



ILLUMINATIONS

Sharing the Gospel Always

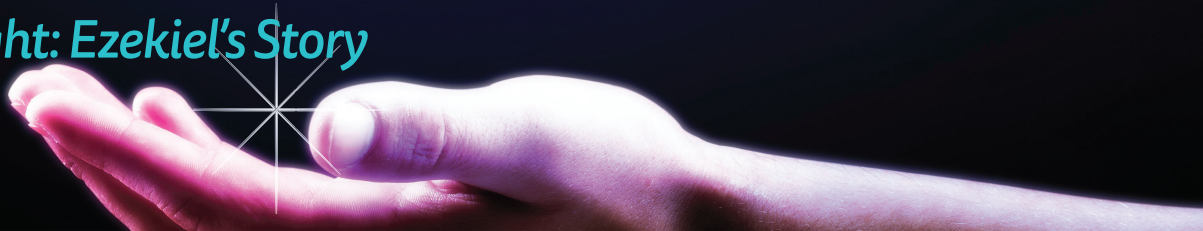
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Touching the Light: Ezekiel's Story



When Ezekiel was born, doctors knew he would face challenges. A rare birth defect left his body twisted and frail, with fingers curled tightly into his palms. Yet even as a child, he learned to adapt, to persevere, and to live with remarkable determination. Losing his eyesight, however, was something he never expected. For years, Ezekiel lived with his disability without any indication that blindness would follow. But one morning, without warning, he woke up in total darkness.

"I didn't think it would happen to me," he said quietly. "But that day, everything changed."

Still, Ezekiel refused to let blindness take away the one thing he loved most—reading Scripture. His church had been studying the book of Mark, his favorite book of the Bible, and he had cherished every word. When he lost his sight, he longed to continue, not by listening to an audio Bible, but by **reading God's Word for himself**.

During the pandemic, Ezekiel hoped to enroll in a school to learn Braille, but lockdowns made that impossible. So he did something remarkable: he taught himself Braille. Using printed coursework and extraordinary determination, he mastered the tactile code in just one month. Learning Braille, however, wasn't enough. Like many Blind Christians in Mexico, Ezekiel could not afford a Braille Bible. Then he discovered the Bible Society of Mexico, who connected him with a Braille Bible produced and provided free of charge by Lutheran Braille Workers.

When Nate Paredes, LBW's Vice President of Operations & Finance, traveled to Mexico with the United Bible Society, he met Ezekiel and asked him what receiving this Bible meant. Ezekiel lifted his hands over the Braille pages and said something Nate will never forget:

"When I read the Bible, I can touch light."

Nate shared the moment this way: ***"One thing he said that stuck with me was how touching the Bible is so important to him. Even the smell of the paper, the whole experience, it matters. He told me he didn't want to hear someone read the Bible; he wanted to read it himself. And then he said, 'When I read this, I can touch light.' You and I, we see light, but he said, 'I can touch it.' For him, because he's touching the Word of God, he's confident he's touching light. That really got me."***

That simple phrase, ***"I can touch light,"*** captured everything Ezekiel had fought for: independence, hope, and faith made tangible in darkness. Reading Scripture by touch gives him a closeness to God that he cannot experience in any other way. It gives him dignity. It gives him strength. And it reminds him that he is not alone.

Ezekiel's story is more than a testimony of resilience; it is a witness to how the Light of Christ breaks through even the deepest darkness. Because of supporters like you, Ezekiel now reads Scripture every day, one page at a time, his fingers tracing the promises of God. The Bible is hope he can feel and light he can touch.





It seems like only yesterday that I started my new position as president of Lutheran Braille Workers. I'm so grateful for the kind welcome extended to me from the Board of Directors, the amazing volunteers I've met at the production and outreach centers and our extremely talented and dedicated staff.

Although it was hard to leave parish life, I have only grown my commitment and passion for the ministry and vision of Lutheran Braille Workers. In fact, I will continue to use the title of my column each issue with a play on my last name, **Hart**well, as I describe my passion for the mission and vision and the many God moments along the way.

This issue, my heart has been encouraged and filled up by the work of LBW's Ministry Outreach Centers where the blind and those with low vision gather for support, worship and fellowship. Dr. Brooke Pernice is the Director of Outreach and helps support and encourage these centers.

I recently met a center leader who has a strong program. She is blind and a mother and grandmother and has the most loving way about her. She wondered why she was asked to meet the new President. I shared that I am trying to meet as many production and outreach center leaders as I can and I happened to be near her home. It turns out God was intending to inspire me with this Saint of God. She manages the center with grace and wisdom, has a wonderful sense of humor and does it all despite some great challenges, but saturated with faith.

Our ministry is for the Blind and Sight Impaired but also with and alongside these sisters and brothers in Christ. Our Board of Directors adopted the following goal (among others):

Enhance awareness of available resources: Equip staff, volunteers, and congregations to connect people who are Blind or Visually Impaired with appropriate programs and services.

This is not just a goal **for** the Blind but also **for** the church and community at large. Blind and Low Vision persons often feel isolated. Yet they have spiritual gifts and a witness to Christ that we all need. I needed to meet this faithful woman of God, and she inspired me through her dedication and faithfulness. In your prayers, pray for the overall ministry of LBW but especially the ministry of our production and outreach centers and their leaders across the USA. Their work is awesome and fills my **Hart** for the mission of LBW.



Merry Christmas!

Robert Hartwell

(Rev. Dr.) Rob Hartwell
President, Lutheran Braille Workers



Year End Alleluias! *from the LBW Staff*

As we approach the end of another meaningful year, our LBW staff took a moment to reflect on the experiences that brought joy, inspiration, and gratitude in 2025. Our favorite moments of the year reflect the heart of our mission and the incredible people who make it possible. May these reflections warm your heart as much as they did ours.

My favorite event was getting a new President at LBW and he's doing an awesome job so far!

~ Deanna

My favorite moment of this year was Youth Gathering. It was amazing to see everyone's hard work and collaboration come to fruition. I also loved seeing the youths passion for Christ and ministry.

~ Cynthia

My favorite Godwink moment was when a mother and her son happened to stop by LBW HQ on their walk home from church. The mother was in tears when she found out we had a Spanish Braille Bible perfect for her to take home to her blind daughter the same day, who had been without for quite some time. It showed me a first hand reaction of how our materials are received and just how much they mean to those in need of access to the word of God.

~ Madyson

My Godwink moment was the first production center opening after I started, which just so happened to be in (Godwink) the New York metro area where I have lived most of my adult life. St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Brooklyn. And I got to experience Rachel Potts and Cynthia Keh in action as they helped set up the center and train the leaders and volunteers with expert care.

~ Pastor Hartwell

I hosted a baby shower for a friend earlier this year up in the chapel, during the event I gave a tour of HQ to show off all the Braillos/Pumas and such. During the tour, everyone lost a bit of focus on the party and became infatuated with what we do for the Blind/Low Vision community. I was able to handout quite a few of our materials to very gracious people. The exposure was fantastic for us. These people drive by our office everyday and never knew what we did...they were in Awe!

~ Sky

LBW Staff Shares Christmas Joy with Children in Yucaipa

For many years, the staff of Lutheran Braille Workers has embraced a beloved Christmas tradition: collecting funds to give bicycles to children in need in Yucaipa. What began as a small act of kindness has grown into a treasured annual project that brings together staff, donors, and the local community.

Each December, LBW team members pool their resources, shop for bikes of all sizes, and deliver them with joy. For the LBW staff, this tradition is more than gift-giving; it's a way to share the love of Christ in a tangible, meaningful way during the holiday season.

The project has become a highlight of the year for LBW employees, who eagerly look forward to participating. This is just another expression of the heart of LBW's ministry: serving others, spreading hope, and shining light into the lives of those who need it most.



Michigan District Pastors Conference

LBW was blessed to be part of the Michigan District Pastors Conference this week, a gathering that brought together leaders from more than 340 congregations across the state!

LBW Board of Directors' Priscilla Newton and Director of Ministry Relations & Strategic Partnerships Rachel Potts shared how God works through thousands of volunteers - including those at five production centers in Michigan - to produce and distribute free Braille and Large Print Bibles and Christian materials.

The conference theme, "Boldly Preaching When it Seems Like No One is Listening," reminded us of the power of proclaiming the Gospel with confidence and compassion. What a joy to join in fellowship, worship, and shared mission!



Michigan District Pastors Conference

Rachel Potts spoke at Convocation Hour at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana, on October 15, introducing future pastors and deaconesses to the free Braille and large print Bibles, devotionals, and other church resources that LBW provides to individuals and congregations. Rachel shared that these resources allow those who are blind or visually impaired to participate fully in the life of their congregations and in their personal devotional life. It was a special reunion for Provost Dr. Charles Geischen and Rachel. He was her pastor when she was in high school in Northern Michigan!



Hands up for St. John's Lutheran School in Midland, Michigan



Their students have been bringing chapel offerings to support LBW this quarter, and Rachel Potts got to hang out with them in late October during chapel! They talked about how we can share the amazing news of Jesus' love with everyone, especially those with visual impairments. *Thanks, St. John's, for helping LBW make this happen and for being part of this awesome mission!*



#151 Redeemer Lutheran: Ontario, California

On Sunday, November 9, President Robert Hartwell visited Redeemer Lutheran Church in Ontario, California, home of Ministry Production Center #151. After sharing the message during worship, he toured the center and thanked the amazing volunteers who produce Spanish Braille four days each week!

Redeemer's team has served faithfully since 1983, working even through COVID. They produce about 450–525 Braille pages a day, roughly one full Braille Bible every five working days (about 50 volunteer hours!).

The center also honored longtime volunteer Ernie Baughman for 10+ years of service, celebrated new volunteers, and recognized milestone anniversaries, including one over 20 years. Pastor Daniel Grabowski closed the day with a special blessing for LBW and all who serve. *Thank you, Redeemer volunteers, for shining Christ's light through your faithful hands!*



#173 Christ the Redeemer: Tulsa, Oklahoma

President Hartwell visited the awesome Ministry Production Center #73 at Christ the Redeemer Lutheran Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Amazing center and volunteers and a church in mission in so many ways. What a great start to the day. Thanks to Claudette Brown and Patti Ross for the warm welcome!



#14 Trinity Lutheran: Edmond, Oklahoma

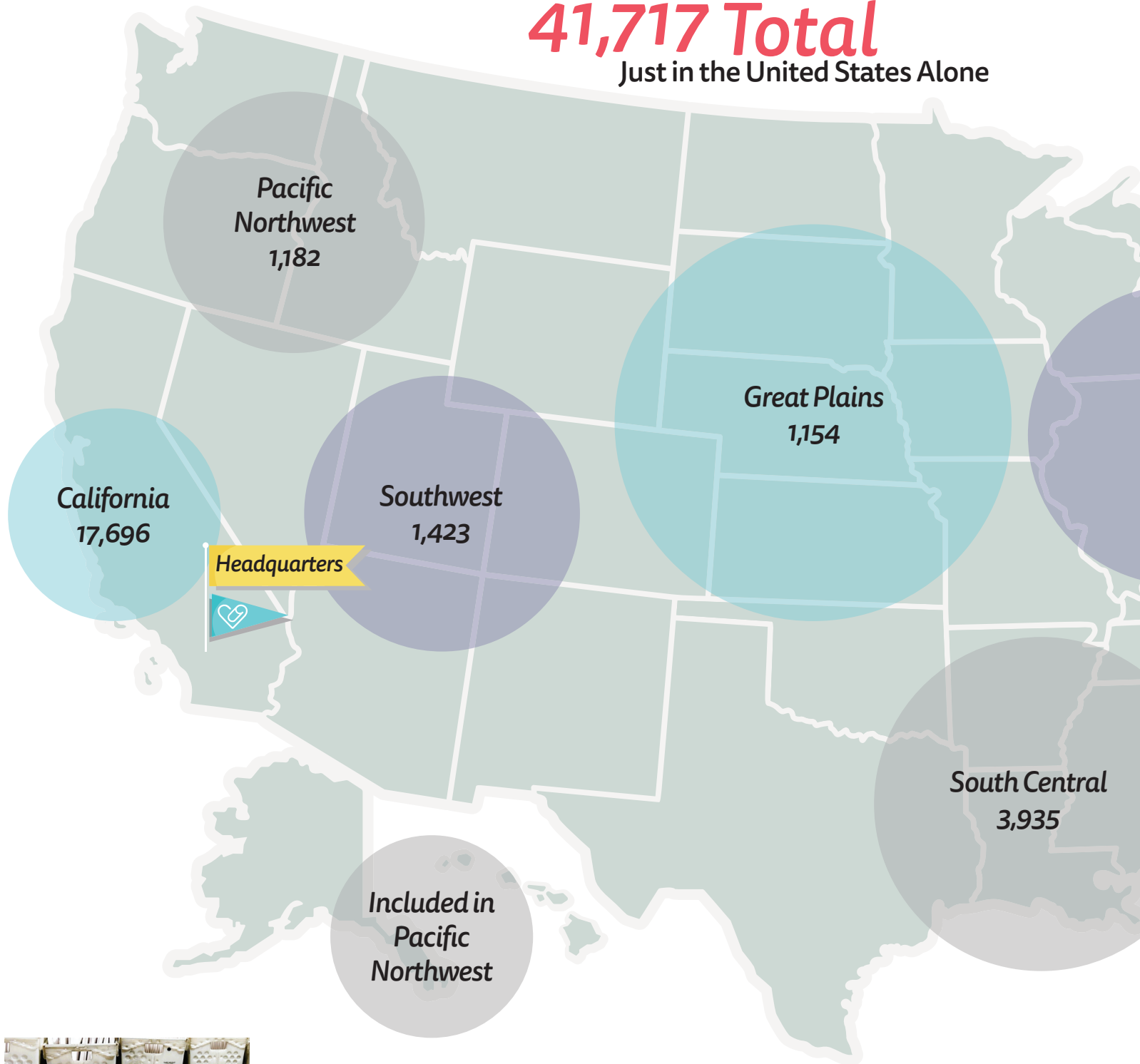
President Hartwell stopped by Ministry Production Center #14, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Edmond, OK, on October 16 and met up with the Meyer's who gave him a tour of the active Ministry Center and Holy Trinity's beautiful church and school campus.



These numbers represent the number of volumes of materials ordered in each region

41,717 Total

Just in the United States Alone



31 Totes with 900+ Calendars Shipped!

A huge thank you to all of the volunteers at Ministry Production Center #310 at Trinity Lutheran in Peoria, Illinois. About 840 domestic and 60 international calendars were shipped in mid-October, and the remaining calendars were sent out in early November.

NATIONWIDE IMPACT



New Center Opening in Brooklyn, New York

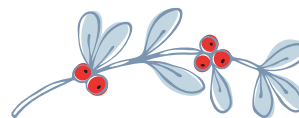
Praise God for new beginnings in Brooklyn! Last weekend, Lutheran Braille Workers officially opened Large Print Ministry Production Center #334 at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Brooklyn, New York.

We were blessed to celebrate with LBW President Rev. Dr. Robert Hartwell, Cynthia Keh, Rachel Potts, Deaconess Miriam Lamboy and her sister Linda (who will serve as the new center leaders), President Bishop Dien Taylor of the LCMS Atlantic District, and President Deaconess Raquel Rojas of the LWML Atlantic District. More than 15 volunteers attended training sessions and were enthusiastic about beginning this new ministry at St. Paul's. Their energy and presence made the dedication especially meaningful as we launched this center committed to sharing the Gospel with those who are blind or visually impaired.

This opening is also a homecoming for President Hartwell, who served as pastor in the Atlantic District for 28 years. St. Paul's now joins that legacy, stepping forward to ensure that all people, regardless of visual ability, can read and treasure God's Word.



Along with production at headquarters and a servant event at Crean High School, a total of 2,610 Braille calendars have been printed to share God's Word with people who are Blind or Visually Impaired around the world.



We are excited to present this devotional in each newsletter written by our Director of Outreach, Dr. Brooke Pernice. Brooke is a Doctor of Ministry and is writing these devotions to present a perspective on life as somebody who is Blind.



Something Greater

Written by Dr. Brooke Pernice, Director of Outreach

I recently contacted Dr. Michael Kibbe, a Christian scholar whose thoughts on stewardship and vocation have helped me to encourage other blind believers. He'd never encountered anyone blind before, so I told him several of the stories I've recounted in prior news letters. Eventually, we started talking about the Church's view of blindness, and my concerns about it. I summarized the Reformed theologian John Frame's wonderful case that the Church should prioritize ministry to the disabled. I then mentioned his statements that, "Disablement is part of the curse that comes after the Fall ... those who come to Christ find in the disabled a picture of their own weakness." "I've heard that all my life," Dr. Kibbe said, "and never thought about it, but hearing you lay it out, that doesn't sit very well with me now either."

I told him I couldn't say much about disabilities in general but could speak with some authority on blindness. "I don't deny blindness has something to do with the Fall," I said, "but immediately after they fell, the first consequence for Adam and Eve was the opening of their eyes. That new vision wasn't good. Then God claims responsibility for it in Exodus pretty directly, and Jesus talks about it being for God's glory in John 9." He asked, "If God has more involvement in blindness than just allowing it, how does all of this come together?" "Sight was clearly warped after the Fall," I answered, because shame is connected with it starting with Adam and Eve. When God talks about what He beholds, He contrasts it with physical sight, and one thing about blind people is that we can't make the snap judgments our sighted friends do. Blindness and vision are forms of sight, both are incomplete, but blindness can provide an important correction to the shallower aspects of the sighted worldview. It's part of our calling." "And in the NEW Jerusalem?" he asked.

"To paraphrase C. S. Lewis's words through the professor in 'The Last Battle'" I said, "our own [senses] [sight] and all, [are] only a shadow or copy of something in [Jesus'] real world." "What I'm hearing," he said, "is that we don't have a very good understanding of eternity. We just imagine that we'll see more things in Heaven and see them better, but sight in the New Heavens and Earth will be way more than the sense we know now. It will include some parts of sight that we're familiar with, and some aspects that only the blind understand, but it will be vision of a different kind than any of us have ever experienced." "That's what I meant," I told him. "Only you said it much more beautifully." "Blindness is your vocation," Dr. Kibbe said. *"God called you to fast but not in the way most people think. Sighted people aren't getting an early taste of the heavenly banquet, we're just eating a snack. We enjoy it, but it's not the food we'll have at the Lamb's supper. You're waiting, more fully anticipating something greater."*

This conversation with Dr. Michael Kibbe, an author, theologian, and professor at Great Northern University took place in November, 2024 over Google Meets, and my memories of it have been made more concise than the original discussion. John M Frame, The Doctrine of the Christian Life, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 266-269, 682-683. Frame, Doctrine, 682, 683. C. S. Lewis, The Last Battle, Chronicles of Narnia 7, (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1956), 195.

Optical Optimists

Ministry Outreach Center 620, with the intriguing name, “Optical Optimists” meets at Christ Lutheran Church in Anderson, Indiana and has about 30 attendees of Blind and Sight Impaired persons who meet for socialization and Bible study before the meal.

They celebrated their 21st anniversary in November 2025.

Please pray for their church’s pastoral call process and prayers for leader Barb who has health issues. Also pray for continued growth of the program and leaders who can continue to guide programs and services.



Annual Servant Event in Irvine, California

Lutheran Braille Workers is blessed once again by the faithful partnership of Crean Lutheran High School in Irvine, California, as students and staff gather for their annual November servant event. For many years, Crean has dedicated time, energy, and hearts to support LBW’s mission, and today is no exception.

A team of 30 students and 4 staff members are spending their day assembling and preparing the final shipments of this year’s Braille and Large Print calendars, ensuring they reach individuals around the world who rely on accessible resources to stay connected, encouraged, and organized. Their work today helps bring the Light of Christ to people living with visual impairment—one carefully prepared calendar at a time.

LBW is deeply grateful for Crean Lutheran’s ongoing commitment to service, compassion, and leadership. Their willingness to partner, year after year, has had a tremendous impact on our ministry and the thousands of people we serve. We look forward to seeing how this partnership might continue to grow in the future, as together we share God’s Word in accessible formats with all who need it.

Thank you, Crean Saints, for shining so brightly!

Love Works in Anaheim, California

President Hartwell was the special guest speaker at Prince of Peace Lutheran School in Anaheim’s chapel service. Students from kindergarten through 8th grade are praying for and collecting donations for LBW this fall.

President Hartwell shared samples of Braille materials and spoke about LBW’s more than 80 years of ministry serving people who are Blind or Visually impaired as fellow redeemed and equal partners in the Gospel of Jesus.



Looking Ahead: LBW at 2026 Conferences and Conventions

2026 is shaping up to be an exciting year of ministry connections for Lutheran Braille Workers! We are grateful for every opportunity to share our mission, connect with volunteers, and inspire new partnerships across the country.

This February, LBW will be presenting and exhibiting at the Best Practices in Ministry Conference in Phoenix, one of the largest and most energizing gatherings of church leaders and volunteers each year. We look forward to sharing how accessible Scripture changes lives—and how congregations can be part of the work.

In June and July, LBW will be present at more than 10 LWML District Conventions, presenting, exhibiting, and connecting with the many women who have faithfully supported our ministry for decades.

We are also thrilled to be heading to Phoenix again in July for the LCMS National Convention, where LBW will exhibit and host a hands-on servant event. This will be a wonderful opportunity for attendees to learn about our ministry while helping produce accessible materials that will be sent directly to people who need them.

We thank God for these opportunities to shine the Light of Christ and look forward to seeing many of you in 2026!

Exploring a New Large Print Ministry in Northwest Iowa

After the LWML Convention in June, Rachel Potts visited Faith Lutheran in Orange City and St. John Lutheran in Germantown to discuss the possibility of launching a new Large Print Ministry Production Center. Both congregations were warm and enthusiastic about the vision.

Pastors Thomas Batchelder and Carl Stenzel have continued conversations with LBW via Zoom, and excitement is growing about a shared partnership between their two churches.

A special blessing in this process has been the involvement of Pastor Gus George (retired) and his wife, Carol. Living in the area and having served in more than six congregations with LBW centers, Pastor George brings invaluable experience. He and Carol are thrilled to help support the development of yet another center—this time in their own community.

LBW is grateful for these faithful leaders and looks forward to what God may bring through this new ministry opportunity in northwest Iowa.

We Live by Faith, Not by Sight

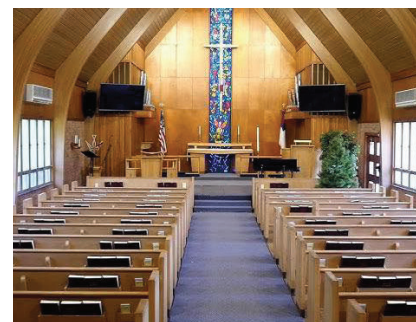


New Large Print Ministry Conversations

Rachel Potts had a wonderful visit at Christ Memorial Lutheran Church in Malvern, PA, where exciting conversations are underway about launching a new Large Print Ministry Production Center in 2026. This potential center is especially meaningful because it was birthed out of another center's ministry.

Back in spring 2024, Pastor Carl Emberger visited MPC #192 at Immanuel Lutheran in Scranton, PA, where Pastor John Zimmerman hosted a "Big Braille Bonanza." Several youth from Christ Memorial joined him, and the experience inspired them to start a center of their own.

Meeting with Pastor Emberger and Dave Sonnenberg this week made us even more excited about what God may be preparing to do through this wonderful congregation. Big things are ahead!



The Next Ministry Production Center

President Hartwell recently took a trip to Baltimore to scope out the location of the next Ministry Production Center, slated to open in 2026. During his visit, he also had the opportunity to meet Mary Kuforiji, the leader of Ministry Outreach Center #168.

The Outreach Center, held at Martini Lutheran Church in Baltimore, gathers on the last week of each month for Bible study, lunch, entertainment, and worship. This vibrant ministry is sponsored by LBW in cooperation with The Wyneken Project.



Special thanks to Pastor Emeritus Elliott Robertson and Pastor Phil Joseph for their faithful support and leadership.

Holiday Wish Book

In December, LBW produced its Holiday Wish Book catalog of giving with items that will help to support our ministry. Financial contributions, no matter the size, has the potential to bring hope and joy to someone in need.

We pray this tradition of giving continues to bless both the givers and receivers for years to come.



Thanks to a special gift, every donation this Christmas is matched up to \$50,000! Your gift goes twice as far through the end of December!





Notes & Jokes

from Dennis...

One of the joys of ministry at Lutheran Braille Workers is hearing from the people whose lives are touched by God's Word in accessible formats. Among our most faithful correspondents is Dennis from Sierra Madre, California.

Dear LBW,

I hope you are all doing great. I want to thank you for the calendar you sent me. I appreciate it very much. I hope the jokes make you laugh.

Sincerely Yours,
Dennis

p.s. Happy Holidays! p.p.s. I have Jesus in my heart!!

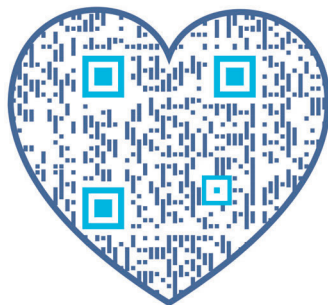
“ If athletes get athletes foot,
what do elves get? Mistle-toe

“ What did the gingerbread man
put on his bed? A cookie sheet.

“ How do loaves of bread
congratulate each other?
With a toast!

Dennis will be celebrating his birthday in January. If you would like to share a birthday message with him, please email us at rachel@lbwloveworks.org and we will pass it along to him!

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