



Mountain *Mover*

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER | FAITH LUTHERAN CHURCH | JULY 2026

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Join us for
Camp
SUNDAY

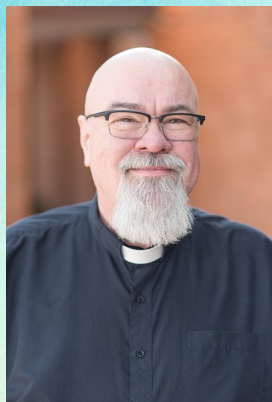


July 12th @ 9:30 a.m.

Faith Bellaire

Pastor's Thoughts

by Pastor Marvin Havard, Senior Pastor



"For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven." Ecclesiastes 3:1

Summer: heat, humidity, pool parties, fireworks, and so much more. School is out and many of us embark on vacations and other adventures. The vibe is a little more relaxed. At least for some of us!

I often laugh out loud when people ask if I'm happy that things have slowed down at the church for the summer. Then I explain what really happens around Faith during the summer months: three weeks of Faith Camp with 70+ kids and youth filling the building, Faith School and Faith House ministries that continue without a break, planning events and worship for the coming year like Launch Day (August 16) and our 80-40-30 anniversary celebrations (September 19-20), and much more. I'm not complaining! I love that this community keeps on serving throughout the year and that our space is always filled with activity.

The writer of Ecclesiastes is correct: there are seasons for everything and along with our usual activities, this summer has brought us a couple of new things.

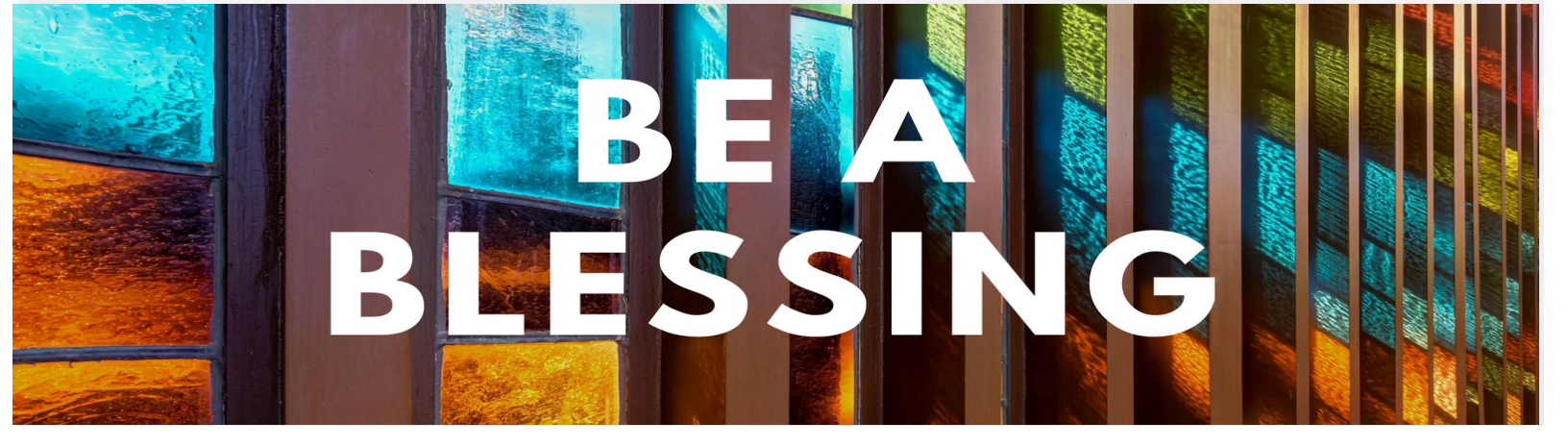
Our strategic planning process continues to move forward. We're finishing the first phase of the process: gathering information about the community, the congregation, and the ministry possibilities that exist. The consulting group will take what we've collected and bring back options to consider and suggestions for improvement. Then our team will continue our work by testing those ideas and reviewing our values and vision for ministry.

The other new thing is less exciting. After 28 years of dedicated ministry in music and worship, Alan Balius has announced his retirement as organist and choir director. When I begin ministry with a congregation, I'm always interested in the music program. No surprise there! I think about my own experiences as an organist and hope that my relationship with the congregation's musicians will be good. When I attended my first choir rehearsal, I was impressed with the intentionality of Alan's choices of music and the spiritual focus in rehearsals. Did you know that at the end of every rehearsal, the choir has prayer time? And not just a closing prayer but a time to share concerns and specific requests for prayers for individuals and issues. What a gift to choir members and those for whom they pray! We will celebrate Alan's ministry with Faith Lutheran Church in worship on Sunday, July 26 and a reception following worship.

As Alan finishes his time with us, we will begin an interim period as we search for a new organist and choir director. As with a long-term pastorate, there will need to be a time of adjustment before a long-term director is hired. Alan's season with us ends and a new season begins. We'll celebrate Alan's time with us, take a short breath from rehearsals in August, and gather again to enter a new season.

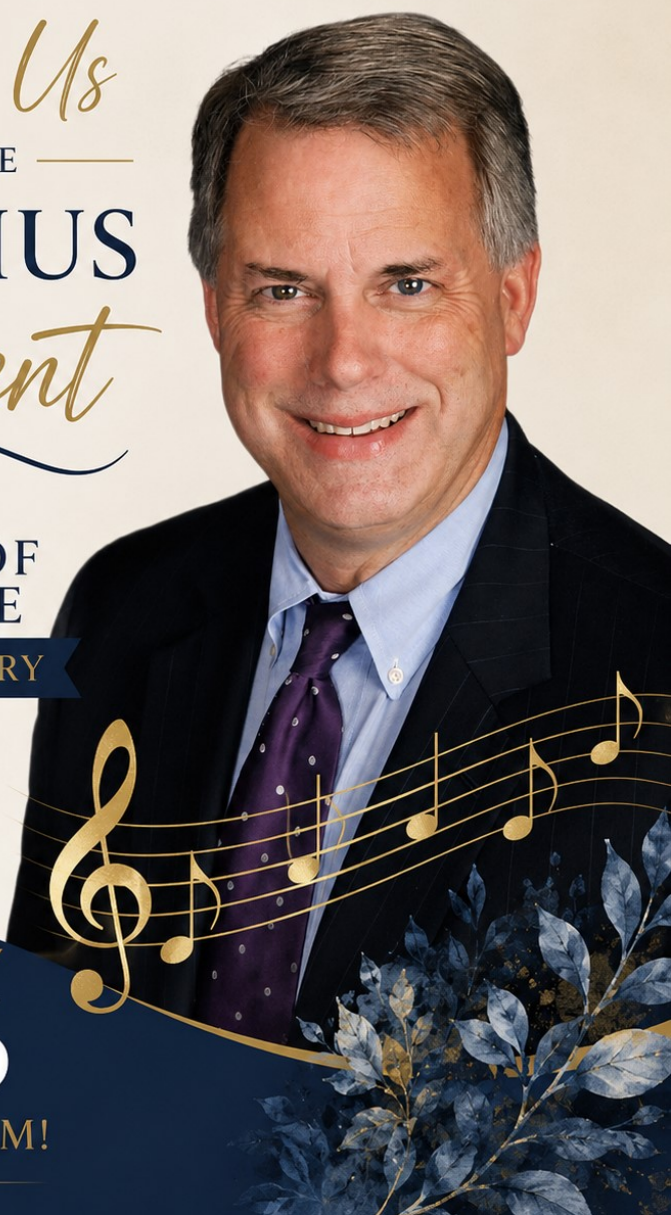
The seasons continue to change and God walks with us through them. Maybe even moving us to sing or hum along with those changes: To everything... (Turn, Turn, Turn) there is a season.

Peace & Blessings,
Pastor Marvin



BE A BLESSING

*The mission of Faith Lutheran Church is
to follow Jesus in blessing the world
with faith, hope, and love.*

A composite image featuring a portrait of a smiling man with grey hair, wearing a dark suit, light blue shirt, and a purple patterned tie. To his right, there are golden musical notes on a staff. At the bottom right, there is a branch with blue leaves and small white flowers.

Please Join Us
— AS WE CELEBRATE —
ALAN BALIUS
Retirement
AFTER
28 YEARS OF
SERVICE
TO THE MUSIC MINISTRY

 **FAITH**
LUTHERAN CHURCH

Join us on
JULY 26
AS WE CELEBRATE HIM!
— ♥ —

Two Kingdoms, One Lord

by Pastor Junfeng Tan, Associate Pastor



This Fourth of July, our nation celebrates its 250th birthday. As a naturalized citizen and a Christian pastor, I have been reflecting on a simple question: How should Christians love their country?

Martin Luther offers a helpful answer through his teaching on the Two Kingdoms. Luther believed that God rules the world with two hands—a left hand and a right hand. Both belong to God, and both are important.

The Left-Hand Kingdom: Serving as Citizens

God's left-hand kingdom is the world of everyday life. It includes government, schools, businesses, courts, neighborhoods, and families. Here God works through laws, public institutions, and civil authorities to preserve order and promote the common good. Luther never saw this as less important than church life. In fact, he believed this work is one of the ways God cares for the world. When we vote thoughtfully, serve on a jury, pay our taxes honestly, teach a child, help a neighbor, serve in public office, or work for justice and peace, we are participating in God's work in society. Through ordinary people doing ordinary things faithfully, God provides care and stability for others.

The Right-Hand Kingdom: Living Under Grace

But there is another kingdom. Luther called it God's right-hand kingdom—the kingdom where Christ reigns through the Gospel. Here God does not rule through laws or government. God rules through grace, forgiveness, and mercy, working through the preaching of the Gospel and the ministry of the Church.

These two kingdoms must be carefully distinguished, but never divorced. Government cannot save souls, and the church is not called to govern nations or use political power to convert people. Each has its own role, and both are part of God's work in the world.

Citizenship in God's right-hand kingdom does not come through birth certificates or naturalization papers. It is God's gift to us through Jesus Christ. Through his death and resurrection, we are welcomed into God's family.

Yet the Bible reminds us that we are also pilgrims and sojourners. Peter writes that we are living as temporary residents in this world (1 Peter 1:17). The heroes of faith in the book Hebrews confessed that they were "strangers and foreigners on the earth" (Hebrews 11:13). They were looking for a better homeland—a heavenly one.

So while we give thanks for our earthly country, we remember that our deepest citizenship is in heaven.

Where the Two Kingdoms Meet: Welcoming the Stranger

This is where the two kingdoms come together.

Because we know what it means to be welcomed by grace, we are called to welcome others. Because God welcomed us when we had nothing to offer, we can open our hearts to those who are far from home. The immigrant, the refugee, the migrant worker, the international student, the visiting scholar—these are not simply issues to debate. They are people created and loved by God. They are our neighbors. I know this personally. Before I was a pastor, before I was a citizen, I was a stranger in a new land. Others welcomed me, helped me find my place, and made this country feel like home.

And there is an even deeper reason for this welcome. In the book of Revelation, John sees a vision of God's future. He sees "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9).

This is where God's story is leading. The kingdom we are moving toward includes people from every corner of the world, praising God together in every language.

Whenever we welcome a stranger today, we get a glimpse of the heavenly home God is preparing for us. We are simply practicing for heaven.

Holding Both Together

So this Fourth of July, let us hold both kingdoms together, just as Luther taught. Let us be faithful citizens—voting, serving, building communities, and seeking the common good.

And let us be faithful pilgrims—living by grace, quick to forgive, eager to welcome strangers, and always remembering that our ultimate home is with God.

Happy Birthday, America.

And come, Lord Jesus.



Safety Check-In Ministry Announcement:

The Safety Check-In Ministry is a caring ministry designed to support members of our congregation who live alone. Through brief daily or regular check-ins by phone, text message, or the Snug app, this ministry helps promote safety, connection, and peace of mind. If you live alone and would like to participate, please contact Pastor Tan (jtan@faithbellaire.org) or Elaine Gabriel (egabriel3@comcast.net) for more information or to sign up. We are also seeking caring and reliable volunteers to serve in this ministry. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact Pastor Tan or Elaine.

Lutheran Theology as Freedom Theology

by Pastor Amber Harbolt, Pastor for Faith Formation



One of the delights of attending a seminary that is a member of a large theological union was that I received a broad and well-rounded education. I learned about pastoral care from Buddhists, death and dying from the Swedenborgians, James Baldwin & the Bible from an American Baptist, and leadership in times of transformation from some Congregationalists.

With so much to choose from, though, my seminary had to be intentional and creative in the way it presented courses, since they had to entice both Lutheran seminarians like myself and the larger student body of the Graduate Theological Union. What might dryly be called basic Lutheran Readings in a typical seminary was called Freedom Theology with Martin Luther in mine.

Catchy, right?

Bringing a hermeneutic (or perspective) of freedom opened a new world of interpretation, application, and critique of foundational Lutheran writings. Here's what I mean. Buckle up, we're about to get very Lutheran.

As Lutherans, our doctrinal standard is a great big book called the *Book of Concord* that functions as the "rule and norm" of what Lutherans of all kinds think and believe. It's got the Creeds, the Augsburg Confession, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Small and Large Catechisms, booklets with Luther's thoughts on marriage and baptism, and a few other articles and treatises. Our primary confession of faith (after the Creeds) is summarized in the Augsburg Confession. It's a little dense, but using a perspective of freedom can help us make our way through some of it.

1. This is how we are set free: humans cannot achieve righteousness and forgiveness before God (justification) through anything we do or don't do (e.g., merit, works, accomplishments, etc.). Justification comes from God out of unmerited grace through Christ's suffering for [and with] us by means of faith. (Article IV)
2. It is this faith that yields the good works that God has set before us to carry out, not because they are the key to our salvation, but freely and simply as the fruit, the lived response to being reconciled with God. (Article VI)
3. Living faithfully does not mean we must live separately from the world, but within it. Christians must be obedient to secular laws, governing authorities, public order, etc., unless doing so would cause one to sin. (Article XVI)
4. Lutherans' understanding of faith does not prohibit good works at all. Rather, faith alone moves the heart to good works, not the threat of damnation or promise of reconciliation to God. This is what makes Lutheran theology (in my, Pastor Amber's, opinion) a freedom theology: that Christians are liberated from the cycle of sin and trying to earn salvation so that we can do the good things God has commanded us, like loving our neighbors and avoiding evil. (Article XX)

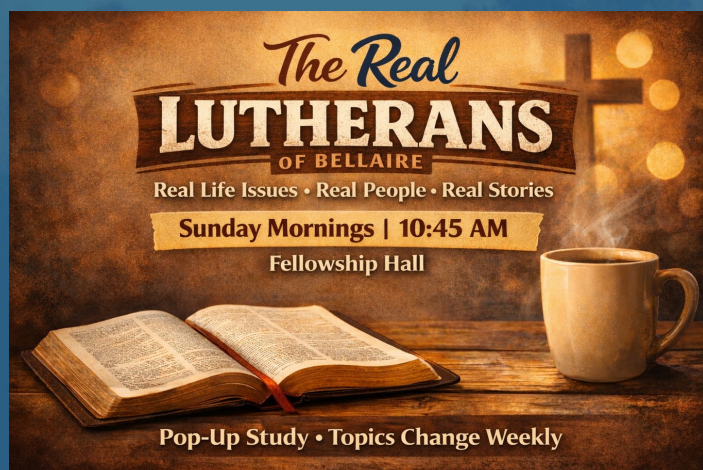
Luther put it more simply (rare for Luther, I know), in his treatise titled *On The Freedom of a Christian*: "Insofar as a Christian is free, he or she does nothing; insofar as the Christian is a slave, he or she does all things." And again, "The Christian individual is a completely free lord of all, subject to none. The Christian individual is a completely dutiful servant of all, subject to all." To me, this is the core paradoxical freedom we inhabit as Christians. We are "freed from," but we are also "freed to." Christians are freed from Mosaic restrictions and obligations, the chains of original sin, and the spiritual and psychological angst of constantly striving to win a merits-based salvation or avoid damnation, and we are freed to follow Christ and natural law in service to others. The freedom of a Christian is Gospel (God's grace in Christ that frees us) and it is also Law (we are to help and serve others from a guiding ethic of neighbor-love).

This month, amid cookouts and pool parties and fireworks, I invite you to consider your own freedom.

What has God freed you from?

What has God freed you for?

God's peace,
Pastor Amber

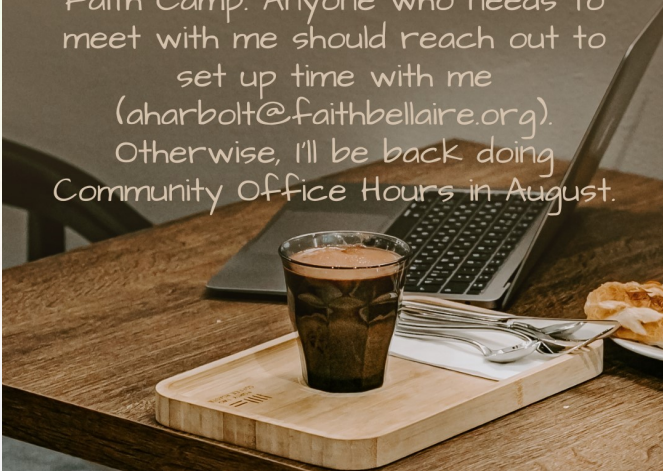


- ❖ July 5 - Creed Series: God the Son
- ❖ July 12 - Camp Games for Grown-ups
- ❖ July 19 - Creed Series: God the Spirit
- ❖ July 26 - Creed Series: Living It Out


**July
2026**

Pastor Amber's Community Office Hours

I don't have any community office hours scheduled for July due to Faith Camp. Anyone who needs to meet with me should reach out to set up time with me (aharbolt@faithbellaire.org). Otherwise, I'll be back doing Community Office Hours in August.




Adult volunteers are needed
for a few hours each day to:

- ♦ take pictures
- ♦ help with crafts
- ♦ Be a PAP (Positive Adult Presence)

Email aharbolt@faithbellaire.org to volunteer for a few hours, a day or a week.

Welcoming the Voice of Change: A Summer of Renewal in Our Worship Life

by Rev. Dr. Jerry Maynard, Director of Worship



As we enter the summer season, our culture embraces longer days with scorching heat, humidity, and plenty of time for relaxation. Spiritually speaking, summer is a time when creation reminds us that change is always moving, reshaping, inviting.

This summer, we are embracing a simple but powerful spiritual principle: change is the first and final voice we should always welcome.

At the very beginning of scripture, we read that God spoke creation into being; that first voice is the voice of movement — separating light from darkness, waters from land, calling life into places of despair. Continuing in our reading of scripture, we are promised “a new heaven and a new earth” — a final voice of change that gathers all things into God’s renew-

ing love.

Change, then, is not something we resist or fear but rather, something we welcome, knowing that God is already there, preparing the way ahead.

You might ask: Why change something that’s familiar? Namely, the familiar can be a gift, but it can also become a comfort zone that no longer stretches us. Welcoming change is one of the surest ways to stay awake to God’s surprises. Change reminds us that faith is a journey, not a fixed place.

In his book *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminds us, “The Christian cannot simply take for granted the privilege of living among other Christians.” This is especially true when we gather in worship: it is a privilege, a gift, to let God shape us anew so let us not take it for granted.

Together, let us practice the holy art of welcoming the new, knowing that it is in the movement of change that we meet the living God.



The church office and school will be closed



Each year Faith Camp campers partner with local organizations that make a difference in our communities.

This year we are partnering with:



kids' meals

Monetary Donations
also accepted here:



We need your help collecting:

Note: Kids' Meals can only accept specifically the items listed below.



Protein

Peanut Butter Crackers
Jerky
Tuna Packs



Fruit

Fruit Cups
Individual Applesauce
100% Fruit Snacks



Snack

Snack bags of:
SkinnyPop
Pretzels



Drink

8oz Waterbottles
100% Juice Boxes

You can drop your donation in the lobby of the church

Need Help Dealing with Grief?

GriefShare Grief & Loss Support Groups Are Here for You

Sundays, July 19 to October 18, 2026 @ 3:00 PM - 4:30 PM
Faith Lutheran Church Main Building Conference Room
Contact: Pastor Tan (jtan@faithbellaire.org or 832-540-6802)

A GriefShare support group is a safe, welcoming place where people understand the difficult emotions of grief. Through this 13-week group, you'll discover what to expect in the days ahead and what's "normal" in grief. Since there are no neat, orderly stages of grief, you'll learn helpful ways of coping with grief, in all its unpredictability—and gain solid support each step of the way.

At GriefShare you'll receive valuable guidance and tips, leading you to relief, comfort, and peace of mind.

Videos that encourage

Each weekly GriefShare group begins with a 30-minute video featuring respected experts on grief-related topics and helpful stories from people who have experienced loss. Their insights will help you manage your emotions, gain clarity, and find answers to your questions as you walk through the grief process.

Supportive discussions

After the video, you and the other group members will spend time discussing what was presented in the video and what is going on in your lives. Talking with other people who understand what you're experiencing brings great comfort, normalizes the grief experience, and offers a supportive environment to work through your grief.

Helpful book to guide you

Your participant guide serves as a road map on your grief journey. This book helps you process your emotions and experiences and cope with the loss. You'll apply what you've heard in the group and gain tools to deal with complicated grief.

GriefShare®



Our mission is to provide a safe, welcoming environment for vulnerable youth experiencing homelessness of all sexualities and genders, providing nourishment, healthy relationships, and hope for the future.

Every Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday at 6:00 pm, Grace Place opens its doors to youth experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity of all sexualities and genders between the ages of 13 and 24 years old. Youth Night is an evening of food, mentorship, skills building, and access to direct resources with interactive volunteers and staff in a supportive, affirming space that allows youth to be who they are.

Contact Pastor Tan (jtan@faithbellaire.org or 832-540-6802) if you would like to join the Faith team to provide home-made dinner to homeless youth at the Grace Place *one Monday every other month*. The remaining 2026 dates are: **July 13, September 14 and November 9.**

Be a blessing!



Volunteers Needed for **CCSC Food Pantry**

For I was hungry and you gave me food. (Matthew 25:35)
Come to join the Faith food pantry volunteer team!

Saturdays, July 11, August 8, October 3, October 31
@ 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM

St. Luke's United Methodist Church Gethsemane Campus
(6856 Bellaire Blvd, Houston, TX 77074)

To join the Faith Food Pantry Team or for more information, contact Pastor Tan at jt看@faithbellaire.org or 832-540-6802.



Help students start the school year strong

Since 1986, CCSC has been helping students from low-income families prepare for the first day of school. This year's program will provide 4,000 students with school supplies, a backpack and a \$50 clothing gift card.

GIVE Online

<https://secure.qgiv.com/for/ccscbacktoschoolsupplies>

Volunteer

July: Supply Bag Assembly

Package school supplies into pre-K through 12th grade bags.

Volunteer ages: 5+

Parental supervision is required for children ages 12 and under.

August: Community Event

Distribute school supply bags, backpacks and gift cards to clients.

Volunteer ages: 15+



\$75

provides brand-new school
supplies, a backpack, and a
clothing gift card
to a child in need.

Become a 72 Hour Lutheran

Hurricane season is from June 1 through November 30. Early preparation is essential to staying safe all season but we may not be as prepared as we need to be. We encourage each and every one of you to become a **72 Hour Lutheran**, *a person who has enough supplies in their home to meet their household's basic needs for 72 hours.*

Checklist:

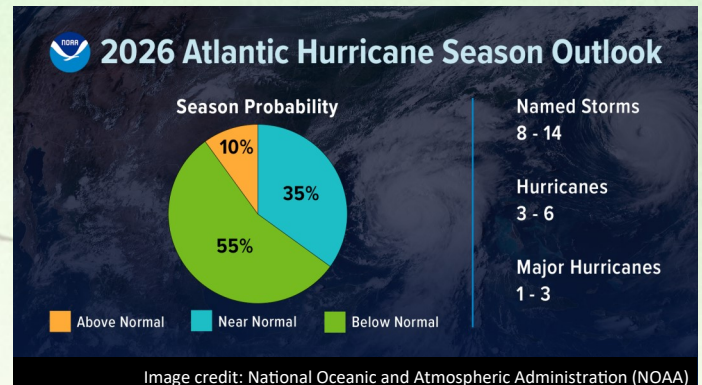
- ☐ Discuss the type of hazards that could affect your family. Know your home's vulnerability to storm surge, flooding, and wind. Locate a safe room or the safest areas in your home for each hurricane hazard. In certain circumstances, the safest areas may not be your home but within your community.
- ☐ If necessary, determine an escape route from your home and designate places to meet. (Note: these should be measured in tens of miles, rather than hundreds of miles.) Have an out-of-state friend as a family contact so all your family members have a single point of contact.
- ☐ Make a plan now for what to do with your pets if you need to evacuate.
- ☐ Call the church and make sure that they have all your information.
- ☐ Create a **Disaster Supply Kit**

Proper identification. Immunization records. Medicines, Prescriptions. Waterproof bag for important documents and items, Flashlight/ Batteries, Battery operated and NOAA weather radio. Fully charged cellphone, charger, power bank, etc. Access to a traditional (non-wireless) landline phone, in your home or at a nearby trusted location. Cash (with small bills). Extra keys. Tools - keep a set with you during the storm. Vehicle fuel tank (kept filled). Pet care items, including drinking water.

- ☐ Stock up on **Non-perishable Emergency Supplies**

One gallon of water per person per day. Snack foods. Cooking tools. BBQ, camp stove, or other method of heating food. Non-electric can opener. Fuel, oil for generators, chainsaws, etc. Paper plates and plastic utensils. First-aid kit. Toiletries, hygiene items, moist wipes. Weather & news apps downloaded to devices. Bug repellent. Duct tape. Tarps.

Scan the QR code to link to the Synod Disaster Response & Preparedness resource page.



Faith Lutheran Church

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Faith House: 713-664-3048

FaithBellaire.org

FaithDaySchool.org

FaithHouseHouston.org

info@faithbellaire.org

Pr. Marvin Havard

Pr. Junfeng Tan

Pr. Amber Harbolt

Stacy Williams

Dr. Jerry Maynard

Kendolyn Pope

Alan Balias

Yu Cao

Patricia Deckard

Lin Chen

Malcolm Mathis

Teresa Roman

Senior Pastor

Associate Pastor

Pastor for Faith Formation

Director of Operations

Director of Worship & Digital Ministries

Director of Faith Schools

Organist/Choir Director

Office Coordinator

Office Coordinator

Faith Formation Admin Assistant

Facility Sexton

Accounting Clerk

