

# TEXAS

DECEMBER 2025

M E S S E N G E R

The Texas District • The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



# A common community



**Rev. Dr. Jon Braunersreuther**  
District President

Can you play the organ? Are you fluent in Oromo? Have you been a missionary to China? Do you have a doctor's degree? Are you good at farming? Do you know how to manage financial records? Are you good at public

speaking? Teaching four-year-olds? Do you relate well to people in nursing homes?

The list of questions is nearly endless if we are asking about skills, abilities and perspectives needed in the church.

In previous months, I have been writing about the *common convictions* that we have as Lutheran Christians in the Texas District, the *common cause* in which we are engaged, and the *common community* that we enjoy. We have convictions based on God's Word that must and should be maintained. Those convictions — deeply held — cannot help but impel us to our common cause, which is reaching those who are far from God with the precious, life-giving, eternity-assuring Gospel.

"Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers," St. Paul writes in 1 Tim. 4:16.

In last month's column, I wrote about how we manage challenges to our convictions and cause best when we do so together, in community. The first church convention in Acts 15:1-31 is a perfect model for that.

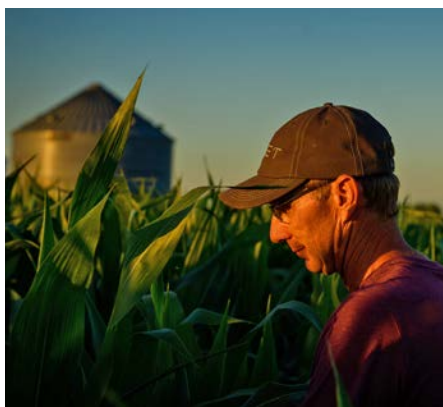
But there's more about our community that God has put in place to bless us. He has given a variety of gifts — diverse gifts — for the sake of building the church. In the preamble to the constitution of our church body, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1 Corinthians 12:4-31 is quoted as the basis for the second of the "Reasons for the Formation of a Synodical Union." The reason? "Our Lord's will that the diversities of gifts should be for the common profit."

From God's Word: "Now there are varies of gifts, but the same Spirit; ... To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:4,7). From there the gifts begin to be listed — faith, wisdom, healing, prophecy. Notice that **each** one has gifts. Everyone does. **You** have gifts that God's people, gathered together as the church, need!

And that is a point made clear in the remainder of the passage. The church is the body of Christ, and each person is an important part of it. Each person has important gifts to contribute. Without that person, that gift would be missing.

The diverse giftedness among God's people is a part of His design. We have different abilities, different interests and different perspectives, all of which are intended to work together (as a body) for the sake of our common convictions and our common cause.

God has richly blessed us as Lutheran Christians to work together in this way — solving our problems together (Acts 15) and exercising our gifts (1 Corinthians 12). More on that to come...



Photos: LCMS/Erik M. Lunsford





*Impossible to look at nature and not see God. His hand in everything...Glorify God through creation.*

- Dave DeVore,  
Texas District Evangelist,  
Redeemer Lutheran Church, Austin



**DAVE DEVORE**  
Nature Photographer

Watch Dave's Faith Story here: [txlcms.org/videos](http://txlcms.org/videos)

# SPREADING THE GOSPEL ACROSS TEXAS

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

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!



**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)

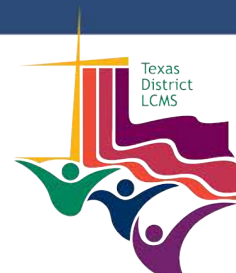


## GIFTS

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



# Caring for church planters



## Rev. Ben Gonzales

Area B Mission Strategist,  
District Discipleship Development

### A Response to Soul Care

I was recently asked a question that made me stop and really consider how I would answer. The question brought back memories of church planting, and it made

me wonder what I would do if I were to answer the question after 14 years of church planting, with seven of those years planting a church as a bi-vocational church planter in inner-city Houston. I drove from the North Side of Houston to the South Side every day, working with teens in gangs for \$8 an hour at an evening reporting center while planning to plant a church.

The question was, "Is it possible to plant a church and have a healthy soul?" And if it is possible, what should we look for?

This question stirred my spirit, and not just because of my church planting history, but also because of the many church planters I get to work with in Area B of the Texas District. I don't see them as planters. I see them as brothers and friends, yet also

find myself experiencing this familiar deep compassion, like seeing sheep without a shepherd. Church planting can be extremely lonely, painful and soul-draining.

Church planting is one of the most rewarding yet challenging callings in ministry. It combines spiritual, relational, financial and leadership challenges — often all at once.

Early stages can feel lonely, and momentum can be slow if the planter tries to do everything alone. It can often feel tempting to copy another congregation's model instead of seeking God's unique direction. There's temptation to rely on strategy and structure more than the Spirit. There is the emotional, spiritual and financial toll on the planter and their family. There's trying to crack the "cultural code," understanding the unique social, ethnic and cultural context of the area. Discouragement or personal burnout can arise unexpectedly.

And imagine being called to the United States from another country and trying to navigate a whole different culture, one which often doesn't speak your heart language. Imagine all the cultural, linguistic and economic challenges that arise when you are trying to plant a church for people from your country,

yet you are not in your country of origin. Imagine finding a home and school, and navigating the social sector and how to support your family. There are financial challenges and relational challenges, and we cannot count out the spiritual warfare that also arises. There are numerous challenges that don't even have to do with those of planting a church.

Honestly, I am already tired just describing all this.

I hope you would take a moment to consider what that does to someone's soul if it is not properly cared for. And often we are far too late in addressing the question.

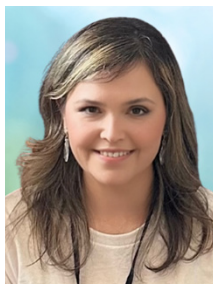


Every Mission Developer gathering includes a time for sharing a meal and teaching that stems from the conversations during check-ins.

See **PLANTING**, Page 11



# Looking in the rearview mirror



## Dayna Dinan

Administrative/Marketing  
Coordinator

As we near the end of 2025, we find ourselves glancing in the rearview mirror — not to dwell on the past, but to marvel at the road the Lord has guided us along this year. Each mile car-

ried moments of joy, challenge and grace — all woven together by His faithful hand.

At Legacy Deo, this year has been one of meaningful milestones and renewed purpose. We witnessed transitions that reminded us of God's provision and the beauty of servant leadership. With gratitude, we celebrated the faithful leadership and retirement of Rev. Dr. Gerald Kieschnick, followed by the commissioning of our new CEO, Patrick Carlove, whose heart for ministry and stewardship has breathed fresh energy into our mission. Together, we have continued to walk in the legacy of those who came before us — faithfully managing the gifts God has entrusted to us for the sake of His Kingdom.

Throughout 2025, we have seen generosity in action. Churches and individuals across Texas and

beyond have stepped forward in faith to plan for the future — not just their own, but for generations yet to come. Through planned gifts, endowments and charitable trusts, we've watched people turn blessings into blessings, transforming their earthly resources into eternal impact.

As we reflect on the road behind us, we are humbled by what God has done. Yet, like any journey of faith, the most important miles are still ahead. Legacy Deo's mission remains steadfast: to inspire generosity that impacts life forever. We invite you to walk with us — to pray for our ministry, to share our story and to consider how your legacy might bless others long after you've reached your eternal reward.

When we look in the rearview mirror, we see evidence of God's faithfulness. When we look ahead, we see opportunity — a wide, open road lined with hope, calling us forward into His future.

Let us continue this journey together, trusting that the same God who has guided us thus far will carry us onward — until every act of giving becomes an echo of His eternal grace.

**[legacydeo.org](https://legacydeo.org) • 800-880-3733**



## HAPPENINGS

### WACO



St. Paul received new members on June 29. Pictured are, from left (bottom row) Mary Ann Bamsch, Kiersten Nawara, Kailynn Nawara; (middle row) Doug Bamsch, Bob Ray, Donald Newman, Natalie Newman, Nick Mistakos and daughter Ekko, Gretchen Schwarz, Shelley Caffey, Diane Walters, Susan Dethlefsen, Beverly Woodward; (top row) Karen Holland, Mary Beth Michaelis, Melody Kingsbury, Tom Michaelis, Rev. Dr. Brian Hesse, Dale Caffey, George Dethlefsen and Leon Woodward. Missing from the photo are Christi Kersten Sutton and daughters Katie and Bella, and Paiten Rand.

### CLEBURNE

With plans in place to build a new sanctuary, Ascension Lutheran Church has completed renovations to its current facilities. These renovations included dividing the current fellowship hall into classrooms, offices and a conference room. The old sanctuary building has been gutted to make way for a new fellowship hall.

On Sept. 21, the new fellowship hall was dedicated and christened in honor of Rev. Benjamin G. Rathgeber, Ascension's pastor emeritus. From now on, the remodeled building will be known as Rathgeber Fellowship Hall.

Pastor Rathgeber and his wife, Lois, are pictured next to a memorial that will be hung on the wall of the fellowship hall. Pastor Rathgeber was ordained in 1958 and served as Ascension pastor for 22 years, retiring in 2006. He also served congregations in Loebau, Dime Box, Andrews, Kermit and Gavelston, and Gadsen, Ala.





## THORNDALE



The St. Paul Image Class of 2025 — the third-grade students — received their faith milestone and the *Faith Alive* Bible, which they will use in their religion classes and confirmation. Children pictured are, from left, Anna Kroeger, Caroline Ging, Cadence Gerren, Mateo Gates, Pearl Falke, Lillian Braun, Preston Cooper, Hudson Lockhart, Wyatt Mirtsching, Levi Ocha, Braylei Robbins, Henry Warner and Riley Zuehlke. In back are Brenda Johnson, Rev. Jeff Doria and Lori Fisher.



The Image SS Stones are St. Paul's three-year-olds, who received their faith milestone after reaching the age to begin attending Sunday school. With Pastor Doria are, from, left, Chase Hilton (with his brother, Brooks), Arya Hilton, Scarlett Ging, Demi Morrow, Tucker Glenn and Charlie Messick (with his sister, Leila).



## HAPPENINGS

### WACO



St. Mark welcomed 11 new members — seven by Baptism (one adult), three by adult confirmations, and two by transfer. All but one are pictured with Rev. Peter C. Kolb.

### HUFFMAN



Our Shepherd joyfully welcomed new members to its family on Oct. 12. Pictured are, from left, Carolyn Marshall, Candace Wells, Rev. John Moore, and Patty and Al Howell.

### HILLSBORO



Through the waters of Holy Baptism, Daphne Nemec and children Oliver Ward and Catalina Skye were added to the Christ Lutheran Church family on July 20.

Pictured are, from left, Juli Paranuk and Daniel Kolb (sponsors); Rev. Michael Nemec; parents Diego (holding Catalina) and Daphne (holding Oliver) Nemec.

The congregation gives thanks and praise that God graciously preserves and has enlarged His family at Christ.



## WALBURG



Eighteen new families were welcomed into membership at Zion on Oct. 5.

## DALLAS



Rev. Walker Nery and Rev. Jonas Ntagawa were ordained and installed as associate pastors of Bethel Lutheran Church on Sept. 28. Both had been serving Bethel as vicars. Rev. Dr. Jon Braunersreuther, Texas District president, officiated with help from Rev. Dr. Chris Holder, Bethel senior pastor. Pictured are, from left, (front row) Revs. Will Kemp, Jonas Ntagawa, Walker Nery, Shawn Deterding, Dr. Jon Braunersreuther; (back rows) Noah Menke, Mark Couser, Mark Hotopp, Dr. Yohannes Mengsteab, Mark Huston, Jaime Gonzalez, Lincon Guerra, Ben Gonzales, Randy Haedge and Dr. Chris Holder.



## Celebrating 40 years



The Houston Lutheran Chorale, which includes LCMS members located in the Houston area, celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2025 and reveled all year! They presented a very special Lenten cantata, "Song of the Shadows." They embraced patriotism for Flag Day and, of course, July 4, with special concerts to honor our nation. They wrapped up the year-long celebration with an even bigger festivity for Christmas 2025, with concerts focused on "The Joy of Christmas." Pictured is the Christmas concert at Trinity Lutheran Church—Downtown, Houston, on Dec. 8, 2024.

### HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

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

**St. Paul, The Grove**  
Walter and Daisy Sohns  
69 years, Dec. 1

**St. John, Beaumont**



Tim and Laura Kaspar  
50 years, Oct. 10

**Christ Our Savior, Lago Vista**



Robert Henry and Edna Koenig  
70 years, Aug. 14  
(The Koenigs are founding members of the congregation.)

## 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).

The Texas Messenger is available online at **txlcms.org**.

**Cover photo: LCMS/Erik M. Lunsford**





Participants of the Mission Developer gatherings discuss their spiritual, personal and ministry well-being. Afterward, each individual is prayed over by another group member.

## PLANTING

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4)

Usually it is too late, and we are forced to operate from reaction mode rather than preventative mode.

### Mission Developer

We have begun to come together in Area B in what is known as “Mission Developer.” It is a way to bring preventative measures to those who are desiring to enter into the mission field. The goal is not to first develop a plan for mission, but instead to develop the person — spiritually, emotionally and relationally.

It is a space where people are seen and heard rather than just trained. The idea is not to learn “from” the expert, but to learn “with” each other by how we listen, see and care for each other and discover real needs and ways we can provide support and encouragement.



Mission Developer gatherings commence with a time of worship and seeking the Lord through a corporate prayer session.

We find that Jesus modeled this with His own disciples, as He simply invited them to “be with Him.” It is from their being with Him that He would then find ways to send them, but from a place of care,

support and relationship.

In fact, there came a time when people described the disciples this way:

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.

**ACTS 4:13**

While we are still in the early stages of this journey, learning and growing from our shared experiences, we are also envisioning a way to confidently answer the question, “Can you plant a church and have a healthy soul?” with an emphatic “Yes!” And we are finding a way together to answer, “What should we look for?”

If you would like to know more about Mission Developer, contact met at [bgonzales@txlcms.org](mailto:bgonzales@txlcms.org).

# A heart for service



**Dr. Bill Hinz**

Director, School Ministry

Texas District School Ministry hosted its annual Beginning Teachers' Retreat Oct. 5–6 at Camp Lone Star in LaGrange.

For those new to the teaching ministry, the retreat is a great opportunity to pause and gather with others for support and to see how they are experiencing similar challenges, and to learn and grow through these shared experiences. The time away also gives these new teachers an opportunity to reflect and sharpen skills. One valuable way of learning is through the opportunities that promote an atmosphere of collaboration.

The retreat schedule offers a variety of sectionals, one-on-one mentor sessions, and group discussions on topics such as classroom management and curriculum. The retreat also provides spiritual growth through devotional time and group activities.

Our retreat time was guided by an experienced Leadership Team that consists of Vicki Pietsch, Im-

manuel, Giddings; Daniel Parsons, Prince of Peace, Carrollton; Lya Camp, Concordia High School, Austin, Caitlin Copeland, Redeemer, Austin, and yours truly. The Leadership Team helps our new teachers to gain additional insights into their roles as teachers and mentors of young people.

Our Lutheran school teachers are front-line missionaries who are helping to equip front-line missionaries — their students. As teachers share the love and forgiveness won for us by Jesus Christ through His death and resurrection, the Word does not return void. The Word of Christ transforms lives for now and for eternity. What a calling our teachers have in the lives of students and families.

The first few years in any ministry can be challenging. By supporting your pastors, teachers and youth leaders in your congregations and schools through prayers and words of affirmation, you are giving them a powerful blessing.

*Soli Deo gloria* — to God be the glory!



Attendees of the retreat are, from left, (bottom) Rebekah Lamb, Faith, Huntsville; Jada Soules, Good Sheperd, Bastrop; Heather Lobera, Redeemer, Austin; Ginger Wagner-Main, Our Savior, Houston; Joshua McLain, Prince of Peace, Carrollton; Lya Moriff, Concordia High School, Pflugerville; Caitlin Copeland, Redeemer, Austin; (middle) Nathan Botros, Concordia High School, Pflugerville; Mike Justice, Lutheran South Academy, Houston; Luke De Young, Immanuel, Giddings; Dustin Ivey, Concordia Lutheran High School, Tomball; Ben Singer, Concordia Lutheran High School, Tomball; Kirbie Bradley, Faith, Huntsville; Patricia Woodley, Good Shepherd, Bastrop; Vicki Pietsch, Immanuel, Giddings; Kelli Paradowski, Our Redeemer, Dallas; (top) Daniel Parsons, Prince of Peace, Carrollton; and Dr. Hinz.



# trust



**By Pat Fick**  
CAN-DO Director

Have you ever been to camp? Sent your kids to camp? Wished you could skip a week of work and go to camp?

I am blessed to have the opportunity to go to Camp Lone Star in LaGrange at least a couple of times a year for spiritual retreats. At the pastors' wives retreat, we were given the opportunity to try out the new 40-foot-high climbing wall. It has a series of holds of various shapes and sizes that your hands and feet cling to as you ascend the wooden structure.

The first thing you must do is step into a harness that will be attached to the auto belay rope system. It's the coolest, and you have to trust that it will catch you!

Thank you, Maggie Weber, for going first! Seeing you demonstrate how it works was very helpful and gave us confidence that the auto belay system would graciously deliver us back to the ground unharmed.

As I started to climb, some of the holds were easy to reach, and others were more of a challenge. About halfway up the wall, I looked down and decided this would be a good time to repel back down to the ground below. (Alex Honnold I am not. My amygdala works quite well, thank you!)

"Sit down, push off, and enjoy the ride!" Here's where trust is needed. There's only one way down, and it requires leaning back and letting go of the climbing holds. "OK, I'm coming down now." Believe it or not, letting go and gliding through the air is probably the most fun part of the experience. The auto belay does all the work and you get to have all the fun. Similarly, God does the work and we are blessed by the experience!

I decided to spell trust with two crosses, one at the beginning and one at the end because Jesus' death and resurrection prove that He is trustworthy. Here are some verses to remind us to trust God with every part of our lives! Best auto belay system ever!



Pat is pictured at left and Blanca Ruiz is on the right.

The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him. **PSALM 28:7**

Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God. **PSALM 20:7**

And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you. **PSALM 9:10**

Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act. **PSALM 37:5**

Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the LORD God is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation. **ISAIAH 12:2**



With teamwork and compassion, Upbring staff and volunteers help a young woman in the Houston BeREAL program furnish and set up her new apartment — creating a fresh start and a place to call home.

## BeREAL grows to empower more young adults across Texas

When young adults age out of foster care, the moment is both a milestone and a crossroads. Each year, more than 1,300 Texans transition from foster care into adulthood with limited access to housing, guidance and support. Without a safety net, many face daunting odds — homelessness, incarceration and barriers to education or employment.

For more than a decade, Upbring's BeREAL program has been rewriting that story. Launched in Austin in 2014, BeREAL offers more than housing — it provides hope, stability and a path forward. Through safe apartments, mentorship, life-skills coaching and consistent support, BeREAL helps young adults develop the confidence and independence to thrive.

"When a young person opens the door to a furnished, welcoming home on day one, it says: you matter, and you're not alone," shared a member of the BeREAL team. "That moment changes everything."

In April 2025, BeREAL reached an exciting new milestone — expanding to Houston, one of Texas's largest cities and home to thousands of youth with foster care experience. The program began serving four young adults and aims to reach 10 by the

end of the year. Volunteers and donors are coming together to furnish apartments, transforming empty spaces into welcoming homes filled with essentials and care. Many participants arrive with little more than the clothes they are wearing. Within hours, they're handed keys to a safe, fully furnished apartment — and the chance to start fresh.

"It's not just about furniture," said Susan Jensen, a longtime volunteer. "It's about dignity. Every plate, pillow and lamp says, someone believes in you."

As BeREAL continues to grow across Texas, the vision is clear: build connected communities — Dallas, Austin, San Antonio and Houston — where every young adult leaving foster care has access to education, employment and a place to call home.



To learn more, visit  
[Upbring.org/BeREAL](https://Upbring.org/BeREAL)

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

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## MISSION GRANT SPOTLIGHT



We celebrate the impact of the \$20,000 LWML Texas District Mission Grant that made Adventure Woods at **Camp Lone Star's** Tomball location a reality.

The support transformed vision into ministry — a dynamic playground with slides, climbing structures and camp games, which welcomed students into Christ-centered adventures. Campers build friendships, grow spiritually and enjoy a fun, engaging environment.

Local families responded enthusiastically with multi-week registrations, glowing reviews and social media buzz. Plans are underway to double camper capacity next year, and staff hiring has begun. Beyond summer, the new equipment blesses year-round visitors and groups.

Camp Lone Star praises God for the work He is doing through leaders, staff and ministry partners, and especially thanks LWML for helping share Christ's love with more children and families.



The **Hereford Hispanic Outreach Ministry** expresses heartfelt thanks to the LWML Texas District for their generous \$25,000 grant. The funds have upgraded the facilities of Immanuel, Hereford, creating a welcoming space for Hispanic ministry. The continued support fosters a vibrant, inclusive community.

Over the past three years, the ministry has hosted vacation Bible school, backpack giveaways, fall festivals, Christmas celebrations and book fairs. Hispanic pastors and families have helped refurbish the church and education building, and connect with the local population.

The ministry is seeking a Hispanic pastor to lead and expand outreach to surrounding towns. English as a Second Language (ESL) classes are slated to begin in 2026.

## It's time to apply!

Do you know of a female member of your Texas District congregation studying at an LCMS university to become an LCMS full-time professional church worker? Encourage her to apply for an LWML Texas District scholarship for the 2026-2027 school year!


Visit [lwmltxdist.org/about-us](https://lwmltxdist.org/about-us), click "Scholarships" and download the 2026 application. Completed applications must be received by March 31. Questions? contact Michelle Heckmann at [scholarships@lwmltxdist.org](mailto:scholarships@lwmltxdist.org).

**Send mite offerings** along with a remittance form to:

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

Starting in January 2026, Lutheran Women in Mission of the Texas District will publish a **monthly newsletter**. To receive by email, sign up at [lwmltxdist.org](https://lwmltxdist.org).





This season, we give thanks to God for  
His greatest gift—Jesus Christ.  
And we give thanks for you! Your  
generosity and partnership help us  
share His love and make a difference  
across Texas.

As we enter 2026, we can't wait to see  
how God continues to work through  
this ministry and through faithful  
supporters like you.

May the joy of Christ fill your heart this  
season and throughout the year ahead!

## TEXAS DISTRICT CHURCH EXTENSION FUND

