

September 2026

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: Volunteers attending "Every One His Witness" workshop Aug. 22, 2026, at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Joplin, Mo. Photo by: Rev. John Perling

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear friends,

There are some similarities between the relationship of a husband and wife and that of a pastor and congregation. Both begin with vows of fidelity and prayers for God's strength. In the wedding rite, the husband pledges to care for and love his wife as Christ does His church. The wife vows her commitment to submit to him as the church submits to Christ. In the ordination and installation rites, the pastor promises that he will submit his life to the Word of God – both as the content of what he preaches and teaches, and also as the norm for how he conducts his ministry and his life. The congregation responds by promising to obey the shepherd placed over them by the Lord. The key to understanding the vocations of husband and wife, pastor and hearer, is the call to love.

We are called to love and serve in our various vocations. While not every vocation begins with a worship service, the life as a child of God begins by loving Christ and, therefore, loving one another. A couple's wedding or a congregation observing the installation of their pastor are both significant events where we celebrate and give thanks to God. In fact, we usually mark both types of events with celebrations that reach far beyond the normal worship service. Special invitations are sent out. As with all celebrations, the people of God mark the occasion with a great feast. We even take lots of pictures to remember the occasion. So much energy is put into the beginning of these relationships that we often forget what is promised in the vows when the hard work begins.

Whether speaking about marriage or ministry, the importance of love and service should not be forgotten. How often do we forget about the words that were spoken in the marriage or installation rite? The trouble begins in the marriage between husband and wife or between pastor and people when people forget the vows that were taken, and grace and forgiveness are in short supply. Thanks be to God, His grace is sufficient for us and His power is made perfect in our weakness. May we return to the baptismal waters, that by daily contrition and repentance all sin in us would be drowned and die, so that the new creation may spring forth and we can live out our callings as Christ enables us to do, in love and service to Him and to one another.



Peace in Christ,

R. Lee Hagan

Rev. Dr. R. Lee Hagan
President

ROOTED IN CHRIST:

A JOYFUL BEGINNING FOR A NEW SCHOOL YEAR BY JOSH SWARTZ

Across the Missouri District, the opening of a new school year brings joy and opportunities for students to grow in knowledge and faith. Classrooms are once again filled with learning, laughter, prayer, and the proclamation of God's Word. This year, our schools are united around the theme "Rooted in Christ," based on Col. 2:6-7 (ESV):

Therefore, as you received
Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk
in him, rooted and built up in
him and established in the faith,
just as you were taught,
abounding in thanksgiving.

COLOSSIANS 2:6-7

Christ the King Lutheran High School
9100 State HWY YY | Leslie, MO 63056 | Ebenezer Lutheran Church



Photo by: Josh Swartz

The beginning of this school year was especially meaningful in Leslie, Mo., as Christ the King Lutheran High School celebrated its inaugural opening. The first class consists of eight students to help establish the culture, traditions, and legacy of this new educational ministry.

The opening service was a wonderful celebration of God's faithfulness. Students, families, educators, congregation members, and supporters gathered to worship, give thanks, and ask God's blessing upon the school and all who will learn and serve there. The message encouraged students to be mindful of the roots they are planted in. Many things in this world promise security, meaning, and success, but they cannot provide a lasting foundation. Only in Christ alone is that true. Rooted in His Word and grounded in His promises, students can face new opportunities, challenges, and uncertainties with confidence because they belong to the One who upholds them.

This is at the heart of Lutheran education. Lutheran schools do more than prepare students academically. They empower young people to see life through the truth of God's Word. They equip students to think

carefully, serve faithfully, use their God-given abilities well, and live confidently in their vocations. Most importantly, Lutheran schools point students to Christ, their sure foundation and the source of their lasting hope.

The eight inaugural students at Christ the King are beginning more than a school year; they are beginning a new chapter in Lutheran education in Leslie and the surrounding community. We celebrate with them and all those whose prayerful work and faithful support helped make this day possible.

As schools throughout the Missouri District begin another year of ministry, we give thanks for every student, educator, administrator, pastor, congregation, and family. May the Lord continue to build up our students in Christ, establish them in the faith, and equip them for lives of faithful service.

What a wonderful way to begin the year: rooted in Christ and growing together in Him.

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

The Art of Recruiting and Training God's Servants for Children's Ministry

BY DCE PAM NUMMELA

Filling roles for children's ministry (or any ministry) is an art. While we open the bulletin and see notices about the need for volunteers, efforts like these are not always the most successful ways to engage God's disciples in ministries.

The "art" starts with the "why, what, and how" of serving God's children.

God gives us all gifts that He wants us to use to share His story with others—that's the "why" a disciple should serve. In children's ministry, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:14 ESV), is the "what" and "how" of the art, and includes growing faith and fellowship with the children and those who to serve God in this way.

For children's ministry leaders, identifying and equipping people is an ongoing process. The first and regular step of this

art is to "take it to the Lord in prayer" recognizing our Lord as the number 1 recruiter and trainer for His beloved children. Emily Schatz, director of children's ministry at Lutheran Church of Webster Gardens in St. Louis, Mo., builds trust and relationships with people, connects with them one on one, and looks for their gifts and strengths. Then she encourages them to consider a role in the children's ministry.

When someone is interested in serving, the training depends on the position. Being a leader, teacher, assistant, caregiver, or filling other roles requires different training. Leaders take time to talk through the position, provide necessary materials, complete background checks, and share the congregation's policies for child safety.

However, the most important action is that servants read the lesson in the Bible before they teach it!

Aunnee Trampe, children's ministry coordinator at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Des Peres, Mo., invites new servants to join a class, get to know the children and leaders, and see an event in action before beginning in the role. She communicates regularly with the staff, keeping them updated, and asking their opinions. She provides encouragement by sharing positive updates, and letting the new and current servants know what a blessing they are.

May God bless your congregation's ministry as God's servants and children benefit from growing in faith together.

DCE Pam Nummela is family discipleship lead facilitator at the LCMS Missouri District.



YouthLead

BY DCE DAN KREIENKAMP

What might happen when we give young people meaningful opportunities to lead in the church?

For Kirby Rassbach, a member of Christ Memorial Lutheran Church in St. Louis, those opportunities have helped shape how he serves today and where he sees God leading him. After participating in YouthLead for two years, Kirby is now a freshman at Concordia University, Nebraska, studying to become a Director of Christian Education (DCE).

YouthLead brings together high school students from across The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) to grow as Christian leaders, build relationships and put leadership into practice. Rassbach remembers the friendships he made, but especially the opportunities he was given to serve others.

“One moment that stood out to me was each of the prayer services we held over my two years attending,” Rassbach said. “We had the opportunity to lead prayer and pray over our fellow retreat members, which was very special to me.”

Those experiences continued in his congregation and youth group and now into his preparation for church work. “It has really pushed me into a Christ-centered service mindset,” he said.

Rassbach’s advice to congregations is simple: provide opportunities.

“Giving teenagers and young adults opportunities to lead empowers them to have a passion for Christ,” he said. Whether through Vacation Bible School, servant events, Bible studies, youth groups, or mission trips, young people need opportunities to serve alongside adults who listen, encourage, and support them. Not every young leader will become a church worker, but tomorrow’s church workers are among the young people in our congregations today.

There are different ways for youth and youth mentors to get involved with YouthLead. Last spring 10 churches from Missouri sent youth and adult mentors to attend the

YouthLead training held in St. Louis, and we hope to send more this year. This summer there will be limited space for youth to attend National27, a standalone youth ministry practitioners conference that equips, encourages, and connects those who serve young people in the church. It will be held in San Antonio, the site of the 2028 LCMS Youth Gathering.

Finally, for the last two years our Missouri District Youth Gathering (DYG) has given opportunities for youth like Rassbach to attend and lead other youth in breakout sessions to help raise up leaders. One of the most well-attended sessions on writing a devotion was led by youth! We look forward to having more opportunities once again at this year’s DYG April 16–18, 2027.

DCE Dan Kreienkamp is director of family life & youth at the LCMS Missouri District. Pictured: Kirby Rassbach received the Christo Servus Award for his service to the church and for his positive influence in the Christian atmosphere at Lutheran High School South, presented by Rev. Jeff Cloeter, senior pastor at Christ Memorial Lutheran Church, St. Louis.



Photo posted by Lutheran High School South

VOLUNTEERS LIFT HIGH THE CROSS TOGETHER

BY: REV. JOHN PERLING

The Missouri District's "re:Vitality" process begins with discernment and leads to action. Congregations first use the Congregational Assessment of Development/Decline Status (CADDs) to evaluate their ministry's health, identify strengths, and recognize challenges that may hinder future growth and vitality. This honest assessment shows where a congregation stands and where attention is needed.

Next, congregations move into Serving in God's Mission, where pastors, leaders, and members develop a strategic ministry plan. Through prayer, conversation, and broad congregational participation, they identify priorities, establish goals, and seek to align their ministry with God's mission in their community.

With solid data and planning, congregations use "re:Vitality" to determine where volunteers can best serve and where ministry efforts can have the greatest impact. "Going through the 're:Vitality'



process helped us rediscover our strengths and energized our volunteers. We saw new faces step forward to serve and felt more unified around our shared mission," said a participant pictured above at an August pilot "Every One His Witness" workshop in Joplin, Mo.

"Every One His Witness," an outreach training program, tunes members to share the Gospel with confidence and compassion. One participant shared, "Loved it! It gave me a peace about being a witness—I don't know everything. Time to share the discussion with others was valuable." "Connect To Disciple," a resource for building relationships and inviting others to faith, recognizes every congregational effort as a pathway to Jesus as volunteers build

relationships in their communities and invite neighbors into congregational life. "Shepherding Our Strays," a ministry tool for reaching inactive members, brings Christlike care to inactive members with encouragement and renewed hope.

These efforts provide a unified path for congregations seeking renewed vitality and faithful mission. Guided by discernment, strengthened by planning, and carried forward by dedicated volunteers, congregations across the Missouri District lift high the cross of Christ. As members witness to their neighbors, welcome newcomers, care for those who have drifted away, and help shape the future of their congregations, they participate in Christ's

ongoing work of gathering, nurturing, and sending His people.

If your congregation is interested in learning more about the "re:Vitality" process or would like support along the way, visit mo.lcms.org/district-missions or contact the Director of Mission Services Rev. John Perling at john.perling@mo.lcms.org or 314-590-6205.

Through these shared efforts, volunteers strengthen their congregations and advance the Gospel mission that unites the church. As we look to the future, may every congregation find renewed energy and purpose in lifting high the cross—together.

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

SERVING TOGETHER IN FAITH

BY: MIKE WADLEY

June 17, the entire Lutheran Church Extension Fund organization came together for a powerful day of service, putting faith into action across six project sites in St. Louis. From schools and parks to community organizations, teams gave their time, talents, and energy to support ministries and strengthen the communities they serve.

At Abiding Savior Lutheran School, volunteers painted hallways and a restroom, refreshed stairwell railings and steps, and trimmed landscaping around the parking lot. At Salem Lutheran School, teams painted three large classrooms, organized and cleaned classrooms and storage areas, moved supplies, and removed large furniture in preparation for the upcoming school year.

Green Park Lutheran School received a tremendous boost as volunteers thoroughly cleaned 22 classrooms, hallways, and gym bleachers. They also painted four bathrooms and prepared four more for painting.

At Christian Friends of New Americans, volunteers tackled a wide range of projects, from cleaning carpets and office spaces to building six picnic tables and eight raised-bed planters. They also painted walls, prepared vault areas, and refreshed a multi-purpose room and other facilities.

The Lutheran Development Group team focused on caring for the surrounding community. Volunteers weeded, painted and planted flowers in 12 large median planters, hauled dirt by wheelbarrow, collected trash, and completed general grounds maintenance throughout the park and neighborhood.

At Hope Seeds International, volunteers packaged an incredible 8,696 individual bags of cabbage and cayenne pepper seeds and wrote 183 cards for the prison ministry. The team was ready to do even more but ran out of labels and cards!

The day was a beautiful example of what can happen when people work together in faith. Every brushstroke, wheelbarrow, seed packet, and handwritten card represented an opportunity to serve others and strengthen ministries.

Through service, we are reminded that stewardship is more than what we give—it is also how we use our time, talents, and resources to bless others. Together, we can make a lasting difference for Christ and His church.

Mike Wadley is the former LCEF District vice president for the Missouri District and has begun a new position with LCEF as senior director of Real Estate Solutions. TJ Mattick will serve as interim District vice president for the Missouri District.



Interim LCEF District Vice President, Team Lead, District Solutions

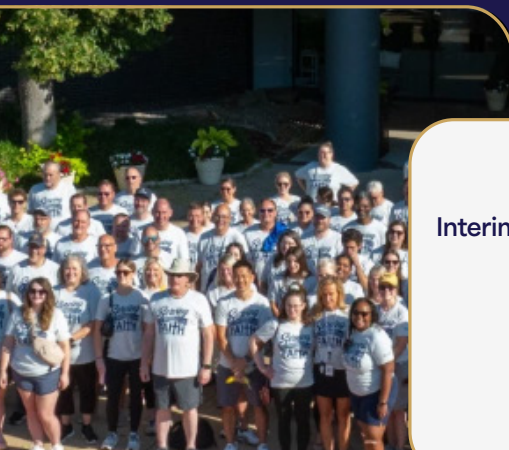
TJ Mattick



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Photos provided by: Mike Wadley

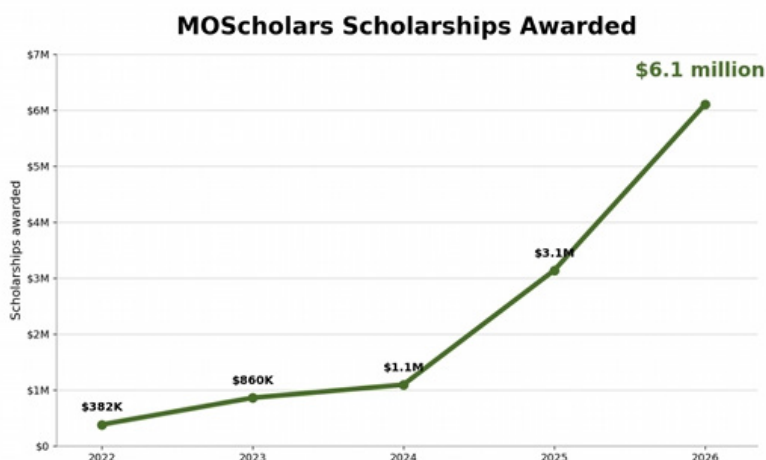


LUTHERAN CHURCH
EXTENSION FUND

MOSCHOLARS AWARDED \$6.1 MILLION

Celebrating an incredible start to the 2026–27 school year!

To date, the Missouri District has awarded \$6,100,905 in scholarships through MOScholars for this academic year, helping 782 students attend 57 Lutheran schools across Missouri. Each scholarship represents more than a number; it represents a student receiving a Christ-centered education and a family being supported.



With four more months remaining in the calendar year, you can add your state income tax dollars to this effort! There are still children awaiting funding and plenty of tax credits available to make that happen. Head to mo.lcms.org/tax-credit to get started. We give thanks to God for this opportunity and are deeply grateful for the donors, families, schools, and partners who make this ministry possible!

UPCOMING EVENTS 2026–27

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



Oct. 20–23, 2026

PROFESSIONAL CHURCH WORKERS CONFERENCE

Dec. 4, 2026

MISSOURI DISTRICT CHRISTMAS OPEN HOUSE

Jan. 22, 2027

ADULT MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID VIRTUAL TRAINING

April 9–18, 2027

SHINE!

April 16–18, 2027

DISTRICT YOUTH GATHERING

