

# TEXAS

NOVEMBER 2024

M E S S E N G E R

The Texas District  
Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

We want to share  
what God is  
doing in your church!  
Send in your news:  
[txmess@txlcms.org](mailto:txmess@txlcms.org)

**"During this season of gratitude, we give thanks for God's Word, and we pray that it will always be alive in us and through us!"**

Rev. Michael Newman,  
President

**"Even now, signs of new life are evident. Right here in our Texas District, right now, churches are being planted, evangelists are being trained, leaders are being equipped, ethnic ministries are being initiated, disciples are being made, ministries are being multiplied, congregations are being strengthened, and the unstoppable front of the Gospel is going out into all the world!"**

# Grateful for the Word of God

After three articles about what it means to be Lutheran, it seems appropriate to write about one of the foundations of Lutheranism that we never want to risk: Scripture alone! The Word of God.

We are so grateful for the Word of God. It our foundation and “norming norm.” But two temptations to forsake the Word of God loom large even in our strongly scriptural and confessional church.

The first is to become scripturally selective.

The church rightly proclaims justification by grace through faith: **“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” (Ephesians 2:8–9)**. But it cannot ignore the teaching that follows: **“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us” (Ephesians 4:32–5:2)**.

The church rightly emphasizes moral faithfulness: **“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality” (1 Corinthians 6:9)**. But it can never gloss over the preceding verses: **“I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers?” (1 Corinthians 6:5–6)**.

Similar examples abound as God’s Word calls us to hear the Word of God and keep it — not just part of it. All of it.

The second is to become scripturally skeptical.

The Lutheran church rightly teaches that God’s Word works: **“So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11)**.

But if we begin to believe that the culture is too strong, that sin is too complex, or that our big human problems will somehow overpower the Word of God, we begin to live as scriptural skeptics. We cease to rely on God’s Word and we become hesitant to share it with others. Becoming a scriptural skeptic makes us hearers of the Word, but not doers, so that we deceive ourselves (James 1:22).

Falling to the temptations of becoming scripturally selective and skeptical will result in a church that lives in fear and lovelessness, that acts like the world, and that moves toward an inward focus.

But when the church demonstrates the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23); when humility and repentance, passion for sharing the treasure of the Gospel, and increase even during persecution are evident in the church, the Word is at work.

During this season of gratitude, we give thanks for God’s Word, and we pray that it will always be alive in us and through us!

Rev. Michael W. Newman  
President

## Question for reflection...

**Read James 1:21–25.** How do these verses guide you and your congregation regarding God’s Word?

**Prayer starter:** Ask God to let His Word dwell in you richly (Colossians. 3:16).





# EVERY DOLLAR

contributed to  
Texas Partners in Mission  
goes directly to  
support missions in  
the Texas District.

Watch Our Video "Pathways to Ministry"

*"People are around you. Where you live, work, play and learn. They need Jesus. People out there need to hear God's good Word."*

~ Jeff Mensing, ACTS Kyle

<https://txlcms.org/videos/>

Our goal this year is:  
**\$500,000**

Please consider joining us as a mission partner and help more Texans hear the Gospel.



**GIVE NOW!**  
[txlcms.org/tpim](https://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](https://bit.ly/missionprayertx)

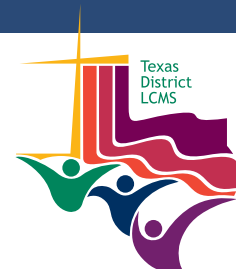


## GIFTS

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**



# False fall



**Rev. Pete Mueller**

Area C Mission Strategist

*"My strength was sapped as in the heat of summer."*

*(Psalm 32:4)*

It's been a hot week in Texas. That may come as no surprise to some, but it caught me off guard. That's because the previous week had been perfect — chilly mornings, sunny afternoons, a clear sky, a gentle breeze.

Having been persuaded by clear evidence that summer was past, I had begun settling into autumn. I pulled some potted plants back onto the patio. I pumped up my bike tires. I put soup on the stove.

Imagine my alarm, then, when the local weather team insisted that the low humidity was too good to last. Despite the current streak of favorable weather, the following week was to push the thermometer back past the century mark. Blanketed by reality, I braced for summer once more.

On the day I discovered that autumn had no intention of sticking around, I also learned that this end-of-season deception was not at all uncommon. In fact, the phenomenon is so well known that meteorologists have a name for it. They call it "false fall."

When Texas District congregations finally emerged from the heat and pressure of the COVID-19 pandemic, it felt like the world's fever had broken. A sweet season of gathering and growth seemed to be upon us. Church leaders breathed a sigh of relief. Church members once again savored the sweet air of community. Church treasurers rejoiced at having navigated the brutal business environment. Church planters high-fived one another, astonished that they had actually withstood the drought.

Little did they know that they were experiencing a false fall. The favorable conditions were too good to last. Before long, a new weather pattern began sapping the strength of our homes, communities and churches. Families reluctantly learned to deal

with mental health challenges, learning deficits, institutional distrust, political polarization and uncivil discourse. America braced for a new normal that was far from refreshing.

Now, before you throw up your hands and dismiss this article as a meteorological mess, let me remind you of the one thing we all know about weather. It changes. And although the post-pandemic season has been admittedly far from perfect, it will not dictate our future reality. True autumn is on its way.

In the closing hours of Christ's life, while feeling the increasing heat and pressure of the plot against Him, Jesus became hyper-focused on His disciples' purpose and perseverance. He said to them, "In this world you will have trouble." Then He looked at them fondly and added, "But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33 NIV)

Although we may sweat under the final onslaught of summer, it would be foolish for us to assume this is how it's always going to be. Following the pattern of saints who have gone before us, we exercise faith by looking past the present conditions toward a future promise. The grip of late summer is loosening. It's only a matter of time before a new season is upon us.

Even now, signs of new life are evident. Right here in our Texas District, right now, churches are being planted, evangelists are being trained, leaders are being equipped, ethnic ministries are being initiated, disciples are being made, ministries are being multiplied, congregations are being strengthened, and the unstoppable front of the Gospel is going out into all the world!

***"Forget the former things;  
do not dwell on the past.  
See, I am doing a new thing!  
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?  
I am making a way in the wilderness  
and streams in the wasteland."***

***Isaiah 43:18-19 NIV***

# Gifts of stock provide many benefits



**Brian D. Hamilton**  
Chief Financial Officer

Now that we are well into the last calendar quarter, many are probably thinking about when and how to make their year-end gifts to charity. Giving by check or credit card is convenient and is the option of

choice for most people. But are you aware there are other ways to give? Some people may benefit from making a non-cash gift, particularly a gift of investment securities. Let's listen in as two close friends talk about this topic over lunch.

**Trixie:** You should know that Ted and I are thinking about retiring at the end of next year.

**Babette:** That is great news! Bill and I are happy for you. Are you ready for all the changes that will bring?

**Trixie:** For the most part, we are. There's just a lot of planning to do with our finances. Ted and I are concerned about a few things, mainly tax planning and continuing our charitable giving. When the tax law changed a few years ago, we were still able to itemize our deductions. We probably won't be able to do that in retirement. Plus, Ted owns several stocks that have grown in value over the years. We don't need them in our retirement portfolio, but if we sell them to fund our travel plans we'll pay a hefty amount of capital gains tax. We don't need that while we're still working or in retirement.

**Babette:** I'm glad you mentioned that. Have you considered using your appreciated stocks to make a charitable gift? You'll bless a charity and avoid paying capital gains tax in the process.

**Trixie:** I didn't know that was possible. Tell me how.

**Babette:** Bill and I did that with Legacy Deo, a charitable foundation. We had our broker transfer some stock to their brokerage account as a charitable gift. Because we gifted the stock and didn't sell it ourselves, we bypassed the capital gain. Legacy Deo liquidated the stock and sent the proceeds to charity on our behalf. Because

we were still itemizing at the time, we qualified for a charitable deduction equal to the appreciated value of our stock.

**Trixie:** Sounds great! Was it a difficult process?

**Babette:** Not at all! We filled out two simple forms and let Legacy Deo know the names of our three charities. They handled the rest.

**Trixie:** What could be easier? I'm going to speak with Ted about this as soon as I get home.

Every year, we help families like Babette and Bill fulfill their charitable intentions with appreciated investment securities. Giving assets like stocks is a great way to immediately bless your favorite charity or charities. It's also perfect for funding a donor-advised giving account that can bless a variety of charities on your timetable. If donating appreciated securities could benefit your situation, give us a call. We're happy to walk you through the process.

(NOTE: If you would like to give appreciated investments, we must receive your securities by Dec. 31 for the gift to count toward the 2024 tax year. We encourage you to plan ahead with your broker and arrange to make your gift by early December.)

Brian Hamilton is a Certified Public Accountant and serves as Chief Financial Officer for Legacy Deo. Legacy Deo is not licensed by the Texas State Board of Public Accountancy to practice public accountancy, nor does it provide legal, tax, or financial advice. We encourage you to seek the advice of your own legal, tax, or financial professional in connection with planning and gifting matters.



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800-880-3733



# Happenings Around Texas

## Submit your news!

Send photos, stories and newsletters for The Lutheran Witness to:

[txmess@txlcms.org](mailto:txmess@txlcms.org)

Texas Messenger  
1221 Satellite View  
Round Rock, TX 78665

Please be sure all photos sent electronically are in color and 300 dpi (high resolution). Also, send your news to us well in advance, if possible.

The Texas Messenger is available online at [txlcms.org](http://txlcms.org).

## MERCEDES

### Adding to the family of faith

On Aug. 18, Rev. Ed Weber baptized Braison Eschete; his sister, Hailey Burciaga; and their father, Lance Eschete, at Immanuel Lutheran Church and School.

Pictured are, from left, Lance Eschete, Jerred Eschete (godfather of Hailey and Braison), Hailey, Pastor Weber, Braison Eschete, Victoria Eschete (Lance's wife), and Amie Eschete (godmother of Braison and Hailey).

## THORNDALE

### Double baptism at St. Paul

Rylee Morrow and Kasen Kovar were baptized into the family of faith on Sept. 15 by Rev. Jeff Doria.

Pictured are, from left, Austin, Kelbi and Rylee Morrow; Pastor Doria; and Kyler, Kasen and J'Nea Kovar. Rylee and Kasen are first cousins.



**SAN ANTONIO**

**New members received**

On June 30, Crown of Life welcomed 43 new members, including six by Baptism and six by Adult Confirmation!



**BASTROP**

**New members**

Ruby Lehmann and Linda Hanson were received into membership on June 21. They recently relocated to Bastrop from Boerne.

Pictured are, from left, Rev. E. B. Holschuh, Ruby Lehmann and Linda Hanson.



**HOUSTON**

**Gethsemane helps local school**

Earlier this year, Gethsemane's Outreach and Assistance ministry received a request from Principal Michelle Lewis (pictured below) of Houston Independent School District's Wainwright Elementary.

Congregation members George Menghi, Edda Entunica, Dorothy Krohn and Ed Johnson purchased plants to beautify the campus. Lisa Sitz, Gethsemane's mission director, also delivered five baskets of tester items and shirts for grades one through five.



## HAPPENINGS

### FAIRVIEW

#### Vacation Bible School at Immanuel

Learning about our God — the I AM — at VBS this last summer was tons of fun! Pictured are those who ran and attended the program.



### PLANO

#### Vacation Bible School at Faith

With the help of almost 70 volunteers, Faith presented "Celebrate the Savior" vacation Bible school June 17–21 for more than 75 children. Participants enjoyed a great week of Bible study, songs, crafts, games, snacks and more!





**NACOGDOCHES**

**Celebrate the Savior!**

Redeemer was blessed to welcome Josie Galatas into the family of faith through the Rite of Confirmation on June 16. They also celebrated the Savior with the children of the congregation during vacation Bible school later that summer. Additionally, Redeemer's Piecemaker Quilters created and donated 30 baby quilts and infant caps to Heartbeat Pregnancy Center, as well as 30 bibs and aprons for a local nursing home.



Rev. John William Cain confirms Josie Galatas.



From left, Kristi Morten, Marianne Rogers, Elsie Davis, Arlene Loeschen, Vickie Manley, Brenda Peters, Jan Oaksford and Carla Mezines

Pictured below are volunteers and participants of Redeemer's VBS.



## HAPPENINGS

### MAGNOLIA

#### Installation at St. Thomas

Rev. Stanley Lacey was installed as pastor of St. Thomas on Aug. 17. Several Texas District pastors participated in the installation service.

Pictured are, from left (below) Rev. Dr. Scott Murray, Rev. Ned Moerbe, Rev. Steven Cholak, Stanley Lacey, Crucifer Luke Sander, Rev. Dr. Brian Kachelmeier, Rev. Bernard Schey; (above) Rev. Thomas Obersat, Rev. Mark De Young, Rev. Steven Resner, Rev. Jason Kaspar, Rev. John De Young, Rev. David Woelmer and Rev. Dr. Ron Bogs.



### THORNDALE

#### First Bibles for third graders

Third-grade students attending St. Paul Lutheran School received their *Faith Alive* Bibles on Aug. 18. During service, the children were brought forward and presented with their Bibles and a Milestone Ministry Bible stone.

Pictured are, from left, Mason Terrell, Brenda Johnson (presenter), Tristan Schwarz, Gina Gillmore (presenter), Levi Humphreys, Loreli Hopper, Chaynee Helbert, Wade Koederitz, Creek Niemtschk, Jessi Ragsdale, Chloe Weber, Ty Zuehlke, Daisy Williams and Rev. Jeff Doria.



## AUSTIN

### Tenth ordination anniversary

Rev. Eric Borchers was called to Our Savior in June 2014. Once he had accepted the call and arrived with his family, alleluias could be heard all over northeast Austin! Little did the congregation know how much he would bless them! Pastor Borchers celebrated his 10-year anniversary with Our Savior this summer. Thanks be to God!

In July, the anniversary was celebrated with some certificates and gifts for him, and a delicious brunch in honor of his years of dedicated and faithful service. The particular Sunday happened to fall after a fun week of vacation Bible school. VBS doesn't just "happen" at this church. Pastor Borchers is right in the middle of it! This year, he promised to dye his hair green for the attendees if over the week, \$500 was given in offerings for an August mission trip to Guatemala. To everyone's delight, they exceeded the \$500 goal and Pastor Borchers followed through with green hair for Sunday's service!

Pastor Borchers is pictured at right, wearing a new stole that was gifted to him on the occasion.



## MERCEDES

### 20 years of teaching!

Lorri Marchant was honored at Immanuel on May 26 for 20 years of faithful service as a teacher at Immanuel's Day School.

Pictured below is Lorri with some of her past and present students who gathered for the celebration.



## ANNIVERSARIES

### SEALY

#### 30th anniversary of ordination

Congratulations to Rev. Kenneth Bersche, pastor of Trinity, on his 30th anniversary of ordination! Thank you for bringing love, laughter and countless blessings to us. We look forward to many more years of your ministry.

A catered meal was served in celebration, topped off with a variety of beautiful desserts, including cake.

Pastor Bersche is pictured at right with his family.



### AUSTIN

#### 25th anniversary of ordination

On Aug. 10, Beautiful Savior celebrated the 25th anniversary of the ordination of Rev. Jonathan Bontke.

Pastor Bontke is pictured below with his wife, Diane.



### AUSTIN

#### Business Manager honored

Sheryl Josseland has been serving as business manager at Our Savior (OSL) since 2011. The congregation says she works tirelessly on all things financial, in addition to many other things that don't fall under anyone else's umbrella!

On July 7, she was honored for her 13 years of service at OSL with an award, a plant and a celebratory time of fellowship.

Pictured below are Sheryl and her husband, Brian.



## GRANBURY

### 50 years of ministry at Our Savior

Our Savior Lutheran Church (OSLC) celebrated its 50th Golden Anniversary Jubilee Sept. 21–22! All current and former members and pastors, LCMS dignitaries, City of Granbury officials and many extended family members and friends were invited to a joyous weekend of festivities.

The church's historical journey began in 1972 when 12 Lutheran families met with LCMS pastors to formally petition to start a church in Granbury. On Oct. 8, 1972, they began their initial worship with Rev. Carl Rehwaldt as interim pastor. By July 1973, there were 14 confirmed adults and five children. In 1974, the group embarked on the job of applying for a charter and submitting a constitution to the Texas District. On Sept. 22, 1974, the charter was signed and the church moved to Ables Street with donated furniture. By this time, there were 40 confirmed members and 55 baptized members.

In 1975, the congregation purchased land on Highway 377 and Old Cleburne Road. On June 26, 1977, Rev. Stuart Brassie was installed as the first pastor. The church building was dedicated on March 25, 1979.

On Aug. 29, 1982, Rev. Mark Pepoon was installed as the second pastor. On July 18, 1993, Rev. Mark Rossington became the third pastor at OSLC. On Oct. 26, 1997, Rev. John Austin became the fourth pastor. As the number of members and visitors continued to grow, it became apparent that a larger piece of property was needed to fulfill the needs of the burgeoning congregation.

The current property at 1400 North Meadows Drive was purchased and dedicated on July 1, 2001. While construction was being completed, services were held in a nearby elementary school. Nine couples came to the area from Laborers for Christ to help with the construction. Current members still remember a windy and bone-chilling Christmas Eve service held in the unfinished building with no heat or plumbing. Despite the condi-

tions, or maybe because of them, it was a wonder-filled Christmas Eve service! The sanctuary was formally dedicated on May 13, 2007. Upon Pastor Austin's retirement, Pastor David Schatte was installed on April 6, 2014 as the fifth pastor of Our Savior Lutheran Church. Pastor Schatte recently celebrated his 10th year of ministry at OSLC.

Jubilee weekend activities included a rousing OSLC golf tournament on Saturday morning. The festivities continued that evening with a formal dinner held for all current and former members, pastors, dignitaries, and family and friends at Pecan Plantation Clubhouse. On Sunday, a 10 a.m. service was held, led by Rev. Michael Newman, Texas District president. All attendees enjoyed a catered lunch followed by a Jubilee Celebration service in the sanctuary at 2 p.m. Revs. Newman and Rev. Austin joined Rev. Schatte in leading the service. Pastor Rossington also attended the service. A dessert and coffee reception concluded the events.

For 50 years, Our Savior Lutheran Church has actively promoted Christian service in the Granbury community. Congregation members were challenged to provide 50 acts of service/kindness leading up to the celebration festivities. Members performed many maintenance and landscaping tasks in and around the church. This was in addition to volunteering for numerous community programs, delivering hot meals, supplying food pantries, working on Braille Bibles, organizing a summer VBS, quilting blankets, helping Crosstown Preschool, and providing food and distributing household supplies through its Neighbors-in-Need program.

Our Savior Lutheran Church pledges to continue making disciples who know, live and share the love of Christ for the next 50 years.

***"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever." (Isaiah 40:8)***



**HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!**

**Congratulations to the following couples,  
who are celebrating marriages of 50 years or more:**

St. Matthew, Houston  
**John and Janis Stayton**  
53 years, Oct. 2

Gethsemane, Houston  
**James and Darlene Ellison**  
58 years, Nov. 25

St. Peter, Texas City  
**Edwin and Jo Kleinhans**  
70 years, July 24

St. Paul, Thorndale  
**Delbert and Sharon Faske**  
54 years, Oct. 10

**Giles and Evelyn Summerlin**  
55 years, Oct. 11

Mount Calvary, La Grange  
**Don and Betsy Chovanec**  
53 years, November

Redeemer, Alpine  
**Fred and Ardis Luthe**  
60 years, Sept. 12

St. Paul, The Grove  
**Jerry and Betty Sohns**  
62 years, Nov. 3

Cross of Christ, DeSoto  
**Robert and Nona Flye**  
67 years, Nov. 29



Edwin and Jo Kleinhans



Fred and Ardis Luthe

**ATTENTION, STUDENTS!**

**Lutherans for Life Essay Contest**

The Lutherans For Life (LFL) Council of Federation Presidents sponsors an essay contest each year for students in two grade categories: 6-8 and 9-12. This contest is available for students in all states who attend a Lutheran school or a Lutheran church. Contestants will be awarded cash prizes if their essay is selected as a first- or second-place entry for the Texas District contest and/or the national contest.

To participate, students will write a life-affirming essay based on the theme "Fearfully and Wonderfully Made," using Ps. 139:13-14: ***"For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you,***

***for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well."***

The LFL Council of Federation Presidents looks forward to students across the nation participating in the contest and letting their voices be heard through their life-affirming essays!

Questions? Please contact Virginia Flo at [vflo@lutheransforlife.org](mailto:vflo@lutheransforlife.org).

Or you may visit [lutheransforlife.org/2025-lutherans-for-life-essay-contest](http://lutheransforlife.org/2025-lutherans-for-life-essay-contest) or scan the QR code.



# 'Now Thank We All Our God with Heart and Hands and Voices'

***"Oh, may this bounteous God through all our life be near us, with ever joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us, and keep us in his grace and guide us when perplexed, and free us from all ills in this world in the next!"*** Now Thank We All Our God (LSB 895:2)



This hymn was written by Martin Rinkart in the mid-1600s. He was the bishop of Eilenberg, Germany, a walled city. During the Thirty Years War, Eilenberg was a place of refuge for fugitives of the war — and a place of famine and disease due to overcrowding. Rinkart was the only clergyman left in the city who could perform services, bury the dead and lead the people. In the second verse of his hymn above, he asks for strength during the trials of life. He ends the hymn as if to say, "The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away, may the name of the Lord be praised." His faith leads him to write this hymn as a prayer to God during his most difficult time.

Do we have this level of faith? Do we go to the Lord for strength? Do we pray to be delivered from the problems of our lives?

Lutheran Hour Ministries *Project Connect* booklet **Prayer – When You Don't Know What to Say** gives us some answers. In this booklet, the authors tell us to

talk to God. They go on to say that spending time with God is vital for relationship with Him. Having God listen to your concerns requests would be an honor, especially if He could use His power and influence to help solve some of your problems. We Christians believe that God is the Creator of all things and is with us every step of our lives. We should look at it as being an honor and privilege to spend time sharing everything with God Himself.

Prayer is a natural part of our relationship with God. Our prayers can be thought, spoken or sung. However we do it, we are engaging in a conversation with God, who loves us and has promised to hear our every prayer. The God to whom we pray is almighty and all-powerful. He can do anything we need Him to do. He is all-knowing — including everything that will happen in our lives. He answers our

prayers in the way He knows will be the best for us individually and for everyone whose life is impacted by ours. God always answers our prayers sometimes "yes," sometimes "no" and sometimes "not now." Or, in His wisdom, He will often answer prayers by saying "I have a better solution."

A great way to go to God this Thanksgiving is to pray the following:

***"Heavenly Father, my heart is filled with joy, and I am overwhelmed by all You have given me. I am thankful for my family and friends, health and home. I am thankful You are always near and love me unconditionally. I thank You for surrounding me with Your protection and love. Most of all, I thank you for giving Your only Son Jesus Christ to pay the price for my sins on the cross. You have done this so that I may live with you forever. Amen."***

# God qualifies the called

**Dr. Bill Hinz**

Director, School Ministry

Having received God's grace and forgiveness through Christ Jesus, we are called to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves. God prepares us to serve Him and share His love through our gifts and experiences. All of us have been significantly impacted by numerous Christ followers throughout our lives.

In our Lutheran schools and churches, through God's Word, and through fellow Christians, we are equipped to share Christ's love. What a great calling! Fortunately, God is the one who qualifies and equips us as His called sons and daughters. We are blessed by Lutheran teachers, pastors, youth leaders and lay leaders who share the love of Christ with young people.

Two such remarkable leaders, who have incredibly blessed many students, families and fellow teachers, administrators and staff members are Debbie and Mark Baacke. If there was a Lutheran Teacher Hall of Fame, Debbie and Mark would certainly be in it.

On May 3, Debbie and Mark were awarded the Concordia University, Nebraska Master Educator Award for distinguished and superior service in Lutheran educational ministry.

In 2020, Mark retired after serving 45 years at Lutheran South Academy (LSA), Houston. At LSA, Mark chaired the science department for many years. He hosted summer Bible studies for college students, and still sends weekly Bible verses to 400 alumni via the Remind app.

Debbie also served for 22 years at LSA, first as the middle school principal and then lower school principal. Before coming to LSA, Debbie served 23 years at Our Savior Lutheran School, Houston. Debbie has also enjoyed using her gifts to write papers and speak at conferences.

Looking back on their careers, Mark and Debbie hold most dear the love they had for the students they taught, and the love the students had for them. They enjoy seeing social media posts that update them on the milestone moments in the lives of "their kids," and are sad to learn when their time on earth has ended. They look forward to a huge reunion in heaven and an eternity with Jesus, and

no separation from their immediate and distant families and all the students they were blessed to know for such a little while at the places where they taught.

We give thanks to God for these two of many dedicated servants of the Lord.

To God be the glory.



On May 3, Debbie and Mark Baacke were awarded the Concordia University, Nebraska Master Educator Award for distinguished and superior service in Lutheran educational ministry.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Jan. 19-21 • Austin**

Principal 360 Leadership Program

**Jan. 27 • Dallas/Fort Worth:**

Texas Executive Leadership  
Retreat (Herzog Foundation)

**Feb. 20-22 • Trinity-Klein, Spring**

Early Childhood Educators Conference



# Blank



By Pat Fick  
CAN-DO Director

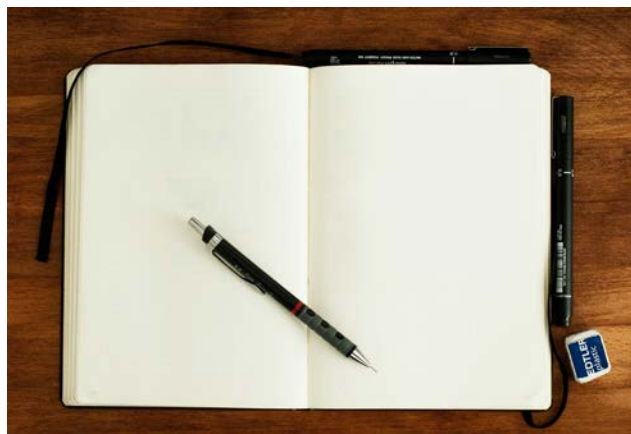
Have you ever needed to write something, but your mind was blank? Me too! Right now! So I decided to look up the word “blank” to see what it means. Blank means empty, vacant or void, having a complete absence of contents.

That's a pretty good way to look at what Christ did for us on the cross. He eliminated our slate full of sin and replaced it with a blank slate. Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, *all* our immoral acts, evil deeds, wicked intentions, selfish moments, prideful errors and terrible trespasses have been washed away by the blood of the Lamb that was slain. Complete and total annihilation! Decimation! As far as the east is from the west obliteration! (I have a confession to make ... I really love looking up synonyms ... such fun words!)

This summer Steve and I were visiting friends in Florida and decided to go sightseeing at a serpentarium. Can anyone relate to having ophidiophobia (a fear of snakes)? It was a fascinating afternoon as we watched a proud and enthusiastic snake handler milk three venomous snakes: a cottonmouth, a coral snake and a king cobra. Did I mention that this snake handler survived 15 venomous snake bites (so far)? And the king cobra got loose for a moment, creating a fear among the onlookers that we might get to witness snake bite No. 16!

You may wonder why they milk the venom from snakes. Crazy snake guy explained the process to make antivenom.

A small amount of venom is injected into a sheep. The sheep's immune system responds to the venom by producing antibodies. The sheep's blood plasma is collected, and the red blood cells are returned to the animal. The blood plasma is then purified into antivenom so that someone who has received a venomous snake bite can be treated with the sheep's blood. Wow! Such a parallel to our salvation being provided by the blood of the



Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (**John 1:29**)!

One of my favorite moments at Teen Camp in Alaska this summer was when we all wrote our sins on paper and threw them in an old metal cooking pot. Then we lit the sin papers on fire and watched them burn. One of the counselors encouraged us to yell the word “Freedom!” as the fire consumed our sins.

Thank you, Jesus, for the freedom you purchased for us, not with gold or silver, but with your holy, precious blood, with your innocent suffering and death, so that I may be your own and live under you in your kingdom and serve you in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness!

***And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”***

**Revelation 5:13**

# TEXAS TWO-STEP

Increase your **INVESTMENT**.  
Double your **DONATION**.

## STEP ONE:

An individual opens a new fixed-rate investment of \$5,000 or more and gives a gift of at least 10% of the initial investment amount to Texas Partners in Mission.

## STEP TWO:

Texas District Church Extension Fund will match the gift 100% to Texas Partners in Mission AND pay an additional 1% APY during the first term of the new investment.

**Texas Church Extension Fund and Texas Partners in Mission** are pairing up to increase financial resources available for starting new ministries in Texas. Every dollar contributed to Texas Partners in Mission goes directly to support missions in the Texas District. Join the “Texas Two-Step” Program to increase your investment and double your donation.

Take steps across Texas to share Jesus. Learn more at [texascef.org/texastwostep](http://texascef.org/texastwostep)

Texas District  
Church Extension Fund  
& Texas Partners in Mission

Ministry Focused. Financially Responsible.



*Texas District CEF is a non-profit religious organization, therefore, CEF investments are no SIPC- or FDIC-insured bank deposit accounts. This does not constitute an offer to sell or a request to buy. The offer is made solely by CEF's Offering Circular.*



# Volunteer's Commitment

## Strengthens Upbring's Mission and Community Outreach

Upbring is fortunate to have volunteers whose passion and dedication help amplify our mission to break the cycle of child abuse. Among them is Kerrin Gaenzle, who has championed our annual fundraising gala in Austin for more than 20 years.

"Kerrin's unwavering commitment to Upbring has made a lasting impact," said Kurt Westveld, Upbring's Philanthropic Advisor in Austin. "She is the perfect example of a volunteer that leads with contagious passion, and others want to be a part of her team. We are grateful to have her as a cornerstone of our efforts."

Kerrin and her husband, Gordon, first learned about Upbring's Austin Make A Difference Gala through a neighbor who recruited Kerrin to create centerpieces for the 1999 event. At that time, funds raised went to support New Life Children's Center (New Life), a residential treatment center for girls ages 11-17.

"I got to visit New Life at Canyon Lake and meet all the wonderful people and the girls that needed to be in a safe environment like a child is supposed to be," said Kerrin, a retired kindergarten teacher.

Kerrin went on to join the gala planning committee in 2000. She helped plan some "wonderful" galas including one themed "The Beatles" where attendees dressed in 1960s attire and a live band played music by the boys from Liverpool.

Even though Upbring paused the gala for a few years following the pandemic, Kerrin remained on



*Kerrin Gaenzle is a long-time planning committee member for Upbring's Make a Difference Gala in Austin. A retired kindergarten teacher, children are "near and dear" to her heart.*

the planning committee. Now she and about 14 other volunteers are ready to reignite the spark!

Kerrin is especially enthusiastic about the "Boots and Bling" theme for the March 2025 Make A Difference Gala, featuring a popular band and fantastic auction items like getaways to Breckenridge, CO, and Hilton Head, SC.

"We're working to bring the gala back in 2025 because it's so important to gather people together to witness the incredible work Upbring does," said Kerrin. "It's about creating a fun environment where we can invite our friends and neighbors to learn about the impact they can have, just like my neighbor invited me."

Because of volunteers like Kerrin, Upbring can provide life-changing services to Texas children and families. To learn more about volunteer opportunities with Upbring, visit [Upbring.org/Get-Involved](https://Upbring.org/Get-Involved). To register for the 2025 Make A Difference Gala and other special events, visit [Upbring.org/Events](https://Upbring.org/Events).

Stay updated with the latest Upbring news and stories by following us today.

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### Inspirational Legacy

In June 1990, the women of our district gathered in Austin for a very special convention. We celebrated LWML Texas District's 50th anniversary and furthered our organization's legacy in a new way by establishing the Scholarship Endowment. Why an endowment? Because endowments allow us to give bigger!

The Scholarship Endowment began with a convention offering of \$1,878. Over the next 34 years, that amount was increased through immediate and planned gifts from our members. Since 1992, the Scholarship Endowment has awarded 115 scholarships totaling \$116,825 to Texas women pursuing degrees to become LCMS church workers. Through our combined effort in growing this endowment, we can increase the amount each recipient receives, blessing our future called workers before they even graduate.

How does almost \$2,000 become over \$100,000 in funding? Every gift made to our endowments become part of the invested principal. A gift to the Scholarship Endowment isn't a one-time contribution, but a perpetual gift that will bless generations of young women. Gifting today truly blesses tomorrow!

"Being awarded the scholarship is a great gift and I am



thankful to be one of the students selected. By rewarding me with the scholarship, you have lightened my financial burden, which allows me to focus more on the most important aspect of school: learning. Your generosity has inspired me to help others and give back to the community. I hope one day I will be able to help students achieve their goals just as you have helped me. Thank you very much once again! Praying for the work that you do and those you serve."

**Abigail Velten, 2024–2025 recipient**

How can you participate in **Gifting Today to Bless Tomorrow**? Visit our endowment pages at [lwmltxdist.org/endowments](http://lwmltxdist.org/endowments) to learn more!

## IT'S TIME TO APPLY!

Do you know of a female member of your Texas District congregation attending an LCMS university and is studying to become an LCMS full-time professional church worker. If so, it's time to encourage her to apply for a Texas District LWML scholarship for the 2025–2026 school year! For eligibility requirements and to apply, visit [lwmltxdist.org](http://lwmltxdist.org). Go to "Committees," choose "Scholarships" from the drop-down menu, and download the 2025 scholarship application packet. For more information, contact Michelle Heckmann, Scholarship Committee chairman, at [scholarship@lwmltxdist.org](mailto:scholarship@lwmltxdist.org). Completed application packets must be sent or emailed to Michelle, time-stamped or postmarked, by March 31.

## 2024–2026 Mite Goal: \$403,000

Mites received through Aug. 31: \$61,319  
(\$341,681 still needed)

Mission Grants paid through Aug. 31: \$38,657

**Send your mite offerings** along with a remittance form to:  
LWML Texas District  
Attn: Alissa Elley, Financial Secretary  
P.O. Box 183  
Seguin, TX 78456

## 2024-2026 Mission Grant Recipient

**Hereford Hispanic Outreach, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Hereford**

This thank you was received by Patti Samsel, LWML Texas District VP of Gospel Outreach, on Sept. 7.

"We were totally blown away to be the recipients of the first partial mission grant of the new biennium! What a blessing! Kelly Bernhardt, LWML Texas District VP of Communication, presented the check at the Sunday service at Prince of Peace in Amarillo. The company we had already contacted earlier was able to install the air conditioner that week. And last Saturday, for the first time in many years, we worshiped in cool comfort!

That was a blessing for those in attendance — but an even greater blessing was the impact on the emerging Hispanic ministry. Rev. Lincon Guerra brought a prospective Hispanic mission developer to visit Hereford that week. We believe he was impressed that we were getting the facility ready for the many doors God is opening for Hispanic ministry.

Our gratitude and love to the women of the LWML Texas District for partnering with us in this effort! To God be the glory!"