

# Annual Report 2020

*A Year of Rising Up in Unexpected Times.*



## REFLECTIONS ON 2020

### Pastor Tom Grevlos

Greetings.

I would like to begin our annual report with a look back on 2020, and what a year it was. When I thought about this year I was drawn to a song I love that begins “Holy Spirit rain down...” Maybe you’ve enjoyed that song like I have. The song fills my heart and my spirit with a reminder that the Holy Spirit has rained down in our lives this year. So if I was to encapsulate 2020 in a few words, I would use these words: 2020 was a year where the Holy Spirit rained down on full display here at Shepherd of the Hills. The Holy Spirit brought Pr. Lauren, Dave, Owen and Caroline. The Holy Spirit empowered us to stay connected through worship, through learning, and through fellowship by utilizing the gift of technology. The Holy Spirit also rained down and encouraged amazing generosity, and we thank you for that. The Holy Spirit encouraged us to take part in tough conversations in ways that tore down walls rather than building walls. It propelled us to move into the future, a future that is filled with hope.

The Holy Spirit is the glue that hold us together, it is what gathers us together and what will allow us to be together once again in person. The Holy Spirit has rained down upon Shepherd of the Hills, and we thank God for the gift of the Holy Spirit. You will read more below about the ministry that you are doing here at Shepherd on behalf of Christ and his Church.

Holy Spirit rain down.

It is indeed a great day to be the church.

## STAYING CONNECTED

### Worship, Learning, and Caring Ministries

**Worship AV (Bill Dawson)** This Matters! prophetic inclusion of advanced audio visual upgrades not only allowed us to adapt worship during the March closures but actually expanded our ability to spread The Good News! This Spirit led blessing with the addition of Dave Wegner’s A/V work continues to enhance and connect us in ways we didn’t imagine. The Apostles were sent to build a Church (without walls) had to imagine how to reach the community and that witness is helping us imagine what we can do with Digital Ministry, spreading the Good News as a Church Without Walls!

**Camp Hope (Pr. Lauren Dow Wegner)** Camp Hope took the shape it did because of the pandemic. It began in the Spring, when the Family Ministry Team wanted to provide our young ones with a camp-like experience over the Summer to supplement for missing out on Summer Camp. We found creative ways to engage our kids in activities, crafts, songs, and Bible studies for 45 minutes every week. From there we wanted to keep the momentum going into the Fall, so Camp Hope took on a slightly new shape in the form of Sunday School.

This has been an awesome way for our young ones to engage in meaningful lessons about God and to take

part in the formative experiences that Sunday School provides, even when the pandemic has kept us apart physically.

**Impact Statement:** *Camp Hope Parent, Megan Hansen: "As a parent, Camp Hope has been a beacon of light for me and my family during the pandemic. It's been a place of consistency and community for my son when our children had to remain physically apart. A place where my son was invited to learn and grow in Christ. A place of silliness and holiness with outstanding youth mentors. A home for our weary kids with people they know and trust. A place where I, as a parent and Sunday School teacher for years, could remain part of the faith-building in our community. I am so grateful for Camp Hope in so many ways. It has meant so very much to me."*

**NextGen (Joel Timmons)** NextGen has taken a new shape over the course of the past year because of the pandemic. We moved from meeting on Sunday mornings in person to Wednesday evenings via Zoom. We've called this NextGen @ Night. The emphasis has been on having fun. During COVID, Zoom fatigue has been something students have all experienced, so we wanted to provide a way for our NextGen students to engage in a meaningful Confirmation experience that gives life and energy, rather than further draining them. We have an intentional check in and Bible study time, but then we transition to games and laughter. Over the last semester, we've seen this approach create a space for the NextGen youth to come, be themselves, and enjoy time in community with each other.

The play and laughter is exactly where we've seen God at work in NextGen – God wants us to have joy and this has certainly been a place where that is experienced.

**Impact Statement:** *NextGen Youth, Audrey Cullinane: "Not being able to see anyone or go anywhere this past year has been really hard and lonely, but NextGen is a fun way to see friends and play games while learning about God."*

**HS Youth Group (Joel Timmons)** The pandemic caused the High School Youth Group to take on a creative new form. As of Fall of 2020, the Youth Group began meeting on Wednesday nights either in the church courtyard or in the outdoor worship space for masked & social distanced gatherings. Some nights we have a bonfire and worship, other nights we get incredibly creative with games or silly activities. But something that's been incredible about the Youth Group is their ownership, they're creative and have a vision for what they want our group to look like. For example, the youth themselves have been the ones to think up fun ideas for Youth Group such as a jumbo slip-n-slide in the courtyard or Mario Kart on the inflatable movie screen.

God has certainly been at work in the Youth Group through the way they've committed to each other throughout the length of the pandemic. Fostering intentional Christian community is something so important in the lives of teenagers and it's something our youth have done really well over the course of the last year.

**Adult Bible Study (Ruby Cadenhead)** Every Sunday morning at 9:30, the Adult bible class meets. The bible is our Life road map on how to navigate life. Lay-led by Don Cadenhead and Linda Roesle, the class explores characters and stories from the bible and discusses how we can apply what we learn to our daily living. We follow the guide from the late James Parks who, passionately believed, we should always have a bible study class available every Sunday.

Last year we studied Ephesians, Philippians, and Galatians. Some of our classes are led by Pastors Tom and Lauren. We also, as a class chose to join two very, special classes: For the Love of God and Dear Church. After Dear Church we looked at the book of Exodus from the Black experience and invited a special guest, Dr. Stephen Reid, professor at Baylor University School of Theology.

There are always new ways to experience a walk through God's manual. And speaking of new ways, this past year our classes have moved to Zoom, and we've had former members of Shepherd join us from other cities. It's an exciting time at Shepherd and with the Adult bible class. We get to see and hear great ideas and perspectives and truly live a life of love in a class without walls. We have a great time. All are welcome. Please join us!

**Impact Statement 1:** *Weekly Sunday School is always a bright spot in my locked down life! The chance to*

*share prayer concerns, thanks, and praise in addition to digging deeply into the scripture passages. It is amazing how people can view the same words in vastly different ways and hearing those insights helps us all to grow. However, my favorite part of Adult Sunday School is the opportunity to see and hear friends I have known for decades and miss dearly! That is priceless. ~Jennifer Arndt*

**Impact Statement 2:** *I always look forward to the adult study time on Sundays and so much appreciate the time and effort our leaders put into the preparation, especially during this time of isolation when we cannot be together physically. The focus on dissecting the Word of God and how that relates to our daily lives is a guidepost for a healthy Christian life. We miss James but Don, Linda and Ruby are filling those shoes nicely and we are very fortunate to have them as teachers. ~Jeri*

**Ignite! Small Groups (Carole Morgan)** The COVID guidelines to stay at home and/or social distance moved us to meet on ZOOM and we truly missed seeing each other in person. That said, as some were more home bound than others, it seemed more important than ever to offer the companionship of the group by continuing to meet weekly through that platform so we regularly gathered for sessions of sharing, study and prayer. We still happily grew in our knowledge of each other, support for each other and our shared commitment to focus on our Christian walk. As situations arose such that some had to leave the group, we offered our blessings and prayers for them.

**Prayer Shawl (Sharon Collins)** The prayer shawl ministry has been at Shepherd of the Hills for over 15 years. The ministry has crocheted and knitted and distributed from 100 to 150 Prayer Shawls and Prayer Blankets each year. We also crochet or knit Baby Blankets for Baptisms or if needed for other reasons are always available.

This past year 2020 has been a challenge with the pandemic and not being able to gather together in person. The Prayer Shawl Ministry was able to continue as a group virtually each Sunday evening. The number of those who attend can vary each week from 3 up to 12. During our virtual time together many topics are discussed. Personal, prayers needed for concerns, updates of families or friends in need of help and laughter. Blessings of completed shawls, virtual prayers for specific individuals or shawls or blankets to be placed in the cabinet to be distributed when needed or requested.

We were also able to meet in person following guidelines for safety at the home of Barb Hampton on Fridays in her backyard weather permitting. We call it our Happy Hour.

Sandy Gaskin, Shepherd of the Hills nurse and also member of the Prayer Shawl Ministry has been instrumental in being able to distribute the prayer shawls as needed.

The above is all of God's love and the gifts he has given this wonderful group of ladies and men. God's love shines in each one.

In the cabinet there should be some cards from those you received a prayer shawl.

**10 Great Dates (Pr. Lauren Dow Wegner)** While our monthly gatherings paused in 2020, our couples benefited from a wonderful webinar presentation in the spring by a licensed marriage and family therapist. She shared with our couples some important tips for growing marriages while in the stressful time of COVID life. We look to reinstate more regular meetings of this wonderful ministry for our couples in 2021

**Family Fun Night (Melissa Robertson)** Friday Fun Night is a group of families with children (infant-approx 4<sup>th</sup> grade) meeting once a month on Friday nights at the church.

In 2020, we did not meet from March – August due to Covid.

Beginning in September (and Oct, Nov) we had "Drive-In Movie Nights" in the courtyard. We showed a G movie and served popcorn. Families kept physically distanced and wore masks and brought their own chairs, blankets and drinks. They could stay in their cars if they wanted. We had good attendance, with our regular active 6-7 families attending. The feedback I received was all positive, that families were thankful we could get together outside and feel a sense of fellowship again. The kids seemed to enjoy the movies and popcorn treat each time.

Looking Ahead: We plan to resume movie nights in the courtyard for March, April and May and then re-evaluate options for the summer. We are hopeful we can attend Family Advent Camp at Chrysalis in December 2021.

***Impact Statement:** “FFN has been an easy way to get together with other families of young kids and enjoy spending an evening together. The adults can catch up while the kids play in a safe environment.” Angela Davis, Jan 2021*

**Men’s Breakfast (Nadar Ayoub)** The last year has been a challenging time for all our families and friends at Shephills. This past year, I personally realized the tremendous service different groups provide to our members. For me, I realized the impact of getting to know these men (in the Men’s Breakfast Group), their families, and how much we mean to each other. It is all about the relationships and growing together as a community. God’s love is in full view in these most difficult times. The Men’s group has continued to stay connected over this past year through our ongoing Zoom calls on Saturday mornings, phone check ins, and even in coordinating when we take evening walks to get to see a friendly face. This group exposes all of us to new perspectives from each other and from our invited guest. Even though we are not all the same, I feel like in many ways we actually are all the same.

**Yoga (Richard Arndt)** Yoga is a meditative practice, we focus on the sensations that arise in our bodies as we move through various poses. Some poses test our strength, others our flexibility, and all our balance. We meet weekly Tuesday afternoons 5:30-6:30. We enjoy inviting The Divine into our practice, giving thanks that our bodies allow us to practice, that we can share the practice with each other and that He chooses to live in us.

Initially when COVID hit we suspended the group. Over time, I saw how others lead ZOOM based classes; with staff encouragement and support of the core group members we experimented, and again enjoy our weekly sessions. On the upside, we now have regulars who otherwise would not be able to commute to class. The major downside to on-line is that I can not share my tea with the group at the end of class.

***Impact statement:** The greatest blessing is to again hear “thanks – I needed that”.*

**Reader’s Heaven (Karen Flint)**, To feel what it was like to have lived through 2020, all you have to do is take a look at the books read by Readers’ Heaven.

We began the year with The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Little did we know how much our world was about to change and how challenged we would be to find JOY in our daily lives. Perhaps we should read this one again!

Next came The Time Keeper by Mitch Albom. Ironically, we were reading this one as we headed into lockdown and found ourselves having to drastically restructure our time. We also had to change our meetings to Zoom for this and following discussions.

Then, in the wake of the killing of George Floyd and Black Lives Matter, we tackled White Fragility: Why It’s So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism by Robin DiAngelo. We spent THREE sessions discussing this difficult topic. One positive of our Zoom discussions was to be able to record them for the participants who were unable to join the discussions.

Next was True Inclusion: Creating Communities of Radical Embrace by Brandan Robertson. This book challenges churches like Shepherd of the Hills “to move from mere welcome to radical embrace” -- “to become deeply, robustly and richly inclusive of ALL people.”

What a year it was! What great discussions we had! We look forward to where God will lead our reading and discussions and 2021!

***Impact statement:** Reader’s Heaven is a safe place to discuss important, timely, and, sometimes controversial, subjects. We read books that make us think beyond our own comfortable lives. Jeanne Anderson*

**Impact statement:** *I feel like this book club helps develop my faith as I hear the different members' opinions on the books that we discuss. Joan Byrne*

**Impact statement:** *I am really enjoying this group and the books that we are reading and discussing. It's great hearing input from the others and comments that make me think differently about passages in the books. Linda Roesle*

**Caring for God's Creation (Elaine Herrmann)** This year, the Caring for God's Creation team's work was focused on the Shepherd's Garden. We did have other activities planned prior to the pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, we participated in SeniorFest– we had the most sign-ups of any of the sessions, and gave about 6 sessions to the areawide Lutheran seniors about 10 things they can do to care for God's creation.

For our work on the Shepherd's Garden, here's our purpose statement:

God speaks to his people using the language of seeds, cultivation, growth and gardens. The Shepherd's Garden invites an interactive garden experience for all who care to touch, feel, reflect, plant or grow. It takes us from the Garden of Eden to the Garden of Gethsemane, and allows us to simply "be" with the plants Jesus spoke of: grapevines, an olive tree, a fig tree and other plants of the Holy Lands. How can we understand the parables if we live lives far removed from the soil and the seed?

This year, the Caring for God's Creation improved and maintained the Shepherd's Garden and the ShepHills campus:

- We improved the retention area from the back parking lot by building a wall and an overflow structure. We did this because that area was full of debris and was filling up during rains and creating an erosion problem in the area below.
- We installed a permanent pump to bring rainwater from the rainwater tank to the garden, along with a timer. We did this because the rainwater collection tank was a gravity flow system, which had difficulty draining to the garden, and when it did, it emptied all of the water in the tank at one time.
- We installed new timers and sprinkler heads throughout the garden.
- We added a sprinkler system to the vegetable garden.
- We pruned the trees shading the vegetable garden.
- We restored the picnic table near the garden, replacing all of the rotted wood.
- We set up a team to shut off the watering system when a freeze is predicted.
- We repainted the footbridge, garden shed and picnic tables, protecting them from sun and water.
- We tended the garden and kept it alive.

***The Monarch butterflies that visit Shepherd's Garden are our Impact Statement.*** *They are a recipient of our work in the garden, planting habitat to help the monarch restore itself during its migration. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has found that adding the monarch butterfly to the list of threatened and endangered species is warranted" December 2020.*

**Stephen Ministries (Rebecca Guengerich)** The benefit of Stephen Ministry, prior to Covid, was based on the ability of an individual to share their burdens in a one-on-one, in-person, caring visit from one of our 13 Stephen Ministers.

As Covid emerged, we wondered would zoom relationships be enough? Would people share deeply through a camera lens? Would lack of a hug adversely affect their mental health?

Stephen Ministers had no choice but to find a way to meet because the need was still present and needed more than ever. In the absence of a hug, the emotional support received through consoling, laughing, crying, sharing and behind the scenes work of a Stephen Minister, life was restored and sometimes in surprising new ways.

**Impact Statement:** *"Through Stephen Ministry training I have learned to listen to others in a deeper, more*

*meaningful way. It's been an honor to walk alongside another person in their journey." Linda Plummer*

**Life and Living (Pat Saul)** Life and Living, founded in mid 2019, is a support group that grew from a desire for fellowship and care among church members and friends of SOTH experiencing life challenges. Those challenges include but are not limited to: the process of aging, chronic physical health conditions, degenerative issues, etc. Care givers and family members of those individuals are also welcomed.

We meet once a month for 1 hour on the second Monday of every month at 1:00 pm. We pledge confidentiality to one another so we can feel safe sharing in the presence of our participants. The pandemic has forced the group to hold meetings via Zoom as opposed to a physical gathering, but as soon as it is safe, we all hope to be together again.

One of our members offers testimony as to what this group has meant to them over the past year:

***Impact Statement:** "I so look forward to seeing all the faces of our group each month. We hear one another's stories, challenges, triumphs...we feel the love of one another and by witnessing to each other, and we feel the love of God. We are not alone..."*

**Care Team and Congregational Nurse Report (Sandy Gaskin, MSN RN)** The Care Team has Focused on staying in touch with Congregational members. Because of the Pandemic we are unable to visit in person and so have had to find other ways of communication. Because isolation can lead to loneliness and health issues, we have been especially concerned about those who live alone. For the Christmas season we initiated a card writing campaign and included notes from Butterfly Preschool children. Feedback from that event was very positive. And several of us received calls and emails thanking us for the cards.

Rebecca and I also worked with Dabney and Amanda to start the "Walk to Bethlehem event. It was well received and great fun. It was a good way to promote getting outside and getting exercise. We will plan to hold that event next year as well but begin later as everyone arrived too soon.

As the Congregational Nurse, I have been involved in Videos about health-related information. I have been working to update the congregation about immunization information and have answered question received from those who need assistance in registering for the vaccine on various websites. I have also made numerous phone calls to those with health issues to answer question, check in and give whatever support or advise is needed.

It is such a blessing to be the Congregational Nurse and to help provide care for our congregation along with the rest of the Care Team members.

***Impact Statement:** Dealing with long term, chronic pain is difficult under any circumstance. While I have doctors on whom I rely, having a congregational nurse to consult has also been a real blessing for me during my episode. Not only has she assisted with medical advice, the prayerful discussions we have had make me realize how very fortunate I am to be a member of a church family that goes the extra mile in caring for those in need. ~Jeri Porter*

## **GROWING OUR FAITH IN NEW WAYS**

### **Events and Special Studies**

#### **For the Love of God Series (Rob Spillar)**

For the Love of God is an exploration of our church's values related to accepting people who identify as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, queer, or transgendered (LGBTQ+). The multi-week class challenges our understanding of what the bible really says about the role of LGBTQ+ Christian disciples in the early church. The ministry supports our congregation at Shepherd of the Hills to become a Reconciled Church in Christ, one that openly accepts and celebrates the diversity of Christian disciples accepted through grace alone by Jesus Christ. The ministry challenges our church to become a community that embraces diversity, regardless of race, gender, or sexual orientation without attaching a label of sin or judgement.

The ministry attracted a wide swath of Shepherd of the Hills members, with classes growing to as large as 35 and 45 members in attendance. The consensus of class participants was that Shepherd of the Hills, although a welcoming community, needs to work harder at celebrating the diversity of our members. Class members are exploring opportunities to increase the awareness of our congregation and the awareness of our community about our goal to proclaim God's love for all people. We are working with church leadership to explore opportunities for Shepherd of the Hills to more forcefully proclaim the good news that all people are welcome and appreciated here.

### **Dear Church Study (Pr. Adam Varner)**

Events during 2020 provided a wake-up call for many Americans concerning long-standing racial injustice. As people of faith, we wondered: How do our faith commitments interact with issues of racial justice, and social justice more broadly? And what is the role of the Church in relation to these issues? Members of the Shepherd of the Hills community gathered virtually using Zoom over the summer to explore these questions by reading and discussing "Dear Church" by Pastor Lenny Duncan. Three separate discussion groups met six times each to explore the connections of faith to various systems of social oppression in relation to race, gender, sexuality, and nationality. As the discussion groups engaged these ideas by reading and discussing "Dear Church," we also worked together to discern how these ideas connect to our lives as individuals and as a faith community. The experience left us with an increased understanding of the ways that our faith calls us to work for justice, both as individuals and as a faith community -- and hopefully inspired us to take a next step on our journey of growing in faith and working for justice.

*Impact statement: "This startling book made me sit up and take notice of the good and the bad about the ELCA. It forced me to pull my head out of the sand and realize that "We are the answer to the question 'Is God real?'. We are the resounding Yes that the very mountains will shout." To ignore this call is to do so at the risk of my very soul." -- Linda Roesle, discussion group participant*

### **Let's Talk: Immigration and Refugees**

The year began with an educational seminar about conditions affecting immigrants and refugees in our country, led by guest speaker Krish Vignarajah, CEO of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services. We had many from the outside community join us for this informative presentation, which has led to our support of LIRS.

### **Faith in the Public Square**

Dr. Peter Marty and the webinar "Faith in the Public Square" examined the role of the Church in the political sphere, and how we can find unity during division.

### **Anne Lamott Webinar**

As part of "Honest to God!," a message series about the Psalms, author Anne Lamott encouraged us to express ourselves in written psalms and prayers. Sara Enochs led a follow-up webinar for those interested in spiritual writing. Several submitted works which were read aloud during the conclusion of the Message Series.

## **Special Worship:**

### **Faith Conversations and Manna (Pastor Lauren Dow Wegner)**

Wednesdays are full of faith at ShepHills! The year of physical distancing afforded us opportunities to be creative in gathering remotely to strengthen our faith. We began "Manna," our midweek teaching of various topics led by a pastor at the noon hour. We also started a midweek evening "Faith Conversations," which included conversations of all kinds. Sometimes Pastor Tom and Pastor Lauren simply discussed topics of faith; other times, we engaged our congregation members in conversations about their own lives (as seen in our fall series "Faith at Work").

# REACHING OUT

## Local And Global Missions

### Hunger Ministries:

**Bread for All (Weldon Allison)** In the BFA Rent Assistance program, we distributed close to \$18,000 from a St. David's Foundation grant to 19 BFA neighbors. The amounts ranged from \$100 to \$1,400, depending on family size and monthly rent/debt. Every single neighbor who received assistance was appreciative. I'll have a blog post summarizing more of these details next week on [www.austincitylutherans.org](http://www.austincitylutherans.org). Thanks again to Steve Zwernemann, Jane Tackett, and Pr. Ellen Williams for serving on the working committee for this program.

Our new neighbor rate was about the same as last month - on target with our "normal" long-term rate of 20 percent - at 18.7 percent. In 2019, we served some 700 different households. So far in 2020, we've served 1150 households. We're on pace in this category for a 70 percent increase over the previous year.

**Feed My People (Dave Fossmeier)** I have not been involved with the Feed My People program since COVID restricted and adversely affected the effort. As I understand, simple meals have been prepared, sacked and distributed (handed out) by a small group of folks who are not senior and are considered (safe). We (SOTH) have continued to support the program with funds (We are providing money for the 5th Tuesday of the month). I look forward to continuing our physical support when COVID scourge abates. It truly deserves our support.

**Meals on Wheels (Weldon Allison)** They are now having volunteers go to their downtown location and load several boxes of food that go to various places in Austin. They are no longer neighborhood oriented. We donate to them financially, but not many volunteers. When the pandemic is over, they plan to go back to neighborhood service., and we will resume volunteer support then.

### Global Ministries:

**Guatemala (Don Cadenhead)** January 29, 2020 - We began the year with the first of several ILAG Skype meetings with other U.S. partners. The ILAG is rehabbing the new school they purchased through an ELCA loan. They currently have 124 students in a building that is too small and on a hill that is unsafe. The new school will be able to accommodate 400 Elementary students. Also, the Milagro Center began the year with the addition of 6 new girls.

April 3, 2020 - Due to COVID, we cancelled our Guatemala mission partnership trip planned for June 20-27.

April 13, 2020 - We received a letter from Pastor Karen asking for an Emergency Relief Fund because of health and food insecurity in the ILAG communities in rural Guatemala. They are in extreme poverty with no access to a monthly salary, a hospital or clinic, or even access to buy soap.

May 27, 2020 - In addition to sponsoring the 42 families at our sister church in Aurora, Shepherd of the Hills wired funds providing emergency relief for an additional 50 families. Praise God that Pastor Karen and ILAG can assess the needs of the ILAG families and SOTH & other partners can respond to meet the needs (like the churches Paul started that sent money to help the Jerusalem church).

August 7, 2020 - COVID-19 is in the villages, there is no medicine, and Pastor Karen is concerned. She asks for prayers for the communities of Aurora 8 de Octubre, Santa Elena 20 de Octubre, Atenas, San Antonio Tzeja and Israel which are in quarantine. Special prayers for Pastor Ricardo Poou and his entire family, as all of them are COVID positive, as well as Celestino and his family, and P. Santos' wife, Maria.

August 23, 2020 - Testimonials: Sunday's "Generosity Impact" moment in our Live Stream worship highlights our partnership in mission with Guatemala.

December 1, 2020 - After two hurricanes, floods and crop devastation, Pastor Karen, Diego and Estuardo are able to visit numerous rural churches for the first time in 2020.

December 12, 2020 - The Shepherd of the Hills community contributed over \$36,000 for the ministry in Aurora 8 de Octubre, as well as, for the Milagro Center and a new classroom in ILAG's Elementary school in



Guatemala City. Aid to Aurora included solar powered flashlights and food kits of rice, beans, and corn for 55 families after extensive flooding and crop loss.

**Haiti (Karen Stern)** Malcolm and Joy Henderson presented our church's gifts of solar powered Haitian Creole bibles to several groups of blind or illiterate people who live in small villages high in the mountains of Haiti. After a prayer from our church was read to them, the people cried and kissed their bibles! Thank you Lord for creating this joy in these precious people.

### **Lutheran World Relief (LWR):**

**The Festival of Love** held in the Courtyard in November provided opportunities to support Lutheran World Relief through our Quilting and Baby Care Kit ministries. A quilting bee was held, and 125 baby blanket kits were distributed to be made at home.

**Quilting (Sandy Nielsen)** Quilters are continuing this important ministry offsite during COVID restrictions. The hard work and dedication of the Quilting Ministry team before the Pandemic this year allowed Shepherd of the Hills to deliver 90 quilts to the Lutheran World Relief gathering, give a quilt to a Habitat for Humanity family, and present quilts to four of our high school graduating seniors. The quilts donated to LWR are distributed from a warehouse in Maryland to over 24 countries throughout the world. Since the Pandemic began in early spring, the Quilting Ministry team has been unable to meet regularly. As natural disasters continue, the homeless population increases, and so many are experiencing isolation due to Covid 19, it is very important that we continue this outreach ministry.

Thank you for the donations of cotton fabrics and gently used sheets that give us the opportunity to reach out beyond the walls of our church to wrap our love for others in quilts and pray that they will know God's love.

**Impact Statement:** The importance of the quilt ministry can best be summarized by Megan DeVaney, one of last year's graduating seniors. *She wrote "I absolutely love the senior quilt that was made for me. Every time I look at my quilt it is a great reminder of the support I have in our church community".*

It is the hope of the Quilting Ministry team that the church will find a way for the team to safely meet in the near future at the church to continue this very important outreach ministry

**Baby Care Kits (Kathy Gerhardt)** Due to COVID, shipment of our Baby Care Kits was delayed but are now being processed and we will be able to track their journey soon. The pandemic has also impacted our ability to collect enough items for another shipment to be sent. Our plans for a fundraiser had to be postponed indefinitely. November 14th, Generosity Weekend, 125 receiving blanket kits were distributed to dedicated volunteers. We are gradually building towards another Baby Care Kit assembly.

### **Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS):**

Supporting Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) as an organization on the front lines of the complex issues of immigration. Through education, working with government agencies, and advocacy, this ministry provides a faithful voice to the powerless.

### **Ministries in our Community:**

**Mariposa (Pastor Tom Grevlos)** Mariposa Family Learning Center: A 2-Gen ministry for children and families in Montopolis, one of the most underserved and socio-economically depressed sections of Austin. Working in partnership with other Austin City Lutheran congregations, this Early Childhood Center provides a holistic approach to the ministry.

### **Butterfly (Butterfly Director Jeanne Grevlos)**

The year started off with great success. We had given more tours than any previous year; at the time of registration, each classroom was completely full with a waiting list for the upcoming year. March, Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>, was the final day Butterfly met for the 2019-2020 calendar school year. As part of the lockdown, we

mobilized to stay connected to children and families using technology, activities, and inspiration for a difficult time. We were able to have a celebratory drive through good-bye for our younger classes, and a safe, socially distant graduation for each of our four-year-old classes in our courtyard. Fast forward to August—Butterfly lost 5 staff members due to the need to supervise their own children once public school started. God provided! In the span of three weeks, we were able to open the school with a complete staff! Our campus provided just what we needed for separate entrances along with lots of outside time. Following CDC guidelines has reduced our enrollment for protocol, and we have felt the loss of tuition along with expenditures for safety measures in which Butterfly invested. The good news? Butterfly opened in the fall. We have not had one of our students sick with the virus, nor any staff member. The collaboration with Shepherd of the Hills, the staff of Butterfly, and the energy of the Spirit has kept us physically healthy—and developmentally, too! The Butterfly Board has been incredibly supportive under the leadership of Clay Byrne. Parents are grateful, children are happy and learning, the ministry of Butterfly has found new wings during this difficult year....a testimony to the foundation laid years ago, and the purpose and passion of today's leaders and staff. Thanks be to God!

***Impact Statement:** From the time our family first stepped foot into Butterfly Preschool four year ago, Jeanne Grevlos and her amazingly gifted teachers and staff have routinely breathed life into our children, not to mention into us as parents. Whitney and Graham are now five, fully prepared for kindergarten, but it seems like yesterday our 20-month-old toddlers were first making friends, working their little bodies, reaching milestones, learning boundaries all the while being loved on, learning in a play-based environment, and taught the Word of God. We are so grateful for this strong foundation for our children. Some of their first church experiences have been within the walls of Shepherd of the Hills—through Butterfly's weekly Chapel, Ms. Jeanne's Sunday school class and the sanctuary's "playground" during regular Sunday service. When our daughter was faced with major surgery a couple years ago, the church family prayed for her and gifted her with a blessed hand-knit blanket. At the kids' final Christmas pageant as the big kids at Butterfly last month, our heart warmed as we heard them recite Scripture. The love, play, education and truth offered at Butterfly Preschool are the heart of this ministry. The children come first, yet we parents also feel fully supported with Jeanne's weekly "Butterfly Bits" and individualized attention from the teachers. We feel blessed to experience this special place five days a week and feel fortunate Butterfly is where our children first learned to spread their wings.-Keri and Greg Walling, parents of Graham and Whitney, students since 2017*

**Christmas Giving (Linda Roesle)** for BeReal, New Life, Foster in Texas and Aids Families. Once again Christmas Giving ministry was a huge success -- especially during the Covid crisis! At first I really doubted that we would be able to accomplish this with social distancing and lack of large in-church services, but with the Holy Spirit nudging me to adjust and with the fantastic help of the pastors and church staff, an extremely generous congregation, and hard-working Christmas captains, it all came together so that not one of the 60 New Life girls, 40 Foster Angels, 3 AIDS Service families, and 35 BeREAL young adults was left out of receiving gifts. Special thanks to the captains for each charity without whom this ministry would not be possible: Kathy Gerhardt, Karen Stern, Mary Allison, Barb Hampton, as well as Norma Smith.

*Impact Statement: On Christmas morning, all the New Life girls woke up to find a personal Christmas gift bag under the Christmas tree in their special unit. The director, Lisa stated - the girls sensed someone cared about them.*

**Generosity Weekend (Pastor Tom Grevlos)** Stewardship and service projects on Nov. 14, 2020 - - This weekend was a great success. It benefited the church grounds (coordinated by Milt Nielsen), Bread for All Food Drive, Quilt-making, LWR Baby Blankets, and Christmas Giving Tree efforts with a good turnout. It is an event worth repeating next year.

**Habitat for Humanity (Weldon Allison)** We participated in our annual Faith Builds and had a great turn out!

**UpBring (Kathy Gerhardt)**, BeREAL In 2020, there were 35 young adults in the BeREAL supervised independent living program in Austin, San Marcos and San Antonio. Due to COVID 19, many of these Y.A.'s

experienced job loss and as a result food insecurities. Some of those attending online classes were in need of computers. Shepherd of the Hills stepped in to assist with these needs. All 35 residents received a gift card at Christmas thanks to our Christmas Giving Trees.

**Community Partners (Bill Dawson)** Covid had the unfortunate consequence of shutting down most of our campus use ministry but we are able to continue to share our beautiful campus with the greater community. This means our youth community can continue to play basketball and our outside parking/courtyard can be used for spaced healthy activities such as Jazzercise! These groups also participate in our Bread for All Food Pantry and some are watching Online Worship demonstrating ShepHills is a Church Without Walls!

## LEADERSHIP

**Council (Debra Ayoub)** The Church Council has only met via Zoom since the pandemic began. Although it would be preferable to be able to meet in person, Zoom meetings have been very effective. One of the biggest challenges this year has been making decisions about how to worship safely. A special committee was formed, including a few Council members, to research options for worship and make recommendations to Council. The Council has worked diligently to make sure there are both virtual and in person options while keeping everyone's health and safety a priority. Sometimes this meant having to re-evaluate decisions as the COVID numbers increased, but the result has been beautiful services both virtually and in person in our amazing courtyard. We all look forward to the time when we can safely meet indoors in person, but are thankful to have the technology for virtual services as well as the outdoor space for in person worship and a staff that has worked tirelessly to make all of these changes happen so seamlessly.

**Stewarding for Growth (Larry Wikelius)** As a group Stewarding for Growth has had to deal with significant and impactful events in 2021 that could have been quite disruptive to our mission of ensuring that Shepherd of the Hills has the resources to deliver on our key ministry and outreach goals. COVID has been a generational event with so many impacts and we were very concerned about the potential for decreased giving and pledging with the economic uncertainty that so many have faced. Other areas of disruption and conflict in our country have added to that uncertainty. Within our congregation we have also had the transition to a new fiscal year model and staff changes with Kevin joining the team.

In spite of these challenges we have been greatly blessed with an unwavering commitment from the Shepherd of the Hills faith community resulting in our ability not only to continue our ministry goals but also to send significant amounts to our outreach and mission partners. This commitment includes continued gifts from the membership for our This Matters support. What is even more inspiring has been the giving from a broader community well beyond Austin - many of whom have been inspired by our online services, resources and outreach.

Thanks to leadership from Bill Dawson and others Shepherd of the Hills has been expanding our online presence for a number of years, culminating in the rollout of REALM. With the support for easy online giving via REALM as well as pledging we have been able to transition to an infrastructure that supports remote giving just like our live streaming has supported remote worship. We continue to see greater adoption from the congregation with these online tools which have served us very well as everyone adjusts to "the new normal"

"Stewardship" in the Lutheran church has often been something that gets attention for a few weeks in the Fall. Our "Stewarding for Growth" team has been moving to a year round model that takes a much broader view of giving and looks to a closer integration with the other areas of ministry in the church. I feel that in 2020 we have actually further established this model for Shepherd of the Hills with continued monthly team meetings via Zoom, closer partnership with our Endowment Board and "This Matters" campaign and a growing level of engagement across the Stewarding for Growth team, staff and many lay leaders in the congregation. Thanks to the commitment of so many we not only have stayed connected but even expanded our reach and our engagement. I look forward to seeing where God takes us in 2021!

## LOOKING FORWARD

### Pastor Lauren Dow Wegner

Wow. What else can we say? Shepherd of the Hills is taking all that God has revealed to us in 2020 and using it to propel us forward into an exciting future.

In ways we never would've imagined, God has increased our faith this past year. I'm sure we'd all agree that we wouldn't have asked for what we've had to live with lately. . .but from age to age, God's people have always been surprised by what God can do when we feel least prepared, least qualified. . .and most uncertain.

So, you've heard about the amazing ministry throughout 2020 in this place. What will 2021 look like, feel like, be like?

We will be about a whole bunch of Good News sharing! That's who we are. And it's Whose we are. We belong to the Good News himself--Jesus Christ. And so we follow where he calls us.

We continue forging into the new frontier of digital ministry, where we get to be part of getting the Good News into the ears of those who might not have ever heard it.

We continue thinking carefully and critically about our community and who's not yet a part of it: who might God be calling to join us, and more importantly, how are we called to further stretch our arms and our hearts to be even more welcoming, inclusive, affirming, and generous in love?

We continue doing what we know is already working well to serve our community: small groups and faith formation, worship and special events, outreach both near and far.

We will be about Good News sharing. It's who we are.

We will tell the story that has changed us. . .and then watch that story change the world.

We, your pastors, staff, and leadership, cannot say enough how truly amazing it is to be part of what God is doing at Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church.

So let's keep doing it. Together. With each other. And with Jesus, before, behind, and beside us.

