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Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

CONNECTIONS

*A Network of Christ-Centered, Outwardly-Focused, Faith-Growing
Communities for the Sake of the World*

April 2026



A Bishop's Place Is...On the Board

by Bishop Tracey Breashears Schultz

I learned in December that all three ELCA bishops in Texas are members of the TLU Corporation Board. I attended my first board meeting on the TLU campus on January 31, 2026. The purpose of the Corporation Board is to hear from the university president, approve the previous year's audit, and appoint new members to the Board of Regents. Besides myself, our synod's TLU Corporation Board representatives are John Roalson (Christ the King-Houston), Opie Otterstad (Living Word-Katy), Ashley Bergeron (Living Word-Katy), Kathy Toensing (St Paul-La Grange) and Pastor Brad Otto (Messiah-Cypress). Kathy serves as board secretary.

After the meeting, we were invited to stay for lunch, and I'm so glad I did. Current students, who are endowment fund recipients, were seated at each of the tables, so no matter where we sat, we'd meet a student. Of the three I met, one knew her whole life she'd be attending TLU, but the other two initially only considered it for scholarship opportunities but have since found a home there. One of them told me she would not be a college student were it not for the financial help. Wow!

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God Be in My Head: A Chrism Mass Reflection on Vows, Unity, and Shared Call

by Deacon Aimee Elles, Bishop's Associate for Candidacy and Education

“God be in my head...” These were the opening words of the Gospel Acclamation sung at the Chrism Mass with Reaffirmation of Ordination Vows for the Bishop, Priests, and Deacons of the Dioceses of Louisiana on March 30th in New Orleans. The prayer, originating in the Sarum Primer of 1514, immediately grounded our worship in a tradition shared across centuries—even as we gathered across denominational lines.

The Right Reverend Shannon Rogers Duckworth invited Bishop Tracey and the clergy of the Bayou Conference to celebrate this mass together. What unfolded was far more than a beautifully crafted liturgy. It was a visible and embodied proclamation of unity: Episcopal and Lutheran clergy, bishops, priests, deacons, and pastors gathered side by side to pray, sing, and hear the Word of God together.

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Chrism Mass 2026: Kyrie Eleison, Every Day

by Rev. Cassandra Nagle, Bishop's Associate for Community & Call Process

On Tuesday in Holy Week, the Gulf Coast Synod hosts a Chrism Mass service for rostered ministers and lay members in the Texas portion of the synod. This year, our gracious hosts were the good people at Christ the Servant Lutheran Church in Houston, and their pastor, The Reverend John Vickery. (We are grateful to The Right Reverend Shannon Rogers Duckworth and the Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana for inviting our Louisiana clergy members to worship together on Monday in Holy Week.)

Chrism Mass (“Anointing with Oil” + “Worship”) is a special annual service in which we pray, reaffirm vows for bishops, deacons, pastors, and all the baptized, receive Holy Communion, and are anointed with oil. This oil, blessed by the Bishop, is then shared, so worshipers can take it to their faith communities for anointing the baptized, the sick, and the dying. The oil may also be used when preparing ashes for Ash Wednesday. As synod staff, we hope to provide this worship space and time for clergy and lay members so that they might experience rest, renewal, and restoration amid the fullness of Holy Week. We are deeply grateful to [Christ the Servant in Houston](#) for partnering with us in this effort and for graciously hosting this year’s worship service and reception.

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A SOLEMN LOOK BACK

With city forever changed, New Orleans marks 20 years since Hurricane Katrina



Love Your Neighbor Means ALL Your Neighbors: Ecumenical and Interfaith Ministry in Louisiana

by Pastor Sandra Barnes, Gethsemane Lutheran Church, Chalmette, LA

Sometimes, when people hear the teaching of “love your neighbor,” the lines of “neighbor” get drawn very tightly. Sometimes people think their neighbors are fellow members in their congregation, maybe their local community, possibly Lutheran work in other parts of the country. However, “neighbor” means, as we say in Louisiana and Texas, “all y’all.”

It is my privilege to serve on behalf of the Bayou Conference and the synod in ecumenical and interfaith ministry in Louisiana. Ecumenical means working with our fellow Christians of other denominations, realizing that our unity is in Christ, and finding ways to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus in word and deed. The main organization that coordinates this work here is the [Louisiana Interchurch Conference](#). We come together to find ways to pray together, such as our annual Week of Christian Unity Prayer Service, as well as finding ways to serve those around us. Recently, we held our annual assembly, and learned how LIC is supporting the work and ministry done on behalf of those

incarcerated, the homeless, the immigrants, as well as the environment and climate change.

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Our Synod's Ministry on the Move: Supporting Students Together

by Deacon Aimee Elles, Bishop's Associate for Candidacy and Education

Campus ministry serves as a crucial period of transition for many individuals during their faith journey. They often find themselves away from home, grappling with the challenges of managing schedules and making decisions independently for the first time. This newfound autonomy allows them to choose their meals, destinations, and even when to sleep in, instead of following the routine of attending worship with their families. While this period can be filled with exciting experiences like forming friendships and relationships, it can also bring about difficult emotions such as loneliness, fear, and heartbreak. Additionally, the vastness of opportunities that lie ahead, particularly with the prospect of secondary education, can be overwhelming.

Campus ministry plays a pivotal role in the life of a college student. It provides a safe haven for individuals navigating this new chapter, offering a space to confide in trusted mentors. Campus ministers assist in exploring how faith can guide their uncertain future, especially in times of global turmoil. This is often a time when individuals may discern a calling to ministry. In such cases, having a supportive and understanding presence, even on the campus of a commuter college or a prestigious university, fosters a genuine faith community.

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March Madness, Mahjong, and the Ministry of Presence: ELCA Campus Ministry in Houston

by Rev. Morgan Gates, Campus Pastor for HouMin

Rarely is there ever a dull moment in campus ministry – and Lord knows that’s especially true here in Houston! The 2026 spring semester has been full to the brim with regular Wednesday evening gatherings that include dinner, fellowship, and Holden Evening Prayer, an Ecumenical Ash Wednesday service in the A.D. Bruce Religion Center at the University of Houston, and meaningful ministry moments in conversations over coffee or a quick bite to eat at the Student Center.

In addition to these regular programming events HouMin has tapped into our more athletic, “sporty,” side! We are participating in a special ELCA Campus Ministry edition of *Ministry March Madness* a friendly fund-and-friend-raising

ministry edition of Ministry March Madness, a friendly fundraising and fundraising competition amongst ELCA Campus Ministries across the country. You can learn more (and donate in support of HouMin/University of Houston) by visiting luminelca.org/madness. While we're leaving the actual basketball to the UH Men's Basketball team during their EIGHTH CONSECUTIVE NCAA Tournament appearance (GO COOGS!!!), we're still leaning into that competitive spirit and invite you to join us in the fun!

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Re-Emerging Community: Ecumenical Campus Ministry in New Orleans

by Pastor Anders Nilsen, Chaplain, Chapel of the Holy Spirit, New Orleans, LA

In the August 2024, two weeks before classes started for the fall semester at Tulane and Loyola Universities in New Orleans, Louisiana – I started my new position as the Chaplain at the Chapel of the Holy Spirit. This is a community that was created by the Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana in the 1950's to cater

to the needs of the students, staffs, and neighborhood surrounding these two universities. Since then, it has become the home for the Episcopal and Lutheran campus ministry.

The Chapel is positioned beautifully directly across the street from Tulane University and caddy corner to “The Boot” which is one of the best campus bars in America according to just about every poll that exists on the internet concerning campus bars. You would think that being a big, very stereotypical “church”-looking building across the street from the ragingly popular “The Boot”, more folks would have known that The Chapel existed. I made that assumption – I was wrong.

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Lisa’s Pieces: Creation Care Tips from the Synod Lutherans Restoring Creation Team

by Lisa Brenskelle

The mission of [Lutherans Restoring Creation](#) is to promote incorporation of care for creation into the full life and mission of the church, working in five areas: worship, education, discipleship, building & grounds, and public ministry/advocacy.

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April & Early May Creation Care Events

- [Living the Change](#) – ongoing thru May, dates/times individually scheduled, online
- [Cool Congregations Cohort](#) – monthly on the 4th Monday at 7 p.m., online (January-November)

- [Earth Month Ecochallenge](#) – month of April, online (Join Lutheran Restoring Creation – Gulf Coast Team)
- [Native Plant Pollinator Garden Work Day](#) – Saturday, April 4, 10 a.m. – noon, Christ the King Lutheran Church, 2353 Rice Blvd., Houston, 77005
- [Justice Advocacy Event](#) – Sunday, April 12, 9:30 a.m.-1 p.m., Christ the King Lutheran Church, 2353 Rice Blvd., Houston, 77005
- [Saving Water While Saving Souls: Water Conservation at Houses of Worship](#) – Sunday, April 12, 3 p.m., online
- [Via Creationis: Walking the Way of Creation](#) – Saturday, April 18, 9 - 11 a.m., Hermann Park, Houston
- [Spring 2026 Interfaith Environmental Stewardship Event](#) – Sunday, April 26, 1:30 – 4:30 p.m., Willow Waterhole Greenspace, 11350 Ricecrest, Houston, TX 77035
- [It's Always About the Habitat](#) – Sunday, April 26, 6 p.m., online
- [Justice Advocacy Event](#) – Sunday, May 3, 9:30 a.m. – 1 p.m., Christ the King Lutheran Church, 2353 Rice Blvd., Houston, TX 77005
- [Pocket Prairie & Great Grow Out Workshop](#) – Sunday, May 3, 2 – 4 p.m., Deer Park Prairie Education Center, 1222 E. Purdue Ln., Deer Park, TX

Contact gcs.lrc@gmail.com for details on any of these events.



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