

February 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: Trinity Lutheran Church in Kearney, Mo. *Photo by: Rev. Peter Kirby*

FROM THE INTERIM DISTRICT PRESIDENT

Dear friends,

Jesus came to accomplish the work given by the Father.

“And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly” (Mark 8:31-32, ESV).

Having taught His disciples, Jesus went toward the place He would die. “When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51, ESV).

As Jesus went, He sent seventy-two others ahead of him to say, “The kingdom of God has come near to you.” Where Christ is, there is the reign of God.

“He went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem” (Luke 13:22, ESV).

On pilgrimage, Jesus taught about a feast yet to come and resurrection. He taught that many receive the kingdom of God. He would make a way.

“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 Lamb goes uncomplaining forth to accomplish the work given by the Father.

“And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem” (Luke 19:28, ESV).

Lord Jesus, You are my Redeemer. In You we have the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and the promise of resurrection. Lamb of God, have mercy +



Peace in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which reads "Craig D. Otto". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Interim District President Rev. Craig D. Otto

STEWARDSHIP &

BY REV. DR. WAYNE KNOLHOFF

RELATIONSHIPS

Charles Lane, in his book *Ask, Thank, Tell*, writes, “Stewardship has been kidnapped and is being held hostage by a sinister villain named ‘Paying the Bills.’” It’s true. For many Christians stewardship is all about money, but Biblical stewardship is so much more.

Biblical stewardship is a relational issue. God entrusts us with many relationships that we are to manage for His glory. The biblical doctrine of creation describes the relationships God established. We are stewards of our relationship with God, with each other, with ourselves, and with creation.



The first and most important relationship we manage is with God Himself. God established that relationship with us when He created us in His image. Because of sin, that relationship needed to be restored, and God did that in the person and work of Jesus Christ. We steward that relationship with God by how we manage our lives in regard to daily prayer, reading and studying Scripture, regular worship, etc.



We also manage the relationships we have with each other. God created us for relationships. We are designed to live in community—to relate to other human beings. We are to manage these relationships with concern, love, and care. Martin Luther is quoted as saying, “God doesn’t need your good works, but your neighbor does.” The good works that we do are a response to God’s love in Christ and are to be directed toward our neighbor, whether near or far.



Another relationship we manage is the relationship with ourselves. The May 4, 2024, issue of *The Lutheran Witness* included an article titled, “The Stewardship Wellness Wheel,” which stated, in part: “Living out our Baptism, as Luther advises, by daily renouncing the old self and embracing the new life in righteousness, represents the essence of true stewardship.” We are called to steward our physical, emotional, intellectual, and vocational well-being, all to glorify God.



Finally, we are called to manage our relationship with creation. The first stewardship tasks God gave humanity were to have dominion over His creation (Gen. 1:28) and to take care of and keep the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:15). That first great commission still stands. We are to care for creation as God’s representatives so that it flourishes as God intends it to flourish.

We are called to steward all the relationships God entrusts to our care. That includes our relationship with God, with others, with ourselves, and with creation. More information and Bible studies on these relationships can be found at Godsstewards.com.

Rev. Dr. Wayne Knolhoff is interim director of mission services at the LCMS Missouri District.

IT ONLY TAKES A SPARK

BY DCE PAM NUMMELA

“It only takes a spark to get a fire going” is the first line of a favorite camp song. God is blessing Missouri District disciples, sparking growth in faith daily, whatever the circumstances, for all kinds of families: couples, singles, and seniors.

What is the spark? In the past year, dozens of new Facilitators (church workers and lay leaders) gained training and resources in family discipleship to bring back to their churches. They left the training with an action plan that includes simple steps, easy “tweaks,” and the reminder that “it starts with me.”

In addition, Rev. Dr. Todd Biermann, executive director of the Concordia Center for the Family, leads “Talk and Pray” Zoom sessions for facilitators for encouragement, sharing experiences, and prayers for specific needs and for all who are seeking to grow as children of God in their homes daily.

Stories from the new Facilitators tell us that hundreds of people in their congregations have already benefited from those resources and training. Parents have stronger relationships with their children; husbands and wives are praying together, and families are more closely connected in faith. More Lutherans are prepared to face a secular culture that criticizes their faith.

Rev. Jarod Koenig (pictured below), senior pastor at Redeemer in Springfield, Mo., says about their congregation’s spark, “They see a need now for reaching children of the congregation and realize that traditional Sunday School isn’t working.”



“Our Wednesday midweek program reignited with a family discipleship focus. Families come together instead of just dropping off their kids. They share a meal together and do an activity that models at-home devotions. Then, parents meet together to discuss a book on parenting and implementing habits of faith in the home. We have had 8–10 families participating all fall, and 20+ kids every week.”

What was the spark? “All of this began this fall, after I was trained as a family discipleship facilitator,” said Pastor Koenig.

Spark your home and your congregations with Family Discipleship Facilitator Training with Concordia Center for the Family this year! In 2026, two training events are planned in Missouri. One is in Lee’s Summit, June 1–3. For detailed information, visit: concordiafamily.org.

The second is Family Discipleship Camp at Heit’s Point, Lincoln, June 15–19.

Connect with Heit’s Point at heitspointlutheran.org.

In addition, four other training events are happening in:

- Fort Wayne, Ind.
- Irvine, Calif.
- Rockledge, Fla.
- Milwaukee, Wis.

God bless you and those you love with the “spark” of God’s love in Jesus Christ!



Brewing

mission-minded relationships



BY CHRISTIE HAMPTON

On the third Tuesday of each month, a small but growing community gathers at Crave Coffeehouse and Reliant Church on the campus of Saint Louis University, where coffee, faith, and mission-minded conversation come together.

The initiative is part of Al1gn! St. Louis, a Missouri District mission partner, supporting mission efforts across the region for more than a decade. Founded by a group of lay leaders and pastors, Al1gn! was designed to “support, encourage and seek out mission opportunities in the St. Louis region,” according to Rev. David Lewis, pastor and mission leader at Saint Trinity Lutheran Church, St. Louis, Mo.

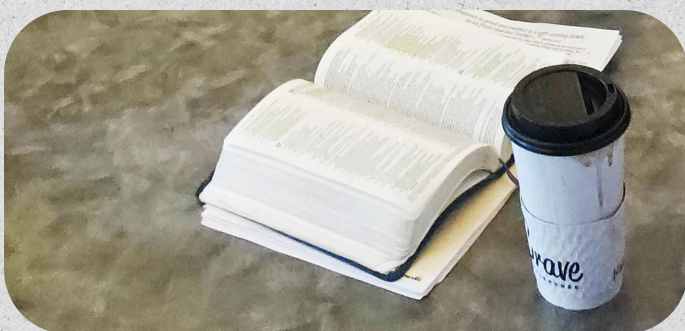
Each gathering draws young adults, multiethnic participants and both first- and second-generation immigrants to pray for St. Louis and its surrounding communities. This past month’s focus in January, included Unite4Worship, led by Rev. Brandon Boos, pastor of missions and discipleship development at Faith Oakville, Rev. Cyril Loum, pastor at Faith Oakville, and Rev. David Lewis. The effort brings young adults together for worship, music, prayer and conversation, cultivating discipleship and leadership.

Al1gn! also supports The Harbor Leadership Collective, led by Pam Dickerson, executive director of The Harbor Leadership Collective, which mentors young leaders for service in churches and ministries across the region.

Like a good brewed cup of coffee, the community nurtured by Al1gn! requires patience, care and the right mix of people. As Paul wrote in Romans 12:4-5 (ESV), “For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.” Al1gn! brings together different gifts and efforts, working together to serve God and the people of St. Louis.

Pictured below: Crave Coffeehouse and Reliant Church, St. Louis, Mo. (left), The Harbor Leadership Collective cohort, St. Louis, Mo. (right). Photos provided by: Rev. David Lewis

Christie Hampton is communications specialist at the LCMS Missouri District.





An act of kindness

BY CHRISTIE HAMPTON

After sleeping in a tent, car, and occasional hotel room when finances allowed, a single father finally turned the key to a place he could call home.

For him and his three children, the apartment marked a long-awaited turning point, but it was only the beginning of rebuilding a life after loss.

His story gives us a peek into Lutheran Urban Mission Agency (LUMA), where compassion often meets people at pivotal moments like this. At the end of 2025, LUMA Community Outreach Coordinator Kelsha James, a Kansas City native with experience in youth programming and community outreach, noticed a Facebook post from a widower seeking help. After his wife's passing, he had struggled to keep his family afloat, cycling through homelessness. Securing housing was a victory, but the apartment was empty, his cupboards bare, and his resources stretched thin.

Kelsha reached out immediately. An appointment was scheduled, and during their conversation, the father shared his story, the weight of grief, the responsibility of parenting alone, and his deep hope of providing stability for his children. LUMA responded with urgency and care. That same day, he received bags of groceries to stock his shelves and reassurance that he was not alone. A follow-up appointment was arranged at Flourish, a Kansas City furniture bank, where he could select essential household items to begin turning his apartment into a home.

Shopping together the next day, the father's relief was visible. Each item, dishes, bedding, basic necessities, represented more than material support. It was stress eased and hope renewed. What might seem like small acts, carried profound impact for a family ready to start again.

Stories like this reflect the heart of LUMA's mission: walking alongside neighbors with compassion that adapts to each unique need. No two situations are the same, but every person deserves to be met with respect, care, and love. At the center of this work is the love of Jesus, a love that serves without barriers, welcomes without judgment, and gives generously.

“When families come to us, we want them to feel seen. Sometimes hope starts with one small act of kindness,” said Kelsha.

As the year continues, stories like this remind us that compassion is not seasonal. God's gifts, mercy and the opportunity to serve, remain constant. In moments of rebuilding and renewal, LUMA bears witness to hope, one family, one story, one step forward at a time.

Christie Hampton is communications specialist at the LCMS Missouri District.

Investing with LCEF

The Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) provides faith-based investment options for LCMS members who want their savings to earn competitive interest while directly supporting congregations, schools and church workers. LCEF's mission is to start, sustain, and strengthen LCMS ministries/Investor dollars are used to make loans and provide financial services to those ministries, so returns are financial and mission-driven.

CORE PRODUCTS



All Access Account

A liquid, everyday account with tiered interest rates, daily interest accrual, online and mobile access and an optional Visa® debit card. It's designed for checking and savings style needs with no monthly maintenance fees and convenient electronic services such as bill pay, e-statements, and transfers.



Term Notes

Fixed- and floating-rate term notes offer higher yields for investors willing to lock funds for set terms (many up to five years). Interest options include periodic payouts or compounding.



IRAs

Traditional and Roth IRAs are available, often structured using term-note formats so retirement savings earn interest while supporting ministry. IRA-specific rules and minimums apply.



Health Savings Account (HSA)

For those with qualifying High Deductible Health Plans, LCEF's HSA offers tax-advantaged saving for medical costs, tiered interest rates, online access, and an optional debit card.



Church Worker Loan Pool (CWLP)

A mission-focused investment vehicle that funds affordable mortgages and loans for church workers. Investing in CWLP directly lowers borrowing costs for those serving in ministry.




Young Investor/Steward Accounts

Accounts designed to help families start children and young adults on a stewardship-focused savings path that benefits LCMS ministries.

Our website, lcef.org, has application forms, opportunities to open an account online, and interest rates and APYs. Most products include online account management via MyAccount and mobile access, and many offer debit cards for transaction convenience.

Your LCEF District Vice President (DVP) is

Mike Wadley

 314-885-6489

 mike.wadley@lcef.org



For questions or assistance contact your Missouri District representative, Mike Wadley, at 314-885-6489, or LCEF Customer Relations at 800 843 5233.

Investing with LCEF combines competitive savings options with the opportunity to support LCMS ministries through your financial decisions.

Shine!

BACK FOR SIXTH YEAR

Let's *SHINE!* for the sixth time, Missouri District! Registration is now open for our upcoming statewide servant event, April 10–19, 2026. Grab your family and friends, find a need in your community, and serve this spring with thousands across the state. Teams are free to wear outfits of their own choosing or purchase the 2026 *SHINE!* T-shirt at a special online store created just for this occasion. Head to mo.lcms.org/shine for all the details. Shine on, Missouri!

Upcoming events

2026

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

Feb. 27

MISSION GRANT: Submission deadline

Feb. 21, 28; March 7

E² CONFERENCES: Various locations

March 6–7

GO LEADERSHIP RETREAT

March 7

EARLY CHILDHOOD CONFERENCE

April 10–19: *SHINE!*
April 17–19: District Youth Gathering | Pastors Wives Retreat
April 28–29: Call Day services at our seminaries
June 6, Aug. 7: Adult Mental Health First Aid Trainings
July 16–17: Summer Admin Conference
July 18–23: LCMS Synod Convention
Sept. 18–19: New Teacher Orientation
Sept. 25–26: Servant Leadership Academy
Oct. 19–23: Professional Church Workers Conference
Oct. 25–28: Regional District Ed Exec Conference (MO Host)

