

... for the sake of  
<sup>Tmm</sup>  
**God's MISSION**



2025  
<sup>Tmm</sup>  
**Annual Report**

**First Lutheran**  
discover more : together

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## A Message From Presiding Bishop Yahiel Curry

*“As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.”*

— Colossians 2:6-7



Dear friends in Christ,

As Lutherans, we are set free to love our neighbors and seek justice. In Colossians 2, we read: “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving” (6-7).

I am abounding in thankfulness for you, church. You are an integral part of this mission as we envision a world experiencing the difference God’s grace and love in Christ make for all people and creation. The ministries of congregations including yours, our synods and the ELCA churchwide organization are all working together today and every day so more people may know the way of Jesus and discover community, justice and love.

From providing food to people experiencing hunger, to helping train the next generation of leaders that will lead this church, your support is at work here at home and around the world.

Your generosity to each of the three expressions of the church — your congregation, your synod, and the churchwide organization — has made it possible for us to do this work together. Your financial resources, your time volunteering and accompanying others, and your voices are so valued.

As we look ahead to the coming year, I encourage you to continue to walk in Christ, remembering you are rooted and established in faith, and free to love and serve your neighbors. Thank you, church, for the ways you connect with and support our siblings across the ELCA and in our communities.

In Christ,  
The Rev. Yahiel Curry  
Presiding Bishop  
Evangelical Lutheran  
Church in America



Evangelical  
Lutheran Church  
in America

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*From providing food to people experiencing hunger, to helping train the next generation of leaders that will lead this church, your support is at work here at home and around the world.*

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*Through your generosity, God is at work across the ELCA. A portion of your offering, called Mission Support, advances the ministry of our church, helping the ELCA nurture Christian community, raise up leaders, serve our neighbors and strive for justice. Read stories and learn more at [LivingLutheran.org](http://LivingLutheran.org)*



## Senior Pastor's Report the Rev. Dr. Steven J. Knudson

### For the Sake of God's Mission

God has a mission to restore all people and all the earth to that quality of life and joy first experienced in the beginning. God's mission has the church. Each congregation is the result of God's spirit gathering people to be both a witness to God's love for the world and a demonstration of what that love looks like. Everything we do is for the sake of God's mission, to bear witness God's mission of love and mercy for all by what we do and what we say.

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*This annual report tells the story of how First Lutheran Church serves God's Mission in the heart of Cedar Rapids.*

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The general ways a congregation does this are common to all: worship around word and sacrament (baptism and communion), discipleship as a life-long journey, serving the neighbor, a generous welcome into community, and a spirit of generosity in all things. How a congregation does these acts, *Ah!* — that's what makes each congregation unique.

This annual report tells the story of how First Lutheran Church serves God's Mission in the heart of Cedar Rapids. Our impact is both local and far reaching. First Lutheran is a people with many passions and abilities. You can see it in the ministries and events. What is important to remember is that the many offerings serves one purpose—for the sake of God's mission.

One way we talk about engaging God's mission is with the metaphor of a journey—**Discover More: Together**. What does that mean? Faith is a journey of discovery. When we are baptized, whether as an infant or adult, we begin a life-long journey in the grace of God. We are never done growing and maturing in Christ.

That is why we say *more*, for there is always *more* to discover about who God is, and God's call for our lives. We say *discover more*, because suffering and challenge serve as the occasions for a deeper experience of trust, hope, peace, and joy in God.

We talk about *together*, Discover More: *Together*, because faith is a team sport. The journey of faith is both personal, we each are on our own journey to God, and communal, we journey with others. Jesus called twelve disciples, and the church began. This annual report is one way of describing how we have discovered more together while serving God's mission in 2025.

My invitation to you is this: How might God be calling you to participate in new ways? Where do you experience the invitation to try something new, to discover something more in your journey of faith? Looking back to 2025, what stirs in you to live for something bigger than just yourself—to live for the sake of God's mission?

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*How might God be calling you to participate in new ways?*

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## Our Stories Telling God's Story

The staff and church council took time to gather up the accomplishments of the year. I learned a couple of things from that exercise. First, we see more together than any one person can see alone. Isn't that how it works? I could name 5 or 10 things, but the total list of accomplishments and celebrations numbered close to one hundred. Second, in naming, we notice not only our own areas of ministry, we notice what others were doing. We encourage one another. We see God at work through one another. Third, once we were done, we experienced a sense of awe—all that happened made us aware of God's activity in our midst. God's mission was at work. Our stories tell a bigger story of God. What are some of those stories for you? Here are some observations I pass on to you.

### Renewing for God's Mission

In one year we both approved the renewal project, gathered in a majority of donations, and completed construction. That's amazing. I want to lift up especially Bob Koenig who served at Chair of the Building Committee. Bob worked with the building committee and Rinderknecht for many years matching what we can do with our fund appeal income. We owe much to Bob's labors.

There is something more. Many members and friends volunteered their time painting, installing baseboard, refinishing an endless supply of interior doors, and moving furniture and boxes. And they did it all with good cheer. On July 3rd, a text was sent in the morning, asking for help moving. That same afternoon, *twenty people* showed up. Amazing.



### For the Sake of God's Mission that is Bigger

This year was a special year partnering with churches and needs that are bigger than just First Lutheran Church. We supported partner congregations in Tanzania and nearby Wellington Community Church with grants totaling \$100,000. This Christmas, we supported three major endeavors: Christmas boxes for children of Ukraine, Gifts Tags for 4 Oaks children, and a major gift to Helping Hands. And we continued to feed people through SEMP on Saturday and throughout each week, totaling 35,000 meals. That's about 100 meals every day of the year. There is more, we packed 60,000 meals in one day in April. God's mission is bigger than just First Lutheran. What a privilege.



### For the Beauty of God's Mission

We experience the beauty of God's Mission through music. It is a beauty that lifts us each worship service. We are blessed with a variety of musical genres, traditional and contemporary, all for the sake of God's mission. The Musical Arts ministry hosted organ and choral concerts, which gathered more than a thousand people over the year. One organ concert raised \$5,000 for Ukrainian relief.



### **Growing Young for the sake of God's Mission**

Growing Young is more than just the demographics of a congregation. It really has to do with developing a culture so that young people feel a greater sense of empowerment and participation at church. The Wednesday ECHO services become that place where youth freely assume leadership roles in worship: singing, reading the scripture, serving communion, ushering. Vacation Bible School is an incubator for leadership development for youth. It's all about creating a culture where faith is a call to discipleship, to learn and to serve.

### **For the sake of God's Mission, we didn't stop.**

Every space outside of the sanctuary was disrupted during construction, and yet we didn't stop doing ministry. The staff showed great patience, collaboration, creativity, flexibility, and pivoting skills. When the parking lot was out of commission, VBS kept on. When the offices were all moved, the computers were re-networked, and we didn't skip a beat, all thanks to Will and Blake. When the narthex was walled off, donuts moved downstairs (can't *not* have donuts!). Each staff person, each ministry found a way to keep on serving God's mission, and often it was not easy. We just kept on, keeping on.

### **Renewed to Serve God's Mission**

I offer my deep appreciation to First Lutheran and the church council for providing a policy that grants time of sabbatical. For three months, I was able to step away from the daily demands of ministry for the sake of being renewed. The theme for my sabbatical was "Pilgrimage." I began the sabbatical with a pilgrimage walk on the Camino, walking 100 kilometers along the Portuguese way to Santiago de Compostella. I ended the sabbatical with an American kind of pilgrimage, traveling to Holden Village and hiking in the Cascade mountains. In between, we made pilgrimages to see grandchildren on both coasts, and made a pilgrimage to a family cabin on a lake in Minnesota.

It was a season of renewal for me. Perhaps the one thing I take away from these pilgrimages is that any day can be a pilgrimage, where we journey with God, and sense God's traveling with us. For me, scripture and prayer are important ways of making the journey of faith, and discovering more each day.



2025 was an unusual year of pilgrimage. In October, 32 people traveled with Becky and I to Greece and Turkey to look at the places where Paul planted churches. I came away with a renewed sense of Paul's courage and an appreciation for how the stories of Acts match the setting of each city and place. What's next? Rome in 2027.

### **Looking to 2026 for the Sake of God's Mission**

The Spring of 2026 will be a season of Celebration and Invitation as we dedicate our renewed spaces and open our doors to the community. We are planning for a dedication weekend on May 3, but there will be more. We have several outward facing events that will welcome the wider community to First Lutheran. To name a few: Easter, Annual Meal Packing Event, Community Hymn Sing, Dedication Weekend, and we are hosting the Synod Assembly at First Lutheran on May 15-16.

I also believe now is a good time for us to step back and ask a larger question: What's next for First Lutheran? I see this as a time of listening to one another, exploring what matters in our own journey of faith, and listening to the wider community. Eleven years ago, we engaged in a visioning project that led to our building programs. I am not looking for another building effort, but rather a bigger sense, a newer sense of what we can more fully do as a congregation for the sake of God's Mission. More to come.

### **Staff Serving God's Mission**

We have been blessed with such consistency, creativity, and continuity in our staff. I give thanks to God for how God has brought together a dear group of people to serve God's mission in partnership with the people of First Lutheran Church.

I give thanks to God for Deborah Hansen, who served as Director for Spiritual Formation Ministries. She came to us during the time of COVID in 2021 and retired in 2025. She was a trusted spiritual guide for many, and helped create a number of special prayer services.



*A staff meeting in the Spring of 2025 with our two retirees, Deborah Hansen and Rose Gordon.*

I give thanks to God for Rose Gordon, who served as a receptionist and office assistant beginning in 2012, retiring in 2025. Rose was the friendly calm voice answering the phone. She worked especially with our visitation ministry, calling to arrange many of the 500 home visits done each year.

I give thanks to God for Megan Fleming, who served as the producer of the streaming worship. She came within the first weeks of the pandemic when we went from in-person to online for worship. With her experience with TV, she crafted the visual look that created a worshipful experience for all who worshipped online.

I give thanks to God for the vision Marcie Watson had years ago, of sending people from First Lutheran to the Center for Spiritual Direction at La Crosse to become trained as spiritual directors. Since then six people have gone through the three-year training. Michael Beckmann has now completed his training in 2025, and he is looking for ways to use spiritual direction training for the sake of God's Mission at First Lutheran.

I give thanks to God for each and every staff member I am privileged to work with. Let me give particular thanks for pastoral colleagues in ministry: Pr. Craig and Pr. Katie. I cherish their friendship and partnership. I am grateful for the variety of gifts God has gathered, that together we can serve God's mission more fully.

The true nature of how First Lutheran carries out God's Mission happens through all the baptized believers of First Lutheran. As staff, we are servants of Christ in the body of Christ, working to lift up gifts, encourage collaboration, foster creativity, and ask the question again and again: for the sake of God's mission, what shall we do?

God has placed First Lutheran Church in the heart of this city, that we may show God's heart for all. In a changing landscape for ministry, we continue to discover more together what this means: all for the sake of God's Mission.

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*God has placed First Lutheran Church in the heart of this city to show God's heart for all.*

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Peace be with you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Steven J. Knudson".

Rev. Dr. Steven J Knudson

## Seminarian Daniel Luepke

Over this past year I have continued to serve as Intern and Synodically Authorized Minister (SAM) at Ascension Lutheran Church. I am the pastoral presence at Ascension, and I continue to serve alongside the congregation. I lead worship and walk with people in pastoral care. Over this past year we have adopted a new constitution, started a new Bible study, dedicated a playground, went to Confirmation Camp, confirmed six youth, experimented with different worship styles, and had joint services with other congregations.

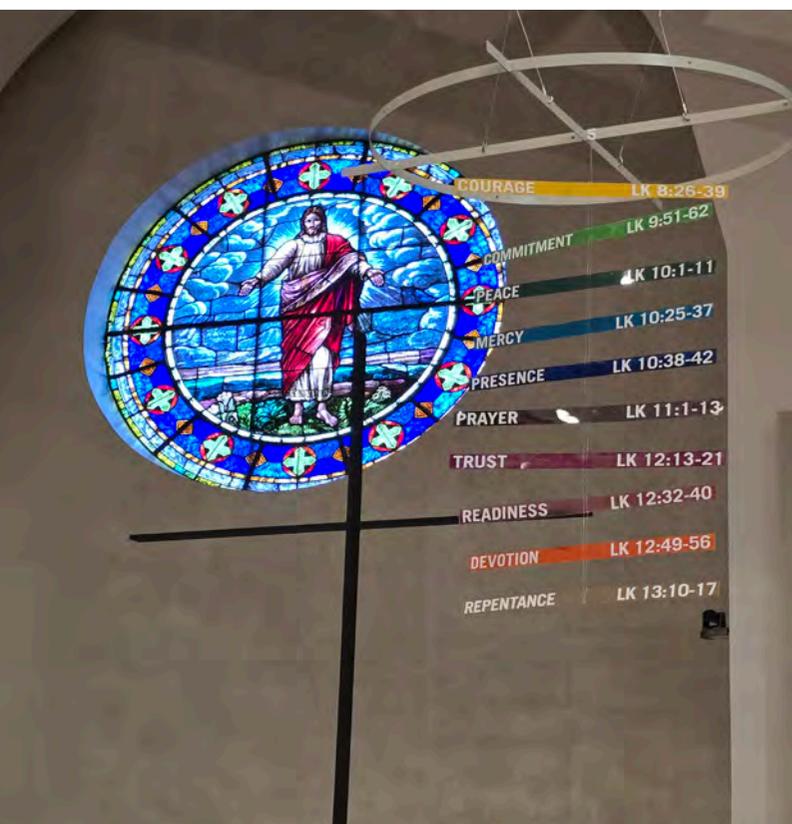


Daniel was also able to join us back at First Lutheran for "the best week of summer" leading daily Bible Lessons for our True North VBS.

I continue to bring in what I have learned from First Lutheran, and I continue to learn in my seminary classes, and from the congregation at Ascension. I continue to give thanks for Pastor Steve's mentorship throughout this time and for the Internship Committee/Collaborative Learning Team led by Terry Shie, with five other First Lutheran members. Without *both* congregations I would not be able to do what I do and learn what I have. This past year I was able to apply *so much more* of what I learned immediately in worship, teaching, and so much more. Thank you for your continued support and prayers during this time of learning and ministry!

God's Peace,  
Seminarian Daniel Luepke

## Worship for the Sake of God's Mission



First Lutheran gathers together in worship, centering on God's word and sacrament, forgiveness and renewal. Worship is central to God's mission for the local church. Worship is our source of teaching, an outlet for our joy and thanksgiving, and a gathering of God's people to do kingdom work in the world around us. All the mission and ministry we do as the hands and feet of Christ in this world start and end with the forgiveness, teaching, and praise found in worship.

Throughout the year we often focus worship around a particular series or theme to draw together common threads through scripture and discover more depth and meaning through more focused time spent on a particular subject.

*Each week of the summer series, our mobile art reflected light through the nave and reminded us of how and where God can breakthrough in unexpected ways.*

# Give Thanks & Praise

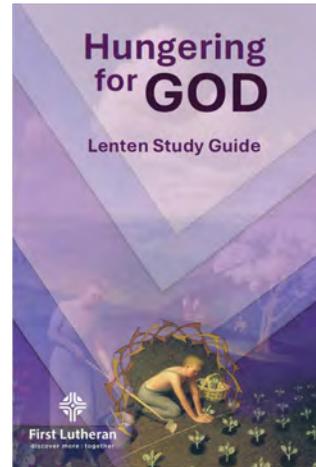


## “Follow Jesus Everywhere”

The invitation of our first worship series of the year was to take a bigger view of our lives. Generally we might break down our lives into segments based on the different things we do or places we go, work and hobbies, separate from the families, organizations and church we belong to. The series challenged us to look at life in a fresh way of following Jesus first in every facet of life. This is the Lutheran tradition of vocation; living our Christian Lives in everyday places and situations.

## Lent: “Hungering for God”

The *Hungering for God* Worship Series showed us how we were created with a deep spiritual hunger for connection with God. Throughout the season of Lent we intentionally guided worshipers into confronting that hunger in order to discover true spiritual satisfaction. The series explored how emptiness, suffering, and even well-intentioned but limited human choices revealed a need that the world, politics, or personal effort could not fulfill. The series emphasized how the Gospel meets people at their deepest places of need with God’s promises of forgiveness, peace, and well-being. Using a painting of local artist Grant Wood as part of the series graphics, we also tied in a fun, social trip to the Cedar Rapids Museum of Art to see the work of one of Iowa’s most famous artists for ourselves.



## Summer: “Possibilities”

The Summer series invited us to journey primarily through the Gospel of Luke, to see divine possibilities emerge in unexpected places. The Gospel of Luke revealed a God whose love opened doors and transformed lives. The series challenged us to imagine the possibilities of what God can do in us, among us, and through us when God shows up in unexpected ways.

## Fall: “I Believe: Life in the Creator, Savior, & Spirit”

We all say it; many of us can recite it by heart, and in different versions - but what’s it really trying to say? Our Fall worship series took a deep dive to discover the rich meaning and spiritual truths found in the Apostles’ Creed. We looked to Martin Luther’s Small Catechism for a line-by-line breakdown of what it means for us to live life through the Creator, the Savior, and the Spirit; the emphasis of each of the three sections of the Creed.

## Advent: “Christ Be Our Light”

In Advent we drew our worship together around the tradition of the Advent Wreath, marking the four Sundays leading up to Christmas. Each week we looked at how Christ came into the world to dispel darkness and bring faith, hope, love, and peace to God’s people. Thanks to the crafting expertise of Doug Pauls, each family was able to receive a wooden candle holder and electric candles along with the study and devotion materials for Advent.

Each series we use is created by our Pastors for our congregation to help us discover deeper truths through scripture than what can be uncovered in a single worship service. Through worship, study, and discussions, together we reveal God’s goodness, forgiveness, and purpose for our lives.



# Worship and Music in 2025 *“To be your presence ..”*

*“To be your presence is our mission here...to be your heart of mercy ever near,  
To be your presence is our mission bold...to be your hands of justice, right uphold,  
To be your presence is our mission blest...to be your voice of hope, your love expressed.”*

*“To Be In Your Presence” ELW #546*



***Our choir adapted during renovations and sang from the ground floor while the elevator was being refurbished.***

In the area of Music Ministry, our mission is blessed to be two-pronged, both inwardly and outwardly focused. Our inward focus is to offer music ensembles in which our members and friends can be a part of in preparation for their participation and leadership in worship. Those groups include Junior Choir, Youth Choir, Youth Handbells, Resonaré Ringers, Adult Handbell Ensemble, Adult Choir, and our Brass Ensemble. In addition to serving in worship, the various ensembles also participated in special events and presentations. On May 4, most of the ensembles participated in “Let It Shine”, a Star Wars-themed Hymn Festival which was great fun. And just a week later, the Youth choirs presented their Mother’s Day musical, “It’s Cool in the Furnace”.

Our outward focus includes the connections we have with local colleges and national organizations. On January 30, we hosted the Nordic Choir from Luther College, which included dinner and overnight housing. This is a wonderful way to draw in the community and to offer the gift of hospitality. Just one month later, folks from the Adult Choir traveled to Decorah to participate in a concert with the National Lutheran Choir, directed by Dr. Jennaya Robison. That led to an invitation for her to come to Cedar Rapids to conduct a Choral workshop with our Adult Choir and members of the choir from St. Andrew Lutheran; and our Youth Choirs participated as well. This workshop culminated in the choirs joining together to lead worship that Saturday evening. We also host a number of concerts for various community ensembles including Vocal Artists of Iowa and Cedar Rapids Concert Chorale. The latter’s performance of “Considering Matthew Shepard” in March was a stunning “sold out” performance of an important masterpiece in the choral repertoire.

***Cedar Rapids Concert Chorale presented “Considering Matthew Shepard” to a full house.***

Our outward focus is also visible through our Musical Arts Series, which is shepherded by a dedicated team of volunteers. The concerts in this series are consistently well attended, especially by non-members. Concerts in the series this year include Dr. Carrie Groenewold, organist from Dordt University; Dr. Gail Archer, Concert for Peace/Ukraine Relief in which we raised over \$5,000; Spring Serenade concerts presented by Kirkwood College faculty Chris Navarrete, Aura Strohschein, and Jessica Saunders; Pipes, Pedals, and Pie summer concerts presented by Dr. Minji Kwon, Dr. Lynda Hakken, and Dr. Mark Baumann; Dr. Brett Wolgast’s annual recital; Dr. Stephen Hamilton; and we always wrap up the year with “Lunch in the Loft”, casual concerts presented by local organists, which have outgrown the “loft”, so we now invite people to sit downstairs in addition to sitting in the balcony.



# . to be your heart

On a personal note, we were blessed to use continuing education funds to attend the Association of Lutheran Church Musician's national conference in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina in August. Highlights were hearing the Raleigh Ringers Handbell Ensemble and Voces8 vocal ensemble. We were also blessed to travel with a group from First Lutheran on the Greece and Turkey trip in October. We couldn't take time away without people who are so willing to step in and sub as organists, pianists, and vocal leaders. A special thank you to Robin Wagner, Dawn Schlesinger, and Sara Barnes Randall.

As we live into our newly renovated spaces, may we continue to live in gratitude and to share with others the blessings God has given us. “

*We are your heart, O Christ, your hands and voice  
...and in this mission we, the church, rejoice.”*

Respectfully submitted,  
Marita Wolgast  
Director of Traditional Worship

*“It's Cool in the Furnace” spring musical performed  
in worship by our youngest choir members.*



*In 2025 we provided more opportunities for children to participate in worship and to serve in key volunteer roles during worship. Children and youth served by reading scriptures, serving communion, ushering, and greeting! The congregation continued to encourage the younger servers with open arms!*

*Dear God, thank you, for loving us,  
forgiving us, forever. Amen!*



## Director of Contemporary Worship Music Joel Reeves

Looking back on the year 2025, there were many great experiences as we all strived to welcome God's people at First Lutheran Church, and to discover more together.

First, we started the year with our amazing contemporary worship band leading our freshly updated 11 a.m. worship service with so much joy and positive energy. We have been more intentional about having the band spread out to better engage the congregation. Also, we have made the service more contemporary and organic with unscripted, spirit-filled leadership from Cindy Shadrick. This group of so many talented musicians make every single contemporary worship service worth attending, whether in-person or online. The love of God, and sharing God's love through music is truly amazing.

Then we have our awesome Wednesday evening Echo worship supported by Pastor Katie Lowe Lancaster and Mr. Michael Beckmann. The youth-led, adult-supported worship service involves young people in all worship roles—not just for their peer groups—but with people of all ages. This interaction between generations leaves many excited to show up to worship every Wednesday evening. It is a testament to the church's mission of welcoming one another, just as Christ has welcomed us, for the glory of God, and for the sake of God's mission.

We have also been blessed to have Mrs. Tanya Malloy filling in as our keyboard player when Dr. Brett Wolgast has been away. We give thanks to God for her talents and the wonderful, gentle spirit she brings to the youth worship band.

In late August we had another great highlight of the year with our "Big Tent Event" worship planned by Dr. Brett and Mrs. Marita Wolgast, and the entire FLC staff creating the surrounding celebration. The music, the food, and the fellowship were all true expressions of how we welcome others with the love of God for the sake of God's mission.

We are forever grateful to our AV team Avery Karkosh, Jacob Bartels, Kraig Wilford, led by Megan Flemming. They do outstanding work to provide quality sound and visual support for worship and the contemporary band. We give thanks to God for Megan who shared her gifts and talents with us as our AV director for the last five years. Megan stepped down from the control booth in December, and we appreciate her for all the years she worked with the 11 a.m. contemporary band.

The AV team worked especially hard this year with members of the band and our Pastors to enhance our sound quality, which greatly changed the vibe at the 11 a.m. worship. All of the updates to our worship over this past year signal our commitment to passionate, engaging worship for the sake of God's mission in the local church.

We were also blessed to have a wonderful musician and friend sing with the band, Kathleen Marsh. She was a gentle and caring child of God who brought light to everyone she encountered. Kathleen went on to be with the Lord in 2025, and she will forever be greatly missed.



*Positioning the Band across the front of the worship space creates a closer connection to the worshipping community.*

# through Music

We closed the year with another wonderful Advent season of great music, great preaching, great teaching — especially having the theme of *Christ Be Our Light* when our world seems so dark. The sharing of God’s love to one another, all put together by a wonderful team of staff members, volunteers, musicians, and our great worshipping community, for the sake of God’s mission. I am excited for what God has in store for us in the year 2026. May God continue to shower his blessings upon all of us as we all work together to discover more.

Blessings,  
Joel Reeves



## Discipleship Lead Pastor for Discipleship & Pastor for Children and Family Ministry The Rev Katie Lowe Lancaster,

*With all this going for us, my dear, dear friends, stand your ground. And don't hold back. Throw yourselves into the work of the Master, confident that nothing you do for him is a waste of time or effort.*

— 1 Corinthians 15:58 The Message

This passage is like saying, *we are all in!* Christ is our center, the ground on which we stand. In 2025 my focus areas were discipleship, welcoming / hospitality, preaching / teaching, pastoral care, Children and Family Ministries, Echo Worship/Ministry, Vacation Bible School/Day Camp, Meal Packing and new areas of mentorship. *Whew!*

For the sake of welcoming throughout all ministries, we entered 2025 with a heart to tackle any challenge with, “yes, *how can we.*” Although at times we may have experienced renovation fatigue, the results of Renewing for God’s Mission at First Lutheran provided a much needed “refresh” inside and out! What is next? We will learn to envision, dream, and use the new space with a sense of compassionate purpose and a passion to thrive!

A focal point in updating the space in 2025 was to create the opportunity as Pr. Steve says, changing UGHS to HUGS. What does that mean? UGHS has been a devoted and committed team of ushers, greeters, hosts, and servers. Thank you to every one of you who has served in any one of

those roles! Moving to HUGS means we tackle the big picture of what it means to be a Hospitable church. In 2025, we have been studying what a church looks like when they are known as “hospitable” or “welcoming.” Using that overview, we will work collaboratively as a HUGS team to bring together the passion to welcome to a contagious feeling of all are welcome here to First Lutheran.

During 2025 I was able to dig deeper into my role as Lead Pastor for Discipleship Ministry. I created the summer *Possibilities* worship series, as well as our *Christ Be the Light* Advent worship series and small group resource.

I am thankful for the collaborative partnership in ministry throughout First Lutheran. Together we discover the joy that our lives are centered in Christ. Together, we live as people filled with grace as we boldly love one another as Christ has loved us.

Blessings,  
Pastor Katie

# Play, Pray, & Sing with Body,

## Children & Family Ministry

Pastor Katie Lowe Lancaster

*“Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. <sup>5</sup> You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. <sup>6</sup> Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. <sup>7</sup> Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. <sup>8</sup> Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, <sup>9</sup> and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

— Deuteronomy 6:4-8 NRSVue

For the Mission of Christ, we welcome all children to play, pray, and sing songs with all of their hearts, minds, bodies, and souls! The goal to engage children in a vibrant and meaningful ministry for their age group and connect with families for a 24/7 faith in a child's life.

CFM takes to heart the mission to worship, learn, experience, and grow in a relationship with God and with one another. Therefore, the ministry in 2025 was to provide a nurturing space focused on the spiritual, physical, and emotional safety for all children, their families, and faith leaders.

### Weekly Gatherings

In 2025, the faith leadership team of adults and especially our youth leaders shared their gifts of time and faith with our youngest members on Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings. The curriculum was the same for both weekend and weekday participation. Sundays include preschoolers and kindergartners, with special music.

From January through September, CFM included birth through 5th grade. Area schools have adapted to new grade settings in the elementary buildings. We

decided in the fall of 2025 to move the 5th graders to Youth and Family Ministry. The decision was difficult but provided the greatest benefit to children and their families.

### First Lutheran kids 2025 – to Discovery Zone 4Kidz

In the beginning of 2025, the space for CFM was usable for large groups and smaller groups. Preschool-Kindergarten had their own class across from the Little Parents' Room while elementary classes were at the other end of the hallway.

In the fall of 2025, the projected renovations to the 3rd Floor provided a new opportunity to tie the theme of Discover More Together with the children's space, creating a Discovery Zone for Kidz.

The new name, new focus, and new space are a work in progress, but will provide a much-needed child and family-friendly space for children for all accessibility needs. The final renovations will be revealed in the spring of 2026.

*HUGE thanks to these adult and youth volunteers, and for all who help foster the faith of the youngest believers in the congregation in 2025.*



# Mind & Soul

## Highlights:

- Reconfigured Sunday Morning Learning with new age groups and starting times.
- Intentionality to align sermon themes with children's messages in worship and with children's ministry lessons.
- Focused on matching Children's Ministry calendars with other Youth and Family events.
- Child care team continued to provide quality and loving care on Sundays and Wednesdays.
- And, of course - renovated the entire CFM space!

*New, vivid room colors!  
New chairs/seating!  
Updated toys and supplies!  
All Rooms Carpeted!*

## Vacation Bible School/ Day Camp 2025

Photos always tell the best stories of a week that was one big – wow! 65 children, 25 youth leaders, 20 adults, 6 college students, all looking up to the sky at True North 2025. VBS was from 9:00-11:30 a.m., the Day Camp portion of the day went until 4:00 p.m.

Seminarian Daniel Luepke joined us for daily bible lessons while Pr. Katie provided the daily bible adventure. Whitney Luepke was our lead for Opening and Closing large group times. Emily Hannes and Maddy Newhouse were the gurus behind the scenes with a *million* ideas, plans, and details.

Camp Ewalu staff were mentors for our youth staff in the mornings and led a typical day camp in the afternoons.



***Dodging around construction, we used whatever space was available on all three floors of the building during our VBS/Daycamp week!***



# Faith Formation

## Youth & Family Ministry



In 2025, Youth and Family Ministry at First Lutheran Church walked alongside children, youth, and families as they grew in faith, community, and service for the sake of God’s mission. We prioritized building welcoming spaces where young people feel a true sense of belonging—encouraging them to ask big questions, serve others, and discover how faith connects to everyday life.

Throughout the year, youth were actively involved in the congregation’s worship life. On Wednesday nights, ECHO Worship provided a consistent space for middle and high school students to serve as leaders—readers, communion assistants, ushers, musicians, and singers. This regular involvement reinforced the idea that youth are not just the church’s future but also an important part of the church today, integral to our Growing Young initiative.



Weekly gatherings for middle and high school students focused on building relationships, deepening faith, and fostering a sense of belonging. Special events throughout the year—such as lock-ins, service projects, and social gatherings—strengthened friendships and deepened trust within the group. During VBS, youth served as leaders and helpers, gaining valuable leadership experience while supporting younger children in learning about God’s love.

*Top - guys small group at the final Echo Worship in the Spring; Above - High School BBQ at Beckmann’s; Below - our 9th grade class affirming their Baptisms in the fall.*

Youth and family ministry was supported by dedicated adult volunteers, mentors, and leaders who invested time and care in building relationships with young people. Their presence and commitment made it possible to offer consistent programming, meaningful small groups, and safe spaces for students to grow.



As we move into 2026, youth and family ministry looks forward to continuing to grow in participation, leadership, and connection. With renewed spaces and ongoing support from the congregation, there are new opportunities to invite young people and families into deeper engagement for the sake of God’s mission. We hope you’ll join us!

Michael Beckmann  
Director of Youth & Family Ministries

Follow our social channels:



*A big part of our Youth Ministry is providing opportunities for our older youth to work with and mentor our younger kids, like these two youth who served as Youth Helpers for Vacation Bible School.*

# for All Ages

## Spiritual Direction Program Completion

This year, I completed my Spiritual Direction preparation program, and I am deeply thankful to the congregation for the support and encouragement that made this journey possible. The seasons of study, reflection, and practice were a meaningful time of growth, and I am grateful to serve in a church that values deep listening and spiritual formation as part of God's mission. I look forward to using this training with youth and families, and with the wider congregation, in the life and ministry of First Lutheran.

Michael Beckmann,  
Director of Youth & Family Ministries

## Adult Faith Formation

Though our Spiritual Formation Director retired in the Spring of 2025, the congregation still had lots of great study options to deepen faith and discover more together through group settings.

Our Worship-based devotions provided a focus for deepening relationships and discussing faith for many in the congregation in various seasons of the year, but that was only the beginning.

Beginning the year in January couples participated in the Alpha Marriage Course, giving their relationships a "tune up". The course helps couples discover keys to better communication based on the ways they receive and express love toward each other.

Through our Spring book study, the writings of Lutheran Pastor and Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer invited us to take a deeper look at what it means for us to be Christian through his book, "Life Together." Our book discussion broke down the Christian life into community, our days with others, our days alone, ministry & vocation, and worship. This was the final group led by Deborah Hansen before her retirement.

Still more options were offered on Sunday Mornings. An ongoing group meets weekly to view and discuss the lectures of Professor Bruce Gore. Other occasional offerings pop up throughout the year, such as Pastor Steve walking through the journeys of the Apostle Paul, or sharing about the enriching experiences of Sabbatical and the trip he led to Greece.



*Michael Beckmann's primary role will remain with Youth and Family Ministry, and teaching during Echo Worship, as seen above, but he will begin to offer adult spiritual formation opportunities as well.*



*Above, couples of all ages take part in the Alpha Marriage class. Below, members listen to Pastor Steve recount the Footsteps of the Apostle Paul through Greece and Turkey.*



# Discover More in Ministry Engagement



The Newcomers ministry experienced another great year of growth! We hosted three Newcomers dinners throughout the year and welcomed over 40 new members into our First Lutheran community! They have all been discovering more together with First Lutheran by serving and engaging in a variety of ways – some already leading classes and small groups.

First Lutheran's Volunteer Ministry really showed up to serve the community in 2025. There are currently over 100 volunteers that serve in worship across the three weekend services. These volunteers are great at supporting one another, the congregation, and the wider community! Whenever there is a need, they will always come forward to lend a hand. In addition to worship, we have had volunteers come in on weekdays to help with tasks big and small – like setting up the 14' Christmas Tree and decorating the sanctuary all in one day – and with a smile on their face. Our congregation is so blessed to have such amazing and generous volunteers!



In December we launched a rebranding of the Worship Volunteer Ministry to "HUGS"! HUGS stands for Hospitality, Ushers, Greeters, and Servers. With this "rebranding" we are working to live into "Welcoming Like Christ" and putting hospitality first in all we do. Throughout 2026 you will see different changes to the volunteer ministry like a new scheduling system - Planning Center Services - a modernized Narthex layout, updated job duties for worship volunteers, and more! These updates to the ministry will help our congregation be even more welcoming and accessible to all visitors and worshippers.

Maddy Newhouse,  
Ministry Engagement Coordinator



*If you are interested in serving the church community in any way this year, please contact Maddy Newhouse to be added to the team. There are opportunities for all ages and abilities throughout the year!*

# Community Together

## Visitation Ministries

Sheila Anderson was installed as Visitation Chaplain for First Lutheran in 2022. In this role she visits members who are homebound or in care centers extending our Welcome beyond the building. She is honored and privileged with the opportunity to get to know members better and hear their life stories. She also takes communion to members as desired.

Her visits provide an opportunity for members to feel connected to the church and to learn more about what is going on with different ministries as well as sometimes have a discussion on the latest scripture reading and sermon. Some members she visits are faithful on-line participants while others never miss the radio sermon. Though they may not come to the church often almost all of them are faithful readers of *The Light* newsletter to keep up with what is happening. While many members she visits have been home bound for a while – sometimes she starts visiting people who have had a health issue and/or are recovering from surgery and may be unable to attend church while they recover. Whatever the circumstances she welcomes the opportunity to get to know members better than she ever could from just speaking with them in the Narthex before or after service. It is truly humbling to listen to members recount their faith walk over the years. No two journeys are the same, but they are all warm and inspiring. At this point Sheila has developed such strong ties with some members that they feel like family, and she celebrates with them and mourns with them through the seasons of life.

Some members welcome monthly visits from Sheila, while others are comfortable with once every two to three months. Rose Gordon who was an integral part of this ministry has now retired, so Sheila is doing more of her own scheduling but also pleased that Maddy Newhouse will now help schedule visits. Maddy is excited by this opportunity as it gives her a chance to talk with and get to know some members she might otherwise never know. If you would like a visit from Sheila or one of the Pastors, please contact Maddy Newhouse.

## Stephen Ministry

Stephen Ministry is a one-to-one lay ministry, welcoming like Christ and walking alongside any adult who is experiencing a crisis or life changing event. We have a group of well-trained and supervised volunteers who provide confidential Christian care and a listening ear to those in need.

2025 found our Stephen Ministry group finding a new stride after the pandemic years. Every newly trained Stephen Minister had an opportunity to partner with a care receiver. We continue to have robust continuing education and regular meetings provide opportunity for us to learn from each other and support one another.

If you or someone you know would like more information, you may contact Sheila Anderson, Visitation Chaplain, Chris Maakestad, Leader or any of the Pastors for more information.

## Senior Adults



*Above, our tour of the Iowa State Research Farm, Ames, Below, author Dave Markward shares his journey "From Dubuque to Selma"*



Our monthly lunch group had a delightful variety of speakers and experiences in 2025 and excellent attendance. The luncheons proved a great way to meet others and many new friendships and bonds were forged. Ruth continues to delight with her creative and delicious menus and of course there are always abundant sweet treats to enjoy before the program kicks off.

We continued with an annual road trip venturing out to Reiman's Gardens in Ames which was lovely, but the bigger hit for many was visiting the Iowa State Horticulture Station and Research Farm. Even those without farming roots were fascinated by what we learned.

We also continued extending an invitation to an author- this time a local one- Dave Markward, who shared the story of his journey researching and then writing "From Dubuque to Selma." We all learned a lot from Dave who is a gifted speaker and writer.

We heard from our very own Leslie Schwarting who is a leader at Prairiewoods Spiritual Center and she previewed a book and presentation about The Awakened Brain. We continued spotlighting our own gifted members when Jenny Schulz shared the amazing work of her organization, Kids First Law Center.

We enjoyed the music and talents of Barefoot Becky and our very own Joel Reeves, who warmed our hearts leading us in beautiful Christmas carols.

Our Thursday morning Bible study group continues to learn and thrive with dear sister Anna Peck in the lead. Many in the group have become such good friends that they arrive early just to chat before the study.



*Crossing Guard, Renewing Project Manager, and Director of Support Services (among other hats) Bob Koenig gives an update to the Thursday Morning Bible Study in their first meeting after the carpet and lighting in the Chapel were renewed.*

## Guy Squad Engages Men into Mission

Our Men's Ministry Planning Team, also known as "The Guy Squad" collaborated with our Outreach Team and Children, Youth and Families Ministries on a number of new events in 2025. We saw 64 people of all ages jump on bikes in May to Dan & Debbie's Ice Cream for our first ever CROP Walk Bike Ride to raise \$620 to fight hunger.

We hosted a Mini-Golf Cookout in June at Twin Pines Golf Course for about 70 people of all ages, and 22 guys from college age to seniors salted away the hot summer nights at Big Grove in downtown Cedar Rapids talking about leadership and the character qualities it takes to rise to the top and elevate others around you. We also held a men's fajita and movie night, sang karaoke with our kids, and enriched 60 married folks with the Alpha Marriage Class co-led by Pr. Katie & myself. The faith life of the men of our church is strong and I look forward to a great 2026!



*Above, our CROP bike ride even came complete with safety patrol at road crossings just to help have extra eye on all the kids.*



*We divided up to meet new people and have fun together at the Mini-Pines MiniGolf BBQ event.*



*Silliness ensued during the Dad & Me Dinner & Karaoke event.*

## Social Events just for fun!

We don't need to do a service project or study EVERY time we get together; Sometimes we just have fun! 2025 provided opportunities for fun with our monthly Ladies' Night Out group, and our busy young women and moms even found a few times to have some fun together.

A special highlight was having a special, private evening tour at the Cedar Rapids Museum of Art to see the exhibits on Grant Wood. The local collection holds many of the famous artists' works including his last-ever painting, *Spring in the Country*, which we used as artwork in our Lenten worship Series, *Hungering for God*.



## Lead Pastor for Outreach, the Rev. Craig Brown

A question I'd like you to ask yourself is: Do we live in a world of abundance or a world of scarcity? However you answer that question, it is true. I learned that in seminary and it became real to me in October of this past year. Our Personal Care item collection was well underway and you all were bringing in hundreds of bottles of shampoo and bars of soap to help those in greatest need in our community. At the same time our Generosity Team was telling you about gathering a special offering from our congregation for Helping Hands to help people in need of rent, utility or transportation assistance. And finally, our Hunger & Hope Team was revving up our Christmas Gift Tag program to help kids at Four Oaks have a Christmas who otherwise might not. Any ONE of these efforts is a lot for a church, and we were doing three simultaneously.

It was about this time newer members Doug and Mary Jo Elam approached Pr. Katie and I about filling toys into shoe boxes for Operation Christmas Child for children in Ukraine and other places. "Oh Elams," I sighed. "This would be a great ministry for 2026. We have so much going on now, why don't we hold off until then?" I suggested. Well the Elams didn't

want to let another year go by before our church got involved. They have tremendous evangelical hearts and they had been very patient with our whole Outreach operation. So I took it to our Hunger and Hope Team, and they said, "Why not?" If we had a congregation with a sense of scarcity, it wouldn't have happened. But, we are a congregation full of generous people who believe we live in a world of abundance and say, "Yes! How can we?" so that became our truth.

Here's the incredible news... In addition to fully funding our church budget and building campaign, we raised an additional \$22,000 for our special offering for Helping Hands which then also secured a \$10,000 Thrivent matching grant. We donated 150 gifts to kids locally with our Four Oaks Christmas Gift Tags and sent 107 boxes to kids internationally with Operation Christmas Child. And the cherry on top? You donated over 6,000 items to our Helping Hands Personal Care item drive. *Simply incredible!*

Thank you to 2025 team leaders Katie Chism (H3GO) Stephanie Phelps (Hunger & Hope), Jacqueline and Clinton Carder (Housing), Lou Banker (Global Outreach), and each of you that make our church the special place it is. Thank you for building us into such a generous and loving church that can simultaneously do so much for so many, sharing Christ's love to all who we encounter. As Martin Luther once famously said, This is most certainly true!

In Christ,  
- Pr. Craig Brown,  
Lead Pastor for Outreach



**Mary Jo Elam with an overflowing heart for Christ-like Compassion, and an overflowing car for Operation Christmas Child.**

**Our Personal Care Drive was an amazing outpouring of love for our neighbors in need .**



# Outreach Ministries

## Hunger and Hope, Housing, & Global Outreach - (H3GO)

Our Hope & Hunger; Housing; and Global Outreach (H3GO) teams coordinated a number of extraordinary efforts in 2025! We are incredibly grateful to the chairs of each team and their respective members who so graciously gave of their time and talents to help others experience Christ's love! Our Hope and Hunger team had a busy year filled with many opportunities to serve as Christ's hands to people in need throughout our community .

With partnerships varying from growing and sourcing local produce for the food insecure, to the distribution of more than 1,400 newborn kits to mothers in Liberia, these teams and their members, and this congregation truly made impacts both locally and worldwide.

### Housing Team

led by Clinton and Jacqueline Carder

A house to call home can make a world of difference for struggling families, and provide a stable base to grow from for those experiencing homelessness. For the sake of supporting stable housing and strong neighborhoods in Cedar Rapids, the housing team represented First Lutheran in the community, and helped members of our own church family during 2025.

In early April we helped to build and plant raised garden beds at the Matthew 25 Cultivate Hope Urban Farm, the produce from which is free for those living in the neighborhood.

On April 24 the housing team and other First Lutheran members helped with a local Habitat for Humanity project and Ruth Ehrhardt provided lunch for the entire crew.

In June we participated in Matthew 25 Transform Week. Bruce Lindholm and Ryan Legge supervised Alex Chavez and seven of his friends from the LinnMar Robotics team while assisting with projects. One day that week First Lutheran also served lunch for

Finally, in September for *God's Work, Our Hands Sunday*, First Lutheran volunteers assisted members of our own congregation who had requested help with yard work and minor home repairs. *God's Work, Our Hands* is a national day of service promoted by the ELCA for all of our congregations across the country.



*Newborn infants wrapped in the kits we sent to Liberia, and one of the care providers in Liberia holding a newborn wrapped up in a fresh, new blanket from one of our kits.*

*Below, Raised beds in the Cultivate Hope Urban Garden support the Time Check neighborhood with free produce where there is no large grocery store, making the area more hospitable for residents. Bottom, an FLC youth and friends work on painting a bathroom during Matthew 25 Transform week.*



# Feed My People

## Hunger and Hope Team

led by Stephanie Phelps

After representatives came and spoke at our March meeting, our team felt called to participate in the gardens at Matthew 25 ministry's Urban Farm. Several members planted and maintained the raised bed gardens that community members can harvest and enjoy for free. To witness people who were picking and utilizing the fresh produce was especially fulfilling.



*Above, First Lutheran once again raised a record-setting amount for the CROP hunger walk.*

*Below, Hunger & Hope Team members on gift-delivery day before going to Four Oaks.*



Our summer was also full with a July food drive and the generous amounts of cans and boxed goods supported meal programs and food pantries through HACAP, and directly to our own SEMP meals and distribution to guests. It was such a success that we continued on with a drive for Helping Hands to collect personal hygiene items which went directly to neighbors in need as Helping Hands' supply had run out! Also in the fall we supported fellow FLC member Jasmine Wu in her mission to coordinate the CR/Marion CROP hunger walk. First Lutheran members signed up to walk and to sponsor others. All together the CROP walk raised over \$32,000.

At the end of summer, we raised funds to aid newly immigrated families from Afghanistan with back packs and school supplies, helping them off to a good start at school!

Throughout the year on a bi-monthly basis, we coordinated volunteers to serve at the HACAP Food Reservoir to pack bags for the Food Backpack program. This serves children who need meals on the weekends when they aren't at school.

Just before Thanksgiving, we kicked off our annual Four Oaks Christmas giving project. Confirmation youth joined in with adults and decorated the Narthex and hung the gift tags on the tree and garland. We served seventy-five youth this year, with over 150 gifts donated and \$1,100 in gift cards. This is a wonderful way to wrap up our year and feels so rewarding to reach out to support youth who are away from their families during the holidays. Our generous congregation shows us the love of Christ in many ways to our community.

What a great committee to share God's love for the sake of those who need some extra hope and support!

Blessings,  
Stephanie Phelps,  
Hunger & Hope Team Chair

# Shepherd My Flock

## Global Outreach in 2025

The Global Outreach Committee meets on the first Tuesday of every other month. Our purpose is to help First Lutheran connect with global outreach opportunities within the Southeastern Iowa Synod and other organizations. For a number of years, our main partnership has been with the (3) Lutheran parishes in Samé, Tanzania: the Samé, Kissima and Ebenezer parishes.

This past year has been spent working to strengthen our ties with our Tanzania partners. We do this through our pen-pal exchange program, live zoom meetings and monthly prayer exchanges with each other. We also share holiday greetings with each other for Easter and Christmas celebrations.

We continue to build our pen-pal program with interested members of our congregation. Being able to share our stories and different cultures with each other has been a great way to strengthen our partnership. For details, visit [firstlutheran.org/penpal](http://firstlutheran.org/penpal).

We were very fortunate to be able to assist them with some large building projects they had this past year. It happened to coincide with the 50-year anniversary celebration of the Lutheran Church in Tanzania. We were honored to have Bishop Amy Current of our Southeastern Iowa Synod attend this very important milestone for our Tanzania partners.

Another project we were blessed to help with is the Newborn Kits for two Liberian hospitals: Phebe and Curran. These hospitals have personal connections with some of our church members. We have been able streamline our packing process at a location where we can assemble kits, pack them in shipping containers and prepare them for shipment through Global Health Ministries. Last July, we were honored to have Dr. Ricks of Phebe hospital come to visit First Lutheran to witness this project first hand and to personally thank us. In 2025, we were able to ship 1,484 newborn kits to expecting mothers at these hospitals. In the coming year we are actively seeking to help these hospitals obtain some much needed washers and dryers.

Respectfully submitted,  
Lou Banker  
Global Outreach Team Chair

*Dr. Ricks (in blue) with the First Lutheran team packing newborn kits for Phebe and Curran Hospitals in Liberia.*



*Above, blessing the foundation of the Kissima Parish during 50th Anniversary Celebrations. Below, Southeastern Iowa Synod Bishop Amy Current was in Tanzania for the celebrations.*



# ...as I have loved you,

## Saturday Evening Meal Program

by Ruth Ehrhardt



*Special Christmas Blessing Bags for Saturday Evening Meal Guests made in partnership between Pat Young and Katie Brown's 4th grade class.*



*Serving SEMP up and out the egress windows when the lower level was under renovation.*

Flexibility was the theme of the Saturday Evening Meal Program, (SEMP) in 2025; or, as Pastor Katie says, "Yes - how can we?!"

With the supportive partnership between the Hawkeye Area Community Action Plan (HACAP), donations from the community, and First Lutheran members, over 35,000 meals were provided to our neighbors who are food insecure. Our primary focus was on the Saturday Meal, but additional food is also distributed to the Willis Dady Shelter and Margaret Bock Housing across 3rd Ave any day of the week.

In our 40-year history, SEMP has never missed a Saturday Meal, regardless of natural disaster, pandemic, or construction. We flexed to serve SEMP when the lower level fellowship hall was under renovation by pre-packing meals and handing them out the lower-level egress window in Room 115 to our flexible volunteers who served them from tables set up along the Third Avenue sidewalk.

On several days with heat indexes over 100° our ever-resourceful custodian Todd Cornell set up a cooling mist station and Ice Cream was also served to make the heat a bit more tolerable. Our guests drove up curbside, arrived by foot, or on bicycles.

When our elevator was out-of-commission for its renovation, the construction crews working on our facility would also be flexible and cheerfully help carry arriving groceries down the steps; and help carry up food going out for delivery.

Special shout-outs to Matt Cervantes and Bob Kaestner who picked up weekly food donations, and to Marty Marz, Julie Banker, Paula and LeRoy Bradway, for their flexible volunteer ministry in the kitchen and unloading groceries. We are also eternally grateful for the help of Jenny Bosking and Jake Stigers who manage the SEMP Store; giving out soaps, shampoos and other household goods at the end of each month. There will always be neighbors in need, so new volunteers are always welcome too!

Add your name to a team or substitute list for SEMP by contacting Lisa Rud at [iowastateruds@gmail.com](mailto:iowastateruds@gmail.com) or 319-329-7257. If you want to volunteer for special teams or tasks, contact Ruth Ehrhardt directly at [rute@fiirstlutherancr.org](mailto:rute@fiirstlutherancr.org) or 319-360-5773.



# you also should love...

## Meals from the Heartland Packing Event

Meal Packing Team

*"Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.'<sup>34</sup> I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.<sup>35</sup> By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

— John 13:33-35 NRSVue

The 2nd Annual Meal Packing Event was a highlight of hands-on service for hundreds of people of all ages! There were 4-10 tables with 10+ volunteers packing at each table for seven straight hours. The teams packed 60,000 taco-mac meals that were picked up by HACAP for distribution to hungry people across Eastern Iowa.

The event kicked off at noon with teams from the surrounding MedQ community of medical and non-medical staff. The MedQ sponsored a team from McKinley STEM Academy Middle School who was learning about the science of nutrition. Teams from First Lutheran included small groups, choirs, staff, support groups, work groups, as well as family and friends. The event concluded with the youth and their families finishing up the final meals and clean-up during the evening.

Funding for the event was the result of special gifts, donations from packing teams, MedQ scholarships, Thrivent, and other donations, pulled together for the purpose of feeding God's children. To some, the fast pace and massive scale of this effort may have looked like a bit of controlled chaos. But, to those who need the gift of a warm, nutritious meal for their family, the event was completely, over-the-top, a joy.



*Above, Staff and volunteer leaders gathered in front of the Meals from the Heartland Truck.*

*Below, teams from across the community flowed through the fellowship hall throughout the day for the sake of our hungry neighbors.*





*Students affirming their baptism each fall receive a quilt from the Comfort Makers.*

**In 2025 the Comfort Makers provided:**

- 62 Quilts to local homeless shelters
- 112 Quilts to Lutheran World Relief
- 33 Quilts to HACAP and Child Protection
- 4 Quilts to Central Furniture Rescue
- 72 Quilts to families through CR Schools
- 12 Lap robe Blankets to Care Centers
- 19 Quilts for Affirmation of Baptism
- 12 Quilts for Baptisms
- 10 Walker Bags
- 5 Dignity Bags
- 15 Clothing Protectors
- 105 Christmas Bags for SEMP guests

## Comfort Makers Ministry

First of all I want to thank all of our dedicated members who have contributed their time and talent to another successful year of providing comfort and dignity to others in need. It is with great pleasure we are able to do this. Our active number of members is 20+.

Our group of ladies are looking for new opportunities to ways we can serve our community. We are asking our FLC members to contact anyone of our Comfort Maker members if they are aware of facilities, organizations or individuals who are in need of bedding.

We recently discovered one of those needs from one of our members and we are excited about this new project. We have been asked to make some child-size blankets for the Head Start program in Anamosa for the next school year. Also your continued support with used sheets, light weight blankets, fabric, sewing supplies and Thrivent Action Team grants are greatly appreciated. We cannot survive without your support, encouragement and prayers.

The invitation is open to anyone who wants to join in the fun and fellowship. *No sewing skills required!* We meet at 9:00 am on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday in the Fellowship Center. Always welcome to new faces. Just show up and we will a job for you.

Comfort Maker Co-ordinator  
Susan Padget

## Contemplative Hands



The Contemplative Hands group is dedicated to fostering reflection and fellowship through creative activities such as stitching, knitting, crocheting, and drawing. Additionally, the group operates a prayer shawl ministry, bringing together individuals who knit or crochet shawls designed to offer comfort and spiritual support during prayerful and/or challenging times. These handmade wraps are blessed and distributed to anyone in need, serving as meaningful reminders of care, warmth, and compassion that extend beyond physical comfort. One recipient received a prayer shawl after the passing of her mother and expressed appreciation for the thoughtful gesture. The knowledge that the shawl was crafted and blessed by dedicated individuals provided meaningful comfort during her bereavement. In 2025, the group also created and donated a significant number of hats to the Helping Hands Ministry at the Ecumenical Community Center Foundation. Meetings are held bimonthly, totaling six sessions annually, with attendance typically ranging from six to eight participants. All skill levels are welcome, and materials are provided for anyone interested in learning.

## Partnering in the MedQ

For the sake of God's Mission in the Medical District, First Lutheran partnered with the MedQ and Prairiewoods Spirituality Center to host a conference on spiritual well-being, *The Awakened Brain: The New Science of Spirituality & Our Quest for an Inspired Life*.

The May conference featured author and speaker, Dr. Lisa Miller whose research spans spiritual, psychological, and physical well-being. The conference was attended by the medical community, local care providers, education professionals, and even local high school psychology students.

Pastor Steve has served as the chair of the Faith and Medicine Task for the Medical District since its inception, and this was the 5th medical conference that First Lutheran has co-sponsored with the Med Q.



*Dr. Miller led three workshops for medical and education professionals during the two-day Awakened Brain conference.*

## Building Hosting

In 2025 we still hosted many community organizations during our renewing process! While there were some times when the groups had to meet off-site due to our level of construction, most of the time we were able to say "Yes, How can we?" and accommodate them in other areas of the building. As of November, we have officially welcomed all groups back to their normal meeting locations and we are happy to have them back! The feedback we have received on the updated spaces has been very positive! We are incredibly thankful to our groups for their flexibility during our construction.

With our renovation and technology updates in key meeting places we are excited to be able to offer a centrally-located downtown meeting space, especially for other non-profit groups in our area. We currently have two Optimists Groups, Lions Club, Audubon Society, as well as local community choirs who regularly rehearse or and/or hold their concerts events. We have also been contacted by several new groups to meet or host events here in 2026 and we look forward to hosting them and bringing in new people to our spaces!



*Above, Cedar Rapids' Schools All-State Choir participants participate in a choral workshop day. Below, Members of an Optimists Club listen to a presentation during one of their regular meetings at First Lutheran.*



## Wider Christian Community – Doing God’s Work in the World

As you’ve read through these reports, this church gives generously of our time and finances to act as Christ’s hands supporting local community and world-wide needs. Financially, your contributions in 2025 totaled \$236,153 as follows:

- 1) This giving starts with our annual operating fund budget where we contribute 8% of our total income for the year to the Southeastern Iowa Synod and greater Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. For 2025 this Synod Benevolence was \$127,456. Learn more through the Synod Annual Report, available in print at the church, or digitally at [seiasynod.org/mission-support](https://seiasynod.org/mission-support)
- 2) The operating fund budget also allocates approximately 1.8% of our total income for the year to the Hunger, Housing, Hope and Global Outreach Team (H3GO). These groups engage our community and ministry partners locally in Cedar Rapids, and through global partnerships. In 2025, H3GO contributed \$22,058 to these partners in ministry.
- 3) Freedom from Hunger Food Drive - with continued economic strain and reduced government assistance, our church helped respond to increased needs for neighborhood meal programs and food pantries, contributing *hundreds of food items* and \$1,352.
- 4) We held the second annual Meals from the Heartland food packing event. We worked with the community to fund and package 60,000 emergency meals for distribution right here across eastern Iowa through HACAP. Members and friends donated \$13,197 to purchase the food and supplies for this massive, one-day effort.
- 5) Global Outreach - First Lutheran Church has had a long-standing companion relationship with the Lutheran congregations in and around Samé, Tanzania. In 2025 we added \$5,000 to their support fund which will be transferred when projects are identified.
- 6) Our Saturday Evening Meals Program (SEMP), began 36 years ago to help feed the Cedar Rapids community. In recent years, our meal ministry has greatly expanded beyond our in-house Saturdays. Over 35,000 meals were distributed through our kitchen for the sake of our community in 2025.

This year we also rekindled relationships with the Phebe and Curran Hospitals in Central Liberia. FLC member Suah Borsay started a ministry to provide newborn kits to new mothers who often have nothing. Many members joined in these efforts in 2025 providing hundreds of donated items, logistical support, and volunteer hours. The congregation also provided \$2,500 to help cover shipping & supplies.

A large portion of the operating expenses for SEMP come from grants made by local agencies and foundations. The remainder of SEMP’s funding is contributed by FLC members and friends which in 2025 totaled \$17,267.
- 7) Additionally, members make envelope contributions and place loose coins in the worship offering to send to the ELCA World Hunger relief fund. In 2025, these World Hunger offerings totaled \$7,102.
- 8) FLC has a strong tradition of providing financial support and practical real-world experience to ELCA seminary students through full year paid internships at our Church. This year we continued to sponsor Seminary Intern Daniel Luepke during his seminary training and Part-Time Pastoral ministry at Ascension Lutheran Church in Marion. The total sponsorship for Daniel in 2025 was \$15,562

(9) For 30 years Helping Hands Ministry has been our partner providing Rent, Transportation, Utility, and other tangible assistance to community members in need. In the fall of 2025 we celebrated this partnership anniversary and raised \$20,892 support to them for the sake of our neighbors in need.

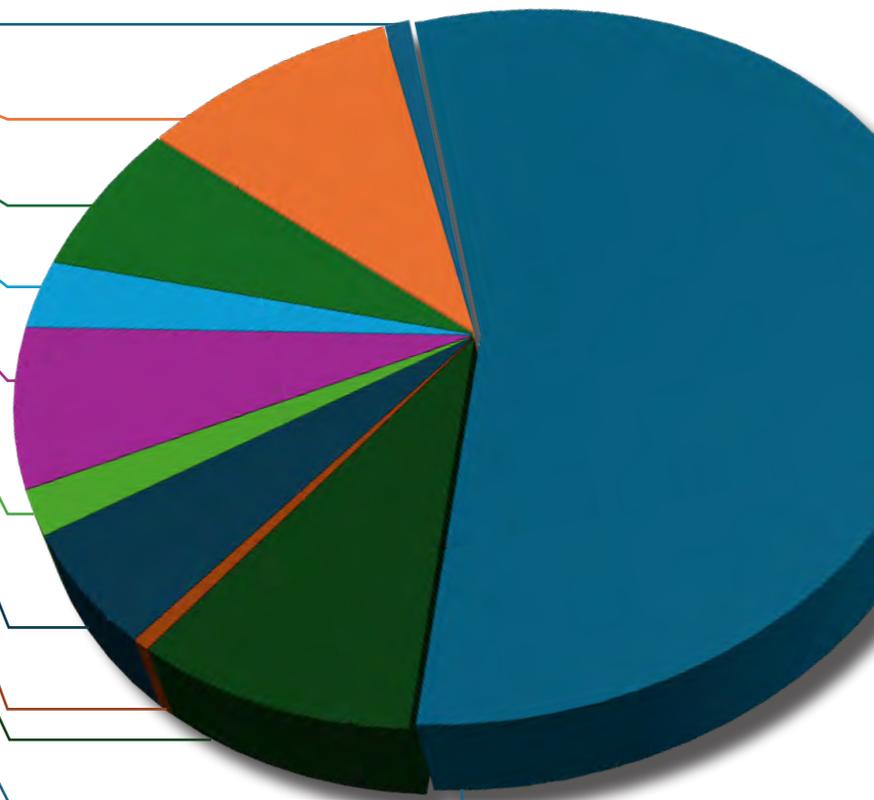
An additional \$1,567 was given to Helping Hands through our Christmas and Easter Virtual Garden dedications.

(10) Four Oaks Christmas Gifts – We supported 75 kids at Four Oaks with our annual collection of Christmas presents, gift cards. In 2025 this totaled around \$2,200.

While these financial records say a lot about the care and support we offer our community, they pale in comparison to the **thousands of hours volunteered** by the congregation doing God’s work with their hands.

Thank you all for your amazing contributions!

10 Four Oaks Christmas Gifts	\$2,200
9 Helping Hands Ministry	\$22,459
8 Intern/Seminary Sponsorship	\$15,562
7 ELCA World Hunger	\$7,102
6 SEMP & Homeless Meals	\$17,267
5 Global Outreach	\$7,500
4 Meals from the Heartland	\$13,197
3 Freedom from Hunger	\$1,352
2 Hunger, Housing & Hope	\$22,058
1 SE Iowa Synod Benevolence	\$127,456



Welcome like Christ  
Romans 15:7

# RENEWING FOR GOD'S MISSION



The year 2025 witnessed several milestones in the Renewing for God's Mission Capital project that originated over 10 years ago. Most noteworthy:

- On January 1st, we concluded the fundraising campaign to finance Phase 2 of the project – thanks to our member's generosity, the goal of \$3,000,000 in pledges over a 3 year period was achieved!
- The Building Committee, Locus Architects and Rinderknecht Construction finalized the design and construction drawings during Jan – March. Several project tasks identified to be performed by FLC volunteers saving over \$110,000 in cost.
- On April 2nd, Rinderknecht released drawings to sub-contractors and solicited bids.
- Rinderknecht and Building Committee reach agreement on the final construction contract – May 16th.
- At a special meeting of the Congregation on May 18th the budget for the project and the Rinderknecht contract are approved and permission given to proceed.
- Rinderknecht begins construction on May 19th
- During the months of May – December the amazing transformation from dream to reality takes place on all three levels of our Church
- By December 23rd, the construction is verified by the Building Committee to be complete in all material respects – **ahead of schedule, under budget and exceeding quality goals!**
- And now, our Church at the corner of 3rd Ave and 10th Street in downtown Cedar Rapids is ready to support the ministries of First Lutheran for many decades to come.



In addition to all the new construction and refurbishment work, the budget for this project included: (1) gifts of \$50,000 each to two ministry partners - SAME Tanzania Parishes and Wellington Heights Community Church, which have now been paid, and (2) pay off the deficit of \$545,000 from the Sanctuary renewal project. That deficit is being repaid as the funds are available from the pledge payments received in 2026 and 2027; and thereafter the entire renewal of our Church will have been accomplished with no remaining debt.

Those involved in the Renewing for God's Mission project express deep gratitude to the Members of First Lutheran for their steadfast financial support, encouragement and patience during this year. We hope you are as pleased with the outcome as we are.

Members of the team responsible for completing this project deserve recognition for their many hours of hard work, teamwork, smart choices and focus on getting the desired results throughout. A lot of fun and fellowship was shared by all. This team included:

**Members of the Building Committee:**

Jorie Shire	Pat Marshall	David Selk	Tom Schamberger
Bruce Lindholm	Randy Bishop	Rich Hillyer	Pr Steve Knudson
Pr Katie Lowe Lancaster		Bob Koenig	

**Locus Architects:** Wynne Yelland

**Rinderknecht Construction:** John Baker    Kory Walsh    Ginger Zenor

**Hearth & Home:** Jason Shire

**Assisting Staff & Volunteers:**

Coordinator, Jim Reese	Mark Scheumann	Todd Cornell
Paula Bradway	Terry Shie	Will Mittelsteadt
Leroy Bradway	Craig Rabe	Megan Roling
Brent Foss	John Swenson	Jordan Gross
Leigh Haug	Lisa Rud	Maddy Newhouse
Linda Herman	Martin Wissenberg	Emily Hannes
Marcia Hinrichs	Ryan Torson	Ruth Ehrhardt
Wendell Maakestad	Brad Bartels	Dee Anderson
Mark Marz	Tim Epperson	



## Congregational Council Report

It has been my privilege to be the Chair of the Church Council in 2025. The Council meets once a month, and the Executive Committee meets the week prior to the Council meeting. The Pastors provide reports of their activities, the financial sheets are examined, and upcoming events, church needs, both financial and spiritual, are analyzed and supported. We have three hard-working and loving Pastors. We have an exceptional and motivated staff that works well together. Pastor Steve is excellent at managing people and keeping staff, Council and our congregation on the right path, which can be difficult in times of uncertainty.

Bob Koenig (Director of Support Services) and Jana Grimm (serving in the role of 2025 Treasurer) are exceptional with financial management. Through the generous support of the congregation, we are financially stable, both in our operating budget as well as our Capital Campaign: Renewing for God's Mission (RGM). We have a wide array of activities to meet the needs of different groups and individuals. We see an increasing number of members, including young families with children. First Lutheran is a very blessed congregation.

### The following people served on the Congregational Council in 2025:

Keith Abkes, Chair  
Josh Hetrick, Vice Chair  
Jana Grimm, Council Treasurer  
Doug Pauls, Council Secretary  
Suah Borsay

Kari Bruns  
Mark Scheumann  
Sally Sklarsky  
Tonya Trudo

### The following council members and officers will serve for 2026:

Keith Abkes, Chair (2nd term, 2025-2027)  
Josh Hetrick Chair-Elect (1st Term, 2024-2026)  
Stephanie Phelps, Treasurer (1st term, 2026-2028)  
Doug Pauls, Secretary (2nd term, 2024-2026)  
Suah Borsay (2nd term, 2025-2027)

Kari Bruns (2nd term, 2025-2027)  
Becca Moore (1st Term, 2026-2028)  
Sally Sklarsky (2nd term, 2024-2026)  
Mark Scheumann, (2nd term, 2026-2028)  
Sarah Gross, (1st Term, 2026-2028)

### 2025 Highlights and Accomplishments:

Met 11 times (July is off).

We were able to support and sustain our ministry, staff, and church during Pastor Steve's sabbatical, with Pastor Katie and Pastor Craig stepping up.

We have led the Congregational Meetings in February for the budget, in May to approve the RGM budget, and November for elections. Prior to Congregational meetings, we generally hosted information sessions or provided information for the upcoming meeting on the week prior, which made the Congregational meetings run much smoother.

Represented First Lutheran at the Annual Synod meeting in Des Moines.

As a Council, we read and discussed the book "How Change Comes to Your Church". It's a book that has First Lutheran's staff and Council thinking about becoming and remaining vital, both spiritually and organizationally.

Our Saturday Evening Meal Program (SEMP) continues to be effective in feeding the hungry. We are all in awe of Ruth Ehrhardt's ability to feed an amazing number of meals for the budget provided.

We have continued to provide support for Daniel Luepke as an intern and Synodically Authorized Minister in his journey toward becoming a Pastor.

We have continued to see growth and energy in our Growing Young initiative: we see strong numbers in our Wednesday Evening Midweek ECHO Worship led by many youth in our Confirmation Ministry which is taking place on the same night and led by Michael Beckman, who wonderfully leads our youth's faith-walk with grace, kindness and humility. This service is typically led by our youth by "giving them the keys". It is well attended and has youth and adults alike excited about Jesus.

We see continued support in Pastor Craig's Faith First podcasts, our on-line presence for those that want to worship on-line, Pastor Craig's Guy Squad outreach; and Contemplative Hands, an occasional gathering for creating, conversation and reflection while stitching, knitting and crocheting.

Hosted a meal-packing event organized through Meals from the Heartland. Over 60,000 meals were packaged and sent out to people in need in our Country and internationally.

In Christ,  
Keith Abkes  
Council Chair 2025

We see continued work and satisfaction with Sunday Morning learning: Discovery Zone for Kids, small study groups for adults and the Professor Gore Video lectures.

Through the efforts of many, we funded and completed the Capital Campaign for Renewing for God's Mission (RGM). Many hours of toil and strife have gone into the budget, planning, correspondence, communication, shuffling staff around church, volunteer efforts, fund-raising and the actual contractor work. Given the outstanding efforts of all involved, especially Bob Koenig, this project is complete and within budget. In addition to the building work, RGM was able to sustain and nurture two (2) congregations with a \$50,000 donation to each: the Wellington Community Church here in Cedar Rapids and our partner congregations in Tanzania.

First Lutheran Church has many other ministries that touch a lot of hearts that are not listed here. Love and blessings abound in our church by support, prayer, hard-work, dedication and through God's love. Many thanks from your Church Council and all glory to God.

<b>Baptized Members</b>		<b>Communicant members</b>	
<b>January 1, 2025</b>	<b>1,878</b>	<b>January 1, 2025</b>	<b>1,403</b>
<b>Increases</b>		<b>Increases</b>	
Baptism: Child	10	Baptized Members Confirmed	20
Baptism: Adult	1	Baptized Adult	1
Affirmation of Faith	20	Affirmation of Faith	20
Transfer from other ELCA	1	Transfer from other ELCA	1
Other/Reinstated	0	Other/Reinstated	0
<b>Total Increases</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>Total Increases</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Decreases</b>		<b>Decreases</b>	
Death	23	Death	23
Inactivity	0	Inactivity	0
Transfers: other ELCA	0	Transfers: other ELCA	0
Other reason/Own request	1	Other reason/Own request	25
<b>Total Decreases</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>Total Decreases</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>net change</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>net change</b>	<b>-6</b>
<b>Membership as of Dec. 31</b>	<b>1,886</b>	<b>Membership as of Dec. 31</b>	<b>1,398</b>

## Trust Committee

The First Lutheran Church Trust Fund is a permanent endowment that invites members to create a lasting legacy through planned gifts. By supporting the Trust, the church can pursue new initiatives and meet needs beyond the annual operating budget—opening new doors for mission and ministry. Within the Trust, funds are allocated across three primary categories: (1) property, (2) mission and ministry, and (3) donor-designated purposes. During the past year, the Trust’s investment assets increased due to favorable market conditions and careful stewardship, reaching a balance of \$1,363,752 as of December 31, 2025. This growth enabled the Trustees to fully support the following distribution requests.

Description	Disbursement
Help fund start-up cost of the “Growing Young” initiative	\$12,000
Unplanned heat and humidity fixes in December	\$3,283
Add overhead lightning for balcony pianist	\$1,037
Refurbish main exhaust fan for all restrooms	\$1,118
Purchase new larger food warmer well and sneeze guard for Fellowship Hall serving counter	\$3,194
Replace motor for cooling fan in Sanctuary rooftop condenser	\$1,819
Replace floor drain and trap in Room 118	\$1,994
Fund Daniel Luepke’s final 6 months of collaborative learning program	\$4,311
Replace cooling fan motor on south narthex rooftop a/c unit	\$1,724
Support the special offering for Helping Hands	\$5,000
Cumulative Total of 2025 Distributions	\$35,480

In addition to providing prudent oversight of the Trust Fund’s investments and distributing its income, the Trust Committee is also committed to growing the Fund’s principal for future generations. In 2025, the Committee launched the Legacy Project, a new initiative that invites members, through personal conversations, to look beyond the present moment and envision the lasting impact they can make through planned giving. This effort helps ensure that our church’s mission of worship, service, and community outreach continues to flourish for generations to come.

Individuals who are considering a legacy gift to the First Lutheran Trust Fund are encouraged to contact Bob Koenig or a member of the Trust Committee - Lois Buntz, Mark Fersdahl, John Swenson, Thomas Wolle, or Alison Urbina.

*Please Note, the reports of the Audit Committee and Finance Committee are found in the 2025 Financial Report.*

## Minutes from the Annual Meeting of the Congregation February 16, 2025

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. by Pastor Steve Knudson with about 104 members in attendance.

Opening devotions led by Pastor Katie Lowe Lancaster, with people sharing when they had felt most welcomed. Pastor Katie then led the congregation in the Lord's Prayer.

Pastor Steve presented the proposed agenda for the annual meeting. This was moved by the Church Council. Motion seconded by Jim Gruettner. Agenda approved. There was no discussion.

Pastor Steve indicated that the minutes from the February 11, 2024 and June 9, 2024 Congregational Meetings were in the Annual Report, pages 35-37, and requested approval. There were no corrections or additions to either set of minutes, taken by Council Secretary Jim Jahnke. Approved as circulated.

Mark Scheumann, 2024 Council Chair, provided a summary of the 2024 Annual Report, including a thank you to the staff for their hard work in 2024. Mark also recognized the 2024 Church Council for their hard work and efforts. Items of note in 2024 were: Revision of Pastoral Roles; Renewing for God's Mission; the Growing Young Initiative; Musical Arts Series; and our support for future leaders of the church. The Wednesday evening ECHO service and the revised contemporary worship at 11:00 on Sundays continue to flourish. FLC served over 46,000 meals in 2024, led by Ruth Ehrhardt. This had a financial impact of \$322,000 on the community. It was a wonderful year. Mark also expressed his appreciation of our church staff and how wonderful they were to work with.

Keith Abkes, 2025 Council Chair, presented some focal points for the 2025 year:

- Congregational Meeting in April to approve the contracts for RGM building
- Construction for RGM – commence in May 2025 with completion February 2026.
- Sustain, strengthen and grow Ministries

Pastor Steve presented Eric Kline (Church Council) and Alison Urbina (Trust Committee). The Council moved that these individuals be approved for these roles. Motion was seconded by Bill Klein. There was no discussion, nor any other names nominated. Jim Gruettner moved for unanimous consent, seconded by Martin Wissenberg. Motion passed unanimously.

Pastor Steve Knudson presented the delegates to represent First Lutheran at the Synod Assembly being held in May. Doug Pauls and Kari Bruns of the Church Council had agreed to attend. One additional male and female were needed. Slayton Thompson and Mary Van Houghton volunteered to fill those two slots. Martin Wissenberg volunteered to be an alternate if needed. A motion was made by John Bonte and seconded by Leroy Bradley to approve these four individuals to represent FLC at the Synod Meeting. Motion approved.

Jana Grimm, Council Treasurer, could not be present to present the 2024 Treasurer's Report, which was given by Bob Koenig. Bob expressed what a joy it was working with the fantastic staff and our outstanding congregation. Overall, it was a good year financially for FLC, due to a very generous congregation, with a surplus of \$2,276 of income over expenses. Gordon Epping moved for the adoption of the Treasurer's Report for 2024. Mark Scheumann seconded the motion. Motion was approved.

*Continued* →

## Annual Meeting Minutes, *cont'd*

Lois Buntz, President of the Trust Committee, presented the Trust Report for 2024. There was an overall growth in the assets, which allowed for a record number of distributions (\$57K) for LFC non-budgeted needs. Lois encouraged the congregation to consider a legacy gift in their estate planning. Dan Musil moved to adopt the Trust Report for 2024, seconded by Sue Padget. Motion was approved.

Pastor Craig Brown reported on the Growing Young Initiative. Alex Chavez and Laura Walsh gave an overview of the Growing Young Task Force and their activities. Their recommendations were provided on a supplemental handout. This is work growing out of the Growing Young Initiative from the spring of 2024. Initiatives included:

- Encourage adults to attend at least one Wednesday night ECHO service
- Involve Youth in Sunday leadership roles
- Prioritize Multi-Generational event

Bruce Lindholm suggested we should consider having a youth on all of our church committees. A motion to accept the report of the Growing Young Task force was moved by John Lepse, seconded by Bill Klein. Motion Approved.

Bob Koenig presented an overview of the Renewing for God's Mission (RGM) Capital Campaign and a revised artist rendering of the Narthex remodeling. The Capital Campaign was very successful. The goal was \$3M and a total of \$3,048,119 was pledged. Early giving (Oct-Jan) has exceeded \$1.1M so far. A Congregational Meeting will be needed in April to approve the construction contracts. Construction is expected to start in early May, 2025, and be completed by February, 2026.

Round table discussions were held around two posed questions: (1) I wonder if ....., and (2) What concerns do you want the building team and Council to be mindful of as we start construction? Discussion followed. Notes from each table were collected to be reviewed later.

Bob Koenig, acting for Jana Grimm, presented the Stewardship Report for 2024 and the proposed 2025 Operating Fund Budget \$1,617,015. There will be an estimated \$14,304 deficit for 2025. We have had a significant increase in the number of households pledging this year. We have 43 new members this year when many other churches in the area have had 0. We have lost 44 individuals through death and moving. We had a 7% growth in attendance in 2024. Some of the big expense drivers have been property insurance. There are no anticipated staff changes for 2024. There is a proposed 1.5% raise for all staff members effective March 1, with a 1.5% bonus for all staff coming from the residual PPP funds (Covid), and unrestricted memorials. The Church Council moved for the adoption of the 2025 Operating Fund Budget as presented. Motion was seconded by Laverne Gordon. There was no discussion. Motion Approved.

Keith Abkes, 2025 Council Chair, opened the floor for any old or new business but none was presented.

Closing prayer by Pastor Craig Brown. Meeting adjourned at 2:44 p.m.

Minutes Recorded by Doug Pauls, Church Council Secretary

## Special Congregation Meeting Minutes May 18, 2025

This special Congregational meeting was called for the express purpose of approving the final bids and associated actions for the Renewing for God's Mission (RGM). There were a total of 107 present at the meeting. The constitution requires a minimum of 50 members, so the quorum requirement was met.

A handout had been prepared that contained Page 5 of the fundraising brochure, the projected budget figures, and the Ballot.

Pastor Katie Lowe Lancaster opened with a word of prayer.

The meeting was called to order by Keith Abkes, Council Chairman at 10:20 am. Keith gave a brief summary of the RGM related actions that took place since the Congregation approved the RGM renovations in a June 2024 Congregational Meeting. There were no questions or comments raised.

Keith presented the budget for the RGM renovations, where the final figures came in less than the total amount pledged, which was a tribute to the generosity of our congregation. There were no questions or comments on the budget.

Keith presented the Ballot for voting and went over each of the elements. A question was asked on what Ballot element #5 meant. Jana Grimm explained that the RGM project had donations coming in across a 3-year period, but most of the construction costs were up-front costs. It will be necessary to carry a construction loan for a portion of the period. The costs of such a loan were included in the budget. A question was also raised as to what pledged and unpledged giving meant. Bob Koenig explained that there were people who donated to Mission and Ministry, and likewise to RGM, but who did not fill out a formal pledge. Unpledged giving relates to these donations.

The Congregation voted, with Council members collecting the ballots. Ballots were tabulated by Doug Pauls, Tonya Trudo, Jana Grimm, and Sally Sklarsy. The tally was 106 Yes, 0 No, 1 Abstain. The Ballot passed.

Keith thanked the Congregation, and a sending prayer was provided by Pastor Katie. Keith adjourned the meeting at 10:40 a.m.

Minutes Recorded by Doug Pauls,  
Church Council Secretary

## Congregation Meeting Minutes November 30, 2025

The stated purpose of this Congregational Meeting was the election of members to the Church Council, FLC Trust Committee, and to the FLC Audit Committee. The meeting was called to order at 9:58 a.m. by Pastor Steve Knudson with 52 members in attendance. A quorum is 50, so the meeting was in order. Attendance was down due to a bad winter storm the night before. The ballot was handed out to attending members.

Pastor Steve presented the Council candidates and asked if there were any additional nominations. None were presented and the nominations for Council were closed. Pastor Steve presented the Trust Committee candidate and asked if there were any additional nominations. None were

presented and the nominations for the Trust Committee were closed. Pastor Steve presented the Audit Committee candidates and asked if there were any additional nominations. None were presented and the nominations for the Audit Committee were closed.

As there were no additional nominations, a motion was made by Dan Musil, seconded by Evie Faroute, to cast a collective voice vote. Motion passed. All nominees were elected to their respective positions unanimously. Pastor Steve closed the meeting at 10:02 a.m.

Minutes recorded by Doug Pauls, Council Secretary

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