



First Hearts August 2026

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Faith in the Mountains: Campfirmation 2026 Bridges Districts and Builds

Foundations

By Rev. Derek Roberts, Pastor at Praise Lutheran Church in Maryville, TN and Campfirmation Director at Camp Linn Haven, NC.

For over 80 years, Camp Linn Haven has provided a sanctuary of faith, fellowship, and Christian community along the Linville River in Avery County, North Carolina. Nestled 3,600 feet up in the Blue Ridge Mountains, this 52-acre retreat center has long been a crown jewel of outdoor ministry. While historically affiliated with our neighbors in the Southeastern District, it has also been a vital regional resource for the Mid-South District - particularly for congregations in East Tennessee looking for a driveable retreat location in the mountains.

This summer, from July 5-11, 2026, youth ages 12 and up gathered at Camp Linn Haven for Campfirmation 2026. Note that the word "campfirmation" is a

portmanteau, combining camp and confirmation. They joined their peers from Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee for an intensive week of catechesis, liturgical worship, and communal life.

Catechesis in Creation: The Apostles' Creed

Unlike a standard recreational summer camp, Campfirmation operates with a distinct Biblical and confessional Lutheran theology. The curriculum brings Luther's Small Catechism to life. The theological anchor for the 2026 season directly addressed the core confession of the ancient Church: "I believe in the Triune God" and the focus was the three articles of the Apostles' Creed.

Throughout the week, a dedicated team of LCMS pastors, DCEs, teachers, and laymen led students through plenaries and breakout sessions about gender, family, technology, redemption, the end times, and God-pleasing vocations. This rigorous study wasn't left on the whiteboard; it was immediately woven into the rhythm of daily life. Campers framed their days with corporate Matins, Evening Prayer, and Compline along with two Divine Services. Campers talked about the sermons and the teachings as they hiked and when they met in small groups at family time. Private Confession and Absolution was offered daily so that students could fully experience all aspects of the means of grace that they learn about at church and at home.

A Story of Multi-District Resilience

For Mid-South workers and parents who monitored the devastating regional impact of Hurricane Helene, the very fact that Campfirmation 2025 and 2026 ran smoothly is a profound cause for thanksgiving. The mountain facility suffered catastrophic floodwater and structural damage during the storm.

However, the body of Christ rose to the occasion. Intensive recovery deployments throughout late 2024 and early 2025 - heavily supported by LCMS Lutheran Early Response Teams (LERT) and volunteer networks across multiple districts - cleared debris, stabilized the waterfront, and repaired the camp's infrastructure. Thanks to these tireless servants, the camp's 18 modern cabins, dining hall, and Mountainside Lutheran Church were fully operational, safe, and ready to welcome youth by the time summer arrived in 2025 and now again in 2026.

Fellowship Without Borders

For young people in the Eastern side of the Mid-South District, the benefits of a regional camp are immeasurable. Worship, study, hiking, and campfires alongside other Lutheran youth and church workers reminds catechumens that they are part of a larger, vibrant confession of faith that extends far beyond their home pews.

Furthermore, the camp provides an exceptionally low-barrier financial framework

for individual and congregation budgets. It is one of the most accessible and affordable week-long summer youth retreats available.

Because the camp handles all meal preparation and facility maintenance, the visiting pastors, DCEs, and layman can focus on teaching and interacting with the youth. They spend the week doing what matters most: proclaiming Christ crucified and risen and building deep, lasting pastoral relationships with the students during a pivotal time in their lives. Leaders from the participating churches note how Campfirmation inspires more youth towards church vocations than any other activity they plan throughout the year.

Mid-South District representatives and pastors at Campfirmation include Rev. David Graves (4th Vice President and Pastor of St. Paul Lutheran, Wartburg) who served as the Dean of Chapel for the week, Rev. Chase Lefort (Knoxville Circuit Visitor and Pastor of Faith Lutheran, Oak Ridge) who taught and preached during the week, Rev. Ed Maanum (First Lutheran, Knoxville) who taught Middle School Plenaries and preached at camp, and Rev. Derek Roberts (Praise Lutheran, Maryville) who served as the Camp Director for the week.

Looking Ahead to 2027: Loved and Loving Others (The Ten Commandments)

Campfirmation week has consistently hit capacity over the last several years with approximately 10 churches participating, nearly filling every bed available. Though Campfirmation leaders would certainly love to share the teachings and life together with more people, they currently cannot invite any more and provide sufficient accommodations. They do, however, covet prayers as they prepare for 2027 and for the LCMS youth (and adults) who are impacted by Campfirmation.

Next year's theme is *Loved and Loving Others* - teachings on The Ten Commandments with Luther's explanations.











Weekly Events

Sunday - Divine Service 9:30 am; Bible Study/Sunday School 10:45am

Board Happenings

8/11 - School Board 6:00pm

Other Church Activities

8/1 - Men's Bible Study 8:30am

8/9 - Young Adult Bible Study 12:00pm

8/15 - Work Day 8:30am - 12:00pm

8/16 - Youth group 12:00pm

8/22 - GermanFest 11:00am - 8:00pm

	Aug. 1 (Prop. 13)	Eleventh S. after Pentecost	Ex. 16:2–15	Psalm 145:10– 21	Eph. 4:1–16	John 6:22–35
	Aug. 8 (Prop. 14)	Twelfth S. after Pentecost	1 Kings 19:1–8	Psalm 34:1–8	Eph. 4:17–5:2	John 6:35–51
	Aug. 15	St. Mary, Mother of Our Lord	Isaiah 61:7–11	Psalm 45:10–17	Gal. 4:4–7	Luke 1:(39–45) 46–55
	or (Prop. 15)	Thirteenth S. after Pentecost	Prov. 9:1–10 or Josh. 24:1–2a, 14–18	Psalm 34:12–22	Eph. 5:6–21	John 6:51–69
	Aug. 22 (Prop. 16)	Fourteenth S. after Pentecost	Isaiah 29:11–19	Psalm 14	Eph. 5:22–33	Mark 7:1–13
	Aug. 29	The Martyrdom of St. John the Baptist	Rev. 6:9–11	Psalm 71:1–8	Rom. 6:1–5	Mark 6:14–29
	or (Prop. 17)	Fifteenth S. after Pentecost	Deut. 4:1–2, 6–9	Psalm 119: 129–136	Eph. 6:10–20	Mark 7:14–23



From the Principal

Change is hard.

You've probably heard the joke: How many Lutherans does it take to change a light bulb? None, because they don't believe in change.

It's funny because there's a grain of truth to it—but it should also serve as a warning. If that light bulb doesn't get changed, we're just walking around in the dark.

There is something to be said for tradition: the liturgy, a history of educational excellence, and even the silly traditions like drawing yourself as a LEGO person when you're in Ms. Rodgers' class or doing the Lion Dance in Mrs. Wiberley's class. These traditions ground us. They remind us where we've been, what we value, and what we have accomplished together.

However, sometimes change is necessary.

A new school year brings a new grade, a new teacher, and new routines. While that can be exciting, it can also be hard. We loved our old teacher. We knew the old routine so well that we could practically do it in our sleep.

This year, our school was thrown a curveball. We were forced to switch our student information system at the same time we were starting a new school year. This is where everything from financial information and student data to attendance and grades is kept. Suddenly, an undertaking that would typically take place over the summer months was compressed into just a few weeks—all while we were trying to get a new school year off to a good start. Needless to say, it has caused a bit of stress.

And yet, there is excitement, too. This new program can do things our old system could not, and it will help our school continue to move forward. There is certainly a learning curve, but there are also new possibilities and opportunities.

Colossians 2:6–7 reminds us, “*Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith.*”

As Christians, we can face change differently because we know that while many things around us may change, **Christ does not**. Being rooted does not mean standing still. A tree that is rooted well is able to grow, stretch, and reach toward the light because its foundation is secure.

That is what we want for our students and for our school. We want to honor the traditions that have shaped us, while also being willing to grow, adapt, and embrace the opportunities God places before us.

So, yes—change is hard. But it doesn’t have to be something we fear. We can step into change knowing that our circumstances may shift, our routines may change, and our technology may frustrate us—but **our roots remain strong**.

In Other News

Stewardship

Define Your Life by How You Give

Originally Published in August 2023

Winston Churchill reportedly said that “we make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.” According to Churchill, our lives are defined not by what we have gotten, but by what we give away.

Our Lord’s life is defined in this way. He gave completely of Himself for us. He became man for us. He taught the truth of God’s Word. He healed those with many and various diseases. He died the death that we deserved for our sins. He gave of Himself in order to save us from sin, death and hell. And so it is that by giving completely of Himself, He got for Himself us, making us citizens of His eternal kingdom by grace.

As it was for Jesus, so it also is for us. We get more from giving than we do from simply getting. For, giving softens our hearts and frees us from the grip which the worries of this world and making a living have on us. When we are singularly focused on making a living, we are singularly focused on what we get. That mindset begins to bleed into all areas of our lives — our relationships with friends and family, with neighbors and coworkers and with the Lord. It shifts our focus from asking the question, “How can I be a friend, family member, neighbor and servant to others?”

to asking the question, “What have they done for me lately?” We become more selfish instead of selfless.

But when we give, we do not have less, nor do we become less; rather, we have more and become more. When we give, we join in the bond of friendship and family, the bond of service to those around us out of love for them. And love is the fulfillment of the Law. It is the nature of God Himself, for God is Love. Thus, we are participating in the Divine Nature. As Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

GermanFest is coming up on August 22 and we need everyone's help to make this a success. Please sign up for shifts at this

link: <https://forms.gle/RfELE4ZxhsRaf7ei8> or using the QR code on the bulletin board across from the church mailboxes. We are especially looking for people who are willing to work with food in the last three shifts! If you have any questions - reach out to Christine Sprecher (christinesprecher@gmail.com).



Choir Rehearsal: The initial choir rehearsal for the season will be Wednesday, August 26th at 6:00 pm, at the home of Charles and Canda Kandt, 5212 Malibu Drive, Knoxville. This will be a dinner and social get-together with a short rehearsal. Families are invited. Please bring a side dish, and swim suits if you are so inclined. Children and curiosity seekers are welcomed.

Young Adult Bible Study - please join us on the second Sunday of every month.

Youth! Mark your calendars, join in fun and fellowship after Sunday School on the third Sunday of every month.

Website: Please visit the church website www.firstknoxville.org for Bible study and other resources.

Facebook Page: Follow First Lutheran on Facebook for all the latest updates:
<https://www.facebook.com/KnoxFirstLutheran/>



Anniversaries:

Aug. 1: Todd & Jill Seaver
Aug. 8: Carroll & Sherry Ward
Aug. 20: Erik & Emily Blomenberg
Aug. 22: Eric & Kristin Lintz
Aug. 25: Tom & Mary Spiegel
Aug. 30: Marc & Lois Blais

Birthdays:

Aug. 2: John Mueller
Aug. 3: Noah Broyles; August Sircy
Aug. 5: Jered Sprecher
Aug. 9: Christina Boatman
Aug. 10: Kim Robinson; Aidan Scruggs
Aug. 12: Kevin Holliday; Tyler Ward
Aug. 13: Doug Bales; Shellia Byrd; Zach McSween
Aug. 14: Fae Maanum
Aug. 15: Wendy Appleton; Gary Munsey
Aug. 16: Rex Bartholomay
Aug. 17: Roger Bartholomay; Steve Killian; JoAnn Niedens
Aug. 18: Terrie Yeatts
Aug. 19: Chris Cox; Ruth Franklin
Aug. 21: Dawn Roberts
Aug. 22: Nathan Baum; Robbie Miller
Aug. 24: Charles Kandt

Aug. 28: Keith Hodson; Amy Klingerman; Christopher Mitchell

Aug. 29: Eric Lintz; Annie Miller; Larry Miller

Aug. 30: Jackie Wheat

Aug. 31: Olivia Wolford