

# The VOICE

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The Missouri District's mission is to serve and encourage congregations to fulfill the Great Commission and to promote unity of the true faith. Pictured above: During their SHINE! service Sunday, April 19, members of Trinity Lutheran Church in Springfield, Mo., assist a neighbor with yard work, including the removal of an unused pergola.

Photo by: Vicar Noah Oloff

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# FROM THE PRESIDENT

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Dear friends,

Baptism is not a past event but a present reality in the life of a Christian. The same can be said of Easter. It is not just one day that moves around on the church's calendar, but the confidence of every Christian that because Christ has risen from the dead, so shall we. The white paraments remind us that Easter continues as the Gospel readings recount His resurrection appearances. The pastor declares, "Christ is risen!" The congregation joyfully responds, "He is risen indeed! Alleluia!" This responsory is not confined to Easter Sunday but is spoken throughout the season and especially at the graveside for the funeral of a Christian. As the Pascal candle is lit throughout this season, we are reminded that Jesus appeared to his disciples on a number of occasions before his ascension. Another way that this is taught is that the pastor leads confession and absolution from the baptismal font. It serves as a reminder that the forgiveness we receive was won for us on the cross and the power of the Christian life was achieved by our Lord's resurrection.

Christ's Resurrection is not limited to one day but is the hope and consolation of every day. We are an Easter people! This certainty gives confidence for every Christian facing trial or temptation and to every congregation that endures suffering. When the pastor distributes Christ's body and blood, the people receive his lasting testament that he is with them always. What a joy to receive Christ's assurance that we do not face the challenges of this life alone. Thanks be to God that he is truly with us.

Easter is not a Sunday or even a season but the source of the ultimate confidence that we have as Christians. We live each day looking forward to our Lord's coming again. This is the hope that we share and the message that we proclaim. May Christ's resurrection fill your hearts with joy as you face life's challenges and as you serve the living Lord.



Peace in Christ,

*R. Lee Hagan*

Rev. Dr. R. Lee Hagan  
President

# CELEBRATING CALL DAY SERVICES

BY CHRISTIE HAMPTON

The 2026 Call Day events at our seminaries April 28–29 were filled with joy and celebration as seminarians from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Mo., and Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Ind., received their pastoral and diaconal ministry placements, as well as vicarage and internship assignments. This milestone marks a significant step in their journey to serve congregations and ministries within The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). Please continue to pray for these men and women.

If you want to watch the livestreams, recordings of the services are available online:

- [Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo. \(CSL\)](#)
- [Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind. \(CTSFW\)](#)

CSL SEMINARIANS



CTSFW SEMINARIAN



## CALLS INTO THE PASTORAL MINISTRY



**Peyton Holland**  
Sole Pastor  
Holy Cross Lutheran Church  
Ste. Genevieve, Mo.



**Ryan Pfendler**  
Associate Pastor  
Messiah Lutheran Church  
Weldon Spring, Mo.



**Jack Engelder**  
Associate Pastor  
Redeemer Lutheran Church  
Nixa, Mo.

## CALL INTO THE DIACONAL MINISTRY



**Abigail Reynolds**  
Deaconess  
Peace Lutheran Church  
St. Louis, Mo.



*Pictured from left: Abigail and August Reynolds; Hayleigh and Peyton Holland; Ryan Pfendler; President Rev. Dr. R. Lee and Jill Hagan.*



*Pictured from left: Chair of the Redeemer Lutheran Church Board of Elders Russell Hawk; Associate pastor at Redeemer Lutheran Church, Springfield Campus Rev. Stephen Moser; Third Vice President of the Missouri District Rev. Samuel Powell; and Jack and Savannah Engelder.*

## VICARAGES



**Ethan Bruhn**  
Vicar  
St. Paul Lutheran Church  
Saint Joseph, Mo.



**Daniel Hampton**  
Vicar  
New Beginnings Lutheran Church  
Pacific, Mo.



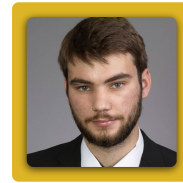
**Stephen Christian**  
Vicar  
Lutheran Church of the Resurrection  
St. Louis, Mo.



**Kurtis Hankemeier**  
Vicar  
Immanuel Lutheran Church  
St. Charles, Mo.



**David Danzeisen**  
Vicar  
Village Lutheran Church  
St. Louis, Mo.



**Ambrose Shaltanis**  
Vicar  
Trinity Lutheran Church  
Springfield, Mo.



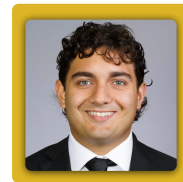
**Joshua Fields**  
Vicar  
Hanover Lutheran Church  
Cape Girardeau, Mo.



**Lamar Stewart**  
Vicar  
Immanuel Lutheran Church  
Olivette, Mo.



**Jeffery Goetz**  
Vicar  
Our Savior Lutheran Church  
St. Charles, Mo.

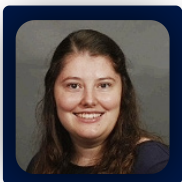


**Alexander Uttley**  
Vicar  
Chapel of the Cross Lutheran Church  
St. Peters, Mo.



**Patrick Hamilton**  
Vicar  
Bethlehem Lutheran Church—All Nations  
University City, Mo.

## DEACONESS INTERNSHIPS



**Ashley Lehr**  
Deaconess Intern  
LCMS Office of International Mission  
St. Louis, Mo.



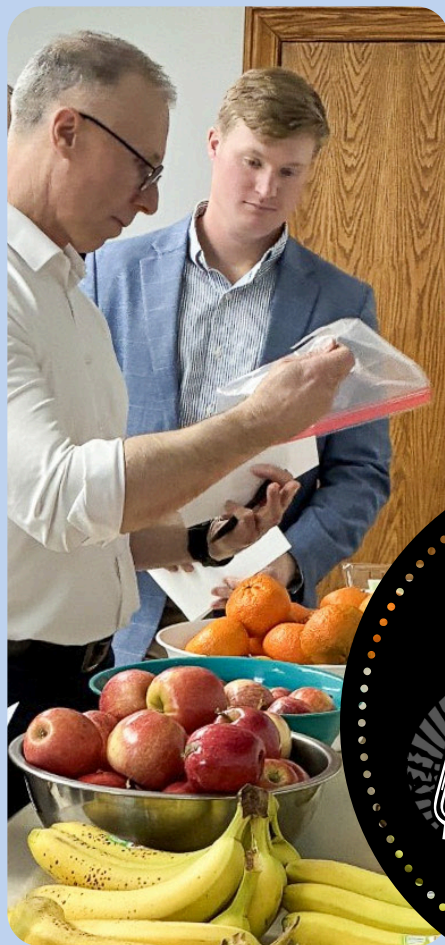
**Cathy Newman**  
Deaconess Intern  
Lutheran Senior Services - EverTrue  
St. Louis, Mo.



**Virginia Schweigert**  
Deaconess Intern  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
Arnold, Mo.

# MISSOURI SHINES FOR SIXTH TIME

Thousands of men, women, and children headed out into their communities and shined God's light throughout the Missouri District this spring! Our annual statewide servant event—*SHINE!*—was held April 10–19, though groups were happily serving well before and after this timeframe. “Even now in our sixth year of hosting this initiative, it's clear the joy in loving others and being a witness for Jesus Christ remains strong in Missouri,” shares Leah Sieveking, director of advancement for the District. Selected projects ranged from cleaning and repairing buildings, maintaining grounds, collecting and preparing food, visiting and singing with the homebound, caring for animals, and so much more.



“It's fun, and it's a great way to share God's light with people who need it,” says Brenda, a six-time group leader from Redeemer Lutheran Church in Rolla. Her crew filled bags with fruit and added handwritten notes of encouragement inside. In preparation, the congregation was asked to spend weeks thinking about who they would give these to and then invite them to worship.

While collecting trash along the roads near their church, a team from Redeemer Lutheran Church in Springfield was there to assist in helping after witnessing a vehicle crash. “We do a little bit and help a lot,” said one member of the team, highlighting how God may call us to serve Him in ways we never planned for.

When asked if he had any words of encouragement for those wondering how to get started in serving their communities, John from St. Paul Lutheran Church in Union got right to the point, “Just get out there and do it.” We thank God for all the groups that served this year and we look forward to shining again in April of 2027. Shine on, Missouri District!

# STRENGTHENING MINISTRY SUPPORT DURING MENTAL HEALTH MONTH

BY REV. MARTY HASZ, LPC

Recently, Missouri District resources on spring storm readiness for pastors—including an [introductory video](#) and an upcoming [Spring Storm Readiness Zoom](#)—highlight the importance of being prepared rather than reactive. While focused on seasonal weather preparedness, the broader theme also speaks to life and ministry: the value of readiness, awareness, and steady support when difficulties arise.

Missouri District Mental Health Ministry Month for May 2026 also calls attention to evolving challenges in ministry, including rising costs, the growing role of artificial intelligence in church work, and the urgent need to engage the next generation in congregational life. These pressures affect both professional church workers and volunteers across the district.

## Here are a few ideas as prompts for support and care:

- Build support routines by linking care to weekly staff or family devotions.
- Strengthen care systems by incorporating self-care practices, [Concordia Plans resources \(video how to access\)](#), preventative care, wellness leadership, [annual suicide prevention training](#), and ongoing mental health awareness.
- Prioritize co-worker fellowship, continuing education, and participation in events such as the fall [Missouri District Professional Church Workers Conference](#) in Osage Beach, Mo.

A separate, year-round resource is “988,” the National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. By calling or texting 988, individuals are connected with trained crisis counselors who provide immediate emotional support, listen without judgment, and help connect callers to local mental health resources.

Because of the high calling of public ministry, workers often face sustained public pressure. Stress can build over time, leading to cynicism, frustration, or withdrawal if left unaddressed. Ministry today can also involve unexpected public observation or recording, and many congregations rely on volunteers or newly called workers without sufficient onboarding or ongoing support.

Support is not optional; *it is essential*. Ministry workers are encouraged to develop intentional support networks and advocate for systems that provide consistent, long-term care.

As a reminder, “Don’t be scared. Be prepared.” While often used for weather emergencies, it also applies to the storms of ministry life. Daily grounding in God’s Word remains foundational. In Christ’s resurrection, God’s care is present now and for eternity, strengthening His people for daily life and service.



## Adult Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Virtual Training June 6, 2026

Our next training is scheduled 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. Saturday, June 6, 2026. Please [register](#) yourself and/or members of your staff for this training by May 26. Space is limited! Questions? Contact Director of Church Worker Support, Rev. Marty Hasz, LPC, at [marty.hasz@mo.lcms.org](mailto:marty.hasz@mo.lcms.org).

*Rev. Marty Hasz, LPC, is the director of church worker support at the LCMS Missouri District.*

# PLANTING A CHRIST-CENTERED HOME

BY CHRISTIE HAMPTON



*Pictured from left: Vicar Jon Christopher and Pastor Dixon Gbeanquoi, March 31, 2026, at All Nations Church during their first worship service together.*

**“After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands” (Rev. 7:9, ESV).**

Pastor Dixon Gbeanquoi serves in church planting alongside his wife, Christiana, and their two children, Milcah and Uri. A Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) student at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, he previously served as a missionary in Tanzania with Global Lutheran Outreach. He recently spoke about a new church plant in north St. Louis.

## **What inspired you to start this mission?**

Through prayer and research, I learned there are thousands of African immigrants in the area who are unfamiliar with worship practices in the United States and are not drawn to established churches. This mission seeks to create a church community where they can hear God’s Word, grow in understanding Lutheran worship, and participate comfortably embodying the distinctly African qualities, fostering hope and inspiration.

## **Why partner with All Nations?**

Our ministry began in our home, welcoming African students from Ghana, South Sudan, and Kenya. As interest grew beyond students, I connected with District leaders to explore opportunities for expansion. Finding space in north county was tough, but we were given the opportunity to work with Ebenezer Lutheran Church in Baden. We took that offer and even did a joint service with them, but sadly, many of our members found the distance difficult. We decided to split the group, and some of us met at the hall provided by Christian Friends of New Americans (CFNA). One day, I received a call from Pastor Chris Knepper about a potential job opportunity for my wife at their childcare center. After meeting the team at Bethlehem Lutheran Church, we were introduced to All Nations. With shared vision and a strong location, partnership became the best path forward.

## **What unique spiritual, cultural, or social needs do African immigrants bring, and how do you foster unity?**

African immigrants often bring rich spiritual vitality and a strong sense of community. The church is seen as an extended family. True unity cannot be built on culture, personality, or preferences – it must be rooted in a shared identity. Christ must be seen as the center; cultures gather around Him. Unity becomes a powerful testimony that the Gospel reconciles not only individuals but also peoples.

## **Now that you’ve had your first services with All Nations, what are your hopes moving forward?**

Our first service showed promise, we see significant growth potential, especially given All Nations’ location at the center of African communities and students. We pray this ministry will reach African communities across Missouri, not just in St. Louis.

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



## YOUTH CONNECT AT "RAISED UP!"

Missouri youth reflected on the District Youth Gathering (DYG) "Raised Up!" event, sharing that the service project showed "the body of Christ at work," while breakout sessions helped them "find something that relates to me." Participants described the weekend as "energizing and fun," highlighting engaging, Scripture-centered sessions led by AJ Vega. As participants reflected on what they hold up or what weighs them down, they heard a shared message: "Jesus says that I belong." *Pictured from left, counterclockwise: DCE AJ Vega, featured speaker; speaking to youth April 17-19 at Cross Pointe Camp & Retreat Center in Rocky Mount; DYG leaders.*



# UPCOMING EVENTS

2026

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

June 6, Aug. 7

ADULT MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID TRAININGS

July 16-17

SUMMER ADMINISTRATORS CONFERENCE

July 18-23

LCMS SYNOD CONVENTION

**Oct. 19-23**

Professional Church Workers Conference  
Margaritaville, Osage Beach, MO

**Oct. 25-28**

Regional District Education Executive Conference  
Missouri Hosting  
Lake Ozark, MO

