

# WE ARE CHURCH TOGETHER



## STORYTELLING ENGAGEMENT

### May 2025 Mission Support Memo

#### God With Us

A story about our [Southwestern Texas Synod](#)

As you read this story, what inspires you?

How is your congregation connecting to community?

In the hill country of central Texas, about 45 miles outside San Antonio, lies [Immanuel Lutheran Church](#). In 2020, its members had been without a pastor for a while and had struggled to survive the COVID-19 pandemic, yet as the name “Immanuel” implies, God was with them. That year, Katie Rode, a fifth-generation Lutheran pastor, was called to Immanuel under a special collaborative with Wartburg Seminary that allows leaders to serve a church part-time and attend seminary full-time. When Rode interviewed for the job, church leaders explained that the town was small and the church was not well connected to its community. They needed a shepherd to ensure that their work fit with the community’s needs.

When Rode started at Immanuel, the congregation had 150 members on the books, with 25 showing up to worship, but because of its more open attitude, it has since added 80 new members. Immanuel members believe that their ministry is about not “to” but “with.” Perhaps this tone of acceptance comes from their living out the name of their town — Comfort, Texas — or the town having been settled by educated German “freethinkers,” advocates of democracy, freedom, friendship and equality. In a rural community where political tensions may run high, Comfort is a community of open, loving members eager to collaborate.

Immanuel had a 20-year history of feeding neighbors through the, an independent 501(c)(3) run by volunteers from Immanuel and the Comfort Community. Every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, seniors and low-income friends came to the Immanuel Fellowship Hall for lunch and fellowship at the Comfort Table. The associated pantry, open two days a week, was outgrowing the shed used to house it. Pastor Rode has been active on the pantry board since 2021, and in 2023, Immanuel’s church council voted to give the pantry part of its parking lot. Ninety percent of the congregation voted in favor of the measure, and all the questions brought forth by members were good considerations. The pantry is working to obtain more access to coolers and refrigerators and open shopping flexibility while meeting the needs of over 150 families each week



As this change was going on, Texas was experiencing a drought and wildfires, so Immanuel created a water and creation stewardship ministry with three goals: moving back to glass communion cups rather than plastic which fill landfills, creating a water containment site to serve a plot for vegetables going to the pantry, and asking members to “glean” their surplus pears, honey and eggs for the pantry to reduce waste.

As with all good ideas, some worked and some failed. No one stepped up for the vegetable garden plot, but the church solved this by embedding it into the Sunday school with the help of a farmer who donated the raised bed wood, a couple in the congregation who agreed to lead the program, and continued “gleaning” donations.

The Southwestern Texas Synod is partly responsible for the ministry happening at Immanuel, providing the church with a Transformational Ministry Grant, funds from a hospitality hub, and water stewardship dollars. Some of this funding comes from Mission Support given to the synod by its other congregations, which proves that “God with us” means church together.

## ENGAGE WITH US

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### Stewardship Conference: Stewardship Kaleidoscope — New Orleans!

Stewardship Kaleidoscope offers real tools for real ministry and is perfect for both rostered and lay leaders. The mission of the conference is to ignite generosity, give practical tools for cultivating congregational generosity, expand leadership capacity for stewardship leaders and cultivate adaptive approaches for funding Christ’s mission throughout the world. In partnership with the Presbyterian Foundation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the ELCA stewardship and generosity team is proud to present a three-day conference digging deeply into stewardship and generosity, using workshops and plenaries that highlight diverse and authoritative voices from across the Presbyterian Church, the ELCA and partner church bodies. This year we’ll be in New Orleans, La., exploring how stewardship is a matter of “art and resilience” and hearing from people who are engaged in both practical and cutting-edge aspects of fueling ministry.

Limited partial scholarships are available! If you’re interested, contact the [Rev. Tim Brown](#).

**Mark your calendar:**

Monday, Sept. 22–Wednesday, Sept. 24, New Orleans, La.

**Registration is open!**

For more information, visit [stewardshipkaleidoscope.org](https://stewardshipkaleidoscope.org).

## GRATEFUL

We are truly grateful for the generosity of this church, especially through individuals’ sharing of Mission Support. In 2024, our congregations and worshiping communities made it possible for synods to share \$35,225,726 in Mission Support with the churchwide organization. We hope you will also hear our gratitude for this Mission Support at your synod assembly. In the next few months, we will be sending out an updated version of the resource “Mission Support: A Deep Dive” with your synod-specific Mission Support totals for 2024. We appreciate the synod staff and volunteers who focus on generosity and stewardship, our bookkeepers and treasurers, and our synod bishops and vice presidents, who help tell the story of the impact Mission Support has on synod and churchwide ministries.

In gratitude,

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