



June 2026 Mission Support Memo

STORYTELLING ENGAGEMENT

Power of a network

A story from our Southwestern Texas Synod, written in collaboration with the Rev. Ricardo Jimenez-Reyes

As you read this story, what inspires you?

How is your congregation creating networks?

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

If you ever need to reach a church in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, you'll be dialing "956" as the area code. Far away from Austin and San Antonio, this area is a unique blend of U.S. and Mexican culture. What you will find here is the Holy Spirit actively merging congregations, communities and partners as if they were tributaries feeding into something greater that extends "to the ends of the earth."

The **956 River of Faith Network**, originally the Valley Metanoia Network, is a synod-authorized outreach ministry of our Southwestern Texas Synod. The network serves the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) as a ministry focused on sharing resources, support and creativity; exploring contextualized forms of worship and belonging; and connecting with partners that seek justice, compassion and Christ's unconditional love.

Texas is vast, with huge distances that can feel very isolating. The congregations in the valley have felt isolated from and in the church, but this network is an intentional ministry, funded in part by ELCA and synod resources, to ensure a consistent presence that connects them to each other, the synod and vital partners.

It was important to the congregational and community leaders involved in this network to find a name that flows from the valley itself and reminds us that this is not about one church or one leader but about a river that renews leaders, helps congregations collaborate and transforms communities. It is not about creating new churches but about mission connections, community networks and building more just systems and holy gathering spaces.



The RGV has 1.4 million residents, who are 93% Latiné and predominantly young adults. As is common in more isolated locations, many congregations face stretched resources, pastoral vacancies and Holy Closure, which makes the area both a challenge and an opportunity for fresh expressions of faith and mission.

That's why the network organizers are excited to create collaborative spaces where congregations and leaders will gather in prayer, listening and experimentation. They will partner to equip and connect people and congregations, offering training and mutual support. The organizers are excited to make a collective impact on their communities, create a place to serve together and reflect on shared wisdom. With many deep connections in the community already, they hope to nourish and strengthen the network's partnerships with Proyecto Desarrollo Humano (Project for Human Development), alongside Sister Fatima Santiago in the colonias, to continue vigils at Jackson Ranch and bilingual and Spanish service opportunities at St. John Lutheran Church in San Juan. They offer placements for social work students from University of Texas Rio Grande Valley and work with Mount Calvary Christian Church, an intentional LGBTQIA+ community in La Feria, Texas. They have also intentionally sought to strengthen ecumenical and full-communion relationships in the Rio Grande Valley, particularly through our partnerships with the United Church of Christ and Church of the Advent Episcopal in Brownsville, building a spirit of collaboration and accompaniment.

There is no lack of partnerships, and these congregations are committed. They are also eager to look with hope toward future collaborations with Camp Hope in Houston and Camp Chrysalis just outside of Kerrville, places where children and youth experience community and faith in ways that ripple outward. The Spirit is powerful in the valley. The 956 River of Faith Network links local community and surrounding networks while connecting across ethnic and cultural divides, all to transcend boundaries and build bridges in the name of Christ.

ENGAGE WITH US

“What Does My Offering Do?” document available

We are excited to share an updated version of the [“Mission Support: What Does My Offering Do?”](#) flyer, available for you to use and share. This resource is meant to help congregations and worshiping communities see how their offering becomes Mission Support and how that Mission Support impacts the ministry of the whole church through the churchwide organization. The Mission Support that you share with the churchwide organization helps to grow Christian communities, accompany Lutherans globally and sustain the ministry of the whole church. This resource provides a succinct breakdown of how the churchwide organization stewards Mission Support. In the coming weeks, we will also share a synod-specific version that celebrates the Mission Support your synod shared with the churchwide organization in 2025. Both this version and the synod-specific version will be available in Spanish as well as English.

GRATEFUL

We are grateful for connections between congregations, across synod conferences and clusters, and with community partners that allow our church to connect to community needs and access valuable resources. These networks allow us all to more fully live out Christ's command to love our neighbor. We thank Presiding Bishop Curry for calling us to be more connected and to “be together in one place, when that place is connection in the unity that only Christ gives us.” Read his full [monthly message](#).

In gratitude,
Victoria Flood, Senior Director for Congregation and Synod Support
Nick Kiger, Director for Mission Support
Karen Kretschmann, Coordinator for Storytelling Engagement

