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Comfort in the Hill Country: Crosses that point to Jesus, salvation, redemption

By Bethany Blankley | The Center Square contributor
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Members of the public have left messages and paid their respects for those lost on July 4 at 50-foot memorial Wall of Hope in Kerrville.

Bethany Blankley for The Center Square

(The Center Square) – Throughout the Hill Country, crosses, words of Jesus, prayers and messages of hope are written on memorials honoring nearly 150 killed from the catastrophic July 4 flash flood.

In Hunt, along the Guadalupe Riverbank, a wooden cross memorial was presented to the people of Kerr County by TheMessageOfTheCross.net. It cites Revelation 21:4, “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor

crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

At its base is a stone-shaped heart full of stuffed animals, candles, messages about Jesus and heaven and badges from fire and rescue crews who were part of recovery efforts.

At the Guadalupe Park in Kerrville, crosses of all sizes, some reaching more than 10 feet tall, line the stairs and walkway down to the river and hundreds of feet along the riverbank. Each cross bears the name of a July 4 victim. Nestled among them is a mural painted by artist Roberto Marquez.

92 Hearts of Mercy & Compassion crosses were erected in memory to those who died on July 4. They line a pathway to "The Empty Cross" and "Coming King" sculptures created by artist and architect Max Greiner, Jr., in the Coming King and Sculpture Prayers Gardens in Kerrville, Texas. Art & architecture by Max Greiner, Jr. ©

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A now 50-foot memorial wall on Water Street in Kerrville also pays tribute to victims. Decorated with flowers, photos, T-shirts left by Christian relief workers with Bible verses written on them, mini-crocheted prayer blankets, it's also anchored with small wooden crosses lining the pavement. Known as the "Wall of Hope," it was started by Miami-based artist Leo Soto and visitors continue to add to it.

Next to it in a building window is a painting of trees and a peaceful river with the words of Jesus, "Come unto me all who are weary and heavy burdened, and I will give you rest," Matthew 11:28. On another building wall, the words of Jesus are written in chalk, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you," John 14:27.

Just north of town, Lutheran Church Charities (LLC) gifted a **Hearts of Mercy & Compassion** (HMC) memorial at the **Coming King and Sculpture Prayer Gardens** created by Hill Country artist, architect and sculptor Max Greiner, Jr. The 24.5-acre prayer garden is located at the top of a large hill off of I-10 when exiting for Kerrville.

The HMC memorial includes 92 white wooden crosses that line a pathway facing sculptures created by Greiner. On one end are two sculptures, "**The Empty Cross**" and the "**Coming King**;" at the other is another sculpture of Jesus. The HMC memorial represents "the love and hope of Jesus through presence and prayer," LCC explains.

In the center of each cross is a blue heart. In its center is the name of a July 4 victim framed by a white Ichthys with the inscription, "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit," Psalm 34:18. The letters of the Ichthys, a first century Greek symbol, spell the early Christian confession, "Jesus Christ is the Son of God and Savior." Ichthys symbolizes "God's saving grace;" the hearts are blue to represent hope, LCC says.

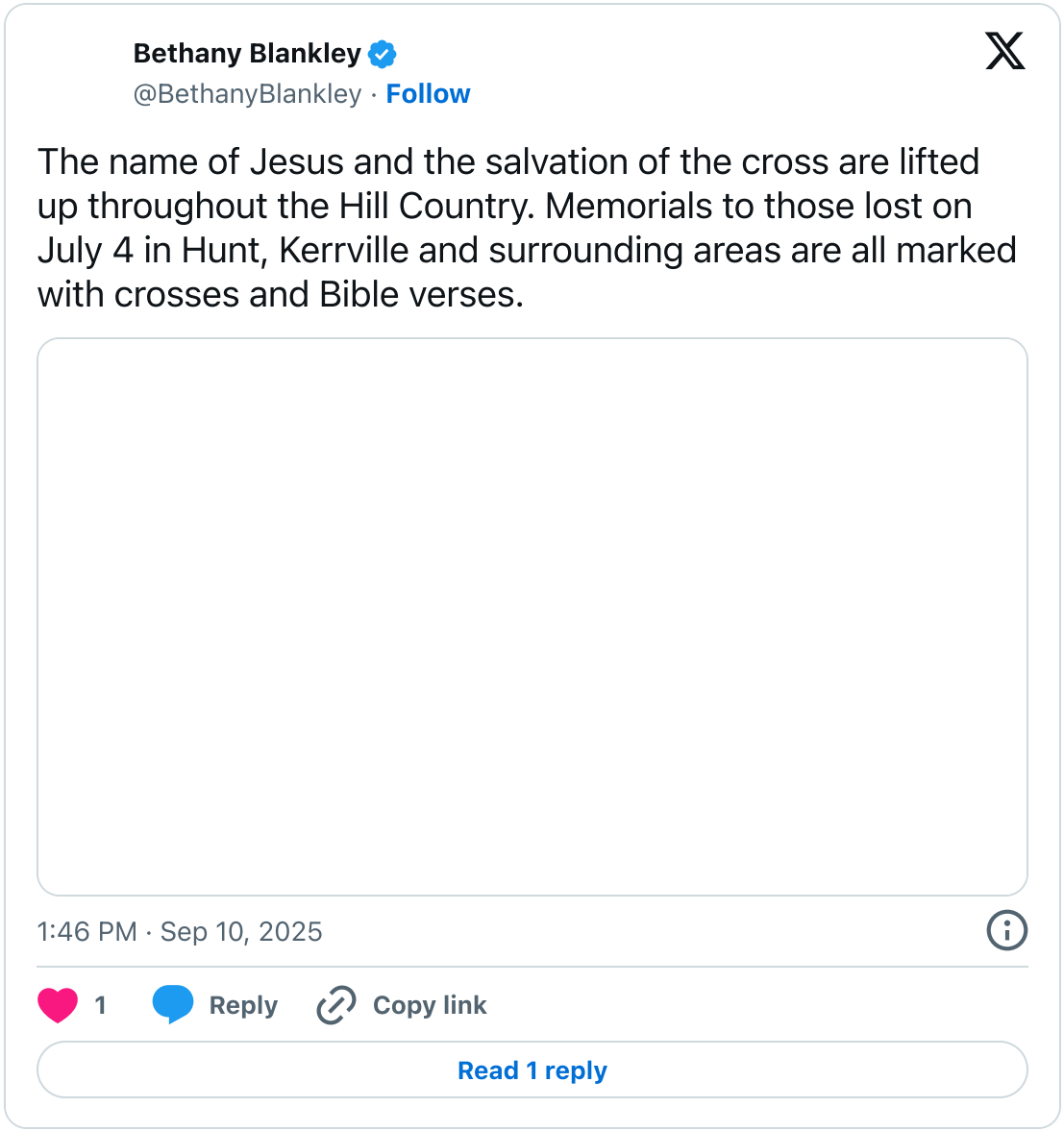
The seven-story (77.7 feet) Cor-ten steel cross is empty, symbolizing Jesus' resurrection and Jesus as "the door, the narrow gate, the strong tower, mighty fortress and light of the world," Greiner explains, also citing Matthew 28:6. "The cross, a central symbol in Christianity, represents the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and serves as a profound emblem of faith, redemption, and salvation. Its significance is deeply rooted in the New Testament and has been a focal point of Christian theology and devotion throughout history," BibleHub.com explains.

The garden is located halfway between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans and is the same latitude as Israel, Greiner told The Center Square. More than 120,000 people visit a year from all 50 states and more than 80 countries, he said. It's maintained by volunteers with

the **Coming King Foundation**, a nonprofit art museum dedicated "to bless, inspire and educate the public through the exhibition of monumental spiritual art and Biblical scriptures."

When asked about the significance of the cross at the center of the memorials, Greiner told The Center Square, "The cross of Jesus Christ is central in the lives of most Kerr County residents. Their faith has allowed them to deal with the terrible Fourth of July tragedy. All the Christians here have prayed, many have donated their time, resources and money to this disaster. Many Christians risked their lives and some even lost their lives trying to save others from the raging flood waters.

"Virtually all of the volunteer organizations who immediately responded to the monumental crisis in Kerr County were responding to the command of Jesus Christ who requires His followers to put the needs of others before their own."



The memorials are interactive, inviting members of the public to write messages or prayers. The LCC and Coming King Foundation, among others, also provided a list of resources to help those in need.

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