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The VOICE

FEATURES

- 1 FROM THE PRESIDENT
- 2 INVESTING IN TOMORROW'S
TEACHERS & PREACHERS
- 3 EVERY PIECE
FOR HIS PURPOSE
- 4 MOSCHOLARS TO MORE
THAN DOUBLE SUPPORT
- 5 IMPACT OF MISSION GRANTS
- 6 BLOOM WHERE
YOU ARE PLANTED
- 7 UPCOMING EVENTS

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: Guests gathered for the official open house, March 13, celebrating the new partnership between Hope Lutheran Ministries and Grace Coffee + Cafe in Cape Girardeau, Mo. The event highlighted the newly renovated student ministry space, designed for Southeast Missouri State University students and the surrounding community.

Photo by: Doug Raddemann, campus missionary at Hope Lutheran Ministries in Cape Girardeau, Mo.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear friends,

The “Today” show recently featured a segment on how Generation Z is returning to church. While the focus of the feature was on the Roman Catholic Church, the program reported that there is a similar movement going on across denominational lines. The Archbishop of New York was interviewed, and he noted that this generation is seeking community and truth.

Our churches have what the world needs and what people need in their lives. The television segment was encouraging, because it offered hope for reaching this generation of young people. However, our congregations do not try to reach one generation or another because it makes for good TV. We recognize that the church exists to bring healing to broken and hurting people because our Lord commands it. We see all of the problems in our world today. The church has always been committed to being a faithful and loving community founded on the truth of God's Word. The Acts of the Apostles describes how the church lives out this two-fold focus of Christ-centered community and the centrality of the Word of God.

This doesn't mean that 300 young adults will meet for pizza and then march into one of our churches, as was featured in the television segment. We simply devote ourselves to God's Word, to the Lord's Supper and to corporate prayer, the signs of Christian community. This devotion produces glad and sincere hearts among those who share in it, and we are confident that the Lord gives the growth, just as he did in the Book of Acts.

May our congregations be known for this type of devotion and not for infighting and division. By God's grace and strength, may we be known as congregations that are committed to the Word of God and known for our love and concern for one another. May God grant it for Jesus' sake!



Peace in Christ,

R. Lee Hagan

Rev. Dr. R. Lee Hagan
President

Investing in TOMORROW'S Teachers & Preachers

BY JOSH SWARTZ

Where will the next generation of Lutheran teachers and pastors come from over the next decade? Who will be teaching our children, proclaiming God's Word, and serving Christ's church in the years ahead?

That answer depends, in part, on the investments we make today.

One of the greatest blessings entrusted to the church is the responsibility of preparing the next generation of church workers. As Lutheran schools and congregations continue to face growing needs for pastors, teachers, Directors of Christian Education (DCEs), Directors of Church Ministry (DCMs), and other church professionals, intentional prayer and financial investment in future church workers has never been more important.

Through the Missouri District's *Tomorrow's Teachers & Preachers* endowment, congregations, student chapel offerings, and individuals are making a lasting impact on the future of Christ-centered ministry. This endowment exists to encourage and support students preparing for careers in church work by helping reduce the financial burden associated with their education. Over the past two academic years, the Missouri District has provided nearly \$200,000 in church worker scholarships, supporting 160 future church workers as they prepare for service. While these numbers are encouraging, the true impact is measured not only in dollars awarded but in lives dedicated to serving Christ and His people.

The Missouri District has already begun to witness the fruit of these investments. During the past two years, our congregations and schools have welcomed 62 newly placed church workers who are now serving throughout Missouri. Every scholarship represents more than financial assistance; it represents a future teacher sharing Christ's love with a child, a future pastor proclaiming God's Word in a community thirsting for meaning, a church worker serving where the Lord has called, equipping others for lives of discipleship. Church worker recruitment remains one of the most important opportunities before us. The need for faithful pastors, teachers, DCEs, DCMs, and other church workers continues to grow. Endowment initiatives such as *Tomorrow's Teachers & Preachers* demonstrate what can happen when congregations and the District work together to invest in those preparing for ministry.

As we celebrate the blessings God has provided through this scholarship program, we also give thanks for the students who have answered His call to serve. We pray that the Lord of the harvest will continue to raise up laborers for His harvest field and that the church will remain committed to supporting those who are preparing for lives of faithful service.

"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2, ESV).

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



EVERY PIECE FOR HIS PURPOSE

“They made church not a Sunday morning thing, but an everyday thing.” — REV. SAMUEL POWELL

BY LEAH SIEVEKING

The most popular size of a jigsaw puzzle is 1,000 pieces. A considerable number of parts to complete an image! It's also how our God prepared Rev. Samuel Powell, pastor of Trinity Lutheran in Jefferson City, for ministry—by linking numerous forms of encouragement ... until the picture of his future became clear.

The first piece put in place was the closest to him. “My mom and grandma were the main people in my faith development,” he shares. As members of St. Paul’s Lutheran in California, Mo., these women took an active role in the life of the congregation. “They made church not a Sunday morning thing, but an everyday thing.” Teenage Sam took his involvement statewide by serving on the Missouri District Youth Board, unaware that he was meeting church workers and laity that he’d one day work alongside.

Pastor Powell recalls another key piece of the puzzle, “Everyone on the youth board was headed into church work.” The idea that maybe he should as well was planted and took root. “I realized I’d been running from it!” He made plans to attend Concordia University Nebraska, despite never having set foot in that state.

The Missouri District has served as one of those encouraging puzzle pieces for more than 40 years through our Missouri District Student Aid

Endowment. Providing financial support for students preparing for full-time roles in our LCMS churches and schools is both a blessing and great responsibility. Once again, we boldly launch *Tomorrow’s Teachers & Preachers*, the annual campaign to raise awareness of these roles within the church and bolster support for those called to serve.

“A scary thing for someone considering church work is the cost,” reflects Pastor Powell. “No one wants to be in debt starting at a church or school. The District endowment can help alleviate these concerns.” Today we invite you to join those who have spent the last four decades establishing and growing this venture. **Would you please prayerfully consider making a gift to the scholarship endowment that will provide support to those furthering their education in preparation for these vocations in the church?** Gifts can be made online at mo.lcms.org/donate, via mail, or through your congregation’s offering plate.

Tomorrow’s Teachers & Preachers is just one piece of the puzzle that our God uses to provide for future generations. His provision also includes all of you, and for that we are filled with joy and gratitude. Thank you!

Leah Sieveking is director of mission advancement at the LCMS Missouri District.

TO MORE THAN DOUBLE SUPPORT

BY LEAH SIEVEKING

The MOScholars tax credit program continues to be a blessing for students attending LCMS schools in Missouri. Last academic year, the Missouri District distributed more than \$3 million in scholarships. The first distribution from the District for the upcoming 2026–27 school year will go out next month—and it's already more than \$6 million! These funds are a combination of state general revenue funds and tax credits. We thank God for the coordination of the Treasurer's Office in Jefferson City and the participation of many taxpayers. This level of growth is unexpected and fills us with joy.

Demand for these scholarships is high, which shows the strong desire of parents throughout Missouri to have their children receive both a quality education and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Missouri District now maintains a waitlist of students who qualify for a MOScholars scholarship for the upcoming school year, but for whom there currently are no available funds. There is a way to resolve all of this—and it takes just a matter of minutes!



Taxpayers to the state of Missouri, both individuals and businesses, have the opportunity to direct up to 50% of their state income tax liability each year towards this effort. It's as easy as:

- 1 Visit mo.lcms.org/mo-scholars and follow the prompts to reserve your tax credits in 2026. Select "The Missouri District" when asked which group can make use of your funds.
- 2 Mail in your check or submit payment electronically using the link on our website. Taxpayers using required minimum distributions can easily coordinate the process with their financial institutions.
- 3 After you receive the official paperwork from the Treasurer's Office, submit it when filing 2026 taxes.



For any questions, please reach out to leah.sieveking@mo.lcms.org or 314–590–6211. Thank you for your participation in MOScholars and your partnership with the Missouri District!

Leah Sieveking is director of mission advancement at the LCMS Missouri District.

Impact of Mission Grants

In our District

BY REV. JOHN PERLING

Too many of our fellow Missourians are not hearing the Gospel. They are missing the comfort, peace, and hope of Jesus' direct address, "I forgive you." They are not making diligent use of the means of grace. Of Missouri's more than six million residents, the District's 138,000 or so members account for 2.3% of Missouri's population. Fewer than half claim a church of any kind at all.

Mission Services works with members, congregations, and circuits to invigorate mission zeal, employ best practices for Christ-centered conversations, and develop discipleship habits that affirm the use of the means of grace, gathering the lost around Christ's Word and Sacraments.

For the 2026–27 fiscal year, we funded or partially funded 30 evangelistic efforts led by District members, congregations, schools, and circuits. These efforts bring the Gospel of the Kingdom of God to our neighbors, lead them to baptism, and teach all that Jesus said and did. Grants awarded this year include:

New starts in
Hispanic, African
immigrant, and
urban ministries

Retention, apologetic, and
evangelistic efforts leading to
baptisms and confirmations
among college-campus and
military-installation congregations

Congregations and schools
making disciples in multiple
languages, reflecting the
Lord's promise to gather all
nations around His throne

Rural, small-town,
and circuit
partnerships
supporting family
and deaconess
ministry

Urban congregation and
school networks
connecting Gospel
proclamation with Gospel
service in Jesus' name

Unfortunately, we could not affirm every request or fully fund every approved request. Congregational offerings to District work remain the backbone of our cooperative mission in Missouri, and individual donors open new doors. Gospel zeal fuels congregational creativity. The grant application itself serves as a strategic planning jumpstart.

Mission Services can help congregations identify local mission opportunities by opening conversations with community leaders, naming and celebrating your congregation's unique gifts, building on existing strengths, and matching ministry to community needs while lifting high the cross. Developing and working together on a plan clarifies each congregation's role and purpose in the kingdom of God, so members labor together in making disciples of all nations.

Rev. John Perling is director of mission services at the LCMS Missouri District.

Bloom Where You Are Planted

BY CHRISTIE HAMPTON

A Sunday morning worship service might be held in a chapel or on the tailgate of a Humvee with soldiers gathered around. For Chaplain Matthew Mortenson, ministry happens wherever the military mission leads. He goes where his unit goes, providing worship services, pastoral care, counseling, and spiritual support to service members and their families. Whether serving on a military installation, during a field exercise, or while deployed, his calling remains the same: to bring the light of Christ to the people entrusted to his care.

Chaplain Mortenson grew up in an Army family. His father enlisted in 1972, served in the 82nd Airborne Division, and later became an Army chaplain. Inspired by his father's service and his own desire to serve others, Chaplain Mortenson enlisted after high school and spent 6 1/2 years as a combat medic before attending college and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. His first pastoral call was at a rural Nebraska congregation before returning to the Army, where he has now served as a military chaplain for more than 11 years.

"The military needs a pastor," Chaplain Mortenson said. "You must be formed as a pastor and maintain that pastoral identity."

Military life brings challenges, frequent moves, deployments, and time away from loved ones. Yet Chaplain Mortenson believes God works through those experiences, creating opportunities to build relationships and share Christ's love. He has walked with service members through personal and family struggles, often finding that trust opens the door to deeper conversations about faith.



Several Scripture passages sustain him in ministry, including Phil. 3:12–14, 1 John 3:1–2, and 1 Peter 3:15. These verses encourage him in Christ's calling and remind him of his identity in God's love, even amidst imperfections. They also emphasize the importance of living a life of faith with gentleness and respect.

As Chaplain Mortenson prepares for a new assignment at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, he said transitions include "a new assignment, new coworkers, a new home, and a new church—but the military provides resources and help along the way." Whether serving in Nebraska, Missouri, Kentucky, or elsewhere, Chaplain Mortenson finds comfort in the constancy of Christ.

"You must embrace the life and bloom where you are planted," he said. "Remember your calling and vocation, stay in the Word, and prioritize faith and family."

Christie Hampton is communications specialist at the LCMS Missouri District. Photos provided by CH (MAJ) Matthew Mortenson.

THUMBS UP FOR JESUS

BY DCE PAM NUMMELA

Family Camp was all about Jesus! It was held at Heit's Point Camp in Lincoln, Mo., June 15–19. With the support of their congregations, participating parents, children, and grandparents learned how to grow daily in their home as disciples of Jesus.

Led by Pastor Todd Biermann and his wife, Heather, the fourteen adults who participated all week completed Concordia Center for the Family training as "Family Discipleship Facilitators" to share what they learned with family, friends, and congregations. The afternoon sessions and the closing service included lots of fun and faithful activities. A big "thank you" to the excellent Heit's Point camp staff who worked to make this a great week.



Inspired, Andrew and Jenni Wachter added a morning family devotion time. The little ones love the "thumbs up for Jesus" learned at Camp to start their day. And, yes, it is all about Jesus!

UPCOMING EVENTS 2026–27

Learn more: mo.lcms.org/upcoming-events, 314-590-6200

July 16–17

SUMMER ADMINISTRATORS CONFERENCE

July 18–23

LCMS SYNOD CONVENTION

Aug. 7

ADULT MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID TRAINING

Oct. 20–23

Professional Church Workers Conference, Margaritaville, Osage Beach

Oct. 25–28

Regional District Education Executive Conference, Lake Ozark

April 9–18, 2027

SHINE!

