



BLEEDING KANSAS PROGRAM Page 14



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Bible Read-A-Thon to Be Held at Capitol



A Bible Read A Thon will be held on January 11th, from 12:30-2:30 p.m. at the Capitol Building in Topeka, on the 2nd floor Rotunda. The entire Bible will be read aloud simultaneously, and participants will each be assigned a verse to read. There will worship with hymns beforehand.

Those wishing to participate are encouraged to bring a Bible and enter through the North Doors. Children are welcome. At the sound of the shofar the Bible Reading will begin, for the 4th year of reading the entire Bible out loud in the capitol of Kansas.



How to Fulfill Your Divine Destiny

By Clint Decker

Each day when you get in your vehicle, you do so with a destination in mind. When you begin cooking, you have a mental picture of what you are going to make. While picking up your phone, you know what apps you are going to open. Every day, all of us have a sense of direction for ourselves in the different tasks we do. But the sad part is, when it comes to our overall lives, many have no direction. Millions wake up each morn-

ing and go about their day without a sense of purpose for their life.

This is not of God. He did not make us that way. Look at creation. It speaks of something entirely different. Every January 1st there is new year. Each Sunday is the start of a new week and there is a new sunrise each day.

Today is the day for a new start.

Are you living out your Divine Destiny? When Jeremiah was a teenager, while he was still determining a sense of direction for

himself like other youth, God spoke to him, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." (Jeremiah 1:4-5)

Then there was Mary. As she going about her day and still unsure of her life's direction God spoke through an angel, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and

■ Please see DESTINY page 3

State Sales Tax on Groceries Now Zero



On Jan. 1, 2025, Kansans will no longer pay state sales tax on groceries. They will still pay city- and county-imposed taxes, but the current state tax of 2% will be reduced to zero.

A 2022 law set out a three-year plan to reduce the state's sales tax on groceries, which was at 6.5% in 2022. In 2023, it was reduced to 4%, and in 2024 to 2%. When the bill was introduced, Kansas had one of the highest food sales taxes, second to Mississippi with 7%.

City and county grocery taxes will still be added. They range from 0%, in 11 counties, to a high of 2.25% in Sherman

■ Please see SALES TAX page 4

Report Ranks Topeka No. 5 in Nation for Economic Strength

Area Development magazine has ranked Topeka No. 5 in the nation for economic strength in its 2024 Leading Metro Locations report.

The Topeka Metropolitan Statistical Area ranked No. 11 overall in the nation. Topeka ranked No. 90 out of 410 on workforce availability.

Topeka was the highest-ranked metropolitan area in Kansas and Missouri. Wichita came in at No. 66,

Manhattan at No. 100 and Lawrence at No. 180 in the overall rankings. The Kansas City metro area ranked No. 225 overall.

Wichita also ranked high for economic strength at No. 78, with Manhattan at No. 84 and Lawrence at No. 119.

The report evaluated the 410 largest metro areas in the United

■ Please see RANKINGS page 4



Housing prices in Kansas have exploded. Here are three ideas to make homes affordable

A housing shortage in Kansas has sparked skyrocketing home prices, making it much harder to purchase a home. That's leading to a rise in homelessness and could be hurting the economy. State lawmakers have taken notice and are considering ways to create more affordable housing.

A special committee in the Legislature reviewed the situation in Kansas and suggested several ideas that may be able to alleviate some of the problems. But none of the ideas include large new programs or major state funding.

Republican Rep. Sean Tarwater of Stilwell, who led the committee, said the state approved affordable housing initiatives in recent years. He said those changes have not had enough time to make a significant difference yet.

"We've got to be cognizant of the programs that we currently have before we start piling on new programs," Tarwater said, "and we've got to make sure the ones we have work."

Still, the state has a long way to go. Housing advocates estimate it would take several thousand new homes built each year just to meet demand. And construction costs keep rising as well. So it could take years before the shortage is resolved.

The lack of housing is also contributing to rising homelessness in the state. While home prices are rising, so are home and apartment rental costs. Advocates serving the homeless say Kansas had the sixth highest rent price increase in the country in 2023. Data in Johnson County also shows more than half of homeless people there have some sort of income, but still can't afford a place to live.

The housing shortage may also hurt the economy. Republican Rep. Leah Howell said she's heard from business owners who are having a hard time filling positions because new employees can't find housing.

Here are some of the ideas the committee is recommending:

• Reviewing tax incentives

Federal tax credits for affordable housing projects are not new but were not regularly utilized. Housing development in Kansas took off once the state joined in on providing its own



In 2022, Kansas lawmakers approved new state tax credits for affordable housing, which were used to build these Mission 43 housing units in Kansas City, Kansas.

tax credits.

The Legislature enacted the Affordable Housing Tax Credit in 2022, which can be coupled with federal benefits to further incentivize developers to build more affordable housing in the state. The Kansas Housing Resources Corporation, which oversees those state tax credits, shows that it helped develop nearly 5,000 homes over the last two years.

The committee suggested looking at whether the state can find more opportunities to couple state tax credits with federal funding opportunities to create an even larger impact.

But lawmakers said they also want to review whether some incentives should be spread out, rather than coupled with the federal funding or connected to other state tax credits, to make sure they are dispersed and support more housing projects.

• Reworking state zoning law

Kansas zoning laws are currently based on land use. Some communities want to create more mixed-use zoning, like allowing multi-story buildings with businesses on the ground floor and apartments above.

Jamie Sauder, who is the president

of the Kansas Association of Realtors and a city commissioner in Emporia, said his community tried creating a new comprehensive plan that would have implemented form-based zoning. That focuses more on the appearance of a property, rather than its use. So buildings can be mixed-use.

However, the city and Lyon County could not enact the plan, because state law requires land-use zoning. So a property can only have one use, like commercial or residential. Mixed-use zoning is allowed, but it usually requires a special permit. That also gives people in the community an extra chance to block a project they don't like.

Sauder said amending the state law could allow cities to enact form-based zoning. That and streamlining could allow more housing development. He said form-based zoning also promotes housing density and makes property more affordable.

"It puts more people using the same amount of infrastructure (together)," Sauder said, "which means it's cheaper. Property taxes go down."

Republican Sen. Renee Erickson of Augusta said she wants the Legislature to consider reworking state zoning

laws to allow more flexibility for cities to create local solutions.

But she said she wants lawmakers to be careful and not go too far. She said any changes should not restrict a community's local control of zoning.

• Sealing eviction filings

When a landlord begins an eviction process in court, they must provide notice to the renter and then file a lawsuit. However, that filing is a public court record and can be held against a renter when they try to find new housing, even if they are never formally evicted.

For instance, a renter could fall behind on paying rent and a landlord could then file an eviction notice. The renter could then resolve the issue and the eviction case does not proceed in court. But that filing is still on the renter's record, and a landlord of a different property could point to that as

a reason to disqualify them.

Christina Ashie Guidry, director of policy and planning for United Community Services of Johnson County, told lawmakers that it's unfair to renters who are never formally evicted. She said landlords in Kansas file more than 14,000 eviction filings each year, but only half of them are finalized.

"It stays on your record, publicly searchable, forever," Ashie Guidry said. "That is despite the fact that half of these cases are never prosecuted."

The committee recommended sealing the eviction filings in court, meaning they won't be publicly viewable.

That won't create more housing, but it may provide relief to low-income renters who have previously faced eviction and are struggling to find a home.

—By Dylan Lysen / KCUR



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What New Kansas Laws Took Effect January 1?

Kansas passed numerous laws that the Republican-controlled legislature hopes will ease tax burdens, trash fees and improve school funding. They each went into effect on New Year's Day, 2025.

1. No More Food Tax - Your grocery bills are about to get cheaper. After a gradual phase-out that started in 2022, Kansas is joining 38 other states that don't tax food, which means real savings at the checkout counter in an era that has seen prices on many items jump upwards of 40 percent since 2020.

2. A Break for Drivers with Unpaid Tickets - Getting your license suspended over unpaid traffic tickets has been a huge headache for many Kansans. That's changing. The new law gives people a second chance by allowing restricted licenses for work, school, and medical appointments. Instead of getting stuck in a cycle of mounting fines, you'll pay a flat \$100 fee for a restricted license while you sort out your tickets.

3. Banking Goes Modern; Get Paid Early - The financial world is changing, and Kansas is keeping up. A major overhaul modernizes how money moves around the state. The new law covers everything from digital payments to earned wage access – that means some workers can get their pay before payday through approved providers. It's a big



deal for gig workers and anyone living paycheck to paycheck.

4. Credit Card Fees Get Real - Here's one you might not like, but should know about: Starting January 1, stores can legally charge you extra for using your credit card. The good news? They have to tell you about it upfront.

5. School Enrollment Changes - Starting January 2025, Kansas schools are implementing a significant change to their enrollment policies. School districts must accept non-resident student applications from January 1 to June 15 for enrollment in the next school year. This is part of the state's new open enrollment initiative, which has already seen about 1,500 students transfer to new districts in its initial phase. The law gives Kansas families more freedom to

choose their children's schools while ensuring districts can maintain appropriate class sizes.

6. More Tax Changes - Kansas joins the growing list of states that won't tax Social Security benefits in 2025, providing relief for retirees. The Kansas Department of Revenue will also implement various local tax rate updates effective January 1, 2025, though these changes will vary by jurisdiction.

7. Money Transfer Rules Get an Update - The old Money Transmitter Act is getting replaced with something more suited for Venmo and Cash App era. The new Money Transmission Act brings Kansas into the digital age while making sure your money stays safe when you send it electronically.

DESTINY

continued from page 1

bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus." (Luke 1:30-31)

Jesus said these words to a Roman ruler shortly before He was crucified, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth." (John 18:37)

Jeremiah and Mary, like Jesus, lived with a sense of their Divine Destiny. And there are millions of others that live the same, yet sadly millions more live aimlessly. They wake up and go about the course of their day, without an overall sense of the Divine or any direction. They are not heading anywhere; just living. And there are others, that do have a sense of direction. They wake up with purpose. They set goals. However, they have no sense of the Divine because they are self-guided, self-improved and self-made. Con-

sequently, without realizing it the direction they are headed is off course.

How can you live out your divine destiny? For you only get one life, and once you arrive at the funeral home, it is too late.

1. Know Jesus. Turn from operating life on your terms. Place your full trust in Christ and love Him with all your being.

2. Walk with Jesus. This is not just about a decision, but a daily walk with the King of kings, where you follow Him faithfully by obeying His commands through the power of His Spirit.

3. Draw near to Jesus. You will begin seeing the direction of your life clearer the closer you come to Christ through a life of worship, obedience and service.

4. Begin where you are. Divine Direction is not found after you get a degree, work through your current crisis, nor has it passed you by. It exists before you. It is found through what you are already doing. Open your eyes and see.

5. Listen and respond to God's voice. When you are seeking to find the purpose for which you were born and living according to these ways, you have laid the foundation for God to speak. And when He does, you will hear from Him in His Word, or through others, in life's circumstances, nature and or through the quiet voice of His Spirit. And in all these ways, God never contradicts His written Word.

Do not waste your life another second. Fulfill your destiny.

A prayer for you – *Creator God, you made all of us with a purpose, but due to the curse of sin and our evil ways, we are not living it out. Today, we change that. We seek you with all our heart that we might live out your purpose for our lives. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Clint Decker is President of Great Awakenings. Please share your comment at cdeckergreatawakenings.org and follow his blog at clintdecker.blogspot.com.

C5 “POWER” Luncheon to be at Harley Davidson

The January C5Alive POWER Luncheon will be held on the 9th in the event room at Harley Davidson, 21st & Topeka Blvd., at 11:30am.

The program will include a feature on RightNow Media resources for businesses and families.

Admission is free, and lunch can be ordered at Black Dog BBQ on site. RSVPs and inquiries can be sent to info@C5Alive.org.

“POWER” luncheons are held on the second Thursday of each month and are open to the public. C5Alive is dedicated to creating Christian culture in the Capital City, by developing and uniting leaders in community businesses, non-profits and churches.

Upcoming luncheon dates are February 13, and March 13, 2025.

C5 also hosts other events, including EASTERFEST, the annual Topeka Easter Parade and Fun Fair, held on N. Kansas Avenue and at Great Overland Station on the day before Easter.

C5 members may also sponsor luncheons and other events as a way to promote their organizations.

C5 is currently holding a membership drive with special incentives for new members. Lower-priced memberships for small and home-based businesses are now available. Individuals without a business to promote may join for \$20. A list of current members is available on the website. For information about C5Alive, go to www.C5Alive.org, www.facebook.com/C5Alive, or call 785-640-6399.



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Kansas nears a 'constitutional crisis' as small-town lawyers become a scarcity

Kansas judges in rural counties struggle to find qualified attorneys to represent defendants in cases where the right to a lawyer is guaranteed.

"We are approaching a constitutional crisis," said Kansas Supreme Court Justice Keynen "K.J." Wall.

Forty-seven rural counties are legal deserts, or areas without adequate access to legal help. One-third of rural attorneys are also over 60 years old. If they all retired, 87 counties would lack adequate legal representation.

The attorney shortage is so bad older lawyers put off retirement because if they go, then their neighbors might have no legal representation. Some cities and counties are struggling to hire as well.

Those findings come from a report released Friday by the Kansas Rural Justice Initiative. That 35-member committee was created in 2022 by the Kansas Supreme Court.



The committee studied access to lawyers in rural Kansas and suggested solutions.

Why this problem is so bad

Financial, practice and cultural issues are three major barriers to legal aid, the committee found.

Before 1980, about one in four attorneys graduated with student loan

debt. That debt averaged around \$12,000 — or \$48,000 when adjusted for inflation. Since 1980, 93% of attorneys are graduating with \$125,000 in debt.

These young lawyers want a steady job to pay off that debt. Larger firms in urban areas pay more, the report said, and rural practices might offer

pay based on the number of cases a lawyer handles. If work is slow, those younger attorneys lose out on money and can be crushed by debt.

Add those money woes to poor child care options, limited jobs for spouses and scarce housing. So attorneys are opting for larger cities where these problems may be more muted.

Wall said attorneys also want mentorship. Law students worry that going to rural Kansas would mean less support from more senior lawyers.

Marla Luckert, chief justice of the Kansas Supreme Court, said she knew the rural attorney shortage was a problem, but the report found that it was even worse than she thought.

She said there are solutions, though, and the state judicial branch is committed to fixing this problem.

Fixes for attorney shortage

The report outlined 10 recommendations. Wall said the key recommendations are tuition assistance, student loan help and creating a rural attorney network.

An attorney graduating now has two and half times as much student loan debt as an attorney who graduated before 1980, when adjusted for inflation. Wall wants the state Legislature to create a program that cuts the cost of college in exchange for that attorney working in rural Kansas.

Similar programs already exist for veterinarians. Wall said the rural vet program has successfully placed many veterinarians in rural communities.

The rural attorney network would help connect prospective employees with firms looking to hire.

Other recommendations include:

- Creating a permanent committee to study and monitor rural justice initiatives.

- Partnering with the Kansas State Department of Education to promote civics classes and outreach programs in rural school districts.

- Encouraging rural law outreach programs at Kansas universities.

- Creating a professional organization for rural attorneys to "collaborate on issues relating to the recruitment and retention of attorneys in rural Kansas."

The rural justice committee had two state lawmakers on it. Sen. Elaine Bowers, a Concordia Republican, said the Legislature is prepared to act on these issues.

"We don't have to reinvent the wheel," she said. "We have models that we're going to start from. So I'm looking forward to the introduction of legislation."

This story was originally published by The Beacon, a fellow member of the KC Media Collective.

SALES TAX

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County. Most counties have between 0.01% to 2% grocery taxes. Twelve counties have a grocery tax higher than 2%. The average monthly household cost for groceries is about \$500 per month, so it's estimated that the average Sherman County household would pay about \$11 per month on grocery tax. In 2022, they would have paid around \$34

per month.

Nancy Hamilton, a health psychologist, says the burden of the food sales tax — and other regressive taxes — fall the heaviest on low-income communities.

"Eliminating sales tax on food should have a greater benefit for those with the least because they spend the greatest proportion of their income on necessities like food," Hamilton said.

The Kansas Health Institute found that not only did the tax harm low-income Kansans financially, but also in

terms of health.

"Taxes are a financial driver within the overall food system that impact household purchasing power and behavior, community health and nutrition," they said.

The 2022 law was passed with bipartisan support, unanimously in the Senate and with an overwhelming majority in the House.

When the law was passed, food prices had increased by 9.9%. In 2023, they increased by 5.8%.

RANKINGS

continued from page 1

States, and emphasizes key factors driving economic health, including workforce availability, economic strength and affordability.

Brownsville-Harlingen, TX, took the top overall spot in the rankings, reflecting the growing economic significance of the Southwest, particularly thanks to the SpaceX effect. The company's operations in nearby Boca Chica have transformed Brownsville into a high-tech manufacturing hub, with SpaceX investing more than \$3 billion in infrastructure and driving job growth across the region. With over 21,000 indirect jobs supported and a growing focus on advanced

manufacturing, Brownsville exemplifies how strategic investments in key industries can propel smaller metros to national prominence.

For more information about Topeka's economic strengths, visit TopekaPartnership.com.

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Some migrating geese in Kansas are carrying the bird flu.

Migrating flocks of wild birds can carry avian influenza, also known as the bird flu. That's why Kansas officials are warning residents to avoid sick birds and report or dispose of dead ones.

Tom Bidrowski is a migratory game bird specialist with the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks. He said flocks of wild birds can come from as far as the Arctic and travel to the Gulf of Mexico.

Bidrowski said during this lengthy migration, birds mingle with large flocks from different continents.

"So that kind of sets the stage for outbreaks or disease remission to occur," he said. "Infected birds spread the virus either through saliva, nasal or tracheal secretions or even feces. And the virus can be carried in things: in water, manure, on equipment."

According to Bidrowski, there are up to 150 strains of avian influenza. He said domestic poultry are at the highest risk of contracting the deadly virus.

Earlier this year, there were even outbreaks of avian influenza in commercial

cattle in states including Kansas, Colorado and Texas. A spokesperson from the Kansas Department of Agriculture said that was a different strain of the virus than what is being identified in poultry cases.

In Kansas, there have not been any bird flu outbreaks among commercial flocks of poultry since spring. But the Kansas Department of Agriculture said there have been two confirmed cases of the virus in small backyard flocks.

The department also said the virus was detected in wild birds across the state. In Missouri, three dead snow geese found in Vernon and Henry counties, near the Kansas border, tested positive for the virus.

Operation Wildlife, an animal rescue and rehabilitation center in Linwood,

Kansas, said it has had a high volume of calls about sick wild birds recently.

"We're probably receiving between 10 and 12 calls a day about geese on the ground that are sick or injured because they've had a traumatic fall and broken a wing or something. And they're exhibiting symptoms of avian influenza," said Diane Johnson, executive director for Operation Wildlife.

Johnson said birds with avian influenza typically "act drunk."

"Their eyes are swollen. They are uncoordinated," she said. "Sometimes they

have respiratory issues where they're wheezing, frothing at the nose and the mouth."

Johnson said her organization can't care for wild birds with the virus because it would put other birds at their facility at risk. She also said her staff would be limited in what they could do to help because the virus is almost always fatal for birds.

"Our quarantine areas are full," she said.

Johnson said anyone who finds a dead bird should report it to law enforcement or animal control, or throw it away.

"Double-bag them, bury them, burn them, somehow dispose of them," Johnson said, adding that people should disinfect their clothes afterward.

Bidrowski from the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks said people should wear disposable gloves to touch a dead bird. Avoid birds that act sick, and keep pets away from sick birds, he said.

Bidrowski said bird flu rarely spreads to mammals, but it's not impossible for a pet or person to contract the virus. So far this year, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has recorded 60 human cases of the H5N1 strain of the bird flu across the country.

A spokesperson from the Kansas Department of Agriculture said the risk to the public is low, and there has not been any indication of person-to-person spread of the bird flu.

—By Bek Shackelford-Nwanganga & Rose Conlon / KCUR





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HITTING YOUR GOALS

Dear Dave,

Do you have any advice for sticking with your goals and New Year's resolutions? I always have great things in mind to shoot for in December, but then they always seem to fall by the wayside before spring.

Rae

Dear Rae,

First, be specific. Things like "eat healthier" or "read more" are too vague. Instead, try something like "cut eating

out to twice a week" or "read for at least 30 minutes every night before bed."

Number two, make your goals measurable. A goal like "lose weight" has no target attached to it. But "lose 20 pounds" has a clear finish line. You can also break your goal setting into bite-size chunks. Give yourself daily, weekly and monthly steps to take.

Three, set a time limit. You need a finish line, so take your goal, create a plan and break it all the way down into daily activities. Then, give yourself a deadline. You might say, "I want to lose 25 pounds by December 31, 2025." To lose those 25 pounds by your deadline, figure out things like how many times you need to work out each week and how many calories to eat in a day.

Number four, make sure the goals are yours. Trying to achieve someone else's goals for your life never works.

Finally, set your goals down in writing. Something special happens when you write down specific goals.

How to Save a Boatload in Tax if You Work(ed) for the Federal Government or a University

By **Ryan Shumaker**
Smartvestor Pro

Ryan hosts a radio show Saturdays at 7:30am & Sundays at 8am on FM93.5/AM1440. Listen anytime at RetireLawrence.com/Radio



Retirees are one of the highest and most unfairly taxed groups. Every dollar that needlessly goes to taxes is one additional dollar you must make up for elsewhere, whether that be by taking on extra investment risk, spending less, or not having as much to pass on as a legacy.

One of the core things we assist clients with is tax reduction, since we feel that most people should be free to spend their hard-earned money as they see fit. If you're someone who feels they don't pay enough in taxes, I have great news! At www.treasury.gov you can anonymously donate to either help pay off the nation's \$36+ trillion dollar debt or pay extra into the general revenue fund where the government decides the best use of your money. Believe it or not, every year there are people that do one or both. One individual recently gave over \$1.5 million!

If you're like most of our clients and would prefer to decide where your money goes and currently or previously worked for either the federal government or one of the major universities in Kansas, there are several tax exemptions that can save you an incredible amount of money. How much money? Well, in the case of taxes paid to Kansas, the answer is all of it! You see, about a decade ago there was a challenge to K.S.A. 79-32,117(vii) which, in a nutshell, states if you have retirement income from the federal government (like a pension) you are exempt from having to pay state income tax on any of that money. The challenge was whether money that was in a TSP (Thrift Savings Plan, which is like the 401(k) equivalent for federal workers) falls under the same exemption. After a bill failed to pass that would have added language to clarify this, the Department of Revenue decided their interpretation moving forward would be that any money that was in, or subsequently rolled over from, a TSP plan would qualify for the state tax exemption. We've seen many cases where retired federal employees (and/or their tax preparers) are unaware of this and have needlessly paid income tax on their retirement money. Given that the highest income tax bracket in Kansas is 5.58%, this can add up quickly. If, for example,

you withdrew one million dollars over time that is \$55,800 in tax that could be saved!

A very similar provision also applies to any benefits eligible individual that has worked for any of the Board of Regents Universities like KU, KSU, Emporia State, Wichita State, etc. in K.S.A. 74-4923(b). These differ from federal workers in that in order to get the tax exemption, the money must come directly out of a university retirement plan, like a 403(b). For federal workers you can roll your money over and out of the TSP and to another account and still maintain the tax exemption, but that isn't the case with the university plans. Does that mean you need to always keep all of your money in one of these plans? No, because you can actually put money back into these plans right before you complete a withdrawal and still receive the tax exemption! This is something we help people with regularly, as we are one of the few advisors in the state that can open retirement accounts on this plan. We can also help a client transfer money they might have from a different 401k, IRA, or other retirement account into one of these retirement plans and get them this tax break on all of their retirement money- not just what they contributed while working! We recently did this for a client that hadn't worked for KU since the 1980's, which resulted in tens of thousands in tax savings across all of their retirement account balances.

Another place we frequently see people paying taxes on retirement money

when they shouldn't is a KPERS pension buyout. KPERS pensions, much like federal pensions, are exempt from Kansas tax. If you elect to take a buyout of your KPERS pension and roll that money over to a retirement account that money still maintains that exemption. Unfortunately, many don't know that and end up unnecessarily paying state tax when they make a withdrawal. We often see situations where advisors unaware of this tax provision combine pension buyout money with other money they're managing and give incorrect tax reporting. This causes account holders to pay Kansas tax when they shouldn't. The good news is this can all be corrected by working with a team that understands the tax code.

If you currently or previously have worked for a major university in Kansas or for the federal government, or have taken a KPERS pension buyout, and want to ensure you're taking all the appropriate steps to maximum this tax break I suggest scheduling a 3 Step Review with one of our advisors either through www.RetireLawrence.com or by calling 785-330-9292.

Other great articles about retirement, investing, and tax reduction can be seen at RetireLawrence.com/blog

Material discussed is meant for general/informational purposes and is not intended to be used as the sole basis for any financial decisions, nor be construed as advice to meet your particular needs. Please consult a financial professional for further information.



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Common Misconceptions About 529 Plans

By Jim Hanna



Hanna

Many families and individuals who want effective and efficient ways to save for education expenses often turn to the ever-popular 529 plan, which offers wide-ranging tax benefits. In recent years, the scope of 529 savings plan has expanded with several new features, many of which are often overlooked. If you anticipate that someone in your life may benefit from a 529, it's important to understand the advantages – and common myths – of this unique savings vehicle.

Four common 529 plan misconceptions:

#1) A 529 is just for college. It is a common misunderstanding that 529 plans can only be used for higher education or college expenses. While the 529 plan was originally created to save for college costs, it has since expanded to be a broader savings vehicle. For example, 529 funds can now be used for qualified expenses for apprenticeship programs registered with the U.S. Department of Labor, educational loan payments (up to \$10,000 total), and specific K-12 tuition (up to \$10,000 per year). The major value of a 529 plan is that any withdrawal from the fund that is designated as a qualified educational expense such as tuition and books is free from federal income taxes, and in some cases, state income tax.

#2) I must have children to open a 529. You do not have to have children to open a 529 for a beneficiary. Adults over the age of 18 can open a 529 plan for themselves or for another student, including a parent, grandparent, extended family or friend. You also can open a 529 plan for future children or grandchildren before they're born, which is a

tremendous advantage as it allows savers to take advantage of a long-time horizon for funds to grow. If you are anticipating a future student's need for educational cost-assistance, you can start a 529 plan and name yourself the beneficiary and switch the account from yourself to the student at any point in the future. However, keep in mind there may be tax consequences if you change the beneficiary to someone outside of the original beneficiary's family. Consider the relationship between any initial and intended beneficiary in advance of opening any plan. It is also important to note that the owner of the 529 plan must switch over the account to the appropriate beneficiary before withdrawals can take place.

#3) 529 plans rule out need-based financial aid. Opening and utilizing a 529 can impact distributions of financial aid based on need, but it does not rule it out completely. A 529 owned by a parent or student is considered an asset under the Federal Application for Student Aid (FAFSA), which can reduce the ability to receive need-based financial aid, but only by a small percentage of the asset's value. It is still possible to receive need-based financial aid if you have 529.

#4) I must use all the money in the account. You do not have to use all the funds in a 529 for education expenses. If you have funds remaining in your 529 plan – perhaps a child received a significant scholarship or a grandchild chose an alternative path over college – you may reallocate them. Starting in 2024, beneficiaries of a 529 plan that has been in place for more than 15 years can allocate the assets from the 529 account to a Roth IRA, which can be a great option to increase retirement savings in lieu of education expenditures. The lifetime maximum that can be transferred from a 529 plan to a Roth IRA is \$35,000.

If transferring the funds to a Roth IRA does not make sense for your financial plan, you can utilize the money in a 529 for other expenses, but keep tax and penalty consequences in mind. For example, if the funds are used for expenses that are not designated as qualified education expenses, the earnings portion of the withdrawal is subject to federal, and likely state, income tax as well as a 10% federal penalty. Make sure to consult a tax advisor for additional guidance.

A 529 plan can be a valuable saving tool if you have a desire to support the education of one or more loved ones in your life. Your financial advisor can help you understand if a 529 makes sense for your situation and how to plan for one of life's biggest expenses while staying attuned to your long-term goals.

###

1 – Ameriprise Financial: "529 plans: frequently asked questions". ameriprise.com/financial-goals-priorities/education-planning/529-plan-FAQ

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Keeping the Faith and Your New Year's Resolutions

Keeping the Faith and Your New Year's Resolutions

By Myra Kahn Adams

I won't bore you with the circumstances, but this week, the word "rejoice" crossed my path in a divine way. Then, given the timing, New Year's resolutions were on my mind, and a passage popped up that combined both. The following passage will help sustain your resolutions and goals for the New Year while deepening your faith:

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:4-7).

Make the words of St. Paul's a foundation. When you incorporate those faith behaviors into your life, much good will result. Double your effort to appreciate the Lord, praising and celebrating Him, for He is the Almighty Creator. Moreover, Psalm 46:10 teaches us to "Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth!"

This year, make the Lord your partner to help strengthen your resolve to keep your New Year's resolutions. Ask Him for strength through prayer to "not be anxious about anything." If that seems insurmountable, know, "For nothing is impossible with God."

Last year, on Dec. 31, 2023, I wrote: "How about a New Year's resolution that



encompasses what Jesus said are the two most important commandments? For that reason, they are called 'The Greatest Commandments.' Together, we read:

"Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?'

Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:34-40). Note: The Greatest Commandment also appears in (Mark 12: 28-31) and (Luke 10:25-

28).

We rephrase for today: All New Year's resolutions hang on these two commandments.

If you love God, you will trust and depend on Him to help you with whatever needs to change. Recognizing the need for change is the first step to achieving the

■ Continued on next page

Was the Virgin Birth Necessary?



CLINT DECKER

President and Evangelist with Great Awakenings, Inc.

Speaking Truth

"Silent night! Holy night! All is calm, all is bright; 'round yon virgin mother and child! Holy infant, so tender and mild, sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace."

The popular Christmas carol that is sung by millions in schools, community events, television specials and in churches speaks clearly to the true focus of Christmas – the miraculous virgin birth of Jesus.

The birth became the method through which Jesus came from heaven to earth. It was how God became a man and humbly lived among us. Often Jesus referred to Himself as being sent by His Father in heaven. The virgin birth is how that happened.

Jesus eternally existed in heaven until one marvelous day. It was then

He left His Father and the angels in His celestial home, to become a seed planted inside of a young virgin's womb. I cannot imagine what heaven must have been like, seeing Him go. And Mary became God's chosen instrument to bring His Son into the world. She was a woman in her teenage years when she and her fiancé, Joseph, were preparing to wed. It was during this time Mary had an encounter that would change her life and the world, forever. An angel appeared to her and communicated a message from the Lord God, "...you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus" (Luke 1:31). Thinking logically, Mary could not understand. She replied to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" (Luke 1:34). The angel explained, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy—the Son of God... For nothing will be impossible with God." (Luke 1:35, 38).

First, the virgin birth was necessary

because of who Jesus was, a holy, perfect, and sinless Man. And God the Father took Mary from among many other women, and blessed her with the gift of bringing Jesus into the world. Mary was faithful to the Lord and a virgin. One who was pure and had never lain with a man. Though Mary was not sinless herself, God made her



holy, which prepared her to receive the Son of God.

Second, the virgin birth was also necessary because of the cross. When Jesus grew up from an infant to a man, only He could have died on the cross in order to provide forgiveness, for the sins of the world. In all the universe there was no one so good, so right as was He. There would be no resurrection, no cross if there was no virgin

birth.

The virgin birth was no myth, legend or allegory. It is a historical fact, albeit, a miraculous one. No scientist can explain or fully understand it. It is a complete miracle in how a virgin can give birth to a child. Do you believe in the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ? Jesus came from heaven to earth for you and your household. For it is only through His birth and resurrection, both miracles, that you can have the hope of forgiveness and be spared from the judgment of God.

A prayer for you - *Lord God, I pray you will help us to believe in the virgin birth of your Son. It is a miracle. It defies human reasoning and logic. How could this be? Help us to believe and to yield our lives fully to you. For you are the God of the impossible. Do the impossible within us. Change our hearts. Change our lives today. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

—Clint Decker is President of Great Awakenings. Share your comment at cdecker@greatawakenings.org and follow his blog at clintdecker.blogspot.com.

How do Pete Hegseth's credentials compare to former Secretaries of Defense?

The President's Cabinet Secretaries - including State, Defense, Education, and others - are anything but secretaries listening to a boss. Each must excel in their field through education and experience. Their jobs are to advise the President and carry out directives to achieve successful outcomes. While some political appointees entered their roles with limited experience, many adapted quickly by learning or finding expert support. The President appoints all Secretaries, the Senate confirms them by majority vote, and no, shorthand is not required.

Pete Hegseth, President-elect Donald Trump's pick, will go through the process once the new Congress is seated in January.

The Cabinet has evolved with America's needs. While some positions like Secretary of State date to our nation's founding, others emerged more recently. The Department of Education began in May 1980, building on educational initia-

tives dating to 1867 under President Andrew Johnson. That same year saw the Department of Health and Human Services emerge from the Department of Health Education and Welfare. The original Cabinet included Alexander Hamilton as Treasury Secretary, Thomas Jefferson as Secretary of State, Henry Knox as Secretary of War, and Edmund Randolph as Attorney General. Some roles have vanished - the Postmaster General served as a Cabinet position for over 140 years. Today's Cabinet comprises the Vice President plus 15 executive departments.

The Secretary of Defense position, created in 1949 after World War II, transformed the earlier Secretary of War role for the nuclear age. This change recognized America's need for constant military preparedness, not just during wartime. By law, appointees cannot have served as mil-



itary officers within seven years of their appointment, with a ten-year requirement for generals and admirals. While military experience might seem essential, six Secretaries of Defense served without it: Charles Wilson, Neil McElroy, James Schlesinger, Dick Cheney, Harold Brown (a nuclear physicist), and Mark Esper (who worked in government and private sectors).

The qualities of successful Defense Secretaries vary with circumstances. Only two graduated from military academies: George Marshall from Virginia Military Institute and current Secretary Lloyd Austin from West Point. Both required exceptions to the National Defense Act's service restrictions. Congress has clearly prioritized exceptions over rules. America's defense leaders have brought diverse expertise to the role. James Forrestal,

though he never completed his studies at Dartmouth and Princeton, earned his place in history through his success containing Communist expansion in Yugoslavia, leading to the naming of one of America's first supercarriers in his honor.

Most Defense Department leaders graduated from prestigious universities - Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Columbia, and Pennsylvania. Their backgrounds span law, investment banking, military service, and corporate leadership. Two brought scientific expertise as nuclear physicists, while others transitioned from leading major corporations like Ford and General Motors.

President-elect Trump's nomination of Hegseth draws interesting parallels with past appointees. Like Forrestal, who began as a newspaper reporter, Hegseth built his career in media at Fox News - perhaps today's equivalent of the influential newspapers of the early 1900s. He holds political science degrees from Princeton and

Harvard, has authored several books, and generates big headlines in news outlets. His early career mirrors Forrestal's path through investment banking, having worked as an analyst at Bear Stearns in 2005. Hegseth served with distinction in the Army and reserves, though his attempt to serve on January 6th in Washington DC ended, emails show, when officials rejected him over a Jerusalem Cross tattoo. His management record shows mixed results leading veterans' organizations.

As with all Cabinet appointments, politics plays a central role. Hegseth's advocacy for veterans strengthens his case, though he needs an exemption from the National Defense Act, having retired as a Major in the reserves within the seven-year window. Despite past management challenges, his commitment to veterans' interests suggests he could serve effectively as Secretary of Defense.

-Robert White / Metro Voice

Continued from previous page

ended results. Loving Him with all your heart, soul, and mind means that He is your God. No bad habits or addictions — the modern-day equivalent of idols — should be worshipped that interfere with God always being number one. Only you know the behavior(s) that need to stop. Only you know if God speaks to you with these words.

The second part, "loving your neighbor as yourself," is all-encompassing and applicable to every relationship — spouse, family, friends, work colleagues,

etc. Selfish behaviors and addictions impact your ability to "love your neighbor as yourself."

With the new year upon us, we should be open to a new attitude and desire to operationalize the two greatest commandments. That is where rejoicing comes into play, sparked by a message left on my desk. So now, let's rejoice on New Year's Day, saying aloud:

"This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it" (Psalm 118:24). And we must never forget:

"Let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy, and spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may exult in you" (Psalm 5:11).

Every year brings some suffering through which we grow. I pray that yours were minimal. About suffering, St. Paul wrote:

"More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Romans 5:3-5).

I pray this study has inspired you to contemplate how to improve your relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ in the new year. Here is my go-to verse:

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Happy New Year! Amen!

Myra Kahn Adams is a conservative political and religious writer with numerous national credits. Her book, "Bible Study For Those Who Don't Read The Bible," reprints the first 56 volumes of this popular study. "Part 2," with the same title, reprints Vols. 57-113. She is also the Executive Director of the National Shroud of Turin Exhibit, dedicated to building a future permanent Shroud of Turin exhibit in Washington, D.C. Contact: MyraAdams01@gmail.com

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Israel Pro-Life: Giving Pregnant Moms “The Greatest Gift in Their Lives”

The pro-life movement can seem like a uniquely American force. But the battle for life is worldwide and has a steadfast friend and ally in the Holy Land.

EFRAT (IsraelBabies.com) is the pro-life movement in Israel. They have helped thousands of women every single year prevent the terrible atrocity of abortions. Since 1977, 88,000 babies have been brought into the world safe and sound because of EFRAT’s life-giving work.

Nir Salomon, EFRAT’s executive director, notes that when his son goes into the battlefield as a member of the Golani brigade, he cannot guarantee his safety. “But God gives us free choice in the moment of taking a life when it comes to abortion,” he explains.

EFRAT comes around pregnant



moms in their moment of greatest need. Feeling great anxiety over the financial costs involved in having another child and oftentimes experiencing pressure to end the pregnancy, EFRAT is by their side. “Sometimes we need to be the out-

stretched arm of God Almighty Himself,” Nir shares.

EFRAT offers material assistance in the form of a crib, a carriage, two years of baby diapers, and formula. They also provide job training for moms. And just

as important, they provide emotional cushion to these women who are under great duress. “Now they are able to breathe and experience that deep desire to mother that baby, and when they have that opportunity, the clear answer to giving birth is an overwhelming yes,” he said.

“When you support EFRAT, you are giving these women the greatest gift in their lives, and that is their child,” he adds.

By helping Israel’s moms “choose life,” as Moses declares in Deuteronomy 30:19, you can also obey the command of God in Genesis 12:3 to bless the people of Israel, and so thereby receive a blessing. “Please help more Jewish babies come into the world,” Nir says.

To learn more, visit

IsraelBabies.com.

—Clem Boyd



The belief that life has infinite, irreplaceable value— as plain as a red sweater on a newborn

It has become a lovely tradition in hospitals around the nation: dressing newborn babies in distinctive garb, based upon a holiday or some other celebration.

Witness babies dressed like Mister Rogers, the acclaimed children’s television host... newborns dressed as characters from the film “Frozen”... and babies outfitted in Christmas stockings.

These beautiful photos go viral on social media, adorning Facebook feeds, Instagram stories, and Twitter pages. While some may dismiss this phenomenon as just a

cute custom, it is actually much more than that. It is a recognition of the amazing beauty of the newly born... an honoring of their personhood... and a celebration of their oh-so-young lives.

Yet, it is alarming that babies not much younger than these are routinely and brutally denied the right to life.

Abortion represents the ending of what should be infinite possibilities. It is an action born of hopelessness, despair, and even greed by abortion center profiteers. It is the opposite of the neighborliness of a

Mister Rogers... the indomitable spirit of a “Frozen” character... and the hope re-born each Christmas.

Future generations may indeed wonder at this deeply disturbing dichotomy—the festive observance of life on the one hand, the cold-hearted ending of that defenseless life on the other. While nurses and doctors provide round-the-clock care to premature infants in one health care facility, abortionists down the street can destroy pre-born lives as part of one morning’s “work.”

However, because of the Dobbs decision which sent Roe back to where it rightly belongs, I believe our culture’s schizophrenia attitude toward preborn life is beginning to end. The vast numbers of pregnancy resource centers pitching in to help women in their hour of need will contribute to reversing our cultural descent into nihilism.

Oxford expertly defines “nihilism” as the belief that life is meaningless. The better angels of our natures know differently. It’s as plain as a red sweater on a newborn



baby’s back, the belief that life has infinite, irreplaceable value.

And that no amount of pontifi-

cating by the pro-abortion movement will change that incontrovertible fact.

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Kansas provided more abortions in 2023 than ever before, mostly for out-of-state patients

More abortions occurred in Kansas in 2023 than ever before in the state's recorded history — driven by a surge of patients living in nearby states with abortion bans.

A vital statistics report released Friday by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment said 19,467 abortions occurred in Kansas in 2023. That was the first full year after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade, allowing many states to ban the procedure.

The 2023 figure represents a 58% increase from the 12,318 abortions recorded in 2022 and a 148% increase from the 7,849 recorded in 2021.

The 2023 report shows that less than a fourth of the patients who received abortions at Kansas clinics were in-state residents. Texans made up the largest portion of patients, followed by Kansans, Oklahomans, Missourians and Arkansans.

More than 9 in 10 abortions occurred before the 13th week of pregnancy. None happened after 22 weeks, which is the legal limit in Kansas.

Kansas started reporting yearly



abortion figures in 1971. The previous record was set in 1973, when the state recorded 12,612 procedures. The number has ebbed and flowed over the years, with a general trend downward starting around 2000.

Organization decision.

In an email, the anti-abortion lobbying group Kansans for Life called the increase of abortions last year “heartbreaking.”

“The surge of abortions in Kansas

is a heartbreaking reminder of the abortion industry's relentless targeting of vulnerable women who are no longer protected by

enforceable informed consent laws or basic abortion facility-inspection and safety standards,” the group's communications director Danielle Underwood said.

In 2022, Kansas voters overwhelmingly rejected an anti-abortion ballot measure that would have enabled state lawmakers to severely restrict or ban the procedure.

Three new clinics have opened in Kansas in response to the increasing demand from out-of-state residents: in Kansas City, Kansas, in 2021, in Wichita in 2022 and in Pittsburg in August.

—Rose Conlon / Kansas News Service

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart.

Jeremiah 1:5



The downward trend was broken in 2022, when the state's clinics saw a renewed influx of out-of-state patients after the Supreme Court's Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health

Pairing children with godly mentors helps them develop character, skills



Craig Thompson's son, David, with one of his mentors, Aleksey Melnikov. Aleksey taught David that his choice of profession can impact the amount of time he's able to spend with his family and church.

A Tennessee father's innovative program to find godly mentors is transforming young lives through character development and life skills.

Craig Thompson, a father of six, gave his son a gift that would have a profound influence on his life when he turned 13.

“What I needed to give my son for his birthday was the opportunity to meet with men from all walks of life who were of noble character,” he told “The Epoch Times.” “Men who would talk with him not just about business or money or investing, but who would share wisdom about life itself.”

He began writing down the names of potential mentors for his firstborn, David, with the idea of proposing that they spend one day with his son to teach him some skill or life lesson. As they started to respond, he began scheduling one mentor per week, beginning on the week of David's 13th birthday. His goal was to schedule 52 mentors over 52 weeks so his son would have a whole year of mentoring.

It was a success. Now, 14 years later, he has continued the tradition with three of his other children and is preparing a mentoring program for his fifth child, who will turn 13 in Jan-

uary.

“I try to find company owners, retired persons, employees, homemakers, teachers, business professionals, authors and other types of genuinely different people,” Thompson said. “Mentors from different socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds can love God with all their hearts, and they can impact my child with a life lesson that we as parents have not considered or remembered.”

Thompson said mentoring gives young people a renewed sense of purpose and direction in their lives.


“At the base level, we have seen that this year of mentoring delivers a reproducible maturation in each of the children who have gone through it,” he said. “Unlike many of the other youth who are in the 13- to 14-year age group, the children who have gone through this mentoring program begin to think about life and their future in a new way.”


Since making his first mentoring program, Thompson has written several books and guided many parents in finding mentors for their children.

“Asking other people to mentor your children is an exercise in humility,” he said. “I have reached out to men and women, because I realize that I do not have a complete grasp on serving God, living life fully, running a business or even being a husband and father. If you are willing to admit this, then you can more freely begin to look for mentors for your own children.

“If you are not intentional in mentoring your children with godly men and women, know that the world system will provide plenty of mentors to corrupt your children. Commit to something positive, and commit to making a start in your own family.”

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North Topeka has Axes, Ghosts and Musicals, Oh My!

Axe throwing leagues are now forming at Odin's Lair. Leagues start January 8 at 7 p.m. Call 785-214-3798 for details.

There will be a **Ghost Hunt** at Shawnee North Community Center January 10 from 8-10 p.m. participants are welcome to bring their own cameras and equipment. Hear ghostly tales and the history of Shawnee North Community Center. Then we will turn off the lights for a ghost hunt! Led by Ghost Tours of Kansas. Ages 13+. \$25

Seussical The Musical Auditions will be held Jan 4th, 8am-2:30pm, at Calvary Lutheran Church, 4211 NW Topeka Blvd. Sign up for an audition time or just find more information at www.theworldshisstage.com. The World's His Stage is a theatre organization for Christian homeschool families. theworldshisstage@gmail.com.

A **TIBA Lunch & Learn** will be held Jan. 14, 11:30-1, at The Brownstone, 4020 NW 25th. Discussing Marketing needs

for small businesses will be the topic. For more information: questions@topekataba.org

Is it too soon to start thinking about Easter? Be sure to make plans to be in the parade or vendor market at the 10th Annual **Easterfest** Topeka Easter Parade & Fun Fair on Apr. 19, 10am-3pm, at Great Overland Station and on North Kansas Avenue. Topeka's annual Easter Parade will begin at 10am at Garfield Park and proceed south on Kansas Avenue to the tracks in NOTO. Egg Hunt begins right after the parade at the Great Overland Station. Food Trucks will be on hand and the Family Fun Fair, Vendor Market, and Health Fair will be 10-3, inside and outside Great Overland Station, including vendor booths, children's games, food, facepainting, inflatables, cake walk and more. Live music, gymnastics, ballet and other entertainment will be on hand. For info: Topeka Easter Parade on facebook,



info@C5Alive.org or 640-6399.

First Friday Art Walk hours are 10 am to 9 pm. First Friday Art Walk & Market is the first Friday of every month. The North Topeka Arts District has become an attraction to Art Lovers and History Buffs alike with beautiful scenes of art and history. Entertainment can also be found on First Fridays, at various venues during the artwalk up and down N. Kansas Avenue, as well as streetside vendors. The restaurants, locally owned shops, art galleries antiques and studios have become a favorite art walk destination.

You can also visit 3rd Friday's NOTO Night Out! Many Merchants are also open longer hours on Second Saturdays.

For more event information visit explorenoto.org/.

More North Topeka events:

WOODSHED INDOOR MARKET—Sundays 10-3, 1901 N. Kansas Ave.

SENIORS PITCH CLUB - Every Tuesday 1 pm at Garfield Community Center. First visit free then a dollar per visit for coffee and replacement cards

SUNRISE OPTIMIST CLUB—Every Tue., 6:30am, Sunrise Optimist Complex, 720 NW 50th St. 246-1291.

VIP LUNCHEON FOR SENIORS—Every Wed., 10:45 bible Study and meal at Noon, Topeka Church of the Brethren, 3201 NW Rochester Rd. 1 mile north of Dillon's North). FREE lunch with Christian fellowship, devotions & entertainment provided by Topeka North Outreach. For info: 785-224-8803.

OPERATION BACKPACK—1st Thurs., 6pm, Indian Creek Elementary, 4303 NE Indian Creek Rd. Volunteers gather to assemble Weekend Snack Sacks for low-income students. No assembly in August. Sponsored by Topeka North Outreach. For info: 286-1370.

FREE MOBILE FOOD DISTRIBUTION—4th Tue. through Nov., 9am, 1231 NW Eugene St. Randel Ministries, Inc., in partnership with Harvesters and Family of God Church will have its monthly food distribution. No ID or proof of income required, first come first served. Distributing fresh produce and other items to families in need. 785-234-1111 www.RandelMinistries.com

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The Area's Most Complete Guide to the Family-Friendly Events You Want to See!

the events calendar

FREE LISTINGS! E-mail your events to: Voice@cox.net; mail to Metro Voice, P.O. 5724, Topeka, KS 66605; fax to 785-235-3340 or enter online at metrovoiceneews.com
Get your event **Highlighted in Blue in print, our online calendar and promoted in social media for only \$29!**

CONCERTS

KANSAS PRAIRIE PICKERS – Fourth Sun. ea. Month, 1pm, Auburn Community Center. Foot-stomping, hand-clapping tunes. Concessions available

GRAND OTTAWA OPRY – 2nd & 4th Saturday, 5:30PM- pre-show, 6PM showtime, Ottawa Memorial Auditorium, 301 S Hickory, Ottawa. Tickets are \$15 and only at the door. Ph. 785-241-6762, email grandootpry@gmail.com. GrandOttawaOpry.com

"PICKIN' ON THE PRAIRIE", a FREE Acoustic Jam at the Old Prairie Town every Sunday from 1-3pm at the historic Potwin Drugstore.

SPECIAL CHURCH EVENTS

HARVESTER'S PROGRAM FOR SENIOR CITIZENS – every second Sat., takes place at Christian Lord Ministries, 2421 SE California. Call 266-4979.

HOPE HOUSE FREE COMMUNITY CLOTHING BANK – Wed. 6-8pm and Sat. 12-3pm, Oakland Church of the Nazarene, 939 NE Oakland

HARVESTER FREE MOBILE FOOD DISTRIBUTION – 2nd Saturday each month, 1:30-3pm, Oakland Church of the Nazarene, 939 NE Oakland

FIRST SATURDAY BREAKFAST BUFFET – 7:30 AM - 10:00 AM, Shawnee Heights UMC, 6020 SE 44th

INSIDE OUT FELLOWSHIP CHURCH – Every Sunday 12pm service; Every Tuesday 7:30pm service. Location: 2409 NE Division St. For info: 785-380-7031 or io@insideoutinc.net or www.insideoutinc.net

KIDS for JESUS! - Wednesday's 7 - 8pm, Lakeview Church of the Nazarene, 2835 SE Croco Rd. Bring your

friends, family, neighbors, enemies! For info: 785-266-3247, FB: Topeka Lakeview Nazarene, Email: Lake-naz@aol.com

MID-WEEK PRAYER & BIBLE STUDY - Wednesday's, 7-8pm, Lakeview Nazarene, 2835 SE Croco Rd. You are invited! Contact info: (785)266-3247, FB: Topeka Lakeview Nazarene

LOL "LADIES OF LAKEVIEW" - Lakeview Church of the Nazarene, 2835 SE Croco Rd. Monthly Women's Ministry Events! (Cooking, Crafts, Outreach, Bible Study, Fellowship!) Call the church office for info: (785) 266-3247, Facebook: Topeka Lakeview Nazarene Email: LakeNaz@aol.com

ROOTED CHRISTIAN HOMESCHOOL CO-OP; Colossians 2:6-7. Monday's 12-4pm. Cooking class for 4th graders & older at noon. Call the Church Office for more information. Lakeview Church of the Nazarene, 2835 SE Croco Rd. Church: (785) 266-3247. Facebook: Topeka Lakeview Nazarene. LakeNaz@aol.com

FAMILY-FRIENDLY EVENTS

SENIORS NUTRITIONAL LUNCH – Weekdays, except holidays, at noon at Auburn Civic Center, 1020 N. Washington Street. Minimal cost per person. Reservations/cancellations required 24 hours in advance by calling Meals on Wheels of Jefferson & Shawnee Co. at 295-3980. Each meal includes 1% milk & sugar-free items for diabetics. 215- 0064.

MEDICARE MONDAYS – First Mon. ea. month, 1-3pm. Topeka/Sh. Co. Public Library, 1515 SW 10th. Jayhawk Area Agency on Aging offers Senior health insurance counseling. For info: 580-4545 or nhnl@tscpl.org

COUNTRY AND BALLROOM DANCING - Thursdays 6-9pm. Croco Hall. Info: Edwina 379-9538, 478-4760.

FIRST FRIDAY ART MARKET – Downtown and NOTO arts district. Arts, antiques, fine crafts, flea market items, snacks, beverages, entertainment and more.

TOPEKA ACAPELLA UNLIMITED AUDITIONS – Topeka Acappella Unlimited is looking for female singers who would like to sing four-part acappella harmonies. Topeka Acappella Unlimited is a Chapter of Sweet Aedlines, International. Cindy Patton: 785-640-7403

HARVESTERS MOBILE FOOD PANTRY, 1st & 3rd Sat, 2-3pm, Shawnee Heights UMC parking lot.

FREE MOBILE FOOD DISTRIBUTION – 4th Tue. thru Nov., 9am, 1231 NW Eugene St. Randel Ministries, Inc., in partnership with Harvesters and Family of God Church will have its monthly food distribution. No ID or proof of income required, first come first served. Distributing fresh produce and other items to families in need. 785-234-1111. RandelMinistries.com

TOPEKA PUBLIC LIBRARY PLAY BUS – 9:30am-noon, Lakeview Nazarene Church, 2835 Croco. Every Tuesday, enjoy story time, play opportunities, books for check-out & take & make art. 785-266-3247.

OPEN INDOOR COURT PICKLEBALL – Sundays at 4pm, Berryton United Methodist Church (7010 SE Berryton Rd. All ages and abilities welcome.

SENIORS PITCH CLUB - Every Tuesday 1 pm at Garfield Community Center. First visit free then a dollar per visit for coffee and replacement cards ..

WOODSHED MARKET – Sun. 10-3, 1901 N. Kansas Ave.

FAMILY NIGHT AT COSMOS COURT – Tuesdays, 5pm, Cosmos Court, 909 S. Kansas Ave. Pizza, salads, hot dogs, nachos, soup and more! Get a 16" Pizza, 2 side salads, and 4 cups of ice cream for only \$30! Also table games, etc.

SEUSSICAL THE MUSICAL AUDITIONS – Jan 4th, 8am-2:30pm, Calvary Lutheran Church, 4211 NW Topeka Blvd. Sign up for an audition time or find more information at

www.theworldshisstage.com. The World's His Stage is a theatre organization for Christian homeschool families. For info:

worldshisstage@gmail.com.

PRESENTATION FROM RAISEMYHEAD – Jan. 6, 11:30am, 3500 SW 10th. Topeka Lions present Guest Speaker Tami Wagstaff from RaiseMyHead.org, who will give a presentation on what this Wichita-based organization is doing to support and foster healing for victims of Human Trafficking. To order a box lunch, or for more info, visit topekaliions.org and place your order for lunch by Friday, Jan. 3. Lunch at 11:30 am – Noon meeting concludes at 1 pm. If not eating please arrive by 11:50 am. (Also available via Zoom)

TOPEKA FARM SHOW – Jan. 7-9, 9am, Vail Events Ctr
ANNUAL BLUE BLOOD DRIVE – Jan. 5, 9-4, Topeka Police Dept, 158 SE 4th. Hosted by TPD, the Kansas Concerns of Police Survivors, and the American Red Cross. The drive will be held in Classroom A. Make an appointment at www.RedCrossBlood.org/give and use code: COPS

C5Alive "POWER" LUNCHEON – Jan. 9, 11:30-1, Harley Davidson, 21st & Topeka Blvd. Featuring a media resources presentation. Free admission. Meals available if desired at Black Dog BBQ. Please RSVP to info@C5Alive.org so we know how many to expect. Open to the public - bring a friend!

SAVE THE DATE: C5 POWER Luncheon, Feb. 13, 11:30-1.

KIDS IN THE KITCHEN – Jan. 11, 1-2pm, HyVee. Decorate Your Own Chef's Hat, DIY Homemade Cocoa Mix, Banana Snowmen, Snowflake Quesadillas. Join your Hy-Vee dietician team for this hands-on cooking event.

In this class our Jr. Chefs will get to make and eat fun themed recipes, learn nutrition and creativity in the kitchen and take home a recipe booklet for your creations! Recommended age range is 4-8 years old. Tickets are only needed for the participating child(ren). Get your ticket at: <https://events.humanitix.com/kids-in-the-kitchen-at-topeka-hy-vee>. Contact Hy-Vee Dietitian, Kristi Sanders at:

Kristi.Sanders@hy-vee.com | 785-370-3394

BIBLE READ A THON – Jan. 11, 12:30 – 2:30pm, Rotunda of Kansas Capitol. Enter through the North Doors; Bring your Bible; children are welcome! At the sound of the shofar the Bible Reading will begin, for the 4th year of reading the entire Bible out loud in the capitol of Kansas. We will worship, we will surround the Capitol with the voice of our Lord! After worship, you will receive your assigned reading.

TIBA LUNCH & LEARN – Jan. 14, 11:30-1, The Brownstone, 4020 NW 25th. Discussing Marketing needs for small businesses. questions@topekataba.org

JAM4DAN17 Jam For Dan – Jan. 17-19, Celtic Fox. Lots of Bands will participate. <https://jam4dan.com/about.html>

COCKTAIL BLACKTIE-ISH EVENT – Jan. 25, 6-9pm, Cosmos Court, 909 S. Kansas Ave. Play dress-up (if you like) and be home early! Photographer will be on hand to take party pix! Free Admission, but Register at www.eventbrite.com/e/cocktail-party-black-tie-ish-event-tickets-1126263367049

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|-------------|--|
| JANUARY 26 | "Kansas Day"
by Patrick Zolten, Executive Director, Kansas Historical Society and Sarah Bell, Ph.D., Museum and Education Division Director, Kansas Historical Society. (records by Bruce Marshall, United States Senator, 1854) |
| FEBRUARY 2 | "The Tale of Two Buttons: Territorial Kansas Southern Militia Buttons Found Near Leecompton"
by Andrew Peterson, Geologist, Kansas Historical Society volunteer, aerial detecting and avocational historical archeologist. |
| FEBRUARY 9 | "From Slave to Buffalo Soldier"
by George Pomroy, Certified Oral Storyteller, great grandson of an 1867 original Buffalo Soldier, Executive Vice President, Alexander/Medison Chapter, Kansas City Buffalo Soldiers Museum, Humanities Board of Directors, Chair, Frontier Museum of the United States Army Foundation, Fort Leavenworth. |
| FEBRUARY 16 | "Quantrill Comes to Town"
by Tim Talbot, Site Manager, Mahaffie Stagecoach Stop & Park, Historic Site, Mohe. |
| FEBRUARY 23 | "Frontier Justice and Politics in Bleeding Kansas: A Deputy U.S. Marshal is Killed"
by Bryce Benedict, J.D., retired Kansas National Guard Historian and the author of "Jayhawkers: Civil War Brigades of James H. Lane" |
| MARCH 2 | "From the Kaw to the Potomac: The Story of Charles Curtis"
by Debra Goodrich, Historian and author of "From the Reservation to Washington, the Rise of Charles Curtis." Book signing following talk. |



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C5Alive POWER Luncheons are held 2nd Thur. each mo.

Jan. 9, 11:30-1: "POWER" Luncheon at Harley Davidson. Featuring a media resource presentation.

Free Admission; Lunch available if desired. Open to the public.

RSVP to info@C5Alive.org

Save the Dates!

- Feb 13: POWER Luncheon, 11:30-1
- Mar 13: POWER Luncheon, 11:30-1

For info: www.C5Alive.org or [Facebook.com/C5Alive](https://www.facebook.com/C5Alive)

286-0489 or faithfamilylifeministries@gmail.com.

BIKERS AGAINST CHILD ABUSE – NE Kansas Chapter (B.A.C.A.) 3rd Sun., 4 pm American Legion, 3800 SE Michigan. Open to the public. For info: 817-5801.

DIVORCARE PROGRAMS – (For updates check www.divorcecare.org) locations and times:

WED. – 6:30pm, Topeka Bible Church, 1101 SW Mulvane. Cost: \$15. Child care provided. For info: 379-0505 or www.divorcecare.org.

WED. – 6:45 – 8:45pm, Walnut View Christian Church, 3634 SE 37th St. (just East of 37th & Croco). Cost: \$10 registration (scholarships available). The video seminar series featuring some of the nation's foremost experts on divorce and recovery topics, com-

bined with support group discussion of the materials. Complimentary child care children up to the fifth grade. Info: 266-7550 or walnutviewcc@att.net.

WED. – 6:30pm, Northland Christian Church, 3102 NW Topeka Blvd. No Cost. 785-286-1204, www.northland.cc

PROSTATE CANCER SUPPORT GROUP – First Thursday, 3pm, St Francis Hospital, Room 300 on 2nd floor. For info: Jim 785 806 3266

CELEBRATE RECOVERY – Every Fri., 6pm, 1912 Gage Blvd. A Christ-centered program, based on 8 principles found in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Applying these Biblical principles, become free from addictive & dysfunctional behaviors. crtopekaks.org.

NICOTINE ANONYMOUS – Every Fri., 6:30pm, Town & Country Church Renaissance Room, 4925 SW 29th St., use west door cross red foot bridge. A fellowship of men & women helping each other to live free of nicotine. No fees. 402-321-486; Laboomaha@att.net

TOPEKA NAR-ANON FAMILY GROUP – For families & friends who are affected by someone else's narcotic addiction. Every Sat., noon-1:15 pm, rm. A, 1st Baptist Church, 3033 SW MacVicar, enter on S. side, door A. www.naranonmidwest.org

COVENANT KEEPERS – 3rd Sat. Group for people who want to see their marriage saved when their spouse wants out. 816-453-0884 or 816-966-0927

MOMS-IN-TOUCH PRAYER GROUP – Every Wed., 2:30-3:30pm, Library at Cair Paravel-Latin School.

Experience God's power through prayer as we lift our students, teachers, staff, administrators & board up to the Lord. For info: 357-0369.

GAMBLERS ANONYMOUS – Every Wed, 7pm, St. Francis Hospital, meeting room #8.

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events to voice@cox.net

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entertainment

10 best Christian movies of 2024

For fans of faith-based entertainment, 2024 was a stellar year.

There were so many good faith-based movies, in fact, that you may have missed a few gems.

Here are my 10 favorite Christian movies of 2024:

Average Joe — A football coach defies school officials after they order him to stop delivering post-game prayers. It's the true story of Joe Kennedy, a courageous yet humble assistant football coach who quietly begins a tradition of praying, alone, at the 50-yard line after each game. When he is fired, he sues — and eventually wins at the U.S. Supreme Court. Rated PG-13 for some thematic material and violence. Also includes mild language.

The Best Christmas Pageant Ever — Troubled siblings threaten to derail a small town's Christmas play when they unexpectedly land every major role. The film is based on the popular children's book by Barbara Robinson and follows the exploits of the Herdmans, six children who are notorious for their complete disregard for the rules.

It's the best family movie of the year and is packed with lessons about redemption, outreach and love. Rated PG for thematic material and brief underage smoking. Also includes brief mild language.

Bonhoeffer — A talented ministerial student in Nazi Germany courageously stands up against Adolf Hitler and his hate-filled regime. This gripping biopic follows the story of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian who helped lead the Confessing Church movement and was executed following an unsuccessful assassination attempt on Hitler.

Rated PG-13 for violent content, thematic elements and some smoking. Also includes mild language.

Disciples in the Moonlight — A faithful group of Christians bands together to smuggle Bibles into a futuristic America where Scripture has been banned and replaced with an "Enlightened Truth Bible."

This creative, thought-provoking



thriller offers plenty of surprises, as well as lessons for today. Unrated, it includes no coarse language or sexuality.

The Forge — An irresponsible young man is given a crash course on life when his single mom hands him an ultimatum: Grow up or get out.

Fortunately, a wise mentor steps in, offering him a job and Bible-based life lessons that challenge him to change his ways. This Kendrick Brothers movie spotlights the theme of discipleship as few other films have. Rated PG for thematic elements.

Homestead — A homesteading family fights for survival after terrorists detonate a bomb on the west coast, plunging America into chaos. It's a captivating drama that offers a realistic scenario along with tough questions.

For example: How do you balance compassion with the harsh realities of limited resources when hungry neighbors knock on your gate? Rated PG-13 for some violence and thematic elements.

Ordinary Angels — A hairdresser rallies a community to assist a family in need. It's based on a real-life story about Louisville, Kentucky, resident Sharon Stevens Evans, who launches a fundraiser to benefit an ill 5-year-old girl who is in desperate need of a transplant. It's a story that urges us to be an "ordinary angel" in our neighborhoods. Rated PG for thematic content, brief bloody images and smoking.

Sound of Hope — A pastor and his wife spark a massive adoption movement by taking in children rejected by

other couples. It's the true story of WC and Donna Martin and their small town of Possum Trot, Texas, where 77 of the region's toughest-to-place children found loving homes despite their modest means.

Due to thematic elements, this one's not for young viewers. Rated PG-13 for thematic material involving child abuse, some violence, language and brief suggestive material.

Unsung Hero — A family must rely on their faith and each other after their relocation from Australia to the United States goes awry.

The movie tells the true story of David and Helen Smallbone, who move to America in the early 1990s with big dreams but are blindsided when his job opportunity collapses. The Smallbones, of course, are the parents of Joel and Luke Smallbone of For King & Country and CCM artist Rebecca St. James. Rated PG for thematic elements.

White Bird — A teenage boy's perspective on life shifts after discovering his grandmother's past as a young Jewish girl hidden by a classmate's family in Nazi-occupied France.

This film serves as both a prequel and sequel to "Wonder," beginning with the story of Julian, a student who was suspended for bullying and later removed from school by his parents in protest. Rated PG-13 for some strong violence, thematic material and language.

— Michael Foust

Director focuses on historical accuracy in movie about Mary



Few people are more central to the Christmas season than Mary. Her remarkable story will come to life in the new movie "Mary," which will be shown on Netflix on December 6.

"As a practicing Christian, I believe Mary is the most extraordinary woman ever to walk this earth," director D.J. Caruso said. "Her story, especially for younger generations, has often been underappreciated. I wanted to create a film that presents Mary as someone we can all relate to, not just as a saint but as the young woman she was before her sanctification."

From a cinematic perspective, Caruso described "Mary" as "an origin story of Christianity" centered on her journey as the chosen one to bring the world its greatest gift. Like many reluctant heroes, Mary has her doubts, but in a decisive moment, she proclaims her "fiat" -- "Let it be done to me according to God's will." She endures scorn, is hunted and makes profound sacrifices, yet remains steadfast.

Audiences witness her transformation from a young girl into the iconic Virgin Mary, with a story

rooted in love, grace and forgiveness that overcomes all obstacles. "At its core, the story is about love and forgiveness, overcoming all evils," he said. "Mary brings grace into the world."

Historical accuracy was important to Caruso.

"It was essential to stay true to the biblical narrative as the story's foundation, which Tim Michael Hayes' script captured beautifully," he said "I was fortunate to have the guidance of a brilliant biblical scholar who served as my spiritual advisor and an expert on Mary. He helped me interpret the scriptures in a way that was both relatable and deeply emotional. From there, we carefully fictionalized the moments between Mary's journey, adding tension, emotion and pacing -- all vital elements for compelling cinema -- while preserving the truths of the miraculous events in her life.

"Mary's story is as relevant today as ever. She's a timeless yet contemporary character that we can all relate to. And we bring all of this to life in a very engaging and entertaining film."

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Christian Film 'The Forge' Breaks into Netflix Top 5, Surpassing 'Barbie' and 'Sing'

A Christian movie with a tale of redemption has soared into Netflix's Top 5. *The Forge* (PG) launched on Netflix on Dec. 21 and quickly entered the platform's Top 10 list during the Christmas holiday, inching above titles with bigger stars and larger budgets.

Two days after Christmas, *The Forge* was the fifth-most watched movie in the U.S. on Netflix, edging *It Ends with Us*, *That Christmas*, *Our Little Secret*, *Barbie*, and *Sing*.

The movie tells the story of a young directionless man, Isaiah, who discovers purpose and faith through a discipleship program led by a wise and compassionate boss.

It stars Cameron Arnett, Aspen Kennedy, Karen Abercrombie, Priscilla Shirer, T.C. Stallings, and Benjamin Watson.

It was made by Alex and Stephen Kendrick, the same filmmakers who were behind *Overcomer*, *War Room*, and other faith-based hits.

The Kendricks hope the movie sparks a discipleship movement.

"We pray between every film that we do," Alex Kendrick told *Crosswalk Headlines*, referencing the movie's theme.



"Discipleship is different than just being a convert to the faith," he explained. "We can go through Jesus for salvation -- that's a free gift. But being a disciple [is different]. Jesus said, 'If anyone wants to be My disciple, they must deny themselves, take up their cross daily, and follow Me. In other words, there's a cost to discipleship. So we want to draw people to that.'"

As demonstrated in the film, the filmmakers said, discipleship involves one-on-one relationships. Jesus "poured into" his disciples, Alex Kendrick said.

"It was hard on them at times, but they bore fruit at a deeper level. And

they walked more intimately with the Lord," he said. "And so we want to do that. And we hope the church wants to grow in their discipleship. And so that's really what the world needs to see."

The world, he added, needs to experience Christians practicing their faith.

"We don't need to see more lukewarm Christians in churches," Alex Kendrick said. "We need to see people that are devoted to Jesus, that truly want to glorify and honor the Lord, and [that] walk more intimately with Him. So this movie focuses on what that could look like."

—Michael Foust

Just Do GOOD Entertainment focuses on inspirational TV, movies



Slowly but surely, faith and family based entertainment is making inroads in Hollywood. Industry veterans Monty Hobbs and Valerie Smaldone have started Just Do GOOD Entertainment, which seeks to entertain, inspire and motivate viewers to do good.

Their show "Divine Renovation," with host Erik Estrada, just began its second season. It's a faith-based reality TV show about home improvement that brings in powerful spiritual themes. Another project is "Finding Kindness," a show that finds and features small-business leaders who are helping out in their communities. The inspiration for these shows and the new company came when Hobbs and Smaldone were working on a movie a few years ago in Connecticut.

"It was a real feel-good, inspirational movie about doing good," Smaldone told "Faithwire." "Another person had written the story and we were just bringing it to life, but we were filming during the outbreak of the Ukraine war in March of that year, and I remember waking up every morning, thinking about how lucky we were to be going to set to film this lovely story and people were suffering miles away?"

After the film wrapped, Smaldone said she and Hobbs wanted to continue working together, seeking to find ways to push projects filled with "positivity, inspiration and helping your fellow person in the world," she said. That's when they decided to launch "Divine Renovation."

"At the beginning of this year, we decided to really finalize and formalize our partnership and to build on Just Do GOOD," she said. "And everything we do, all the content we create, is about a positive message and really about what can you do -- our viewer, our reader, whatever we're doing -- what can you do to make the world a better place?"

Hobbs said they aren't trying to "reinvent the wheel" and that they simply want to deliver "good, quality, clean content."

"That seems odd nowadays, with the messaging of values, the messaging of respecting our vets, the messaging of that there is a higher power," he said. "Our goal is to shine a light that was embedded in us. We live in a polarized world now that's always in our face, and the majority of the public doesn't want that."

Wilson Sees 'God Continuing to Open Doors'

Country and Christian artist Anne Wilson is marveling at the doors God has opened for her in her music career.

"The doors that have opened for me have been absolutely amazing," she said in a recent episode of her YouTube series *REBEL IN THE MAKING*. "Sometimes, I sit in awe and I just can't believe that my life has gone from a little 15 year-old girl in Kentucky, to singing at her brother's funeral, to signing a record deal, to now having my second album out and all the opportunities I'm getting in country music."

She continued, "I never dreamed of any of it. I never thought it was even possible, and so to see all that come now, it definitely feels like it's been a constant flow of opportunities since my first song came out three years ago and it's been really cool to be a part of."

Wilson touched on some of her recent career highlights, including her induction into the Grand Ole Opry's



Class of 2024.

"When I found out that I had been chosen to be a part of Opry's NextStage Class of 2024, I was beside myself," she said. "I love the Opry so much, it's my favorite venue to play... The Opry has been so kind to me. They've been so inviting and so welcoming. It'll forever be my favorite venue to play."

Wilson celebrated the milestone in an Instagram post, writing, "A dream

come true to be a part of this year's Opry NextStage Class! So grateful for the @opry and all the incredible experiences they've given me in Nashville."

The singer also spoke about her CMT nomination for Breakthrough Female Video of the Year for her single "Rain in the Rearview."

"That was a rough day... it was freezing cold in November," Wilson recalled. "I was having to sing with freezing cold water pouring down on me, in freezing cold weather, and it was miserable. I got really sick after we finished filming, so then when I found out I was nominated, it kind of made it worth it."

"Getting the opportunity to take my music to a broader audience like that has just been a dream come true," she concluded. "Some days, I feel like I have no clue what I'm doing, but I just see God continuing to open doors and I just keep walking through them and I can't wait to see what's going to happen next."

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A First-Timer's Guide to Kitchen Remodeling

Kitchen upgrades are among the most common renovation projects homeowners tackle. Even so, it's a big project for a first-time renovation, and the final results are sure to be stronger with some detailed planning from the start.

Take into account these five tips from the experts at Wellborn Cabinet to help first-time kitchen remodelers achieve the kitchens of their dreams:

1. Plan Your Budget

Establish a clear and realistic budget. Factor in costs for materials, labor and some extra for unexpected expenses. Sticking to your budget can help ensure you enjoy the outcome of the project while avoiding financial stress. Your contractor can help you strike a balance between your vision and financial resources. You may also find it helpful to consult with a real estate professional who can ensure your plans are in line with the overall value of your home and

neighborhood.

2. Prioritize Functionality

Design with practicality in mind. Ensure there's enough counter space and storage to create an efficient workflow. Consider the kitchen work triangle; that is, be conscious of the travel pattern among the sink, stove and refrigerator.

Additionally, look for opportunities to incorporate functional storage in unexpected places. One example is the exposed end of a cabinet run or side of the refrigerator, where there is often wasted space. One example is a shallow cleaning utility cabinet from Wellborn Cabinet that fits a broom, dustpan and everyday cleaning supplies neatly, giving you practical access to frequently used supplies. A variation on this cabinet offers a spice rack designed for easy access to cooking essentials. Other options in the line include an over-fridge cabinet with a combination of shelves, sheet pan or cutting board storage and a trash



can-cutting board combination.

3. Choose Quality Materials

Consider factors such as durability, maintenance requirements and compatibility with your design aesthetic when selecting materials for your kitchen. You may be tempted to cut corners and stretch your money further, but quality materials are a critical element of successful renovations. Prioritize high-quality materials that stand the test of time. Durable countertops, solid cabinetry and reliable appliances typically save money in the long run, and they'll enhance the overall look and value of your kitchen.

4. Hire Professionals

Work with experienced contractors and designers. Their expertise can help you avoid common pitfalls and ensure your remodel meets all safety and building codes. What's more, these professionals have likely encountered and overcome all kinds of challenges, which means they'll be well-prepared to help you navigate unexpected obstacles and provide a wealth of knowledge from previous clients to help make recommendations for the perfect finished space.

5. Stay Flexible

Be prepared for unexpected challenges and delays. Stay adaptable and open to changes and remember patience is key to achieving the kitchen of your dreams. Materials go on backorder

and paperwork gets misplaced all the time. Set a realistic timeline for your project that allows for some hiccups and try to avoid becoming too rigidly attached to any single element of the design, so if you have to make a

modification, it doesn't feel like a monumental sacrifice.

Look for more ideas and inspiration for your kitchen remodel at Wellborn.com.

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Eagles QB Jalen Hurts rights passing game, seeks to 'dive in Scripture'

Rest easy, Philadelphia. All appears well in the City of Brotherly Love.

After a week in which rumors swirled about discontentment in the Eagles locker room due to the team's sometimes-meager passing game, star quarterback Jalen Hurts delivered one of his best games of the season. He led Philly to a 27-13 win against the in-state rival Pittsburgh Steelers, who were previously 10-3.

Hurts completed 25 of his 32 passing attempts for 290 yards and two touchdowns, and he added another 45 yards and a touchdown in 15 attempts on the ground. His 290 yards through the air were his second most of any game this season, behind only his 311 yards in a September win at New Orleans.

"The approach was a little different this week. The grass will be green where you water it. We decided to water it and saw the fruits of our labor in that," Hurts said about the Eagles' passing game. "Obviously, we've been watering the running game a good bit. It's natural to put emphasis on one thing and take emphasis off of another and see what you guys have seen. We want to continue to be well rounded, push to be well rounded, and water all areas of our yard."

Hurts' extended metaphor was in reference to the wide disparity between Philadelphia's offensive production in the running game and its offensive production in the passing game. Led by the addition of star running back Saquon Barkley in free agency this offseason, the Eagles rank No. 1 in the NFL with 186.2 yards per game on the ground. By comparison, they are No. 28 in passing yards per game with 187.0.

Hurts, who also revealed he has a broken ring finger on his left non-throwing hand, is focused ultimately not on what others expect him to be but on who God has made him to be.

"I really lean on [God] and I try to keep Him in the center of everything I do," Hurts said in a press conference before the Super Bowl in 2023, "because I know without God, I wouldn't be where I am today. I wouldn't be the man I am today without having that faith in Him, without integrity and leadership and diligence and all those things. I think the biggest thing is you get so influenced by so much around you, you just want to pray that you're the person that God calls you to be. So that's



what I'm gonna do — be what God called me to be."

"I've found that the plane gives me a lot of time to take a deep dive in Scripture, and then go back on my week of notes and the game plan for the opponent," Hurts said. "Those things are very important to me, and I feel like you have to intentionally pursue them to continue to build wisdom."

Two years ago, Hurts did a video with GQ in which he talked about his daily devotional and his journal.

"I'm a man of God," he said. "Waking up every morning and having a routine where I can gain some wisdom, learn His Word, and just walk by the Spirit, I strive to do that daily. And I challenge myself to spread that Word organically."

Buffalo Bulls All-American LB Shaun Dolac says 'my identity is in Christ'

Shaun Dolac, a fifth-year senior linebacker at the University at Buffalo, made program history when the Associated Press college football All-America teams were released this week. He was one of only three linebackers in the country to be named an AP first-team All-American, the first Buffalo Bull ever to be granted such an honor. He was also the first Bull to be a consensus All-American selection, having been named a first-team All-American by four organizations recognized by the NCAA.

Former Bulls Khalil Mack (2013) and Jaret Patterson (2020) were both second-team AP All-Americans, while Gerald LaFountain (1965) was an honorable mention.

Dolac's 2024 campaign saw him accumulate an impressive 159 combined tackles (two shy of a program single-season record) — 5.5 of which were sacks — to go along with five interceptions. His 159 tackles leads all of FBS, 16 ahead of teammate Red Murdock, who is second.

For his efforts, Dolac was named the 2024 Mid-American Conference Defensive Player of the Year and the MAC Defensive Player of the Week a program-record five times this fall.

Standing 6-foot-1 and weighing 225 pounds, Dolac was very lightly recruited out of West Seneca East Senior High School in West Seneca, New York. He en-

"I've just matured and realized that God is everything, and He's worthy of praise," Hurts told CBSSports.com in September 2022. "You have to put Him



rolled for a year at Milford Academy, a post-secondary school, before joining Buffalo just a short drive from his hometown as a preferred walk-on ahead of the 2020 season.

Dolac totaled only 44 combined tackles in his first two seasons in a Bulls uniform but broke out in 2022 with 148 tackles (97 solo). A shoulder injury ended his 2023 season after only four games, and with two years of eligibility still remaining, Dolac decided to transfer to Utah State before the spring semester in 2024. Yet as Dolac petitioned God for His guidance through prayer, he came to the realization that his heart was still in western New York. He transferred back to Buffalo in May.

Dolac spoke about walking through life's various obstacles when he joined the Sports Spectrum Podcast earlier this

month.

"My identity is in Christ," Dolac said. "Throughout my whole life, I've been through a lot of adversities, a lot of obstacles."

Perhaps the biggest obstacle the linebacker has faced was the death of his father in 2016 due to esophageal cancer. Dolac's father was his and his four siblings' primary source of spiritual guidance, and he brought them to church whenever he could.

"Throughout that time, I really found myself searching for Christ," Dolac said on the podcast. "My dad ended up passing away that year (2016), and sometimes when things happen to people, they tend to turn away from Christ. I had to make a decision to turn towards Him and find Him and search Him and make sure that what I do in my life, it's for Him and it's for the glory of Him."

"... Ever since that happened, my faith just grew because that was my comfort — in Jesus. And just learning more and more about Him and having to walk in faith is something that I'm gonna cherish and have forever because you can always continue to learn about God and continue to learn what He wants for you. And ultimately, things aren't gonna go your way, and it's how you respond and just continue to praise God for whatever happens."

at the center of everything that you do. That's what I believe. All my spiritual wisdom — all of my wisdom as a whole — comes from Him, in some way, shape

or form. ... I just think, in all the things that we experience in life — good, bad or indifferent — you have to keep Him at the center."

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A Guide to Enjoying Life in the Best Years

Essential Year-End Financial Checklist for Retirees: Secure Your 2025

Although people eventually retire from work, they never retire from financial and tax obligations. A year-end financial review can help things go smoother in 2025. “The Epoch Times” recommends several steps to include.

Review retirement income sources. Evaluate income sources to ensure they meet your needs. Among these are Social Security benefits, pensions, withdrawals from retirement accounts such as 401(k) and investment income. Specifically, consider the following questions:

- Can you cover your expenses with your income streams?

- Over the past year, have your financial needs changed significantly?

Don't miss the required minimum distribution deadline. Are you 73 or older? If so, you may be subject to the RMD. According to the IRS, the withdrawal of a specific amount

from your retirement accounts is mandated every year. Despite the temptation to delay, meeting these deadlines is essential to avoid penalties. This year's RMD typically is due on December 31. If you want to ensure that you comply, consult a tax professional or financial advisor for advice.

As noted by financial experts, evaluate your tax situation. As the year ends, you can review your financial situation and plan ahead for the next tax year. If you are a retiree, you have several options for minimizing your tax burden:

- **Plan your withdrawals wisely.** Depending on your tax bracket, strategically withdraw from your retirement accounts to minimize your tax burden.

- **Monitor mutual fund capital gains.** Be aware of potential capital gains distributions from mutual funds and choose the right time to

buy them.

- **Maximize medical deductions.**

To reduce taxable income, consider itemizing medical expenses, such as prescription drugs, Medicare premiums and copays.

- **Consider tax-loss or gain harvesting.** Selling underperforming investments can reduce taxable income or offset capital gains.

- **Strategic charitable giving.** To meet RMDs and receive a tax benefit, utilize Qualified Charitable Distributions.

- **Leverage Roth conversions.** Transferring funds from a traditional IRA to a Roth IRA may reduce your future tax burden.

- **Develop a cash-flow strategy.** By carefully planning withdrawals to maximize tax efficiency, you can maintain a comfortable retirement lifestyle.

Review your spending and budget. Retirement often comes with unpredictable expenses, such as home improvements or medical costs. As such, to be financially prepared, you should review your spending habits from the past year; identify areas where you can reduce spending or reallocate resources; and ensure that your emergency fund is adequate (typically three to six months' essentials). Ultimately, keeping spending in line with income will ensure you remain financially solvent.

“In addition to being a task list, a year-end financial checklist ensures that your retirement years will be financially secure and stress-free,” the story said. “A proactive approach to reviewing your income, taxes, spending, investments and estate plans will give you confidence and clarity going into the new year.”





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Healthy Aging Tips: 8 Ways to Stay Healthy in 2025



With the start of a new year, many seniors make resolutions and set goals related to maintaining wellness. Prioritizing healthy aging is especially important as we get older. The right lifestyle habits can help combat disease, improve quality of life, and allow seniors to remain independent for longer. This article will provide 8 practical healthy aging tips for seniors looking to enhance their health and well-being in 2024.

“Aging with vitality involves both body and mind,” says Connie Bessler, CEO of Trousdale Living Communities. “Wellness requires ongoing effort, but I firmly believe it’s never too late to prioritize your health. Small, positive changes can make a big difference

when it comes to healthy aging.”

1. Cultivate a Positive Mindset for Healthy Aging

Having a positive attitude and outlook can help reduce stress and boost immunity. To promote a positive mindset for healthy aging, try practicing gratitude, making time for hobbies you enjoy, and staying socially connected with family and friends. Beginning

each day with an uplifting thought or affirmation can set you on the right foot.

One way to achieve this is by starting your morning by writing down three things you’re grateful for. This ritual helps frame the day with positivity.

2. Make Physical Activity Part of Your Healthy Aging Routine

Staying physically active is essential for healthy aging. Aim for at least 150 minutes per week of moderate exercise, such as brisk walking, swimming, or golf. Also try to incorporate strength training 2-3 times per week. Activities like yoga and gardening can help improve balance and mobility. Always consult your doctor before beginning

a new exercise regimen.

3. Eat a Nutrient-Rich Diet for Healthy Aging

Nutrition is key for senior health. Focus on whole, minimally processed foods like fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, nuts, seeds, and whole grains. Hydration is also important—try to drink at least 6-8 glasses of water per day. Limit sweets, salty foods, saturated fats, and refined carbohydrates. Taking a multi-vitamin can help fill any nutritional gaps.

4. Get Preventive Care for Healthy Aging

It’s essential to keep up with recommended health screenings, vaccinations, and check-ups. Seeing your doctor regularly for conditions like high blood pressure, cholesterol, and diabetes can help detect issues early. Important screenings include mammograms, colonoscopies, bone density tests, cognitive health assessments, and more. Stay on top of your medications and have them reviewed annually.

5. Prioritize Mental Health as Part of Healthy Aging

Mental sharpness and acuity are a key part of healthy aging. Activities like puzzles, reading, and board games can help exercise your mind. Social connections are also beneficial. Try volunteering, joining a club, or attending community events and classes. Don’t neglect emotional health—seek support from loved ones or professionals if you are struggling with grief, anxiety, depression, or other issues.

6. Focus on Quality Sleep for Healthy Aging

Aim for 7-9 hours of sleep per night to support immune function, cognition, and overall well-being. Having a consistent bedtime routine and limiting screen time before bed can improve sleep quality. Evaluate your bedroom for optimal temperature, light, and noise levels. Be sure to consult your doctor if you experience frequent insomnia or sleep disruptions.

7. Stay Socially Engaged for Healthy Aging

Maintaining social ties and avoiding isolation is vital for seniors. Interacting with family, friends, and community provides mental stimulation and emotional

fulfillment. Join clubs related to your hobbies, volunteer at local organizations, or attend events at a senior center to stay connected. Video chat with relatives if you can’t see them in person.

8. Focus on Safety for Healthy Aging

As we age, additional safety precautions help prevent injury. Remove tripping hazards like clutter and rugs in your home. Install grab bars in your bathroom, replace poor lighting, and use non-slip mats in the tub or shower.



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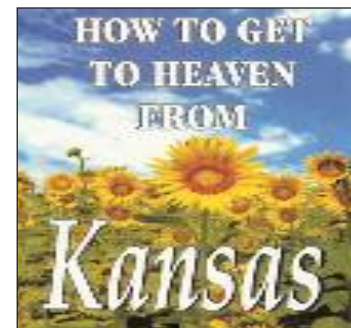
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1. Realize you are a sinner. Everyone starts the same place spiritually. "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23). Sin's penalty keeps you out of Heaven and condemns you to Hell, separating you from God. Romans 6:23 says, "The wages of sin is death." Sin brings both physical & spiritual death. "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death." (Rev. 20:14).

2. Realize Jesus paid the penalty. Jesus Christ's death, burial, and resurrection provided a way for you to go to heaven and restore your relationship with God. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:8). Since Jesus, God's Son, was the only One who could pay for our sin, He is the only Way to Heaven.

3. Repent of your sin and receive Jesus as your Savior. In order to go to Heaven from KANSAS, or anywhere else, you must accept Christ by calling on Him in prayer. He tells us in Romans 10:13, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Use the following prayer, or one similar to it, to receive Him now:

Dear Lord Jesus, I know I am a sinner. I believe that you died and rose again for me. Please forgive me of my sin, become Lord of my life, and take me to heaven when I die. I am trusting you completely, and in nothing I can do. Thank you Jesus! Amen.



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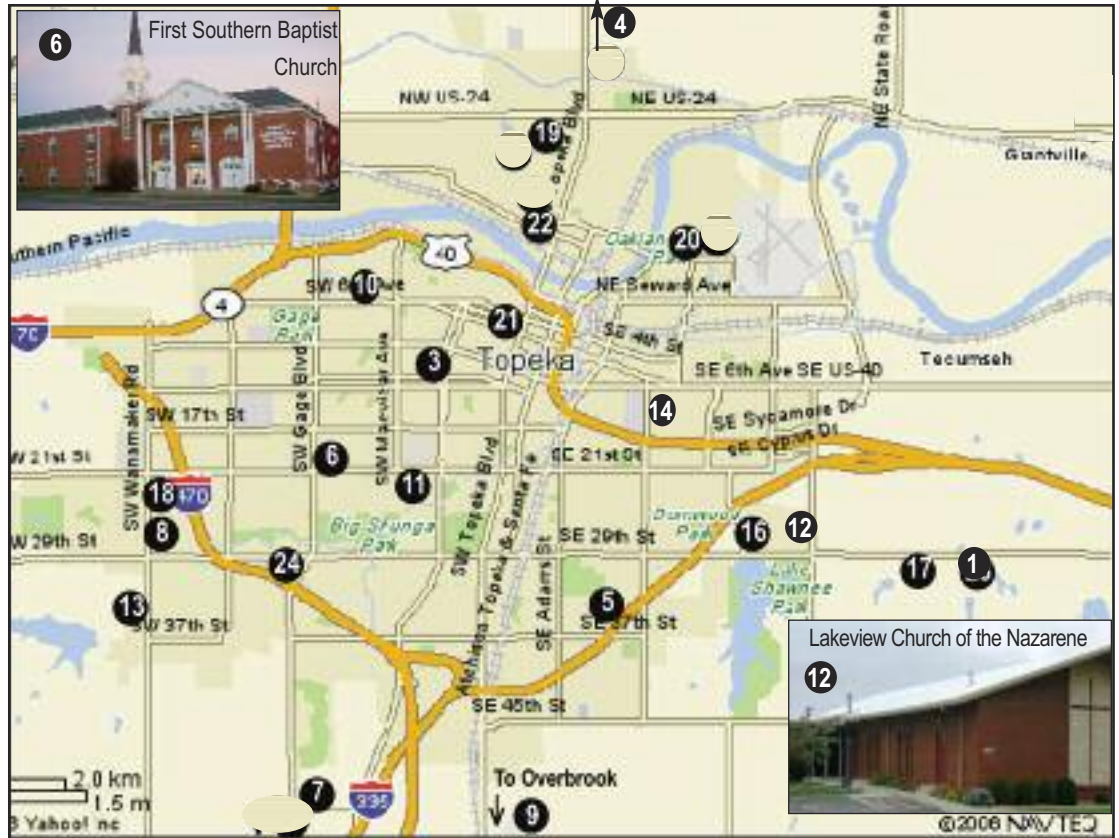
Hanover Pancake House...need I say more?

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New Resident Church Guide



1. HIGHLAND HEIGHTS CHRISTIAN CHURCH

785-379-5642
 Sunday Services: 8:30 and 10:00 AM
 2930 SE Tecumseh Road
 Tecumseh, Kansas 66654
www.highlandheightssc.com
 Jars of Clay Children's Ctr 785-379-9098

2. CHRISTIAN CAVALRY MINISTRIES INT.

Pastor Beaux Bryant
 Call about new meeting location for current services.
 785-224-5419 • www.church4bikers.org
 Sun. School 9:30 am
 Sun. Service 10:45 am
 Wed. Prayer & Bible Study 7pm

3. TOPEKA BIBLE CHURCH

1101 SW Mulvane St., Topeka
 785-234-5545
 Worship: 9:00 & 10:30 am
 Livestream at 9:00 am
 Sunday School & Bible Studies:
 9:00 & 10:30 am
www.discovertbc.com

4. BETHEL BAPTIST CHURCH

4011 N. Kansas Ave, Topeka
 785-286-0467
 Sunday School at 9:30am
 Worship at 10:30am
 Livestream on Youtube at 10:30am
www.betheltopeka.org

5. INDIANA AVENUE CHURCH OF CHRIST

"Grace has dispensed, because Grace has redeemed"
 3510 SE Indiana Ave., Topeka, Ks. 66605
 785-266-7788, www.Indianaavecofc.org
 Bible University – Sunday - 9:30 a.m.
 Classes for all ages.
 Morning Worship – Sunday – 10:45 a.m.
 Midweek Bible University – Wed. – 7pm

6. FIRST SOUTHERN BAPTIST

1912 SW Gage, Topeka, KS
 272-0443 www.fsbctopeka.org
 Sunday Services:
 8:30 AM Traditional Worship
 9:45 AM Bible study—all ages
 11 AM Contemporary Worship

7. TOPEKA BAPTIST CHURCH

"Finding NEW LIFE in CHRIST"
 Sunday Worship 8:30, 10 & 11:30am, 6pm
 ~ Sunday School for all ages ~
 4500 SW Gage Blvd., Topeka
 785-862-0988
www.topekabaptist.org

8. WANAMAKER ROAD BAPTIST CHURCH

"Being and making disciples of Jesus Christ by the power of the Gospel, to the glory of God"
 2700 SW Wanamaker Rd., Topeka
 (785) 272-9323 www.wrbctopeka.com
 Traditional Sunday Worship 11am & 6pm
 Sunday School 9:30am • Wed. Prayer 7pm

9. GRACE COMMUNITY CHURCH

310 E 8th St (E. US 56 Hwy)
 Overbrook, KS; 785-670-6456
 Elvin Dillard, Senior Pastor
 Sunday School 9 am; Worship 10 am
www.gccinoverbrook.com
office@gccinoverbrook.com

11. COMMUNITY CHURCH

1819 SW 21st St., Topeka
 233-3537 www.CommunityTopeka.com
info@CommunityTopeka.com
 Sun. 8:30am - Sunday School for all ages
 Sun. 10:00am - Worship & Word
 Sun. 10:00am Youth Service
 ~ Nursery care for all services ~

12. LAKEVIEW CHURCH of the NAZARENE

2835 SE Croco Road (785)266-3247
 Rob Self, Senior Pastor
 Facebook: Topeka Lakeview Nazarene
 Sun. 9:45am: Sunday School all ages
 Sunday 10:45am:
 Nursery, Children's Church, & Worship
 Wed.: Prayer, Bible Study, & Discussion 7-8pm
 Kids J.A.M. 'Jesus & Me!' 7-8pm

13. WANAMAKER WOODS NAZARENE

3501 SW Wanamaker Rd • 273-2248
www.wwnaz.org
 Sun. Worship: 9am (Hymns) & 11 am
 Children's Worship 9 & 11 am
 Sunday School 10 am, all ages
 Sun. Evening Various Children's Programs
 6 pm Life Groups; 6:30 pm Teen Service
 Wed. 6:30 pm Adult & Teen Life Groups
 Wed. 6:30 pm Kids University
 ~ Nursery care at all services ~

14. OPEN ARMS OUTREACH MINISTRIES COGIC

1 (785) 232-3463/+1 (785) 217-5560
 Sunday School 9:30, Worship 11:00
 In person or conference call:
 (712) 770-4749 / 583229
 Bible Study Tue & Wed conference call
 2401 SE 11th St., Topeka KS 66607
 Supt. S. C. Mitchell, Pastor

16. HOUSE OF THE LORD CHURCH

A Spirit-filled, Word-centered church
 2531 SE Wittenberg Rd., Topeka
 Sunday Worship 11am & 6pm
 Wed. Prayer & Praise 7pm
 785-266-LOVE (5683)
 J. Michael Borjon, Pastor

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17. EAST SIDE BAPTIST CHURCH

4425 S.E. 29th St., 785-379-9933.
 Sunday Worship 10:00am & 5:30pm
 Sunday Evenings at 5:30pm:
 • AWANA
 • Student Ministries
 • reJengage
www.esbcks.org

20. HERITAGE BAPTIST CHURCH

1937 NE Madison St,
 Topeka, KS 66608 • 785-506-4594
 Pastor Dale Stockburger
 Sunday Worship: 11 am and 6pm
 Sunday School: Sun 10am
 Wed. Evening Worship: 7pm

21. HARVEST FAMILY FELLOWSHIP

Meets at 522 SW Polk
 785-220-5418
 Pastor Rey Rodriguez
 Sun. Worship 10:30 am
 Sunday School 9:15 am
 Bible Study Wed. 7 pm
www.harvestfamilyfellowshiptoepka.org

22. FAMILY OF GOD CHURCH

1231 NW Eugene St.
 Topeka, KS 66608
 Pastor Roger Randel
 Sunday School 9am; Worship 10:30am
 Wednesday Bible Study 7pm
 785-234-1111
FOGchurch.com

24. TRINITY REFORMED BAPTIST

Holding to the authorized King James Version and the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith
 Sunday 9:30 a.m. Wednesday 6 p.m.
 Pastor Bob Spagnuolo 785-273-3506
 meeting in our home:
 4307 SW 30th Ter., Topeka
www.TrinityReformedBaptist.org

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 785-232-2992 or 785-231-8183

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10TH ANNUAL TOPEKA



SAVE THE DATE!

EASTER FEST

EASTER PARADE + FAMILY FUN FAIR!



It all takes place at Great Overland Station and on N. Kansas Avenue!

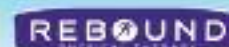
Fun Fair open 10 am - 3 pm at Great Overland Station, with Live Music 10:45 am - 3 pm!

Parade starts at 10 am at Garfield Park and goes to the tracks in NOTO. Big Egg Hunt follows parade at 11 am at Great Overland Station! 5K Run/Walk starts 9am at Garfield Park. Food Trucks open 9 am - 3pm at Great Overland Station. Vendor Market and Health Fair open 10 am - 3 pm at Great Overland Station, with craft stations, face painting, Easter Bunny photos, Petting Zoo, Inflatables, Carnival Games, Cup Cake Walks, Health exams, products & demonstrations: Dance, Gymnastics, Ballet, Vision Screening and more!

Volunteers needed! Contact:
info@C5Alive.org or 785-640-6399

For booth, sponsor & parade entry information:
info@C5Alive.org or 785-640-6399

Funds raised will be shared with a local non-profit serving local families



SATURDAY, Apr. 19, 2025 • 10 AM - 3 PM

TopekaEasterParade.com • "Like" us on Facebook: Topeka Easter Parade & Family Fun Fair