

TEXAS

DECEMBER 2024

M E S S E N G E R

The Texas District • The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

**“Christmas is God’s rescue mission.
Let us join in the angelic joy of the
Savior who came to find us.”**

Rev. Michael Newman,
President

We want to share what
God is doing in your
church!

Send in your news:
txmess@txlcms.org

***“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the
government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name
shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”***



The joy of salvation

Are you encountering any holiday drudgery? Is any Christmas sadness stealing your joy? The Scriptures bring clarity about the Advent and Christmas season: It is a time for joy. The angels declared that the arrival of the Christ-child brought “good tidings of great joy” to all people.

True, the world is a challenging place. Yes, we bear the cross as followers of Christ. By all means, in this world we will have trouble. But Christ has overcome the world. And now, we rejoice in the Lord always. If we forget, the apostle Paul added, **“Again I will say, rejoice!”** (Philippians 4:4).

The Confessions emphasize the joy of salvation in Jesus. Quoting Martin Luther, the Formula of Concord notes:

“Faith is a divine work in us that transforms us and begets us anew from God, kills the Old Adam, makes us entirely different people in heart, spirit, mind, and all our powers, and brings the Holy Spirit with it. Oh, faith is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, so that it is impossible for it not to be constantly doing what is good... **Faith is a vital, deliberate trust in God’s grace, so certain that it would die a thousand times for it. And such confidence and knowledge of divine grace makes us joyous, mettlesome, and merry toward God and all creatures.** This the Holy Spirit works by faith, and therefore without any coercion a man is willing and desirous to do good to everyone, to serve everyone, to suffer everything for the love of God and to his glory, who has been gracious to him.” (FC, SD IV, 10ff, emphasis added)

Not long ago, an author pointed out that people in our generation may be walking away from the church not because they are rejecting what the church teaches, but because the people of the church appear not to believe what the church teaches. The “joyous, mettlesome and merry” attitude toward God and all creatures seems absent. The desire to “do good to everyone, to serve everyone, and to suffer everything for the love of God” appears to be lacking.

But Christmas is a time when God restores to us the joy of salvation (Psalm 51).

A few months ago, a 70-year-old man got lost in a western national park. Rescue teams sprang into action. Helicopters combed the area where he was last seen. The search effort was massive. Nobody became disgusted that the man got lost. No one refused to search for him because he had erred. No one pointed fingers or picked a fight with him for being so careless and wrong. Instead, no resource was spared in the effort to find him. And the joy that erupted when he was found made headlines across the nation.

Christmas is God’s rescue mission. Let us join in the angelic joy of the Savior who came to find us.

Rev. Michael W. Newman
President



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Read Luke 2:1-20. What joy do you notice in these verses and how does it impact who you are as a Christian and as a Christian congregation?

Prayer starter: Let God know three things you are rejoicing in these days.

SUPPORTING MISSIONS ACROSS TEXAS



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!



TEXAS TWO-STEP

Join the "Texas Two-Step" Program to increase your investment and 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.

Learn more at: texascef.org/texastwostep



"This was a perfect fit for me. St. Peter is all about missions. This congregation has a rich history of reaching the community, especially the Hispanic community. And for me just being here in the central location of downtown, right in the heart of downtown ... this is where actually the city started. So it was for me a go-go and do it. God was opening doors. God was answering prayers. He was definitely allowing me or confirming that this is where He wanted me to be."

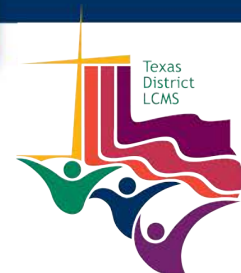
— Pastor Jose w, St. Peter Lutheran Church, Houston

GIVE NOW!
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



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

Summit recharges participants



Rev. Dr. Jon Braunersreuther

Mission Strategist Area D, Circuit 30-40 and Director of Districtwide Strategy

About 35 people gathered at St. Timothy, Houston, on Oct. 2 for the first Exponential Learning Community Summit. The Summit was designed for those who have been, are or soon will be participants in Exponential Learning Communities sponsored by the Texas District.

The Exponential Learning Communities process is designed to help professional church workers and lay leaders multiply disciples and congregations in their ministry contexts. The impetus for the gathering came from participants themselves. Focus groups conducted by district staff indicated that past participants felt a strong need to gather for the purpose of sharing best practices, mutual accountability and encouragement to one another.

Summit attendees heard presentations from Rev. Brad Jurischk, St. Timothy senior pastor; Rev. Aaron Lytle, pastor of Oikos, Houston; and Rev. Dan Schepmann, senior pastor of Gloria Dei, Nassau Bay. The presentations focused on each congregation's best practices in their respective contexts and the challenges they faced. Summit attendees also had the opportunity to have conversations with the presenters.



Pictured are, from left, Revs. Aaron Lytle, Dan Schepmann, Dr. Jon Braunersreuther (event facilitator) and Brad Jurischk.

Discussion groups led by Revs. Brady Blasdel (Zion, Pasadena) and Rob Bailey (Southlake, League City), along with DCEs Nathan Engman (Memorial, Katy) and Jason Phelps (Gloria Dei, Nassau Bay) allowed participants to share their personal ministry experiences and engage in peer-to-peer coaching.

The formal content of the day, the side conversation and, of course, Rudy's Barbecue (!), recharged attendees for ministry in their local congregations.



Rev. Rob Bailey leads an engaged group of participants in discussion.

Christmas – a time for giving



Rev. Dr. Gerald B. Kieschnick
Chief Executive Officer

Many of you know my dear wife, Terry. On Jan. 29 of next year, which is right around the corner, we will celebrate our 59th wedding anniversary. That's a long time with the same man!

Since our wedding and even before, I've discovered that Terry loves to give. She often remarks that she'd like to win the lottery just so she could give the proceeds away to people in need.

That love of giving, which both of us share, prompted us a few years ago to establish an endowment to support organizations that provide charitable relief for people, especially children, suffering from hunger, disability, abuse, homelessness or any other chronic malady.

The endowment's name, **The Least of These**, is based on a story told by Jesus in Matthew 25. He was meeting privately with His disciples, answering their questions about the end of the world.

Jesus said that on the day of judgment, He will bless the people who fed Him when He was hungry, gave Him a drink when He was thirsty, clothed Him when He was naked, provided hospitality to Him when He was a stranger and visited Him when He was sick and imprisoned.

When the disciples asked Jesus when they had seen Him hungry, thirsty, naked, a stranger, sick, or imprisoned, He replied, "I tell you the truth. When you did these things for the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it for me."

Since **The Least of These** was established, we've made more gifts to the endowment. At an unknown point in the future, our estate plan calls for an additional infusion of our assets to this endowment. It's our way of expressing our love for Jesus and for people in need.

Some of you have also heard that the Legacy Deo Board of Directors has established an endowment in thanksgiving to God for the 55th anniversary of my ordination to the pastoral ministry, which will occur on June 7, 2025. That endowment is named **The Great Sending**.

It's based on the words of Jesus in John 20:21 — "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you" — and will annually support, in perpetuity, the work of Christian missions in Texas, across our land and around the world. It will also receive support some day from our estate.

What's the point of these stories? Simply this. Christmas is a time for giving. As we give gifts to the people we know and love, we also have opportunity in many ways to give for the sake of those we don't know. Though we don't know them, we can still show our love for them.

It's Christmas. A time for giving. So, give to your favorite charity. Generously. To support **The Least of These** or **The Great Sending**, visit legacydeo.org/give/donate.

As Jesus said, "When you did these things for the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it for me."



2901 Caballo Ranch Road
Bldg 4 / Units C and D
Cedar Park, Texas 78641

legacydeo.org
800-880-3733



Happenings Around Texas

Submit your news!

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

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 (think
three to four months), if possible.

The Texas Messenger is available online at
txlcms.org.

WALBURG

On Oct. 6, 26 families joined the family of faith at Zion! Pictured with the new members is Rev. Kevin Hintze (at left).

MEXIA

Confirmation at Faith

On Sept. 15, Dawn von Ahn was confirmed at Faith. Her mother, Barbara von Ahn, was also received into membership by affirmation. They are pictured with Rev. Joel Hall.



ABILENE

On July 21, Rev. Robert Pase was installed as pastor of Our Savior. Pictured are, from left (front row) Revs. Richard Mittelstadt, Grace, Brownwood; Craig Sanders, Zion, Abilene; David Rohde, emeritus; Robert Pase; Clyde Kieschnick, Zion, Abilene; Thomas Chandler, Trinity, Albany; (back row) Keith Hills Jr., Faith, Sweetwater; Keith Reich, Redeemer, Cisco; Mark De Young, St. Peter, Bowie; Allan Eckert, Trinity, San Angelo, and district second vice-president; and Curtis Schneider, emeritus.

**TEXARKANA****Board of Elders complete evangelism training**

On July 14, the Board of Elders of First Lutheran Church were certified following completion of an evangelism course with Rev. Juan Zamora. Pictured are, from left, Pastor Zamora, Jeff Fluegge, Pete Haugh, George Boger, Deaconess Noemi Guerra, Eddie Wood, Jimmy Curtis, Mark Oestman and Rev. Scott Sundbye.



HAPPENINGS

CANYON

Two birthdays!

On Sept. 30, Dayvia Holmes was baptized into God's forever family and became a member of St. Paul. She is pictured with Rev. Brian Shane. Dayvia won't have trouble remembering her baptismal date, as it was also her birthday!



HOUSTON

Baptisms at Beautiful Savior Our Redeemer

On Oct. 20, God brought five more saints into His kingdom. David Horn and his son, Dyllon, were baptized, as were as Nathan Cabrera, Maddison Ellis and Sebastian Carvajal. They are pictured with Rev. Russell Strimple.



THE GROVE

Holy Baptism

On Oct. 13, the members of St. Paul were blessed to once again witness the miraculous creation of faith by the Holy Spirit, working through the ordinary Means of water and the Word in the heart of Alora Isabel Natalroman.

Commemorating this most incredible day are, from left, grandparents Gerald and Kristen Natalroman, Rev. John Heckmann, mother Viktoria Natalroman (holding Alora) and great-grandma Doris Reigle.



GUN BARREL CITY

Six Baptisms at St. Peter

On Sept. 15, the family of faith at St. Peter welcomed six children into the family of God through the waters of Baptism. (Front row) Riley DeMorrow, Skyler Dix, Betty Daniels, Apella Daniels; (back row) Joselyn Brown, holding Blake Larson. The children are pictured with their sponsors and family. Also pictured is Rev. D. R. Nelson.



LUBBOCK

Baptism at Redeemer

On Sept. 8, Rev. Charles Nemecek baptized Michael Jaenicke Jr.



NEDERLAND

Baptism at Holy Cross

On Oct. 22, Faith Baldonado (center) was welcomed into the family of God through Holy Baptism. She is pictured with Rev. Joshua Knippa and Cadence McCullough, her sponsor.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

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

- Mount Calvary, La Grange
Don and Kathy Pietsch
52 years, December
Garland and Stell Midgett
60 years, December
- Grace, Crockett
Bryan and Linda Willis
59 years, Aug. 7
- St. Paul, The Grove
Walter and Daisy Sohns
68 years, Dec. 1
- Trinity, Copperas Cove
Gene and Helga Dixon
61 years, Oct. 11
- Christ Our Savior, Lago Vista
Loren and Sherdel Janssen
61 years, Oct. 11
Gary and Odilia Little
53 years, Oct. 23
Tom and Barbara Mittelstadt
51 years, Dec. 1



Bryan and Linda Willis

ATTENTION, STUDENTS!

Lutherans for Life Essay Contest

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

To participate, students will write a life-affirming essay based on the theme “Fearfully and Wonderfully Made,” using Psalm 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 Lutherans For Life 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.

You may also visit lutheransforlife.org/2025-lutherans-for-life-essay-contest.

Celebrating our Educators of the Year



From left, Dr. Hinz is pictured with the Educator of the Year finalists: Janis Hong, St. Mark Lutheran School, Houston; Josh Cooper, Shepherd of the Hills, San Antonio; Dr. Marianne Rader, Concordia High School, Austin; Amber Brooks, St. Paul Lutheran School, Thorndale; and Rev. Steve Garrabrant, Gloria Dei, Houston

Dr. Bill Hinz

Director, School Ministry

Our Lutheran school educators joined fellow partners in the Gospel for the Professional Church Workers Conference, held Oct. 14-15 at Redeemer Lutheran Church and School, Austin.

This year's conference theme was "Overcome" from John 16:33: ***"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."***

There were opportunities for growing our spiritual and academic knowledge through attending sectionals, networking and having fellowship with one another. We were blessed to have Rev. Mike Newman, Texas District president, lead us in our opening worship service.

Each year during the conference, we are privileged to recognize the Educator of the Year and finalists,

who have been nominated by their peers.

This was an exciting year, as the selection committee received many outstanding candidates. As a result, the selection committee decided to honor not one, but two recipients for Educator of the Year. We celebrate and congratulate **Josh Cooper** of Shepherd of the Hills, San Antonio, and **Dr. Mariann Rader** of Concordia High School, Austin, as this year's recipients.

The last time two educators shared the award was in 2004.

We acknowledge and celebrate all our Lutheran educators for their dedication to their students and families in sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to the high calling each of them represent in their respective ministries.

Soli Deo Gloria! To God alone be the glory!

Upcoming Events

Jan. 19-21:

Principal 360 Leadership Program, Austin

Jan. 27-29:

Texas Executive Leadership Retreat (Herzog Foundation), Dallas-Fort Worth

Feb. 20-22:

Early Childhood Educators Conference, Trinity-Klein, Spring

April 14-15:

Secondary Administrators, Texas District office, Austin

June 4:

MRR (Marketing, Recruitment & Retention), Concordia Lutheran High School, Tomball

July 14-16:

Texas District Administrators' Conference, Drury Plaza, San Antonio

Anxiety



By Pat Fick
CAN-DO Director

Our little chiweenie Regalito has separation anxiety. We dropped him off at our friend Betty's house while we helped a family move. Betty said that as soon as we left her house, Regalito was agitated and began to yelp and whine, refusing to be consoled for at least half an hour. Even though Regalito knows and loves Betty — she dog sits for us when we are out of town — he was anxious about where his owners went.

Research.com reports that six out of 10 college students experience "overwhelming anxiety" while over 40% were saddled with crippling depression.

What causes you anxiety? Safety concerns, family issues, relationship strife, lack of finances, poor health, political unrest, wars, fears about climate change, addiction? There is a plethora of things that can catapult each of us into a downward spiral of anxiety and fear.

The Glorify app recently had a fascinating quote from Chuck Swindoll: "We are all faced with a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as impossible situations." When you reframe anxiety in that light, it is an opportunity to trust God in all things, to depend on Him as your source of strength and stamina!

Here is a little anti-anxiety encouragement from God's Word. Run to it often!

For nothing will be impossible with God. Luke 1:37

But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Matthew 19:26

He said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you." Matthew 17:20

"Ah, Lord God! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you."

Jeremiah 32:17

"Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me?" Jeremiah 32:27

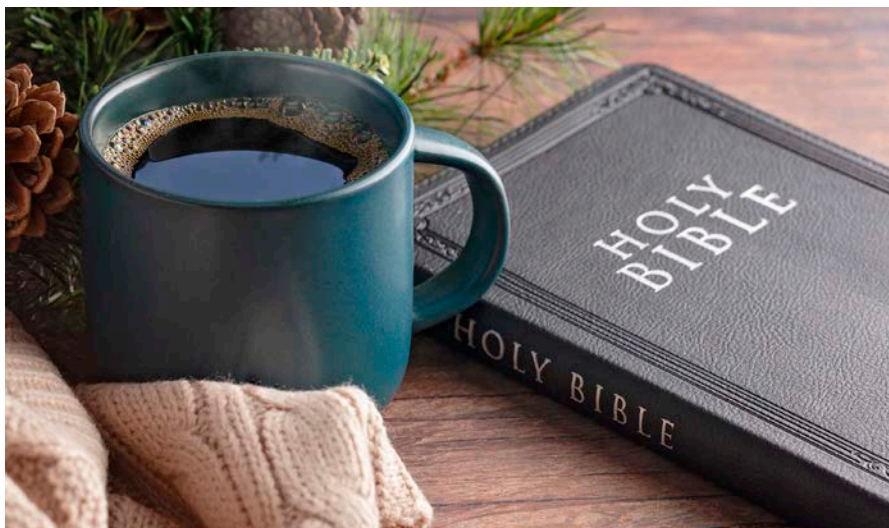
"Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son." Genesis 18:14

Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear."

Isaiah 59:1

"The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent." Exodus 14:14

Lord, help us to cast all our anxious cares upon you because you care for us so much that you would rather die than live without us! Amen!





We give thanks to God for the beautiful and wonderful gift of Jesus Christ.

We also express our heartfelt gratitude for YOU—your support makes a difference!

As we look ahead to 2025, we are excited to see the incredible things God will accomplish in Texas through our ministry and through investors like you.

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

**TEXAS DISTRICT
CHURCH EXTENSION FUND**



‘A Proud Moment’

Nico’s Story at Upbring Head Start

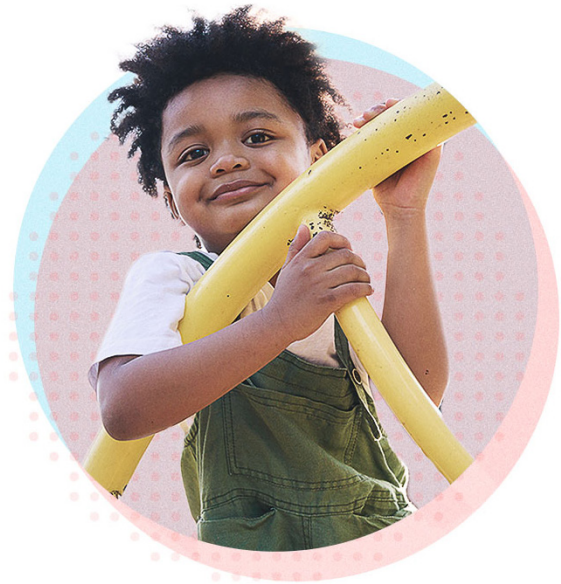
When Nico* entered the Upbring Early Head Start Preschool program in Bay City, Texas, as an infant, he was already showing signs of developmental delays. He wasn’t progressing toward walking at the same rate as his peers, so the education team provided early intervention services to help him gain lower body strength.

At age 3, Nico transitioned to the Head Start program. (Early Head Start enrolls children from low-income families up to age 2, while Head Start is open to those ages 3 to 5.) Teachers noticed his verbal skills were also delayed—he would babble and sometimes point but he wasn’t talking. To help with this, Head Start added speech therapy to his individual learning plan.

With these interventions, plus daily classroom support from his Head Start teachers, Nico began to flourish. He went from not walking to walking, from nonverbal to verbal. He started saying more words and expressing himself appropriately to his teachers, his peers and his family.

“In Nico’s last year of Head Start, he was finally able to say his teacher’s name,” recalled Education Coordinator Emma Allen. “This was a proud moment.”

Nico’s father and siblings reaped the benefits of Head Start too. Each Head Start family is connected with an Upbring Family Engagement Advocate who provides them with wraparound support to meet their full range of needs. At the time, Nico’s father was raising three young sons on his own. He worked hard to provide for them but still needed support. Upbring Head Start helped Nico’s dad find resources to get through the hardships he was facing—something he truly appreciated.



Thanks to the care he received from Upbring, Nico was ready to start kindergarten on time alongside his peers. Today, he is a happy third grader. He’s doing well in school, and his father credits Upbring Head Start for making that possible.

Nico’s amazing progress illustrates how high-quality early childhood education builds a solid foundation for child wellbeing and lifelong learning. “As a professional in early childhood, I know that Head Start is powerful and that it works,” Emma shared. “Our programs make a big impact, and for some families, it is truly life-changing.”

Upbring Head Start and Early Head Start Preschools provide a safe, inclusive space for children to grow, learn and thrive.



To learn more about Upbring Head Start, visit:
Upbring.org/HeadStart

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

[/UpbringOrg](https://www.facebook.com/UpbringOrg) | [@UpbringOrg](https://twitter.com/UpbringOrg) | [UpbringOrg](https://www.instagram.com/UpbringOrg)

**Nico’s story is true, but we have changed his name and used a stock photo to protect his and his family’s identity.*

Securing a strong financial finish to 2024



As the year draws to a close, we invite you to consider the impact of your generosity through end-of-year giving to Camp Lone Star. Our mission is to transform lives through adventurous Christ-centered experiences, and your support makes this possible. We humbly ask you to help us bridge our funding gap and finish the fiscal year strong, ensuring Camp Lone Star's continued success.

Your gift transforms lives! To date, we have invested \$46,000 in our Junior Staff, welcoming 87 high school volunteers this summer to serve Jesus and be disciplined; \$24,000 in our Elevate Interns, as we pour into a new generation of Christian leaders; and \$47,000 in summer-camp discounts, ensuring that more campers can be transformed as they experience Jesus' love at camp.

Your gift helps us provide Christ-centered experiences! To date, we have also invested \$45,000 in the reconstruction of the Last Resort and \$23,000 in hurricane damage recovery and lost revenue. Additionally, we are in need of \$115,000 to rebuild the climbing tower in La Grange, an essential facility that enhances our adventurous programming and fosters personal growth among campers and guests.

Your gifts play a crucial role in sustaining and expanding our ministry at Camp Lone Star, both in La Grange

and Tomball. If you want to transform lives through your generosity as we approach the end of the year, we encourage you to donate to our General Operating Fund by mailing a check to Camp Lone Star (2016 Camp Lone Star Road, La Grange, TX 78945) or donating online at camplonestar.org. Each donation to our General Operating Fund helps us plant seeds of faith, cultivate Christian leaders, and grow the kingdom of God. Together, we can make an eternal impact!



EST. 1941

★ CAMP ★

LONE STAR

ADVENTUROUS CHRIST-CENTERED EXPERIENCES

2016 Camp Lone Star Road
La Grange, TX 78945

(979) 968-1657

info@camplonestar.org

camplonestar.org



Spiritual Care for Girls at New Life Children's Center

New Life is the most appropriate name to describe both the facility and the spiritual care program at Upbring's New Life Children's Center. New Life provides a place for girls ages 11–17 to heal from significant trauma caused by abuse or neglect.

The healing gives girls a chance to:

- ▶ Recover from abuse;
- ▶ Learn skills to manage their responses to trauma;
- ▶ Provide individualized and specialized education to get back on track with their education; and

- ▶ Leave with a chance to build a new life.

New Life Children's Center is Texas' only facility able to accept girls into an intensive psychiatric treatment program, meaning that New Life is the essential stopgap for girls with significant trauma whose next step is either being psychiatrically hospitalized or put into juvenile detention.

During their average stay of nine months, girls are given the option to explore their faith in a safe, structured environment, which is

a key component in the holistic healing every girl at New Life deserves. The spiritual care program is a unique, principal component of New Life's services. The program is led by Mark Lara, who provides space for girls to experience a faith journey built on experiencing God in many ways. This may include Bible studies, participating in local youth groups, vacation Bible schools, journaling, gardening or even church camps.

The LWML Texas District mission grant of \$20,000 will provide funding to pay ministry expenses; and purchase Bibles and Bible studies as well as gardening and art therapy materials.

Pictured is the New Life Children's Center chapel.



2024-26 MITE GOAL: \$403,000

Mites received through Sept. 30: \$80,847
(\$322,152.51 still needed)

Mission Grants paid through Sept. 30: \$52,907
(\$248,657 balance to be paid)

SEND YOUR MITE OFFERINGS

along with a remittance form to:

LWML Texas District
Attn: Alissa Elley, Financial Secretary
P.O. Box 183
Seguin, TX 78156