

# Spotlight on San Marcos Lutheran Children's Center: Growing in Faith, Nature, and Community



Since opening its doors in September 2003, *San Marcos Lutheran Children's Center* in San Marcos, CA, has been a spotlight of early childhood education and community outreach. Founded through a generous donation from The Kellogg Family (yes, the cereal!), the center offers a morning preschool program for children ages 3-5, with the mission to provide a loving, nurturing environment where young minds can grow in faith and respect for God's creation.

What sets *San Marcos Lutheran Children's Center* apart is its exceptional outdoor play area. Designed as an extension of the indoor classroom, this mini park features real grass, thriving trees, a sensory garden, and a creek that encourages exploration. The built-in amphitheater is a beloved spot for chapel services, and the

calming swing provides peaceful moments for students and staff alike. After 20 years and overcoming the challenges of a global pandemic, the center is proud to be accredited by the *Evangelical Lutheran Education Association (ELEA)* and certified as a *National Wildlife Habitat*.



### **Proud Accomplishments: Meeting Community Needs**

The center recently opened a new program for 2-year-olds in response to growing community needs. This expansion came at a critical time as the center sought to support its families and adapt to the ever-changing landscape of early childhood education. The addition of the 2-year-old program is a testament to the school’s dedication to evolving alongside its community.

### **The ELEA: A Lifeline of Support**

*San Marcos Lutheran Children’s Center* has found immense support and camaraderie as part of the ELEA network. “*Being a member of ELEA is a blessing and a gift,*” Director Ann Leong shared. “*It’s a built-in support group where I know no one personally but feel fully supported professionally. We laugh, cry, and pray together. I contacted schools with 2-year-old programs, and the responses were great. It was comforting to know that my peers were rooting for me.*”

The ELEA community provided critical support when the center faced challenges, such as declining enrollment due to the expansion of Transitional Kindergarten in public schools. Ann contacted ELEA leaders Cory Newman and Melanie Bicket, who offered immediate guidance and encouragement.

*“Through heart-to-heart conversations, I felt loved, validated, and motivated to move forward. They reminded me how needed we are and challenged me to respond to my community, which inspired me to open the 2-year-old classroom.”*

### **Looking Forward: Expanding Support for Families**

In the upcoming year, San Marcos Lutheran Children’s Center has exciting plans to continue serving its community. The center aims to create an ongoing *Scholarship Fund* to support families in need. Ann is exploring ideas like hosting enrichment programs, Parents’ Night Out events, bake sales, and even talent shows to bring together the church and preschool in fundraising efforts. One upcoming event, the *Sidewalk Sale for Scholarships*, will serve as a fundraiser to launch the new Scholarship Fund.

With ELEA grants and the support of her peers, Ann looks forward to bringing these initiatives to life. “I anticipate good conversations and ideas with my ELEA group as we work to ensure more children can experience the Christ-centered, play-based learning environment at our school.”

