



FAITH IN NATURE

Visit New Life Lutheran Church in Dripping Springs, Texas, on a Sunday and you'll be greeted by friendly faces as well as three giant, century-old oak trees that frame their worship space—the great outdoors.

Although some might describe New Life's venue as nontraditional, its pastor, Carmen Retzlaff, says this outdoor worshiping community is actually a return to ancient times when everyone worshiped outside. The central Texas climate makes outdoor worship possible nearly year-round, but New Life also has a large event tent and outdoor heaters to use when it's cold or raining.

How did the new congregation land on worshipping outside? In 2010, the ELCA Mission Investment Fund purchased 12 acres of land and was holding it for New Life until members had enough money to erect a building on the site.

After a few years of using a rental property, the congregation decided that they had fallen in love with the land and didn't need to wait to have a building, Retzlaff said.

"I can only credit the Holy Spirit that [our members] were so willing to know that our mission was to reach out to people with the good news of God's love and not to build ourselves a church like the one we came from," Retzlaff said.

Without having to worry about constructing and maintaining a building, the congregation has more energy to focus on outreach, including its regular community-service Sundays, which have found members cleaning up a portion of a highway and pausing for communion at the site to make their work part of the liturgy.

 Watch video footage of New Life's beautiful outdoor worship space at [ELCA.org/SOFIA](https://www.elca.org/SOFIA).

Your Mission Support dollars are used by the ELCA churchwide organization to fund new congregations like New Life Lutheran Church.

To read more stories, visit [ELCA.org/SOFIA](https://www.elca.org/SOFIA) and download a copy of *Stories of Faith in Action*.



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