CALLED to Gather

By Caitlin Graver, Communication and Program Administrator, LCMC Texas

We were CALLED to gather, and gather we did! On July 24-25, hundreds of people from 11 states gathered at St. Paul Lutheran Church in New Braunfels, Texas, for the 2026 LCMC Texas District Annual Gathering. This year, 300+ people registered for the event. Our theme, “Called,” came from 2 Timothy 1:9, where Paul describes a holy calling, one set apart for God's purposes rather than something ordinary. That's the heart of the verse. The basis for our calling isn't our own effort, but God's “own purpose and grace”. It was given to us in Christ “before the ages began,” part of God's plan from before time itself.

Ben Griffin, Nathan Hoff, and Julie Smith presented both at the Pre-Gathering Seminar and as keynote speakers, bringing a fresh perspective and challenge to what it means to live out a holy calling in everyday ministry and life. Leading our event were emcees Bryce Formwalt and Kari Malinak, making sure to keep us all on our toes with information, humor, sound effects and stop watches. Leading us in two unique, inspirational worship services were Redeemer United, Marion with David Eibel preaching on Friday night and Saturday’s closing worship, led by host church, St. Paul, New Braunfels, with Jeremy Pedersen preaching. There were a total of 18 breakout presentations, with an offering wide enough that all attendees, whatever their ministry context, could find a room they felt called into. The variety was itself a reflection of the theme: God calls each of us differently, and this Gathering gave people room to explore what that calling looks like for them.

While the adults gathered, the next generation was busy answering their own call. Students in grades 6 through 12 came together for a simultaneous Youth Gathering and overnight lock-in, a full weekend of energy, fellowship, and faith formation built just for them. Forty-eight youth took part, proof that “CALLED” is not a theme reserved for adulthood. It is a calling that starts young and grows alongside every young

person who showed up ready to be part of something bigger than themselves. A special thank you to Kimberly Wunderlich for serving as our Youth Event Coordinator this year!

Feedback from this year's Gathering was very positive! Everyone who completed our survey said this year's Annual Gathering met or beat their expectations and said they would recommend the event to others. Our keynote speakers were the talk of the weekend; our theme "CALLED" showed up everywhere from worship to workshops; and the fellowship with folks from across the District reminded more than one attendee why these Gatherings matter so much. One attendee summed it up perfectly: "Each keynote speaker hit a home run this year, and the Texas District took home a huge win! The messages equipped the listeners and mobilized them, while remaining rooted in God's power."

St. Paul Lutheran Church of New Braunfels gave the LCMC Texas District a wonderful place to land for a weekend of food, fellowship, worship, and teaching, but the real gift was the reminder each person carried home. We were CALLED to gather. Now we're CALLED to go, back to our congregations, our communities, and our everyday lives, to live out that holy calling until we gather again.

Thank you to St. Paul Lutheran Church, New Braunfels, for hosting, to Ben Griffin, Nathan Hoff, and Julie Smith for their teaching, to every volunteer and exhibitor and breakout presenter who made the weekend run, and to the 257 adults, 48 youth, and every family who answered the call to show up.