



MID-SOUTH LUTHERAN

What an investment!

Right after St. Paul mentions the Gospel truth in Eph. 2:8-9, he continues to explain the essence of living the Christian life. He first begins with:

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.



Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola
District President



LCMS/Erik M. Lunsford

But then, he continues to answer the “so what?”:

Therefore, remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.* For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through

the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ... For through Him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In Him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. **Eph. 2:8-16, 18-22**

Notice the italicized words? You and I were bought at a price. Good stewardship in a Christian’s life means we calculate the risk of investment based on the probability the investment will produce the desired results. For example, when we purchase groceries at the market, clothing at the mall or a car from a trusted dealer, we expect that

the dollars (or credit card) we put on the counter will be for reliable products.

What about God? Was God a good steward in His “investment” when He sent His only begotten Son to pay for our sin’s debt? What did God expect for such a huge investment cost? What kind of economist is God to expect a realistic return? Jesus became God in flesh who revealed His life and grace in order to serve us, His sinful creatures. His love for us preexisted before time and creation. God is love! That’s what the apostle John claims in his first epistle.

The steps of humiliation Jesus Christ walked are laid out in the Apostles’ Creed:

Conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried.

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CHRIST

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

Christ Jesus humbled Himself, coming from His glorious throne to take our human flesh upon Himself for the very purpose of being our Savior and redeeming us in the economy of God. Everything that was necessary for you and me to inherit the glory of an everlasting kingdom in the presence of Almighty God was this divine economy. We acknowledge the steps of exaltation:

He descended into Hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He shall come again to judge the living and the dead.

So what? St. Paul begins Eph. 2:11 with "Therefore." It's there for a reason! God knows that our feeble attempts for righteousness before Him are weighed down with sin, the sin that we are (original) and the sins we commit (actual). Therefore, God doesn't arrange the divine hereafter by just waving His hand and patting us on the top of the head, saying, "It's OK." Paul reminds us that the wages of sin is death. But Christ Jesus paid that cost and rescued us, His sheep, from everlasting torment and condemnation.

Left to ourselves, we would have chosen a different "down payment." If we chose the way to get out of sin's just price, we would have added in our "good intentions," our "doings" and sin-laden things that build up points like those S&H Green stamps we used to get at the gas stations many years ago. (How many trips to the gas station did it take to purchase that alarm clock?) Even with our jaded view of what sin has done to our relationship to God, we will eventually come to the conclusion that any effort to prove ourselves worthy of God's pardon is impossible, futile and most likely counterproductive.

But what we consider as being impossible, God foreknew He would accomplish in His Son. God became man for us to take away our sin and put death to death, in order that by the death of God we are made alive in



“God is the Good Steward, the Good Shepherd and the Beautiful Savior who spent His greatest and dearest treasures for us. That is the overflowing grace that we apprehend by the gift of faith given by the Holy Spirit, lest anyone should boast.”



Christ (Romans 6). By human reason it's impossible. Yet in God's divine economy, He did what we needed.

Cyril of Alexandria wrote:

He who is from God by nature, the Only-begotten, He who is in the bosom of the Father, He through whom are all things and in whom are all things (John 1:3), albeit having before every age and time His own existence, and ever co-existing with Him who begot Him, descended into voluntary nothingness (Phil. 2:7) in the last times of the world, and took the servant's form, that is, became in our condition and man economically, and was made in all things like His brothers (Heb. 2:17), by partaking similarly of blood and flesh (Heb. 2:14), and that He thus underwent birth with us and like us,

and took into Himself the passing into being of His own flesh, not as though He needed a second beginning into being (for the Word was in the beginning and was God) but, that He might gather together the human race, a second first-fruits of all things after that first one, born after the flesh of a woman, according to the Scriptures. For being rich, He became poor, bringing us again into His own wealth and having all in Himself through the flesh which was united to Him. We have been buried with Christ through holy baptism (Rom. 6:4) and have been raised and seated with Him in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6).

There are times when we bring home the groceries, clothes or car we bought, only to find out that some of the apples are rotten, there's a flaw in the cloth or worse, the car should have come from the produce section of the grocery store because it's a lemon. In most cases, we can return the damaged or worthless goods for a refund. God doesn't ask for a refund even though some people reject His gift, others scoff at His cross and others live as if He doesn't exist.

But God is the Good Steward, the Good Shepherd and the Beautiful Savior who spent His greatest and dearest treasures for us. That is the overflowing grace that we apprehend by the gift of faith given by the Holy Spirit, lest anyone should boast. God wasn't "cheap." Our Lord Jesus Christ willingly made the investment for our sake. Is it possible for us to confess what He has already done for a world that desperately needs Jesus? What can we invest for the Kingdom of Christ and what He has entrusted to our keeping? St. Peter would remind us:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. **1 Peter 2**

What an investment indeed!

Tennessee student wins national contest

On June 26, Anna Young, daughter of Rev. Philip Young, pastor of Redeemer, Nashville, won the National Right To Life Pro-Life Oratory Contest for high school students.

Anna won the state contest in April and received a cash prize and the honor of representing Tennessee in the national contest. She competed alongside 10 other state winners during the National Right to Life Convention, held in Herndon, Va.

As the national winner, Anna delivered her first-place speech to the full assembly, speaking just before Arkansas Sen. Tom Cotton.

Anna plans to attend Concordia University Wisconsin in the fall. Blessings to her as she continues to reach more listeners with this vital message.

▶ Watch Anna deliver her speech at tinyurl.com/4dc5xmjx.

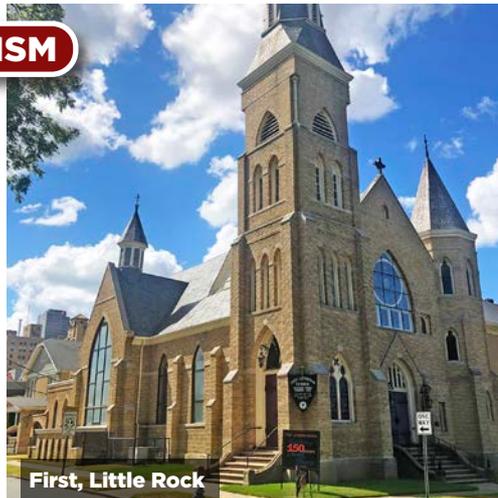


Anna Young, left, is pictured with Frances Arthur, chairman of the Tennessee Right To Life Oratory Contest.

FOCUS on EVANGELISM

In these troubled times, when more than half of U.S. citizens believe that Christianity's influence is decreasing and church attendance is dramatically declining, it's more important than ever that Christians become involved in outreach and evangelism, as the Great Commission demands.

In this new series of articles, the **Board of Evangelism of First, Little Rock**, shares with us tips for evangelism and their insights from God's Word on our nation's current post-Christian culture.



The most important thing we can do in our lives and to spread the Gospel is to spend time with the Lord. If we don't spend time with the Lord in His Word and prayer, in which our minds become transformed, we will have nothing special to share with others. We will be like a dry well that has no living water to share with others.

Here are five suggestions:

- ▶ **Have a special place and time**, preferably in the morning, to spend time with the Lord in His Word, our shelter of the most High (Ps. 91:1).
- ▶ **Start with prayer**, casting all our burdens upon Him and asking Him to join us in this special time. He is already knocking on our door; we just need to invite Him in (Rev. 3:20). He knows us better than we know ourselves, loves us more than we can imagine and invites us to join Him.

- ▶ **Be expectant.** This is a divine appointment with the sovereign, living God of the universe, and we are entering into His presence. Don't you think the sovereign, living God of the universe might have something special to impart to you, to give you comfort, guidance, peace, strength and courage?
- ▶ **Take notes in a journal**, writing out the flow of thoughts that come to you. Just write, and you can reflect on your notes later.
- ▶ **Share with others.** The Lord will reveal insights to you that apply in your life and the lives of those around you. When you share these with others, you bless them and become a river of living water (John 7:38).
"Call to Me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known." **Jer. 33:3**

Congregation mission commitment receipts

as of May 31, 2021 (5 months)

Anticipated amount (42% of budget)	\$614,006
Actual receipts	\$612,119
Over (under) anticipated amount	(\$1,887)

Use of mission commitment receipts

Allocated to Synod for world missions	\$173,219
Allocated to Tanzania	\$10,417
Retained for district ministry/mission support (70% of receipts)	\$428,483
Total receipts	\$612,119

Mission commitment receipts comparison

Actual receipts as of May 31 2021	\$612,119
Actual receipts as of May 31, 2020	\$596,435
Over (under) prior year receipts	\$15,684

Let's support our students and teachers!



The Lutheran Women's Missionary League has some great ideas for how to support both students and teachers as they head back to school this fall.

First, check out the Gospel Outreach toolkits by visiting lwml.org/gospel-outreach and click the "Gifts from the Heart Toolkit" on the right side of the screen (under "Demonstrating Jesus' Love"). There you will find a wide variety of toolkit ideas. For this month you could use one of these:

► **College Kits**

There are two kits described here, but they could be combined into one. They include practical items such as those for personal care and gift cards, as well as spirit-lifting items such as Mustard Seed Devotions.

► **Teacher Kit**

Every teacher needs a little pampering and this kit has lots of ideas. And for encouragement there are also Mustard Seed Devotions and the "Splashes of Grace" devotional from Concordia Publishing House.

Also, at the Gospel Outreach webpage, you can click on the "Jesus' Love in Action Through the Year" link to find two years' worth of monthly mission service ideas.

In the first year, the August suggestion is to collect school supplies and personal care items for homeless children or those going into foster care. And the "extra credit" idea is to host a back-to-school party for children in a homeless shelter. Just be sure to check with homeless ministries first to find out what the children need most.

Attend a district Fall Retreat!



"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you." – Jer. 29:11-12 NIV

Please join us for our fall retreat at a location near you. The theme, based on the Bible study written by Donna Snow, is "Our Hope & Future." The study is broken into four sections and is inspired by Jer. 29:11-12:

First, we learn how to discern God's plans for us. Next, we focus on God's plans as they relate to prosperity and protection. In the third section we examine where we place our hope. And in the final section we are reminded of the importance of "calling upon the Lord" through prayer.

In addition to Bible study, we will enjoy fellowship, quiet time and the beauty of God's creation.

Theme: "Our Hope & Future"

WEST	MIDDLE	EAST
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sept. 10-12 • Mount Eagle Retreat Center 935 Beal Road Clinton, Ark. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sept. 17-19 • Camp Garner Creek 700 Sam Hollow Road Dickson, Tenn. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sept. 24-26 • Eagle Rock Retreat Center 7143 Flats Road Tallasse, Tenn.

For more information, including registration, visit midsouthlwml.org and select "District Retreats" from the "News and Events" tab.

Camp Trinity

Lodge groundbreaking is Aug. 15

Members of LCMS congregations in the Mid-South District are invited to gather Aug. 15 at Camp Trinity, the Lutheran Camp on Petit Jean Mountain, for a groundbreaking for the retreat lodge. The event will also include site dedication, worship, firstfruits offering for construction of the lodge and a barbecue dinner. Anyone planning to attend is asked to let the camp know by Aug. 8 so the camp staff can prepare for the meal.

Aug. 8 is commitment Sunday for the capital campaign. Friends of the camp who want to join in this mission expansion are encouraged to turn in pledges on or before Aug. 8. The total pledges will be announced at the groundbreaking a week later. Firstfruit gifts will be donated in person at the groundbreaking.

Those who want to be part of the mission but are unable to attend Aug. 15 can make pledges and donations at lutherancamp.org. The camp will, of course, accept pledges and gifts after that date, until the cost of construction is covered.

The lodge is expected to accommodate up to 32 people in six sleeping rooms and include a large gathering room, galley kitchen, large porch and safe room/storm shelter. It will be ideal for church retreats and family reunions.



Pictured is an architect's rendering of the new lodge at Camp Trinity.

Camp Trinity set aside almost half the funds needed for the project and started the capital campaign in the spring to raise the remainder. Anyone who has been blessed by the ministry of the camp is invited to help make it possible for future generations to enjoy the same blessing.

All Saints has new pastor, headmaster

Rev. Andrew Lehman was installed as associate pastor and headmaster of All Saints Lutheran Church and School, Jonesboro, Ark., June 6. From left, Revs. Bill Zwick, Jeffrey King, Dr. Roger Paavola, Andrew Lehman, Joshua Leigeber, Paul Leigeber and Joel Krogen.



LCC K-9 COMFORT DOG MINISTRY



Mission of compassion

Lutheran Church Charities (LCC) Comfort Dogs have been sharing Christ's love since 2008, employing the unique calming nature and skills of purebred golden retrievers. The ministry now comprises 130 dogs in 27 states, including two in the Mid-South District.

Twelve years of Comfort Dog history have highlighted the incomparable value of their gentle, compassionate presence during the darkest of times, when often a calming touch helps more than words and opens doors for conversation about faith and Christ's mercy for all.

But as many have discovered in the pandemic year of 2020, those who experience enforced isolation and loneliness are suffering as well. How can the Comfort Dogs reach out to those in need of a comforting touch when social distancing and plexiglass barriers make "touch" impossible?

The answer is another gift that has expanded their compassionate outreach far beyond 27 states — virtual visits that continue to increase in popularity, even as personal interactive life returns to normal in the pandemic's wake.

Transcending social distance

"During the past year, people have been afraid, felt isolated, and wondering if this will ever end," said Tim Hetzner, LCC president and CEO. "Right away, we knew we had to do something since we were limited in being physically out with people. However, we know that when a door closes, God opens a bigger

one. Launching Comfort Dog Ministry® Virtual Visits gave us the opportunity to stay in touch as well as provide support and love during these challenging times. When we are not physically able to be present, our presence is still felt by sharing the hope and love that can be found in Jesus Christ."

**Comfort Dog
Jewel of Christ
Our Savior,
Loudon,
Tenn., visits
with medical
professionals.**

The virtual visits were launched on April 1, 2020, enabling connections and comfort across the United States as opportunities for each ministry team to visit teachers, students, healthcare workers and other individuals were coordinated by the LCC

K-9 ministry team headquartered in Northbrook, Ill.

So far, the LCC office reports, Comfort Dog teams have provided pandemic stress relief through more than 400 virtual visits with people from 28 states, and the requests for such visits continue to arrive daily as awareness spreads.

In 2021, Comfort Dog ministry teams from across the United States joined together to connect with Lutheran and public school classrooms, largely via Zoom.

Even during a virtual visit, the dog is "very present" with the handler, who can pet the dog as directed by the viewer; or the handler may direct the viewer to call the dog's name and see the dog's immediate reaction to their voice, said Debra Baran, LCC's director of Communications.

More than 70 heart-warming photos of virtual connections and shared love can be seen at lccphotos.smugmug.com/2020-Photos/K9s-Staying-Connected. The photos illustrate the many other creative ways that Comfort Dog teams are connecting, including window visits to locked-down nursing and assisted living facilities, sending "thinking of you" cards and photos, and posting videos and words of encouragement on Facebook.

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The Tennessee bookends: Jewel and Job

The Mid-South District's Comfort Dogs, Jewel and Job, serve from opposite ends of Tennessee: Jewel is based at Christ Our Savior, Loudon, and Job is based at Christ the King (CTK), Memphis.

Both Jewel and Job have an active social media presence that supported their outreach during the pandemic. Each has close to 4,000 Facebook followers, while Job has additional followers on his Kare 9 page, where he connects with military personnel, veterans and their families.

Each dog also has multiple handlers. In addition to "Top Dog" Genie Swan, Job is handled by 10 carefully trained humans who accompany him on weekly visits to assisted living, rehabilitation and hospice facilities, while Steve Schoenherr shares handler responsibilities with others at Christ Our Savior.

Since Jewel's usual daily duties likewise involved visits to nursing homes, rehab and assisted living facilities, all of which were in lockdown during the pandemic, Schoenherr notes that their schedule of visits was significantly curtailed and initially limited to a presence during drive-through communion to gladden the hearts of those who were able to wave to her friendly and familiar face. Later in the summer, when services resumed with masks, Jewel was on duty in the narthex, greeting congregants as they arrived, and school children were able to pet Jewel on their way back to a limited schedule of classes as well.

The importance of Jewel's regular pre-pandemic visits not only to patients, but also to healthcare workers, became clear to Steve when he recently began taking her back to assisted living and rehab centers. Once the word spread that "Jewel's back," the number of staff members who came running to welcome her brought tears to his eyes.

In addition to his Facebook and Instagram presence, Job participated in creative outreach and awareness activities during the pandemic, with Valentine gift bags for homebound members, while supporters received Job Christmas cards and a calendar. Job



Comfort Dog Job of Christ the King, Memphis, has an online visit with students at Zion Lutheran School, Alexandria, Minn.

was featured on a lawn poster inviting community neighbors to join him for worship at CTK on Easter Sunday, and he even participated with other Comfort Dogs in a virtual 5K run for a special education class in Illinois, helping to raise funds to benefit the Special Olympics.

(The Job calendar benefiting the Job Comfort Dog ministry goes on sale in November!)

Swan pointed out that keeping this "very smart" dog occupied and engaged during the period of isolation was a bit of a challenge since, like a child, Job needs daily activity even when there's no work to do.

Initially Job was kept active and engaged by spending time in the homes of his other handlers, benefiting from the change of house and scenery. The discipline of regular training also helped.

"Training is a delicate dance" said Swan. It reminds each of their place in the alpha (handler)-and-dog relationship. It strengthens the bond while stressing a respectful distance and polite behavior — which does not preclude Job running zoomies with his tennis ball when off duty.

Back at work again, with distancing and masking mandates largely lifted, Job is happily busy visiting many friends eager to greet him at an American Legion Memorial Day function, assisted living and hospice facilities, and more.

On the job, these dogs "absorb" a lot, Swan notes, especially with grief-stricken and troubled people. Sometimes, however, there's a happy surprise. When one of Job's handlers received a heart transplant, Job was there to cheer on his recovery with a special level of comfort and encouragement.

Schoenherr, too, stressed the importance of keeping Jewel active when her usual comfort visits weren't possible. Her regular training includes mile-long walks twice a day — exercise and exposure that are essential to her health and well-being, as reflected in her glowing appearance as "Miss April" in the LCC K-9 Comfort Dog Ministry 2018 calendar, Schoenherr joked.

Now that the team is back in action, he recalls some of the things he has experienced and observed as Jewel's handler, and the extraordinary insights and instincts the dogs sometimes seem to possess. Handlers agree that the dogs seem to have a sixth sense for recognizing who needs their comfort most, something Hetzner has also acknowledged.

In "The Genius of Dogs," researcher Brian Hare shares findings of others who confirm that, unlike any other animal, including the intelligent primates who are ostensibly our closest human relatives, it is dogs alone who respond with a unique understanding of our human perspectives and an ability to "see" through our eyes. In laboratory tests, when asked to bring the researcher a ball, dogs with a clear view of two identical tennis balls consistently chose to deliver the one which the researcher was able to see, and ignored the one which they recognized was blocked from the researcher's view.

Researchers continue to discover that, gifted with the extension of senses we have lost or never attained, dogs are able to perceive and understand much more than we realized. It's easy to believe that sometimes, perhaps, they're also guided by a Voice we cannot hear.

Schoenherr notes that, in practice, it's often the people who seem strongest and most self-contained who need and

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Congregation has **NEW HOME**

On Sunday, April 25, the members of Chapel of the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Sharps Chapel, Tenn. dedicated their new church building to the service for the proclamation of Christ Jesus the Good Shepherd. More than 75 people attended the service that

culminated four years of work to create a Lutheran presence in the Sharp's Chapel community.

Rev. Paul Kritsch has been leading the congregation, which started with Kritsch's community-wide Bible studies.

Dedicating the new Chapel of the Good Shepherd sanctuary were, from left, Revs. Dr. Roger Paavola, district president; Paul Kritsch, Chapel of the Good Shepherd pastor; and Robert Portier, Knoxville Circuit visitor.

COMFORT

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7)

appreciate comfort — and sometimes it's best to let the Lord lead to where the dog is most needed.

He reflects on the invitation for Jewel to sit in during a counselor's sessions with grade school children following the Parkland High School shooting, where Jewel "just listened," he said, while children were able to pet her and benefit from her calming, compassionate presence as they talked.

"That dog was an answer to my prayers," the counselor later told Steve, and no doubt he was right.

To request a Comfort Dog Virtual Visit, visit

lutheranchurchcharities.org and click the "K-9 Ministries" link.

For more information on our district LCC Comfort Dogs:

Jewel

- Facebook: JewelComfortDog
- Instagram: LCCK9Jewel
- Email: Jewel@K9Comfort.org

Job

- Facebook: JobComfortDog
- Twitter: @LCCK9Job
- Email: Job@K9Comfort.org

Congrats!

Rev. Paul and Carol Donner of Paducah, Ky., recently celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary. They were married Aug. 24, 1956 in St. Louis. They have two children, six grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

October issue deadline is Aug. 15

We love to feature a wide variety of news occurring in our district congregations. If you have any announcements, special events or human interest stories, please share with your brothers and sisters in Christ of the Mid-South District.

Digital files, sent via e-mail, are preferred. Our submission deadline is the 15th of each month, two months before publication. Photos must be sent in high resolution.

Send email submissions to LW@mid-southlcms.com or send by postal mail to: Judy Otto; 150 N. Maury St.; Holly Springs, MS 38635