



Walking by Faith

A Year in Review at Sioux Falls Lutheran School

Fall 2025

SFLS Alumni Lead in Lutheran Classrooms

When the 2025–26 school year began, two Sioux Falls Lutheran School graduates found themselves standing at the front of their own classrooms for the first time.

Classmates from preschool through 12th grade at SFLS, Colin Thuringer and Elizabeth Henschen (SFLS '21) both felt called to serve in Lutheran schools. This fall, Colin began his ministry as music director at Lutheran High School of Indianapolis (LHSI) in

Indiana, while Elizabeth stepped into her first year as an English teacher at Sheboygan Area Lutheran High School in Wisconsin.

Their parallel journeys—from growing up at SFLS to preparing for ministry at Concordia University, Nebraska (CUNE), to teaching students in two different Lutheran high schools—showcase the impact a Christ-centered Lutheran education has on future leaders.

Laying the Foundation for a Future in Education

Colin can't identify the moment when he decided to become a teacher, but his experience at All-City Honor Band in 8th grade and encouragement from music teachers like Mrs. Dooley and Mrs. Walicke helped him see what faithful, Christ-centered teaching could look like.

"While I was a student at SFLS, every teacher made a point to direct our learning toward Christ," Colin said. "That really stood out to me, and it's something I wanted to carry with me into my career."

The seed for becoming an educator was planted in Elizabeth's mind by her 5th grade teacher, Mr. Jon Pinn.

"Throughout my experience at SFLS, I was blessed to be taught by educators with a passion for their students, their subject, and their Savior," she shared. "Mr. Pinn was the first person who told me that he

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Colin Thuringer and Elizabeth Henschen (SFLS '21) pose for a photo during graduation at Concordia University, Nebraska.

(Continued from cover)

could see me becoming a teacher. Although I didn't select my career at age 10, the idea never really left my mind."

Answering the Call

After graduating from SFLS in 2021, both Colin and Elizabeth enrolled at CUNE. Colin pursued PreK-12 Music Education, while Elizabeth studied Secondary Education with an emphasis in English Language Arts. Both also earned Lutheran Teacher's Diplomas.

Today, Colin enjoys building personal relationships with his students while working to grow the small fine arts program at LHSI.

"When I first began and saw the small numbers, I got very discouraged by the uphill battle I knew I was facing," he admitted. "After some conversations and hard work on my part, I have started to see that God placed me here to help build up this program and demonstrate the importance of His gift of music."

Elizabeth also acknowledges how easy it is to feel overwhelmed during the first year of teaching, but she trusts God's plan as she builds confidence and finds joy in the classroom.

"My greatest joy so far has just been building relationships with students and hearing about their lives," she said. "Every day of teaching gets a little more fun as I get to know my students and the gifts God has given them."

Teaching for God's Glory

Colin strives to instill in his students the same Christ-centered perspective he received at SFLS. Every teacher, lesson, and activity pointed him back to Christ, and his goal is to carry that intention forward in his own classroom.

"Performers can easily become focused on what they're doing and how it benefits them," he explained. "However, the things we do are not for our own gain and glory. God gave us the gift of music and the arts as a way to praise Him, and we must keep that fact at the forefront of everything we do."

Likewise, Elizabeth is grateful to root her instruction in the foundation of Christ.

"As I started seriously contemplating my future in high school, I realized that I wanted to help students feel as loved as I had felt at SFLS," she said. "I love being in a Lutheran school because I can remind my students of

the hope they have in Christ everyday. No matter what challenges the day brings, we can trust that God has good plans for us because Jesus has already defeated death on the cross."

Coworkers in Christ

When asked how the SFLS community can continue to support them, Elizabeth and Colin gave the same answer—prayer.

"I love that there is a Lutheran school system where we can support one another and witness how God is working in our schools," Elizabeth said. "Please pray that God would be at work in our school and that all of our students would come to trust Christ as their Savior."

In addition to his request for prayer, Colin shared his desire to bring the SFLS community along on his teaching journey.

"In a way, my position at LHSI makes me a coworker of the faculty at SFLS," he said. "We are all called to bring up students in God's Word, and that shared calling is at the center of our relationship together. There are things that I can still learn from what's happening at SFLS, and I would love for the people who helped shape me as a person to see the fruits of that labor."

Equipped to Serve in a Complex World

As Colin and Elizabeth begin their teaching careers, they embody the mission of Sioux Falls Lutheran School—to prepare students who are World Ready, Faith Secure, and equipped to serve Christ wherever He calls them.

Their stories remind us that the impact of Lutheran education extends far beyond the walls of a single school, touching the lives of students, families, and communities across the country.



Pep band students from Lutheran High School of Indianapolis pose with director, Colin Thuringer (SFLS '21).

Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends of Sioux Falls Lutheran School,

This fall, the cornstalks surrounding our campus reach higher than ever, nourished by God's timely summer rains. Their quiet, steady growth reminds me that much of His work happens out of sight until the season of harvest arrives. As I look toward our rising Upper School addition, I see a harvest of answered prayers, shared vision, and steadfast provision.



SFLS board members pause for a photo by the colored glass cross during a tour of the new Upper School addition.

This fall marks my sixteenth year as Executive Director, and I am continually reminded of God's unseen work. In my early years, our school was small and our dreams were big. Today, the halls are filled with more students learning, growing, and maturing in their faith. Enrollment has grown 60% since moving to Boe Lane in 2019–20, and this year our high school reached a record 84 students. Beyond the classroom, students thrive in music, theater, visual arts, athletics, and a growing array of clubs and service opportunities—each nurturing gifts and fostering the strong community that connects students, families, and teachers.

After six years of enjoying our corn-or-bean-field oasis, this spring the City of Sioux Falls will install a regional retention pond across 10 acres bordering the south edge of campus. This project signals preparations for future development to our south as the I-29/85th Street interchange is built—a visible reminder that just as the fields around us are changing, so too is our ministry landscape.

Our focus is shifting, too. After years of constructing buildings to accommodate growth, we now enter a season of deepening roots—strengthening our financial foundation through growth of our endowment and annual funds, planned giving, and

building a vibrant alumni network. These efforts will sustain our ministry for generations, keeping tuition manageable, salaries sustainable, and supporting mission-driven programs.

To lead this new chapter, we are thrilled to welcome Pastor Scott Sailer and Bree Makepeace to our development team, who are working alongside me to advance the mission of SFLS. Their work honors the faithful foundation laid by countless volunteers whose generosity and dedication have brought us to this moment.

As we look to the horizon, we give thanks for God's perfect timing. Through the recently adopted One Big Beautiful Bill, school choice dollars will, by His grace, become available to most South Dakota families beginning in the 2027–28 school year—opening doors for more children to access Christ-centered education and easing tuition for those already investing in it (as more details become available, we'll keep our families and community informed).



Pastor Scott Sailer



Bree Makepeace

Through every shift—whether in the fields around us or in the faith that sustains us—we rest in the unchanging truth: “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever” (Isaiah 40:8). With heartfelt thanks to all who teach, serve, and support this ministry, may we continue to plant seeds that will yield a harvest far beyond what we can imagine—a lasting legacy of faith, learning, and community for generations to come.

With Gratefulness,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Tia Esser".

Tia Esser, Executive Director
Romans 12:2

A New Life Walking by Faith at SFLS



Senior Rylee Steuerwald speaks about her SFLS experience at the Sioux Falls Kiwanis Club.

Every Wednesday, one SFLS senior has the opportunity to attend and learn from the Sioux Falls Kiwanis Club—a global organization of volunteers committed to improving communities by serving children.

Seniors are selected for this honor based on their academic achievements, involvement in extracurricular activities,

and their willingness to share Christ and the SFLS mission with others. Once a month, Kiwanis attendees share about their life and academic experiences with students from other schools.

In September, senior Rylee Steuerwald addressed the Kiwanis audience, reflecting on how her decision to transfer to SFLS as a freshman shaped her high school journey and strengthened her walk of faith.

"When my parents and I discussed Sioux Falls Lutheran School as an option, I decided to tour and see if I would even like this small school where 'everybody is family,'" Rylee shared. "Little did I know this tour was going to be the start of a new life for me."

Rylee was in 6th grade when she fell behind in school during the transition to learning from home during COVID. Her academic struggles continued throughout middle school, and a smaller school community filled with teachers who invested in building relationships with students was just the thing she needed to get back on track.

She spoke about the challenge of adjusting to a much smaller school, where she was both seen and supported, and the way that experience helped her discover a stronger work ethic and renewed hope for her future.

"It took lots of getting used to being in a small high school where teachers noticed when I had missing assignments," Rylee recalled. "Without having anywhere to hide, I knew I had to try to fit in."

In addition to getting her academic performance back on track, Rylee credits SFLS with helping to bring her faith to life. Together with her classmates, she helped choose this school year's theme verse from 2 Corinthians 5:7, "For we walk by faith, not by sight." She also designed the logo that accompanies the verse, which serves as a daily reminder for our community to walk by faith in every season.

"I knew there was a loving God and Jesus Christ who saved me from my sins, but I never could have estimated how much my relationship with God would grow here," Rylee said. "Weekly chapel and theology classes have shaped me in ways I didn't expect. When I was told Sioux Falls Lutheran would feel like family, I never imagined how true that would be."

Rylee's journey, from feeling overlooked in a large school to finding a place where she is known, challenged, and encouraged in her faith, reflects the heart of our mission: to develop capable Christian servant-leaders in a complex world who are World Ready, Faith Secure.

Celebrate His Gifts Gala

Save the Date: Saturday, February 28, 2026

Join us as we honor the God-given talents of our students through a radiant evening of live musical performances, visual art, and Christ-centered celebration. From elegant decor to heartfelt showcases, this unforgettable night will shine a light on the transformative power of faith, creativity, and community at Sioux Falls Lutheran School. You won't want to miss it!

Catered by: Chef Dominique's



More Than a Game: Coaching as Ministry at SFLS



At Sioux Falls Lutheran School, athletics and activities are more than competition—they are ministry. Under the leadership of Mr. James Stubkjaer,

Middle & High School Principal and Activities Director, our carefully selected Christian coaches and directors are encouraged to see every practice, game, and performance as an opportunity to share Christ's love.

In an effort to instill this mindset amongst activity leaders, Mr. Stubkjaer meets with coaches twice per month for book studies on resources like *3D Coach: Capturing the Heart Behind the Jersey* and *InSideOut Coaching: How Sports Can Transform Lives*. These gatherings go beyond X's and O's, with the goal of teaching coaches how to lead in the "third dimension"—coaching the heart—while deepening their own faith and building stronger relationships with one another.

Basketball coach Dave Sinkgraven speaks highly of the training that he's received during his time coaching at SFLS.

"Studying 3D coaching has certainly challenged me to grow, as I don't believe it is something that can be manufactured," Coach Sinkgraven said. "It simply has to flow out of a heart that has been transformed by the Holy Spirit."

Through prayer, the study of Scripture, and discussion, coaches are reminded of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 10:31: "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." Every huddle, rehearsal, and competition becomes an opportunity for students to experience the love of Christ.

"Most days on my way to practice I pray a simple prayer asking the Lord to allow me to be the bright, radiant, image-bearer of God that He has made me to be," Coach Sinkgraven said. "I ask Him to help me see each athlete for the image-bearer they are and

honor them as such. I invite the Holy Spirit to shine brightly through me so that each athlete and coach experiences the love of Christ in everything we do."

Sophomore Rowen Becker sees and feels the impact Mr. Stubkjaer's intentional work with coaches and directors has on the programs and students at SFLS.

"The music ensembles, teams, and activities here at SFLS definitely have a different vibe than other schools," Becker said. "The brotherhood and family that each group becomes is one-of-a-kind. Our coaches are great at integrating faith into activities. We, as a team, pray before and after every game. Coaches also continually remind us that we play for the King and give Him all the praise and glory."

In the Lutheran tradition of vocation, coaching is more than a job. It is a calling to serve as Jesus instructed in John 13:34, "...love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another." SFLS coaches are living out this calling each and every day, shaping not just athletes and performers, but disciples of Jesus whose identity is rooted in Him.

"I think the shift to 3D coaching has allowed for more joy in the athletes and less stress and pressure," Coach Sinkgraven said. "The holistic approach allows basketball to simply be a good gift from a gracious God rather than something they go to in order to find their identity or value. We emphasize that our value comes from belonging to Jesus and not from anything we could achieve athletically. This seems to produce freedom, life, and joy as they play a sport where there are always lots of mistakes made."



Senior Kiersten Bjordahl Named National Merit Scholarship Semifinalist

SFLS Senior, Kiersten Bjordahl, is a semifinalist for the National Merit Scholarship Competition (NMSC).

To qualify as a semifinalist in the state of South Dakota, a student must earn at least a 211 on the PSAT selection index during their junior year of high school. Approximately 16,000 semifinalists are named each September, and nearly 95 percent of those semifinalists will qualify as finalists the following February. Bjordahl applied to become a finalist this fall, which includes writing an essay and receiving a recommendation from a school administrator.

Beginning in March, NMSC will notify winners of the three types of National Merit Scholarships, which include \$2500 National Merit Scholarships, corporate-sponsored scholarships, and college-sponsored scholarships.

Approximately 7,000 students across the country are named National Merit Scholarship recipients each spring.

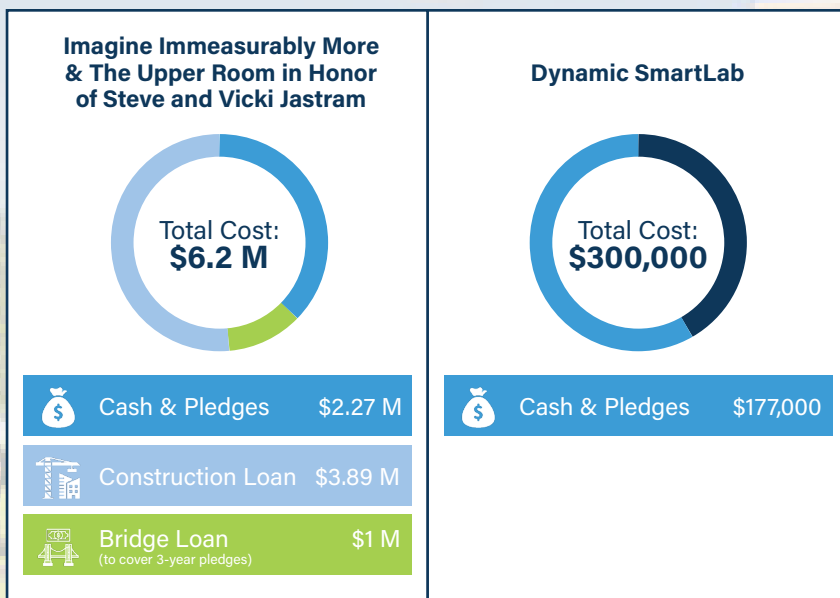


Unimaginable Progress on Our Capital Campaigns

“Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine... to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever!”
– Ephesians 3:20–21

Thanks to the generosity and faithfulness of our supporters, we are making incredible strides through our **Imagine Immeasurably More** initiatives, including the beautiful cantilevered **Upper Room in Honor of Steve and Vicki Jastram** and the **Dynamic SmartLab**. The new middle and high school wing is on schedule for **completion in December**, and a **dedication and ribbon-cutting ceremony is scheduled for January 12th at 4:30 p.m. — please join us!** Filled with stunning, creation-framing windows, the new addition will be a vibrant place for students to explore, learn, and grow in faith as they become **World Ready, Faith Secure**.

We give thanks for the progress made through our open capital campaigns



By God's grace, we pray these projects will continue to be more fully funded. **Every additional gift helps reduce principal and interest, strengthening our ministry and expanding its impact for generations to come.**

If you feel moved to make a gift, you may do so at siouxfallslutheran.com/capital-campaign or by using the **self-addressed envelope** included in this newsletter.

To Him be the glory throughout ALL generations!



Each name below represents a story of faith, generosity, and shared mission. From July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025, our faith-filled donors collectively gave just over \$2.1 million to strengthen SFLS—supporting the Annual Fund, Tuition Assistance, Music, Athletics, Theatre, Robotics, and major campaign initiatives including Our Greatest Gifts, Our Children: His Treasure, the Dynamic SmartLab, Fitness Center, Imagine Immeasurably More, and the Upper Room in Honor of Steve and Vicki Jastram. Many also shared gifts-in-kind that enriched daily life across our campus, equipping students, teachers, and programs in meaningful ways.

Together, these gifts not only enhance learning and campus life, but also help keep tuition manageable for families who value a Christ-centered education. United in purpose, our donors embody the heart of our mission to develop capable Christian servant-leaders—World Ready, Faith Secure.

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the following donor listings. Should you find an error, please contact us so we may make a correction.

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SIOUX FALLS LUTHERAN SCHOOL

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Faith in Action at SFLS



Family Groups

At their first gathering of the year, K-12 Family Groups came together to build friendships, strengthen faith, and reflect on our school year theme verse from 2 Corinthians 5:7: "For we walk by faith, not by sight."



Chapel Offering

First semester's chapel offerings will go to Lunch Is Served, Inc., a nonprofit in Sioux Falls with the unique mission of delivering sack lunches for working men and women who are attempting to break the chains of poverty and hunger. In the first quarter of the year, chapel offerings totaled over \$700!



8th Grade Trip

With the goal of furthering our mission, our 8th graders travel to the Black Hills of South Dakota each fall to learn in the midst of God's creation, develop leadership and teamwork skills, and strengthen their relationships with God and one another.



Senior Class Trip

This fall, our senior class traveled to St. Louis for five days of worship, service, and learning from church leaders about journeys into ministry. Along the way, they explored the city, visiting the Gateway Arch, The City Museum, The Seminary, and even cheering on the Cardinals.