

Extra Ordinary Moments at SFLS



A Year in Review at Sioux Falls Lutheran School

Fall 2026

The People God Places in Our Lives

A story of faith, calling, connection—and the lasting impact of a Sioux Falls Lutheran School education.

TJ Heupel's Sioux Falls Lutheran School education lasted just two years, in seventh and eighth grade, from 1991–1993.

He arrived at Sioux Falls Lutheran at a pivotal time in his life. TJ had attended public school through sixth grade and was preparing to enter a much larger middle school when his father, Rev. Tim Heupel, then pastor at Zion Lutheran Church, suggested Sioux Falls Lutheran instead. TJ quickly discovered that the smaller environment—and the Christian teachers who surrounded him—felt like the right place for him.

"It was a really good place for me," TJ shared. "I had a couple of teachers that really, really were good role models for me."

Those teachers were Jim Knoepfel and Lanny Merkord, the first male classroom teachers TJ had ever had. They shared his interest in athletics, taught and coached him, and gave him an early picture of the kind of man—and teacher—he might someday become.

"They were the first real examples in my life of what a Lutheran teacher is and how they can impact their students through what they teach and how they coach and the way that they live their lives."

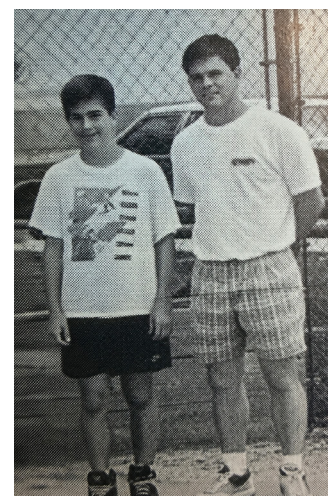
Their influence reached well beyond those two years. At Sioux Falls Lutheran, TJ also had his first exposure

to Spanish, an experience that gave him confidence as he entered high school and continued learning the language. His teachers at Sioux Falls Lutheran had attended Concordia University, Nebraska, and their example helped lead him there as well. Along the way, a high school Spanish teacher became an important mentor, and professors and advisors at Concordia helped him discover that his love of learning and Spanish could become a life of teaching.

Today, after more than two decades in education, TJ is a Spanish teacher at Faith Lutheran High School in Las Vegas. In 2024, he received the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages' K–12 Award for Excellence in World Language Instruction Using Technology, recognizing his outstanding contributions to world language education through innovative use of technology.

But Jim Knoepfel, who now serves as Head Administrator at St. John's Lutheran School in Ocala, Florida, remembers something else about his former student.

"TJ had remarkable athletic talent," he shared. "But his character was even greater."



TJ Heupel & Jim Knoepfel
7th–8th Grade Boys
Softball Team
1992–1993

(Continued from cover)

TJ had an opportunity to pursue athletics beyond high school, but he ultimately chose to follow where God was calling him – to Concordia, where he would be prepared to serve Christ as a Lutheran educator. This choice would build on the foundation that the Lord began laying at Sioux Falls Lutheran School.

“That choice says as much about his character as anything he accomplished on any court or sports field,” Jim said.

Even after TJ left Sioux Falls Lutheran, his relationship with Jim continued. While attending public high school, TJ once asked his former teacher to come give a devotion to his teammates before a game.

“For him to name me as someone who impacted him, I’m just humbled,” Jim shared. “His faith is what drives him and guides him.”

Decades later, the bond between teacher and student remains.

During a recent and serious health journey, TJ’s wife, Jill, asked him to make a list of people he wanted to talk with after he came out of a coma.

Jim Knoepfel was on that list.

When they called, Jim pulled over on the side of the road, listened to what had happened, and prayed with TJ and his family.

“I’m just more proud of the man that he became,” Jim said. “He had a heart for people and a desire to serve—a willingness to put others ahead of himself.”

Perhaps the clearest reminder that this relationship has mattered both ways is a detail Jim shared almost in passing: his oldest son is named TJ.

For Jim, the seventh grader he once taught and coached was never simply another name on a class roster. And for TJ, the teacher who showed him what it looked like to teach, coach and live his faith became part of a story that has continued for more than three decades.

If TJ could go back and speak to himself as a seventh grader—or sit down with a student at Sioux Falls Lutheran today—his message would be simple:

“Be open to learning. Do the best you can today. Learn from your teachers and the examples they set. And don’t be surprised by the amazing things God can do.”



TJ & Jill Heupel
A Life Rooted in
Faith & Service

Because when TJ was sitting in a Sioux Falls Lutheran classroom as a middle school student, he never could have imagined where God would take him—or how God’s work through the teachers who shaped him would help prepare him to become a teacher who would, in turn, shape and bless the lives of others.

EAGLE UPDATES

In case you missed it... our Eagles are doing some pretty exciting things!

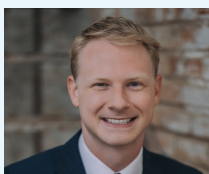
Since launching the **SFLS Alumni Association**, alumni have begun sharing updates about where life has taken them since graduation. From careers and college experiences to growing families, accomplishments, adventures, and milestones, it has been so fun to hear what our Eagles are up to.



Miranda Hueners | SFLS 1997 Preschool–2005 5th Grade

📍 **Richland, Washington**

Miranda earned her Doctor of Optometry degree in 2020 and married her husband, Corey, that same year. They welcomed their daughter, Bailee, in 2022 and are excited to welcome a baby boy in November.



Zachary Hueners | SFLS 1994 Preschool–2002 5th Grade

📍 **Sioux Falls, South Dakota**

Congratulations to Zachary, who was recently promoted to Partner at Panceline Accounting.



Katherine Peters | SFLS Class of 1998

📍 **Valparaiso, Indiana**

Since graduating from SFLS, Katherine has continued to pursue her passions for education and service. She graduated from Valparaiso University in 2006 with bachelor’s degrees in Spanish and International Service. In 2010, she was consecrated as a Lutheran Deaconess through the Lutheran Diaconal Association (LDA) at Valparaiso University and later earned her Master of Education in International Teaching. Katherine married her husband, Anthony, in 2012, and together they are parents to Matthew and Joel.

Once an Eagle, Always an Eagle.

The SFLS Alumni Association launched in late 2025 to keep Eagles connected long after graduation. Share your story, update your contact information, and help inspire the next generation of Eagles!

SCAN HERE



GET INVOLVED

siouxfallslutheran.com/alumni

UPDATE YOUR INFO

Stay connected!

SHARE YOUR STORY

Tell us what’s new!

Letter from the Executive Director: Deepening Roots

Over the past year, roughly ten new trees have been planted across our campus.

They were given as memorials in honor of friends of Sioux Falls Lutheran School who are now at home with the Lord. Here on the South Dakota prairie, where shade and shelter from the wind are precious commodities, those young trees don't look especially significant today. But someday, Lord willing, children who were not yet born when they were planted will gather beneath their branches.

There's something poetic about that.

Paul's words to the Corinthians come to mind:
"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth."
(1 Corinthians 3:6)

The growth God has given SFLS surrounds us. New buildings have risen from the ground. Enrollment has reached milestones that not so long ago were unimaginable. New programs have begun, classrooms have filled, and opportunities for students have expanded. And still, the growth continues. **We have so much for which to give God thanks and praise!**

But some of the most important growth happening at SFLS right now is less visible.

Much of our work has that same long horizon. After years of tremendous visible growth, we're in a season of deepening our roots—strengthening what God has built and preparing it to serve generations still to come.

Enrollment continues to grow, but more important is our ability to serve students well—and make a Christ-centered Lutheran education accessible to families who desire it. Through a generous grant from Lutheran Women in Mission, ten new high school students received tuition assistance last year and another seven this year, opening a door that might otherwise have remained out of reach.

We've also been increasingly intentional about strengthening the financial foundation that will sustain this ministry long into the future. Giving to the Eagle Fund continues to grow, and new endowment funds are taking root—something planted today and carefully tended over time to provide for students we may never meet.

We're nurturing relationships with those who have faithfully supported SFLS while inviting new friends to become part of this ministry. As part of that, we've established a formal alumni organization to strengthen connections with former students and families whose stories remain part of ours.

None of these things comes with a ribbon cutting. And perhaps that's precisely the point.

The work that strengthens a school isn't always visible. It happens through relationships carefully tended, resources faithfully stewarded, opportunities extended to families, and a Christ-centered mission kept firmly at the center.

And that mission remains clear—**Developing Capable Christian Servant-Leaders in a Complex World: World Ready, Faith Secure.**

Someday, those young memorial trees will look very different than they do today. Their roots will reach deeper. Their trunks will grow stronger. Their branches will provide shade on hot August afternoons and protection when prairie winds sweep across our campus. Most students enjoying that shade will never have known the people in whose memory the trees were planted.

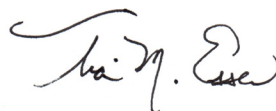
But they will benefit from what someone chose to plant for them.

And that's the work before us today. We're planting and tending things, knowing we may never see their fullest impact—strong financial foundations, enduring relationships, connections across generations, and above all, faith planted deeply in the hearts of children.

We plant. We tend. We trust God with the growth.

And we remain deeply grateful for all of you who plant alongside us.

With Gratefulness,



Tia Esser, Executive Director
Romans 12:2



2026–27 School Year Theme: Extra Ordinary

Each spring, our junior class selects a Bible verse to serve as the school theme for the following academic year. For the Class of 2027, the process led to a message about imperfection, purpose, and the power of God working through us.

Their theme, “Extra Ordinary,” comes from 2 Corinthians 4:7: “But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.” Senior Addison Vis, who designed this year’s theme graphic, gives us a behind-the-scenes look at how the theme came to be and how she brought its message to life through her design.



GOD DOES
extraordinary
THINGS THROUGH
ordinary people.

Behind the Theme

When we were choosing the theme for this year, we had to start from “ground zero” because we had lost the document that had previous theme ideas from other years! Pastor Billy asked us to think about an issue that a lot of high schoolers and students struggle with that we think would be important to talk about. A lot of us talked about anxiety and purpose during our discussion, which is when the idea of “Extra Ordinary” came into play.

At first, we were actually looking at using the verse in Psalms that says, “I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” After further discussion, though, we felt like we wanted to lean into the way that humans are imperfect in a world that strives for perfection and to “be enough.”

The Message

It was actually Mrs. Slavens who came up with the verse from 2 Corinthians, and after some research it was the verse we felt best represented the idea of how God can use our imperfections. We felt this theme and overall idea would speak very well to our students, especially high schoolers.



Senior Addison Vis

The Design

When thinking about what the graphic should look like, I really wanted to emphasize the beauty that can come from the brokenness, thus the light coming through the broken pieces of the pot!

“

I really wanted to emphasize the beauty that can come from the brokenness

”

A Record Breaking Golf Tournament

The 16th Annual Dr. Vaughn & JoAnn Meyer Memorial Golf Tournament was one for the books, and this year's Mardi Gras theme brought plenty of fun to the course!

Thanks to our incredible golfers, sponsors, volunteers, and supporters, **we raised more than \$29,000 for the SFLS Activities & Athletics Fund.** These funds help support athletics, music, art, drama, and so much more for our students.

We are incredibly grateful for everyone who helped make this record-breaking tournament possible. Thank you for your generous support.



The Local Best in Preschool, Child Care & Learning Centers



We are pleased to share that our preschool was named #1 Local Best in the categories of Preschool, Child Care, and Learning Centers this year!

This recognition is a testament to the dedication of our amazing staff, the trust of our families, and the blessing of working with such incredible children.

Our sincere thanks to all who voted in this year's competition. SFLS has been recognized as a Local Best preschool since 2007.



Save the Date for Celebrate His Gifts Saturday, February 27, 2027

Faith is where our story begins. It is the foundation that anchors us, the strength that sustains us, and the hope that guides us into the future.

Like a tree with deep roots, the students of our school are growing in God's truth and grace—developing hearts that love God, minds that seek wisdom, and lives that reflect His light each day.

This year, we invite you to celebrate the legacy that has been planted and the future that continues to grow. Together, we'll honor God's faithfulness, invest in the next generation, and celebrate a community that is Rooted in Faith.



2025-26 Activities Recap

STUDENTS
DISCOVER
THEIR GIFTS

9 Activities Made it to State!

Oral Interp

- Lydia Warden - Superior Rating

One-Act

- Superior Tech Award
- Superior Play Award
- Ensemble Superior Acting Award - Narrators/Grotesque: Jace Storm, Erica Boyce, Caius Bertelsen, Tessa VanGerpen, Kennedy Parrish
- Individual Superior Acting Awards - Lydia Warden, Addison Vis, Becca Ascher, Parker Merriam

State Visual Art Competition

- Kaitlyn Wald - 2nd Place, Three-Dimensional
- Kaitlyn Wald - 3rd Place, Crafts
- Rylee Steuerwald - 3rd Place, Drawing Colored
- Rylee Steuerwald - 3rd Place, Functional Ceramics
- Rylee Steuerwald - 3rd Place, Print Making
- Livia Sinkgraven - 3rd Place, Watercolor
- Livia Sinkgraven - Acrylic
- Kennedy Parrish - Drawing Monochromatic
- Emalee Vinz - Mixed Media

Music

- All-State Chorus - Taylor Miller, Kaitlyn Wald, Addison Vis, Jude Elkins
- All-State Orchestra - Brynlee Post
- SD Senior Honor Choir - Jude Elkins, Caius Bertelsen, Leland Bertelsen
- Region 2 Vocal Solo/Ensemble Contest - 9 entries, 7 Superior and 2 Excellent ratings
- Region 2 Vocal Large Group Contest - Superior Rating
- Region 2 Instrumental Large Group Contest - Superior Rating
- Noah Baumbach played the National Anthem on his electric guitar for a State Wrestling event.

Powerlifting

- Elyse Prouty - 1st Place, Most Outstanding Female Lifter of the State Meet
- Kaitlyn Wald - 1st Place
- Anesha Bright - 2nd Place
- Bridget Miller - 4th Place
- Macy Stadheim - 5th Place
- The girls team placed third out of 20 and broke five state records.

Golf

- Drew Knobloch
- Rowen Becker
- Jake Knobloch
- Jada Sinkgraven
- Sophie Dold

Track

- Boys 4x200 Relay - 3rd Place
- Boys 4x100 Relay - 4th Place
- Owen Gilster 800m Run - 6th Place
- Kiersten Bjordahl High Jump - 6th Place
- Clara Pederson 3200m Run - 13th Place; 1600m run - 19th Place
- Noah Baumbach 3200m Run - 17th Place
- We also had outstanding representation from athletes competing in the girls and boys 4x400 relays, 200m dash, 300m hurdles, and boys high jump.

Cross Country

- Clara Pederson
- Boys team - Bodie Biteler, Noah Baumbach, Josiah Newell, Ben Iverson

Robotics

- 4 teams advanced to state; 1 earned the Create Award



Welcome, New Employees!

We are excited to welcome the following faculty and staff to the SFLS family during the 2026-27 school year. Learn more about them by viewing their full bios on our website: www.siouxfallslutheran.com/about-us/sfls-staff.



Reid Nusser

Eagle Care Director

After serving as an education assistant in preschool last year, Mrs. Nusser began leading our Eagle Care program this summer and looks forward to the school year ahead. She brings years of childcare experience and a passion for building trusting relationships with children and families.



Erin King

Infants

After serving as a long-term substitute in our infant classroom last year, Mrs. King is stepping into the role full-time for the 2026-27 school year. She loves watching our littlest learners grow, discover, and reach exciting milestones, and she enjoys helping every family know their baby is safe, loved, and well cared for during the day.



Kaitlyn Holm

5th Grade

Mrs. Holm is an SFLS alumna! After completing her student teaching at SFLS last spring and finishing out the school year at another local school, she's excited to return to the classroom at SFLS where her journey began as a student.



Ashley Smallfield

6th Grade Homeroom & Middle School English Language Arts

After beginning her teaching career at SFLS, Mrs. Smallfield spent more than a decade teaching in other South Dakota schools before returning to our Christ-centered community. We're excited to welcome her, and her two children, to the SFLS family this fall.



Beth Wall

8th Grade Homeroom & Middle School Bible, Math, Social Studies

After teaching middle school in Iowa, Mrs. Wall spent the past five years at home with her family. Now, she's excited to return to the classroom and looks forward to connecting with middle school students as they grow academically and explore deeper questions about their faith.



Sheena Sinkgraven

Middle & High School Science

With a background in biology and a passion for hands-on learning, Mrs. Sinkgraven loves sparking curiosity and helping students discover the wonder of God's creation. Most of all, she sees teaching as both a profession and a ministry, encouraging students to grow in knowledge, confidence, and faith.



Shasha Kandybin

3rd-12th Grade Strings & Orchestra

With an impressive background as a professional violinist, conductor, and music educator, Mr. Kandybin brings a wealth of experience to SFLS. But beyond his musical accomplishments, he has a deep passion for helping students use their gifts to glorify God.

*New
Faces*
**SAME
MISSION.**

SFLS Featured in PeaceWise Video

In case you missed it, Sioux Falls Lutheran School was recently invited by PeaceWise—an Australian non-profit that equips people to navigate conflict and build healthy relationships through biblical principles—to be featured in a video highlighting its work in the United States.

The video showcases how PeaceWise has become part of the culture at SFLS, where it serves as more than a curriculum. Over time, it has become a shared approach to helping students navigate conflict, rebuild relationships, and put their faith into action.

At SFLS, the formal PeaceWise curriculum is incorporated into Bible classes from five-year-old preschool through eighth grade. But teachers and staff throughout the school are trained in the PeaceWise model, beginning with those who work in our infant and toddler classrooms, so students encounter consistent language and strategies as they grow.

The result is a school community where students learn not only how to work through their own conflicts, but also how to help others navigate difficult situations. In the video, SFLS students and teachers share what that looks like in real life—from resolving playground disagreements to rebuilding friendships after conflict.

We're grateful for the opportunity to share how peacemaking has become a natural part of life at our school and how we are preparing the next generation to navigate relationships and serve others in a complex world.

Scan the QR code to watch the PeaceWise video and read the full story about how SFLS is preparing the next generation of peacemakers.



“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

MATTHEW 5:9



Scan the QR code

to watch the PeaceWise video and read the full story about how SFLS is preparing the next generation of peacemakers.

KIND PEOPLE
CHANGE THE WORLD



Growing Toward What's Next

WHO WE ARE

A family community committed to developing capable Christian servant-leaders in a complex world.

World Ready. Faith Secure.

Building Our Foundation

FOR WHAT'S TO COME

Our foundation includes two pillars that sustain our mission today and strengthen our impact for future generations:

ANNUAL EAGLE FUND

The Annual Eagle Fund fuels what happens every day at SFLS.

- Supports academic excellence
- Enhances student programming
- Invests in faculty & staff
- Bridges the gap between tuition and true cost

*Every gift. Every year.
Every student.*

ENDOWMENTS

Endowments provide lasting support that ensures our mission into the future.

- Tuition assistance & scholarships
- Future facility & program needs
- Preserves our Christian mission
- Creates a legacy that impacts generations

*Today's generosity.
Tomorrow's legacy.*

OUR STRATEGIC VISION

Continue to Excel in Early Childhood. Expand our K-12 Future.

From our youngest learners through our graduating seniors, we are committed to providing an exceptional, Christ-centered educational experience.

Early Childhood

Infants - Preschool

Continuing to strengthen and expand our early years to build strong foundations for faith, learning, and lifelong growth.

K-12 Growth

A Two-Section School

Growing toward two classrooms at every grade level while preserving the family and community feel that make Sioux Falls Lutheran School special.

HELP US BUILD THE FOUNDATION

The future of Sioux Falls Lutheran School starts with the foundation we build today. Your support helps strengthen our school now, invest in our students and staff, grow our mission, and prepare us for the opportunities ahead.

Together, we can build the foundation our students and families need to make what's next possible.



SCAN TO GIVE

Thank you, BUSINESS PARTNERS!

We are grateful for the businesses and organizations that partner with Sioux Falls Lutheran School. Your support helps provide exceptional Christ-centered education, creates opportunities for our students, and strengthens our school community.

2026 Golf Tournament Sponsors

Title Sponsor

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Vern Eide

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First National Bank

Hoogendoorn Construction, Inc.

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North Central Insurance

Vern Eide

2027 All-Program Partners

J&M Auto Service

Vern Eide

Together,
we go further.



Scan the QR code

to learn more about
sponsorship opportunities
at SFLS. We'd love to
partner with you!

*Special
Thanks*

We also appreciate the many businesses and organizations that participate in **RaiseRight**—a program that helps make tuition more affordable for SFLS families. Learn more at www.siouxfallslutheran.com/k12-tuition/raiserright and email Linda Heyd at lheyd@sflutheranschool.com to get your business involved. Your generosity makes a lasting impact on our students and community.

Each name below represents a story of faith, generosity, and shared mission. From July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026, individuals, families, organizations, businesses, and other supporters collectively gave more than \$1.1 million to strengthen Sioux Falls Lutheran School. Their generosity supported a wide range of initiatives and priorities across our school. Many also shared meaningful gifts-in-kind, memorial and tribute gifts, and other acts of generosity that enriched daily life on campus and equipped our students, teachers, and programs in meaningful ways. Together, these gifts not only enhance learning and campus life, but also help keep a Christ-centered education within reach for families and strengthen the foundation of Sioux Falls Lutheran School for generations to come. United in purpose, these generous supporters embody the heart of our mission: to develop capable Christian servant-leaders who are World Ready and Faith Secure.

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

Adult Christians Group, Faith Lutheran Church	Neal Eddy	Kent & Shelly Hoefs	Arvad McIntire	Roger's Plumbing and Heating
Advanced Tech Inc.	Calvin & Julie Eichmann	Bradley & Nicole Holmberg	Doreen McKay	Peter & Emily Ronning
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Michael & Megan Baedke	Fox Pest Control	Keith & Bonnie Jerke	Rev. William & Dr. Kristen Newell	Vanette Schwartz
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Patrick & Tamera Bangasser	Rev. Dr. Brian & Dr. Laurie Friedrich	Michael & Amanda Jesch	Barbara Niswander	Rev. Pete & Elaine Sestak
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Rev. Todd & Teri Bentz	John & Courtney Gaard	Keith & Delia Johnson	Clay & Stacie Noteboom	Nancy Shoup
Jim & Brenda Bernard	Benjamin Gadberry	Mark & Colleen Johnson	Matthew & Tricia Nussbaum	Sioux Falls Lutheran School Endowment
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Bruce & Pam Bettmeng	Sierra Geistfeld	JOY Group, Faith Lutheran Church	Delphine Olson	Wesley & Joanne Skunberg
Dean & Dawn Bickett	Generation to Generation Endowment	Phyllis Joyce	Shane Burden & Bethany Olson-Burden	Eric & Jenna Smart
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Blessed Redeemer Lutheran Church	Rich & Tera Gilster	Bob & Christa Kerr	Charitable Fund	Roger & Debra Strasser
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Dwane & Maxine Boxdorfer	Rev. Kenneth & Betty Greinke	Drew & Jabrel Klinkebiel	Ronald & Mary Pesak	Dr. Adam & Sarah Swingdorf
Loren & Sheila Boyens	Janet Griebel	Jerald J. & F. Jean Knodel	Scott & Dr. Patricia Peters	James & Sandra Tams
Luther & Carol Brack	James & Pamela Groninger	Dennis Knutson	Pete Petersen	Lois Taylor
Justin & Abigail Breems	Sheldon & Kathy Gross	Stacy Kock	Barb Peterson	Rev. Donald & LaVona Taylor
Philip & Sheryl Breems	Mr. Gustafson	Gunther & Vicky Kondert	David & Karleen Peterson	Todd & Jane Taylor
Gary Brendel	Jim & Sharon Haar	Anne Koosman	Diane Peterson-Siegel	Brian & Michelle Ternus
Adam & Sarah Brinkman	Kathy Haar	Jamie Kopp-O'Donnell	Brian & Danielle Petruzzello	The Exercise Coach Sioux Falls
Matthew & Sara Brinkman	Rahel Habtemariam	Woodrow & Kathy Kraft	Chris & Andrea Pham	Thrivent
Ashley & Courtney Brockhoff	Bryan & Rebekah Hakeman	Gordon & Sandra Krause	Pinnacle Wealth	Thrivent Choice Donors
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148 students

received tuition assistance
in 2025–26

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\$260,000

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