

Encourager

Mid-South District LCMS | April 2020

VOLUNTEERS

This month we focus on Volunteers. The past month has presented many challenges to all of us across the Mid-South District. From tornados to a pandemic, life has been turned upside down for many.

For Christians our feet stand on solid ground, and as many people across the District volunteer their time, talent and financial support we thank you. Serving one another is the light that will bring the lost to Him. Volunteering and helping others who cannot repay the gift can be the best way to introduce the lost to Jesus.

Thank you to all the volunteers across the District for all you do to support others and the ministry.

Message from Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola, *President*



While I was in seminary, I had the privilege to serve as a student in a field congregation that was going through a large building program. One of the artifacts that was placed in the beautiful new sanctuary was a life-sized crucifix over the top of the altar. The crucifix was made in Italy and was quite a wonderful piece of work. However, it wasn't as graphic as Mel Gibson's movie on the Crucifixion of Christ, but caused some reactions from some of the less-than-appreciative members of the congregation. The corpus of Christ was both pitiful and magnificent. His head was lowered with His chin resting upon his chest and His long hair hung down, concealing either side of His calm but sorrowful face. The face was turned slightly to

the right side, not peering in any particular direction. But, looking directly at the eyes of the Man of sorrow, made me ponder what the artist who fashioned the corpus was thinking. What moment of Christ's passion was he trying to capture? The eyes were opened meaning the death of Christ had not yet happened. Was the artist trying to capture the moment when He was looking at His mother? Or, was it the moment when Jesus looked at the crowd, asking the Heavenly Father to "Forgive them, for they know not what they do"? What meaning could be drawn from His silent gaze?

Perhaps you may have heard this critique that the crucifix with the corpus of Christ isn't what we Lutherans should have in our sanctuaries. It is criticized

as being too “Catholic.” Or, the other side of the coin’s criticism is that the empty cross on our walls, on our pendants, and other objects shows that Christ’s work is done. Yet, the bottom line is that seeing the corpus of Christ on the cross tells us too much truth about the consequences of our sin and what it cost the Lord of our salvation to return us to God’s favor.

Martin Luther once wrote, “So today when the whole world persecutes us, cruelly damns and kills us, we should glory and exult in this. For we are not undergoing all this on account of our misdeeds as thieves, robbers, etc. (I Peter 4:15), but because of Christ, our Savior and Lord, whose Gospel we teach purely.” He was speaking about the cross – whether it is empty, or it has the corpus of Christ on it.

The cross can be removed or covered or ignored, but it will still tell us about how we can understand our own suffering. The reality of the cross – empty or filled – is the figure of what we, as Christians, will bear. We’d rather hide it away so we didn’t have to face it. But, the centrality of the Cross of Christ and His glorious Resurrection can never be hidden from its message splashed throughout the New Testament. Jesus suffered horribly for us on the cross. His death on the cross is the penultimate event, leading to God’s judicious decision to raise Christ Jesus from the dead in human flesh – the guarantee of our justification in God’s grace. That is why St

Paul declares in I Corinthians, “[Christ sent me to preach the Gospel]... lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, and is ever after described as the Crucified One.” (I Corinthians 1:17-24, ESV)

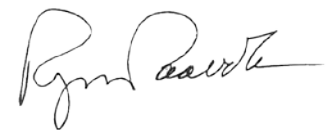
Then, Paul appeals to the Galatians because he has publicly portrayed Christ as crucified before them (Galatians 3:1). There is no way to capture the essence or improve upon the picture that the New Testament draws of the suffering Servant, Jesus Christ.

We sinners deserved to suffer what Jesus suffered. Yet, God in His infinite mercy had Him suffer for us. He suffered, not because He was compelled, but out of sheer grace and His unconditional love for us. My dear friend and sainted churchman, Rev. Dr. Herb Mueller posits in the book he was unable to finish before going to be with the risen Christ,

that the Cross of Christ and His Resurrection is the centrality of and sum of our faith. We can live in the assurance that God’s Son took our place on His cross. His suffering on the cross is our sufferings by faith. We may take up our own crosses – not because we ought to, but because it is His for us.

As I write this, the whole world is moving toward shutting down because of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is no panic, no confusion, or fear. We fear not, but become diligent to confront this faceless enemy of Satan. But, this is how the children of the church face the persecutions, famine, and plagues. Our hope and comfort comes when the Gospel is proclaimed – the truth and peace that passes our human understanding, no matter how the devil rages against us – the Gospel is still the truth. Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is ours in Christ Jesus, who died for sinners like us, and rose again, victorious over sin, death, and Satan. That’s why He was and must remain our Crucified and risen Savior.

Your servant in Christ –
Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola



Volunteers - The True Power Behind God's Kingdom



Shortly before 1 am on the morning of March 3rd, an EF-3 tornado struck Nashville. It was on the ground for 60.13 miles, traveling for almost an hour from Nashville to Cookeville. The tornado destroyed homes, churches, schools and businesses along its path. The path of the tornado came within a 1/2 mile from Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Hermitage. Thankfully there was little damage to the church building and no loss of life of our members, but there was considerable damage throughout our community in Donelson, Hermitage, Mt. Juliet, and Lebanon. The homes of two families that attend our school were completely destroyed and several members had property damage from fallen trees.

At the request of President Paavola, Lutheran Church Charities Disaster Relief Team came to assist us. They brought 50 members of the L.E.R.T. (Lutheran Early Response Team) chainsaw crew. They crew slept each night and ate dinner and breakfast at Emmanuel before going out

into the community to cut down and clear trees at members' homes and throughout the community. Through Lutheran Church Charities, Emmanuel was able to offer help, care, comfort and hope to our community. God turned this disaster into a way to be a witness of the love of Christ to our neighbors. God is good!

— Sarah Baker
Emmanuel Lutheran Church



Prayers for Volunteers



LCC and LERT crews deployed to the Mid-South District in March

Kathy O'Day, LCC Director of Disaster Response, LCC Staff and forty-eight L.E.R.T. chainsaw certified team members completed their deployment in mid-March, serving 25 families affected by tornadoes in Hermitage, Mt. Juliet, Lebanon and Donelson. They worked with Pastor Keith Enko at Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Hermitage. The church intends to continue to assist the two families who were attending Emmanuel's Early Childhood Center and lost everything in the tornado. They will continue to provide spiritual and emotional support to the community as they prepare for a long-term recovery

Read more at <https://www.lutheranchurchcharities.org/articles/category/disaster-response>



Stewardship in Uncertain Times

So many changes are impacting congregations today as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. To do our part in the fight against an enemy we cannot even see, we've had to temporarily give up something that is central to our identity as Christians: the joy of coming together in worship and fellowship. But thanks to technology and the creativity and innovation of many in the church, we are not completely separated from the blessing of worship and fellowship with our faith families. Online tools are connecting thousands across the Mid-South District to worship, Bible study and friends. What a blessing!

But another challenge facing many congregations at this time may take a greater effort to address. **That**

challenge is a fluctuation or decrease in giving. If you are able, please continue to financially support your church. Many faithful supporters of ministry will have their incomes disrupted by the current crisis. If you are fortunate enough to be spared such loss, prayerfully consider helping to "fill in the gap" by increasing your giving over the coming weeks. As the COVID-19 crisis continues to unfold, ministries will work diligently to maintain their financial stability—but for some, this will be a true struggle. Using online giving tools or simply continuing to mail a check to the church each week can be a significant help to your congregation as we all work through this crisis together.