

March 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: Ryan Price, a member of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in St. Louis, Mo., stands in the Save-A-Lot parking lot on a roof torn from a home after a tornado struck the metro area May 16, 2025.

*Photo by: Leah Sieveking*

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# FROM THE INTERIM DISTRICT PRESIDENT

Dear friends,

I will speak of Jesus.

He taught sinners to call on the Father. “This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God” (John 5:18 ESV).

He spoke truth so faith might grasp it. “Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.’ So they picked up stones to throw at him” (John 8:58–59a ESV).

He said His voice is trustworthy like a shepherd’s. “I and the Father are one.’ The Jews picked up stones again to stone him” (John 10:30–31 ESV).

They said, “For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him’ ... So from that day on they made plans to put him to death” (John 11:47b–48a, 53 ESV).

Why did they seek all the more to kill him? Why did they pick up stones to throw at him? Why did they pick up stones again to stone him? Why did they make plans to put him to death?

Jesus said, “And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour ... And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.’ He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die” (John 12:27b, 32–33 ESV).

They sought not a Savior, and when given one, they crucified Him.

This, His relinquishment, was His greatest act of love.

See Him there on the cross +



Peace in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Craig D. Otto". The signature is stylized and fluid.

Interim District President Rev. Craig D. Otto

# STRENGTHENED FOR FAITHFUL LEADERSHIP

BY JOSH SWARTZ

When leaders gather with purpose, ministries grow stronger. That was evident as nearly 70 Lutheran school principals, treasurers, and business managers came together in Columbia for the Missouri District Mid-Administrators Conference.

Framed around Luke 14:28–30 and the theme *From Mission to Sustainability: Leading, Funding, and Growing Lutheran Schools*, the day focused on the essential work of aligning mission clarity with long-term sustainability. Participants engaged deeply in conversations around strategic alignment, financial health, [MOScholars](#), and mission advancement, which are all critical components for strengthening Lutheran schools in today's ministry landscape.

Throughout the conference, the spirit of collaboration was unmistakable. Leaders leaned into practical tools, thoughtful discussion, and shared encouragement, demonstrating once again the strength of our Missouri District network. Sessions highlighted not only the true cost and stewardship realities of operating schools, but also the growing opportunities to expand access for families through thoughtful planning and the strategic use of scholarship resources.

What was most encouraging, however, was the posture of the leaders in the room. These administrators continue to serve as true Champions of HOPE, planning with intentionality, leading with faith, and keeping the Gospel unmistakably at the center of their work.



C.F.W. Walther wisely reminded the Church that “next to the Church, the Christian school is the most important agency for building and sustaining the Kingdom.” His words continue to ring true across the Missouri District today.

The road ahead for Lutheran education requires clarity, courage, and collaboration. Thanks be to God for raising up leaders across our District who are faithfully stepping forward to serve the students, families, and communities entrusted to their care.

*Josh Swartz is director of schools at the LCMS Missouri District.  
Photos by: Leah Sieveking*

# District Youth Gathering Service



BY DCE CHRISTINA STACKLE

For 26 years, [Peace Lutheran Church](#) in St. Louis, Mo., has partnered with [Alaska Missions for Christ](#) in Anchorage, to support Gospel outreach in rural Alaska. One such community served by Alaska Missions for Christ is Hooper Bay, a remote village on the western coast of Alaska along the Bering Sea. Accessible primarily by air, Hooper Bay is the largest village with a population of about 1,200. Nearly 75 percent of the population is 18 or younger. In many households, children often care for younger children.

**Geographic isolation and high transportation costs make even basic necessities expensive and difficult to obtain. Yet the Gospel is proclaimed there faithfully.**

Each summer, the team from St. Louis focuses on providing two daily Vacation Bible School (VBS) sessions serving about 300 children, along with a daily women's Bible study and a teen study. In some years, when schedules permit, a men's Bible study is also offered. In addition to proclaiming Christ crucified and risen, the team brings tangible support: toothbrushes, toothpaste, soap, school supplies, ramen noodles, and blankets to help alleviate pressing physical needs.

## Last year: assembling for Alaska

At last year's [Missouri District Youth Gathering](#), students dedicated their service event time to assisting Alaska Missions for Christ by assembling craft packets for the VBS program. The Alaskan children created fingerprint crosses and Gospel bracelets, while District youth prepared bookmarks inscribed with Bible verses and prayers, reminding each child that he or she is a beloved child of God.

## This year: serving again

This year, gathering participants will once again serve by packaging supplies for washcloth sheep crafts, prayer boxes, butterfly projects, and handmade soap gifts for each child. Through these hands-on projects, students will gain a clearer understanding of the body of Christ at work in places far removed from their own communities.

Congregations and individuals who wish to donate daily-need supplies or are interested in joining the team are encouraged to contact Jackie Hoeflerin, member at Peace Lutheran Church, by calling the church office at 314-892-5610. Through prayer and service, we join together in bringing Christ's love to Hooper Bay, Alaska.

*Christina Stackle is director of Christian education at Peace Lutheran Church, St. Louis, Mo.*

HOOPER BAY



*Pictured: New CFNA location. Photo by: Dan Hampton*

# SERVING THE NATIONS

BY CHRISTIE HAMPTON

By God's grace, [Christian Friends of New Americans](#) (CFNA) has entered an exciting new chapter of ministry in St. Louis. In 2025, CFNA moved into a former bank building at 5515 S. Grand Blvd., nearly four times the size of its previous space. This new Peace Center is already opening new opportunities to serve refugee families in Jesus' name.

**“This move has not simply given us more square footage, ” said Rev. Stanish Stanley, executive director of CFNA. “It has given us new possibilities to grow ministry, serve needs, and bless more people, while deepening the Church’s engagement in mission among New Americans.”**

## **SOCCER MINISTRY**

One of CFNA's recent ministry initiatives, started with the support of a Missouri District grant, is its soccer ministry, renewed with the return of Rev. Antonio “Tony” Boos, CFNA's first missionary in 2002. Refugee children gather weekly to build skills, form friendships, and participate in short devotions and prayer. For some, like 13-year-old Atallah from Afghanistan, the soccer field became more than a place to play. Through patient volunteers and consistent relationships, he began to experience the love of Jesus in action.

When colder weather paused the outdoor season, [Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church](#) in Oakville, Mo., partnered with CFNA to install a futsal court in the new building's

lower-level recreation area. This generous gift allows the soccer ministry to continue year-round, strengthening relationships and providing ongoing opportunities for Gospel witness.

## **TUTORING, CONGREGATIONAL PARTNERSHIP**

The Peace Center is a hub for service. CFNA's After School Tutoring program serves 75 refugee students, including Atallah and other children from Afghanistan, along with children from Congo, Rwanda, Eritrea, Haiti, Sudan, and Nepal. The program has benefited from upgraded technology, improved internet connectivity, and expanded classroom space in the new facility.

Other Missouri District congregations, such as [Epiphany Lutheran Church](#) in St. Louis, Mo., have hosted events, helping CFNA provide tutoring, mentorship, and meaningful community-building experiences.

## **A PLACE FOR MISSION**

“CFNA remains deeply thankful for the LCMS Missouri District's partnership and support in this mission journey among 'the nations' here in St. Louis,” said Stanley. “The mission grant has strengthened our ability to engage refugee children through meaningful relationships, physical activity, academic support, and Gospel-centered care. Thank you for walking alongside CFNA in this mission to welcome, serve, and share Christ's love with the stranger in our midst.”

*Christie Hampton is communications specialist at the LCMS Missouri District.*

# Recruitment and retention



BY REV. PETER KIRBY

One of our biggest challenges in ministry and one of our Missouri District priorities since 2022 has been the recruitment and retention of Lutheran church workers. The 2019 LCMS convention passed a resolution launching Set Apart to Serve (SAS), to promote church work careers and intentionally develop resources and training that would help parents, grandparents, pastors, teachers, and youth workers to talk with children and youth about the value of church work and direct them toward church work as a career.

One of the recent SAS initiatives has focused on recruiting second-career Lutheran teachers from LCMS congregations, as well as non-LCMS teachers currently working in public schools. Media campaigns were conducted in the Missouri District as a pilot project from December 2025 through February 2026. These campaigns generated 428 leads, connecting prospective candidates with the Missouri District job board and Lutheran schools. Non-rostered teachers currently serving in LCMS schools are encouraged to complete LCMS colloquy program.

The Missouri District also maintains a job/position board on the District website under “Schools” that lists open positions for Lutheran school administrators, teachers, directors of Christian education, directors of parish music and other roles.

**If you know candidates who may be open to careers in Lutheran ministry or to a change in ministry setting, encourage them to check out the job board for opportunities. [Click here](#) >>>**

There are also colloquy opportunities for pastors from other denominations to enter service in the LCMS. The first vice president of Synod guides workers through the colloquy process and provides information on the steps needed for each individual case. The Specific Ministry Pastor program also provides a pathway for experienced laymen who have been active in church leadership and theological study to pursue ministry while maintaining their jobs and family and community connections.

The need for church workers today is great, and God continues to provide creative pathways for Lutherans to pursue their passions and serve the Lord in their vocations.

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

*Pictured: Encourage and Equip (E<sup>2</sup>) participants. Photos by: Pam Nummela*



# Preparing pastors for local emergencies

BY REV. MARTY HASZ, LPC



Here are the key points from the Feb. 4 meeting preparing Missouri District pastors for disaster response through the LERT (Local Emergency Response Team) program:

## Disaster response 2025 statistics:

- The state saw **120 tornadoes**.
- Volunteers contributed more than **3,000 hours**.
- At Concordia Seminary, **185 trees** were removed.

*Pictured above: Kris Schuldt (left), disaster response coordinator for the Missouri District LERT, and Ricky Gross (right), senior chainsaw instructor, walking to meet Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, leadership the morning after a tornado struck May 16, 2025. Photo by: Christie Hampton*

## LERT program overview

The LERT program trains volunteers for disaster response and recovery and provides long-term support during rebuilding. It works alongside organizations such as the Red Cross and Samaritan's Purse, serving entire communities. About **75%** of those assisted are non-Lutherans.

## Did you know LERT supports year-round Missions of Mercy?

They build wheelchair ramps, make home repairs, and attract skilled volunteers, while also providing pastoral support such as home visits and preaching assistance during difficult times.

Save & Share

## Preparedness planning

- ✓ Develop a disaster preparedness plan for family and congregation(s), focusing on continuity of ministry, clear communication and succession planning.
- ✓ Present the plan to the congregation president(s) and church council(s).
- ✓ Encourage church members to attend LERT training sessions.
- ✓ Build relationships with local emergency agencies.

## Looking for more information?

Support resources can guide your preparedness efforts. Learn more: [mo.lcms.org/disaster-response](https://mo.lcms.org/disaster-response)

If you're dealing with a natural disaster, contact the Missouri District Disaster Response Coordinator:  
Kris Schuldt  
314-971-5747  
[pitchatent@centurytel.net](mailto:pitchatent@centurytel.net)

More questions? Contact Director of Church Worker Support Rev. Marty Hasz, LPC at 314-590-6204 or [marty.hasz@mo.lcms.org](mailto:marty.hasz@mo.lcms.org).

# MAKE PLANS TO



It's been great to see teams register for *SHINE!*—our statewide servant event happening April 10–19, 2026. Is your group on the list? Head to [mo.lcms.org/shine](https://mo.lcms.org/shine) to make it official. While there's still plenty of time to register a team, the clock is now ticking for ordering the official servant event t-shirt. Final day for those orders is Monday, March 23. Looking forward to a very bright spring in our state. Shine on, Missouri District!



## Upcoming events

2026

Learn more at [mo.lcms.org/upcoming-events](https://mo.lcms.org/upcoming-events) or call 314-590-6200.

April 10–19

*SHINE!*

April 17–19

DISTRICT YOUTH GATHERING

April 17–19

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  
Oct. 9: Curriculum Writers Workshop  
Oct. 19–23: Professional Church Workers Conference  
Oct. 25–28: Regional District Ed Exec Conference (MO Host)

