

# TREE OF LIFE LUTHERAN CHURCH



3201 NORTH LOOP 336 WEST  
CONROE, TEXAS 77304  
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

Rev. Christopher E. Lake  
Pastor

ANNUAL MEETING  
JANUARY 20, 2013  
9:30 AM

2012 Annual  
Presidential Report  
Tree of Life Lutheran Church

Dear Fellow Members and Friends of Tree of Life,

Winter is in the air just it was almost two years ago when I took office as President of Tree of Life. When I put my name in nomination for the presidency, I didn't have any great goals or aspirations...I just wanted to pay back my congregation with love for all the love I had received over the years. I had a feeling that the coming years would be a financial struggle and I wanted to be there for comforting and encouragement. I knew that I could gather up the financial minds of our congregation and I did. I knew that I could count on our younger members of council for inspiration and progressive thinking and they have. I cannot thank the council enough for all their courage in making tough decisions. It would be so tiresome to list one's accomplishments but the bottom line is that two years later, we are still here and growing.

Special thanks have to go Pastor Chris. He was a lifeline to me during the aftermath of my son's death and has continued to be there during the last two years. We have laughed together, cried together and sometimes even fought together while praying for the health of this congregation. Pastor Chris is one of the good guys...trust him and love him, and he will be there for you.

Last but certainly not least, I have to thank Dave. He has been there to listen to my joy and anguish over the last two years. He has offered advice but mainly just listened...he loves TOL and has often calmed me and always supported me in the decisions that have to be made.

Peace and Love,

Daphne Cox

2012 Annual Report  
Evangelism  
Tree of Life Lutheran Church

Let us give thanks to God, our Father for the successes we have enjoyed in 2012 at Tree of Life.

**1 Corinthians 3:7-9** <sup>7</sup> So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, **but only God, who makes things grow.** <sup>8</sup> The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. <sup>9</sup> **For we are co-workers in God's service;** you are God's field, God's building. One of the highlights of this year was a 40 day study "Unbinding the Gospel – Real Life Evangelism" lead by Bishop Mike R. Bishop Mike led the study in personal evangelism, which was well attended and generated much discussion and self-examination. I was particularly drawn to the story of the church that started a small evangelism team. Their first instruction was simply to "meet together and pray together." This continued for three months – meet and pray together, do nothing else, make no decisions for 3 whole months. The committee did report back to the church council and for 3 months the report was : "We are still praying". In summary, after 3 months of intense prayer, that entire church is still being positively impacted by their willingness to risk praying first.

**Philippians 4:6-7** *do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

**Thank you** to all of you who invite your friends to join us for worship, to everyone who greet visitors as they came to worship with us, and to all who welcome returning visitors helping them feel they are part of our Tree of Life family.

For 2013, I would challenge you to pray daily for –

1. Pastor Chris, that his work in this ministry at Tree of Life may be abundantly blessed,
2. Your church council members - to have wisdom and understanding in their leadership at Tree of Life,
3. **"Pray** to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask Him to send more workers into his fields." As Jesus taught in Matthew 9:38
4. And for yourself as Isaiah answered God's call in Isaiah 6:8 Also, I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?  
Then said I, **Here am I; send me.**

If we can all pray these simple petitions, believing Jesus' promise when he said "Ask, and it will be given you", I believe we will see God's work in this place exceed our wildest imagination.

Blessings to you and thanks be to God.

Dennis McConnell  
Evangelism

2012 Annual Report  
Youth and Family Ministries  
Tree of Life Lutheran Church

It has been another great year with the youth and families of Tree of Life. We began our year with preparations and registration for summer camp at Lutherhill. We received a very generous donation of \$3000 to ensure that each child had the opportunity to attend camp. We also hosted our annual spring garage sale along with a Palm Sunday bake sale. Between the donation, the fundraisers, and a Thrivent contribution of \$1600, our youth earned over \$8000 towards camp. We sent 28 youth along with 4 sponsors, Julie Weeks, Bunny Stoutes, Keith Funderburk, and Pastor Chris to Lutherhill in July. Scott Collins, Amy Spoerle, and Shawn Presley also donated a week of their time as camp medics. The camp theme this year was "Let Your Light Shine Bright". The kids learned to go out into the world and let their light shine for others so that they may know Christ through them.

In May, Ryan Dockery joined the staff of Tree of Life as Youth Director. Under his direction we had a summer filled wonderful with activities for all ages. In the fall we continued with Wednesdays at the Tree which carried us into the advent season. We also participated in the Conroe Christmas Parade and won 3<sup>rd</sup> place.

Based on Pastor Chris' vision and the combined efforts of many, we have implemented a retreat style method for Confirmation students, where 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, & 8<sup>th</sup> grade students attend three weekend sessions along with a week of summer camp each year they are in Confirmation.

Bunny Stoutes along with Chris and Lauren Douglas organized our first annual Christmas at the Tree Bazaar. We had a variety of vendors and wonderful items donated for silent auction. The event was a great success raising over \$3600 that will benefit Ryan, the Youth, and TOL.

It has been a blessing serving the youth and families of Tree of Life this past year. I am looking forward to another one filled with many more opportunities for fun, fellowship, and faith building.

Yours In Christ  
Julie Weeks & Ryan Dockery

Tree of Life Lutheran Church  
Annual meeting  
January 20, 2013

1. Call to order
2. Establish a quorum (count from tellers)
3. Opening prayer- Pastor Chris Lake
4. Approval of meeting agenda
5. Approval of January 15, 2012 annual meeting minutes
6. Approval of September 16, 2012 special congregational meeting minutes
7. Statement from President and Pastor
8. Recommendation and approval of updated and revised church constitution and bylaws
9. Nomination for Church council positions (Nominating committee recommendations)
  - a. President- Dennis McConnell
  - b. Council secretary- Vickie Funderburk
  - c. Financial secretary- Linda Bliese
  - d. Evangelism- Daphne Cox
10. Election of council members
11. Financial report 2012- Larry Anderson
12. Presentation and adoption of 2013 budget
13. Report of tellers
14. New business
15. Closing prayer
16. Adjournment

***The Purpose of Tree of Life is to experience a happening church that is friendly, warm, and caring and the Mission of Tree of Life is to invite, inspire and include all people in Christ's love.***

2012 Educational Annual Report  
Tree of Life Lutheran Church

The past year has been an eventful one in the area of Christian Education at Tree of Life. Sunday School continued on in the spring as well as adult Bible Study, led by Dennis McConnell. It was the decision by council to bring Ryan Dockery on as our new Youth Director that changed the course of the year and strengthened our education program. Ryan's summer began right away with VBS and continued on with Wednesday activities, camp, and the beginning of Children's Church during the 10:30 worship service on Sundays. He has been an amazing asset to our youth program and has supported those who work in our education areas with fantastic resources. It has been decided by council that having Ryan as an official youth director for Tree of Life means that the education position on council will no longer be necessary. Even though I will no longer be the single Education leader for our church, I will happily be a part of a strong team, led by Ryan, to grow our education programs. I look forward to being part of a team that makes education decisions instead of feeling as if the responsibility lies only on my shoulders. Great and positive changes will occur under the knowledgeable and wise leadership of Ryan Dockery.

Thank you so much to the Sunday School teachers who have been so patient and committed over the past year: Dennis McConnell, Katherine Lake, Lauren Douglas, Vickie Funderburk, Karen Andrews, Shelley Pfluger, Carlee Smith, Angela Brown, Mariann O'Hagan, Beth Gary, Ida Craig, Scott Collins, Tiffany Nye, Ryan Dockery, and Susan Hillebrandt. Also, thank you to Jennifer Griffin for directing our "Sky" Vacation Bible School last summer. So many others contributed to these two major education endeavors in 2012, and I thank all of you who gave of your time and talents to Sunday School and VBS.

I know that 2013 will be filled with positive changes to our Christian Education program. I thank everyone for their support during my service on council over the past three years.

Many Blessings,  
Karen Solberg

Tree of Life  
Annual Congregational Meeting  
January 15, 2012

Meeting was called to order by Dennis McConnell at 9:08 am. A quorum was established by the tellers, and a list of congregants in attendance at the meeting is attached.

Pastor Chris opened in prayer.

The minutes from the Congregational Meeting in 2011 were reviewed and approved by the congregation.

The returning council members Karen Solberg for Education and Matt Hannes for Building were nominated and approved by the congregation.

The 2012 Annual budget was reviewed by the congregation. Wayne Pfluger alerted the congregation to the fact that the budget that is being presented is a negative balance budget. The Church Council is hoping that the congregation will step up in giving, and that this budget will not remain negative. The budget was approved by the congregation.

The annual ministry reports were reviewed by the congregation.

Pastor Chris and Daphne Cox gave their reports on the previous year, as well as, their hopes for the upcoming year.

There was no old business or new business discussed.

The new council members were installed by Pastor Chris.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:00 am.

Minutes submitted by Jennifer Griffin  
Council Secretary

2012 Annual Building Report  
and needs to come in 2013  
Tree of Life Lutheran Church

This last year has been a success as much as it could be due to some unselfish givers of their time, talents, finances, even from non-members. The Men's group has been a true blessing to this church this year, by committing to projects that would have caused us to dip more into our savings financially than we did this year. The Men's group project consisted of Painting all the corner trim of the sanctuary that had become damage by weather and landscape maintenance. The group also averted a possible drainage issue between the church and playground by removing sediment in the drainage overflow pathway to an appropriate grade. Moved the broke playground flood light out of the tree and onto a post for better illumination of the area. They also attempted to repair the lighting for the parking lot of the Education Building. This group cooked and served Easter breakfast and did two fund raiser hamburger dinners after church. Word amongst the group already has stuff on tap for the coming year including service project, meals and fun/fellowship activates for 2013. Come join us and then you too may know what a difference this group can make in the life of this church body! Talk about a group that has been unselfish in the service they provided this year and that is the cleaning crew for the Education Building. These four groups perform an invaluable service weekly without fail. One of the groups says it's just one way they feel interconnected to this church deeply. If you have not had a chance to thank this group for all they do, please do so. We have been able to add some new members to this group for the year which should be a great asset to those already serving. Some changes are coming to this group that will make this ministry better able to serve with less effort. For this to happen we need to upgrade our bathrooms in this Education Building to a similar effect of our sanctuary's bathrooms. So all can know the cleaning crews better, here they are as follows:

**Team One** *1<sup>st</sup> Week*

Christine Knauf	936-264-3982
Mary Nye	936-445-1739
Tiffany Nye	936-828-3338
Treva Allen & Chuck Will	936-494-3250

**Team Two** *2<sup>nd</sup> Week*

Shirley Finke	936-828-3887
Flo Stiverson	936-273-2572
Edie Tong	936-856-8242
Katherine Lake	936-828-3333
Jennifer Canton	281-460-1254

**Team Three** *3<sup>rd</sup> Week*

Daphne Cox	936-856-1380
Annette Chapman	936-441-9175
Kim Thompson	936-588-3737
Bob & Corinne Myers	936-856-4615

**Team Four**4<sup>th</sup> Week

Dennis & Maxine McConnell	281-292-8581
Susan Hillebrandt	936-671-0019
Jeanne Anderson	936-494-3250
Seth Cunningham	936-522-8648

1<sup>st</sup> person on the list is the team Leader.

Air conditioning systems at TOL this last year have had its costly effects. Thanks to some generous members and generous HVAC repair people we were able to keep most of that cost out of the general maintenance budget. Although we have our A/C systems running and keeping our inside environment as pleasant as possible repair needs are present for 2013. We were able to save the church around \$5000.00 in electricity cost over the last year by incorporating the new wireless controlled thermostats. With these saving I hoped that this money would stay inside the facilities area for 2013's budget for much needed repairs, although that did not happen.

What are our needs for 2013?

We need to replace most of the parking lot light fixtures in the Education Building's parking lot at a cost of \$1050.00 plus the cost of a pole with the Men's group doing the work.

HVAC issues as follows:

Fix the leaking drainage pan on the A/C unit over the copier room in the sanctuary.

Replace the overflow pan for the southern most units in the fellowship hall

Replace the bearing that is out in the northern most units in the fellowship hall

Place filter grates on the unit for the kitchen unit that is more serviceable

All HVAC repairs listed above cost of \$800.00.

Attempt to make our two main HVAC units in the sanctuary more efficient and cost less in future repairs is to place two variable drives from ABB on them at a cost of \$2100.00 each.

Remodel our bathrooms in the Education building to similar effect as those in the sanctuary. To make them function, clean and look as close to the sanctuary as possible we plan to do the following:

Demo and remove the old VCT tile floorings, wall coverings, toilets, counter tops, ceiling grid and tiles, lighting, stall dividers, remove and save the towel dispenser sets.

Clean and seal all concrete

Resurface the walls and raise the ceiling by 12", install fur downs over the sinks and texture and paint wall to match the sanctuary's bathrooms.

Tile floors and walls to match the sanctuary's bathrooms.

Replace all toilets with commercial power assist ADA style toilets.

Install new divider panels to match the sanctuary's bathrooms.

Install new 2'x2' drop ceiling grid at the new height with better lighting fixtures.

Install new lighting over the sink.

Replace the counter top similar to those in the sanctuary's bathroom and reuse the sinks.

Paint the doors and install motion sensing light switches.

Lower the urinal and replace on wall.

Reinstall the towel dispenser sets.

Move the HVAC drains to the bathroom drainage system and eliminate those overflow drains over the sink.

Remodeling with the above description to both bathroom in the Education Building for total cost of \$11,640.00

Repairs to the Education Parking Lot are needed near the dumpster pad as well as sealing most of the expansion joints to decrease future damage like occurred near the dumpster pad. Also have several minor holes in the parking lot from last year's lighting strike that need to be addressed as well.

Just a note: The church will need to be painted within the next 3yrs or less to keep its current protection level. The men's group helped extend the above timeline by painting the trim boards. Do have a bid to repaint all the siding, trim and handrails, caulk all siding and trim as needed and clean/prep before painting with all paint applied by hand with commercial grade Sherwin Williams paint. Above listed description for a cost of \$12,786.00

2012 Annual  
Pastoral Report  
Tree of Life Lutheran Church

I don't know which Sunday this summer I looked out in our congregation during communion and tears started to flow. In 2011, I had teared up often as we kept doing funeral after funeral but this time it was not out of sadness but of a deep and satisfying joy. Six months earlier I had been at a council meeting when Bishop Mike Rinehart had been invited and he brought with him the statistics concerning worship attendance. It was painful to sit there and hear the bishop explain that our worship attendance for Tree of Life for 2011 was an average of 135 which was a 3 year low. Sitting at my desk that night I remember anger and frustration burning in me as I dealt with the question of how to deal with declining finances and worship attendance. I felt broken and unredeemable as your pastor. It was certainly a low moment for me. That night I made a personal goal to increase worship at Tree of Life from 135 to 150. However, that was not even close to the final number. In 2012, the average worship attendance was 160 and we grew our membership significantly. How did we achieve such stunning results?

There were several factors. First of all this congregation has continued to be excellent with visitors and knows how to treat those who visit in worship. When I called visitors this year they almost always stated feeling very welcomed during worship.

Secondly, 18 months ago we stopped using paper to lead worship and started using a projection-lead approach. Visitors found this to be much more inviting and easier to navigate than fumbling with a book and bulletin.

Then there is our worship team who works tirelessly to make amazing and beautiful things happen each week. Linda Bliese was added to the team which meets every Monday for an hour and half going over slides weeks in advance. Linda serves as a representative for the early service and has the notable title of "Copyright Cop" by making sure we have permission to use the songs that we project and use each week. Susan Rinehart who joined the team last year keeps amazing us with her skills in layout and design. In addition the hours she put in each week are considerable and should not be over looked. Jim Voelz continues to organize our weekly volunteers for worship and did a remarkable job including new people all year long. John Burkwall continues to lead our choir and play amazing music for us each week at the late and early service. Whether it is pre-recorded (which he does for free each week) or live, it is always wonderful.

We did not stop there. This year we saw the emergence of our contemporary worship band. The idea having bubbled from within our own people and has grown to where they help lead worship once a month. Already this group has grown and learned so much this last year and I look forward to what they will achieve in 2013. Thanks to Mike Rinehart and Jeremie Brown for organizing and driving this emerging and vital ministry.

Between the work of all these people and my re-energized efforts in my own work, there was solid growth for the first six months of this year. However it was not until June as I looked out into the congregation that I realized that our efforts had just been "building a good fire." When our congregation decided to do the amazing and employ Ryan Dockery to a full time position in Youth Ministry, it was like throwing a

gallon of gas on the fire. Boom! We exploded in worship attendance the last six months as well and as a result we did not have a single month when we did not exceed last years monthly average. Bringing Ryan on board full time was a stroke of genius by the church and I am simply thrilled having such a gifted minister in our presence. I look forward to seeing what seminary training does for him and us as we partner with him through this journey.

I want to be clear that the numbers are not what are important, although you might think that I care about nothing else. In reality what I and Bishop Mike care about is what worship attendance represent which is the health and vitality of a congregation. After 2012 I can tell you Tree of Life is strong and imaginative place for the Gospel. I am starting to hear dreams and ideas again in a way that I have not in the last few years. I see a good future ahead of us.

This story would not be complete though without mentioning a few other names which include our secretary Ida Craig who has worked through a huge learning curve as she completed her first year with us. I continue to stand by my statement last year that I don't hire members for staff positions, but Ida brings so much to the position and her willingness to go the extra mile is much appreciated and why she is deserving of this position. I also have to thank Daphne Cox who exhausted herself throwing every log and stick she could find on our fire here at Tree of Life. John the Baptist stated it best when talking about the coming of Christ. Matt 3:11 "I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." There is nothing enjoyable about being baptized by fire even if it is spirit lead. I think we can both say that we burn away our assumptions of each other and a few ideas we both had. But at the end of two years, we have discovered a deeper more meaningful relationship with our God and each other. Thank you Daphne for going into the fire with me and not loosing hope when the flames seemed to consume us at times.

Last of all, I need to thank my family. It is hard to explain just how often I have had to ask to be excused from a family event or meal to address a pressing church matter. However to have your family and spouse back me the way they do, I know I am blessed. When I got the word that Dave Griffin had died in a motor cycle accident, it was my wife who helped get me out the door as quickly as I could and told me to take care of Gretchen and not to worry about anything that I had committed to at home. Then quietly took my children to school and addressed several items that I was supposed to take care of that day forcing her to change h her schedule. That is just one of a thousand examples of how she so unselfishly gives of herself to this church so that I can be your pastor. People have expectations of their pastor, and we both understood those expectations when we took the call. You have to love the church, Jesus and your spouse to survive it though. I love you Katherine and thank you for all that you have done and made possible.

I will leave the facts and figures of the last year for you to read. They speak for themselves and I look forward to 2013 with hope for a future that reveals an even more faithful and vibrant congregation. This congregation is truly on fire and we are just starting to see what we can accomplish with our united flame in Christ. I have every expectation to show the world where hope lies, give the lonely warmth and comfort, and use this fire that we have started to cook and feed the hungry of spirit with good things that fill the soul and nourish the heart.

God's grace and peace to you,

Pastor Chris

**Baptisms 5**

Peyton Gary  
Kensley Nye  
Mason M. Mitsunaga-Pritz  
Parker Fry  
Jeffery Fry

**Confirmation 5**

Micayla Andrews  
Pablo Bacon  
Austin Funderburk  
Kyle Graves  
Ethan Pieniazek

**Births 2**

Danisha Brown  
Peyton Gary

**Deaths 1**

David Griffin

**New members 35**

Linda & Larry Crochet	Jim Johnson
Harley Elliott	Michelle Johnson
Richard & Peggy Mong	Annika Johnson
David Patzold	Treva Allen & Chuck Will
Debra Patzold	Seth Cunningham
David Patzold III	David France
Lindea Patzold	Kristine France
Perry Patzold	Jacqueline France
Destiny Perry	Monique France
Jessica Perry	Michael Fry
Rodney Perry	Penny Fry
Kelly Rayburn	Parker Fry
James Meriovsky	Jeffery Fry
Amy Meriovsky	David & Gail Pritz
Cody Meriovsky	Carlee Smith
Ryan Meriovsky	