scholars). Additional questions can be directed to Leah Sieveking at 314-590-6211 or [leah.sieveking@mo.lcms.org](mailto:leah.sieveking@mo.lcms.org).



# GO LEADERSHIP RETREAT



BY REV. PETER KIRBY

The seventh annual GO Leadership Retreat for college students took place from Feb. 28–March 1 at Campus Lutheran in Columbia, and evaluations from participants indicated that the event was very well received. Host Pastor Kent Pierce said that this year's speaker, Pastor Brandon Boos, was highly rated. He noted, "Students appreciated not only the relevance of his topic, which was focused on living out our purpose as followers of Christ, but they also appreciated how the event was structured to be interactive. There was time for worship, study, fellowship, and reflection."

Boos reflected on the retreat, "In a culture overwhelmed by busyness, digital noise, and uncertainty, the retreat offered young adults a rare and refreshing opportunity to slow down, reflect, and listen for God's voice. The retreat opened by tackling the heart of the matter: our identity and purpose in Christ. Through Scripture, participants were reminded that we are image bearers—created not first to do, but to be in relationship with God. With space for reflection, honest questions, and community prayer, the session laid a foundation for living out that identity in their vocation with intention and joy. Throughout the weekend, participants engaged in hard conversations—about doubt, deconstruction, evangelism, and what it means to be a leader. Together, they wrestled with real challenges facing their generation and left with tangible tools to make faith relevant and rooted in today's world."

This year's GO Leadership Retreat hosted 65 participants, representing 10 different colleges. Most participants were from Missouri colleges and universities, with one graduate student from Concordia University Wisconsin. Vendors and guests included: Heit's Point Lutheran Ministries, Lincoln; Concordia Seminary, St. Louis; International Student Ministry, Inc., St. Louis; and the LCMS Office of International Mission.



**"We are image bearers—created not first to do, but to be in relationship with God."**

— PASTOR BRANDON BOOS

Boos said, "It was a great opportunity to connect with so many passionate young leaders." The Director of Mission Advancement at the Missouri District, Leah Sieveking reflected, "I enjoyed meeting these student leaders from campus ministry sites throughout the Missouri District, and I am thankful for their service in these unique ministry settings. The camaraderie among different groups—even though they just met—was fun to see. Knowing how they will one day graduate and take their discipleship skills even further out into the world makes me so hopeful for the future of the Church."

*Rev. Peter Kirby is the executive director of congregational services at the LCMS Missouri District.*



Event photos: Leah Sieveking

# Strengthening Principals as Leaders

BY LEAH SIEVEKING

At first, it seemed like it would be too much to add to an already full plate. Ashley Ponder had jumped in with both feet as a first-year principal at United in Christ Lutheran School in Frohna this fall, and it felt like the wrong time to enroll in Principal 360, an 11-month leadership program for Lutheran principals. She took the plunge anyway and is now seeing things differently.



**Ashley Ponder, Principal**  
United in Christ Lutheran School  
Frohna, MO

"It's been the most impactful professional development experience I've had, providing invaluable insights into best practices and equipping me with the tools for true leadership excellence," Ashley shares. Now halfway through the process, she's already been given the skills to work with her staff, board, and stakeholders to identify the school's mission, vision, and values. With these now in place, they serve as the guide in decision making. Further lessons for Ashley and other participants this year will include looking at curriculum, finances, marketing, and innovation in the classroom. She's also been assigned a coach that she knows she can call anytime to offer support throughout this process.

*Post pandemic, enrollment in Lutheran schools throughout Missouri has gone up considerably. Our schools are on the front line of mission activity, and God continues to bless these efforts! Walking with the leaders of these academic institutions is paramount, and the Missouri District is honored to help supplement the cost of Principal 360. Through your generosity, you're walking with these principals as well. Thank you!*

***"It's been the most impactful professional development experience ..."***

Today, we invite you to help the Missouri District and its support of principals across the District. Would you please prayerfully consider making a gift towards this effort? "To those supporting Lutheran educators participating in Principal 360 financially, know that your investment is fostering the growth of effective and impactful school leaders," encourages Ashley. "You're contributing to a program that empowers administrators to create positive change within their schools and communities, ultimately benefiting students and educators alike. It's an investment that truly makes a difference."

Thank you for encouraging these leaders at Lutheran schools in Missouri. Together, we'll continue to strengthen this rapidly growing mission opportunity.

## WAYS TO GIVE

Visit [mo.lcms.org/donate](https://mo.lcms.org/donate),  
scan the QR code, or mail  
a check to:

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



*Leah Sieveking is director of mission advancement at the LCMS Missouri District.*





# Not Just Cute

Intentional Whole Child Development  
with AMANDA MORGAN

## Empowering Educators: 2025 Spring Early Childhood Conference

BY JOSH SWARTZ

Early childhood educators from across Missouri gathered March 1 at Messiah Lutheran School in St. Charles for the annual Missouri District Spring Early Childhood Conference. The event welcomed directors, teachers, and classroom assistants for a day filled with professional development, encouragement, and inspiration rooted in faith and child-centered practices.

Renowned keynote speaker Amanda Morgan, who writes, speaks, and consults on the topic of intentional, whole-child development, kicked off the conference with her session, *Not Just Cute: Teaching with Intention for Powerful Play*. Emphasizing the importance of intentionality, she introduced the Recognize-Emphasize-Maximize framework, empowering educators to turn playful moments into rich learning opportunities.

The day continued with insightful breakout sessions tailored to diverse classroom needs. Attendees explored topics such as spiritual development, sensory activities, early childhood resources, special education services, and director collaboration. Presenters like Cheryl Haun, Teresa Wapelhorst, Lisa Krenz, Bev Gruenwald, and speakers from LASE brought decades of experience and practical guidance to support educators in both faith formation and navigating educational systems.

After a lunch sponsored by Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF), Morgan returned for her second keynote, *The Math Bag: Going Beyond Counting for Real Math Discussions*, which challenged participants to reimagine math instruction as an engaging, hands-on dialogue that builds authentic number sense.



From start to finish, the conference highlighted the vital role of relationships, play, and intentional teaching in early childhood education. With a foundation rooted in faith, the event not only equipped educators with valuable tools but also affirmed their calling to nurture young minds and hearts. As Hebrews 13:21 reminds us, may we be equipped with everything good for doing His will as we continue to serve the youngest learners in our care.

*Josh Swartz is the director of schools at the LCMS Missouri District.*



# CALL DAYS AT OUR SEMINARIES

Joyful anticipation is building for the 2025 call days at our seminaries! This special event marks a significant milestone for seminarians as they receive their pastoral or diaconal ministry placements and vicarage or internship assignments to serve in churches or ministries within The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). Pray for the students and watch online at [ctsfw.regfox.com/2025-call-day](https://ctsfw.regfox.com/2025-call-day) and [csl.edu/call-day](https://csl.edu/call-day) to celebrate.

**6 p.m. (EST) Monday, April 28 and Tuesday, April 29** at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.  
**3 and 7 p.m. (CST) Wednesday, April 30** at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo.



## UPCOMING EVENTS

**APR  
28-30**

### CALL DAYS AT OUR SEMINARIES

Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, IN  
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO

**MAY  
3**

### TREASURER WORKSHOP

Campus Lutheran Church, Columbia, MO

**MAY  
3**

### LUTHERANS FOR LIFE OF MISSOURI ANNUAL GATHERING

Salem Lutheran Church, Affton, MO

LEARN MORE!



[mo.lcms.org/upcoming-events](https://mo.lcms.org/upcoming-events)  
Phone: 314-590-6200



## A LOOK AHEAD

**MAY 16-18:** Pastors Wives Retreat  
**JUNE 6:** Mental Health First Aid Training  
**JUNE 22-24:** Missouri District Convention

**JULY 17-18:** Summer Administrators Conference  
**JULY 19-23:** LCMS Youth Gathering  
**JULY 23:** LCMS Youth Gathering Missouri District Event