

April 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 (from left): Paisley Knowles, Ashlynn Knowles, and Kamden Newland in the Kirksville R-III Homecoming Parade Oct. 10, 2025.
Photo provided by: Faith Lutheran School, Kirksville, Mo.

FROM THE INTERIM DISTRICT PRESIDENT

Dear friends,

I will speak of Jesus whose body lay dead three days.

His disciples grieved Friday at the crucifixion, Saturday while He's entombed, and Sunday hearing His body is gone. Then an angel revealed, "He is not here, for he has risen" (Matt. 28:6 ESV). Life on the third day is the sign.

Remember the one God sent to Ninevah? "And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights" (Jonah 1:17 ESV).

Jesus said Jonah points to Himself: "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:39b-40 ESV).

Jesus told the disciples it would happen: "The Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day" (Matt. 20:18b-19 ESV).

When Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the tomb, they heard the Sunday news: "He is not here, for he has risen, as he said" (Matt. 28:6a ESV). Then Jesus met them and greeted them.

That same evening the disciples would see Jesus. Like Jonah, He had been in the heart of the earth three days. Now He stands among them, a living Jonah.

He was the fulfillment of their wildest hopes +



Peace in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Craig D. Otto".

Interim District President Rev. Craig D. Otto

Early Childhood Conference Encourages Educators with Message “Jesus Is Here!”

BY JOSH SWARTZ

Early childhood educators from across the Missouri and Kansas districts gathered March 7 at Trinity Lutheran School in Jefferson City for the 2026 Missouri District Spring Early Childhood Conference. With nearly 100 participants in attendance, the day provided meaningful professional learning, encouragement, and connection for those serving young children and their families.

Centered on the theme “Jesus Is Here,” drawn from Matt. 28:20, the conference reminded educators that Christ is present in our classrooms as we get to engage and pour Jesus into our little learners each day.

The conference kicked off with an uplifting opening led by Jennie Williamson of AriSon, who immediately engaged participants through music and movement while reminding them of the deeper purpose behind their work. With joy and encouragement, she helped educators reconnect with the calling God has placed on their lives as they serve and nurture young children.

The conference keynote followed with Dr. Julian Petzold of Lion Safety Consulting, who shared

practical guidance focused on school safety, awareness, and proactive protection. His insights provided helpful strategies for educators and leaders seeking to strengthen safe learning environments for the children entrusted to their care.

Throughout the day, participants attended breakout sessions covering a variety of relevant and practical topics, including speech and language development through play, “serve and return” communication, integrating mathematics into early childhood classrooms, and strategies for supporting positive behavior. Williamson also led additional sessions demonstrating how music can support routines, transitions, and emotional development in early childhood settings.

The conference concluded with Williamson leading participants in a joyful and encouraging closing, sending educators back to their

ministries reminded of the important role they play in the lives of young learners.

A special thank you goes to Trinity Lutheran School in Jefferson City for graciously hosting this year’s conference and welcoming educators from across both districts.

For those who attended, the day was a reminder that Christ is present in the important work of early childhood education. For those unable to attend this year, the Missouri District Early Childhood Spring Conference is always held annually on the first Saturday in March, offering another opportunity to gather, grow, and be encouraged in the shared calling of serving young children.

Josh Swartz is director of schools at the LCMS Missouri District. Photos provided by: Josh Swartz





SUPPORT LUTHERAN EDUCATION

Direct your tax dollars to MOScholars

Use your tax dollars to provide scholarships for students attending Lutheran schools through the MOScholars tax credit program! Millions of dollars have been awarded by the Missouri District since the program began in 2022. Participation is easy and takes just minutes to complete.

BEGIN THE PROCESS TODAY

- Visit mo.lcms.org/mo-scholars to reserve your tax credits.
- Complete the prompts and select "The Missouri District" for the EAO.
- Mail your check or submit payment electronically using the link on our website.



If you mail your check, please include your confirmation number in the memo line. Make the check payable to "Missouri District LCMS" and send it to:

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

QUESTIONS?

Contact Leah Sieveking
Director of Mission Advancement
LCMS Missouri District

314-590-6211
leah.sieveking@mo.lcms.org

"With minimal effort and no additional cost, MOScholars is a blessing for taxpayers, students, families, and LCMS schools in Missouri. Thank you for your participation!"

Exciting things are happening at schools in Missouri!

The Campus Ministry Network of the Missouri District is comprised of ministry leaders from 16 colleges and universities throughout the state. Since 2019, the network has served to strengthen ministry efforts and equip others to reach college students with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. A key component of this group is the GO Leadership Retreat—held each spring at Campus Lutheran in Columbia for students to be emboldened in sharing their faith with others.

Participation numbers are up this academic year, too! Check out some highlights from several district-supported sites:

Missouri State University

Springfield

Prayer & Praise—the Tuesday evening meal and Bible study at the Lutheran Student Center—continues to serve as the anchor activity for the ministry. The group even helped host a welcome event for all new MSU students in January.

Southeast Missouri State University

Cape Girardeau

Hope Lutheran Ministries has a new director! Small group Bible studies have been added to the regular routine. The ministry is excited to share that a coffee shop that will operate from the student center, providing a faith-based hangout place for the community.

University of Missouri

Columbia

Campus Lutheran serves as the host congregation for this student group at Mizzou. This academic year, the Wednesday evening Bible study had to move into a larger space to accommodate the growing group. There have already been two baptisms—including one international student.

University of Central Missouri

Warrensburg

With a focus in recent years on international student outreach, the Lutheran Student Center now has attendees from all around the world. The group looks out for the concerns of all—even making recipes from select countries to give a boost to homesick students.

We're also blessed to support **International Student Ministry—St. Louis, College of the Ozarks—Point Lookout**, and **Northwest Missouri State University—Maryville**.

*Our sincerest thanks to the many supporters of the Missouri District who have championed campus ministry efforts through financial gifts and prayers. You are a source of encouragement to these students! These men and women are growing as disciples of Jesus Christ while serving as bold witnesses to their peers on campus. Today we invite you to continue walking with them. **Would you please prayerfully consider making a gift to the campus ministry efforts of the Missouri District?***

This form of encouragement is one with an eternal impact, as students learn more about who they are in Christ and, in turn, tell others about Him. Thank you for your generous support!



WAYS TO GIVE

Visit mo.lcms.org/donate, scan the QR code, or mail a check to:

Missouri District LCMS, 660 Mason Ridge Center Dr., Suite 100
St. Louis, MO 63141

GO LEADERSHIP RETREAT

Intentional Leaders

BY REV. PETER KIRBY



The annual GO Leadership Retreat was held March 6–7 at Campus Lutheran Church in Columbia, Mo. The retreat theme was “Set Your Faith in Motion,” and focused on vocation and Christian leadership. This year’s retreat was designed to help college students connect their faith to their future, grow as authentic disciples in today’s culture, and mentor others with confidence and compassion.

Primary speaker was Pamela Dickerson, executive director of The Harbor Leadership Collective in St. Louis, who has spent more than 25 years guiding young people to live out their faith with purpose and authenticity. As a seasoned bridge ministry leader, mentor, and wife of a pastor, she brings wisdom, energy, and practical insight to integrating faith with daily life. She equips college students to connect their identity in Christ to meaningful action, build authentic relationships, and grow as intentional leaders who make a difference in the world.

Dickerson led the participants through three sessions:

- 1 – “I See in You”
- 2 – “Loved and Sent”
- 3 – “Raised Up to Be Sent”

Forty-one students attended from the following schools:

- **Concordia University Wisconsin**
Mequon, Wisconsin
- **Maryville University**
St. Louis, Missouri
- **Moberly Area Community College**
Moberly, Missouri
- **Missouri State University**
Springfield, Missouri
- **Missouri University of Science and Technology**, Rolla, Missouri
- **Northwest Missouri State University**
Maryville, Missouri
- **Southern Illinois University**
Edwardsville, Illinois
- **Truman State University**
Kirksville, Missouri
- **University of Central Missouri**
Warrensburg, Missouri
- **University of Missouri**
Columbia, Missouri

Rev. James Lanning, pastor at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Centralia, led a Friday worship service centered on the encounter between Jesus and the woman at the well in John 4. Participants were invited to reflect on how encountering Jesus reshapes identity and compels ordinary people to share their story. During Saturday morning worship, Rev. Dr. Kent Pierce, pastor at Campus Lutheran Church in Columbia, focused on Jesus’ interaction with Zacchaeus, emphasizing Christ’s intentional pursuit and grace. Despite being judged and overlooked, Zacchaeus was seen and called by name, leading to a powerful transformation marked by repentance, generosity, and restored relationships.

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

Photo provided by: Rev. Dr. Kent Pierce

A Mission Field in Our Schools

One of the most effective methods of outreach in the The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) historically has been through schools. The earliest German Lutheran immigrants to the United States brought a deep conviction that every congregation should have a school. Education was inseparable from catechesis and faith formation, and schools preserved both doctrine and culture. Because of cultural familiarity and academic rigor, this created a new pathway for outreach, as early schools drew in unchurched immigrant families, creating a connection to the church through their children’s education.

This method of outreach is still a strength of our ministry today. Beyond grade schools, many congregations also have early childhood centers that provide opportunities to reach the unchurched. In my interactions with early childhood centers, it is not uncommon for less than 10% of families of enrolled children to be affiliated with any Christian church. That serves as an incredible opportunity for our dedicated church workers to introduce Jesus to entire families.

Our grade schools also serve as a gateway to faith, with many of our District congregations baptizing whole families as the children learn about and share the message of the Gospel with their parents. It is exciting to see how impactful our schools can be at reaching the lost with a message of hope, love, and salvation.

As a former LCMS school board member, I am thankful for the work of those who have been called to reach the students and families at our Lutheran schools. As a representative of Lutheran Church Extension Fund, I am proud of the work our organization does to support the mission of our schools.

From our youngest investors to large LCMS institutions that trust us with their investments, your partnership allows us to fruitfully walk alongside schools, big and small. Together, we are nurturing the next generation of Lutherans and empowering the future leaders of our church. Praise be to God for the opportunities before us to reach so many through this powerful missional outreach effort.

Your LCEF District Vice President (DVP) is

Mike Wadley

314-885-6489

mike.wadley@lcef.org



HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR

Scholarship Opportunity

High school seniors who have a Young Investors StewardAccount® with Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) are eligible to apply for the Take Heart Scholarship. Answer this question, and you could receive up to \$3,000:

Other than Jesus, which person in the Bible would you love to talk with?



TAKE HEART
SCHOLARSHIP

- Recipients awarded up to \$3,000
- Apply by May 1, 2026
- Visit lcef.org/scholarship



LUTHERAN CHURCH
EXTENSION FUND

Synod Convention July 2026



Synod Convention
July 18–23, 2026
Phoenix Convention
Center, Phoenix, AZ

Go to the
[District website Synod Convention page](#)
to see upcoming
key dates.

Upcoming events

2026

Learn more at 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
Aug. 18: Circuit Visitor Training
Aug. 21: New Church Worker Orientation
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)

