

December 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: Rev. Dan and Jan Gilbert at the Missouri District Christmas Open House.

Photo: Christie Hampton

FROM THE INTERIM DISTRICT PRESIDENT

Dear friends,

We hear a promise about Christ:

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Is. 7:14, ESV).

Reason rejects this as impossible, but faith receives it, believing all things are possible with God.

We hear another promise:

“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel” (Micah 5:2a, ESV).

Years later King Herod inquired where the Christ was to be born. Chief priests and scribes said, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet.”

The promise was spoken to a virgin:

The angel said, “the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God” (Luke 1:35b, ESV).

When Mary heard she would bear the Son of the Most High, God granted her faith to receive it. She believed the Scriptures and the God who delivers.

The promise was fulfilled:

“The angel said to them, ‘Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord’ (Luke 2:10–11, ESV).

The whole created world, under the curse of sin, was groaning under judgment and its demise. Sin, death, and the power of the devil were certain. Then the Lord fulfilled His promise to crush the head of Satan and destroy death.

Christ incarnate, Christ revealed, Christ crucified, Christ arisen, Christ ascended.

This child, born of a virgin in Bethlehem, is the One. In Him the nations hope. In Him we place our faith. His righteousness endures forever.



Peace in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Craig D. Otto". The signature is fluid and stylized, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Interim District President Rev. Craig D. Otto

FAITH OF A CHILD

BY LEAH SIEVEKING

With her family newly settled in St. Louis after a big move from China, Vanessa thought it would be a good idea to send her five-year-old son, Donnie, to the summer camp hosted by Immanuel Lutheran in Olivette. She describes her motives as rather simple—an opportunity for him to play with kids his own age and practice his use of the English language. What really happened, though, was something life-altering for the whole family.

Coming from a Buddhist background, Vanessa was initially taken back by her son's interest in what he was learning. "He would often come home and draw pictures of churches, crosses, Jesus, and so on. I was surprised and amused," she shares. But it didn't end there. Donnie wanted to know more. "Every night before bedtime, we would sit together and read the Children's Bible, discussing it and answering Donnie's 'weird' questions. We would also pray together." **Through Donnie, the Holy Spirit began His work on the entire household.**

"God's love is so marvelous that because of Donnie's simple trust, our whole family experienced His grace together," Vanessa adds. "May we all be able to simply trust and rely on God like little children; may God use each of our lives to bear good witness to Him."

Vanessa and Donnie are members of Light of Christ Chinese Mission, a Missouri District-supported outreach effort to the Chinese population of metro St. Louis. With weekly worship in Mandarin and English, the congregation uses two of a dozen languages used in Lutheran churches each weekend throughout our state. Multiethnic outreach has long been a priority of the District, and we are blessed to have many faithful partners who have given generously and prayed for these many ministries. Thank you!



During Advent and Christmas, we will joyfully spend the remainder of this calendar year preparing for and celebrating the birth of our Savior. Christ came so that all people may know Him, and in many communities in Missouri we are His witnesses as we share Christ. This is exciting work, and we invite you to join in.

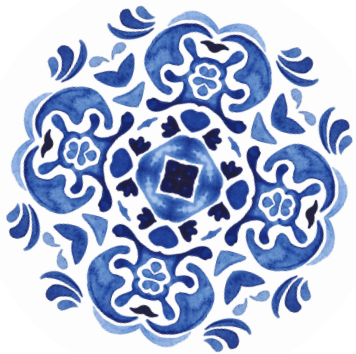
This Christmas season, would you please prayerfully consider a gift to the mission efforts of the Missouri District?

Gifts may be made online at: mo.lcms.org/donate

Or sent to:
Missouri District LCMS
660 Mason Ridge Center Drive,
Suite 100
St. Louis, MO 63141

Whatever the language or people group, we rejoice together that our Savior is born and will come again. God's richest blessings to you and yours this Christmas!

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



A Campus Ministry Story

BY CHRISTIE HAMPTON

When College of the Ozarks senior Lily Wegner, pictured right, steps into a small English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom each week, she's doing more than teaching English. She's building bridges between the campus, the Branson community and a local Lutheran church.

Wegner, an English major, volunteers as an ESL instructor for non-English-speaking workers in the city's hospitality industry. Fluent in Spanish, she often fields questions about faith from her students. One family she worked with recently accepted her invitation to attend a local Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) congregation, where she translated the sermon and helped them follow the liturgy.

Lutheran Student Fellowship (LSF), supported by Faith Lutheran Church in Branson, Mo., provided Wegner with a Spanish-language catechism and *Himnario Luterano* to share with the family. She said the materials help the family better understand the Gospel.

"Jesus fully gives me of Himself, and I desire to be fully given over for Him," Wegner said. "Even in my meager service once a week to my students, Christ receives my givenness as an act of love to Himself. It is His service to me that moves me to serve, as it is all His work anyway."

On campus, Wegner assists faculty through her work-study role and contributes her voice to Chorale and weekly Vespers services. This summer, she volunteered at the LCMS Youth Gathering in New Orleans, La., helping high school youth explore Christian endurance and hope.

Her work reflects a broader trend of campus ministries serving not only students but also the communities around them. Ministries like LSF continue to encourage congregations, strengthen the unity of the faith and support Gospel outreach across Missouri.

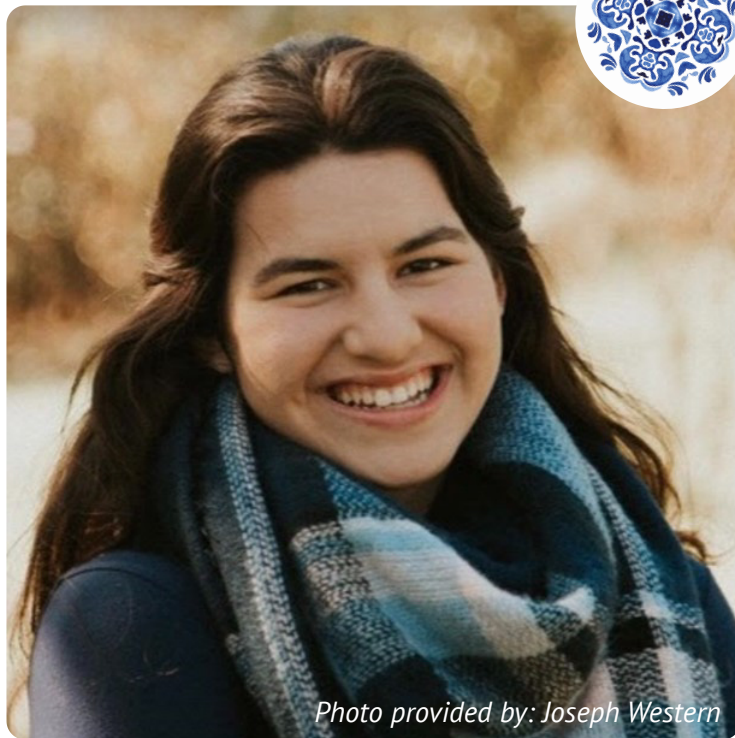


Photo provided by: Joseph Western

"It is His service to me that moves me to serve, as it is all His work anyway."

— Lily Wegner

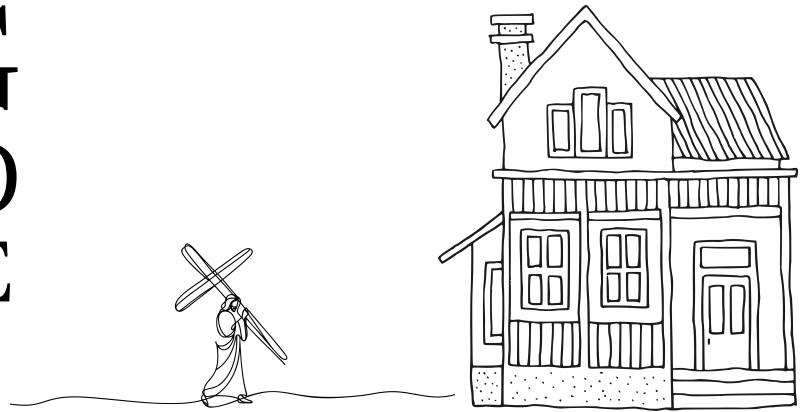
If your congregation or organization is inspired by stories like Lily Wegner's, the Missouri District Mission Grant program can help you take your outreach further. Grants support initiatives that engage the community, develop leaders, build lasting partnerships, and strengthen accountability.

Submit your Notice of Intent by Jan. 16, 2026, and full proposals by Feb. 27, 2026. For questions, contact Rev. Peter Kirby at peter.kirby@mo.lcms.org. Learn more and apply here.

Christie Hampton is communications specialist at the LCMS Missouri District.

BUILDING FAITH-FILLED HABITS AT HOME

BY AUNNEE TRAMPE



Our top priority when engaging families in the church is to point to Christ. We encourage families to read their Bibles, pray, and attend worship together. By helping them build faith-filled habits at home, strong roots are formed and nurtured for their lives outside the home.

Advent and Lent provide important opportunities to deepen family discipleship. These seasons redirect our focus from the things of this world to Jesus Who came, comes, and will come again.

As a children's ministry coordinator, I found great value in hosting Advent and Lent Family Nights. These programs serve two purposes: to learn more about Advent and Lent and provide families—and the broader congregation—to come together and take new habits home.

The secular world offers many activities for individuals within a family. As the church, it is important that we provide activities for the whole family—activities that revolve around Jesus and encourage these practices to continue at home.

Advent and Lent Family Nights include a short educational presentation, a craft, and a devotional for families to read at home. These events lead to follow-up conversations in person, through emails, and social media, encouraging families to continue devotions and remain in the Word.

Blessings to you and your congregations this Advent season as we prepare our hearts and minds for the coming Christ Child!

Examples of Advent and Lent Family Events

- *Advent:* Names of God daily devotions, servant Advent calendar, Advent wall hanging, the history of the Christmas tree, Advent wreath
- *Lent:* Clothespin crosses, resurrection Easter gardens, Lenten jars (pray, fast, give), prayer crosses

Devotional Resources

- Concordia Publishing House
- LCMS Worship
- Lutheran Hour Ministries
- Creative Communications
- Bible reading plans (reading Luke during Advent and Mark during Lent)
- Resources from other LCMS churches, pastors, and congregation members

For ideas and resources, reach out to me at atrampe@stpaulsdp.org. I love sharing ideas and working with fellow believers to further His kingdom!

Aunnee Trampe is the children's ministry coordinator at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Des Peres, Mo. Photo courtesy of Aunnee Trampe.



TELL THE NEXT GENERATION CONFERENCE

GUIDED BY

GOD'S TRUTH

BY DCE PAM NUMMELA

“Guided by God’s Truth,” the Missouri District’s Tell the Next Generation Conference, was held on Saturday, Nov. 8, at Lutheran High School of St. Charles, Mo. Seventy people were in attendance from around Missouri. The theme “Guided by God’s Truth” was based on Ps. 25:4-5. With this powerful reminder that God is our Guide, Rev. Dr. Todd Biermann, our plenary speaker and executive director of Concordia Center for the Family (CCF), shared that when our worldview is shaped by the Truth of God’s Word, it will guide us to a life of peace, contentment, and lasting joy.



Rev. Dr. Todd Biermann
plenary speaker

“Pastor Biermann’s presentation reignited my enthusiasm for family discipleship, inspiring me not just in Family Ministry but also as youth director. He delivered his talk with passion and authenticity, genuinely connecting with us about everyday challenges,” said participant Angie Brenner, director of Christian education (DCE) at Trinity Lutheran Church and School in Jefferson City, Mo. “Also, I found valuable materials from CCF that can help congregations encourage home devotions. I look forward to sharing these resources with our families.”

The breakout sessions included topics of family discipleship in small congregations, social media, family camp, milestones, creating a discipleship culture, reaching out in a secular age, and a variety of ways to support faith in the home—and more.

“Faith formation begins in the home! It was a great blessing to present and to connect with other ministry leaders, like Hannah Knehans, director of family life ministry (DFLM) at Trinity Lutheran Church in Springfield, Mo., who are ‘Telling the Next Generation’ each day!” declared presenter Aunnee Trampe, children’s ministry coordinator at St. Paul’s Lutheran Church in Des Peres, Mo.



Dr. Laura Fleetwood
breakout session speaker

Participants also had the opportunity to connect with one another, developing next steps for their homes and congregations. Dr. Laura Fleetwood, director of discipleship and communication at Messiah in Weldon Springs, Mo., reflected, “How encouraging to spend a day with leaders who actively show others what it looks like to have an authentic, every-day faith in Jesus that spills over into the world!” Thanks be to God for blessing this conference and may we grow in His truth as we faithfully follow Jesus in our homes.

Family Discipleship Facilitator Training

CCF, a Recognized Service Organization of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), is uniting homes and congregations in making lifelong disciples of Jesus. Through foundational training events, family discipleship facilitators are being equipped and inspired to strengthen the marriages and families served by our LCMS congregations and schools. CCF wants YOU as a family discipleship facilitator! This training opportunity is for called and commissioned leaders of LCMS congregations and schools, along with lay family ministry leaders. Find out more about our 2026 trainings [HERE](#). Also consider CCF’s Faith & Life Survey tool to assess how well you’re serving families. Find out more [HERE](#).

DCE Pam Nummela is family discipleship lead facilitator at the LCMS Missouri District.

LCEF partnerships strengthen the Missouri District

Your LCEF District Vice President (DVP) is

Mike Wadley

314-885-6489

mike.wadley@lcef.org



"Train up a child in the way he **should go**; even when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6, ESV).

 LUTHERAN CHURCH
EXTENSION FUND



Ministry continues to expand throughout the Missouri District thanks to the partnership and trust of so many in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). Your investments with The Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) allow us to support ministries as they grow by providing loans, capital campaigns, and ministry solutions.

St. John's in Arnold, Mo., recently broke ground on an expansion of their Early Childhood Center. The project includes eight additional classrooms and a new multi-purpose building. By having dedicated early childhood classrooms, they will free up space in their elementary school, thus allowing the grade school to expand their enrollment capacity significantly in the coming years. St. John's is dedicated to using the resources that God has placed in their midst to reach more people in their community with the saving power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and LCEF is excited to partner with them in this new endeavor.

Lutheran High School in St. Charles, Mo., completed the first phase of their "Empowered by Christ: Enriching Our Future" project in November. In addition to the renovation of classrooms and updating the science labs, the project included construction of a new Cougar Café, and renovation of the commons area to fully support the renowned theatre and music programs and allow the growing student body to come together in worship and praise of God. It is amazing to see God at work through these young people as they share the love of Jesus with each other and the broader community.

These are two great examples of Prov. 22:6, and LCEF is proud to support these ministries in all that they do. You can support ministries like these across the LCMS by simply opening an investment account or term note with LCEF. Our mission is to start, sustain, and strengthen LCMS ministries through financial and strategic partnerships. For more information on the opportunities with LCEF, visit lcef.org, or reach out to **LCEF District Vice President Mike Wadley** at 314-885-6489 or mike.wadley@lcef.org.

2025 Annual Report

Thank you to everyone who supported and participated in the life of the Missouri District in 2025. Following a letter from our Interim District President, the 2025 Annual Report features four articles highlighting key components of our 2025–28 Strategic Plan. While snapshots of broader initiatives, they illustrate examples of how we work together to address the needs of the church. The full 2025 Annual Report—including Mission Grant highlights, MoScholars, the Financial Report, Advancement, and 2026 Mission Projects—is now available online at mo.lcms.org/resources.



UPCOMING EVENTS

JAN
-MAR

E² CONFERENCES

Various locations
9 a.m.–12:15 p.m. Jan. 31; Feb. 7, 21, 28; Mar. 7

JAN
16

MISSION GRANT APPLICATION KEY DATES

Notice of Intent Deadline: Jan. 16, 2026
Application Submission Deadline: Feb. 27, 2026
Site Review Period: Jan. 17 – March 16, 2026

JAN
-AUG

ADULT MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID TRAININGS

Virtual trainings
9 a.m.–4 p.m. Jan. 23, June 6, Aug. 7

FEB 6: Mid-Year Administrators Conference
MAR 6–7: GO Leadership Retreat
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)



LEARN MORE

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

