



C. Leo Symmank

December 9, 1928 - January 1, 2026

Memorial service for Rev. C. Leo Symmank, 97, of Houston, Texas are scheduled for 10:30 am, Monday, January 19, 2026 at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Houston. Graveside service will be held 1:00 pm, Tuesday, January 20, 2026 at the Giddings City Cemetery, Giddings, Texas.

Rev. C. Leo Symmank, a loving pastor, husband, father, grandfather and friend, passed away from a long illness in Lone Tree, Colorado, surrounded by his family on January 1, 2026.

Born on December 9, 1928, on a farm in Giddings, Texas, to Arnold August and Wilhelmine Halene (Vehrenkamp) Symmank. The family lived in mostly Wendish community, speaking German at home.

He attended Immanuel Lutheran School in Giddings, TX ('35-'42), Baptized December 23, 1928, Confirmed March 29, 1942, graduated from Prep School at Concordia Lutheran in Austin, Texas, 1946, graduated St. John's College in Winfield, Kansas, 1948, and completed his seminary training at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, MO in 1953. Following graduation, Leo served for two years on the dean's staff at Concordia Seminary, where he pursued advanced theology studies and attended Washington University, St. Louis as a graduate, in sociology. In 1955, he was ordained in the Lutheran Church. He later received his master's degree in education from Memphis State University in 1962.

Leo dedicated his life to ministry. He served pastorates at Holy Cross in Whitehaven, Tennessee; Bethany in Houston, Texas; Founding Pastor of Gloria Dei in Nassau Bay, Texas; St. Paul and Trinity in New Orleans, Louisiana; Fishers of Men in Port Isabel, Texas; and Grace Lutheran in Many, Louisiana. While serving at Gloria Dei, he was elected to the charter commission responsible for drafting the charter for the newly formed City of Nassau Bay, Texas.

He is a recipient of the Dr. George Beto Leadership Award by Concordia University Texas, the Christus Mundo Award by Concordia University in Irvine, California and the Lamb Award by the Lutheran Association of Scouters.

In 1966, Leo married Rose Merle Schwing, of Houston, Texas, the love of his life. They shared a marriage rooted in faith, service, and deep mutual devotion.

In 1974, Leo and his family moved to St. Louis, where he served for ten years on the national youth staff of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. He was the program director for national youth gatherings and editor of the youth ministry quarterly Resources for Youth Ministry. He developed a youth volunteer program, LCMS Servant Events, serving as the founding director throughout the 1980's. He represented the LCMS to the Camp Fire for Boys and Girls, the Girl Scouts, and the Boy Scouts of America. He authored and co-authored several influential resources, including Sounds of Sorrow and Celebration, A New Start in Youth Ministry, Portals of Prayer & Hopeful Living devotionals and various worship and leadership materials for youth.

In 1984, Leo moved with his family to New Orleans, serving on the staff of the Southern District of the LCMS and as stewardship executive of the Southern District Extension Fund. He was subsequently elected to the district's board of

directors and served on other boards, including P.R.A.Y. (Programs of Religious Activities for Youth) Publishing and Lutheran Social Services of the South. He was a representative for Wheat Ridge Ministries, advocating for health and human care throughout the church.

After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, Leo and Rose Merle returned to Texas and rejoined Gloria Dei Lutheran Church and continued their ministry as parishioners.

As an Eagle Scout, Leo was deeply committed to the Boy Scouts of America, serving on the National Youth Committee for more than forty years and as a member of the Lutheran Association of Scouters, Religious Relationships Committee. He worked as a chaplain at Philmont Scout Ranch for 4 summers and on the Faculty of Lutheran scouting at Philmont Training Center for 8 summers and also served at other BSA camps, including Camp Napowan for 3 summers, the Protestant Chaplain for the USA at the World Scouting Jamboree Australia (1987-88), BSA New Orleans Area Council Board Member and Louisiana-Mississippi Council, Honorary Life Member of the National Association of Lutheran Scouters and contributed numerous worship resources for scouting ministries, including the First Eagles Soaring High, Scouts Worship, and a guide for summer camp chaplains.

In partial retirement, Leo served as a resource leader and advisor for Lutheran Brotherhood, assisting chapters across a six-state area in using fraternal resources to meet human-care needs in their communities. He continued to lead worship until age 89 and to write daily devotionals for Hope-Full Living until age 92. He moved to Seabrook, TX in 2006 and studied to become a Texas Master Naturalist, with Rose Merle, devoting himself to environmental stewardship on the Texas coastal waters.

Leo is survived by his wife of nearly sixty years, Rose Merle Symmank; his children, Mark Edward Symmank, Suzanne Symmank Schmidt, Scott August Symmank and Son-in-Law Joseph Schmidt; his grandsons Jonah James Schmidt and Johann August Schmidt; Brother-in-law Fred L. Ernest and sister-in-law Candice Ernest; his niece Erin Ernest Heard and Jacob Ernest; his sister-in-law Mrs. Charles (Joan) Symmank and his brother H. Melvin Symmank, his sister-in-law Barbara Symmank and many nieces, nephews, relatives and friends. His brother Charles Ray Symmank, and parents preceded him in death.

His life was marked by faith, leadership, compassion, and a profound commitment to young people and the church. His hobby of photography lead to many photo publications, that still bring his family joy, and he loved working on projects to protect and improve nature. He would often be found traveling the blue highways to small towns, stopping for that perfect photo or to speak with locals, he never met a stranger. He will be remembered with gratitude by the many individuals, congregations, and organizations blessed by his ministry, love and friendship.

Memorial may be given to Concordia University, <https://www.concordia.edu/giving/>, or the charity of ones choice. If you are giving to Concordia University please follow the following steps, Click “give now”, Under “What area would you like to support?”, click “Other Designation (fill in)”, In the text field: In memory of Rev. C Leo Symmank”.

Cemetery Details

Giddings City Cemetery

900 West Austin Street
Giddings, TX 78942

Previous Events

Memorial Service

JAN **19**. 10:30 AM (CT)

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church
18220 Upper Bay Rd
Houston , TX 77058

Graveside Service

JAN **20**. 1:00 PM (CT)

Giddings City Cemetery
900 West Austin Street
Giddings, TX 78942

Tribute Wall

BF

“*Pastor Leo and Rosemerle were our next door neighbors here in Clear Lake for many years. He was such a special friend to share stories about his family adventures growing up in Giddings and his journey through life that eventually led him to Gloria Dei. We used to have a Friday afternoon beer fest in our backyards including feeding peanuts to the local squirrel tribe which were always a funny happening. We were so blessed to have this man in outlives.*

Patty and Bill Ferry

Bill Ferry - January 18 at 05:03 PM

KC

“*Pastor Leo was a dear friend, mentor, and fellow Bible studier during our shared years at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Houston. Several years ago he gifted me a Greek NT that I carry everywhere in my Bible case. He had a wonderful spirit, and possessed a lively (and droll!) sense of humor. We miss him! May God grant blessings of peace and comfort to his family and friends.*



Keith Chuvala - January 13 at 09:52 AM

BM

“ Pastor Leo was a dear friend through our Scouting affiliation. We served together as chaplains at Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico and worked on several training courses at the Philmont Training Center designed to promote Scouting as ministry to youth and families. When he was on the LCMS national youth staff, I was director of Protestant and Religious Relationships for BSA. He invited me to participate in several national youth gatherings that he helped organize. He was fun, witty, and deeply spiritual. We stayed in touch now and then over the years. I will miss him like a brother.

Into your hands, O merciful Savior, we commend your servant Leo. Acknowledge, we humbly beseech you, a sheep of your own fold, a lamb of your own flock, a sinner of your own redeeming. Receive him into the arms of your mercy, into the blessed rest of everlasting peace, and into the glorious company of the saints in light. Amen.
Bill McCleery

Bill McCleery - January 09 at 05:27 PM

ES

Remembering the many years we shared. Love and peace to your family.

Enid Schlegel - January 10 at 04:00 PM

TF

“ Tina F. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of C. Leo Symmank.

Tina F. - January 09 at 04:35 PM

DE

“ *I had the honor of serving this dear Man of God as his hospice Chaplain. Until the final moments of his life, he was the consummate Shepherd, graciously thanking those who provided care for him, and sending most everyone away with a pastoral blessing.*

Dale Eudy - January 09 at 02:44 PM

VF

“ *Violet Frosch lit a candle in memory of C. Symmank*



Violet Frosch - January 09 at 02:08 PM