

January 2026

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: The installation of Rev. Josh Schmidt as senior pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church and School in Jackson Mo., held Nov. 2, 2025.

Photo provided by Rev. Josh Schmidt.

FROM THE INTERIM DISTRICT PRESIDENT

Dear friends,

It's amazing.

God promised one to rule the nations in righteousness, and suddenly He appeared! He was born in Bethlehem, called out of Egypt, a Nazarene. Nations were waiting for one they could recognize, and now He walked among them in Judah and Galilee.

At His baptism a voice from heaven declared, "This is my beloved Son" (Matt. 3:17, ESV). The Father spoke, the Spirit descended, and the anointed Son was revealed.

At the synagogue, Jesus proclaimed the one who brings Good News to the poor, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21, ESV). He presented Himself as the One in whom the nations hope.

He revealed Himself to John, brightly, at His transfiguration. John testified, "The life was made manifest, and we have seen it" (1 John 1:2a, ESV).

He revealed Himself to Saul, brightly, on a road to Damascus. Saul testified, "Christ ... is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4c, ESV).

God is revealed in the face of Christ!

Christ appeared, was crucified, died, was buried, rose on the third day, and ascended to the right hand of the Father. Nations are drawn to hear the Good News, the poor have hope, and our faith in Christ is counted as righteousness.

"It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:24–25, ESV).

Trust in Christ alone. He is your forgiveness, your life, and your salvation.

He's amazing.



Peace in Christ,

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

Interim District President Rev. Craig D. Otto

Shine!

BACK FOR SIXTH YEAR IN MISSOURI DISTRICT

Here we go again, Missouri District!

Our annual statewide servant event—*SHINE!*—will take place April 10–19, 2026.

As in previous years, the concept is simple:

1

FORM A TEAM:

Groups can be of any size, age, or skill set.

2

IDENTIFY A NEED IN YOUR COMMUNITY:

Where do you see you could be of service to your neighbors?

3

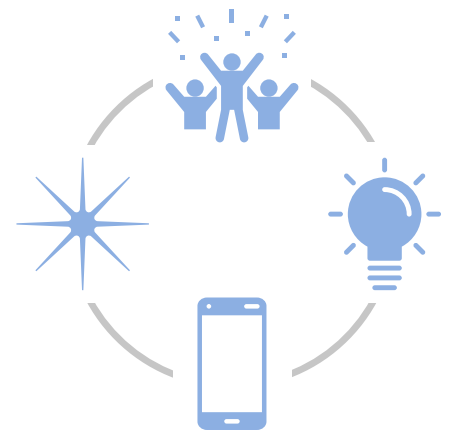
REGISTER WITH THE MISSOURI DISTRICT:

Let us know how and when you'll be serving.

4

SERVE:

Live out Matthew 5:16! Serve for an hour, a full day, or even the entire window of the servant event. (If that April timeframe doesn't work, feel free to select one that does for your group.)



What is changing this year is how we're attired!

Since the servant event's inception, the Missouri District has been blessed with generous sponsors who have provided matching T-shirts at no cost to participants. We'll forever be grateful for their encouragement over the years as this idea took root and grew. New to 2026 is the option of wearing whatever suits your team! It could be your brightest outfit to match our theme Bible verse, a servant event T-shirt from another year, or you can purchase the 2026 *SHINE!* T-shirt at a special online store created just for this occasion. The 'Carolina Blue' color is sure to go great with the rest of the collection.

HOW TO REGISTER

Details on registration and shirt ordering will be available by the end of January. Stay tuned to mo.lcms.org/shine for more information. Shine on, Missouri!

"The start of each new calendar year kicks off *SHINE!* season ... and it never gets old!" shares Director of Mission Advancement for the Missouri District Leah Sieveking. "We're glorifying God, helping our communities, and building one another up for continued work in His kingdom. What could be better?"

Let's Make a Joyful Noise

PSALM 98:4



Lutheran schools boldly proclaim what matters most: that children are known, loved, forgiven, and redeemed by Christ alone.

C.F.W. Walther captured this beautifully when he wrote, *"Our congregational schools are the nurseries of the Church ... Next to pure doctrine, our schools are the greatest treasure we possess."* His words still ring true. Lutheran schools are places where faith is planted, nurtured, and strengthened, where young lives are prepared not only for careers, but for lives of Christian vocation and service.

BY JOSH SWARTZ

National Lutheran Schools Week, Jan. 25–31, invites us to pause, give thanks, and rejoice in the remarkable gift God has given to His Church through Lutheran education. With the theme drawn from Psalm 98, "Make a joyful noise to the Lord," the week is not simply about celebration, but about witness. It is the sound of children singing hymns, classrooms alive with questions, chapel prayers, and educators, pastors, and staff serving with quiet faithfulness. All of it rises together as praise to God.

Our Lutheran schools exist because we believe that Christ belongs at the center of a child's formation in mind, body, and soul. Mark 10:14 (ESV) is a perfect reminder of this, where Jesus says, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them." Every lesson, every relationship, every moment of care is grounded in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In a world filled with competing voices,

As we celebrate National Lutheran Schools Week, we do so with gratitude for all the blessings that God has provided. May this week renew our joy, strengthen our commitment, and remind us why Lutheran school ministry matters.

May our schools continue to make a joyful noise, this week and always, to the glory of God.

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

**NATIONAL LUTHERAN
SCHOOLS WEEK**



lcms.org/lutheranschoolsweek
lcms.org/schoolministry



All E² conferences are Saturday mornings, 9 a.m.–12:15 p.m., with registration from 8:30–9 a.m.

Dates and locations for the workshops are as follows:

Missouri District sponsors E² workshops

BY REV. PETER KIRBY

The biennial Missouri District Equip and Encourage (E²) workshops will take place this winter at five locations around Missouri. The workshops are designed to present topics and training for church workers and lay members to help them more effectively carry out the ministry of the church. District staff will lead the sessions but encourage dialogue and participation of all those present on the topics at hand.

The first session at each location will include Volunteer Recruitment and Retention, Mission Field Missouri, Building a Church Worker Support System in Your Congregation, and Board Management Best Practices.

The second session will include Training Your Church Elders, Teaching Biblical Stewardship Adaptively, and Shared Ministry: Multi-Church Parish Workers.

The third session will include Set Apart to Serve training, Bible and Catechism in Every Home, and Welcoming Guests and Visitors.

Participants may choose to attend one topic in each session. The topics will address the major emphases of the Missouri District 2025–28 Strategic Plan: Church Worker Recruitment and Retention, Discipleship in the Home, Mission Field: Missouri, and Leadership Development. These strategic emphases, adopted at the Missouri District Convention in June 2025, help us to focus on some of the real needs of the churches

while also being faithful to the callings that God has given to us. The topics also help to focus on perennial areas of concern for churches like stewardship and welcoming visitors.

Refreshments will be provided at each location. Fuller descriptions of speakers and topics and registration is now available at mo.lcms.org/e2-conferences— and walk-ins are always welcome. We hope to see you at an E² in your area!

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





Leading with the Good News

BY CHRISTIE HAMPTON

Crafting an Easter communications plan

A 16-year-old entered church, bringing her younger siblings along. Life had been heavy, her family situation uncertain, her hope thin. But a kind invitation from a school friend stayed with her. As the congregation began in song, her problems didn't disappear, but she heard a promise stronger than her circumstances: Christ is risen. And that promise was for her.

After the wonder of Christmas, our communities are ready to hear the rest of the story, during Easter, and all year, the Church proclaims Christ crucified and raised from the dead for the salvation of all who trust in Him. As leaders in Missouri congregations, schools, and organizations, thoughtful communication helps ensure this Good News is clearly heard, warmly received, and faithfully shared.

An effective Easter communications plan begins with mission clarity. Ask: *Who is God calling us to reach this Easter?* Neighbors who don't yet know Jesus, families connected to

your school, those who have drifted from worship, or community members carrying unseen burdens? Shape your message to speak hope into real lives, showing how your ministry serves and loves the community year-round.

Easter communication is not about advertising an event, but extending an invitation—welcoming people to encounter the risen Christ. Instead of beginning with dates and times, begin with a story. A brief testimony of hope, a moment of service, or a glimpse of Christ at work in your community helps people see themselves in the invitation.

Because people receive information in different ways, use multiple communication channels. Consider personal invitations through phone calls, texts, and emails; newsletters; website updates; worship announcements, slides, and sermon references. Or choose a few channels you can steward well and communicate consistently rather than trying to use every tool.

As Mark 16:15b (ESV) reminds us, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.” Today's public square is digital. People scroll when they are hurting, bored, or searching for meaning, support, or even God. While not everyone is called to lead on social media, leaders can support those who do by praying, sharing posts, and encouraging Christ-centered engagement.

Set a simple timeline to share stories, not just event details:

- *January: plan themes*
- *February: design & schedule*
- *March: increase communication*
- *April: celebrate Easter & after*

Above all, communicate with joy. Christ is risen! And Missouri needs to hear that hope through every faithful voice God has given His Church.

Christie Hampton is communications specialist at the LCMS Missouri District.

MISSOURI DISTRICT PRAYER RESOURCE

A guide for church leaders in 2026

BY REV. MARTY HASZ, LPC

This resource helps Missouri District leaders pray for workers, ministries, congregations, and Christian education, fostering spiritual unity and seeking God's guidance, provision, and growth of His kingdom. *Rev. Marty Hasz, LPC is director of church worker support at the LCMS Missouri District.*

PRAYER FOR WORKERS

"Gracious God, provide laborers for Your vineyard."

Lord, as we begin 2026, we pray for an increase in trained workers for congregations, schools, and ministries across the Missouri District. Many positions remain unfilled for years, and some ministries face overwhelming demands. Raise up qualified laborers to share the load and carry out Your mission faithfully. We entrust these petitions to Your loving care, trusting in Your faithfulness and provision.

PRAYER FOR SERVICE

"Let Your Spirit compel us not only to pray but also to answer Your call to serve."


Heavenly Father, Lord of the Harvest, You call us to serve in Your gospel ministry. Help us respond with hearts of generosity, encouragement, and faithfulness. Inspire us not only to pray but to answer Your call personally and support those who dedicate their lives to full-time ministry. Equip Your servants and bless their work so that Your kingdom may flourish among us and throughout the world.

PRAYER FOR CHURCH GROWTH

"Bring to Christian maturity those within our midst, that Your kingdom may grow among us and in this place."

Heavenly Father, strengthen Your church. Build healthy relationships, guide calls and ministries, and bless the proclamation of Your Word. Guard and bless our educational ministries so that, through Your Word and the gospel of Jesus Christ, Your people may grow in faith and faithfully proclaim Your saving work.

IN JESUS'
NAME
WE PRAY.
AMEN.



Upcoming events

2026

LCMS Missouri District

Learn more at mo.lcms.org/upcoming-events or call 314-590-6200.

Jan. 16, Feb. 27

MISSION GRANT: Notice of intent, submission deadlines

Jan. 23, June 6, Aug. 7

ADULT MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID TRAININGS: Virtual

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

E² CONFERENCES: Various locations

Feb. 6

MID-YEAR ADMINISTRATORS CONFERENCE

March 6–7

GO LEADERSHIP RETREAT

March 7

EARLY CHILDHOOD CONFERENCE

April 10–19

SHINE!

FUTURE EVENT DATES:

April 17–19: District Youth Gathering
April 28–29: Call Day services at our Seminaries
July 16–17: Summer Admin Conference
July 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)

