



## Rebuilding the Church in Panama

On Sunday, Feb. 4, 2024, nearly 200 people from all walks of life — including Panamanians, expats, LCMS missionaries and partner church leaders — gathered at Redeemer Lutheran Church in Balboa (Panama City), Panama, to celebrate the dedication of Redeemer's newly renovated sanctuary.

The church, which was started in 1948 by a United States military chaplain, had taken a pounding over the last few years from hurricanes, floods and termites. Workers were in the process of putting a new roof on its parochial hall in 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic hit and the government told them all to go home, leaving the hall exposed during the rainy season.

"There was flooding. Then a tree fell on the sanctuary and caused a gaping hole. ... The damage was so severe," recalled the Rev. Dr. Arthur Rickman, an LCMS missionary to Panama.

The LCMS Latin America and the Caribbean region uses the FORO model (*foro* means "forum" in Spanish) in 13 countries — including Panama — to bring together congregations, districts and other groups that are interested in a specific mission field. The FORO partners in Panama were instrumental in sending short-term teams and helping to restore Redeemer's sanctuary and parochial hall.

Among those who first stepped up was LCMS Disaster Response. The ministry gave

nearly \$250,000 to halt further damage and to help the congregation start to rebuild.

Although much work still remains to be done, the building has undergone an amazing transformation. The sanctuary's roof and underlayment were replaced, the walls were treated for mold and given a fresh coat of paint, the windows were replaced, and the original pasta tile floor was restored to its former beauty. In addition, the whole second floor of the parochial hall has been outfitted with new plumbing and electrical systems.



LCMS missionary Rev. Dr. Arthur Rickman distributes the Sacrament during the Divine Service on Sunday, Feb. 4, 2024, at Redeemer Lutheran Church, Balboa (Panama City), Panama. The service included the dedication of the church's recently renovated sanctuary. At left are photos of the church before the renovation (bottom) and after (top).

"I want to express gratitude for the partnership of the LCMS and of Disaster Response. We know there were a lot of people who gave sacrificially [to support this project]," Rickman said. "This is not only the preservation of a historic building. The church is more than just the building; it is the people. With the restoration work completed, we have the opportunity to revitalize the congregation, renew our presence in the Balboa area and serve as an example of God's faithfulness to all our congregations in Panama."

## Give God Glory ...



... for the Rev. David and Joyce Erber, LCMS career missionaries serving in Ghana. David serves as a theological educator and teaches at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Accra. He also serves as the field coordinator for the Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, online Master of Arts in Theology program, which is utilized by African pastors from Ghana, Kenya, South Sudan and Uganda. Joyce is the regional business manager for Africa, and she manages the financial and accounting dynamics for missionaries and mission projects in 25 countries in Africa. Learn more at [lcms.org/erber](https://lcms.org/erber).

... for the Synod's directors of Christian education (DCEs) and the National Association of Directors of Christian Education (NADCE), an LCMS Recognized Service Organization that

supports DCEs and other church professionals responsible for teaching the faith in a variety of settings, including local parishes, schools, districts and universities. Learn more about the organization's mission at [nadce.wildapricot.org](https://nadce.wildapricot.org).

... for Project 24, a joint program of the LCMS Office of International Mission and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya. In this program, vulnerable children live at a Project 24 boarding facility in Kenya while attending a local primary school. The children also receive meals, medical care, school supplies, tutoring and spiritual care — as well as support for their studies in secondary school and beyond. Project 24 recently broke ground on a new boarding facility. Learn more at [reporter.lcms.org/2024/from-the-mission-field-project-24-breaks-new-ground](https://reporter.lcms.org/2024/from-the-mission-field-project-24-breaks-new-ground).

One of the priorities of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) is to reach out in mercy and compassion to those in need, motivated by Christ and His Gospel, according to the Lutheran confession of the faith. This is accomplished under the familiar name of LCMS World Relief and Human Care, which the Synod uses to describe the mercy work directed by the policies of the Boards for National and International Mission and implemented through the programs of the Offices of National and International Mission.

"Sharing," the newsletter of LCMS World Relief and Human Care, is published by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295. Contributor services line: 888-930-4438. Website: [lcms.org](https://lcms.org).

Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison Ext. 1402  
President  
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Rev. Dr. Cory J. Rajek Ext. 1311  
Executive Director  
LCMS Office of International Mission

Rev. Daniel M. Galchutt Ext. 1730  
Executive Director  
LCMS Office of National Mission



### You Make the Difference through LCMS World Relief and Human Care

You make the ministry described in this newsletter possible! Your prayers and contributions to World Relief and Human Care "Where Needed Most" help deliver our Savior's mercy to people in need. You bolster tightly restricted donations from others to help fully fund important mercy projects, allowing us to report here the impact you are making in Christ's name. The courtesy envelope in this issue allows you to send a future contribution as the Holy Spirit leads, when He leads.

# Feeding Families **in** Texas

**T**rinity Klein Lutheran Church in Spring, Texas, saw a twofold need in its surrounding community: families were going hungry, both physically and spiritually.

To meet this need, Trinity began “Beans and Bibles for Mission Growth,” a project funded by a national development grant from the LCMS Office of National Mission.

Trinity used the grant to put the Word of God into the hands of low-income families in the area and provide them with physical nourishment at the same time.

Restoring Hope, Trinity’s human-care ministry, runs a food pantry that assists thousands of people each month. The ministry served almost 60,000 people in 2023 alone. This particular grant supplied the food pantry with 2,544 ten-pound bags of beans.

The grant also enabled Trinity to purchase 420 parallel Spanish/English ESV Bibles and 417 bilingual copies of *My First Bible Storybook*, a children’s Bible published by Concordia Publishing House.

Clients who came to the food pantry received both a bag of beans and a Bible. The bag of beans acted as a meal extender, helping families stretch resources in thin times. And included with the Bible was a flyer containing Trinity’s



Above: The Rev. Luis and Deaconess Rosy Martinez hold books that were given to food pantry clients with their “Beans and Bibles for Mission Growth” project.

church service times and information about its Hispanic ministry.

When receiving help at the food pantry, many clients hear about the English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classes as well as the Spanish-speaking church services and Bible studies that Trinity Klein has to offer, which are led by the Rev. Luis Martinez and his wife,

Deaconess Rosy Martinez. All these ministries lay the groundwork for deep connections and relationships between the church and its community.

A gift like *My First Bible Storybook* also sparks children’s interest in reading and inspires families to start reading the Bible together.

“I want to say thank you for the Bibles, especially the beautiful children’s Bible,” said Christabel Rivas, a client of Trinity’s food pantry and a student in one of Trinity’s ESL classes. “I have three children, and this gift means a lot to me and is such a blessing for them.”

Lauren McCardell, the director of Restoring Hope, remarked that the children’s Bibles have also helped many clients “have more togetherness as a family.” Gifts like these also generate interest in attending worship and participating in the church’s other programs.

“The love here [at Trinity] is clear, and the overall atmosphere is very welcoming,” said McCardell. “We want to get [the people we help] into the sanctuary [to] see what our church is actually like.”

“Connecting to clients was the major focus of this project. Even the smallest gesture can go a long way, and anytime someone walks in our doors, it opens up an opportunity for conversation,” said McCardell.

## Paul: Mission and Mercy

**S**t. Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea Philippi from A.D. 58 to A.D. 60. He had been arrested in Jerusalem after being accused of causing a riot for taking a Gentile man into a restricted area of the temple. The charges were bogus. He had just returned to Jerusalem from his third missionary journey, which began in 54 (Acts 18:23–21:15). He had spent A.D. 55–56 preaching in Ephesus (Acts 19:8–10), left for Macedonia (20:1), then proceeded to Corinth for three months during the winter of 57–58.

Shortly before Easter, Paul headed east, reaching Jerusalem in the summer of A.D. 58. His opponents who helped get him ousted from Ephesus recognized him and went after him in Jerusalem with false accusations. The Romans, ever wary of riots and tumult (rightly so, since war would soon erupt in A.D. 66 against Israel and culminate in the terrible destruction of Jerusalem in 70), removed Paul to Caesarea, where he endured Governors Festus and Felix, but finally sent him to Rome, since he had appealed to Caesar (his right as a Roman citizen).

Paul spent a couple of years in Rome under house arrest. Today there is a church over that location in Rome. Strong tradition indicates Paul was finally martyred outside the walls of Rome around A.D. 63. Not too many years ago, a probe was pushed into what is thought to be Paul’s tomb in the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls. Bone fragments were tested and found to be those of a first-century man. Shreds of fiber matched first-century Jewish clothing. The church was built above Paul’s grave, which

was located in an ancient pagan cemetery. Why did Paul end up a martyr under Nero? He was bound and determined to return to Jerusalem with a financial gift to the apostolic church suffering both famine and persecution.

“Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings. While I was doing this, they found me purified in the temple, without any crowd or tumult” (Acts 24:17–18). The offering was a profound recognition of the mission and unity of the church and the love of Jesus (see 2 Cor. 8–9). The apostles had accepted Paul’s Gentile converts and did not require circumcision, but as Paul recounted in Galatians 2, “They asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do” (Gal. 2:10).

The church’s ministry of mercy continues today. Through LCMS World Relief and Human Care, you make possible acts of mercy near and far, in the name of Jesus, to our dear fellow Lutheran Christians, and very often through them to people in need who also need Jesus. Thank you. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the collection, “God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work” (2 Cor. 9:8).

Pastor Matthew C. Harrison  
President, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

