



/ JANUARY 2024

# TEXAS MESSENGER

*From the president*



**T**he season of Epiphany begins with urgency. The Wise Men searched. Herod raged. Joseph and the holy family fled. Mark's Gospel — the Gospel used for the three-year series of Scripture readings this church year — communicates this urgency over and over again.

After Jesus' Baptism, He immediately "saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove" (MARK 1:10). Two verses later, "The Spirit immediately drove [Jesus] out into the wilderness" to be tempted (MARK 1:12).

Mark uses the word "immediately" 40 times in his Gospel, in every chapter except two. It means "at once," "as soon as," or "straight-away." It pushes us straight into the next movement of Jesus' mission to save humanity from its fallenness and sin. It is a word of urgency in a Gospel of urgency.

Why so urgent?

Because the trials and struggles of our broken lives and sinful world

pose urgent eternal danger (MARK 4:15-17).

Because Christ's imminent return causes urgent concern for the eternal life of all (MARK 4:26-29).

Because all people have an urgent need for Jesus' comfort and strength during life's storms (MARK 6:47-51).

Because forgiveness and salvation through Jesus Christ is the only answer for the urgent condition of being lost and separated from God (MARK 15:1-5).

Mark's Gospel skips the Christmas account and starts with Isaiah's words: "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him" (MARK 1:3). The word for "straight" is related to the word "immediately." Mark is a "pointer," not a "painter." He doesn't tell the long version of the story. He gets to the point and points us to what we need to know and do right now.

Introducing John the Baptist, Mark notes: "John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (MARK 1:4). Repentance is urgent. It is so easy to get distracted from the Gospel and become captivated by our causes, preferences and ways. Called back to the Way and the Truth and the Life, we fall before our Savior uttering the humble and truthful

Spirit-led plea, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" (LUKE 18:13). The church and the world urgently need us to be people of repentance.

By grace we are returned to Jesus, and by grace we are led by Him. The disciples immediately left their nets — their livelihood and personal standing — to follow Jesus as fishers of men (MARK 1:17-18). Following Jesus as fishers of men is urgent. Nearly 75 percent of people in Texas do not consider attending church a priority and may not know Jesus as Savior. What "nets" do you need to drop so that sharing the Gospel — shining the Epiphany light of Jesus the Savior — can be the urgent priority in your life, in your congregation, and in your ministry?

Check out the mission story in Texas at [txlcms.org/videos](https://txlcms.org/videos).

## Questions for reflection:

Look at the verses from Mark referenced in this article. What do they say about Jesus' mission and our calling?

**Prayer starter:** Ask God to bring clarity, focus, and urgency to your Gospel calling in 2024.



**Rev. Michael Newman**  
President,  
LCMS Texas District  
[txlcms.org](https://txlcms.org)  
[mnewman.org](mailto:mnewman.org)



*"When you find something special, you don't want to keep it for yourself. You want to share it with your loved ones, your people. It's my Vietnamese people. It's my people, my country. Yeah, I love them. I want them to experience how blessed (they are) in Jesus Christ."*

~ Rev. Andrew Nguyễn, Houston



**GIVE NOW!**  
[txlcms.org/tpim](http://txlcms.org/tpim)



## PRAY

It is our number one priority. Our goal is to have 10% of the Texas District, LCMS members praying regularly for the mission.  
[bit.ly/missionprayertx](http://bit.ly/missionprayertx)



## GIFTS

No gift to Texas Partners in Mission is too small. We need gifts to reach the thousands of people in Texas with the life-saving Gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Every dollar contributed to Texas Partners in Mission goes directly to bringing the Gospel to people who don't know Jesus Christ. Thank you for your dedication to the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ!

**"Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation." ~ Mark 16:15**





# 'Exponential'

More than 70 LCMS leaders from across Texas recently traveled to Tennessee to take part in Learning Communities, held by Exponential. Over a day and a half, participants were encouraged by stories of ordinary Christians who are actively witnessing. We were invited into a culture in which it is considered “normal” for disciples to make disciples who make disciples. Our facilitators helped us think through our current contexts and assisted us in making plans for further Kingdom multiplication.

Exponential ([exponential.org/lc](http://exponential.org/lc)) inspires and equips leaders “to change the primary metrics of success in the Church from addition to multiplication, and from accumulation to releasing. The Multipliers Learning Communities were created to help forward-thinking leaders engage in peer-to-peer learning about the future of the church. The Learning Community journey consists of three separate gatherings in three different cities over a seven-month period (from Fall 2023 to Spring 2024). The journey combines the relational, experiential and informational components required for transformation. Learning Community attendees build lasting connections with fellow church multipliers while gaining the innovative ideas that will lead to implementing an action plan in their local context.”

The day after we returned, one participant followed up by texting a group of fellow travelers: “Super blessed by the past few days. Grateful for each of you in my life and connection to what the Holy Spirit is doing in our



**By Rev. Pete Mueller**  
Mission Strategist,  
Area C

midst. My ministry partner and I had deeper conversations about discipleship in our context than we have had in a long while. I am grateful for the space to do so.”

Another emailed members of our Texas District Mission Team: “I am writing for the express purpose of thanking you for the vision and for setting a culture that takes risks in the Exponential ministry. I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to listen/learn as the model was presented over the two days in Nashville. The opportunity to dialogue with men and women who are eager to share the message and allow the Spirit to move them to action was inspiring. Thanks to whomever sought this, found a way to finance it, and for the culture that isn’t “permission-giving” but rather is “opportunity seeking” and willing to take risks. Thanks to those who asked me to be a part of this movement. I’m grateful to be around to witness this prayerful effort at renewal and rebirth.”

For me personally, one of the greatest blessings of this experience was made clear at our final lunch together before flying home. Sitting down randomly with a group of Texas District participants, my table mates were senior and associate pastors, church planters, a college intern, an evangelist trainer and a children’s ministry director. As we waited for our lunch to arrive, each of us shared the place of our birth and the occupation of our parents. Remarkably, the leaders whom God is positioning here in Texas “for such a time as this” have been gathered from the far corners of the earth: Honduras, Colombia, Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Texas, Missouri, and (even) Iowa.

We should not be surprised. For the Lord declares:

“It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.” **ISAIAH 49:6**





In 2024 Legacy Deo is focusing on the concept of “Radical Generosity.” This isn’t a new model for us by any means. Our hallways are full of stories of individuals who understand and live lives of radical generosity.

I am always inspired by the stories of people who, in the midst of great tragedy, rewrote their story. They did not allow tragedy to define them. Instead they chose to follow the example of Jesus and give out of sorrow. I think it’s significant that so many of these people have found healing in the act of giving. To give so generously might not make sense to those looking in from the outside, but most things that are radical rarely make sense to those who don’t share your vision.

We are excited this year to share with you their stories and to show you how you can partner with this concept of radical generosity. In a world full of brokenness and hurt, there has never been a better time to share the love of Jesus and his example of radical generosity.



**Dayna Dinan**  
Administrative/  
Marketing  
Coordinator

**I have been thinking a lot about characteristics of Jesus.**

His patience.

His kindness.

His goodness.

His generosity.

When I think of His patience, I am reminded of his constant love for me, even when I am incredibly unlovable.

When I think of His kindness, I can’t help but think of the Samaritan woman at the well.

When I think about His goodness, I think of five loaves of bread and two fish.

When I think of His generosity, I am undone, because I can’t help but think of the cross. It is the perfect example of radical generosity that doesn’t make sense, but is given nonetheless.

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## SMITHVILLE



▲ Rev. David Woelmer was ordained and installed as pastor of Grace on July 9. Brothers pictured here are, from left (front row) Revs. Richard Mittwede, J. Brown, John Stelling, Thomas Obersat, Bernie Schey, Peter Lange, David Woelmer, James Woelmer (David's father), Michael Newman, Herb Keistman, Josh Hahn, Dave Mumm, Al Loeschman; (back row) Nate Hill, Jason Kaspar, Joshua Woelmer (David's brother), Lee Kunkel, John Austin, Jonathan Meyer, Gary Johnson, Carl Roth, Dustin Beck and Ryan Ogrodowicz.

► On Nov. 12 and 19, Grace welcomed two new members, Christine Thody (left) and Gabrielle Pietsch, by adult confirmation. They are pictured with Pastor Woelmer.



## FAIRVIEW



Immanuel supports the secondary school in Nakabango Village in Uganda. Bishop Charles Bemeka (right) visited Immanuel in August and thanked the congregation and shared information about the Lutheran Church in Uganda. At left is Rev. Tab Ottmers, Immanuel pastor.

## NEW BRAUNFELS



These new members were brought into the body of Christ at Cross Lutheran Church on Reformation Sunday, Oct. 29, by Rite of Membership and Sacrament of Baptism. They are pictured with Rev. Toby Joeckel.



## THORNDALE



▲ For a service project, pre-K 3 through fifth-grade Sunday school students at St. Paul stuffed and dressed 40 various animals to be given to children who are patients at Dell Children's Hospital in Austin.

► On Nov. 19, Rev. Jeff Doria was installed as senior pastor of St. Paul. Pictured are, from left, Revs. Don Kasper, Steve Fick, James K. Mann, Ben Gonzales, Jeff Doria, J. Brown, Scott Schaller, Grayson Albers and Paul Howe.



## LUBBOCK



Clay Lusk was welcomed among the saints of Redeemer Lutheran Church as he was baptized at on Oct. 22 by Rev. Charles Nemec.

## WHARTON

On, Oct. 15, St. John's celebrated its 125th anniversary. Rev. Michael Newman, Texas District president preached with "sons" of St. John's participating in the service — Revs. Norman Stoppenhagen, Gerald Beerger and Mike Ramey. Following the service, a meal and short program was held in the church hall, where stories and memories were shared about St. John's and its members. Old pictures and memorabilia were on display for viewing.





## THE GROVE



Nov. 26 was another big day in the life of the blood-bought children of God of St. Paul. It began with the Baptism of Hayden Ray Heck, a senior at Gatesville High School. At left, Rev. John Heckmann is pictured with Hayden, along with Brandy Wrisk and her daughter, Alaynah, who stood with Hayden as he made this public confession of his saving faith in Jesus Christ. Later in the service, received by the Rite of Adult Confirmation were two more beloved sisters in Christ, Mel Thompson (at right with Pastor Heckmann) and Gina Krause (not pictured).



## CROWN OF LIFE • SAN ANTONIO



## A pillar of the Stone Oak community celebrates 40 years

Crown of Life is located on the southwest corner of Stone Oak Parkway and Knight's Cross. Almost 40 years ago, on Sunday, Jan. 15, 1984, the charter for this congregation was signed at Crown of Life's original location on Blanco Road.

The present sanctuary was dedicated in August 1986, while there was also construction for a growing ministry of the green-stucco Community Life Center in 2007. Long-time members remember when

the busy Stone Oak neighborhoods were ranchlands for cattle.

Rev. Mark Barz has served God's people at Crown of Life since February 1987.

Crown of Life's preschool welcomes children ages two through pre-kindergarten to learn and grow in the grace and love of Jesus. For 30 years, this ministry has been under the direction of Diane Dillow along with a skilled and caring staff, which provides stability and continuity. Touch-a-Truck and va-

cation Bible school are also offered for children and their families.

A traditional LCMS congregation, Crown of Life offers Divine Service at 8 and 10:45 a.m. on most Sundays. Special festival and midweek services are held throughout the church year. An education hour for all ages begins at 9:30 a.m.

The Lutheran faith focuses on the Good News of Jesus Christ and His redeeming work on the cross and His open and empty tomb. Individuals, couples and families will discover a faithful family in Christ at Crown of Life.

# 50 YEARS of Our Savior

Our Savior Lutheran Church (OSL), Austin, celebrated its 50th anniversary with a year-long series of Decade Sundays, leading up to a Grand Jubilee on Nov. 4 and a Jubilee Worship on Nov. 5.

On July 22, 1973, a group of 26 people met for the first time in the chapel of the Texas District office. The following October, OSL broke ground on its permanent facility and on Nov. 11, the church was chartered. In 1990, following the loss of a significant portion of its property to road expansion by the city of Austin, the congregation moved from its original site to its current location.

OSL's pastors through the years included Revs. James Noffke (1973–84), Gordon Albers (1984–97), Keith Gravesmill (1998–2012) and Eric Borchers (2014–present).

In the fall of 1974, an early childhood program serving pre-kindergarten 3 and 4 year olds began, and in 1984 a school serving those grades was established. The school and childcare program grew to serve infants through grade 5 until its closing in 2017 due to financial constraints.

Today, the congregation is focusing on living out its mission of “sharing



From left, Revs. Eric Stinnette, Eric Borchers and Barry Schweisow participated in the 2000s Decade Celebration, focusing on the ministry of Rev. Keith Gravesmill who died in 2012 while serving as OSL pastor. Rev. Borchers is the currently OSL pastor. Revs. Stinnette (St. Paul, Wichita Falls) and Schweisow (Zion, Buffalo, Okla.) are former members who were later ordained at OSL.



David Thoresen, former OSL member, served as organist for the 2010s Decade Celebration, which focused on music over the last 50 years.

God's love with each other and people of the community” by actively supporting the Circle of Hope Food Pantry, Austin Disaster Relief,

LCMS Disaster Response, among other ministries. The “50 for 50” Jubilee program challenged OSL families to donate 50 hours of community service in celebration of the 50 years of blessings showered on OSL. The challenge was met with over 1,200 hours of external community service recorded to date. This year, more than 500 Thanksgiving meals will be prepared and served for families in need.

In the last two years, OSL was also privileged to temporarily open its doors to Concordia High School and Austin Achieve Charter School and is actively seeking partnerships to continue to bring children and families into a nurturing, Christian environment.

OSL is a blessed people looking forward to the next 50 years in anticipation and confident of God's plan to prosper His church on earth.

## Share your news with us!

Send photos and stories for *The Lutheran Witness* insert to [txmess@txlcms.org](mailto:txmess@txlcms.org) or Texas Messenger, LCMS Texas District 1221 Satellite View, Round Rock, TX 78665







## GEORGETOWN

In October, the PieceMakers of Faith Lutheran Church celebrated after making 192 quilts for the year. The quilts are displayed on the pews and receive a blessing before they are given to Lutheran World Relief (LWR), which distributes the quilts to those in need around the world. There are three LWR collection centers in Texas. This past year, 16,721 quilts were collected in Texas, and 220,000 quilts traveled to 19 countries.

## SUGAR LAND



The Lady Fishers group of Fishers of Men Lutheran Church lovingly stitched and tied over 300 quilts to be donated to Lutheran World Relief. Additionally, 10 patriotic quilts will be donated to Camp Hope, which provides mercy and healing to veterans. The quilts were dedicated to God's service, trusting that each quilt, being more than just pieces of fabric, will be an expression of God's love to those that receive them around the world.

## KERRVILLE

Members of Hosanna Lutheran Church gathered on Oct. 26 to fold quilts and load up boxes to be sent around the world to help families in need. The group has been committed to this project for over 10 years. This past year the group created 249 quilts, 66 school kits, 39 personal care kits and 20 baby care kits. From left, Karla Bernhard, Judy Groth, Davella Ryno, Marsha Birkman, Todd and Marilyn Dittloff, Don and Helen Meller and Karen Wulff.





## PLANO

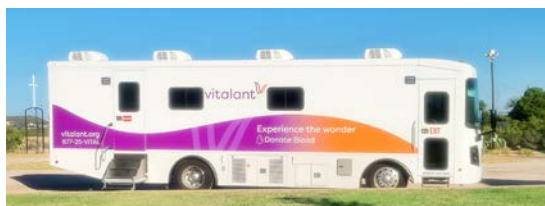
On Nov. 10, Faith Lutheran School observed Veterans Day with a ceremony recognizing community veterans. The event featured the school choir singing the national anthem, a proclamation from the mayor's office, a flag-folding ceremony and the singing of America the Beautiful.



In November, Faith Lutheran School's Lions4Life team collected more than 660 books, magazines and puzzle books for a local assisted living facility. Team members delivered the books to the facility in mid-December — and sang Christmas carols and spent time with the residents.

## BIG SPRING

Alive in Christ Lutheran Church held Trunk-or-Treat on Oct. 31. Pictured at right is Collins Garza, who was among the more than 100 who attended the event. Below, 14 donated blood on Aug. 19.



On Oct. 8, Alive in Christ celebrated LWML Sunday. Pictured are, from left, Daryl Richardson, Grace and Steve Shugrue, Jaunelle Roever (seated), Dolline Budke, and Judy and Rev. Bobby Roever.





These Lutheran friends of yours are celebrating wedding anniversaries of **50 YEARS** or more.

**Redeemer, Baytown**  
Wayne and Gladys Schilhab  
53 years, Nov. 14



**Fred and Fay Hemann**, members of Trinity Klein, Spring, celebrated 65 years of marriage on Oct. 18.



**Richard and Midge Wagner**, members of Trinity Klein, Spring, celebrated 70 years of marriage on Sept. 5.



**Bob and Joanne Allen**, members of Zion, Walburg, celebrated 69 years of marriage on Dec. 29.



**Tommy and Carol Harper**, members of St. Mark, Waco, celebrated their 50th anniversary on Nov. 17.



**Tom and Barbara Mittelstadt**, members of Christ Our Savior, Lago Vista, celebrated their 50th anniversary on Dec. 1.



**Rev. Don and Teri Poole**, members of St. Paul, Aleman, celebrated the 55 years of marriage on Aug. 10.



Florence Weatherly, a member of St. Mark, Conroe, celebrated her 99th birthday on Sept. 23. Florence never misses a worship service and is active in Prime Timers, the young at heart at St. Mark.



Ellie Wilson, a member of Grace, Lamesa, celebrated her 96th birthday on June 18.

## LAGO VISTA



Luke Lee Thompson was baptized at Christ Our Savior on June 4 by his father, Rev. Drew Thompson, Christ Our Savior pastor. Luke is pictured with his parents, Drew and Katie.

Rev. David Thompson, Luke's grandfather, conducted the service. He serves as associate pastor of Our Savior, McKinney.



# WANTED: Future church workers

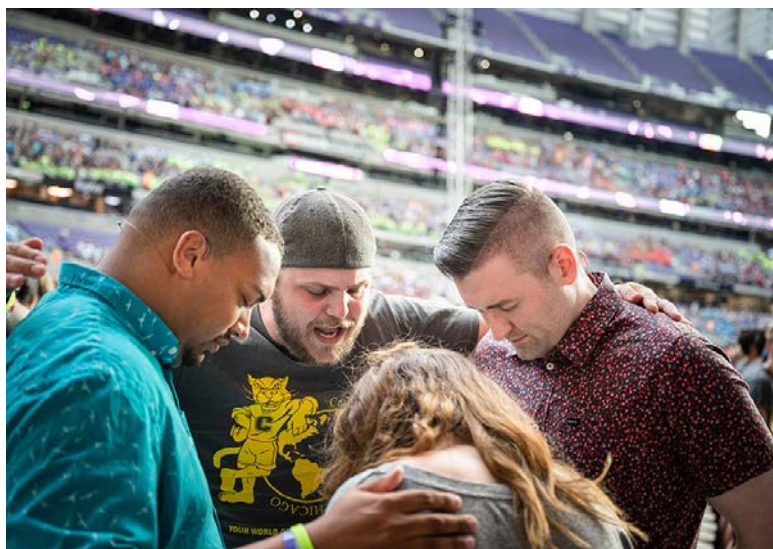
## SET APART TO SERVE

LCMS CHURCH WORK RECRUITMENT



*Set Apart to Serve* is the intentional effort of the LCMS to identify, encourage and form future church workers for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ until His return.

Your congregation can help spread the word about this effort and point interested future workers in the right direction by sharing information about the *Set Apart to Serve* initiative within your congregation. To download bulletin inserts and presentations, and to learn more about the initiative, visit [lcms.org/sas](http://lcms.org/sas).



Photos: LCMS/Erik M. Lunsford



# Celebrating our Lutheran schools

Kimberly Eifert  
is Educator of  
the Year



**By Dr. Bill Hinz**  
Director, School Ministry

**C**ongratulations to Kimberly Eifert, who was recognized as the 2023 Texas District Outstanding Lutheran Educator of the Year. We celebrate alongside Ehipany Lutheran Church and School, Houston, where Kimberly serves as a kindergarten teacher.

Kimberly was recognized during the annual Texas District Educators Conference, held Oct. 8–9 at Cross Lutheran Church and School, New Braunfels.

Educator of the Year finalists also included Betsy Graham, principal (preschool-grade 8) Prince of Peace, Christian School, Carrollton; Sandy Hampton, eighth-grade teacher, Trinity Klein Lutheran School, Spring; and Jennifer Smithers, innovation lab teacher, Salem Lutheran School, Tomball.

During the conference, we were blessed to have Rev. Zach McIntosh, senior pastor of Zion Lutheran Church and School,

Walburg, along with musician Adam Countryman, who led our Sunday night opening worship service. Rev. Michael Newman, Texas District president, shared words of hope and encouragement during our opening devotion on Monday.

Conference attendees had learning opportunities with pre-conference sessions on Sunday, along with a variety of sessions to choose from on Monday. AJ Cluck, executive director, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church and School, Edmond, Okla., and a commissioned teacher, served as our keynote speaker.

We celebrate all our Lutheran educators for their dedication to their students and their families in sharing the Gospel, and we acknowledge the high calling each of them represents to their respective ministries as they serve our Lord in helping to build His kingdom.

*Soli Deo Gloria* — To God alone be the glory.

Outstanding Lutheran Educator of the Year finalists, pictured with Dr. Hinz, are, from left, Betsy Graham, Sandy Hampton, Jennifer Smithers and Kimberly Eifert, who was the winner.



**Jan. 21-27**  
National Lutheran Schools Week

**Feb. 16-18**  
State Basketball Tournament, Tomball

**Feb. 29-March 2**  
Early Childhood Educators Conference, Lake Conroe, Montgomery

**June 5:**  
MRR Workshop (Marketing, Recruitment and Retention), Salem, Tomball

**July 15-17**  
Administrators Conference, San Antonio

**Oct. 14-15**  
All Church Workers Conference, Redeemer, Austin



# 'Pray without ceasing'

**I**t was dark outside when I hooked up my dogs and headed out for a run. As we attempted to cross Hatch Road, there were headlights coming in our direction, so we paused for a moment, letting a car zoom by. Immediately after it passed, I looked both ways and picked up the pace to cross the road before the next set of headlights was upon us.

Amid attempting to run to the other side of the street, my legs got tangled in the three leashes and I fell hard. Ouch! However, there was another car headed our way, and I was lying in the middle of the street. Yikes! Adrenaline really is a thing, so I sprang to my feet, regathered my three dogs and pulled them across the street before the oncoming car could run us over.

Whew! Safely out of harm's way, I could now feel pain in my knee and elbow, so I walked the dogs home and sat down for a few minutes. Not wanting to miss a workout, I eventually finished my run and was grateful that I didn't break anything when I fell.

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge



**Pat Fick**  
CAN-DO  
Director

of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling. **1TIM. 2:1-8**

Pray without ceasing. **1THESS. 5:17**

In these verses we are encouraged to pray for everyone and pray about everything. A strange thing happened the afternoon of my fall. My left ankle started to hurt really bad. I didn't even know I had injured it. By 5 p.m. I had to be carried to the car because I couldn't put any weight on it.

My colleague, Scott, just happened to have an ankle compression sleeve in his office, which he graciously gave me to wear. We called all our doctor friends and put the RICE treatment into play (rest, ice, compression, elevate). We also asked a lot of people to pray ... and the next morning the pain was totally gone!

I'm still in awe that I couldn't put any weight on my ankle one day and the next day it was as if nothing had happened. Wow! God can do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine. I'm so thankful.





# **BEST WISHES**

for a wonderful new year,  
filled with joy and God's blessings,  
from your friends at

**TEXAS DISTRICT EXTENSION FUND**

Becca Jones  
Raelyn Pracht  
Debbie Potter  
Juanita Shelby  
Renee Lehmann

Ruby Cruz  
Rolando Martinez  
Cheryl Springer  
Kenda Zawadzki  
Cynthia Segrest

# Giving Back What She's Been Given:

## Lillian's BeREAL Story



*Lillian was a child in foster care who would like to help foster children when she graduates from college. Upbring BeREAL gave her the necessary support to pursue her dream.*

**M** meet Lillian Davis, a resilient 24-year-old who has charted her own course to success. In 2022, Lillian proudly graduated from Texas A&M University–San Antonio with a degree in sociology. Undeterred by challenges, she is currently pursuing her masters' degree at the University of Texas–San Antonio while making a significant impact as a Court Appointed Special Advocate through her internship.

Lillian's journey is a testament to her unwavering determination to reshape her destiny. Growing up amidst familial struggles due to her mother's substance abuse and an absent father, Lillian found herself under the care of her maternal grandparents and facing economic hardships. At the age of 16, she entered the foster care system in San Antonio, and was placed in a loving foster home through Upbring Foster In Texas.

As a young adult in foster care, Lillian was eligible for free college tuition, which opened the doors to higher education. However, faced with challenges while in the Supervised Independent Living (SIL) program, which imposed restrictive living conditions, Lillian sought independence. Recognizing her need for autonomy, Upbring became part of her life again — this time through our BeREAL program which became a catalyst for her journey.

BeREAL became the cornerstone of Lillian's pursuit of self-sufficiency. While still an SIL, it offered Lillian an apartment of her own and the "me" time she yearned for.

"It's a really good step to independence but still having people come in to check on you to make sure you're alright," Lillian said about BeREAL. "It's not too overbearing and it's very supportive."

Tailored for young adults aged 18-21 transitioning from foster care to independence, BeREAL provided Lillian with not only a supportive living environment, but also crucial life skills and career coaching. Now Lillian is not just re-writing her story; she's crafting a narrative of triumph and empowerment, determined to define her own success and make a lasting impact on the world around her.

In the future, Lillian would like to work with foster youth and help promote education. For now, to prepare for her career, Lillian observes supervisor's meetings and court hearings. "I have experienced child home visits, parent-child visits and mediations," says Lillian. "I am very excited and a little nervous to begin."

*Because of your support, young adults like Lillian can experience a brighter tomorrow and impart what they have learned to others. For more information, go to [Upbring.org/Get-Involved](https://upbring.org/Get-Involved).*

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## WOMEN'S RENEWAL RETREAT

# 'Invited'

Ladies are pictured enjoying fellowship at the 2023 Women's Renewal Retreat, held last February.



As we enter into a new year, many of us have likely set some new goals for growth in our physical and spiritual lives. More often than not, these goals require some level of discipline, focus and hard work. But how often do we consider rest and renewal as part of the equation?

In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus speaks these words:

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

It is so easy to get caught up in our day-to-day routines of errands, cleaning, to-do lists, kids activities, work, appointments and so much more. But Jesus extends this invitation to us, that whenever we are feeling weary or burdened, we can come and find rest in Him alone.

Our annual Women's Renewal Retreat, to be held Feb. 2-4 at the La Grange campus, is intended to provide the opportunity to do

just that. This weekend is set aside for ladies to reflect on how God is active in their lives; be in fellowship with other sisters in Christ; and spend time in His beautiful creation. One participant from last year put her experience this way, "I encountered God at Women's Renewal through meeting new people and sharing experiences. I was reminded that we are not alone."

As you may already know, the theme we will focus on at Camp Lone Star in 2024 is "Invited." Throughout the weekend at Women's Renewal, we will look at how God has invited us into a relationship with Him and how we are called to invite others to come and see what He has done in our lives.

Together, we will find rest and renewal in Jesus as we study His Word and experience adventures like hiking, archery, tomahawk throwing, and conquering the climbing tower. Opportunities to spend time with small groups, sing around the campfire and take in the stars will rejuvenate you; and you will leave filled up and ready to

share the love of Christ with others.

The retreat cost is \$195 per person and registration is open now at [camplonestar.org/womens-renewal](http://camplonestar.org/womens-renewal).



♦ CAMP ♦

# LONE STAR

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## CONTACT US

**Lutheran Outdoors  
Ministry of Texas**

P.O. Box 457; La Grange, TX 78945

[info@camplonestar.org](mailto:info@camplonestar.org)

979-968-1657 • [camplonestar.org](http://camplonestar.org)

# ‘Create in me a clean heart’

As we may be focusing on the resolutions for 2024, it is a good time to also focus on a renewed relationship with our Lord. We read in Psalm 51:10-12:

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

Psalm 51 was composed by David as a confession to God after Nathan the prophet had informed David of God’s judgment against him because of his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah, her husband. The psalm begins with:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!

This is an excellent confession and prayer to use as you begin the new year. Getting right with our Lord should be a very high priority for all of us. The beginning of the new year is a perfect time to begin a new prayer

regimen. Prayer is your conversation with the Lord. He wants us to communicate with him as often as possible.

We are given a promise that He will hear our prayers. It is interesting to listen to prayers at church on Sunday morning. How many of those prayers ask the Lord for blessings — and how many of those prayers thank the Lord for blessings already received?

We need to keep the asking side and the thanking side more in balance. We need to reconcile ourselves with God by remembering to thank God in all our prayers. The psalmist asked for that when he prayed “Create in me a clean heart, O God and renew a right spirit within me.” A “right spirit” says, “Thank you Lord, for my Savior and Your manifold, unending blessings.”

Try this prayer next time: “Dear Lord, forgive my ingratitude. Instead, give me a new heart that is filled with joy in Jesus and all the other temporal and eternal blessings His sacrifice gives. In His name. Amen.”

*Portions of this article have been taken from LHM Daily Devotions and sermons by Revs. Drs. Ken Klaus and Gregory Seltz*







## WonderFull World Retreats

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” JOHN 3:16

In September and October, LWML Texas District held three retreats in which 118 ladies heard the message that God’s love is with us everywhere. God’s love is Awesome! Extravagant! Vast! Amazing! Wonderful!

We explored many wonders on our trip around the world with this re-

treat. We wondered if anyone really cares about us ... how life would be different if we were royalty ... if we matter to God ... where God is when life is hard ... if we can really rely on God ... and if we can make a difference. As we wondered, we confirmed God’s Word has *the* answers. We know we can turn to God, our Bibles and fellow Christians as we go through those times of wondering and as we go into the future.

At these retreats, we also shared God’s love with others. We made

blankets that say “God loves me!” as a tangible demonstration of love. These blankets were shared with pregnancy centers and other locations.

Everyone wonders about the future. The Bible answers this wonder too. We can read Jeremiah 29:11 or Psalm 139:16. But more guidance can be found in Proverbs 3:5-6 (NLT):

Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek His will in all you do, and He will show you which path to take.



Mission Grant Spotlight

**Houston Coalition for Life (HCL)** was a grateful first-time recipient of an LWML Texas District grant in 2022. Funds enabled the purchase of Christian devotionals — *Dear Mother*, *Christmas Story*, and *Redeeming Mama* — as well as 200 Bibles to be given to the women in crisis pregnancies served by HCL.



Founded with the mission of ending abortion in Houston peacefully and prayerfully, HCL operates five Blue Blossom pregnancy centers, including four mobile crisis units: Big Blue, Baby Blue, Little One, and Little Two, and the main office. All offer free pregnancy tests, free ultrasounds, and free Christian counseling to abortion-vulnerable women.

The majority of women served through the pregnancy centers are underserved and do not have a network of support, which includes the lack of a church family. They consider abortion because they are oftentimes pressured by the father of the baby, their family or friends; or feel like they have no other choice. However, once moms are introduced to their baby via a free ultrasound, 93% will choose life.

The team at HCL provides individualized counseling and each mom is invited to free Curriculum of Life classes provided through the Maternal Assistance Program. One of HCL’s clients who had been struggling and received a devotional and a Bible said: “Nobody has ever been so nice to me,” and “the Bible means so much to me. I started to read it and I know that God put you into my life and I am so grateful.”

Alexandra Sizemore • Director of Development

## SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

Invite a female member of your Texas District congregation attending an LCMS college or university and studying to become a full-time professional church worker to apply for the Texas District LWML scholarship for the 2024-2025 school year.

For more information and to apply, visit [lwmltxdist.org](http://lwmltxdist.org). Click “Committees,” choose “Scholarships” from the drop-down menu, and download the 2024 scholarship application packet. You may also contact Melissa Houchin, Scholarship Committee chairman, at [scholarship@lwmltxdist.org](mailto:scholarship@lwmltxdist.org). Completed application packets must be sent or emailed to Melissa, time-stamped or postmarked by March 31.



Paul writes in Gal. 6:10 that “as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone.”

**The Bible Brigade** is a ministry that cares for the whole person (body and soul), providing Bibles and devotional materials for spiritual care; and to meet physical needs gift cards are provided to those affected by disasters. The Bible Brigade mission goes hand-in-hand with services provided by Lutheran Disaster Care (LDC).

LDC has teams that travel all over the United States, helping victims of disasters. They also train volunteers around the state to serve on the teams, including using a chainsaw. In the training sessions, LDC emphasizes the importance of listening to the victims and how to appropriately share the hope that we have in Christ. Sharing the love and mercy of Christ through personal witness and the use of devotional materials through the Bible Brigade is a vital, integral part of the Lutheran disaster response.

Most recently, the Bible Brigade was present in Maui after the devastating fires. Bibles and gift cards were presented to two soldiers who lost everything. This put a smile on their face and hope in their hearts. Bible Brigade thanks the ladies of the LWML Texas District for their partnership and support of this ministry!

GREAT IS HIS Faithfulness!



Totals as of October 31, 2023	
2022–2024 Mite Goal	\$390,000
Mites Received	\$291,794
Total Mites Still Needed	\$ 98,206
Mission Grants Paid	\$171,346

Send your mite offerings along with a remittance form to: LWML Texas District Attn: Kathy Walther Financial Secretary, PO Box 124, Giddings, TX 78942

Send your mite offerings along with a remittance form to: LWML Texas District Attn: Kathy Walther Financial Secretary, PO Box 124, Giddings, TX 78942