



EQUIPPING THE SAINTS 2026

Saturday, February 7

Hosted by Trinity Lutheran Church, Victoria, Texas
106 North DeLeon

Sponsored by

The Bluebonnet Conference of Congregations of the Southwestern Texas Synod,
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

42 Years of Equipping the Saints - Register Now!

Christ, the Cross and the Church

2026 is the 42nd anniversary for the **Annual Equipping the Saints (ETS)** sponsored by the Bluebonnet Conference of ELCA Congregations. **Equipping the Saints** is known for its many workshops that provide important insights and Biblically-based practical tools to equip persons to do congregational and community ministry and mission. There will be opportunities for personal and spiritual growth, table fellowship (catered meal) with Christians of area congregations, child care for young children of attendees, and the experience of worship as the body of Christ. While the event is sponsored by ELCA (Lutheran) congregations, it is **open to persons of all denominations**. Join us for this special opportunity, and invite friends and neighbors to attend.

It's not easy being the Church in a changing culture. How can the Church be or become relevant, addressing a multitude of needs locally and globally? Discovering our purpose individually and as a community of faith—helping and healing, loving and forgiving, celebrating and serving, feeding and freeing, encouraging and strengthening healthy relationships, and showing up for folks in their time of need. We are blessed with the gifts of God to get the work that needs to be done in our communities because of the important connections we have—Christ, the Cross and the Church.

Pastor Herb Beyer, ETS Chair 361-798-0155 beyerfam55@gmail.com

REGISTRATION FORM - ETS 2026

Return registration form to Trinity Lutheran Church, 106 North DeLeon, Victoria, Texas 77901. Preferred registration deadline is Wednesday, February 4, 2026. Please register as soon as possible. (This helps with adequate preparations and meal count). **Register NOW!**

While the ETS event is hosted by ELCA congregations of the Bluebonnet Conference, other persons and congregations are welcome to attend. **There is no charge to ELCA members of the Bluebonnet Conference and only a \$15 charge per person to non-members.** Non-members make checks payable to Bluebonnet Conference—ETS 2026.

Name of Registrant: _____ Name of Spouse Attending: _____

Mailing Address: _____ City & Zip: _____

Congregational Name & City: _____ Denomination: _____

Email Address: _____ Phone Number: _____

Workshop Session A (10:15 a.m.): _____ Spouse: _____

Workshop Session B (12:30 p.m.): _____ Spouse: _____

Workshop Session C (2:00 p.m.): _____ Spouse: _____

Staffed Nursery for Infants and Young Children (up to age 5)

List names and ages of each child or infant requiring Nursery Care:

Luncheon Meal: Indicate number of adults _____ and children _____ eating the noon meal.

Registration by E-mail: Secretary@TrinityVictoria.net

Registration by Phone: 361-573-4725 or 361-573-4796, Church Office

Registration Materials also available through website: trinityvictoria.net

If you register by phone or e-mail, it is important to include registrants' names, mailing address, phone number, names of workshops, church affiliation, child care needs and meals as requested.

Schedule for ETS 2026

8:00 a.m. Registration
Hospitality Hour

9:00 a.m. Opening Communion Service

10:15 a.m. Session A Workshops

11:30 a.m. Luncheon for Participants

12:30 p.m. Session B Workshops

2:00 p.m. Session C Workshops

3:30 p.m. Sending Worship Service

ETS 2026 Workshop Descriptions

Session A Workshops – 10:15 a.m.

- 1. Israeli-Gazan Conflict:** How did it come to this? Where does it go from here? Do you want to better understand what is going on between the Israelis and the Palestinians in a land that some call Holy and others call home? This class in the history of the formation of the State of Israel and interactions between Palestinians and Israelis will help clarify your understanding of the current situation. **Presenter: Rev. Sharon Wiggins.**
- 2. Time. Talents. Treasures. Oh My!** Managing the resources entrusted to the care of congregations can be daunting, frustrating and puzzling work. This workshop will be a dialogue of mission and money, building cultures of gratitude and generating ideas for the start of developing a plan for your context's stewardship ministry efforts. **Presenter: Rev. Katie Wegner.**
- 3. It's "Hell" Getting Old** – It may seem like that for persons approaching their golden years, who end up spending a lot of "gold" when it comes to the number of health issues as they age. And conditions make it difficult to live a quality life. Arthritis, Parkinson's, Dementia or other memory-related conditions, macular degeneration, Heart, Diabetes, Cancer. You name it, you never know what's coming down the road. Taking preventative measures, knowing family history, making better lifestyle choices, coping and managing, and having honest discussion with medical professionals and family. Yes, I'm getting older, but I still want to enjoy my life and stay active. **Presenter: Dr. Maurice Wilkinson.**
- 4. Using Faith to Overcome the Grief of Losing a Loved One** – We experience a sadness, an emptiness when a loved one dies. It is easy to slip into a state of depression and find ourselves barely about to drag ourselves out of bed following such a loss. The truth is, life goes on. And the resources of our faith can be a great resource for overcoming the grief and experiencing joy once again. **Presenter: Rev. Dr. Larry Green.**
- 5. Winning the Game of Sanctification 24 hours at a time** – As Christians, we're saved in a moment, but we're sanctified over a lifetime. Many expect spiritual growth to become automatic after receiving Christ, but it doesn't. Discipline isn't implanted; it's trained. Christian discipline is a daily decision, a practiced skill, and a perishable one at that. In this session, Levi Montgomery equips believers with practical strategies to "win the day" in their spiritual lives through habits of prayer, Scripture, obedience, repentance, and service. This talk tackles the myth that discipline is automatic in the Christian life. Instead, it reinforces that discipline must be sharpened daily, like strength, like endurance, like focus. We'll explore why discipline fades without intentional repetition, how to build a sustainable spiritual "training plan," and how to stay spiritually tough when life pulls you beyond the wire and tests your faith in the deep water. **Presenter: Levi Montgomery.**
- 6. The importance of Native Plants in the Landscape** – With the loss of native plants and wildlife habitat, the invasion of many non-native plants, and the population declines of so many wildlife species, restoring native plants to our landscapes is an urgent call to action. By landscaping with plants that are uniquely adapted to your region's soils and climatic conditions, you can create beautiful gardens that can reduce monthly utility costs, save valuable natural resources, and restore habitat for birds, butterflies, bees, and other wildlife. **Presenter: Master Gardener Catherine Koenig.**
- 7. Gifts in the Attic; Unwrap your present** – For many years the church has been pastor led and lay supported. Today, cultural changes are inspiring a new approach to leadership. The church is now searching its "attic" for forgotten treasures—rediscovering the unique gifts within its community. As these gifts are unwrapped, our present is being transformed by Christians who are shaped by love and trained not only for church leadership, but for whole-life discipleship. As they share their stories of

encountering God, they renew and enrich the faith of all people they meet in the community. **Presenter: Rebecca Guengerich.**

8. **Discussion of Biblical Expressions of Our Love and of God's Love** – According to our biblical texts, how and why should our love for God and only our love for God always be an unconditional love? How and why should our love for all people always be an appropriate love for each of our relationships with them but never an unconditional love? How and why should our love for things always be a responsible love, but certainly never an unconditional love? What do our biblical texts indicate about God's love for us? Is God's love for us an unconditional love? Is God's love for us an appropriate love? Is God's love for us a responsible love? **Presenter: Rev. Dr. Norm Beck.**
9. **Faith-Based & Values-Centered Framework** - This training is grounded in shared faith-based and organizational values that call us to use wisdom, discernment, and integrity in all areas of life—including our digital spaces. **Guiding Values** include using technology responsibly as a gift entrusted to us, seeking truth and understanding before acting or sharing, acting honestly and transparently online, treating every person with kindness and care, safeguarding children, families, seniors, and those at risk, and using digital tools to encourage, educate, and serve others (*“Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.”* Matthew 10:16). **Learning Objectives** are to use digital tools intentionally to reflect faith, values, and service; communicate online with wisdom, kindness, and purpose; recognize scams, deception, and manipulation; protect personal and organizational information; and help others navigate technology safely. **Presenter: Kristi McBride.**

Session B Workshops – 12:30 p.m.

1. **Introduction to The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land**—Meet the Lutheran congregations witnessing to God’s love in the places Jesus walked during his earthly ministry. Lots of pictures, some personal experiences, some interesting history, a little Bible Study. **Presenter: Rev. Sharon Wiggins.**
2. **Strategies for Growing Youth & Family Ministry** – Are you looking for a magic wand to wave over the youth and family ministry at your ministry context? Spoiler alert: There's not one. Workshop attendees will think together through the purpose of youth and family ministry as well as convene as a think tank for ideas and strategies for youth and family ministry that you might take back to your ministry setting. **Presenter: Rev. Katie Wegner.**
3. **A Biblical Understanding of Healing** – In Scripture, we find persons dealing with afflictions of all sorts and who experience life-changing, life renewing encounters with Jesus. Hospitals and physicians have come to increasingly realize that the health and well-being of patients is not only done through medications, surgeries, and treatment, but looking at the whole person. We are persons of mind, body, spirit, emotions. Faith, religiosity, spirituality are important factors that enable persons to cope with physical ailments and life stressors by providing optimism and improved quality of life. Word, Sacrament, Prayer, Confession and Community are essential in the healing of our hurts. **Presenter: Dr. Maurice Wilkinson.**
4. **The Caring and Compassionate Church** – How can we best minister to persons who are ill, suffering from any number of ailments, and even those who are terminally ill? How can we best minister to the walking wounded—persons going through a divorce, persons who have experienced abuse or neglect, a broken relationship, loneliness, isolation? Praying for and physically being present for such persons and their caregivers are important. **Presenter: Rev. Dr. Larry Green.**
5. **Game Plan for Building Strong Families, Strong Relationships, Strong Men and Strong Women** -- Busy defines our families today, and everyone is going all sorts of directions. Building strong Christian families involves intentional practices like consistent prayer, reading scripture, attending church, and modeling

Christ-like love centered on faith, communication, shared values, mutual respect, creating a foundation for spiritual growth, resilience, and unity through God's design. **Presenter: Levi Montgomery.**

6. **Composting** – From why it is important to compost to what to put in a compost pile and when to use compost. Almost everything you may want to know about composting. **Presenter: Master Gardener David Hensley.**
7. **Discussion of the Identity of the 'Beloved Disciple' texts in the Gospel According to John** –Do you think that Jesus had one disciple whom Jesus loved more than Jesus loved his other disciples? If Jesus had a disciple whom Jesus loved more than Jesus loved his other disciples, who was that disciple? If Jesus had such a disciple, why did Jesus love that disciple more than Jesus loved the other disciples of Jesus? Was this "Beloved Disciple" younger, more innocent, less sinful than the other disciples of Jesus were? Why are these frequent references to this disciple whom Jesus loved only in the Fourth Gospel and not in the other Gospels? Why is this "Beloved Disciple" so often contrasted to Peter? What should we preach and teach about this "Beloved Disciple"? What do you think about this "Beloved Disciple"? Would you like to be Jesus' "Beloved Disciple"? What can we learn about the Bible from our study of these "Beloved Disciple" texts? **Presenter: Rev. Dr. Norm Beck.**
8. **How Can/Should Churches Respond to Persons with Mental Illness?** – There are those who can be problematic in the Church, and those we are called to minister to in our churches and communities suffering from a variety of mental illnesses, disorders, and addictions. Family, schools, communities, and law enforcement are dealing, every day, with persons with a number of mental health issues. By fostering a culture of compassion, challenging stigma and bias, providing support, building networks with mental health professionals for referrals, and recognizing that spiritual care complements professional treatment, churches can play a significant collaborative role in addressing this problem. So, how does a church do that? Let's talk about it... **Presenter: Lane Johnson.**

Session C Workshops – 2:00 p.m.

1. **Come and See! Go and Tell!** – Share my trip to Jordan, Israel, and the West Bank this past September. Lots of pictures of Holy Sites in Jordan and Churches in Israel and the West Bank, some Lutheran, some not. All this sprinkled with Biblical considerations shared by Pastors from several of the churches we visited. **Presenter: Rev. Sharon Wiggins.**
2. **The Power of Outdoor Ministry Experiences** – Retreating away from your everyday holds the power to experience God in new, diverse and rich ways. Participants will be invited into discussion about the impact of a summer camp or retreat experience and how to connect those experiences back to our everyday lives. Discover ways to think about experiences for youth, adults or families that will provide shared experiences and an infusion of energy and vitality to your ministry context. **Presenter: Rev. Katie Wegner.**
3. **What Women and Men Need to Know** for their particular health and well-being, tests that should be taken as the years go by, things to pay attention to for long-term health, essential health screenings, knowing family history for self and family, paying attention to changes and symptoms. Also, we may be post-pandemic, but we still have a host of respiratory illnesses that plague us. What vaccines or boosters do I need at various points in life? **Presenter: Dr. Maurice Wilkinson.**
4. **This is Your Life. Plan Your Celebration of Life. Have a say about it.** What are specific ways to celebrate the life you have been living and the life you will be living in the one true and eternal Home of Heaven? Some refer to it as a funeral or memorial service. Choose it to be "A Celebration of Life." Designing your celebration with uplifting music, hope-filled Scripture, wonderful memories, encouraging words for loved ones. Share how your faith has inspired you in doing good in the time that

God has given you. We aren't saved by doing good works. We do the good because we are saved. What kind of "legacy" of faith do you want to gift to family and friends? **Presenter: Rev. Dr. Larry Green.**

5. **Discovering God's Purpose for Your Life** - Looking to the wisdom of Scripture, discovering your strengths, and living a life worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Putting your faith into practice. **Presenter: Levi Montgomery.**
6. **Beneficial Insects** – How do beneficial insects contribute to our vegetative world balance? Ninety-eight percent of insects are beneficial with only two percent being harmful or benign. Learn how to create a yard to attract these creatures and a garden to create winter homes for them. **Presenter: Master Gardener Marcia Kauffman**
7. **Why Love is not Enough** – Cultural change in our society continues on over-drive. Marriage, relationships, and family are being redefined quicker than we can understand them. Boundaries are blurred. Rules are unclear. Expectations are confusing. But one thing remains. Humans continue to desire, and pursue, long-term meaningful relationships. We just aren't sure how to get there anymore. This workshop will explore the top ten ingredients to any long-term, meaningful relationship. The list will probably surprise you. **Presenter: Lane Johnson.**
8. **Wonder Women** – Let's talk, laugh, share stories, and spend time wondering about how God is at work among us. Women are an important and powerful part of the life and work of the Church. Learn about Women of the ELCA and the many ways to get involved—whether that's Bible study, service, leadership, or simply finding community. No experience needed and no pressure to commit—just show up as you are. **Presenter: Elva Villalpando Cope.**

2026 – Workshop Leaders

Rev. Dr. Norm Beck is retired professor of Theology and Classical Languages at Texas Lutheran University and recently retired as pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church in Stockdale (Denhawken). He has a Ph.D. from Princeton Theological Seminary, a B.D. and an honorary D.D. from Trinity Lutheran Seminary, and a B.A. from Capital University. He taught Introduction to Theology, Old Testament Studies, New Testament Studies, History of Religions, Biblical Hebrew, Biblical Greek, and other courses at Texas Lutheran University, and is the author of ten books and of a movie script titled "Jesus, the Man."

Lane Johnson, M.Div., LPC-S, has been practicing as a Licensed Professional Counselor for over 40 years. In addition to private practice, he also serves as the Chief of Clinical Services at Gulf Bend Center in Victoria Texas. Lane is Board Certified in Professional Counseling, a Diplomate member of the American Psychotherapy Association, a Diplomate and Certified Sports Counselor with the National Institute of Sports, and is licensed by the Texas State Board of Examiners of Professional Counselors. Lane is a critical incident consultant for municipalities and private industry. He is certified in crisis response and recovery through the Austin Office of Emergency Management, Austin, Texas. Lane is also an ordained pastor and has served congregations in the United Methodist and Presbyterian Church.

Rev. Sharon Wiggins is a retired Lutheran pastor now living in Austin. She has made four trips to the Holy Land including a three month stay during 2011 in Bethlehem as an Ecumenical Accompanier with a World Council of Churches program. Her most recent trip was this last September. Since her retirement she has been active in promoting the new ELCA initiative, Sumud, which replaced the Peace Not Walls program and making presentations on the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Dr. Maurice Wilkinson graduated from Texas Tech Medical School in 1976 with high honors and was recognized as a distinguished alumna from medical school in 1993. She received the National Rural Health Practitioner of Year 1995. Dr. Wilkinson is a Family Practitioner for 48 years, served for many years as the Chief of Staff at the Lavaca Medical Center, and operates her own clinic in Hallettsville.

Rev. Dr. Larry Green is a full-time pastor, serving God's Church, Victoria, and Goliad Country Fellowship, Goliad. For 17 years he has worked full-time for Hospice of South Texas as a Chaplain. He has also served for the last 5 ½ years as Chaplain for the Victoria Police Department. He received his Doctorate of Education from the University of St. Francis, Joliet, Illinois, in 2018.

Rebecca Guengerich is an educator and spiritual director. She is a graduate of the Episcopal Seminary of the Southwest and currently works at Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran in Austin as Director of Spirituality and Wellness. A common thread woven through Rebecca's career as high school teacher, working in the church and Lutheran Campus Ministry is gathering groups and individuals of all ages to form and develop their faith in relationship to their vocational calling. She is currently serving her 4th year as Leadership Chairperson at the Southwestern Texas Synod, where she continues this passion of faith formation.

Elva Villalpando Cope is President of the Women of the ELCA for the Southwestern Texas Synod and a member of Trinity Lutheran Church, San Antonio. She is a retired certified educator with specialization in dyslexia and special education, and ESL certification. She continues to help students overcome learning barriers and find confidence in their abilities. Elva has held offices within her Women of the ELCA unit, served on the Women's Synodical Board and Synod Church Council. She has served in a variety of roles on church council and in the absence of the Pastor, leads worship. She is founder of A Sole Experience, a shoe donation initiative supporting children of single-parent households plus she is actively starting a community book club that uplifts Latino authors through discussion. Elva is an associate member of the San Antonio Association for Hispanic Journalists, a member of the Texas Business and Professional Women's Foundation, Ambassador to Seniors in Play (theatrical programming), and active in the local senior citizen's Seniors in Play and Writer's group.

Rev. Katie Wegner serves as the Cross Trails Program Director for Cross Trails Ministry. Cross Trails Ministry is a year-round summer camp and retreat ministry based in the Texas Hill Country. Katie has a passion for crafting faith forming opportunities through the outdoors and witnessing God's love as told to us through Creation. It was through youth and family ministry that Katie experienced her call to serve in the Church. She has a stubborn hope that, rooted in Christ, our relationships with one another, Creation and God will empower us to bear God's creative and redeeming love to all the world. Since 2006, Katie has served two congregations and began her call to Cross Trails Ministry in 2022.

Levi Montgomery, as a high-school football coach, athletic director, and a former soldier, brings a locker-room clarity to the walk of faith. He is a member of the Methodist Church, husband and father. He served as an Infantry Fire Team Leader in the 15th Infantry Regiment of the United States Army, attaining the rank of Sergeant and serving in the hostile fire zone of Bosnia in 1996. Upon completing his military service, Montgomery graduated from Texas State University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Exercise Science and a minor in history. He is also a graduate of Liberty University with a Master degree of Education— Educational Administration and Supervision. Montgomery has coached for over 20 years with stops including Bay City, Pflugerville Connally, Canyon Lake, Bracken Christian, Cuero, and currently in Hallettsville. He is also a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Catherine Koenig holds Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degrees in biology. Her career includes work as a research assistant at the University of Texas Medical Center in Galveston, research in estuarine ecology as a graduate student at Texas A&M University in Galveston, and a biologist and natural resource specialist with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. Since retiring she continues conservation work as a member of the Mid-Coast Texas Master Chapter and the Victoria County Master Gardeners Association with projects on native plant conservation, wildlife habitat restoration, and environmental education. She is also an active member of the Native Plant Society of Texas, and the Native Prairie Association of Texas as well as a supporter of a number of other environmental and wildlife protection associations.

David Hensley, Master Gardener, received his Bachelor of General Psychology degree and Clinical Masters Psychology degree from St. Mary's University in San Antonio. He has a PhD from the School of Psychology University of Texas, Austin. David is a retired psychologist in the field of Mental Health. He has been a Master Gardener for the four years. He and his wife Nelda have been in charge of the Master Gardeners training class for the past two years.

Marcia Kauffman, Master Gardener, is a retired elementary educator having taught third grade and fourth grade and rounded out her career in special education. She has been a Master Gardener since 2011.

Kristi McBride is an experienced educational leader, nonprofit executive, and community advocate with over 15 years of service in public education, instructional technology, and organizational leadership. She is the Executive Director of Parents as Teachers of Rural South-Central Texas, leading family-focused programs that support early childhood development, parent education, and community partnerships across rural communities. Kristi previously held roles including elementary principal, district curriculum director, instructional technologist, and administrative specialist, supporting PK–12 curriculum alignment, data-informed decision-making, and technology integration. She holds a Master of Education in Educational Leadership from Texas A&M University. Kristi is passionate about strengthening families, leading with integrity, and using technology wisely to serve and protect communities.

Equipping the Saints

February 7, 2026

Workshop Highlight: B.9. 12:30-1:45 PM

“Plan Your Legacy of Faith”

Everything that we have is a gift that God places in our care during our lifetime. We each have the privilege, responsibility, and joy of being a steward, of caring for loved ones, for God's creation, and also creating gifts for Christian ministry.

As you plan your own legacy that will reflect your faith and values, the Lutheran Foundation of the Southwest is here to assist you. We are here to help you care for your family and benefit Lutheran ministries, as well as your other favorite non-profit organizations.

Lutheran Foundation of the Southwest provides comprehensive gift planning and can assist congregations with their own legacy generosity and legacy stewardship.

During the seminar, we'll discuss:

- How to care and provide for family and other loved ones and provide legacy gifts for ministry and other non-profit organizations.
- Ideas and opportunities to present legacy generosity and stewardship for your congregations.

Signe Fredrickson is our Southwest Texas Synod gift planner, serving our congregations and its members. She has been with the Lutheran Foundation of the Southwest for 3 ½ years. Signe is the council vice president and lay leader at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Comfort, and enjoys living in Bandera.