

October 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: Oct. 1, 2026, St. John's Lutheran Church and School in Hannibal, Mo., officially became a part of the Missouri District. Photo by: Leah Sieveking

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear friends,

Our world is full of people who are longing for peace. While some may say they longed for world peace like a beauty pageant contestant, most people are just looking for peace for themselves. Our lives are a constant barrage of notifications and messages that give us no peace. Twenty-four-hour news cycles are not enough. We desire to have our news instantly, and most of that news is bad.

What draws people into our congregations is this search for peace. They have tried to find it in so many other places previously. But we have good news to speak and peace with God to proclaim. Each week, our services focus on the peace of sins forgiven for Jesus' sake. Whatever caused someone to walk through the doors of one of our churches, we are thankful that they can hear a message that will console the guilt-ridden conscience.

What a blessing it is for a husband and wife to receive Christ's body and blood for the forgiveness of their sins but also as a sign of peace. Brothers and sisters, parents and children, are all able to share the peace of Christ with one another as they come to the Lord's table together. That doesn't mean that they are in absolute agreement with one another on every part of their lives. It is the comforting assurance that Christ Himself is our peace, and we can live in peace with one another through Him.

What a joy it is to hear the gospel proclaimed each week, that we have the good news of sins forgiven through Christ, and to come to the Lord's table and receive that peace which the world cannot give. We will always live with conflict on this side of eternity. This is why we need the comfort of hearing that we have peace with God and one another each week. Then, when Christ shall come on the last day, He will bid all our conflicts cease, and we will live with Him in peace forever. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.



Peace in Christ,

R. Lee Hagan

Rev. Dr. R. Lee Hagan
President

CHURCH WORKER APPRECIATION MONTH

BY REV. MARTY HASZ, LPC

“One thing today. One thing together. One thing systemic.”

What produces worker satisfaction and longevity in ministry? Before answering, first ask your church worker(s) what support would be most meaningful to them. Synod’s research shows many workers find it difficult to self-advocate or share their needs. As the Body of Christ, we’re called to support one another in the mission God has given us.

Jesus sent His disciples out in pairs, instructing them to receive what was given with humble gratitude. In the same way, church workers sometimes remain silent about suffering, even when it isn’t anyone’s fault. All of us are affected by a broken world, the devil, and our own sin. We don’t always “have it all together,” but we do have Christ and each other. In Him, we are secure and find refuge. In the church, we share God’s mercy and support.

As you recognize Church Worker Appreciation Month, consider these actions:

One thing today

- Read Synod’s 2026–27 worker appreciation schedule at [“Ways to Show Your Gratitude and Support for Church Workers.”](#)
- Learn about peacemaking: [Personal Peacemaking, Ambassadors of Reconciliation](#)

One thing together

- Be the church member who listens and prays with your worker, offering Gospel encouragement.
- Invite others to join you in blessing and supporting church workers, perhaps during this year’s [SHINE! event](#).

One thing systemic

- Plan a lay and professional staff in-service using [“Hold Up the Prophet’s Hands”](#) by Rev. Dr. Bruce Hartung or [related resources](#).
- Consider [Mental Health First Aid training](#) or learning about trauma-informed ministry.
- Build strong teams with resources like Patrick Lencioni’s [“The Five Dysfunctions of a Team.”](#)

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



Special Dates

Oct. 1–31

[Church Worker Appreciation Month](#)

Oct. 11

[Pastor Appreciation](#)

Oct. 25

[Deaconess, Director of Family Life Ministry, Director of Christian Outreach, and Director of Church Ministries Appreciation](#)

April 25

[Director of Parish Music Appreciation](#)

May 3–7

[Teacher Appreciation](#)

June 26

[Director of Christian Education Appreciation](#)

People of HOPE

Connecting, Learning, and Serving Together

BY JOSH SWARTZ

Teaching in a Lutheran school creates daily opportunities to engage students' curiosity, encourage their growth, and, most importantly, help them know that, through Jesus Christ, they are forgiven and redeemed children of the heavenly Father, called to make a difference in the lives of others. First-year teachers and veteran educators new to the Missouri District gathered at Margaritaville Lake Resort to reflect on the JOY set before them as Champions of HOPE! Some brought experience from public schools; others had recently graduated from college and were

beginning their first call. Centered on our hope in Christ, the retreat offered time to grow professionally, build relationships, and reflect on the calling to serve children and families through Lutheran education.

The group connected well from the start. Educators shared experiences, asked thoughtful questions, and encouraged one another through honest conversations about classroom joys and challenges. Roundtable discussions brought together different perspectives and helped establish a network of colleagues who can continue supporting one

another throughout the school year. Sessions focused on practical strategies for reaching students with challenging behaviors, setting limits without entering power struggles, and strengthening relationships with parents. Educators also explored how to steward their emotions and care for themselves as they carry out the ministry set before them. Throughout the day and a half, conversations emphasized building relationships that help students feel known, supported, and accountable as they learn.

These Champions of HOPE left refreshed and ready to apply what they had learned as they serve

faithfully in their schools. We thank God for their willingness to learn, their encouragement of one another, and their commitment to engaging and impacting students through the love of Christ. Their calling also reminds each of us of the opportunities God places before us. Whether serving as a layperson or a called church worker, may the Lord bless you as you model what it means to live with Jesus in your home, in your community, and in your church.

Josh Swartz is director of schools at the LCMS Missouri District. Pictured below: New Teacher Orientation participants, Sept. 18–19, 2026. Photo by: Rev. Marty Hasz, LPC



CHURCH PLANTING BEGINS WITH GOD'S PEOPLE

BY: REV. JOHN PERLING

Across Missouri, the Lord opens doors for the Gospel, and Jesus enlivens faithful witness. Church planting invites congregations to missionary action centered in Christ's saving work, as the Lord's people draw life from the well of Word and Sacrament.

The LCMS Church Planting process takes a team-based approach, equipping laypeople to play an important role from the beginning. The process moves through four phases: Develop Concept, Explore Feasibility, Strategic Planning, and Ministry Action. Each phase provides direction, while Missouri District and LCMS Church Planting resources provide training, coaching, and support, every step of the way.

PHASE 1: Develop Concept

Church planting begins with prayerful discernment. A planting team of six to 10 people considers what a new congregation could look like and how it might serve its community while remaining centered on Word and Sacrament ministry. The team develops a planting proposal and submits its work to an advisory team for review.

PHASE 2: Explore Feasibility

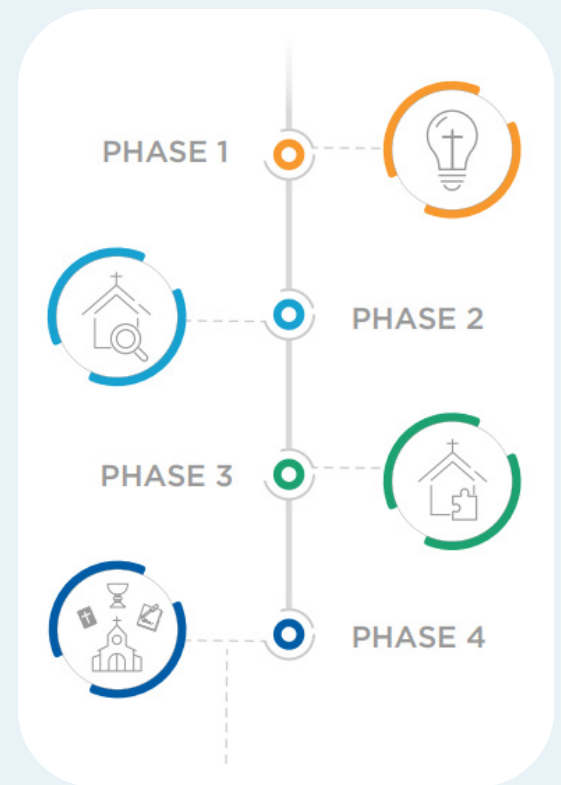
The team then tests its vision through quantitative and qualitative research, conversations with community members, and an examination of the resources needed for ministry. The goal is to understand the community and identify opportunities to share the Gospel.

PHASE 3: Strategic Planning

With a feasible concept, the team develops goals, communication plans, and the practical elements needed to begin ministry. The completed plan is reviewed by the advisory team and may provide a foundation for LCMS Church Planting grant assistance.

PHASE 4: Ministry Action

The strategic plan becomes action as the team begins public ministry. The four milestones are launching public worship, calling a pastor, chartering, and reaching sustainability.

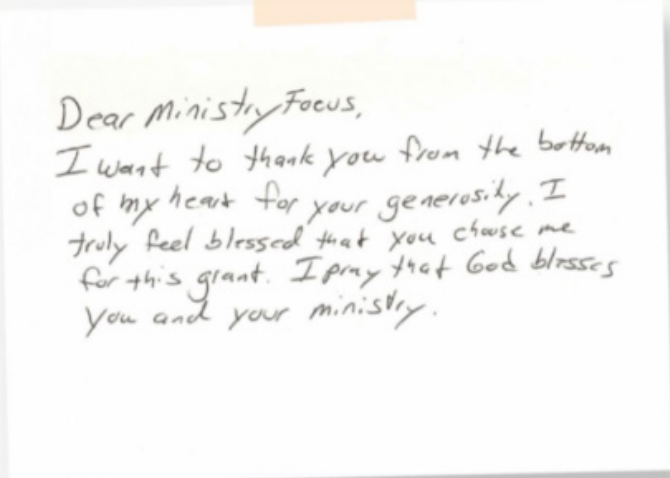


There is no guarantee of success in church planting. Yet seeking new people for Christ's kingdom is never wasted work. Laypeople serve as witnesses, hosts, teachers, organizers, and ambassadors, working alongside pastors. Missouri District Mission Services walks alongside congregations through the process with consultation, research, coaching, leadership development, planning, and connections to LCMS Church Planting.

As Isaiah reminds us, God's Word never goes forth without purpose, "So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty," (Is. 55:11 ESV). We trust in God's promise.

If your congregation sees a new mission opportunity, contact Missouri District Director of Mission Services Rev. John Perling at 314-590-6205 or john.perling@mo.lcms.org. Together, we can prayerfully discern where the Lord is opening doors and equip His people to proclaim Christ's forgiveness, life, and salvation.

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



Dear Ministry Focus,
I want to thank you from the bottom
of my heart for your generosity. I
truly feel blessed that you chose me
for this grant. I pray that God blesses
you and your ministry.

*Applications for 2027 financial assistance grants
available in November*

"It's not about money, it's about ministry," says Rev. Ken Krueger, founder and president of the Recognized Service Organization *MinistryFOCUS*. "We recognize that many church workers and their families in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) face challenging financial realities. By providing financial assistance and education, we help these workers focus less on money and more on ministry so that the faith of believers is strengthened and more people know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior."

STORIES OF THANKSGIVING FROM GRANT RECIPIENTS

Founded by Rev. Ken Krueger and other second-career classmates while in seminary, *MinistryFOCUS* has provided grants totaling approximately \$1.5 million to 472 rostered LCMS church workers since 2015. Grant recipients have responded with numerous notes of thanksgiving, including:

"Because of *MinistryFOCUS*, my husband and I are able to devote ourselves more fully to the ministry God has for us. Praise God!"

"Because of *MinistryFOCUS*, we are now able to get back on our feet, restore balance in our lives, and refocus on what truly matters."

FINANCIAL EDUCATION FOR CHURCH WORKERS

Beginning in 2025, *MinistryFOCUS* also has been able to provide financial education to 112 LCMS pastoral leaders. In a partnership with LCEF and participating districts, including the Missouri District, a new Ministry Excellence Fund (MEF) program provides both financial assistance and an online financial education course developed by Concordia University Wisconsin. The course includes modules on both personal and organizational finances. Graduates of this program have noted:

"My wife and I already have taken steps in just a few short months that already have made a difference in our lives and how we think about money."

"Now I know what the congregational leaders are actually talking about rather than just nodding with an empty smile."

HOW TO APPLY FOR 2027 GRANTS

If interested, applications for 2027 grants will be available at ministryfocus.org in late November 2026.

All rostered church workers of the LCMS are eligible for these grants. *MinistryFOCUS* will determine eligibility for its historical financial assistance-only grants and its MEF grants.

Applications are due Dec. 31, 2026, and award announcements will be made in late January 2027. For further information, please contact Rev. Krueger at ken@ministryfocus.org.

Rev. Ken Krueger is founder and president of MinistryFOCUS.

Stories of God's Faithfulness

BY: CHRISTIE HAMPTON

As church communicators, we have an opportunity to use today's tools to tell stories of what God is doing through our congregations and ministries. Redeeming Life Outreach Ministries provides a beautiful example. In a recent update, the ministry shared about welcoming new residents to its maternity homes in Florida and Illinois and celebrating three baptisms. The ministry highlighted not only these milestones, but also the staff who faithfully walk alongside women and their babies, sharing God's love and truth.

Those aren't simply organizational updates. They are stories of God's faithfulness.

As Redeeming Life works toward opening a maternity home in St. Louis by the end of 2027, its communication helps others see what God has done, what the ministry is praying for, and how they can participate through prayer, partnership and support.

That is something every congregation and ministry can consider: What story are we telling? When we share an answered prayer, celebrate a baptism, introduce a new ministry, highlight a faithful volunteer, or tell how God is working through His people, we have an opportunity to communicate more than information. We can point people to God's faithfulness.

Whether the message is printed on a page, shared through email or posted on social media, the purpose remains the same: to communicate clearly and point people to Christ.

Christie Hampton is communications specialist at the LCMS Missouri District.



Pictured above: Rev. Edward DeWitt, pastor at Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Sanford, Fla., and president and chairman of the Redeeming Life Outreach Ministries board, baptizes one of three babies baptized this summer. *Photo provided by Redeeming Life Outreach Ministries.*

WAYS TO CELEBRATE

- **Look for God at work**

Share answered prayers, baptisms, new ministries, acts of service, and other ways God is working through your congregation.

- **Tell the story**

Help people see the purpose and people God is using behind an event or ministry.

- **Invite participation**

Give people clear opportunities to pray, volunteer, give, or become involved.

PCWC NEXT WEEK! OCT. 20–23

Professional Church Workers Conference (PCWC)
Oct. 20–23, 2026

Pastors, educators, and other professional church workers from across the District will gather for worship, learning, and fellowship under the theme “Live as You Are Called” (1 Cor. 7:17a). Find everything you need to prepare for the conference on our website—including the sectional room listing, exhibitor list, map, conference schedule, and meal information.

mo.lcms.org/professional-church-workers-conference-2026

For more information or questions, contact Events Assistant Sue Thompson at sue.thompson@mo.lcms.org.



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

Feb. 5, 2027

MID-YEAR ADMINISTRATORS CONFERENCE

April 9–18, 2027

SHINE!

April 16–18, 2027

DISTRICT YOUTH GATHERING

July 22–23, 2027

SUMMER ADMINISTRATORS CONFERENCE

