



Evangelical  
Lutheran  
Church in America

# The VISTA

A PUBLICATION OF THE SOUTHWESTERN TEXAS SYNOD

500940

www.swtsynod.org/thevistaprint

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## FAITH WATCH

This issue of *The Vista* includes a giving envelope for gifts to the **Tiemann Endowment Fund for Leadership Development**. Gifts may be given by check through the envelope, or may be made online at [www.swtsynod.org/tiemann](http://www.swtsynod.org/tiemann).

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**Calls and other position openings** are available at [www.swtsynod.org/callspositionopenings](http://www.swtsynod.org/callspositionopenings)

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**St. Paul, Mason** placed a historical marker on the Sunday School Building in recognition of its 100th year of service. The building continues to be used by the congregation.

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**"Worship at the Center: Journey from Ash Wednesday to Easter"** will be held Feb. 1-3 at St. Martin's Lutheran Church in Austin. (773) 380-2590 or [bethann.lynn@elca.org](mailto:bethann.lynn@elca.org)

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The **Bluebonnet Conference Women of the ELCA gathering** will be held on March 10 at St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Ander. Registration will open in January.

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The next **Tri-synodical Theological Conference** will be held Jan. 28-30, 2019, hosted by the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod.

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**Official Notice:** The 2018 Synod Assembly of the Southwestern Texas Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, will be held May 4-6, 2018 at the Embassy Suites by Hilton San Marcos Hotel Conference Center and Spa in San Marcos, Texas.—Deacon Kara Hairell-Speed, secretary, Southwestern Texas Synod.

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Members of Lutheran congregations are eligible to purchase burial plots in the **public cemetery** maintained by Zion Lutheran Church in San Antonio. Contact Dave Newman at (210) 859-7860.

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## Church is called forward to be visible in communities

By Deacon John Dellis

This final issue of *The Vista* continues the "Called forward together in Christ" theme, this time looking at how God calls us to be a visible church deeply committed to working ecumenically and with other people of faith for justice, peace and reconciliation in communities and around the world.

Beginning on pages 4-5, you'll find articles that describe how our ELCA World Hunger gifts are at work in the world, how congregations are connecting deeper to their communities through congregational-based advocacy, and how one of our congregations is recovering

## Called Forward Together in Christ

following extensive damage from Hurricane Harvey.

Included with this issue is a giving envelope for the Tiemann Endowment Fund for Leadership Development. This new initiative will honor Bishop Ray and Debbie Tiemann for what will be 39 years of service in this synod and provide a continuous stream of annual gifts to the synod to support the leadership development of congregational lay leaders and also pastors and deacons.

Additional information about the endowment fund is on page 3. Please consider a gift that will bless congregations and their leaders for years to come by using the enclosed envelope, or give online at [www.swtsynod.org/tiemann](http://www.swtsynod.org/tiemann).

Finally, I invite you to read my thanks and farewell article on page 3. Synod archivist Pastor Luther Oelke provides a wonderful overview of 165 years of publications in the article below.

*Deacon John Dellis is editor of The Vista.*

## Synod Assembly to elect next Southwestern Texas Synod bishop

"Seeds of Hope Beyond All Imagination" is the theme of the 2018 Synod Assembly of the Southwestern Texas Synod. The May 4-6 assembly will elect the fifth bishop of the synod.

Host conference for the synod assembly is the Cibolo Creek Conference. All events will be held at the Embassy Suites by Hilton San Marcos Hotel Conference Center and Spa in San Marcos.

### BISHOP ELECTION PROCESS

Members of synod congregations are invited into a time of prayer, discernment and anticipation as the synod prepares to

elect a new bishop, said the Rev. Stan Meyer, chair of the election committee

"The ministry of the bishop is central to our life together and important to the mission we are called to engage in the name of Christ," he said.

Each of the synod's eight conferences will hold meetings in February, which will mark the beginning of the process to raise up potential candidates for bishop. Names brought forward at the conference meetings are not nominations, but an exercise



to aid in the discernment process.

When the synod assembly begins May 4, the election process will begin according *See SYNOD ASSEMBLY, page 6*

## Final issue of *The Vista* concludes 165 years of publishing ministry

By the Rev. Luther Oelke

As *The Vista* leaves us, we say goodbye to an ecclesiastical member of the print world. Today's world is a digital world. It is a world that is cheap to produce, and easy to access.

So, let us pause to pay tribute to the world that many of us remember fondly, and one that many of us regret losing. *The Vista* has a rich ancestry, with a genealogy that stretches back a century and a half. And it has cousins, relatives in Lutheran publishing circles that like it, strove to communicate the stories of the synods, congregations, and institutions of Lutherans in Texas.

Many of us were acquainted with the two principal predecessors of *The Vista*,

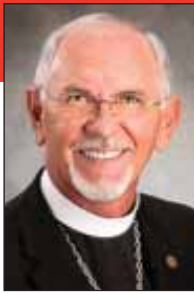
the *Texas-Louisiana Lutheran* and the *Southern Lutheran*, both of which covered a territory far wider than *The Vista*. Looking at the archival copies of these two publications, one can get a glimpse of the vigor of the Texas-Louisiana Synod of the Lutheran Church in America and the Southern District of The American Lutheran Church, respectively.

Editors such as David Cooper and Kurt Hartmann spent untold hours at their typewriters and at the printers getting their news-filled editions published. Congregations and institutions sent photos and stories, which found their way to the pages. Encouragement came from bishops, formerly called presidents, we recall. And columnists—such as the controversial E.S.

*See PUBLICATIONS, page 7*



## FROM THE BISHOP



Brothers and sisters in Christ,

Change! That can be disconcerting for our lives and for the Church. In this article I want to share three things that will change and are interconnected. Before I begin, however, please remember that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8)

The first change is that this is the final issue of *The Vista*. Deacon John Dellis, who has served as its editor for 29 years and eight months, will resign from this position when his contract ends on Jan. 31, 2018, so he can wholeheartedly pursue his work with the Lutheran Foundation of the Southwest. The Synod Council has surveyed a number of congregations, looked at the annual cost of *The Vista*, approximately \$37,500, and prayerfully considered options.

It has been decided that the four printed issues will be replaced with a monthly PDF page that can be distributed in congregational newsletters, either printed or electronically. We trust that you will receive more timely news of synod events and activities in this manner through your own congregational communications, not just four times a year but every month. We hope that this process, accompanied by the synod’s weekly electronic news, will keep communication clear and open for everyone.

The second change is in the synod’s future and strategic plan. Since 2011, we have been using as our focus, “GOD’S People—Growing in faith, Outwardly focused, Doing Mission.” For the last one and one-half years, we have participated in a process of gathering information for a new Purpose Statement, thanks to LEAD (Living Everyday As Disciples) and the ELCA’s Department of Research and

Evaluation. We held conversations in conference and deanery meetings, at the synod assembly, and through an electronic survey. In September, the Synod Council approved a new Purpose Statement, “God’s grace transforms and connects us to learn, to love, to lead.” As the synod’s strategic plan is built around this statement, we will work together to bring this to life in congregations, conferences, and throughout the synod’s ministries. It will help the new bishop have a plan in place that he/she can move forward in a timely and confident way.

Which brings us to the third change, the election of a new bishop at our Synod Assembly on May 5–6, 2018. As I approach the end of 18 years in the Office of Bishop among you, I will now entrust this calling to a new bishop. Not only will this mean change for the synod, but there will be change for me and Debbie as well. My plan is to retire, but I hope to reconnect with parish ministry in some way. We will continue to live in Fredericksburg, and I plan to get my certification as a Master Gardener, a hobby I have enjoyed throughout my life.

My prayer for our synod is to stay focused on our Savior and to be open to the Holy Spirit’s leading. While much changes around us, even in us, trust in God’s grace to provide for the Kingdom.

Bishop Ray Tiemann

*God’s grace transforms and connects us to learn, to love, to lead.*  
—Purpose Statement of the Southwestern Texas Synod



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**Conference Correspondents:** Gracie Cooley, Gulf Coast; Gloria Biermann, Hill Country; and Mary Lovig, Rio Grande.

**Spanish Translation:** Consuelo Espejel de Reid, Lutheran Seminary Program in the Southwest.

News and advertising are to be directed to the editor at [jdellis1961@gmail.com](mailto:jdellis1961@gmail.com) or 13430 Blackstone, Universal City, TX, 78148-3466, (830) 305-2758.

*The Vista* is not responsible for unsolicited materials.

**Letters to the Editor:** *The Vista* welcomes Letters to the Editor, which should include the author’s name and congregation. Letters should address a single topic and may be edited for length and clarity.

**Online:** [www.swtsynod.org/thevista](http://www.swtsynod.org/thevista)

## Calendar of events

<b>December</b>		<b>April</b>	
<b>13</b>	Staff retreat (Lutheran Ministry Center closed)	<b>4</b>	Lutheran World Relief Ingathering, Texas Lutheran University
<b>22</b>	Lutheran Ministry Center closed	<b>7</b>	Women of the ELCA Hill Country Conference event, Bethany, Fredericksburg
<b>25</b>	Christmas Day (Lutheran Ministry Center closed)		
<b>2018</b>		<b>May</b>	
<b>January</b>		<b>4</b>	Synod Council meeting
<b>1</b>	New Year’s Day (Lutheran Ministry Center closed)	<b>4–6</b>	Synod Assembly, Embassy Suites by Hilton San Marcos Hotel Conference Center & Spa
<b>15</b>	Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day (Lutheran Ministry Center closed)	<b>28</b>	Memorial Day (Lutheran Ministry Center closed)
<b>February</b>		<b>June</b>	
<b>3</b>	Equipping the Saints, St. Mark’s, Cuero	<b>27–July 1</b>	ELCA Youth Gathering, Houston
	Women of the ELCA Rio Grande Conference event, Trinity, Mission	<b>July</b>	
	Senior Fest, Christ, Georgetown	<b>4</b>	Independence Day (Lutheran Ministry Center closed)
<b>9–11</b>	High School Youth Gathering, Lutheran Camp Chrysalis	<b>September</b>	
<b>10</b>	Women of the ELCA Gulf Coast Conference event, Galilean, Corpus Christi	<b>3</b>	Labor Day (Lutheran Ministry Center closed)
<b>11–13</b>	Lutheran Legislative Event, Gethsemane, Austin	<b>7–8</b>	Synod Council, Lutheran Ministry Center
<b>16–17</b>	Synod Council, Lutheran Ministry Center	<b>28–30</b>	Southwestern Texas Synodical Women’s Organization convention, Pearl South Padre Island Resort
<b>March</b>		<b>2019</b>	
<b>3</b>	Women of the ELCA Capital North/Capital South Conference event, Gethsemane, Austin	<b>January</b>	
	Women of the ELCA Bluebonnet Conference event, St. Peter’s, Ander	<b>28–30</b>	Tri-Synodical Theological Conference
<b>10</b>		<b>Aug. 5–10</b>	ELCA Churchwide Assembly, Milwaukee, Wis.
<b>17</b>	Women of the ELCA Alamo/Cibolo Creek Conference event, Emanuel’s, Spirit of Joy, and Seguin Outdoor Learning Center	<b>2020</b>	
<b>30</b>	Good Friday (Lutheran Ministry Center closed)	<b>July 16–19</b>	Women of the ELCA Triennial Gathering, Phoenix

## Lutheran Legislative Event to be held Feb. 11–13

The theme for the 2018 Lutheran Legislative Event, sponsored by the synod’s Poverty and Justice Task Force (PJTF) in partnership with Texas Impact, will be “Rooted in Faith/Grounded in Love.”

The event will be held at Gethsemane Lutheran Church in Austin starting the

afternoon of Sunday, Feb. 11 and will conclude about 1 p.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 13.

Online registration is open at [www.swtsynod.org/synodevents](http://www.swtsynod.org/synodevents). The early registration fee is \$90, which includes Sunday dinner and Monday breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

## CALL PROCESS

### Calls Accepted

The Rev. Ellen Williams—St. John/San Juan, Austin

### Primary Candidate

Buda, Living Word (part-time)  
Elgin, St. Peter

### Interviewing

Austin, St. Martin’s

### Calls in Process

Austin, Triumphant Love  
Burnet, First  
San Antonio, St. John  
Seguin, Christ (Elm Creek)

### Determining Needs

Bandera, Grace (part-time)  
Cameron, Abiding Savior (part-time)  
Hutto, Hutto  
San Antonio, Beitel

(Note: **Interviewing** includes congregations and ministry settings that have submitted a Ministry Site Profile and have begun the interview process. **Calls in Process** lists congregations and ministry settings where a call committee has been formed to call a rostered leader. **Determining Needs** lists congregations and ministry settings that are beginning the call process for a rostered leader but have not submitted a Ministry Site Profile.)

## NEWS FROM AROUND THE SYNOD



**Atonement, San Antonio** celebrated the Reformation with a banner made by Janette Mueller and members wearing Lutheran T-shirts. Leading up to Reformation, the congregation had “conversations with Luther.”



The women of **Ebenezer, Maxwell** hosted their annual Sisters' Retreat Sept. 23 under the theme “The Many Hats We Wear,” based on Colossians 3: 23–24, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord...It is the Lord you are serving.” The day's activity included fellowship, singing, chair exercises, a craft session decorating visors with

Christian symbols, and a presentation on the many hats worn by Katarina von Bora, wife of Martin Luther.



Shown visiting God's Work Our Hands Kitchen at **First, Gonzales** is George Nita, a Lutheran missionary from Papua, New Guinea. German missionaries went to New Guinea in 1886 and formed the Evangelical Lutheran Church of New Guinea. George and his wife, Crystal, started the organization iCare4U to support the needs of marginalized Papua, New Guineans. The Christian organization has assisted 105 women registered as HIV-positive over the past six months. Pictured are George; Crystal; son, Judah; and Pastor Ildikó Rigney.

Quilters at **Immanuel, Comfort** sent 17 quilts to people in West Texas following a wildfire and 26 quilts to a nursing home in Refugio following Hurricane Harvey. They are currently working on additional quilts for the Lutheran World Relief Ingathering.

## Tiemann Endowment will provide new resource stream for leadership development

Each day, family, friends, neighbors, and those we have yet to meet are impacting our communities in profound ways through the work of the church. For the past 18 years, Bishop Ray Tiemann has served our community of faith by equipping lay leaders and pastors and deacons as they build and strengthen our congregations and ministries.

Members of synod congregations are invited to join in honoring Bishop Ray and Debbie Tiemann's years of service to our faith community with a gift that will leave a legacy. To honor the bishop's retirement, the Tiemann Endowment Fund for Leadership Development has been established to support the development of congregational lay leaders and pastors and deacons serving under call. Created by the 2017 Synod Assembly and managed by Lutheran Foundation of the Southwest as a permanent endowment, this fund will create a new generation of supported and trained leaders for our faith community.

Imagine what this gift will look like lived out! Isabella, a volunteer youth worker, can now receive an Advanced Certification in Youth and Family Ministry to strengthen the ministry in her congregation. To further congregational experiences and reach our multicultural community, Bob can attend an intensive

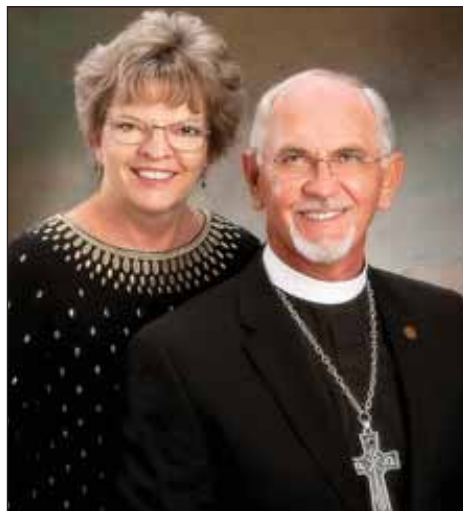


PHOTO BY WHITE OAK STUDIO  
Debbie and Bishop Ray Tiemann

language course, while Sarah can journey on a pilgrimage. Pastor Ryan can have financial assistance to participate in continuing education during his sabbatical. These and other opportunities will be possible with support from the Tiemann Endowment Fund for Leadership Development.

With the financial gifts from members of synod congregations, the Tiemann Endowment Fund for Leadership Development will make a significant contribution. See **TIEMANN ENDOWMENT, p. 8**

## Editor bids farewell, expresses thanks

By Deacon John Dellis

In the summer of 1988, the Southwestern Texas Synod posted a position opening for an editor. Encouraged by several friends and colleagues, I applied. I remember being called to the synod office to meet with Bishop Arthur E. Rode, who shared with me that I was to be the new editor, subject to the approval of the synod council in the fall.

My first issue as editor was published in February of 1989. We had seven monthly issues at that time, which grew over the years to 10. To my knowledge, I was the first editor to use a computer to write articles (previously typewritten pages were mailed to Dallas, where the headlines and articles would be typeset). But those written at the time in WordPerfect still had to be printed and compared to another piece of paper that would show the article's number of column inches.

Photographs (the kind on paper) were cropped and then shipped overnight to our printer in Dallas. The synod and its predecessor bodies had for many years a cooperative working arrangement with the United Methodist Reporter, later UMR Communications. This began prior to *The Vista* and long before the full communion agreement with the United Methodist Church.

Many aspects of the work changed over time. Modems and phone lines allowed copy and scanned photos to be sent directly to Dallas, discontinuing the need for the overnight shipping. Digital photography and programs for publication layout later streamlined the process, as did the Internet for quickly transmitting and sharing files. A major upgrade in the appearance of the paper was moving from an all black-and-white publication to full color.

We were not the only synod that had an every-member newspaper. But what set *The Vista* apart is how it was distributed: mailed directly to members' home mailing addresses. Publications that were predicated on being picked up by members from a stack in the narthex soon ceased. Yet this strength of the publication is also a major reason for its closing: postage is the single greatest cost of producing *The Vista*.

Editorial and advertising policy were guided and set for many years by the former Commission for Communications. Their elected chairs and appointed

members were a constant source of advice, encouragement, and support. *The Vista* was far from the commission's only project. The synod's first web site and its current Facebook page were both initiated and nurtured by the commission and its members.

There are many people to express thanks to for their partnership, assistance, and support: four bishops and their staffs, the chairs and members of the Commission for Communications, the many leaders and congregations who shared information and photographs over the years, those who forwarded congregational news as conference correspondents, the staffs of Fielder Ink, LLC and the former UMR Communications, and the agencies and institutions of the church that shared their news and also provided support through advertising.

While I served as editor, I was supported by several other persons who helped in specific ways. Courtney Classen of Shepherd King, San Antonio most recently served as circulation manager and was one of several people to serve in this role. Consuelo Espejel de Reid has translated the bishop's column from English to Spanish for many years.

And I say a special thank you to the many readers of this newspaper. I have attempted to do my best, in the words of the mission of the former *Lutheran Standard*, to “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15). And each time I gave the final approval to go to print, I believed that in a few days I was going to be welcomed as a guest in each of your homes.

Thank you for receiving me and this publication for so many years. It is a great blessing and privilege to have served in the communications ministry of the church in this way.

Deacon John Dellis  
Editor of *The Vista*, 1989–2017

-30-

## Buda congregation receives recognition for involvement in community

Living Word, Buda received the Hays Caldwell Women's Center Advocacy for Change Award at the center's annual dinner. The award is presented to a group each year that has made a community impact for the center.

The award for Living Word was accepted by Carolyn Lawlwer, Shirley Mueller and Mary Lou Walther. Living

Word also received an Award of Excellence from the Hays Consolidated Independent School District. Living Word was “honored for outstanding achievement, service and commitment to the ideals of excellence upon which Hays CISD was founded. The district is proud of your hard work and accomplishments” in the school supply donation and volunteers in 2017.

## Food pantries serve those in need throughout the synod

Many congregations throughout the synod are involved in ministries that assist those who are food insecure. These food pantries are sometime operated by the congregations themselves, or are cooperative efforts with the community, government, or other congregations.

The Bread for All food pantry is sponsored by Austin City Lutherans. The pantry is open on Monday evenings and is currently located in Prince of Peace, Austin. Neighbors from Southeast Austin are invited to shop at the pantry once a month. Most are shopping for large households and receive free meats, canned goods, bread, cereal, and fresh fruits and vegetables.

First, Edinburg's food pantry is government sponsored, which means the pantry can obtain food from a big food bank, making it possible to supply folks with good meat and everything.

Clients must come from a specific part of the city. It is one of First's biggest ministries.

See **FOOD PANTRY**, page 8



Pilar Hobbs is a frequent volunteer at The Hutto Community Food Pantry.

## Building Community and Working for Justice

By the Rev. Travis Meier

Bethany, Fredericksburg officially joined the second generation of the Congregation Initiated Community Based Advocacy (CICBA) task force in January of 2015. Over the past two and a half years we have gathered a small group of leaders to serve as the congregational task force. We conducted a listening campaign within the congregation seeking to reach 10 percent of the congregation and had one-to-one conversations with civil and non-profit leaders in Fredericksburg. We hosted multiple community building conversations about key issues facing our community, such as affordable housing and food insecurity.

In July of 2016, we hosted a community leadership development conference entitled "The Bartimaeus Effect: Jesus Building Community and Calling Us Follow." The training event spanned five evenings. Each night we began by gathering in fellowship around a meal. We spent an hour in Bible study, engaging the Gospel of Mark as a community building manifesto. We spent two hours each evening in community building skills workshops.

We had 60 participants, representing nine local congregations and four non-profit organizations. This event was a catalyst for developing ecumenical

relationships and a developing a broader network of people committed to working for justice and building community.

As a result of our conversations, we have been able to create resources to better support those in need in our community. We have heard over and over again that we are connecting agencies and people that did not know each other, creating avenues of mutual information and support. We are creating opportunities for people to serve their neighbors by connecting them to resources to support their needs.

One of the biggest learnings I have gained from the CICBA process is the strength of ecumenical partnerships within the local community. Being connected across denominational lines, in a time when the church seems so fractured, is an incredible witness to the strength of the body of Christ in the work of restoring relationships, building community, and ministering to the most vulnerable. These relationships multiply the church's ability to be advocates for those suffering from systemic violence, like poverty.

Being connected to local non-profits is another key to the work of justice and advocacy. By deepening our relationships with those who are already working on behalf of those in poverty, our team has been able to plug into works of justice that are already taking place. These relation-

See **CICBA**, continued on page 8

## ELCA World Hunger assists neighbors in U.S., throughout the world

By Bishop Ray Tiemann

The ELCA World Hunger program provides a wide array of opportunities to help those in poverty and hunger. From health clinics to microloans, water wells to animal husbandry, community meals to advocacy, ELCA World Hunger makes it possible for the ELCA to support sustainable solutions that get at the root causes of hunger and poverty.

Here are a few Hunger Facts: 1) 795 million people around the world—that's one in 10—can't access the food they need to live active, healthy lives; 2) According to the most recent estimates, 766.6 million people live in extreme poverty on less than

\$1.90 per day. That's 10.7 percent of the world's population; 3) At some point in 2015 (the most recent year available), more than 42.2 million people in the United States were unsure where their next meal might come from; and 4) 42.1 million Americans were living in poverty in 2015. For a family of four, this means their annual household income was below \$24,250. We give thanks that ELCA World Hunger receives over \$20 million annually, through many congregational and individual gifts and special offerings like the one at our synod assembly in 2016.

The 2016 Southwestern Texas Synod Assembly received an offering to support  
See **WORLD HUNGER**, page 8



### San Antonio Congregation Leaves Ministry Legacy



St. Andrew Lutheran Church in San Antonio held its final worship service on Nov. 19. Many of the remaining members are joining Shepherd King, San Antonio, St. Andrew's shepherding congregation. The St. Andrew Lutheran Church of San Antonio Endowment Fund, managed for the congregation by Lutheran Foundation of the Southwest, will share annual gifts to support the ELCA Fund for Leaders, ELCA Global Mission personnel, campus ministry in the synod, programs and ministries of the School of Music at Texas Lutheran University, and Christian Assistance Ministry in San Antonio.

The 2018 Austin and Central Texas Senior Fest event will be held Feb. 3 at Christ, Georgetown. Keynote speaker will be the Rev. Dr. Gerald Kieschnick, former president of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, who will speak on "Being a Lutheran in 2018." Registration is \$25 (\$30 after Jan. 28) and includes lunch. Senior Fest is organized annually by Adult Lutherans Organizing for Action, in cooperation with the ELCA Southwestern Texas Synod and the LCMS Texas District. (512) 837-0658 or [mnaleieha@msn.com](mailto:mnaleieha@msn.com).

# Harvey hit hard

By Stan Post

Some dates, due to the impact and experiences associated with them, become etched in your memory. Aug. 25, 2017 will now be one of those dates, at least it will be for the members and friends of Holy Cross in Rockport.

Harvey, one of the most destructive hurricanes to ever hit the Gulf Coast, barreled into Rockport with a vengeance. Most hurricanes hit and quickly move through. Not so with Harvey, as it lingered for hours with sustained wind of 130 miles per hour. There were gusts above that, and

See *HURRICANE HARVEY*, page 8



Hurricane Harvey caused extensive damage to the exterior and interior of Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Rockport.

## Individuals, congregations called to reach out beyond themselves

By Bishop Ray Tiemann

In response to 2016 Synod Assembly action and in anticipation of a leadership transition as we elect a new bishop at the 2018 Synod Assembly, the Strategic Planning Task Force (SPTF) was commissioned for the work of listening to God through Scripture and prayer and listening to the synod—that is, the members of all of the congregations and institutions in the Southwestern Texas Synod. The goal of this deep listening to God and to ourselves was to discern who we, the Southwestern Texas Synod of the ELCA, are right now and who we aspire to be, identifying a clear purpose and goals as we seek to be the Church in the world.

The synod acquired two partners in this process. The first was LEAD (Living Everyday As Disciples), a ministry within the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod who works with congregations and synods to listen well and develop strategic plans for mission and ministry. Our other partner was ELCA Research and Evaluation, who provided a wealth of statistical information (ministry and financial trends in congregations, population changes, etc.) on the synod. They were also able to provide an online survey in early 2017 to gather information on synod hopes and dreams and challenges. The SPTF also participated in many face-to-face conversa-



Strategic Planning Task Force members Rhonda Balsley and the Rev. Dawn Silvius reported on behalf of the task force to the 2017 Synod Assembly.

tions (conference deaneries, conference meetings, the Synod Council, etc.) and at the 2017 Synod Assembly during plenary time.

Through this listening, the SPTF learned that rural, suburban, and urban congregations are experiencing the same struggles as we seek to be sustainable and vital communities of faith. While the struggles are present and difficult, the SPTF also heard an overwhelming sense of hope that the God who creates something out of nothing and who brings life from death is making all things new, empowering us to work together, enlivening us to be

See *STRATEGIC PLANNING*, p. 7

## We are on the “river”

By the Rev. Sarah Nye

Just what is “Missional River” anyway? That is the question we all asked and heard from others in our congregation, even as we voted to participate in this program. We decided to trust, sight unseen, that God would be with us to guide our congregation toward the future using this Missional River program. With this tentative beginning, eight brave souls agreed to join me to serve on our Missional River team in early spring of this year. We have

been meeting bi-monthly and have successfully completed two training seminars to this point.

In our meetings, we have been focusing on learning to listen deeply, openly and with intention to each other and to God. Given that we all have very different personalities, we have found this to be quite challenging. We still have to work on listening deeply and with intent every time we meet.

An exercise entitled “Dwelling In the”  
See *MISSIONAL RIVER*, page 8



Pictured is the Missional River team at St. John Lutheran Church in Robstown.

## Barbecue benefit assists members of the Sutherland Springs community

By Mike Most

Through one little post on social media, an army of volunteers descended on St. Mark Lutheran Church in Adkins on Nov. 11, just six days after a lone gunman opened fire on First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs. A fledgling barbecue ministry whose owners were members of St. Mark stood on the sidewalk that Sunday after services wanting to do something. Given a nod of approval, what would begin as an idea would grow through both the Holy Spirit and this power of communication through social media. It would explode before our very eyes.

For six days, we operated the church 12 hours per day, staffing at least five cell phone lines, to accept and organize the outpouring of donations. The sanctuary of our little church became a giant warehouse. This congregation of 27 would grow to a volunteer force of around 500 by Friday and Saturday.

All were devastated by what had occurred, and there were no denominational boundaries of who we were. Truly we were one in spirit with Christ as each did what needed to be done. Barbecue pits rolled in from around the region, some from as far as Baton Rouge, La. And some held as much as 700 pounds of meat. Giant walk in coolers arrived for cold storage, lights, waste containers, port a potties all rolled in that week. Everyone wanted to help in any way they could.

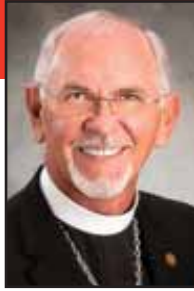
We watched “Facebook” numbers grow at a seemingly exponential rate and by the time of this writing the numbers were 2.5k attended 11k interested. Meat was prepared and cooked through the night Friday to Saturday morning as the majority of volunteers were to arrive between 7–8 a.m. We were preparing for the onslaught of our community and they did not disappoint.

This small community in Texas wanted  
See *BARBECUE BENEFIT*, p. 6



Hundreds of people attended a benefit organized by St. Mark Lutheran Church in Adkins to assist families impacted by the tragedy in Sutherland Springs.

## DE PARTE DEL OBISPO



Hermanos y hermanas en Cristo,  
¡Cambio! Eso puede ser desconcertante para nuestras vidas y para la iglesia. En este artículo quiero compartir tres cosas que están interconectadas y que cambiarán. Sin embargo, antes de comenzar, recuerden que “Jesucristo es el mismo de ayer, de hoy y siempre”. (Hebreos 13:8)

El primer cambio es que está es la última edición de “The Vista”. El Diácono John Dellis, quien ha servido como su editor 29 años y ocho meses, renunciará a esta posición cuando su contrato termine el 31 de enero de 2018, por lo que él puede seguir plenamente su trabajo en la Fundación Luterana del Suroeste (Foundation of the Southwest). El consejo del Sínodo ha realizado una encuesta a un número de congregaciones para saber el costo anual de “The Vista”, aproximadamente \$37,500, y en oración se consideraron opciones. Se ha decidido que los cuatro números impresos serán reemplazados por una página mensual en .pdf que se pueda distribuir en boletines congregacionales, ya sea impresa o electrónicamente. Confiamos en que ustedes recibirán de forma oportuna las noticias, los eventos y las actividades del Sínodo. De esta manera, a través de su propia congregación, la comunicación no sólo será cuatro veces al año sino cada mes. Esperamos que este proceso, acompañado de las noticias electrónicas semanales del Sínodo, se mantenga una comunicación clara y abierta para todos.

El segundo cambio es un plan estratégico sobre el Sínodo. Desde el 2011 nos hemos centrado en “El pueblo de Dios, creciendo en fe, enfocado exteriormente, haciendo misión”. Desde hace un año y medio hemos participado en un proceso de recopilación de información para una nueva declaración de propósito, gracias a LEAD por sus siglas en inglés (Viviendo Diariamente como Discípulos) y, el Departamento de Investigación y

Evaluación de la IELA. Se llevaron a cabo conversaciones en conferencia y reuniones en casa del diácono, en la asamblea del Sínodo y a través de una encuesta electrónica. En septiembre, el consejo del Sínodo aprobó una nueva declaración de propósito, “la gracia de Dios transforma y nos lleva a aprender, a amar, a dirigir”. Como plan estratégico del Sínodo es construir alrededor de esta declaración, trabajaremos juntos para traerlo a la vida en las congregaciones y conferencias a través de los ministerios del Sínodo. Esto ayudará al nuevo obispo para tener un plan, un lugar donde él o ella puedan avanzar en forma oportuna y segura.

Lo que nos lleva al tercer cambio, es la elección de un nuevo obispo en nuestra asamblea del Sínodo, que será el 5 y 6 de mayo del 2018. Mientras me aproximó a finalizar 18 años en la oficina como obispo de ustedes, ahora encomendaré este llamado a un nuevo obispo. No sólo significara este cambio para el Sínodo, sino también será un cambio para mí y Debbie. Mi plan es retirarme, pero espero volver a conectarme con el ministerio de la parroquia de alguna manera. Seguiremos viviendo en Fredericksburg, y planeo conseguir mi certificación como maestro jardinero, un pasatiempo que he disfrutado toda mi vida.

Mi oración es para nuestro Sínodo, que nos mantengamos enfocados en nuestro Salvador y abiertos al Espíritu Santo, para que nos guíe. Mientras que muchos cambios se aproximan, incluso en nosotros, que la confianza en la gracia de Dios prevalezca para su Reino.

*Ray Tiemann*

El Obispo Ray Tiemann

### SYNOD ASSEMBLY (continued from page 1)

to the provisions in the synod constitution.

The results of the potential nominee process begun in the conferences will be available at [www.swtsynod.org](http://www.swtsynod.org) in early April. It will be removed from the website one week prior to the synod assembly.

### OTHER ELECTIONS

Elections will also be held for members

### BARBECUE BENEFIT (continued from page 5)

to help and did by what they knew best. The line of cars stretched some 3 miles at one time from the church southward along U.S. Hwy. 87 South. Individuals who came to donate did not disappoint and were more than generous. Some, who had little of nothing, gave abundantly. As an onlooker I saw young people giving their time and talents, rolling up their sleeves and “digging in.” They were a part of this moment in history, where good challenged evil. These were not the church members

of the Synod Council, chairs of ministry teams, the consultation and discipline committees, nominations for two lay male members of the ELCA Church Council, and voting members to the 2019 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

Additional information, including registration, will be available at [www.swtsynod.org/assembly2018](http://www.swtsynod.org/assembly2018).

of my father, these volunteers were this younger generation of doers, these were the “twenty-something’s and thirty something’s” often missing in the pews.

Thank you, Lord for your love and sharing through this ministry. We give to those who lost so much our neighbors in Sutherland Springs.

*Mike Most is the synodically authorized minister for St. Mark Lutheran Church in Adkins.*

# Reformation 500



In commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, Lutherans and Catholics held an ecumenical prayer service on Reformation Sunday in St. John the Baptist Catholic Church in San Juan. The service, initiated by the Rev. Sylvia de la Garza, St. John, San Juan and supported by Bishop Daniel Flores of the Brownsville Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church, drew participants from congregations throughout the Rio Grande Conference.

Congregations and worshipping communities throughout the Southwestern Texas Synod held special celebrations marking the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

Many services were sponsored jointly with Roman Catholic parishes and other community congregations.

Grace, San Antonio and St. John, San Antonio were among downtown congregations to sponsor a “Reformation 500 Sanctuary Stroll” on Oct. 29. The 3.2 mile circuitous course took participants to a variety of churches celebrating the Reformation.

Texas Lutheran University held a year-long celebration of the Reformation, beginning in January will a chapel address by ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton. Other speakers and special events were held throughout the year, with a Service of Word and Music on Oct. 31.



Helping commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation at First, Gonzales were Father John Padgett, Episcopal Church of the Messiah; James Neumann, organist, Victoria; Father Paul Raaz, Catholic Community of Gonzales and Waelder; and the Rev. Ildikó Rigney of First Lutheran.



Trinity Lutheran Church and Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church in Victoria co-sponsored a Reformation celebration Oct. 29. Special guests were Bishop Ray Tiemann and Bishop Brendan Cahill of the Victoria Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church. The service began at Our Lady of Lourdes, then the congregation processed to Trinity and continued the service in Trinity’s sanctuary.

## STRATEGIC PLANNING (continued from p. 5)

vital expressions of God's love, and calling us to take part in the work of God for peace and justice for all people.

After much conversation, several things became clear. First, we are confident that God has been active in this process for our synod. The honesty and wisdom of responses, the passion for the ministry and mission we do together, and the hope for the future in spite of challenges was inspiring.

Second, there was a clear emphasis that the work of the synod involves all of us in reaching out beyond ourselves and our congregational settings. While congregations form the base of worship life and spiritual growth, reaching beyond ourselves into our neighborhoods and around the world in love and service is our calling.

Third, we wanted to recognize that we can't do this work by ourselves. It is God's grace that will "transform" individuals, ministries, institutions, systems, etc. We trust that "the Holy Spirit has called us through the gospel, enlightened us with his gifts, made us holy and kept us in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith." (Apostles' Creed, Third Article)

Finally, an important theme that kept emerging was the need for us to find more effective ways to "connect." That might be through cooperative ministry ventures, more effective communication, or finding ways to share resources to fund a new mission opportunity. We will do that by

learning together, loving each other, and being strong and faithful leaders in the joint mission of Jesus Christ in the Southwestern Texas Synod.

Therefore, when the Synod Council met on Sept. 9, they approved a new Purpose Statement as part of the synod's strategic plan—God's grace transforms and connects us to learn, to love, to lead. As its Biblical foundation, Romans 12:2 was selected: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect."

A grid was developed to structure goals for learning, loving, and leading in four areas: Pastoral Care for Leaders, Congregational Sustainability and Vitality, Justice and Peace, and Engagement with Neighbors. The SPTF met with the synod staff to begin developing short-term and long-term (two-year) goals for alignment, and execution, of the strategic plan.

This work may include goals to stop doing some ministries in order to take on new opportunities. The next steps include a plan for setting metrics that will help the synod see progress, share stories, and create momentum for being the church in a changing world. When the new bishop takes office, he/she will be able to use this strategic plan to provide direction and emphasis for the synod.

*The Rev. Dr. Ray Tiemann is bishop of the Southwestern Texas Synod.*

### LUTHERAN CHURCH OF CHRIST THE REDEEMER

*in Minneapolis, Minnesota, used an MIF loan to remodel the low-income apartments the church rents to Togolese refugees.*



### WHAT MAKES MIF TERM INVESTMENTS NOTABLE? EVEN NON-INVESTORS SEE A RETURN.

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## PUBLICATIONS (continued from p. 1)

Johns, in anonymity, and the popular Ron Birk, who will forever be known for citing as the world's first proctologist, the biblical Tiglath Pile Easer.

As the merger dawned, Bob Fleischer produced a combined edition until each of the new synods carved out by the fledgling ELCA decided what to do about communication. One of the three Texas-Louisiana synods, the Southwestern Texas Synod, chose to go with a tabloid newspaper dubbed *The Vista*.

But there are many other ancestors and relatives of *The Vista* that also deserve mention. The German-trained pastors of the early Texas synods relished theological debate, and in their publications, such as *Luter Bote* and *Der Treue Zeuge*, they managed to combine news with argument. These papers had a wide circulation among German speakers, but their time was limited. World War I began the decline and though some national German language Lutheran publications continued into the 1940's, they were finished in Texas by 1930.



Another ancestor of *The Vista*, continued in spirit in the Spanish-translated bishop's message, is the Spanish language publication of the Texas District of the 1930 American Lutheran Church, *El Mesanjo*, and its English-language companion, *The Worker's Exchange*. With a lively Spanish-language mission program, the Texas District again employed Kurt Hartmann and his fluency in Spanish as editor.

Meanwhile, publications by Lutheran General Hospital and the Lutheran Welfare Society made their appearances, but none could compete with what was being produced in Seguin at the South

Texas Printing Company. They were publishing a monthly newspaper, the *Lone Star Messenger*, for the Brotherhood of the Texas District, the *Alumnus*, a monthly newspaper for Texas Lutheran College, and the *Lone Star Lutheran*, which faithfully reported on the close relationship TLC had with both the Texas-Louisiana Synod and the Texas District, and subsequent, Southern District.



All the above-mentioned periodicals, now including *The Vista*, are worthy of being honored, as are their editors. Those of us who have had the privilege of knowing Kurt Hartmann, David Cooper, and Bob Fleischer, have been honored to also know another editor of integrity, John Dellis. He is in good company with his predecessors.

*The Rev. Luther Oelke serves as archivist for the Region 4-South Archives, housed at the Lutheran Ministry Center in Seguin. He served as the first chair of the synod's Commission for Communications when the synod was formed in 1987.*



## TLU performing arts center to open Jan. 26

The Caroline M. Weston Center for the Performing Arts at Texas Lutheran University will have its grand opening from 2–3:30 p.m. on Jan. 26. All are invited to participate in this historic occasion. Thanks to many of the university's generous alumni and friends, this is the most ambitious construction project in TLU history with highlights including:

- a 32,000-square-foot School of Music

Building featuring band, choir and ensemble rehearsal halls, studio and classroom space, student practice rooms, and faculty offices;

- a separate black box studio theatre with theatre and video production space and additional dressing room and green room space; and
- the renovation of the Jackson Auditorium lobby and restrooms.

*CICBA (continued from page 4)*

ships and conversations have led to an expanded understanding of our community and an unmasking of some of the local structures that lead to poverty and hunger in our community. Because of these efforts, members of our leadership team are currently sitting on various sub-committees of a visioning committee for Fredericksburg. We are advocating for the most vulnerable, making sure their voices

are at the visioning table.

The work of our team continues. As we move into 2018 we are working on additional ways to keep the whole congregation involved in working for justice in our community.

*The Rev. Travis Meier is a pastor of Bethany Lutheran Church in Fredericksburg.*

*MISSIONAL RIVER (continued from p. 5)*

Word” has been a wonderful tool to help us open our hearts to the complex, yet basic, truths in scripture. When we open our meetings with biblical truth and discuss the scripture as a group, it lends powerful insight for the rest of the meeting. We are all able to hear the same scripture and discern different truths spoken to each of us from that same scripture passage. This has been an important ingredient in learning to listen successfully not only to scripture but to each other. We have learned it is not always the loudest and most verbose voice that has the most to say. Sometimes the shy, quiet person in the group can be heard saying the most profound truth. We are each of value and teaching each other.

There are very deliberate steps we have

to complete throughout this whole process. We are nearing the end of the beginning steps in which we learn to listen to each other within the team. Next, we will be listening to other people in our congregation, and beyond that we will listen in our neighborhood.

Will our end result of this process be some new, unforeseen opportunity to serve God and our community? Or, will we find a new way to tweak something we are already doing in our congregation? Only God knows, and we are waiting to hear Him speak to us. We are your children and we are trying to listen to your voice, Lord.

*The Rev. Sarah Nye is pastor of St. John Lutheran Church in Robstown.*

*WORLD HUNGER (continued from p. 4)*

ELCA World Hunger which totaled \$118,799.67 and reflected your generosity for those suffering hunger and poverty. In that offering, our eight conferences chose specific projects to emphasize the offering. The Alamo Conference selected a program of “Feeding Refugees,” where funds provided food and other supplies for those who had been driven from their homes because of illness or violence and were currently in refugee camps. The Bluebonnet, Capital North, Gulf Coast, and Rio Grande Conferences supported “Family Farms,” a program where a family receives several livestock, farming tools, seeds, and agricultural training and support to provide a lifetime of food to eat and sell on the market to escape the cycle of hunger and poverty.

The Capital South Conference provided gifts for “Micro Loans,” which is funding, primarily for women, to create a business and consistent income. The Cibolo Creek Conference supported a “Medical Clinic” to stock antibiotics, vitamins, vaccines, and other necessities for good health. The Hill Country Conference purchased “Goats,” animals that can survive in some of the harshest environments and give fresh milk, offspring, meat, and income.

Many were blessed through these gifts, and you can support these and many more through the Good Gifts catalog found at [www.ELCA.org/goodgifts](http://www.ELCA.org/goodgifts).

*The Rev. Dr. Ray Tiemann is bishop of the Southwestern Texas Synod.*

*FOOD PANTRY (continued from page 4)*

Seguin’s Christian Cupboard was started by area congregations and provides food for those who qualify. It’s open from 9 a.m.-noon Monday through Thursday of each week. Members of Spirit of Joy, Seguin staff the food pantry during additional times, allowing it to be open on the first and third Saturday mornings each month.

The Hutto Community Food Pantry, based at Hutto, Hutto, provides food and personal items to those in need that live in the City of Hutto or the Hutto Independent School District. It is a partner with the Central Texas Food Bank. The

pantry is overseen by an all-volunteer board that includes members from many of the congregations in Hutto, as well as school board members and city council members. It is open every Saturday morning and distributes food to approximately 80 families each week

There are many other local and community food pantries located throughout the synod that are supported by congregations. For example, St. Luke’s, Schroeder; St. Peter’s, Ander; and Zion, Arneckeville frequently support the Goliad Outreach food pantry and Camal House in Cuero.

*TIEMANN ENDOWMENT (continued from page 3)*

impact in our community! The goal is to raise \$39,000 by May 2018 to ensure that at least two scholarships are awarded in this first year, and to honor the 39 years of ordained ministry the bishop has served in our synod.

A gift envelope is included in this issue of *The Vista*. Checks should be made payable to Lutheran Foundation of the Southwest, noting on your

check memo line Tiemann Endowment Fund. Online giving is available at [www.swtsynod.org/tiemann](http://www.swtsynod.org/tiemann).

Together with you, we can make a long-lasting impact in our community, while significantly honoring Bishop Ray and Debbie Tiemann. Thank you for the support you are providing for every leader who will be blessed deeply by this endowment fund.

*HURRICANE HARVEY (continued from page 5)*

there were numerous spinoff tornadoes. The destruction to Rockport was devastating. The same is true in regards to members of Holy Cross and to the parsonage, the church, and church property.

There were no members of Holy Cross who did not sustain damage, most had significant damage, and several had their homes destroyed. Damage to the parsonage requires a new roof, new fence and repair of minor water damage.

The oak trees at the parsonage, like those throughout Rockport, and there are thousands, literally had no leaves left on them. It was surreal. The trees were simply trunks, limbs and branches. Well over 20 large black contractor bags were filled with leaves and debris. It’s difficult to describe the damage to the trees. In one area where the golf course is located, it was reported that 1,200 trees were blown down, most were oak.

The church did not escape Harvey’s wrath. The steeple blew off and has never been found! This of course left a gaping hole in the roof allowing wind and rain to penetrate. The roof was also compromised in places, again allowing for damage. Probably due to the force of the wind into the building, the interior roof collapsed, as well as some walls. I could go on and on, but perhaps what the Windstorm Adjuster said describes it: “This place looks totaled.”

On the outside, the sign by the street is severely damaged, the fence is mostly down. Brick siding is pulled loose from the building in places and cracked in others. And, of course trees on the property were down or damaged, including in The Prayer Garden. Unbelievably, the force of the wind was so high that it actually blew over the granite columbarium.

If the scope of destruction is overwhelming, and it is, so too has been the support. This too will be etched into our memory. Support provided to Holy Cross, and to its members, has truly been amazing. And, we are so grateful.

Almost immediately we were offered the use of a small, old, empty, concrete block building as a temporary place for worship, and it was offered for free. Members cleaned, replaced ceiling tiles, etc. and brought folding chairs, a few tables, hymnals, worship folders and a few other items. All had to be retrieved from the damaged church and wiped with Clorox for mold. Members and volunteer help did the job joyfully. We were thankful

for the support.

Volunteers from congregations in our conference and synod immediately started reaching out with support. They sent volunteers to help clean debris at the church and at some of the members’ badly damaged homes and at the parsonage. It seemed each week a new group would come to help, and others offered to come if needed.

Bishop Tiemann came twice. He came first early on to see the damage and meet with Pastor Haynes and others. He returned again, bringing representatives from Lutheran Disaster Relief.

Support in terms of volunteer help and financial assistance has come from every direction. It’s been truly humbling. It has come from large congregations in cities like Austin and San Antonio and from small country congregations like in Ander and Bishop. Some volunteers came for a day and some stayed days. Pastor Brad Fuerst brought a group of 10 students from UT Austin Lutheran Campus Ministry. A group from the synod’s Task Force on Poverty and Justice came. They stayed three days!

The volume of supplies received is hard to describe. Just boxes and boxes of cleaning supplies, household items, food, blankets and so much more. It was distributed to thankful members of Holy Cross as well as to many others in need in the community. The same is true for the \$3,000 in Walmart gift cards sent by congregations in the San Antonio area. How blessed we have been!

Almost daily when Pastor Haynes picks up mail, there are checks of financial support. They come from congregations, friends of Holy Cross and from some we do not know. To date we have received \$29,998.82 designated REBUILD. Additionally there have been other general contributions. Again, what wonderful support!

In the midst of even a time like this there are blessings if we can but see them, and we do. The support received has been sustaining. Pastor Haynes continues to provide strong, positive, spiritual leadership. There is worship and joyful fellowship. On Oct. 29, we celebrated the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. And, yes, we sang “A Mighty Fortress is Our God.” So true!

*Stan Post is a member of Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Rockport.*