

From discernment to generosity

By Lizbeth Johnson

How can we be generous in multiple ways with our financial resources?

When St. John Lutheran Church in New Ulm, Texas, needed new hymnals, Ben Marek was drawn to meet the need. He and his brother decided to purchase the hymnals themselves. He included a



Ben Marek

tribute to his wife with a marker for the hymnal as a tribute to her generosity in life and what they had learned together about giving to the work of the Lord.

When you attend a worship service at St. John, you will be drawn to the inscription

that tells you someone named Ben loves the Lord, loved his wife, and loves his church. Ben Marek wants to bless others with a way that extends worship through praise and adoration in song.

Down the road, Immanuel Lutheran Church of Wiedeville has a new water well that will nourish the grass and landscape around the church building and cemetery. Doug Maurer considered the need, discerned his own ability to meet it, and paid for a reliable friend in the well-drilling profession to provide a long-term solution. Doug saw drilling a well as a way to meet the need and honor his late mother, Evelyn, who loved her church.

Happy the well was pumping water to the right places, his heart was pleased, but he moved on to walk the grounds methodically and took note of other needs.

“Ball moss is growing on those oak trees,” he mentioned to the pastor and two council members as they walked the grounds. “We need to take care of it,” he said. A new water well did not stop his

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Bishop Mike Rinehart (front row, right) visits Treehouse campus ministry for students at Texas A&M University and Blinn College.

GRANTS FUND SEMINARIANS, CAMPUS MINISTRY, NEW STARTS

The Live On board of directors approved financial aid for eight clergy candidates and increased funding for the campus ministry programs when it approved grants funded through distributions from the Gulf Coast Synod’s \$2.7 million endowment.

Live On awards grants that are aligned with established priorities—seminary scholarships, campus ministry, mission development and seed money for innovative and emerging ministry ideas. Spring grants totaled \$48,500.

The Spring grants marked the fourth consecutive grant cycle in which Live On met the goal of enabling Gulf Coast Synod candidates for Lutheran ministry to continue their studies without taking on new student debt. Pastor Blair Lundborg, assistant to the bishop, works with ministry candidates to determine their need and makes funding recommendations to the Live On board.

One recipient is Clayton Faulkner, di-

rector of Worship, Music and Technology at Faith Lutheran Church in Bellaire, who began his master of divinity studies in the collaborative learning program at Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa.

“The Live On scholarships provided to Gulf Coast Synod seminary students is proof of God’s provision for me,” he said. “Knowing that I can complete seminary without taking on the burden of more financial debt is confirmation that God is at work. This means so much to my family and the future of our shared ministry. The freedom to seek God’s calling to serve the church in an unencumbered way is a blessing.”

The synod’s campus ministry includes Houston Lutheran Campus Ministry at Rice University and the University of Houston; Treehouse at Texas A&M University and Blinn College and Louisiana State University at Baton Rouge. Live

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About us

Live On is the endowment fund of the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

The fund relies on generous donations from estates, congregations and individuals. Assets are invested in ELCA Endowment Fund Pooled Trust – Fund A, a long-term investment fund with distributions for grants.

Our grant priorities are financial aid for seminarians, campus ministry, mission development and seed money for creative ministries.

Donate to Live On

Send your check by mail to:

Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod
12941 I-45 North Freeway, Suite 210
Houston, TX 77060-1243

Make your secure online donation at:

www.liveongenerously.org/giving

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Gulf Coast Synod Gift Planner

Lizabeth Johnson, the Synod's gift planner, helps pastors, leaders and faithful church members explore endowments, gift annuities, end-of-life stewardship and other strategies. To schedule a meeting, contact Liz at lcjohnson@lfs.org or (713) 775-1595.



JOIN LIVE ON SEPTEMBER

Supporting Live On, the Synod's endowment, will help ensure that the church thrives in the future with faithful pastors, young leaders, new congregations and innovative ministries.

Join Live On September to raise awareness and resources for our mission.

Here's some ways you can help:

- Plan a Sunday collection for Live On.
- Invite a Live On representative or grant recipient to share stories.
- Encourage your church to create an endowment.

- Encourage individuals and families to consider planned giving.
- Request newsletters, posters, bulletin inserts and videos.
- Sign up email: www.liveongenerously.org/contact-us.
- Invite gift planner Lizabeth Johnson to help explore endowments, planned giving and other strategies. Please contact her at lcjohnson@lfs.org or call (713) 775-1595.
- Like us: facebook.com/liveongenerously.

By the numbers ...

\$2,790,711: Value of funds invested in ELCA Foundation Pooled Trust A at June 30, 2017.

\$889,151: Grants awarded since inception of the Gulf Coast Synod endowment in 1999.

49: Candidates for rostered leadership (pastors and deacons) who have received financial aid from the Synod's endowment.

SIX: Colleges served by the Synod's Lutheran Campus Ministries—Rice University, University of Houston, Texas A&M University, Blinn and Louisiana State University.

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eyes from sweeping across the landscape looking for other opportunities to help make Immanuel become a more appealing place.

Having Ben Marek and Doug Maurer meet church needs through their own insights is a wonderful gift of generosity to their congregations. What about those of us who don't think about the new hymnals or have connections to drilling services?

But how do we go beyond our duty and discernment to leave our mark in God's economy to spread the gospel beyond our duty?

Beyond our regular support, a second pocket holds the "special offering" beyond our duty, and the third pocket is for the "legacy" that goes beyond our discernment to recognize what is needed in the church beyond what we see.

Legacy requires extra trust in God, our congregation, and our will to put the Lord first, giving beyond our own lives.

Blessings to all givers, and special blessings to those who include a gift in their long-term planning---in wills and estates bequests that make significant impact on a church or ministry. Let's make it a practice to consider all three pockets for comprehensive generosity!



Doug Maurer and Pastor Sue Beall

Use our secure website to donate to LIVE ON today
liveongenerously.org/giving



LSU: pilgrimage, sacred meals

By Pastor Mike Button

Over the last twelve months we've had 10 students and young adults regularly participating in Lutheran Campus Ministry at Louisiana State University.

Last summer, four students, Nancy Heck from St. Paul Lutheran Church and I joined the synod's Peru pilgrimage. Our students had a great time traveling and working alongside a dozen students from Texas A&M. Thanks to the generous support of the synod and St. Paul, all expenses were covered for our students.

During the academic year, we met on Tuesday evenings at restaurants near the LSU campus for sacred meals and holy conversation.

The support we've received from the synod and from St. Paul have been God-sent.

For the coming year, I would like to hire a part-time campus ministry assistant. This would, I hope, be a full-time student who could help facilitate gatherings, keep us current as a student organization, and plug us into campus events and programs.

MESSAGE OF GRACE AT RICE, UH

By Pastor Janelle Rozek Hooper

Most of us hadn't painted with our fingers in years. We are college students and adult board members who were asked to draw, mold clay and—yes—paint with our fingers and brushes as we prayerfully discerned our future as Houston Lutheran Campus Ministry. We have been in interim status for a year and half, which made it the right time to figure out who we wanted to be moving forward.

On retreat, artist Lisle Gwynn Garrity from A Sanctified Art led us in mission discernment. Some students had done mission discernment before and some had never thought through a visioning process; none of us had done it with blue and green paint on our hands!

That's campus ministry, especially the kind of ministry expressive of the diverse communities we serve at Rice University and the University of Houston—two schools that differ in size, philosophies and student backgrounds. Yet students are students, figuring out how to be whole people, balancing a future career and life goals.

A student early in the year read the text from Matthew 15:21-28 where a woman challenged Jesus to heal her demon-possessed daughter.

The student expressed frustration around the possibility that Jesus changed his mind to heal the daughter after first ignoring the request.

An engineering major, the student felt

pressure never to make mistakes and could not conceive of Jesus changing positions. We've come back to this text over and over again. At our retreat, it formed the basis of our new mission statement, "An open community welcoming faith exploration."

Just a year after wrestling with this text, the student was encouraging other students to consider the nature of God in ways they had not before and to consider the impact of grace in their lives.

I'm amazed by the profound differences we can make in the open minds of students when we are present, listening and caring. Live On's generosity allows us to be present to these young people who need someone to listen to their struggles and care for their spiritual and emotional wellbeing in addition to academics.

Thank you for providing for Jesus's message of grace to live on in these academic settings through Houston Lutheran Campus Ministry.

Grants fund seminarians, campus ministry

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On's funding is in addition to funds from congregations, individuals and the Synod.

Board members also approved grants for new mission starts and seed money for immigration workshops organized by St. James Lutheran Church/Santiago Apóstol in Houston. Seed Money grant applications are reviewed by a committee.

Robert Rivera, who submitted the proposal, said the workshops are valuable for immigrants, important outreach for the congregation and an avenue for ecumenical outreach to other faith communities.

Pastor Chris Markert, mission developer, said, "Through Live On's generosity, we are able to support pastors and deacons as they start new missions and re-vitalize existing ministries."

Treehouse at Texas A&M, Blinn: centered in grace

By Pastor Mindy Roll

The 2016-2017 school year was excellent for Treehouse, the Lutheran Campus Ministry at Texas A&M and Blinn College; it was so good that we ran out of meeting space and needed to hire more staff! A Lutheran approach to the world—centered in grace, nuanced in thinking, and focused on our neighbors—is absolutely compelling on a college campus.

Students who have never been to church, or who have left the church of their childhood, or who feel rejected by religion often find a warm, loving home at Treehouse alongside students who have grown up Lutheran but are aching for a deeper faith.

This unexpected community is the miracle of campus ministry and the gift of a Lutheran approach to the world.

Highlights from the year also included:

- ◇ A fantastic eco-theology

spring break pilgrimage to the Grunewald Guild and Holden Village;

- ◇ Our sixth year of ministry with migrant workers in downtown Bryan, and
- ◇ Campus Ministry Sunday, when 30 students preached in 15 synod churches.

We are celebrating the stories that came from a great year while also attempting to figure out how to accommodate a growing ministry.

As our campus ministries raise funds for almost our entire budget every year, the commitment, encouragement, and support of Live On continues to be a great gift to us.

We are deeply grateful for the donors and board who believe in our synod's three campus ministries and recognize the aching needs of college students and



Treehouse celebrated its first Baptism—Richie Pech, a student at Blinn. young adults to experience a God of grace and love.

Thank you for loving us so well.

ST. JAMES/SANTIAGO APÓSTOL IMMIGRATION WORKSHOPS

Helping immigrants understand their legal options to stay in the United States and how to plan for their family in a time of increased enforcement are subjects for immigration community meetings organized by the Family Life Center at St. James Lutheran Church/Santiago Apóstol and held across the Houston area.

The board of Live On, the Gulf Coast Synod's endowment fund, recently approved a seed money grant to enable the workshops to continue through the year.

"A number of participants discovered that they have a path to citizenship," said

Robert Rivera of St. James. "For example, a person who has been a victim of a crime may qualify for legal status or visa to stay in the country and eventually gain permanent resident status."

Meetings have been held primarily in churches that contacted St. James but also in schools and an apartment complex in southwest Houston. The meetings have served a total of 387 families and impacted over 1,200 people. Each meeting includes discussion of rights and how to make a plan in case of detention.

Volunteer lawyers meet briefly with individuals or families to assess whether

further legal help would be beneficial.

Lawyers who have volunteered include Javier Rivera, Craig Pena, Francis Valdez, Carlo Torres and Edwin Reyes; Catholic Charities Legal Team, and Kathy Patrick and lawyers from Gibbs & Bruns. Other partners include the Weekley YMCA, Catholic Charities, United We Dream Houston and Houston Public Library.

"As our congregation grows, it is important to our Latino membership to support these efforts," Rivera said. "As we stand with undocumented families as many of our families are, our families become more dedicated to our church."

Congregational endowments: a culture of giving

As the membership of Faith Lutheran Church in Dickinson considered their stewardship, creating an endowment was the next step, said Pastor Deb Grant.

"Over the last several years, we have made steps toward good financial practices and careful stewardship; as an older congregation, trust of how money is spent and managed is a deep-seated value."

The congregation paid off loans, paid all bills in timely manner, renegotiated insurance, stayed under budget in spending and

re-built reserve funds.

"Those frugal practices were regularly shared with the congregation and their personal stewardship was strong. This led to a larger reserve than necessary. The ELCA Endowment Fund A was the right option at the right time."

ELCA Endowment Fund Pooled Trust – Fund A enables collective long-term investment of funds belonging to the ELCA and affiliated ministries with distributions to support ministry.

At Living Word Lutheran Church in Katy, "the vision of the Living Legacy Endowment is to create and foster a culture of giving that builds financial capacity for the future and leaves legacy gifts for the mission and ministries of our church," explained Rick Carlson, chair of the fund's board. "The goals are to provide funding for new and expanding ministries at Living Word, for assistance within our local community, and for church support of national and global missions."