LUCE LADDER

"Courage is the ladder on which all the other virtues mount."
– Clare Boothe Luce

From the President *November 2026*

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CLARE BOOTHE LUCE CENTER for CONSERVATIVE WOMEN

Courageous, Conservative Women Find Inspiration at a Texas-Sized Summit





Isabel Brown *(left), with* ***Macy Brookhouser*** *from the University of Arkansas and* ***Mary Margaret Olohan*** *(right) call on young women to live meaningful lives rooted in truth and courage.*

Young women from across the country came together in San Antonio, Texas, October 16–18, for the Luce Center's **College Women's Summit** to enjoy inspiring speakers, lively conversations, and the opportunity to learn from some of the country's leading conservative women.

Attendees came from nearly 20 states, with students representing colleges and universities as varied as **Harvard University**, **Hillsdale College**, **Baylor University**, **Belmont Abbey College**, **Texas Tech University**, and the **University of Dallas.** The gathering also included interns and young professionals from the **Heritage Foundation** and **Herzog Foundation**. Despite their different backgrounds, these young women shared a desire to deepen their conservative convictions, connect with like-minded peers, and make a difference in their communities.

The Summit also welcomed **Luce Center Board Chairman Clare Luce Abbey** and **President's Club** members from across the country, who joined the students for a memorable weekend of learning, fellowship, and Texas hospitality, including a lively evening at the Tejas Rodeo.





*Luce Center President **Kimberly Begg** challenges conservatives to earn Gen Z's trust and offer a compelling vision for their futures.*

Luce Center President Kimberly Begg opened the Summit with a question: **Can conservatives win young women back?** Her answer was **yes, but first they must earn Gen Z's trust.** Young women need to know that conservatives genuinely care about and respect them. That begins with understanding the unprecedented experiences that have defined their generation.

She observed that Gen Z's views have been shaped less by policy arguments than by lived experience, including a Covid response that closed schools and churches while liquor stores stayed open and the transgender movement preyed on children and teens. "Your generation learned that public leaders will lie no matter how obvious the lie is or who it hurts," she said.

Earning that trust begins with listening and responding with a compelling vision that addresses the reality of their lives. "We want women to flourish," Begg said, "and when women flourish, so do their families, their communities, and their country."







***Nicole Parker** (left) draws on her experience as an FBI agent to encourage young women to stand firm in their faith and convictions, meets with **Kyra Martinez** from UT-San Antonio (middle), and signs a copy of her book,* The Two FBIs*, for **Mara O'Hearn** at Johnson County Community College (right).*

Fox News Contributor and author of *The Two FBIs: The Bravery and Betrayal I Saw in My Time at the Bureau* **Nicole Parker** brought that vision of flourishing to life through her own remarkable story of faith, courage, and conviction. Parker traced her journey back to September 11, 2001, when she found herself trapped in a shaky elevator in New York City. Amid the fear and uncertainty, she experienced an overwhelming sense of peace and placed her trust entirely in God. "I made a vow to myself and to God that morning: 'If I get out of here, I will go back and I will serve you one day.'"

Determined to fulfill that promise, Parker eventually joined the FBI, where she discovered that not everyone shared the same loyalties. While some agents were committed to serving the American people, she witnessed others advancing political agendas. The experience reinforced a lesson she urged attendees to carry into their own lives: "Walk away from anything that is not in alignment with your faith and your integrity, because at the end of the day, that is the only thing that matters."

Parker challenged the young women to stand firm in their convictions, even when doing so comes at a cost. **"Never live in fear. Do not be scared to stand up for what you believe."** In a world where the struggle between light and darkness is real, she reminded them that each has a responsibility to be a light to others, to love wholeheartedly, and to live with integrity.







Clockwise from top: ***Mary Margaret Olohan*** *urges attendees to embrace the purpose God has given each of them;* ***Isel Loria*** *(Luce Center Spring Intern),* ***Audrey Hambleton*** *(Franciscan University),* ***Aliza Hopkins*** *(Buffalo State University),* ***Kiela Hawk*** *(University of Dallas),* ***Mercedes Skidd*** *(University of Dallas), and* ***Cecily Cline*** *(Luce Center Spring Intern) gather around Olohan, eager to meet the Luce Center alumna turned White House correspondent;* ***Anna Petrolla****, a student at Christendom College, catches a moment with Olohan after her remarks.*

Mary Margaret Olohan, White House Correspondent for **The Daily Wire**, echoed that call to courage, encouraging attendees to embrace the unique purpose God has given each of them. "Be who God made you to be," she told the students, "and you will set the world on fire."

For Olohan, speaking at the summit was a return to familiar ground. She told attendees she "was in your shoes one time," recalling the College Women's Summit she attended in Orlando as a student at the Catholic University of America. "It was so much fun," she said, "and I've been part of Clare Boothe Luce ever since." Today she covers the White House and serves on the Luce Center's Advisory Board, a reminder to this year's attendees of how far the encouragement they receive here can carry them.

Living out that purpose, she said, takes courage. The culture tells young women that the most important thing they can do is fit in, but each of them has God-given talents meant for a lifelong task. **"This means standing your ground when people tell you that evil is good or that something false is true," Olohan said. "It means living a counter-cultural lifestyle and seeking excellence in a world that tells you that you should be pursuing mediocrity."**

It also means resisting a culture that treats fame and attention as the highest currency. "Our goal should not be to be seen or to be remembered, but to be the woman we were created to be," Olohan said. "That requires something that internet stardom often does not, which is long hours, hard work, humbling ourselves, and working to be a woman of substance and of character who can offer her talents to the world."






Isabel Brown *(left) reminds young women that America's future is in their hands, meets with* ***Hannah Duong*** *from the University of La Verne (middle), and shakes hands with* ***Mara and Bridget O'Hearn*** *from Johnson County Community College in Kansas.*

Isabel Brown, host of *The Isabel Brown Show*, carried that message a step further, reminding attendees that making a difference doesn't require fame or a large following. Meaningful change, she explained, often comes through quiet, consistent acts of wisdom and courage. Our daily choices say more about our values than the size of a podcast audience or the number of retweets ever could. "It's the little acts of love," Brown explained, "one after another in our mundane day-to-day lives that ultimately make us virtuous."

Reflecting on her longtime friend and role model **Charlie Kirk**, who was assassinated last year while speaking to students on a college campus, Brown shared one of his favorite sayings: "It's amazing what can happen when you don't care who gets the credit for it." **Change doesn't happen only in Washington, D.C. It begins with ordinary Americans willing to stand up for what they believe.**

Brown closed by encouraging attendees to live boldly, whether challenging Marxist professors in college classrooms, refusing to compete against biological males in sports, or praying outside abortion facilities. These "small, simple, ordinary acts of extraordinary courage," she said, can change the course of a nation.





Elisha Krauss *(left) warns students of the dangers of socialism and meets with* ***Dinneen Evich, Bridget O'Hearn, Lucy Evich*** *from Christendom College, and* ***Mara O'Hearn*** *from Johnson County Community College.*

Conservative writer and commentator **Elisha Krauss** challenged attendees to confront socialism and its growing appeal among young Americans. "There's a narrative that socialism isn't that bad," she warned. But adding the word "democratic" to it, she argued, does nothing to make socialism any less destructive or diminish the human suffering it causes.

To illustrate her point, Krauss shared the testimony of a friend who escaped socialism in Jamaica: "The left has been putting the modifier 'social' in front of a great many things over the past decade, and none of them have turned out to be better than the original. There's social justice, there's social distancing, and the newest is social housing. All of those serve to mask the terror of true equity, the equity of misery, which I got to see firsthand as a child," her friend shared with Elisha.

Krauss emphasized the seriousness of the threat: **"Democratic socialism is a malignant tumor in our society. It's not benign, and we need to take it more seriously."**































President's Club members from across the country enjoy camaraderie with fellow conservatives. (Left) ***Britt Balkcom*** *talks to Texas Tech University student* ***Preston Parsons*** *at the welcome reception. (Middle) From left to right, President* ***Kimberly Begg****, Board Chairman* ***Clare Luce Abbey****,* ***Doug and Sarah Fehrer****, and Vice President* ***Cindy Rushing*** *soak up the Texas spirit at the Tejas Rodeo. (Right)* ***Nicole Parker*** *continues the conversation with* ***Todd and Cherree Peterson*** *following her remarks.*

Attendees described the weekend as transformative and inspiring:

- "I am impressed by the other college women I met and the thought-provoking speakers I heard at the summit. The speakers have a sense of self that I deeply admire and their conservatism is the result of their strong morals and sense of identity rooted in Christ. That is rare, and I believe that politics are a means to an end—the end being **a country founded upon man's self-governance and freedom. The Luce Center upholds these values** and seeks to spread a form of conservatism I support. Thank you CBL for such a wonderful opportunity!" - Hannah Foster, junior at Hillsdale College

- "I absolutely **LOVED** the summit! I **loved hearing all of the speakers and meeting so many like-minded young women!**" - Esmeralda Stadthagen, junior at Benedictine College

- **"**The staff was super helpful and kind. Our stay was incredible, from the hotel to the authentic rodeo experience **I had so much fun!!** I loved hearing from the different speakers and their separate insight on conservatism within modern day America." - Ariana Oishi, senior at University of Texas at Austin

- "There was a wonderful balance of **intentional speakers and fun activities.**" - Erin Tierney, College of the Ozarks

- "I had an incredible time at the CBL convention-the food was amazing, the resort was beautiful, and the women were so kind and welcoming!! I **loved the opportunity to connect with other conservatives and meet some big name leaders in our generation**." - Lauren Krage, Christendom College

- "I feel that the Luce Center genuinely cares about the people who join / come to events. Therefore I would **recommend this organization to women who need to feel heard within the Conservative Movement**." - Lydia Linscott, Fall Intern at the Heritage Foundation

- "It has been **monumental for my journey as a conservative woman** and I want to share this opportunity with others." - Bridget O'Hearn, Johnson County Community College, Kansas

The greatest measure of the Summit's success may be what happens next. Our team is following up with the many young women who expressed interest in applying for an internship, bringing a speaker to campus, or organizing firearms training at their schools. We can't wait to see what these young women do next, and to help them along the way.

Noelle Mering Exposes the Ideology Behind the Troubling "No Contact" Trend



Noelle Mering *shares her insights from her new book* No Contact: How a Seductive Ideology Broke Families and Friendships and How We Can Repair Them.

Why are so many Americans cutting off contact with their own families? Author **Noelle Mering** explored this alarming trend at the Luce Center's October Conservative Network Event, examining the cultural and ideological forces driving loved ones apart.

A fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center and author of *Awake, Not Woke: A Christian Response to the Cult of Progressive Ideology*, Mering brought clarity and insight to a deeply personal and increasingly divisive issue.

Drawing from her latest book, *No Contact: How a Seductive Ideology Broke Families and Friendships and How We Can Repair Them*, Mering opened with a sobering statistic: **"One in four Americans is estranged from a close family member. That's about 67 million Americans."** She traced the forces behind this widespread estrangement to three interconnected factors: sociological, ideological, and spiritual.

Sociology: When Difficult Becomes Dangerous

Mering began by examining how **social media has changed the way Americans handle conflict.** Blocking, unfollowing, and muting have made it easier than ever to avoid uncomfortable conversations, allowing people to curate their relationships into "silos of self-reinforcing engagement."

Meanwhile, popular psychology influencers encourage followers to search their relationships for signs of toxicity and their pasts for evidence of trauma. "There's an infallibility narrative in the no contact movement that there's nothing I can examine in myself," Mering explained. The result, she argued, is a culture increasingly inclined to view disagreement as a threat rather than an opportunity for understanding. The redefinition of a threat creates fertile ground for political differences to drive wedges between family members.





(Left) Mering signs copies of books while engaging in conversation with guests. (Right) Mering spends time with Luce Center fall interns ***Cecilia Cline*** *and* ***Isel Loria****, following her remarks.*





*(Left) Luce Center alumna **Catherine Connolly** and President's Club member **Richard Ryan** display Noelle Mering's latest book,* No Contact. *(Right) Four members of the Luce Center's 2025 summer internship class reunite: (from left) **Daniela Gomez**, now Executive Office Assistant at Young America's Foundation; **Anastasia Leffas**, now Luce Center Membership Coordinator; **Virginia Kreitzer**, now Luce Center Social Media Coordinator; and **Anastasia Shanahan**, now Luce Center Assistant to the President.*

Ideology: The Empowerment Delusion

Beneath this cultural shift, Mering identified a deeper ideological problem rooted in what she calls the "empowerment delusion." It rests on two seemingly contradictory ideas: **radical autonomy and perpetual victimhood.** Radical autonomy elevates personal choice above all else, treating individual preferences as the ultimate authority. Perpetual victimhood, meanwhile, encourages people to see themselves as powerless over their circumstances, with responsibility for their unhappiness resting elsewhere. Together, these ideas foster what Mering described as **"an identity of woundedness."** As she explained, "If you can't really control the things that have happened to you, if it's all external to yourself, then what is there to do other than rage?"

Spirituality: When Life Becomes a Burden

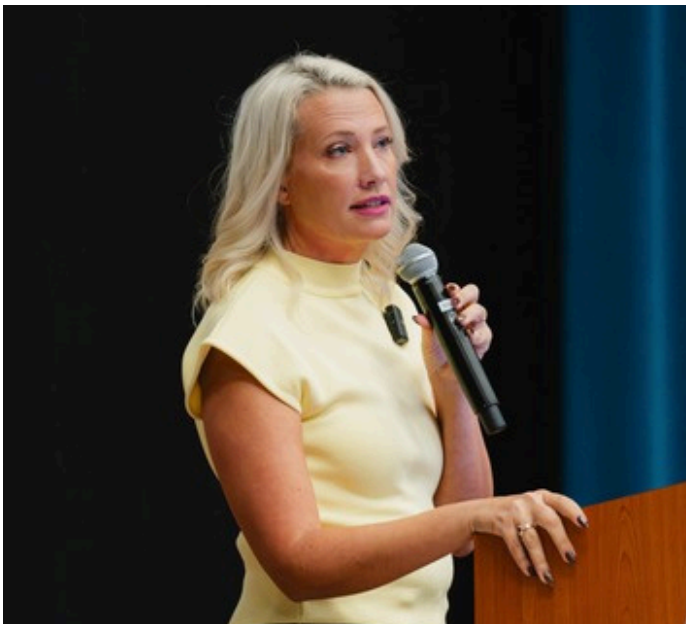
Mering then explored the spiritual consequences of this worldview. When personal choice becomes the measure of everything, she explained, even the things we never chose can come to seem like impositions. Taken to its extreme, that thinking produces a troubling outlook: "I didn't choose to be born…My life is not a blessing, it's a burden." Mering illustrated the point with a quotation from an expert featured in her book: "If you inflict life on unsuspecting flesh, you owe it a lot." The underlying human tendencies are nothing new, Mering observed. People have always been tempted to avoid responsibility, assign blame, and nurse grievances. What concerns her is an ideology that presents those impulses as virtues. **"We're all prone to sort of deflecting from our responsibility, to finding who to blame when something goes wrong, to become the accuser," she said. "But you've got a structure that is telling you not only are you prone to these things, but also these are good things."**

Three Antidotes: Coachability, Service, and Gratitude

Mering concluded by offering three antidotes to the no-contact mentality: coachability, service, and gratitude. Coachability means recognizing our shortcomings and being willing to learn from others. "We all have blind spots. We all have gaps." Service shifts our focus from our own desires to the needs of others, prompting us to ask, "What is needed from me right now in this moment?" And gratitude encourages us to recognize our blessings rather than dwell on grievances. As Mering explained, **"Whether you're looking at that life with gratitude or grievance is going to utterly transform how you see it."**

She closed by reflecting on how freedom and duty come together in love: "The richness of love is rather combining the two, our freedom and our duties, so that we know to whom we owe an allegiance of love and learning how to freely give it."

Elisha Krauss Challenges Berkeley Students to Embrace Dialogue and Debate



Elisha Krauss *encourages UC-Berkeley students to embrace open dialogue and honest debate.*

Elisha Krauss, host of *The Washington Examiner* Newsmaker Series, spoke to UC Berkeley students on October 7 as part of the Luce Center's **Keith Work Speakers Series**, making the case for more open dialogue, honest debate, and seeing those with different views as people rather than enemies.

Krauss began by criticizing political candidates who avoid public appearances and debates or fail to disclose payments to campaign supporters. **Americans deserve transparency and honesty from those seeking public office**, she argued. "We have a right as citizens to hear from the candidates that we may or may not be voting for."

Krauss warned that avoiding difficult conversations is becoming increasingly acceptable, contributing to a political culture marked by division rather than open debate. "We have become so incredibly vitriolic and tribal in our mindset when it comes to identity politics," she said.

Krauss urged students to look beyond political labels and recognize that a person's background, experiences, and beliefs cannot be determined simply by where they live, their ethnicity, or their party affiliation. She pointed to a troubling example of political division: "People on both the right and the left said that if they found out that their neighbor was registered for the opposite political party, they would view them as, quote, unquote, 'an enemy.'"

Instead of making assumptions about others, **Krauss encouraged students to make eye contact, ask questions, and listen to people whose views differ from their own**. "Lived personal experience likely brought you to where you are today," she explained. "If I mock and shut down what I might not understand or think is extreme, then I'm not respecting you and treating you with the equality that I think we are all deserving of."

A lively Q&A followed, with students asking questions and expressing appreciation for Krauss's personal approach to political disagreement.









Through the ***Keith Work Speakers Series,*** *UC-Berkeley students hear conservative ideas about free speech rarely heard on campus.*

The Left's Capture of America's Historic Sites: Brenda Hafera Speaks at Thomas More College



Brenda Hafera *(middle) meets with TMC students and alumnae, including* ***Anastasia Shanahan*** *(right), assistant to the president, following her talk about protecting historic sites.*

Brenda Hafera of the **Heritage Foundation** spoke at **Thomas More College** on October 20 as part of the Luce Center's **Keith Work Speakers Series**, warning that some of America's most treasured historic sites are placing leftist agendas ahead of historical education. She explained that historic sites play an essential role in teaching Americans about their nation's past, particularly the founding principles that have shaped our country.

Hafera's research also revealed troubling examples of activism replacing education. At **James Madison's Montpelier**, a children's exhibit focuses on race and slavery, with books recommended by the **Southern Poverty Law Center**. One asks young readers to imagine themselves "whipping an individual until his flesh cried blood." Such activism, Hafera argued, treats children "as means rather than ends." By contrast, at **Mount Vernon**, children are asked to weigh competing advice from Hamilton and Madison and decide what they would have done in Washington's place. "That's real education," Hafera said.

At stake is more than the future of America's historic sites. It is whether future generations will inherit a sense of gratitude for America and a commitment to preserving its founding principles. "We are at a crossroads," she warned, calling for action now before more historic sites lose sight of their mission to preserve and teach the American story.

Mary FioRito Defends Life at the University of Massachusetts Law School



Ethics and Public Policy Center Fellow ***Mary FioRito*** *gathers with her student host,* ***Sabrina Machado****.*

Mary FioRito, a fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, made the case for protecting unborn life at the University of Massachusetts School of Law on October 14 as part of the Luce Center's **Keith Work Speakers Series**. Student **Sabrina Machado** organized the event through the school's **Federalist Society** chapter, attracting students and professors with differing views.

FioRito began by drawing a comparison to Brown v. Board of Education, the landmark Supreme Court decision that declared racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional. She noted that the ruling did not immediately change public attitudes. Similarly, she argued, the Supreme Court's 2022 decision in Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization, which overturned Roe v. Wade, corrected a flawed legal precedent, but changing the law is only part of the challenge. Changing hearts and minds—and building a culture that recognizes and protects the dignity of unborn children—will take much longer.

Building a culture of life means offering women real support, a cause FioRito has long championed through her work with pregnancy resource centers, post-abortion healing ministries, and perinatal hospice, while also recognizing abortion's often overlooked toll on men.

In a lively Q&A, a student challenged FioRito on reports of rising maternal mortality in Texas after Dobbs. FioRito, who has written extensively about misleading abortion coverage in the media, replied that many widely cited statistics ignore the dangers of abortion pills sent through the mail. The abortion industry, she argued, too often harms the very women it claims to empower.

One Day, Three Ranges: College Women Receive Expert Firearms Training Near Their Campuses





*(Left) 2025 Summer Intern and University of Dallas student **Mercedes Skidd** takes aim, practicing her second amendment rights with confidence. (Middle) Texas A&M University students celebrate their newly acquired marksmanship skills. (Right) Texas A&M students enjoy a day of fellowship and firearms.*

This October, three colleges hosted a Day at the Range, an opportunity for young women to grow in their confidence and firsthand experience with their Second Amendment rights. **Twenty-two young women** from **Texas A&M University**, **Brigham Young University**, and the **University of Dallas** gathered at local firearms ranges for safety and marksmanship instruction and camaraderie with other conservative women.

"This was an incredible opportunity to exercise our Second Amendment rights, celebrate freedom, learn about gun safety, and enjoy time together," reported Libby Mays, a freshman at Texas A&M. Kate Lewis, a junior at BYU, agreed, saying her Day at the Range was "the most amazing opportunity for us to learn more about the Second Amendment and how we can exercise it."

Days at the Range are one of the Luce Center's favorite ways to help young conservative women develop confidence in themselves, in their communities, and in their rights. The Luce Center is proud to stand beside these young women as they grow in knowledge, practical skills, and courage to live out their constitutional rights.





*(Left) 2025 Summer Intern and University of Dallas Junior, **Lucy Ruse**, returns to the range with excitement. (Middle) Texas A&M students showcase their targets, highlighting precision, grit, and capability. (Right) Brigham Young University students gather after a successful day at the Range.*

On a Personal NOTE

As Thanksgiving approaches, I'm reminded of how much we have to be grateful for, even as we face challenges for our country in the months ahead, including the growing popularity of socialism and its expanding influence in public office. The stories in this newsletter offer so many reasons to hope and give thanks.



*One of the joys of our San Antonio Summit was spending time with Board Chairman **Clare Luce Abbey**, Vice President **Cindy Rushing,** and so many wonderful young women. I'm especially grateful for Clare and Cindy's friendship and their devotion to our mission.*

I'm grateful for the courageous young women we have the privilege of knowing and mentoring. At our College Women's Summit in San Antonio last month, I met students from across the country who are eager to build meaningful lives rooted in truth and virtue. They give me every reason to be optimistic about America's future.

I'm grateful for the remarkable women who share their wisdom and experience with our students, including those who speak at our Summits and on campuses. I'm especially grateful to our Board Chairman, **Clare Luce Abbey**, who joined us in San Antonio and made a special effort to engage students in meaningful conversations and offer encouragement. These accomplished, articulate women understand the difference mentorship can make in a young person's life. Through their example, our students learn that courage and conviction are not merely qualities to admire, but virtues to practice in their own lives.

I'm especially grateful for you. Your generosity makes everything we do possible. Because of you, young women across the country are hearing inspiring conservative speakers, receiving valuable training and mentorship, and finding the encouragement to stand up for what they believe. You are making a lasting difference in their lives.

And as we gather with our families this Thanksgiving, **I'm grateful for America.** We have inherited an extraordinary country, blessed with freedoms and opportunities that generations before us sacrificed so much to secure. I feel a responsibility to protect those freedoms for future generations, as I know you do too.

That is why the work we do together matters so much. The young women you are helping us reach today will one day raise families, shape institutions, and influence the direction of our country. Their courage, convictions, and leadership will help build a freer, more prosperous America for generations to come.

From all of us at the Luce Center, **thank you, God bless you, and Happy Thanksgiving!**

In Friendship & Freedom,

Kimberly Begg

President

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P.S. Thank you for believing in our young women and in the future of our wonderful country. We have so much to be thankful for!