

Leaders 4Life – December 2023

A newsletter from Y4Life

The Importance of Lineage

by Michelle Bauman, Director of Y4Life

I don't know about you, but I'm a big fan of family photos, especially generational ones. Whether browned at the edges or shiny and new, family photos are valuable.

They provide a record of sorts, not only of who we are at a moment in time but also how we are loved, where we belong, and, in some cases, how we came to be.

In the visual record photos offer, we also see God's life-affirming love: His gifts of sustenance over time, His work to sustain life over generations. Photos remind us of God's longevity, His commitment to upholding life with abundance.

And that reality isn't new. As Christians, we know that God's commitment to upholding life started long ago—before photos—before the beginning of time even. From His ordered creation of the world to His ordered creation of you in your mother's womb, God's work has always been life-affirming. Grafted into His family through Baptism, we have become children of God and inheritors of eternal life. Our lineage, our family photo, traces back to and includes Him.

It's easy to forget that truth though, isn't it? Sinful by nature and enamored by self-sufficiency, we often opt to serve self over fulfilling obligations to others. Ephesians 2:1-2 reminds us of our old Adam, our fallen nature that, no matter how often he is drowned, seems to rise up. Paul declares,

"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience ..."

Yet these verses are soon followed by the lineage God formed for us, one that traces back to Christ Himself:

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us ... made us alive with Christ" (Ephesians 2:4-5).

We died with Christ and rose with Him. In Him we now live.

That, my friends, changes everything.

The 2024 theme verse for Lutherans For Life is Ephesians 2:10:

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

As theme verses go, it's a good one. It reminds us of our vocations, our purpose even. God did call us to good works through our vocations; even now He gives us opportunity to serve Him by serving and upholding the lives of our neighbors.

But Ephesians 2:10 finds its roots, its lineage, in the verse that comes before:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."



Our works are made both possible and good because they are a result of His workmanship in our lives. They have meaning because their lineage is found in Him.

Lineage matters. And no lineage is more important than the lineage God provides through His Son, Jesus. He shapes our yesterdays and today's, and He is already at work to shape our tomorrows.

I don't yet know what it's like to have grandchildren of my own, but I can imagine that seeing a little part of yourself being passed on to another generation is a gift. Surely, recognizing the shape of your eyes or the tilt of your nose on the face of a new grandbaby would be a reminder of God's faithfulness. And watching a family mannerism or inclination toward a common hobby develop in a grandchild would make any grandparent proud.

But even greater than God's work to pass on our genetic code is His joy-filled work to pass on His Son's. And that most important work is carried out, by the grace of God, through Word and Sacrament and through you.

May you find many opportunities to pass along the lineage of Christ to those you love. And may you rejoice in the life-affirming work God has prepared in advance for you this day and in the year to come!



(Upper left) My dad's family. In back: my grandpa, Bob Bridges, Aunt Cheri, and my grandma, Mary Bridges. Front row (l-r): my dad, Michael, and my Uncle Larry. (Upper right) My mom, Mary Carlson (now Bridges), with her lamb, Tinkerbelle. (Lower left) My maternal grandparents—Carl and Donna Carlson—on their wedding day. (Lower right) My mom and her two older sisters. (l-r) Janie, Mom (Mary), Carla Carlson

Austin Alive

by Michaela Seeliger

My high school students attended the February 2022 Y4Life Summit in Austin, Texas, and learned about many organizations that work diligently to uphold God's good gift of life. Two of those students and I attended the Y4Life Team Training in October of 2022, and together we planned a life-themed mission trip for summer 2023, which we called "Austin Alive." The idea was that we would spend four days serving different organizations that upheld the value of life throughout all stages.

Our first day of serving was spent at Sarah's House, a maternity home in Austin for mothers who have chosen life for their babies.

Sarah's House not only provides a home, but it also helps women complete their education, find a steady job, manage their finances, and connect to a local church. Several women have been baptized through Sarah's House ministry! Our seven students helped move donated cribs from the attic of the maternity home for two mothers who were very close to their due dates! Then we went off-site to their storage unit, which was set to be demolished within a matter of weeks. We helped sort through items and moved them to a new storage unit. One of the pregnant mothers came with us as we cleaned out the storage unit, and our students were able to visit with her for quite a while. They learned that her baby is a girl, and she planned to name her Sunshine. Since our visit, Sunshine has been safely delivered, and her mother is doing well in Sarah's House. Praise be to God!

We stayed at an Airbnb with a theater room, so we spent that evening watching *Unplanned*, the story of how former Planned Parenthood employee, Abby Johnson, came to learn that abortion is the purposeful killing of a child. After the movie ended, we had hours of conversation about *Roe v. Wade* and the Dobbs decision, the emotional and spiritual impacts that result from the horrors of abortion, and how Sarah's House, as well as the organization we'd be serving the next day, were working faithfully to help women choose life for their children.

On the second day of the trip, we traveled north of Austin to Annunciation Maternity Home.

This ministry offers many resources to expectant mothers including housing, education, life skills classes, finance management, and Christian counseling. Our students stayed busy helping the staff prepare for an upcoming fundraiser by sorting through baby clothes. We spent a lot of time outside, and the students were cheerful servants and always kept the goal of being a Gospel-motivated voice for life in mind—even in the blazing central Texas heat!

During our next day of serving, we visited an assisted living home in Austin, where my heart swelled with joy as I saw my students THRIVE in serving!

They assisted the residents as they got some exercise playing cornhole and eagerly joined them for a game of trivia. They served snacks and sparkling grape juice during "Happy Hour" and joined right in for a sing-along during music time. One student and I went to the memory care wing and led a watercolor class for a few residents, while the other students continued playing games with the other residents. We met residents who were partially paralyzed, couldn't remember things that were said 30 seconds ago, couldn't speak, and couldn't see. We also met several staff members who were incredibly patient and loving. The students were quick to realize that the residents who had physical ailments or memory issues were still people God dearly loves and how valuable their lives are. As soon as we got in the car that evening to leave the assisted living home, every single student told me they want to serve with elderly people regularly at home. You can be sure I have already set up monthly visits to an assisted living center just up the road from our church for the coming semester!



On our final day of serving, we spent the whole day at a food bank.

The students were responsible for checking expiration dates, bagging fresh vegetables, and sorting through canned goods. Earlier in the week, several students said they weren't sure how serving at a food bank would be a life-affirming service project. However, while we were serving at Sarah's House, the staff told us that the majority of the food the mothers eat comes from that exact food bank. It was excellent motivation for our whole group when we realized that the food we were preparing was helping feed mothers and their babies! The students were certainly tired at the end of the day, but they all determined it was well worth it when the food bank staff announced that after six hours of service, we had helped prepare 7,550 meals for our neighbors in need!

Since returning home from our trip, several of the students' parents have told me that "Austin Alive" was the highlight of their child's summer and that they can't stop talking about all they learned. I am confident that God has mighty things planned for each of those high school students as they continue to uphold life in each of their vocations.

Michaela Seeliger is Director of Christian Education at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Wichita Falls, Texas.



Teaching 4 Life Award 2023

by Michelle Bauman, Director of Y4Life

The **Teaching 4 Life** award recipient should:

- Uphold the sanctity of life in the classroom and outside of it.
- Incorporate life issues into content material.
- Support life work outside the classroom.
- Exhibit care and concern for their students' lives.
- Encourage youth to share the message that every life is valuable because it has been created by God and redeemed by Jesus.
- Be unafraid to confess the truth about the sanctity of life, even when public opinion is opposed to this message, and be able to do so with a Gospel-motivated voice. He or she should actively mentor young people to do the same.
- Advance the mission of Lutherans For Life by equipping his or her neighbors, in particular his or her students, to be Gospel-motivated voices for life.

This year's **Teaching 4 Life Award** recipient is an exceptional example of the previous traits. Not only does she gently and effectively uphold all human life publicly and privately through her vocations, but she also actively teaches her students, from fourth grade all the way through high school, the truth that every life is valuable, including their own.

An advocate for life at all ages, this year's recipient intentionally pairs beliefs with action, abounding in life-affirming work in her church and school. For example, each year she hosts a tea for students, their grandparents, and other older members of the congregation during the school's Life Week celebration.

In addition, she regularly partners with local nursing home and assisted living facilities by providing age-appropriate ways for elementary, middle, and high school students to engage with and honor their unseen neighbors through artistic drawings, letter writing, and on-site visits filled with hymn sings and conversation time.

And as faculty advisor for her school's Y4Life Team, Lions 4 Life, she has expanded their life-affirming reach, connecting them with local opportunities to serve, such as the local pregnancy resource clinic.

But her work doesn't end there. As a high school English teacher, this year's recipient helps students wrestle with the life issues they encounter in literature through the topics they research and write about and through the hymn texts they are assigned to compose. Even beyond her classroom walls, Christy consistently encourages her students to learn and confess the truth that every life is valuable through opportunities like the Lutherans For Life essay contest and Y4Life Leadership Retreats.

Perhaps a fellow co-worker and nominator from Faith Lutheran School in Plano, Texas, describes her best:

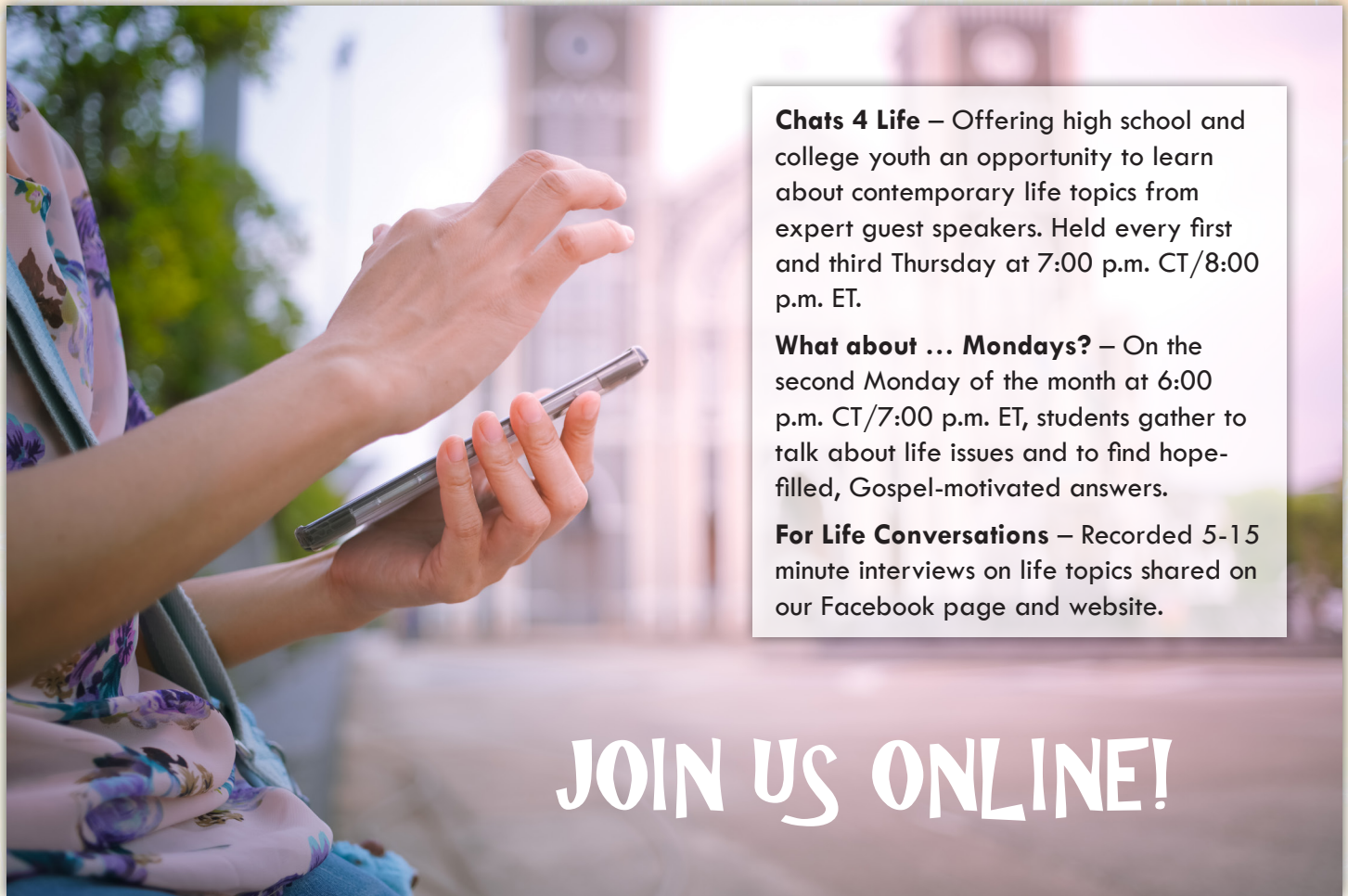


“Christy is one of those rare individuals that is a wonderful combination of dedication, passion, love, determination, and sincerity. Her Christ-centered focus shines through in everything that she does. Whether she is teaching students of all ages in the classroom, caring for an ill friend, celebrating family events, or interacting with church and school staff, she does everything with great love and energy ... always to the best of her ability ... Christy is passionate about life at all ages and stages, and this shines through in her work, personal life, and beyond.”

I could not agree more. It is my honor and pleasure to announce LFL and Y4Life’s very first Teaching 4 Life award recipient:

Mrs. Christine Rivers





Chats 4 Life – Offering high school and college youth an opportunity to learn about contemporary life topics from expert guest speakers. Held every first and third Thursday at 7:00 p.m. CT/8:00 p.m. ET.

What about ... Mondays? – On the second Monday of the month at 6:00 p.m. CT/7:00 p.m. ET, students gather to talk about life issues and to find hope-filled, Gospel-motivated answers.

For Life Conversations – Recorded 5-15 minute interviews on life topics shared on our Facebook page and website.

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