

November 2025

The VOICE

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The Missouri District is to serve and encourage congregations to fulfill the Great Commission and to promote unity of the true faith.

Pictured above (l-r): Rev. Jeremy Freeman, pastor at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Sedalia, Mo., and Rev. Peter Lange, pastor at Bethany Lutheran Church in Eldon, Mo., at the Missouri District's 2025 Pastors Conference Happy Hour.

Photo: Leah Sieveking

FROM THE INTERIM DISTRICT PRESIDENT

Dear friends,

I will testify of Christ.

Peter testified of Him:

“Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, ‘Who do the crowds say that I am?’ And they answered, ‘John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen.’ Then he said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ And Peter answered, ‘The Christ of God’” (Luke 9:18-20, ESV).

Jesus testified of Himself:

“And taking the twelve, he said to them, ‘See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise’” (Luke 18:31-33, ESV).

The Emmaus disciples testified of Him:

“And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, ‘Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?’ And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, ‘The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!’” (Luke 24:31-34, ESV).

The early disciples testified of Christ.

He has come, as the prophets foretold. He gave Himself unto death on a cross, shedding His blood for our sake to reconcile us to God. He is risen and ascended.

When we pray, we testify of Christ. We know and believe He is the Holy One of God.

Christ is your Savior. May His name always be on your lips.



Peace in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Craig D. Otto".

Interim District President Rev. Craig D. Otto

2025 PASTORS CONFERENCE

BY REV. PETER KIRBY



Photo: Leah Sieveking

The Missouri District held its 2025 Pastors Conference at Margaritaville Lake Resort, Osage Beach, Oct. 12–14. The opening Divine Service was held at Christ the King Lutheran Church, Lake Ozark, Sunday evening led by Senior Pastor Rev. Ron Lehenbauer, with a sermon by Interim District President Rev. Craig Otto on how Jesus spoke of Himself in Luke 24. A brass ensemble and choir from the congregation provided special music for the service.

Monday's opening devotions were led by Second Vice President Rev. Randy Asburry, focusing on how John the Baptist spoke of Christ. The plenary speaker, pictured left, was Rev. Dr. Reed Lessing, professor of Theology and Ministry at Concordia University, St. Paul, Minn., who led pastors through the book of Amos with the theme "Restore the Roar." His engaging style, knowledge of the book, and summaries set to the tune of Amazing Grace made it a memorable day of learning about the prophet and applications for today.

Eighteen exhibitors were present in the adjoining hall, including Concordia Publishing House (CPH), Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF), Lutheran Emergency Response Team (LERT), Missouri District Family Discipleship, Concordia Center for the Family, Alliance Defending Freedom, and other Lutheran agencies and Recognized Service Organizations (RSOs).

Interim District President Rev. Craig Otto presented the president's report, starting with a video from District President Rev. Dr. R. Lee Hagan, followed by a detailed update on operations and ministry during this interim time. The report closed with updates from Chief Financial Officer Peter Krege. Monday's session was capped off with Gemütlichkeit on the Windgate Plaza, allowing for fellowship and reunions between attendees.

Third Vice President Rev. Samuel Powell led Tuesday's opening devotion on how Stephen spoke of Christ. Nominations were received for the triennium Conference Committee, and the following were elected:

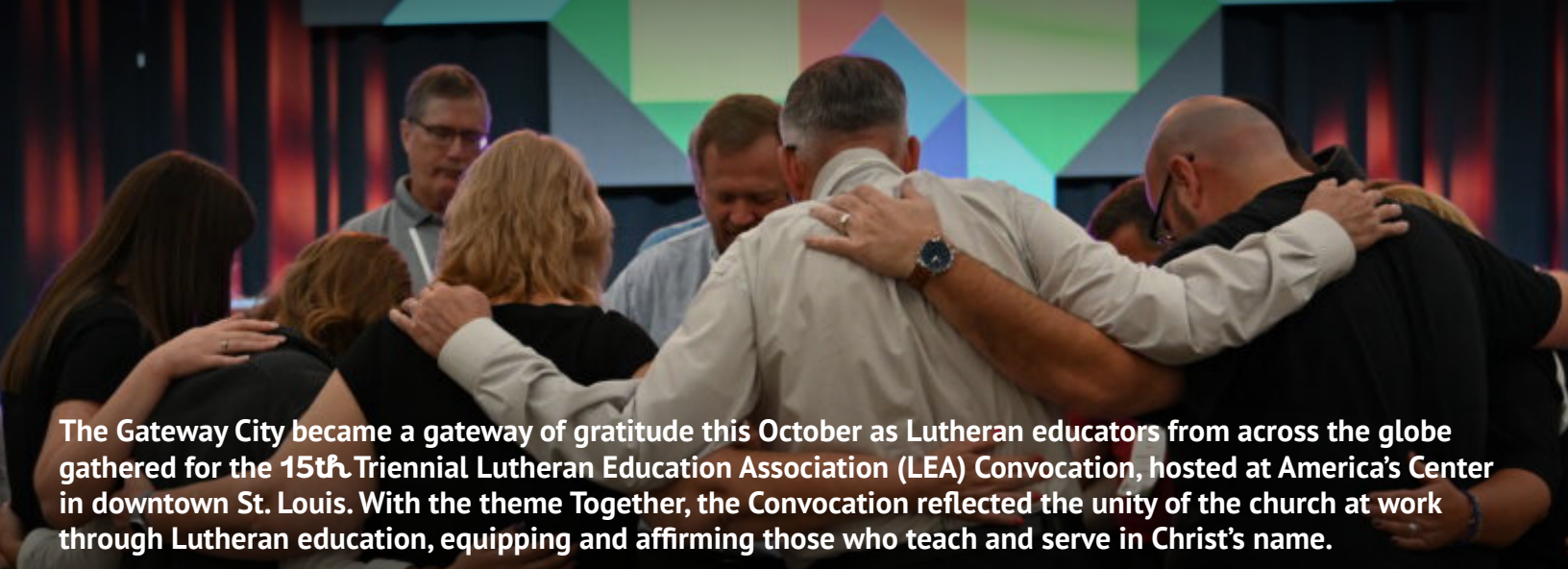
- **Emeritus Pastor Rev. David Burge**
- **MinistryFocus President and Chair Rev. Ken Krueger**
- **Senior Pastor Rev. Andrew Tessone at Our Savior Lutheran Church in Sedalia**

Three breakout sessions were held, each offering eight options on topics. Fourth Vice President Rev. Rick Cody led the closing devotion on how the Apostle Paul spoke of Christ. A fruitful time of learning and fellowship was enjoyed by all church workers and families who attended the 2025 Pastors Conference.

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

A Celebration of the 15th LEA Convocation

BY JOSH SWARTZ



The Gateway City became a gateway of gratitude this October as Lutheran educators from across the globe gathered for the 15th Triennial Lutheran Education Association (LEA) Convocation, hosted at America's Center in downtown St. Louis. With the theme **Together**, the Convocation reflected the unity of the church at work through Lutheran education, equipping and affirming those who teach and serve in Christ's name.

A highlight of this year's Convocation was the joyful participation of **182** students who brought their voices and instruments to worship. Together, the combined high school choir, wind symphony, and elementary choir represented Lutheran High Schools North, South, St. Charles, and Metro East from the Southern Illinois District and several St. Louis area Lutheran elementary schools and Lutheran home school students. Their gift of music filled the Convocation hall with praise and set a tone of celebration for all who attended.

Adding to the celebration were student mascots and cheerleaders from Immanuel in Wentzville, St. John's in Ellisville, Salem in Black Jack, Christ Community Lutheran School in St. Louis, and Lutheran High School St. Charles. Their spirited presence reminded everyone that Lutheran schools are filled not only with academic excellence but also with contagious joy and community pride.

This remarkable event was made possible through the dedication of **201** adult volunteers representing **18** LCMS districts and two international Lutheran schools. From registration teams, to ushers, to hospitality setup, their joyful service created an atmosphere of warmth and welcome for every attendee.

Thanks are due to the greeting teams from Immanuel in Olivette who helped set a welcoming tone on that first day, along with the energetic "Meet Me in St. Louis" Fun Squad from Messiah in Weldon Spring, who brought laughter, fellowship, and local hospitality to Friday evening's celebration. Every volunteer played a vital role in making this event not only successful but deeply memorable.

Throughout the three days, participants gathered in God's Word, networked and fellowshiped together, and had professional growth and renewal in their calling. From keynote sessions to sectionals, exhibit hall connections to morning devotions, the Convocation offered a shared reminder that Lutheran educators are never alone. Together, this Convocation was a reminder of the ongoing story of God's work in the classroom, congregations, and communities from around the world. We give thanks to God for His faithfulness and provision.

"To everyone who made this Convocation in St. Louis possible, thank you. In Christ, we are indeed better together."



Tax Credits Available for 2025

BY LEAH SIEVEKING

Benjamin Franklin once wrote, “In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.” As children of God, we know that the former is a non-issue because of Jesus Christ. As Missourians, the latter is now simply a tool we use to spread the Gospel.

MOScholars is a tax credit program that provides scholarships for qualified K-12 students attending private institutions in our state. The Missouri District is one of only six organizations with access to these funds. Since its inception in July of 2022, hundreds of students attending LCMS schools throughout the District have been blessed by this program.

A huge thank you to the many households and businesses that have directed their tax dollars to support Lutheran education! MOScholars tax credits are dollar-for-dollar, and taxpayers can participate at a level up to 50% of their tax liability in a given year. There's no additional cost for participating, and it takes just minutes to complete the process.

Credits are still available for the 2025 tax year. Taxpayers have until Dec. 31 to take the following quick steps:

- Reserve tax credits by following the prompts at <https://mo.lcms.org/tax-credit>.
- Send in the funds in the amount of the reservation by check, money order, or electronic funds transfer (link available on landing page).
- Questions can be directed to Leah Sieveking at leah.sieveking@mo.lcms.org or 314-590-6211.

**“Thank you for participating in MOScholars
through the Missouri District!”**

Leah Sieveking is director of Mission Advancement at the LCMS Missouri District.



SHARED MINISTRY WITH



phil's friends

cancer is strong. **hope is stronger.**

BY REV. PETER KIRBY

Pictured (from left to right) are Rev. Weston Wildauer, pastor, and Jackson Sprague, ministry administrator, at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Cape Girardeau, Mo., following Sprague's installation service Oct. 5, 2025.

Photo provided by: Rev. Weston Wildauer

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Cape Girardeau, Mo., recently hired Jackson Sprague for a shared ministry post between the congregation and Phil's Friends, a Recognized Service Organization of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). Phil's Friends is based in Crown Point, Ind., and prepares care packages and cards to uplift patients suffering with cancer, as well as engaging volunteers in spiritual conversations to encourage the patients.

Sprague came from Cartersville, Ill., to Cape Girardeau two years ago to finish his bachelor's degree at Southeast Missouri State University. He and his wife joined Good Shepherd earlier this year, and he went on a mission trip to Belize this year with the congregation. Pastor Weston Wildauer says, "That led to conversations about his interest in full-time ministry involvement overseas or stateside. Since the congregation had been recruiting for this shared ministry position for the past seven months, it seemed like a good fit to encourage him toward this shared ministry post with Phil's Friends right here at home."

For two days each week, volunteers from Good Shepherd bring comfort and hope to patients at the St. Francis Hospital infusion center—cleaning rooms, handing out drinks, talking, praying, and directing to Christ. The volunteers also distribute Phil's Friends cancer care packages.

Sprague will take on leadership of that program, with the hope of growing the ministry to operate every day of the week, expanding to other hospitals, and recruiting volunteers from other area churches. He will also travel throughout the area and state to give chapel talks, presentations to Lutheran Women in Mission (LWML) and church groups. He is scheduled to be a speaker at the Missouri District LWML Convention in Cape Girardeau in June 2026.

The April Missouri *SHINE!* projects have involved many Missouri LCMS congregations in packing Phil's Friends care packages and writing cards to cancer patients, including fifth- through eighth-grade students from nearby Trinity Lutheran School in Cape Girardeau. Sprague will also help to coordinate those events in future years.

For the congregation, Sprague will help to oversee food distributions, mission trips, and other community engagement projects.

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

Missouri District opportunities for pastors and church workers

BY REV. MARTY HASZ, LPC

The Missouri District invites pastors, church staff, and ministry workers to a series of upcoming training and fellowship opportunities designed to support their ministry and wellbeing. Please contact Director of Church Worker Support Rev. Marty Hasz, LPC, at marty.hasz@mo.lcms.org, if you have any questions about the following upcoming opportunities:

Adult Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Training

Jan. 23, June 6, or Aug. 7, 2026

In partnership with Concordia Plans, the District offers Nationally Accredited MHFA training at no cost. Participants will learn to recognize signs of mental illness, understand trauma and resilience, respond to mental health crises, and practice self-care. The training includes 7 hours of virtual instruction plus about 2 hours of pre-work. Registration is required by Jan. 12, 2026 for the first Jan. 23 training.

Church worker respite

Heit's Point Lutheran Camp, Lincoln, MO

Feb. 2–4, 2026

Pastors and church workers are invited for a restorative retreat. This opportunity provides worship, time for reflection, renewal, and connection with colleagues in ministry. “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matt. 11:28–29, ESV).

Equipping pastors for storm response

10–11:30 a.m. Wednesday, Feb. 4, 2026

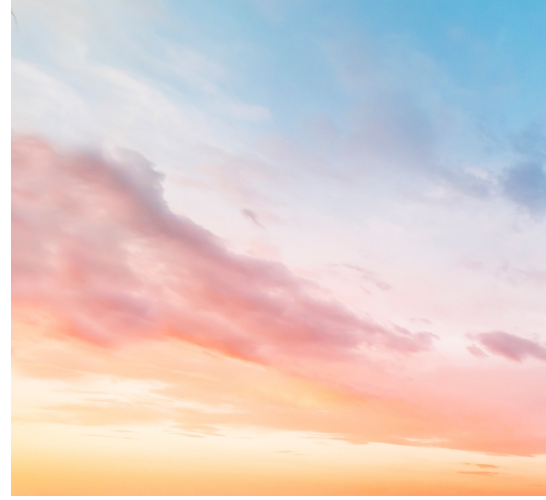
In light of the many storms that affected Missouri communities this past year, Missouri District pastors are invited to a 90-minute online training to prepare for ministry response this spring. This session will focus on how pastors can equip their congregations for works of service (Eph. 4:11–12) in times of need. Guest speakers include Missouri District disaster experts Kris Schuldt and Tom Keel, as well as LCMS leaders Rev. Michael Meyer and Rev. Dr. Ross Johnson. Pastors were sent an email with the Zoom meeting link this month.

Fellowship February for ministry workers

Coming in February 2026

This informal fellowship encourages church, school, and ministry workers to plan a day, evening, or activity focused on fun and connection. Ideas can include family outings, interactive games, or small group gatherings. The goal is to refresh, build community, and share joy in Christ's service.

Rev. Marty Hasz, LPC, is director of church worker support at the LCMS Missouri District.



— MISSOURI DISTRICT —

OPEN HOUSE

FOOD, FELLOWSHIP & FESTIVITIES

UPCOMING EVENTS

NOV
15

LUTHERAN COLLEGE FAIR

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

DEC
5

CHRISTMAS OPEN HOUSE

10 a.m.–1 p.m. Dec. 5, Missouri District Office, St. Louis

JAN
-MAR

E² CONFERENCES

Jan. 31; Feb. 7, 21, 28; Mar. 7



LEARN MORE

mo.lcms.org/upcoming-events
314-590-6200



2026

JAN 23, JUN 6, AUG 7: Adult Mental Health First Aid Virtual Training
FEB 6: Mid-Year Administrators Conference
MAR 7: Early Childhood Conference
MAR 19–22: YouthLead Training
APR 10–19: *SHINE!*
APR 17–19: District Youth Gathering
JUL 16–17: Summer Admin Conference
JUL 18–23: LCMS Synod Convention
SEPT 25–26: Servant Leadership Academy
OCT 19–23: Professional Church Workers Conference
OCT 25–28: Regional District Ed Exec Conference (MO Host)