



**FIRST EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
OF LINCOLN**

**ANNUAL REPORT
2024**

**MAKING DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST
FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE WORLD.**

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AGENDA

ONE HUNDRED FIFTY-FIFTH ANNUAL MEETING FIRST EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

JANUARY 26, 2025
12:30 PM

Gathering in God's Name

- Call to Order (Lee Rockwell, Council President)
- Establishment of Quorum (Emily Sears, Council Secretary)
 - The constitution of the congregation states that the quorum has 5% of voting members.
- Approval of Agenda (Lee Rockwell)
- Approval of Minutes of 154th Annual Meeting January 28, 2024 (Lee Rockwell, Council President)
- Time for Centering and Prayer (Pastor Erin Heidelberger)

God's Call to Leadership - Elections

- Nominations and Elections (Steve Eicher, Nominating Committee Chair)
 1. Congregational Council
 2. Nominating Committee
 3. Synod Assembly
 4. Endowment Fund Board
- Prayer for our Leaders (Pastor)

Celebrating the Spirit's Work

- Membership Report (Pastor Erin Heidelberger)
- Committee and Council Reports (Committee Representatives)
- Prayer of Thanksgiving (Pastor)

Discerning God's Will

- Prayer (Pastor)
- Treasurer Overview (Scott Williamson, Treasurer)
- Approve 2025 Budget (Scott Williamson, Treasurer/Budget Committee)
- Open Comments Period (Lee Rockwell, Council President)

Responding to God's Call

- Staff, Leadership and Volunteer Recognition (Lee Rockwell, Council President)
- Installation of Leaders (Pastor Erin Heidelberger)

Going Forth to Serve

- Blessing and Sending (Pastor Andrew Kitzing)
- Adjournment (Lee Rockwell, Council President)

MINUTES OF THE ONE HUNDRED FIFTY-FOURTH ANNUAL MEETING

FIRST EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH / LINCOLN, NE

JANUARY 28, 2024 / 12:30 PM

BY ANN CARLSON, RECORDER

A. CALL TO ORDER AND ESTABLISHMENT OF QUORUM

The 154th Annual Meeting of First Evangelical Lutheran Church was called to order at 12:37 PM by President Lee Rockwell. It was determined that a quorum (5% of voting members) was established.

B. OPENING DEVOTIONS

Pastor Erin Heidelberger led the opening devotions and prayer.

C. APPROVE AGENDA

It was moved by Tim Maack and seconded by Sandy Latshaw that the agenda be approved. The motion passed.

D. APPROVE MINUTES OF 153rd ANNUAL MEETING HELD ON JANUARY 29, 2023

It was moved by Amy Tipton and seconded by Kristi Fisher that the minutes be approved. The motion passed.

E. NOMINATIONS AND ELECTIONS

Sandy Latshaw, Nominating Committee Member, presented the nominees. Thanks were given to the Nominating Committee members for their work – Tera Beerman, Gene Cotter, Steve Eicher, Carlene Falos, Norman Kempf, Sandy Latshaw and Council Representative, Emily Sears.

a. Congregational Council

Sandy read the names of the Congregational Council Nominees (Vote for 7): John Bonaiuto, Ann Bouma, Patrick Hayden-Roy, Kari Hoeft, Owen Paulsen, Karen Statham, Jenna Troutman, Bev White, and Brandon Wiebelhaus. The five nominees who receive the most votes will serve three-year terms. The nominees who receive the sixth and seventh number of votes will serve one-year terms as they

will be filling the remainder of the terms for departing council members Scott Seebohm and Bruce Hull. No nominations were made from the floor.

b. Nominating Committee

Sandy read the names of the Nominating Committee Nominees (Vote for 3): Courtney Anderson, Les Carlson, Steve Janssen, Jan Modica, Erin Niebuhr, and Gay Sutter. No nominations were made from the floor.

c. Synod Assembly Voting Members

Sandy read the names of the Synod Assembly Voting Member Nominees (Vote for 5 – at least two men and two women): Tony Anderson, Linda Jensen, Joan Johnson, Len Nelson, Carol Olson, Linda Rassmussen, Angie Ripa, Dale Ripa, and Jay Sears. No nominations were made from the floor.

d. Endowment Board

Sandy read the names of the Endowment Board Nominees (Vote for 2): Craig Heier, Karen Peppmuller, Madalyn Popken and Dave Timperley. No nominations were made from the floor.

F. 2023 MEMBERSHIP REPORT

Pastor Erin Heidelberger gave the membership summary. The baptized members as of January 1, 2023, totaled 1,106. There were eighteen additions and thirty-four subtractions making the number of baptized members as of December 31, 2023, 1,090.

G. STAFF AND LEADERSHIP RECOGNITION

Council President Lee Rockwell recognized the following individuals:

Church Staff

- Pastor Erin Heidelberger – Lead Pastor, Pastor Andrew Kitzing – Associate Pastor, Pastor Marsha Anderson – Visitation Pastor, Mandy West – Parish Coordinator, Masako and Boyd Bacon – Worship and Music Directors, Sharon Hardel – Director of Youth and Family Ministry, Laura Graulty – FaithTrek Coordinator, Kathleen Simley – Communications Director, Richard Harris – Facilities Manager, Wyatt Swanson and Bryan Hanson – Church Accountants, Lyle Petersen – Information Technology, Erin Pfister – Nursery Coordinator, Music Directors – Jan Modica, Erin Niebuhr, Christine Carmen and Kristina Hanson

Departing Congregational Council Members

- Lyle Petersen, Amy Tipton, Zachary Schafer, Fred Ohles, Rebecca Pfabe, Scott Seebom, Jenna Troutman and Bruce Hull

Remaining Council Members

- Executive Committee - Lee Rockwell – President, Amy Harrison – Vice President, Judy Batterman – Secretary, Scott Williamson – Treasurer, Pastor Erin Heidelberger and Pastor Andrew Kitzing
- Remainder of Council - Emily Sears, Rod Johnson, Dave Pfister and Jennifer Wemhoff

Nominating Committee – Completing Terms

- Norm Kempf, Tera Beerman and Sandy Latshaw

Synod Assembly – Completing Terms

- Jay Sears, Barb Monson, Kari Hoeft, Clay Ehlers and Verdell Bohling

Endowment Board – Completing Terms

- Terry Kruse and Karen Peppmuller

H. NEW BUSINESS

a. Approve Budget for 2024

It was moved and seconded to approve a budget of \$981,083 for Fiscal Year 2024.

Discussion followed.

Scott Williamson stated that the 2024 budget gets us back to square one (pre-pandemic).
What do we want to do for 2025?

Selected financial results for 2023 are listed below:

- We had a phenomenal year financially, ending with a \$41k surplus.
- Receipts in 2023 totaled \$923k, a \$37k increase over the last year. The increases are a combination of Temple talk money raised at the beginning of 2023, congregational growth, and rental income from the new daycare.
- Expenses remained flat year over the year, coming in at \$882k.
- We have a contingency fund with a balance of \$67k after all associate pastor call expenses are paid.
- The congregation donated \$66k in additional benevolence in 2023.
- The mortgage balance stands at \$1.05 million through December 2023. The capital campaign pledges will end in 2024. In 2025, the mortgage payment will become a line item in the operating budget.

b. 2024 Budget Highlights

- The 2024 budget recommended by the Finance Committee is based on total receipts and expenditures of \$981,083.
- Projected offering receipts of \$906,500 represents an increase of 0.4% over 2023 offering receipts of \$902,575.
- Additional receipts include \$74,583, of which \$41,083 is surplus funds from 2023 and \$30,000 rental income from the Las Abejitas daycare center.
- Total Benevolence/Serving giving of \$90,650 represents 10% of projected offering receipts; with 7% to the ELCA and Nebraska Synod (\$63,455) and 3% to local benevolences (\$27,195).
- Program expenses (Worship, Learning and Hospitality/Care) total \$35,220; an increase of 10.7% over 2023 program expenses of \$31,817.
- Support expenses total \$856,923; an increase of 12.7% over 2023 support expenses of \$760,275. The majority of the budget increase is for compensation and benefits for full staffing that is now on board. In addition, our strategy of transferring funds to the Mortgage Transition Fund will continue for the sixth and final year.

Scott thanked Wyatt and Bryan for their work.

The question was asked if there was any plan to go back to double tithing. The double tithing changed when the capital campaign began, and we started putting money into the mortgage transition fund. The mortgage transition fund is estimated to have a balance of \$222k by the end of 2024. Getting back to a double tithe is contingent on the financial situation of the congregation.

The motion carried.

I. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS RELATING TO REPORTS

The church will be rolling out Realm, a new software platform, by Easter. The church office needs to have the current email addresses for everyone. If you want to be a tester of the new software, please let Pastor Erin, Mandy or Kathleen know.

J. OPEN COMMENTS PERIOD

Gifts of Hope was successful and it will be repeated.

Thanks were given for the delicious lunch.

Election Results

Congregational Council Three-Year Term

John Bonaiuto, Patrick Hayden-Roy, Kari Hoeft, Karen Statham and Jenna Troutman

Congregational Council One-Year Term

Bev White and Brandon Wiebelhaus

Nominating Committee

Courtney Anderson, Les Carlson and Erin Niebuhr

Synod Assembly

Tony Anderson, Joan Johnson, Carol Olson, Angie Ripa and Dale Ripa

Endowment Board

Karen Peppmuller and Madalyn Popken

K. CLOSING PRAYER

Pastor Andrew led the closing prayer.

L. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 1:29 PM.

MEMBERSHIP REPORT 2024

MINISTERIAL ACTS

Baptisms	8
Confirmations	4
Weddings	1
Funerals	15

MEMBERSHIP SUMMARY

		Baptized	Confirmed
Membership, January 1, 2024		<u>1096</u>	<u>913</u>
Additions:	Baptized	8	
	New Members Received	14	14
	Confirmation		4
	Return to Active		
	Other		
	Total	<u>22</u>	<u>18</u>
Subtractions:	Deaths	18	17
	Transfer	5	5
	To Inactive		
	Other		
	Total	<u>23</u>	<u>22</u>
Membership, December 31, 2024		1095	909

We give thanks to God for the new birth of everlasting life into which each of the following was baptized in 2024: Sunday Duer, Duer Duer, Daniel Duer, Goy Lam Duer, Emilio Manuel Cortinas, Edie Erickson, Caden Kasperbauer, and Lyra Rarig

And we give thanks for the blessed rest of everlasting peace, into which each of the following entered in 2024: Fred Monnich, Iris Winkelhake, Phyllis Frickel, Sheila Exstrom, Nancie Kobza, Kenneth Stofferahn, Merl Scott, Margaret Fahrnbruch, Tom Schmitter, Cole Dalby, Barbara Howard, Jane Mickelson, Rev. Mary Jensen, Dan Howard, James Howat, Harold Borchert,

MEETING DATE: January 26, 2025

SUBJECT: Fiscal Year 2025 Budget

PROPOSED ACTION: Approve a budget of \$1,016,461 for Fiscal Year 2025

BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS: The 2025 budget recommended by the Finance Committee is based on total receipts and expenditures of \$1,016,461.

Projected offering receipts of \$933,704 represents an increase of 2.7% over 2024 offering receipts of \$908,833.

Additional receipts include \$82,757, of which:

- \$36,000 from the PPP/Contingency Fund
- \$31,800 is Las Abejitas daycare rent
- \$11,457 Misc Fund II (Memorials & Thrivent)
- \$3,500 Misc/building use

Total Benevolence/Serving giving of \$93,370 represents 10% of projected offering receipts; with 7% to the ELCA & Nebraska Synod (\$65,359) and 3% to local benevolences/Justice in Action (\$28,011).

Program expenses (Worship, Learning, and Hospitality/Care) total \$36,050; an increase of 3.5% over 2024 program expenses of \$34,842.

Support expenses total \$887,041; an increase of only 1.0% over 2024 support expenses of \$878,009. The budgeted cost savings are due to a reduction in janitorial expense (changed cleaning companies and prepaid 2025) and budgeting an average repair and maintenance expense using historical costs.

With the conclusion of the capital campaign, the mortgage payment is now included in the operating budget as a separate line item. The mortgage payment will be subsidized with \$30,000 from the mortgage transition fund which has been built up since 2019 to help transition the mortgage payment to the operating budget.

SPONSORS: Congregational Council

FINANCIAL RESULTS -- 2024

Wyatt Swanson, Church Accountant

We ended the year with a \$20k deficit. However, the deficit was covered in full by member gifts that were designated throughout the year to help offset the increased expenses related to repair and maintenance expenses.

Receipts in 2024 totaled \$983k. We brought over \$41k of surplus funds from 2023 that we used as income in 2024. Excluding the surplus funds, our total receipts were \$942k which is a +2.0% increase year over year or +6.5% increase including the surplus funds! Envelope receipts make up the majority of receipts, however we continue to receive a fair amount in loose offering, miscellaneous and building use income, and of course rental income from Las Abejitas.

Expenses came in at just over \$1 million. Our expenses increased by +13.7% year over year. The increase in expenses is primarily related to staffing. First Lutheran was fully staffed all year in 2024! In addition, we experienced numerous repair and maintenance expenses throughout the year. The repairs and maintenance budget was \$15k and we spent \$35k. Additionally we will have depleted our maintenance reserve fund at the completion of the HVAC and software upgrade project. We did a phenomenal job at managing all other expenses this year.

We saw another year of extreme generosity! The congregation donated \$65k in additional benevolence. Your continued generosity is making lasting impacts on numerous agencies both local and afar. You will find a breakdown of the various agencies/causes to which funds were donated to in the pages ahead.

Lastly, the Captial Campaign drive concluded in 2024. Starting in 2025, the mortgage payment will become a line-item expense in our operating budget. The mortgage balance at the end of 2024 is \$1.02 million. During the year, mortgage payments of \$76k were made. We continued adding 5% of offering receipts to the Mortgage Transition Fund (MTF). The MTF has a balance of \$253k at year end. The bulk of these funds are in a CD earning over 4% interest which generates about \$1k per month in interest.

Thank you to everyone who contributed and supported the functions and mission of First Lutheran Church. We certainly have lots to be thankful for!

The next few pages will recap the 2024 year in more detail!

	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2023</u>	<u>2024</u>	<u>2025 budget</u>
Offering Receipts	\$960k	\$913k	\$874k	\$866k	\$902k	\$909k	\$934k
Other Receipts	\$9k	\$13k	\$23k	\$20k	\$21k	\$74k	\$82k
Expenses	(\$973k)	(\$864k)	(\$895k)	(\$897k)	(\$882k)	(\$1,004k)	(\$1,016k)
	<u>(\$4k)</u>	<u>\$62k</u>	<u>\$2k</u>	<u>(\$11k)</u>	<u>\$41k</u>	<u>(\$21k)</u>	<u>\$0</u>
		\$48k PPP \$					
		= \$110k					
		Contingency Fund					

OFFERING PLEDGES

<u>AS OF 12-31-2024</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>2024</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>Incr/Decr</u>	<u>% Chg</u>
Pledged 2024 & 2025					
increases	88	\$399,563	\$458,476	\$58,913	14.7%
decreases	9	\$42,980	\$33,480	-\$9,500	-22.1%
no change	80	\$207,814	\$207,814	\$0	0.0%
Pledged both years	177	\$650,357	\$699,770	\$49,413	7.6%
New pledges for 2024	16		\$75,650		
Pledged 2024, not 2025 yet	13	\$30,040			
Pledged 2024, deceased	2	\$4,424			
Pledged 2024, stopped giving	7	\$9,180			
GRAND TOTALS		\$694,001	\$775,420		

	<u># pledges</u>	<u>pledge amount</u>
2015	257	\$779,318
2016	276	\$809,806
2017	261	\$823,041
2018	261	\$841,380
2019	243	\$792,062
2020	234	\$800,123
2021	186	\$669,781
2022	202	\$698,315
2023	192	\$703,168
2024	200	\$694,901
2025	193	\$775,420

FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH
2025 Budget

RECEIPTS	2022 Actual	2023 Actual	2024 Actual	2025 Budget
Envelope Receipts	857,997	892,809	900,664	925,454
Loose Receipts	8,272	9,766	8,169	8,250
Sunday School / Interest	1	-	-	
Offering Receipts	866,270	902,575	908,833	933,704
Misc & Building Use	4,093	3,357	2,929	3,500
PPP / Contingency Fund (Fund II transfer)	2,551	-		36,000
Carryforward Surplus Prior Year	2,449	-	41,083	-
Misc Fund II (Memorials & Thrivent)				11,457
Las Abejitas Bilingual Childcare Center	-	17,500	30,000	31,800
Dimensions Early Childhood Income	10,280	-	-	-
Other Receipts	19,373	20,857	74,012	82,757
TOTAL RECEIPTS	885,643	923,432	982,845	1,016,461

EXPENSES	2022 Actual	2023 Actual	2024 Actual	2025 Budget
ELCA & Nebraska Synod Benevolence	90,958	63,180	63,619	65,359
<i>% of Offering Receipts</i>	<i>10.50%</i>	<i>7.00%</i>	<i>7.00%</i>	<i>7.00%</i>

Benevolence / Serving	2022 Actual	2023 Actual	2024 Actual	2025 Budget
Vicar Program (1/2)	-	8,032	-	
World Hunger	8,000	2,500	3,800	
LWR Disaster Relief	1,000	500	1,000	
Food Bank / Backpack / Bridges Out Of Poverty	3,500	1,500	3,000	
Lutheran Food Pantry	3,500	1,000	-	
Bread For The World	500	500	500	
Friendship Home	1,500		1,000	
Clinic With A Heart	1,100		1,000	
Lutheran Family Services	4,000	2,939	3,400	
Matt Talbot Kitchen	-		-	
Fresh Start	2,500	1,000	1,500	
Tabitha / Meals on Wheels	5,532	4,000	5,245	
Prison Ministry / Bridges To Hope	2,000	1,000	2,000	
UNL Lutheran Center	1,000	500	1,000	
UNL Intern Support	3,000	2,000	2,000	
Nebraska Campus Lutheran Ministries	1,000	500	1,000	
Social Ministry Discretionary Fund	100	606	70	
Camp Carol Joy Holling	750	500	750	
Justice in Action (0.5%)	-	-	-	
Benevolence / Serving: Total	38,982	27,077	27,265	28,011
<i>% of Offering Receipts</i>	<i>4.50%</i>	<i>3.00%</i>	<i>3.00%</i>	<i>3.00%</i>

ELCA / Nebraska Synod, Benevolence / Serving	129,940	90,258	90,884	93,370
Grand Total % of Offering Receipts	15.00%	10.00%	10.00%	10.00%

	2022 Actual	2023 Actual	2024 Actual	2025 Budget
Worship				
Devotional Materials	387	350	508	500
Worship Supplies	4,907	5,954	7,017	6,500
Music Honoraria	600	600	150	600
Music/Choir	2,996	2,576	2,910	3,000
Music Conferences/Workshops	90	-	-	100
Organ/Piano Maintenance	1,693	1,575	1,385	1,500
Choir Fellowship	13	68	-	100
Worship: Total	10,686	11,123	11,970	12,300
% of Offering Receipts	1.23%	1.23%	1.32%	1.32%

	2022 Actual	2023 Actual	2024 Actual	2025 Budget
Learning				
Early Childhood	78	312	440	400
Elementary	1,638	2,481	2,934	3,350
Middle School	4,163	4,650	4,624	3,850
High School	8,181	8,066	8,164	6,000
Adults	1,991	1,422	1,809	2,000
Library & Media	-	-	-	200
The Lutheran	209	202	(30)	200
Learning: Total	16,260	17,133	17,941	16,000
% of Offering Receipts	1.88%	1.90%	1.97%	1.71%

	2022 Actual	2023 Actual	2024 Actual	2025 Budget
Hospitality / Care				
Hospitality	2,175	1,682	2,681	2,000
Stewardship	950	462	623	1,000
Fall Festival	-	1,011	656	1,500
All Church Retreat	-	-	1,179	1,500
Star City Pride Sponsorship	-	-	-	500
Fellowship	184	19	(17)	750
Funeral Lunches	(147)	112	(371)	-
Stephen Ministry	1,530	274	180	500
Hospitality / Care: Total	4,692	3,560	4,931	7,750
% of Offering Receipts	0.54%	0.39%	0.54%	0.83%

Support	2022 Actual	2023 Actual	2024 Actual	2025 Budget
Compensation	421,512	431,010	490,996	501,096
Pension/Health Insurance	106,131	109,310	136,914	142,271
Payroll Tax	35,608	35,266	44,768	45,099
Continuing Education	4,296	4,083	5,000	5,000
Pastors Professional Expense	427	526	844	1,000
Staff Professional Expense	100	94	98	300
Vicar Program (1/2)	10,562	8,032	-	-
Staff Hospitality	37	168	53	200
Staff Development	120	199	-	300
Conferences/Workshops (staff)	2,815	2,940	2,256	3,500
Synod Assembly (non-staff)	1,919	1,704	1,875	1,900
Auto & Travel	6,043	6,795	2,521	3,000
Postage	1,893	1,950	1,900	1,900
Background Checks	192	121	-	120
Office Supplies	3,945	7,643	8,745	9,500
Banking Fees	1,962	2,400	2,487	2,640
Communications	2,747	3,314	3,283	3,750
Printer Expense	2,400	3,210	3,943	4,000
Computer Needs	806	1,692	489	1,000
Insurance	25,719	28,836	36,351	38,169
Utilities/Telephone	36,718	43,312	39,548	41,800
Janitorial Supplies	346	1,289	3,387	4,000
Repairs & Maintenance	12,122	16,594	35,438	17,500
Maintenance Reserve Fund	7,000	-	6,000	6,000
Mortgage Transition Fund	43,313	45,129	45,442	-
Mortgage Payment	-	-	-	45,996
Service Contracts	4,272	4,323	5,631	4,500
Lawn Care/Snow Removal	2,010	335	40	2,500
Support: Total	735,015	760,275	878,009	887,041
% of Offering Receipts	84.85%	84.23%	96.61%	95.00%

TOTAL EXPENSES	896,593	882,349	1,003,735	1,016,461
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TOTAL RECEIPTS	885,643	923,432	982,845	1,016,461
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	2022 Actual	2023 Actual	2024 Actual	2025 Budget
RECEIPTS LESS EXPENSES	(10,950)	41,084	(20,890)	(0)
	DEFICIT	SURPLUS	DEFICIT	

<p>used \$3,500 of undesignated member funds; \$7,450 from the Carol Reed Fund</p>	<p>Transferred to 2024 operating budget to use as income</p>	<p>Transferred funds Fund II Maintenance Reserve from designated member gifts</p>
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'Called To Welcome' Building Project

	Receipts		Disbursements						Balance
	Fundraising Expenses	Architects	Construction	Construction Loan Advance	Construction Loan Interest	Mortgage Payment	Mortgage Pre-payment	Transfer to MTE	
2018	\$1,125,856	(\$81,949)	(\$220,024)	(\$29,580)					\$794,303
2019	\$884,370	(\$60,979)	(\$3,123,436)	\$1,663,000	(\$14,936)				\$142,323
2020	\$544,433	(\$32,493)	(\$751,459)	\$405,000	(\$46,489)	(\$58,630)	(\$90,000)		\$112,684
2021	\$561,446		(\$18,337)			(\$127,568)	(\$580,000)		\$98,226
2022	\$191,361					(\$87,372)	(\$162,500)		\$39,715
2023	\$109,112					(\$75,996)	(\$35,000)		\$37,831
2024	\$84,991					(\$75,996)	\$0	(\$21,000)	\$25,826
TOTALS TO-DATE	\$3,501,569	(\$81,949)	(\$313,495)	\$2,068,000	(\$61,425)	(\$425,562)	(\$867,500)	(\$21,000)	\$25,826

- > Initial capital campaign (2018-2021) \$2,874,330
- > Follow-up capital campaign (2021-2024) \$627,239
- > Mortgage started August 2020 \$11,726 monthly payment 8-1-2020 ELCA Mission Investment Fund
- > Interest rate adjustment May 2021 \$10,083 monthly payment 12-31-2020
- > Monthly pay adjustment Jan 2022 \$ 7,281 monthly payment 12-31-2021
- > Monthly pay adjustment Jan 2023 \$ 6,333 monthly payment 12-31-2022
- > Monthly pay adjustment Jan 2023 \$ 6,333 monthly payment 12-31-2022
- > Monthly pay adjustment Jan 2023 \$ 6,333 monthly payment 12-31-2023
- > Monthly pay adjustment Jan 2023 \$ 6,333 monthly payment 12-31-2024
- > In 2025 when the follow-up capital campaign concludes the mortgage payment will be included in our operating budget

12/31/2024

FUND II -- ACCOUNT ANALYSIS

		<u>BALANCE</u> <u>12/31/2023</u>	<u>RECEIPTS</u>	<u>EXPENSES</u>	<u>INTEREST</u>	<u>TRANSFER</u>	<u>BALANCE</u> <u>12/31/2024</u>
Housing Fund	Checking Acct	38.19	2,400.00				2,438.19
	Money Mkt Acct	997.99			27.73		1,025.72
	Housing Loan	16,000.00		(2,400.00)			13,600.00
Memorial Fund	Checking Acct	437.56	12,316.00	(7,194.28)			5,559.28
	Money Mkt Acct	33,787.31			938.51		34,725.82
Flower Fund	Checking Acct	1,188.95	1,651.00	(547.36)			2,292.59
	Money Mkt Acct	2,825.29			78.48		2,903.77
Music Fund	Checking Acct	371.71	1,800.00				2,171.71
	Money Mkt Acct	4,872.08			135.32		5,007.40
Youth Fund	Checking Acct	1,454.38	24,476.78	(31,258.20)			(5,327.04)
	Money Mkt Acct	6,954.70			193.19		7,147.89
Capital Campaign	Checking Acct	32,771.95	85,974.12	(76,999.03)		(21,000.00)	20,747.04
	Mission Investment Chkg Acct	5,058.93			20.28		5,079.21
Mortgage Transition Fund	Checking Acct	3,823.94	45,442.00			(41,500.00)	7,765.94
	Money Mkt Acct	20,131.39			237.95	(20,000.00)	369.34
	Certificate of Deposit (1) 5-31-24	101,755.28			2,133.10	(103,888.38)	0.00
	Certificate of Deposit (2) 5-31-24	51,072.90			1,070.67	(52,143.57)	0.00
	Certificate of Deposit (LFSB) 2-28-25	0.00			6,274.66	238,531.95	244,806.61
Maintenance Reserve Fund	Checking Acct	1,942.07	27,737.09	(39,993.65)			(10,314.49)
	Money Mkt Acct	37,080.57			1,030.00		38,110.57
Sabbatical Fund	Checking Acct	371.65		(682.08)			(310.43)
	Money Mkt Acct	11,340.04			315.00		11,655.04
Ministry Initiative Fund	Checking Acct	506.58		(2,207.50)			(1,700.92)
	Money Mkt Acct	10,603.02			294.53		10,897.55
Seminary Scholarship Fund	Checking Acct	728.92					728.92
	Money Mkt Acct	7,013.84			194.82		7,208.66
Contingency Fund	Checking Acct	2,120.68		(1,129.60)			991.08
	Money Mkt Acct	66,545.78			1,848.12		68,393.90
'All Other' Designated Fund (see detail tab)	Checking Acct	44,810.54	112,714.81	(142,964.68)			14,560.67
	Money Mkt Acct	340,834.14			9,467.39		350,301.53
		\$807,440.38	\$314,511.80	(\$305,376.38)	\$24,259.75	\$0.00	\$840,835.55

CONTINGENCY FUND

12/31/2024

Receipts:

2020 operating surplus	\$62,798
2020 Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) funds	48,000
	<u>110,798</u>

Interest to-date:

\$4,394

Disbursements to-date:

Jan 2021 - additional 2020 benevolence contributions	(9,279)
Jan 2021 - Epson copier for office	(10,434)
May-Aug 2021 - Pastor Erin call expenses	(2,021)
Oct-Nov 2021 - Pastor Erin relocation	(16,078)
March 2022 - new phone system	(3,164)
Sept 2022-May 2023 - Pastor Andrew call expenses	(1,149)
Nov 2023 - Pastor Andrew relocation	(1,130)
Dec 2022 - applied PPP contingency funds to the 2022 budget	(2,551)
	<u>(45,807)</u>

BALANCE \$69,385

*Using \$36,000 of PPP funds in the 2025 budget

MORTGAGE TRANSITION FUND

12/31/2024

Receipts:

Nov 2018 - check received	\$13,000	Dorothy Ekblad estate gift
Feb 2020 - check received	1,000	Clara Wasenius estate gift
Feb & May 2020 - memorial funds transferred	655	Clara & Al Wasenius memorial funds
October 2024 - Transfer	21,000	Transfer from Capital Campaign Fund
transfer from 2019 Fund I budget	9,900	2% of offering receipts (1/2 year)
transfer from 2020 Fund I budget	25,180	3% of offering receipts
transfer from 2021 Fund I budget	34,945	4% of offering receipts
transfer from 2022 Fund I budget	43,313	5% of offering receipts
transfer from 2023 Fund I budget	45,129	5% of offering receipts
transfer from 2024 Fund I budget	45,442	5% of offering receipts
	<u>\$239,564</u>	

Interest to-date:

\$13,378

BALANCE

\$252,942

*In January 2025, transferring \$20,747 from the Capital Campaign fund to MTF.

*Total MTF balance \$273,689 of which \$30,000 will be used to subsidize the 2025 mortgage payments.

CONGREGATION COUNCIL

LEE ROCKWELL, CONGREGATIONAL PRESIDENT

The 2024 annual meeting of the First Lutheran congregation wraps up my two year stint as president. It's been a real honor to work closely with our council, our pastors and church staff, several church committees, and the members of our congregation.

Our council has experienced many joys over the past year, along with challenges...some of which were resolved and others which will require attention over the coming years.

Some of our major issues and activities are highlighted below:

- Approved First Lutheran's participation in the Lincoln Justice in Action program along with an annual financial commitment.
- Revised and approved our sabbatical policy limited to rostered staff.
- Adopted the ELCA "Internal Controls – Best Practices" guidelines with check payment signatures limited to Council officers.
- Proposed constitutional amendments reducing Council membership from 15 to 12 members and providing "housekeeping" elements to our endowment guidelines. Approved by the congregation in a special meeting.
- Approved the updated church Emergency Action Plan necessitated by completion and expansion of our physical facility and the activation of the Las Abejitas daycare and preschool.
- Held three congregational Town Hall gatherings for a potluck meal, financial status updates and opportunities for general dialogue/conversations with the council.
- Advocated for the re-establishment of the Discipleship Director staff position while recognizing that financial realities will be the driving force.
- Approved purchase and installation of replacement heating equipment and controls at a substantial cost, but not too surprising given the age of some building components.
- Approved use of one classroom next to the Upper Room for expanded Las Abejitas services when not required for First Lutheran activities.
- Approved a process for the annual pastor's evaluation (currently in process).

- Spent time reading, watching a video presentation, and discussing the need to involve younger members of our congregation in leadership roles. This effort requires continual planning and implementing.
- Continued to monitor the longstanding roof issue and filed suit with Brotherhood Mutual, for an equitable settlement for the hail damage sustained several years ago.

Our congregation is facing substantial financial concerns that need to be seriously addressed over the coming year. While our 2025 financial proposal provides a process to balance our revenue and expenditures, creative and realistic planning for 2026 and beyond needs to occur in the months ahead.

I applaud the dedication and active participation of our Congregational Council members. And, on behalf of the Council, I again thank the congregation for the support and encouragement you extend to us individually and collectively.

MINISTRY OF THE LEAD PASTOR

BY PASTOR ERIN HEIDELBERGER

¹⁶Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshiped him, but they doubted. ¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:16-20)

Dear First Lutheran Family,

I'm so grateful for God's call to be part of this community of faith and for another year of walking with you as one of your pastors! Over the past year, we have welcomed new worshippers and new members. We have shed tears and comforted one another as we've said goodbye to church family at a time of death or when some have moved on to new locations. We have baptized babies and toddlers and welcomed young people to the Lord's Supper. We have opened our doors to about 70 children each weekday through Las Abejitas Childcare Center. We have gathered to be nourished for living our faith in daily life through worship, Bible study, learning, and fellowship. We have offered child-centered Good Friday and Christmas Eve services. I continue to hear from newcomers how grateful they are to be welcomed to a congregation with open arms.

Here are just a few more of the things I'm giving thanks for:

+ In 2023, First Lutheran joined Justice in Action, a grassroots coalition of faith communities in Lancaster County to organize and address issues of justice, like mental healthcare and criminal justice reform, in the Lincoln area. We are now a member faith community of JIA and are able to join in working with people of faith from the whole community to serve our neighbors by advocating on significant justice issues.

+ We have enjoyed comparatively stable staffing for the first time since I began my call here in late summer 2021 - thanks be to God! We have just marked Pastor Andrew's first full year with us as Associate Pastor. We also welcomed a new facilities maintenance manager, Janis Strautkalns, and are grateful for his hard work maintaining our building.

This is a good point, then, to give my thanks to the rest of our awesome staff for all the work they do: Parish Coordinator Mandy West, Worship & Music Directors Masako and Boyd Bacon, Youth & Family Ministry Director Sharon Hardel, FaithTrek Coordinator Laura Grauly, Communications Director Kathleen Simley, Visitation Pastor Marsha Anderson, accountants Wyatt Swanson and Bryan Hanson, Lyle Petersen (IT), and nursery coordinator/preschool FaithTrek teacher Erin Pfister, as well as musicians and music directors Jan Modica, Erin Niebuhr, Christine Carman, and Kristina Hanson. And I can't neglect saying thank you to Steve Lenzen, who volunteers *many* hours to help with maintenance and repairs of the church building. What a blessing it is to work with a gifted, skilled staff!

+ Las Abejitas Bilingual Education Center has been operating at First Lutheran for more than a year (opened June 2023) and now serves about 70 children, newborn through elementary-age. Las Abejitas was also able to open a second location at First Plymouth UCC and has expanded its reach and impact on the Lincoln community.

+ The Vitality Initiative team has now been at work for 16 months of learning, listening, and discernment that is geared toward helping First Lutheran discern our vocation and cultivate missional imagination. They have practiced a model of discerning vision for ministry that is about listening to God, listening with the congregation, and listening to our neighbors. Vitality is all about how God is and will continue to bring life to the world through this church. It's about how this church brings life-giving service to the world, working for the flourishing and thriving of the neighbor. One of the primary tasks they undertook was finding the common thread woven through First Lutheran's history and current life. This is a particular vocation that God has called this church into. We believe the best description for that vocation, that thread woven throughout the ministry of this congregation is to *accompany/walk with*. The VI team will soon be inviting the congregation into the final phase of this 18-month journey to discern what specific accompaniment ministry God is calling us into.

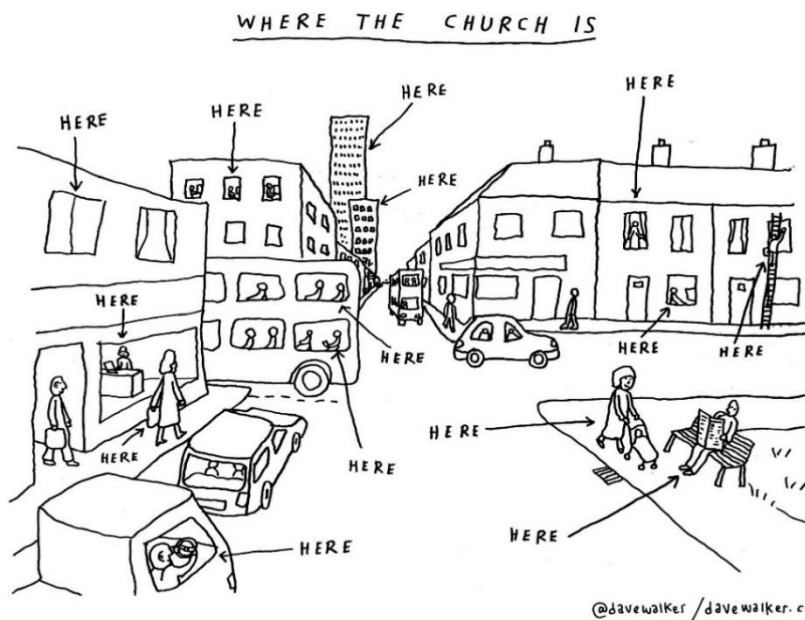
One of the biggest questions before the church (not just First Lutheran) in this time is: Does the church matter?

We are in an extraordinary time of pivoting from relying on and preserving old models of church to discovering new ways that God is calling us to be church in the world. Our mission at First Lutheran is *Making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world* (taken directly from Jesus' Great Commission in Matthew 28).

How does our discipleship transform the world? What exactly accomplishes that transformation? It's the ministry (service to the neighbor) that all baptized people have been called into—Christ's ministry to the world, ministries that are about God's intention for us and our world, which, in short, is *shalom*, peace, well-being. Christ's ministries happen through others and through us, ministries of reconciliation, caring, tending, connection, building up, walking alongside, loving, mending, forgiving, advocating, peacemaking, giving grace, sustaining. These are all ministries that Christ has given to us and are the ministries that transform the world.

The church matters, because it's where and how we make disciples. It's where and how we baptize, *and* it's where and how we are equipped for faith as a way of life. The church always has this as a focus—on those people and places and relationships and roles outside of the church building. This means that our purpose when we are gathered as a church is formation of the baptized for connecting faith and life.

To help answer the question, "Does the church matter?" or "How does the church matter?" this cartoon might be helpful (reprinted with permission):



The church isn't the church only when we are gathered together. We are the church when we're sent out by the Holy Spirit—scattered into our homes, schools, workplaces, playgrounds, fields, shops, streets, neighborhoods, and basketball courts.

Each one of us is a minister and each time we are gathered into the church, we are then sent out

into our daily lives in all our roles and relationships. *This* is where ministry happens. It is not only inside the church building but is also—in fact, *mostly*—in your everyday lives. So, this church has engaged in daily ministry in all your vocations like: spouses and partners, sometimes to those with brief or chronic illnesses, sometimes with life-threatening conditions, sometimes ministry at the deathbed of a spouse/partner; parents to babies, toddlers, preschool-age children, elementary-age

children, middle school-age children, high school-age children, college students, young adults, and adult children; adult children of aging parents, helping to care for them, sometimes as they experience loss of health and memory; grandparents who are intentional about being faith mentors to your grandkids; friends; citizens taking seriously what it means to vote in an informed way, taking on issues of justice, serving on juries for particularly challenging and difficult cases; teachers (we have a lot of you at First Lutheran!); nurses, physical therapists, and other health care workers, computer programmers, youth mentors, homeless outreach street team members, grocery store employees, professional musicians, and attorneys. You are serving in these are so many other vocations, roles, and relationships.

Dear friends, we are partners in the gospel of Jesus Christ, in bringing life to this world. I am happy to be in this ministry with you and I look forward to all the ways the Spirit will draw us together in ministry this year.

With great thanks for each of you,
Pastor Erin Heidelberger

MINISTRY OF THE ASSOCIATE PASTOR

BY PASTOR ANDREW KITZING

It is hard to believe that we've spent a whole year together! In many ways, I feel as though I've just arrived. Now is an appropriate time to give thanks for all that we've experienced together – thanking both you and God for the past year. I typically do a review of the year for my annual reports. That results in several pages of long reading, which I feel is no longer necessary. What I'm going to begin doing this year is to highlight, at most, one major/fun/important event from each month, knowing that much more has happened during the previous year.

January gave me the opportunity to get to know many of our Nuer members a little better. The four Duer children were baptized at the end of the month. Their family remains active in the Nuer service, and I've appreciated the camaraderie that exists between Bol, the Nuer speakers, and us.

Ash Wednesday was on February 14th this year. The Lenten season has many more worship services than what I've been previously used to. However, it also has a whole lot more soup! We also gathered as a small group of folks from First to begin our discussions about joining Justice in Action. I'm pleased with the dedicated group of folks who have made JIA a priority for us. I also think that being involved in organizations like JIA is what makes community members attracted to First. Programming used to be what brought people through the door. Now, there's more programs available to people in the world than there's ever been before. Walking the walk and talking the talk is what people look for in churches today. Do we live out our mission statement? Do we take our welcome statement seriously and follow through? Are we engaged in the community and caring for the widow, orphan, and widow? Are we being Christ in the world? Those are the sorts of questions that people ask when visiting a new church today. JIA helps us follow through on those commitments.

Along with all the usual Holy Week services this year, we had the chance to participate in, and host, a Lincoln cluster Easter Vigil service. For a first-ever event for the cluster churches, I think it went quite well. The plan is to rotate churches every year that host the service.

I have served on the Nebraska Synod Micah 6:8 Committee since its formation. Prior to that I was a member of the Justice Committee (which was one of the three committees that formed Micah 6:8).

The Covid shutdowns made it hard for us to meet regularly and really get much of anything done. It also took us a long time to get back into the swing of doing to work of justice, hunger, and world relief advocacy and care. This past April, we got the ball rolling again. My hope is that we can use this year to not just meet for the sake of meeting, but re-envision what the work of this group will be.

In May I attended the Festival of Homiletics online. I often go to the festival, but this year I opted to watch it online. The preaching is always good and the insights from today's best theologians I find quite helpful.

This year's VBS I thought went quite well. While I didn't stay for the entire day each day, the portion I was there for was full of fun and excitement. The worldwide focus, as a theme, was good for the kids and the volunteers. It is always a worthwhile thing for us to expand our understanding of the world and creation.

I had the chance to chaperone the high school kids on the trip to the National Youth Gathering in New Orleans. This was the first gathering I'd been to since 2009. A lot has changed! Overall, I think the kids who decided that they were going to have fun, had fun, and those that expected fun to happen to them, are probably still waiting. The youth gathering is the largest gathering of ELCA members. No other group gets together and has as many people worshipping and singing at the same time. It is something to be experienced and enjoyed. The next gathering is in Minneapolis.

For those that don't know, I referee football in the fall. When the end of August comes, every free minute I have in my week is usually spent on a football field. After a quick vacation in New Jersey to visit Lori's family and meet a niece and nephew that I had not met yet, it was off to the football field with my spare time.

This year is the first year of working into my preferred "curriculum" for confirmation. I know the transition to new teaching styles and ideas and methods can be hard. I think the year has gone extremely well with respect to that. Next year the transition will be more obvious as we'll be getting a whole new crop of middle school students. The curriculum always changes, but the Bible and Small Catechism are still our basis for confirmation, as are service-learning opportunities.

I got to attend my first Fall Festival this year. It was a really fun afternoon. My sister brought our niece from Beatrice to play and run around. She had a blast! I know it's a lot of work to put on and

plan ever year, but it was a worthwhile afternoon. Thank you to everyone who planned Fall Festival this year. There's one little girl that would love to come back and do it again.

We moved Confirmation Sunday from the end of October to the beginning of November because of the Good Life Halfsy. I feel like I hardly got the chance to get to know the four young people who were confirmed this year but am so glad to see them since. The rate of participation with this group is higher than average. I find hope in that. I can't wait to see their continued involvement through high school.

There is no way to summarize the month of December without mentioning the staff brunch that is hosted by Bob and Carlene Falos. Is there even a reason to get out of bed in December if you don't get to hear Bob's jokes! Coming in a close second is the Gifts of Hope ministry event. We worked this year to find a few new partners and ensure all the groups were tied to our welcome statement. The event is huge, as you know, and this year we set a new record for money raised. Your generosity, compassion, and selflessness are inspirational. Like I said earlier, it's events like this that show the world we mean what we say and can walk the walk.

All of that is a brief summary of each month, with many other activities, meetings, services, etc., taking place. I mean no disrespect in leaving anything out but wanted to highlight one thing each month.

For pastoral acts, I have always given a brief summary in my report and left the details up to the statistical report...

Baptisms – 7

Confirmations – 4

Weddings – 0

Funerals – 7 (6 member/1 nonmember)

My only goal last year was to settle into a routine. I think I've done that. Or at least I'm closer to being there than I was this time last year. It will become more comfortable as time passes.

In my previous calls I've never had an active Executive Council. I'd like to see the goals that I set for the coming year come out of conversations with our Executive Council. Those are conversations that have not happened, up to this point, between me and the Executive Council of First. I hope we can find ourselves in a position of collaboration and partnership when it comes to the coming year and to what goals I may set for myself moving forward.

Thank you all for all you do. I am thankful that I get to do the work of the gospel with all of you.

Blessings,

Pr. Andrew

COMMUNICATIONS MINISTRY

BY KATHLEEN SIMLEY, COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

It all started with Hebrews 10:24: *“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.”* I’ve read this verse countless times, but recently, it feels like it’s reaching out, nudging me directly.

I’ll be honest - some days my role as Communications Director at First Lutheran Church feels like a heavy lift. The endless cycle of emails, social media posts and bulletin inserts can leave me wondering, “Is this making a difference? Does anyone notice or read any of it? Does my work actually inspire someone to live out their faith?”

There are moments when doubt creeps in, making it hard to see beyond the task list. But Hebrews 10:24 has been a lifeline, gently reminding me that these tasks aren’t just busywork. They’re part of something bigger. My job isn’t just about sharing updates or detailing events - it’s about sparking something deeper. It’s about planting seeds of encouragement, hope, connection, love and good works - trusting they’ll grow in ways I may never see.

This shift in perspective has been transformative for me. It’s helped me focus on four simple, yet impactful, actions in my work:

- **Celebrating Discipleship in Action:** I’ve started paying closer attention to the incredible things happening in our community - acts of kindness, compassion, care, hope and love. Serving food at Matt Talbot Kitchen, stitching warmth and comfort in handmade quilts for those in need, spreading hope around the world through the Gifts of Hope Market - these moments out of so many remind me of the real, tangible good that’s happening all around us. Highlighting these stories can inspire others to take their own steps toward making a difference in ways that matter most to them.
- **Fostering Connection:** It’s so easy for someone to feel disconnected. A personal note, a warm smile, even a small conversation can be a reminder that they belong. I’ve seen firsthand how recognizing someone’s unique skills, interests and passions, and personally inviting them to contribute in meaningful ways, can transform disengagement into engagement. These small but intentional acts have the power to reignite a person’s sense of community and purpose, creating a ripple effect of connection and belonging.
- **Inspiring Hope:** A simple act of kindness - a prayer, an encouraging email, a heartfelt note or an uplifting social media post - can carry immense power during challenging times. Letting

someone know, "You're not alone," and reminding them that their church community is here to support, uplift and inspire can truly make a world of difference.

- **Encouraging Action with Meaning:** Sharing the "why" behind our work is incredibly impactful. Too often, we become consumed by the logistical details of events and activities and lose sight of our greater purpose. Refocusing on the "why" helps guide our planning, sharpen our focus and align our efforts with the mission of First Lutheran. Planning without a clear purpose is like setting out on a journey without a destination.

When we communicate the "why" to those we aim to reach, it can make all the difference in their decision to get involved. Understanding the purpose behind their actions, the potential impact and the benefits for themselves and others creates a deeper sense of meaning and motivation. By keeping the "why" at the heart of what we do, we not only strengthen our efforts but also inspire others to join us on this meaningful journey.

With these beliefs and intentions guiding me, I've begun approaching my work from a new perspective. Rather than simply sharing information, I now ask myself, "Will this inspire someone to deepen their faith? Can it motivate them to take action, love more courageously, connect with others more deeply or create meaningful change in our community?"

On the harder days - when my to-do list feels endless or when I question if what I'm doing really matters - I come back to Hebrews 10:24. It's my anchor - reminding me that my calling is to serve faithfully where God has placed me, trusting him to carry the results. Whether I'm crafting a social media post, designing a TV slide or writing the weekly e-newsletter, I know he's working through it and through me in ways I can't and won't always see.

And verse Hebrews 10:25, which follows, offers even more reassurance: *"...Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another and all the more as you see the day approaching."*

The reminder of togetherness, of shared purpose and the simple truth that we need one another has been a breath of fresh air for my soul. I witness it every week at First Lutheran - through our dedicated volunteers, inspiring leaders and members of all ages. This sense of unity keeps me grounded, reminding me I am not alone and that we are truly in this together.

As we look ahead to 2025, the words of Hebrews 10:24-25 feel less like verses and more like a roadmap. They call you and me to encourage, love, collaborate, act and be community. These principles will guide our journey forward - walking the path side by side.

So, as we step into 2025, let's carry hearts inspired by Hebrews 10:24-25. Together, we have the power to transform lives - not only our own but also those of countless others we may never meet.

MY TOP 10 HIGHLIGHTS OF 2024

During 2024, countless collaborations and partnerships took place with staff, leaders, committees, teams and members - far too many to name individually. Instead, I've compiled my Top 10 Highlights of 2024 (in no particular order) to celebrate the moments that stood out most:

#10: Launching Realm

Introducing Realm, our innovative online member platform, has already proven to be a game-changer. This exciting tool has and will continue to transform how we connect, engage and share information with one another. I'm thrilled about what it has already brought to our community and what it will continue to offer in the future.

#9: Time for Renewal and Inspiration

This year, I took some much-needed time in January and July for continuing education and personal rejuvenation. Among other things, I dove into two inspiring books that deeply motivated me: *Between the Listening and the Telling: How Stories Can Save Us* and *Leading Faithful Innovation: Following God Into a Hopeful Future*. The time to reflect, imagine and create was invaluable.

#8: Preserving Our Pandemic Stories

I had the privilege of publishing [*My Story. Our Story. God's Story., a digital book*](#) archiving over 180 mosaic tiles. These tiles, created by First Lutheran members in early 2022, tell each person's pandemic story - a heartfelt and lasting testament to our collective journey through a very difficult time.

#7: Conversations That Inspired

This year, I had the privilege of engaging in meaningful conversations with First member Millie Howe. She shared a remarkable story from the mid to late 1970s about Christopher LaPel, a Cambodian refugee who worshiped at First Lutheran. Inspired by her account, I connected with Christopher through several Zoom conversations, where I had the honor of hearing his riveting and deeply moving story firsthand.

Christopher's journey has profoundly touched my heart and ignited a new calling within me - a desire to share his story with our congregation and beyond. It is a story that deserves to be retold, one that carries the power to inspire and uplift. Stay tuned in 2025 as I embark on this path and explore how best to bring his incredible story to life.

#6: Stewardship Through Stories

Interviewing and filming members about how they've cultivated connection, community and grace - or experienced it through others - was an honor. These stories, shared during the Stewardship campaign, were deeply moving and I'm grateful for the trust they placed in me to help tell them.

#5: Planning the Fall Festival

Working with the Fall Festival planning team was an absolute joy! Collaborating with such creative, hardworking and outreach-focused members was empowering and so satisfying. Their dedication to living out our Welcome Statement was nothing short of inspiring.

#4: Gifts of Hope

Publishing the newly designed [Gifts of Hope online catalog](#) was a project I approached with careful thought. Our 11 partners and the people they serve entrusted me to share their stories through quotes, testimonies, photos and videos. The result? A record-breaking \$25,000+ in donations for our partners this year!

#3: Launching First Stories Newsletter

In 2024, I introduced the [First Stories newsletter](#), a quarterly publication highlighting the impactful narratives of our ministry. Filled with personal stories, testimonies, photos and videos, it resonated with many of you. Your positive feedback affirmed how vital it is to continue the newsletter in 2025.

#2: Community of Yes

Whether asking for readers, greeters, event volunteers or food donations, I saw time and again how this community steps up with generosity and enthusiasm. From offering hospitality to 40+ dozen cookies on Christmas Eve, your resounding "yes" made all the difference. Thank you!

#1: The Power of Your Stories

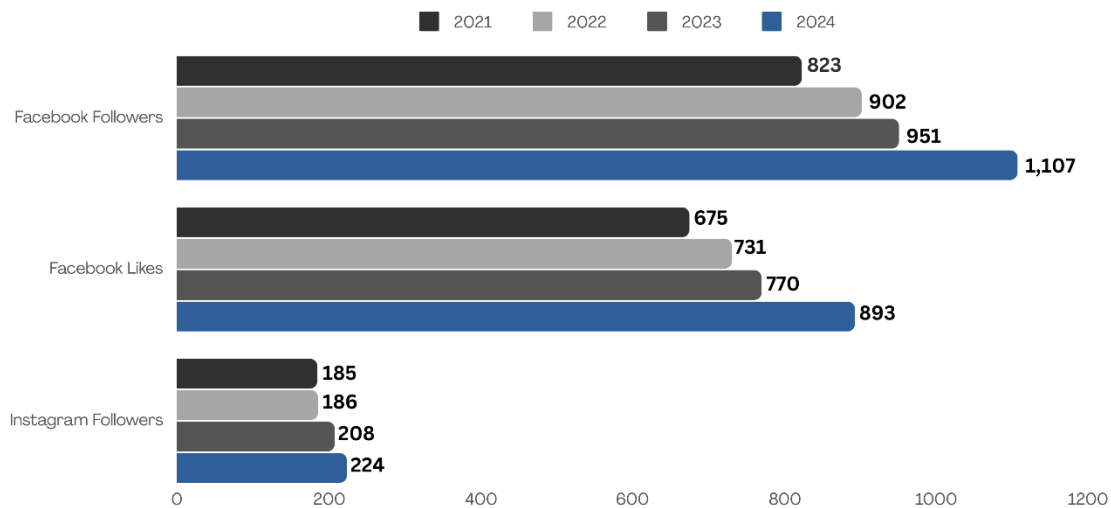
Above all, my greatest highlight is helping to tell your stories - stories of service, giving, worship, learning, accompaniment, outreach and being community. Your faith stories inspire me daily and remind me how privileged I am to serve as both the Communications Director and a fellow member of First Lutheran Church. I am grateful for all of you.

Here's to all we've accomplished together this year and to many more stories to share in 2025!

P.S. What follows is a glimpse into the impact of our social media, e-newsletters and website in 2024. While these tools are just one part of our broader outreach, they provide a snapshot of the consistent connections we've fostered week after week, month after month, here at First Lutheran. Though the data includes plenty of numbers, remember that most every number represents a person - a life

touched by our love and good works. Whether in our congregation, in Lincoln, Nebraska, across the United States or even around the world, our mission continues to reach and touch the lives of many.

SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWING



FUN FACTS ABOUT OUR FOLLOWERS

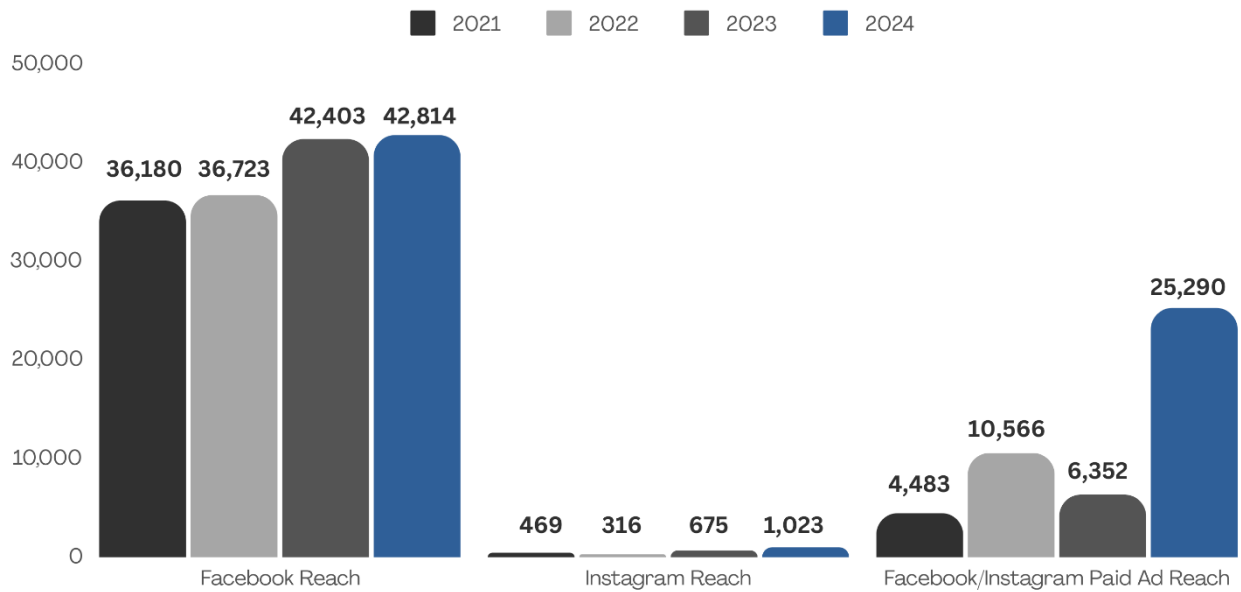
72% Of our Facebook followers are females with 28% being males.

Top 3 Cities where our followers reside are #1 Lincoln, #2 Omaha and #3 Fremont. The countries are #1 United States, #2 Liberia and #3 Bangladesh, Guatemala and Pakistan.

5:00 PM The time of day most of our Facebook followers are active.

8:00 PM The time of day most of our Instagram followers are active.

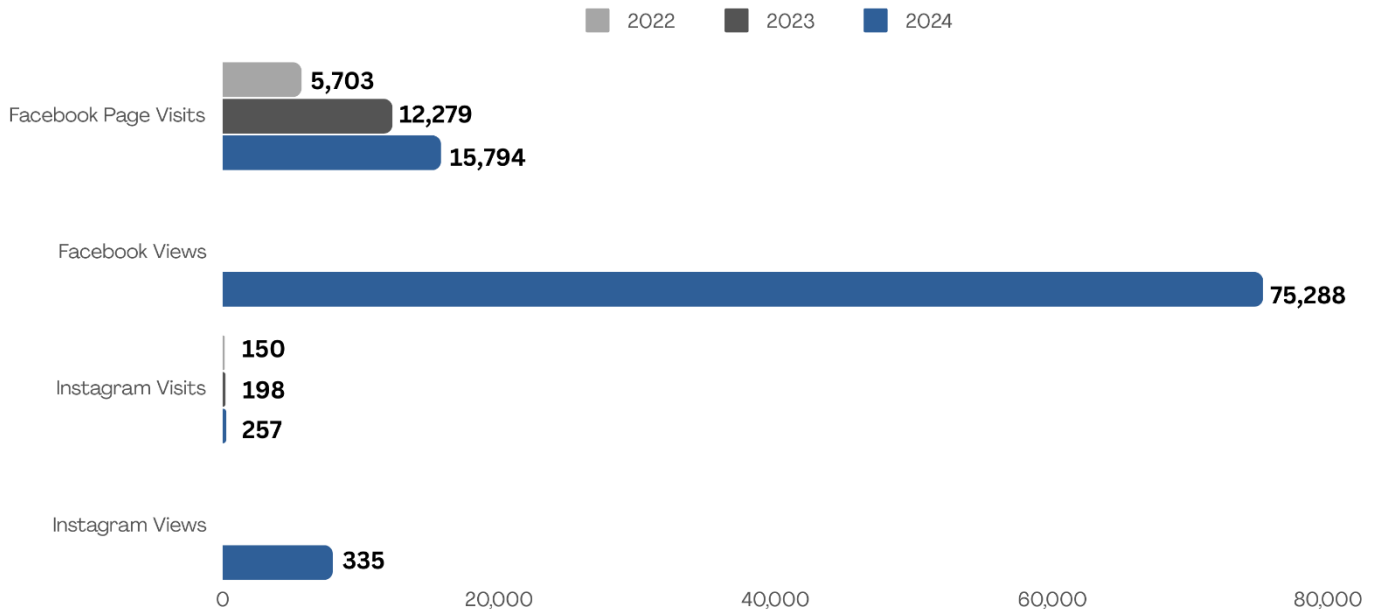
SOCIAL MEDIA REACH



SOCIAL MEDIA OUTREACH FACTS

- 500** The total number of Facebook posts in 2024.
- 335** The total number of Instagram posts in 2024.
- 1,168** The most people reached with a Facebook post in 2024 (July 7). The post was a quote - *“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”* – MLK Jr.
- 104** The most interactions (comments, likes, shares, etc) to a Facebook post in 2024 (December 12). The post was in honor of Ruby Augustine’s 105th birthday – our oldest member at First by age!
- 168** The most people reached with an Instagram post in 2024 (November 25). The post featured a front page story in the Journal Star newspaper about a Justice in Action rally.
- 7,494** Largest number of people reached by a Facebook and Instagram paid ad post in 2024 (March 8) promoting Vacation Bible School registration.

SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT



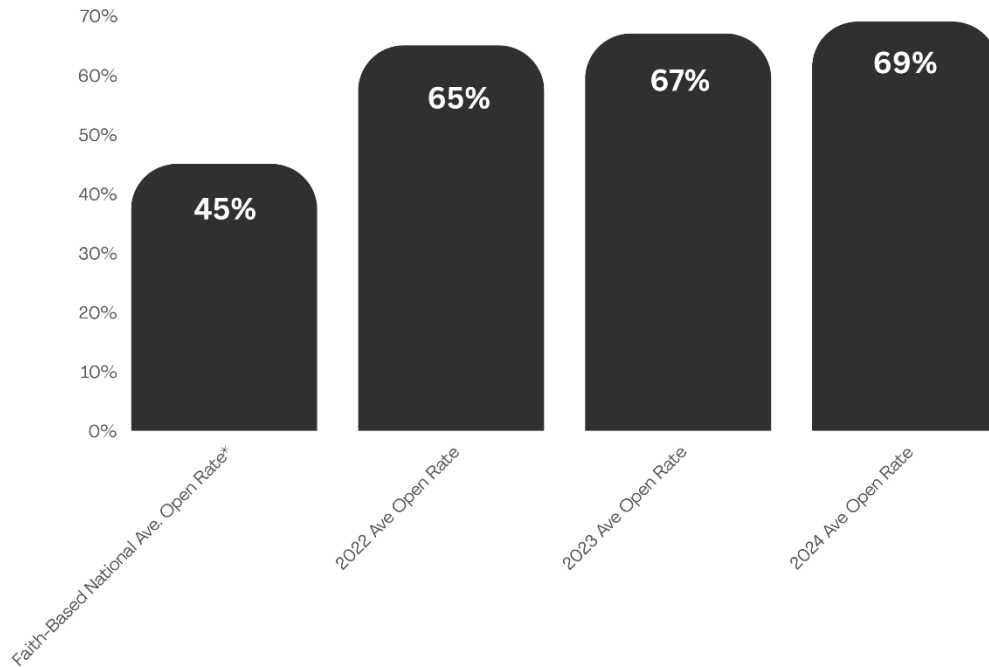
INTERESTING SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT FACTS

1,508 The most views of a Facebook post in 2024 (December 26). The post featured fun photos from our Christmas Eve photobooth.

194 The most views of an Instagram post in 2024 (November 25). The post featured a front page story in the Journal Star newspaper about a Justice in Action rally.

NOTE: Facebook and Instagram began to provide data about the number of views of a post in 2024. There is no comparative data to offer for 2022 and 2023.

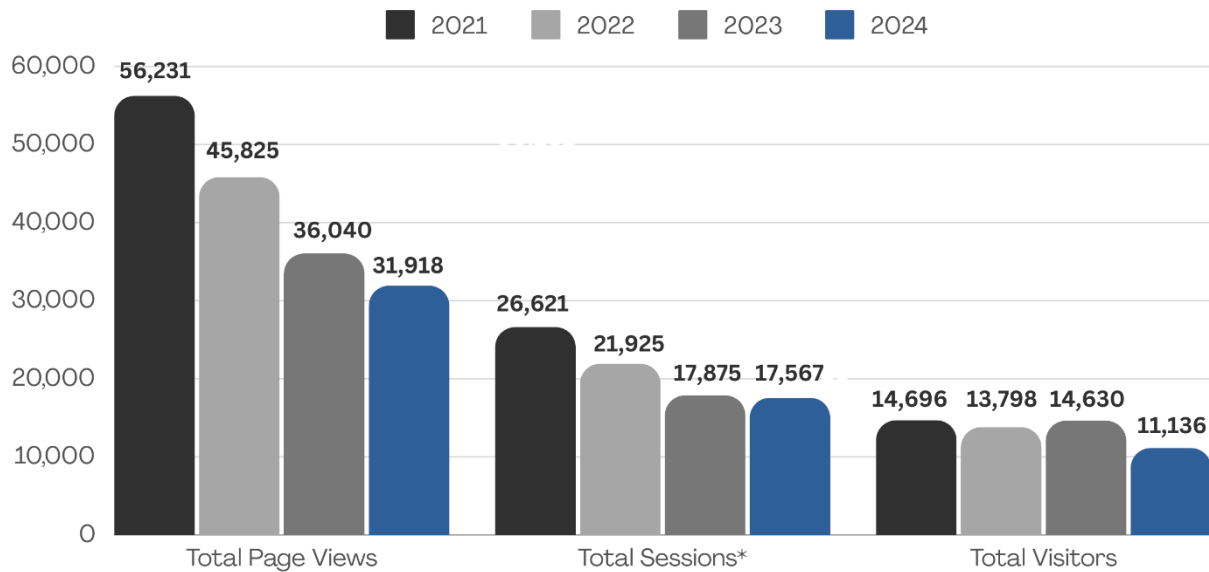
FIRST THINGS FIRST WEEKLY E-NEWSLETTER OPEN RATE



“BY THE NUMBER” EMAIL CAMPAIGN OUTREACH FACTS

- 139** Total email campaigns were sent. This includes 51 *First Things First* weekly e-newsletters, 41 FaithTrek weekly e-newsletters for parents of 3 yrs-5th grade, 9 *First Look* weekly e-newsletters for parents of middle and high school students, 13 Lent/Easter and Advent/Christmas weekly devotions, 18 death notices and 7 general announcement emails.
- 69%** The average open rate in 2024 for ALL email campaigns – a 2% increase from 2023.
- 545** People subscribe to our *First Things First* weekly e-newsletter. This is a net increase of 5 from 2023 and factors in new subscribers, unsubscribes and removal of bounced emails.
- 74%** The highest open rate in 2024 for a *First Things First* e-newsletter (January 31, 2024) and the highest open rate in the history of *First Things First*.
- 9%** The average click rate of links in *First Things First* emails. This is a 3% decrease compared to 2023, but still almost a 7% increase above the national average rate of 2.60%.

WEBSITE TRAFFIC



INSIGHTFUL WEBSITE OUTREACH FACTS

9,719 Total engaged sessions**

8,118 Total number of home page views on our website (a decrease of 3,432 from 2023). The top three page views were: #1 Home Page, #2 Calendar and #3 About Us.

1,777 Total livestream page views – a decrease of 890 compared to 2023.

580 Total sessions on our livestream page. This is the number of visitors who engaged with the web page and are most likely to have watched a livestream recording. This is a decrease of 95 compared to 2023.

*(*Total Sessions = Number of visitors who actually engaged with a web page)*

*(**Total engaged sessions = A session that lasts longer than 10 seconds or has at least 2 page views or screen views.)*

OTHER OUTREACH DATA

- 291** News posts on our website (<https://flclincoln.org/news>)
- 52** Published *First Glance* bulletin inserts.
- 52** Livestreamed or recorded Sunday worship services.
- 6** Recorded memorial services and Celebrations of Life and shared with families.
- 140** Videos were recorded and/or created and uploaded to Vimeo (<https://vimeo.com/flclincoln>). Includes videos of worship, sermons, Lenten midweek messages, music, ministries, special events, Adult Forum, educational videos, etc.
- 40** Video recordings of weekly sermons were shared on social media, our News webpage and on Vimeo every Tuesday from January to November.

WORSHIP AND MUSIC MINISTRY

BY MASAKO BACON, DIRECTOR OF WORSHIP AND MUSIC MINISTRY

By the grace of God, we had a fruitful year of 2024. I am grateful for the deep dedication of the people who are involved in this ministry.

Altar Guild

I am most grateful for this growing team Bonita Thomsen and Jan Wigodsky continue recruiting for and coordinating. Bob and Carlene Falos have been serving the Altar Guild ministry for Saturday worship. The team does their ministry with care for all of us to come together. This ministry involves weekly setup of and cleaning for communion.

Altar Guild Ministry Volunteers:

Pat DeWald, Jan Wigodsky, Karen Moser, Linda Bogenrief, Courtney Anderson, Faye, Doolittle, Teresa Brohimer, Doris Bushard, Molly Goninan, Gay Sutter, Tracy Knezevic, Eleanor Anderson, Angie Ripa, Donice Kaspar, Cindy Schuster, Chris Wilhelm, Nguyet Ho, Karen Statham, Colin Schmitter, Kyle Schmitter and Vivi Pfister.

Music Ministry

Adult Choir: Their weekly leadership (except for the first Sunday) is appreciated. We welcomed a few new singers from new member classes.

Spirit Ringers: We welcomed a new member. Besides playing once a month for Sunday worship services, some members of the group played for Holden Evening Services during Advent, at the door for a Christmas Eve worship service and for one of our members at a rehabilitation facility.

Jazz: We welcomed new young people. Once a month they played for both worship services. It is particularly pleasing to see the growth of players, especially young people.

Brass: Many members double with the Jazz Team, which means they make time for intense rehearsals and playing multiple services. We are grateful for their dedication.

FaithTrek & Youth Music: It is a blessing to see love for playing music at the worship services among the children. I am grateful for all the work done by Jan Modica, Erin Niebuhr and Kristina

Hansen with the children. Erin also arranges pieces for both FaithTrek and Youth Orff and directs the Youth Orff group.

String Ensembles: We had a wonderful full group until the wonderful Niebuhr children left for college. We miss them and their presence and music, but the rest of the group showed growth and strength surprisingly well. We also have a new player who joined this fall. I look forward to this ministry with talented string players.

Cantors & Soloists: Keeping to the traditional Lutheran worship experience makes the presence of a cantor essential. We are blessed to have many people who stepped up to be a cantor and lead our worship services. Also, I'm grateful to have people who shared their vocal and instrumental music throughout the year. The ages range from twelve to ninety-six.

Special Worship Services

- February 14: Ash Wednesday Worship Service (Noon & 6:30PM)
- March 17: UNL Lutheran Center Band
- February 21- March 20: Lenten Midweek Worship Services with Holden Evening Prayer (Wednesdays at Noon and 6:30 PM)
- March 24: Palm Sunday - Passion of Jesus – Reader's Theatre
- March 28: Maundy Thursday (Noon & 6:30 PM)
- March 29: Good Friday - Children's Service at Noon and Tenebrae service at 6:30 PM
- March 30: Easter Vigil - Combined churches and hosted at First Lutheran
- March 31: Easter Worship Services – Held at 8:00, 9:30 and 11:00 AM
- June 2: Synod Assembly Worship Service - Only one service at 11:00 AM when we joined the closing worship service of the Nebraska Synod Assembly through livestream in the Activity Center, as recommended by Synod
- July 14: One worship service at 10:45 AM - Vitality Initiative
- October 6: Commitment Sunday & Fall Festival Day – No Saturday Worship
- October 27: Reformation Sunday - 10:45 AM worship only due to the Good Life Halfsy
- November 3: All Saints Sunday (both services) and Confirmation Sunday at 10:45 AM
- November 24: Christ the King – Celebrating Reign of the Christ in the Seasons of the Church
- December 1, 8, 15 and 22: Advent Sundays
- December 5, 12, 19: Advent Midweek Services with Holden Evening Prayer (Wednesdays at Noon and 6:30 PM)

- December 21: Service of the Longest Night (Grief Service) at 6:30 PM
- Christmas Eve Worship Services: Held at 1:30, 3:30, 5:30 and 7:30 PM
- Christmas Day Worship Service: Held at 10:00 AM
- First Sunday of Christmas – One service only at 10:45 AM

A Few Changes and “First Times” in 2024

- Easter Vigil was held with Shepherd of the Hills, Spirit of Hope and Zion Lutheran Church. The role of hosting this service will be shared among the churches each year.
- The first time of livestreaming a worship service with our congregation gathered in the Activity Center happened when we connected with the Synod Assembly worship service in June.
- Celebrating Reign of the Christ was held on Christ the King Sunday at the end of the church year after having a few years of “Thanksgiving Sunday”. Celebrating the whole church year with readings, music and liturgical color was well received.
- Harold Sutter became the new chair of the Worship & Music Committee.

2024 First Lutheran Church Musicians

Adult Choir

Bryce Anderson, Tony Anderson, Betsy Bjerke, Sharon Bohl, Kathy Dalby, Kristi Fisher, Chris Gabriel, Kristina Hanson, Sharon Hardel, Priscilla Hayden-Roy, Craig Heier, Ann Johnson, Rod Johnson, Andy Kruse, Janet Kruse, Terry Kruse, Andy Kuhn, Karen Kuhn, Karen Lenzen, Mark Mesarch, Jan Modica, Doug Lind-Olson, Joel Nelson, Arlene Nelson, Len Nelson, Ann Nitzel, Carla Osberg, Bill Peterson, Judy Peterson, David Pitts, David Pfister, Erin Pfister, Paul Runyan, Robyn Runyan, Alisa Sandin, Liana Sandin, Linda Sears, Jane Shaner, Gay Sutter, Martha Tanner, Bonita Thomsen, Ron Thomsen, Jenna Troutman, Maya Troutman, Jan Wigodsky, Kristy Williams and Gordon Youngquist

Summer Choir (Outside Other Choirs)

Dawn Brock, Paul Cramer, Kari Hoeft, Brian Niebuhr, Erin Niebuhr, Aden Niebuhr, Will Niebuhr, Xander Niebuhr, Malcolm Pfister, Vivi Pfister, Kathi Schmitter, Kate Schmitter, Kyle Schmitter and Colin Schmitter

Spirit Ringers

Ann Bouma, Richard Bouma, Christine Carman, Kristi Fisher, Sandy Latshaw, Connie Kisling, Brian Niebuhr, Erin Niebuhr, Will Niebuhr, Xander Niebuhr, Lillie Rademacher, Shirley Rogge, Karen Statham, Martha Tanner, Bonita Thomsen, Denise Tiedgen and Tracy Way

Special Handbell Groups/Substitute Ringers (Besides Spirit Ringers)

Linda Carlson, Roxy Just, Aden Niebuhr, Will Niebuhr, Ann Nitzel and Lillie Rademacher

Brass and Timpani

Bryce Anderson, Tony Anderson, Bennett Bacon, Trevor Culbertson, Alex Hinton, Spencer Janssen, Steve Janssen, RJ Metteer, Aden Niebuhr, Christian Paulsen, Matt Reckmeyer, Jay Sears, Harold Sutter, Martha Tanner, Tom Thorpe, Myles Thorpe, Tommy Thorpe and Jenna Troutman

Jazz Team

Bryce Anderson, Tony Anderson, Bennett Bacon, Courtney Bruntz, Caitlin Buckwalter, Trevor Culbertson, Dakota Fisher, Kristi Fisher, Konnor Garrett, Alex Hinton, Spencer Janssen, Sophia Johnson, RJ Metteer, Christian Paulsen, Carol Reckmeyer, Matt Reckmeyer, Kyle Schmitter, Bob Schoetter, Jay Sears, Christopher Simley, Martha Tanner, Tom Thorpe, Jenna Troutman, Scott Vicroy and Anna Wemhoff

String Ensemble

Kara Baxter, Sebastian Baxter, Bennett Bacon, Kaitlyn Brock, Lucas Culbertson, Konnor Garrett, Mai Jacobo, Anna Kruse, Aden Niebuhr, Brian Niebuhr, Erin Niebuhr, Will Niebuhr, Xander Niebuhr, Kayla Peters, Jenna Troutman and Elsa Wemhoff

Cantors and Vocalists (Vocal & Instrumental)

Amanda Andersen, Bryce Anderson, Betsy Bjerke, Dawn Brock, Kaitlyn Brock, Tony Bushard, Zachary Bushard, Nicholas Bushard, Daniel Bushard, Christine Carman, Lucas Culbertson, Kristi Fisher, Dakota Fisher, Kathy Havelicek-Cook, Clare Ehlers, Eliana Genis Frank Sharon Hardel, Kari Hoeft, Cora Hoeft, Megan Hulse, Connie Kisling, Rebecca Kokes, Anna Kruse, Doug Lind-Olson, Mark Mesarch, Brian Niebuhr, Erin Niebuhr, Aden Niebuhr, Will Niebuhr, Xander Niebuhr, Ann Nitzel, Pr. Bill Peterson, Judy Peterson, Erin Pfister, David Pitts, Liana Sandin, Martha Tanner, Bonita Thomsen, Amy Thorpe, Scott Vicroy, Julia Williams and Gordon Youngquist

Youth Orff

Bennett Bacon, Kaitlyn Brock, Stephen Fisher, Cora Hoeft, Daniel Long, Maddie Meyer, Malcolm Pfister, Kyle Schmitter, Maya Troutman, Cole Troutman, Anna Wemhoff and Sawyer White

FaithTrek

Sabrina Andersen, Achim Click, Bryar Hughes, Harlow Hughes, Marceline Just, Oliver Logsdon, Reese Logsdon, Sofia Long, Owen Meyer, Carson Peters, Vivi Pfister, Harper Schaffer, Walter Schaffer, Colin Schmitter, Calvin Schawang, Jules Schawang, Maxine Schawang, Valentine Schawang, Jax Warnke, Frank Way, Elsa Wemhoff, Kenton White, Dax Wiebelhaus, Milo Wiebelhaus and Nash Wiebelhaus

Thank you for sharing your gifts!

2025 Goal

My goal for the coming year is to grow together in ministry. I hope to be more diligent about connecting and reconnecting people to serve together. I would especially like to see growth in the area of worship assistant volunteers.

YOUTH AND FAMILY MINISTRY

BY SHARON HARDEL, YOUTH & FAMILY MINISTRY DIRECTOR

Greetings and thank you to everyone who helped make 2024 a wonderful year for the youth and families here at First Lutheran. I hold you all in prayer as we look forward to another year of ministry together. Here are the highlights from our ministry each month below that was new or helped us grow in our discipleship.

January

- We held a mini-intergenerational VBS over Christmas break that enabled us to learn about Epiphany and “*Shine our lights*” around Lincoln. We packed cold weather kits, baked cookies, served at the Center for People and at Matt Talbot, and enjoyed a pizza party movie as a wrap up. This was a new venture for 2024 and we repeated it in December with “*Wrapped in Love*.”
- We began training on a new membership software called Realm and that training continued throughout the year. This software allows us to communicate better with members and load a picture of ourselves on our profile, so it also serves as a photo directory.
- I attended the ELCA Youth Worker’s Extravaganza for continuing education and was able to explore the city and plan for the upcoming summer Youth Gathering.
- I was privileged to participate in Pastor Erick’s ordination and celebrate with him and First Lutheran members at the event.

February

- Carol Olson and I put together “Go and Pray” stations for members to explore on a Sunday afternoon from 12 – 6. This was an opportunity to grow in our spiritual practices and reflect on the Synod’s Go And... campaign. We received positive comments from those that attended, and we hope more will take advantage of the opportunities in the future.
- The youth were invited to my home for a Super Bowl Party, and we had a great time playing games, eating, and watching the game.
- I began meeting with Pastor Eric Spruth-Janssen from St. James in Humboldt because he asked to join us with his youth for the Youth Gathering. We were glad to have Josie join us for the event, however due to the death of his father, Pastor Eric had to cancel last minute.
- This year was Leap Year, so I invited youth to stop in at Scooters for a Leap Day treat and was able to have some fun conversations with them and catch up on what they were doing.

March

- The month of concerts and school plays...I was able to attend 5 concerts and plays to cheer on our youth.
- The youth tried their hand at glass fusion art in Omaha and we designed crosses and had conversations about the season of Lent.
- The Youth served at Center for People on a day off school by prepping and painting two rooms as part of the center's plan for renovating the People's Pantry and Diaper distribution.
- Laura and I designed a Lego intergenerational event for Palm Sunday where the participants built the Passion Week story out of Lego. The idea of a Lego room was spawned at the Youth Worker's Extravaganza, and this was our kickoff event. It was a huge success, and many visitors complimented the display of the creations, they were beyond any of our expectations, and I believe the participants will remember the passion stories they created for the rest of their lives. Laura and I handed out Lego sets to all the elementary aged children on Easter Sunday, while preschoolers received egg shaped sidewalk chalk.

April

- The Lincoln and Omaha Youth Workers held a ministry planning meeting at Camp Carol Joy Holling. This was educational as well as giving us a chance to plan some combined activities for the remainder of the year.
- VBS planning really began before April with Kari Lickliter and I choosing curriculum and ironing out logistics. We kicked into full gear with decorating meetings and volunteer sign-ups in April.
- The Middle School Synod Youth Gathering was changed to a single day event this year. We focused on discipleship and serving. Our youth learned how to use their gifts and were able to serve by stocking neighborhood food boxes throughout Lincoln.
- Pastor Andrew and I led a "Welcome to Middle School" milestone for our 5th graders who would be entering 6th grade in the fall. We focused on being created in God's image and their identities. We met with parents first while youth were at music and helped answer questions, which were mostly about Confirmation and what that entailed.

May

- We celebrated the end of Discipleship University for the spring at Urban Air where Confirmands and parents enjoyed pizza, conversation, and lots of jumping.
- Many of our usual events happened, such as the Mother's Day Brunch Fundraiser, Blessing our Graduates, the Last Day of School Ice Cream meet up, and of course more VBS meetings. Summer Trip planning meetings were also happening throughout the year; however, we

were now getting more into the logistics of travel and packing. We also held our Prayer Partner potluck with time for students to meet and have conversation with their prayer partners.

- The Pastors, Laura and I met to begin planning fall and what needed covered while I was on Sabbatical. A full staff planning session was held at the end of the month to coordinate the church calendar and future events.

June

- We held a summer trip and summer camp blessing for all attendees. We added photos of each participant this year in a bulletin insert so the congregation could put a face with each name and keep us in prayer as we traveled.
- Many more VBS and Summer Trip planning meetings took place. Special thanks to Erin Pfister for leading VBS training for volunteers!
- We held a new fundraiser at Don and Millie's (as one of our youth participants worked there) which gave congregation members a chance to fellowship together as they ate. I was happy to see so many members come out and support our youth.
- VBS was held at Our Saviour's Lutheran Church, we have been partnering with them for the last 2 years. It was a great week of learning, singing, and playing together. We concluded our week with a magic show and pizza party celebration. We had over 40 children participate and over 30 volunteers throughout the week. 2025 VBS will be held at First Lutheran.
- The Middle School trip to Louisville enabled our youth and advisors to leave our mark on the city. We helped in community gardens and service ministry sites around the city as well as having time to worship with and get to know youth from several other states that participated the same week we did. And we got a chance to explore some of the city and learn about the history there.

July

- I met with Laura, Dave Schmitter, and Jenna to coordinate Backpack Blessing and Middle and High School Learning start up in the fall. I also met with Karrie to finalize the VBS expenses and evaluate our week.
- We had our final Youth Gathering Meeting before heading to New Orleans for the event. In New Orleans the youth had many opportunities to explore the city, worship with about 16,000 other Lutherans in the Smoothie King Areana, and have time to gather as a Synod for worship and a city-wide scavenger hunt. Our day of service was helping to pick up trash at

an abandoned mall site destroyed by Katrina. The owners of this property were hoping to start a youth center once the cleanup was completed. One of the highlights of our trip was being selected as part of the mass cast for worship. We learned a choreographed routine and were able to be on the main stage one evening at worship. We heard so many amazing speakers, had time to explore, and learn about the ministries of the ELCA, as well as play in the interactive center.

- I began my sabbatical a week after returning from the youth gathering. I tried to make sure that I had the supplies ready for fall learning kick off and that my remaining responsibilities were covered for the duration of my sabbatical.

August – Mid-September

- My Sabbatical report is on record with Council. I was grateful for the opportunity to reconnect with God in new ways, travel, and receive rest and renewal.

September

- I began a 3-year term on the Lutheran Student Center Governance Council and I serve as the secretary for this board. (I was asked over the summer to participate)
- I met with staff and Jenna to discuss the summer and be brought up to speed with the events that were scheduled before I left for sabbatical
- Our Congregational Retreat was held at Camp Carol Joy Holling. We had a wonderful day together and those that attended expressed their thankfulness for the opportunity to fellowship together. Please join us in the future as it is a great way to grow in community together in a relaxed and beautiful setting.
- Our 9th graders met with Pastor Andrew and me to prepare for their Affirmation of Baptism service. They designed their own stoles, highlighted their favorite Bible verses in each other's bibles and signed up to serve in worship the day of their affirmation. Pastor Andrew and I were thrilled when Kayla said she would preach the sermon.

October

- A Middle School camp out was held at Southwood Lutheran Church. We cooked over an open fire, sang songs and did skits by the campfire, played games, and slept in tents. This was a new event and great opportunity to meet other youth.
- A Synod learning day was held at Camp Carol Joy Holling for Youth Workers. Bishop Johnson kicked it off with a devotional reflection and we had a presentation on mental health from social workers at Cedars. After our learning time, we were able to collaborate on planning events and curriculum sharing.

- A fun day and scary night have become a favorite youth group activity at Rocca Berry Farm. Sheridan Lutheran rents a campfire and several groups from the Lincoln area join in the fun. This year Memorial Lutheran in Syracuse joined us.
- “The Bake Sale of Indulgences” was held on Reformation Sunday as a youth fundraiser, thanks to all the members that donated and / or purchased items. One of our youth also roamed around as Martin Luther to pose for pictures and entertain those coming to worship.

November

- We held our annual Affirmation of Baptism service and breakfast. The confirmand families appreciate the celebration, and it gives the youth a chance to explain the stoles they designed. Kayla Peters preached an amazing sermon while the other students did a great job reading, carrying the cross, and assisting with communion.
- This year the youth had off school for election day. So, we put our hospitality hats on and handed out cookies, muffins, pizza, and sandwiches along with water and coffee throughout the day. The youth also got a personal tour of the voting process by one of the poll workers. We had so many comments of thanks from the community as well as questions about our congregation and worship times. We also collected over \$100 in tips (no donation was required). Along with serving treats at the polls, our Gather and Gab group set up a prayer vigil that began on Election Eve and ran through Election Day. Thanks for praying with us!
- I had the privilege to meet with one of our young adults who went on the Youth Gathering with us to discuss baptism. She has not been baptized and was asking a lot of questions about the Bible and Confirmation. We talked for quite a while, and she is now helping to plan the Dec. Mini VBS and will talk with one of the Pastors about a February 2025 baptism.
- Some of our High School Youth attended the Synod “Shine” weekend where they learned about leadership styles and got to practice their styles through games, problem solving activities, scripture study, and worship. I was so proud of our youth for helping to lead music and design banners for worship.

December

- Established a Prayground for the mid-week Advent worship services where children (of all ages) can do some hands-on activities that reinforce the theme and lessons of Advent during the service. We want to make this worship more accessible and welcoming to families.
- Took adults and youth to St. Benedict Retreat Center to experience “Christmas on the Hill”. We marveled over beautiful nativity sets that came from around the world and shopped at local craft vendors booths. It was a great time to fellowship.

- Judy Bailey and I had been working since October to pick, cast and practice our Christmas Pageant. It was a big hit and so many complimented us on what a wonderful pageant it was. Some of the cast have begun asking what we will do for Easter...stay tuned!
- We end our year like it started with our Intergenerational Mini VBS "*Wrapped in Love*". Plans and sign ups are underway as I write this report.

A huge thank you to all those involved in the youth and family ministry here at First Lutheran. Your prayers, monetary support, willingness to provide meals, snacks and rides, to facilitate learning and go on trips with us is so appreciated! I couldn't do it without you!

FAITHTREK MINISTRY

BY LAURA GRAULTY, FAITHTREK COORDINATOR

We are still growing in FaithTrek. We can take attendance with Realm, therefore it's easy to track our numbers. We average 16 children per week. I'm proud of the growth I see and pray for continued growth. Every week I tweak the curriculum, contact the teachers and prepare the rooms with all the supplies needed to be successful, as well as plan and execute a monthly children's sermon. I very much enjoy doing the children's sermon on the first Sunday of the month. I'm pleased to hear that the recipients are benefiting from the amounts collected. I get information to the parents every week in my Weekly Blast email and use it to connect with the lesson taught that week.

Here's some monthly highlights from 2024:

January

Sharon Hardel and I went to New Orleans, LA for the Extravaganza Conference for youth ministries. It was my first and was very informative. You have that seminar to thank for my mission to establish a Lego room at First Lutheran.

February

The FaithTrekkers made Valentine's for homebound members. I washed and cleaned thousands of Lego blocks.

March

The intergenerational event - depicting the Holy Week through Lego creations - was populated mostly by FaithTrekkers and their families. I was disappointed greatly that the majority of the congregation chose not to attend. Pastor Erin introduced a Good Friday "kid friendly" service that I helped with and that was fun and well received. Carlene Falos helped me with "resurrection rolls" and the people loved them. Sharon and I passed out Lego blocks or sidewalk chalk to children attending Easter service, along with information about summer VBS and FaithTrek.

April-May

Easter was celebrated and planning for the end of the FaithTrek year breakfast in May was done. The Lego room was finally up and running and available to all ages and for anyone who loves to create.

June-August

I hosted a movie night at the church for families with Sharon. I sent out some reminder emails and calendar dates of important events to parents. I met with Sharon before her sabbatical so I could be squared away for the new year. I met with Kathleen to get some tips on Realm and wrote an article for her for an upcoming publication of the new First Stories newsletter. I looked through the next year's lectionary curriculum starting in the fall and planned a Lego lesson for FaithTrek every 6 weeks during the year. I went through the supply closet and reorganized, threw out dried up glue, etc and reordered low supplies. I helped Sharon with Vacation Bible School.

September

Attended the All-Congregation Retreat at Camp Carol Joy Holling near Ashland. The new year saw FaithTrek continuing to grow and we had teacher sign up complete for the fall in one week. I taught a Lego lesson about building a house on firm ground or sand and it was a big hit.

October

The cherubs attended the Fall Festival and there was a good turnout of them. This month was busy with FaithTrek when we had a strong emphasis on putting others first. We had a lot of musical practice for the upcoming performance in worship on November 3. Sharon and I registered and made reservations for the ELCA Youth Ministers Extravaganza to be held in Louisville, KY in January. Reformation Sunday activities were held, and I manned the "build a mighty fortress station".

November

November had FaithTrek class lessons, along with me teaching a lesson with Lego bricks over the books of the Bible - with the kids working in groups to "stack" the books.

The "Lego Challenge" that was launched earlier culminated on Gratitude Sunday. We had about 15 entries, with 4 winners. Our judges were definitely intergenerational, with ages from 4-90. A huge thank you to our judges - Marci J, Valentine S, Jenna T and Bob F. FaithTrek practiced music for upcoming worship performances in December and being sheep/angels for the intergenerational Christmas pageant on December 15.

December

The "Prayground" during Advent midweek services launched and I helped Sharon with this. I participated in the Christmas Pageant and it went well. Lastly, I helped make crafts for the children and family worship service at 1:30 PM on Christmas Eve, as well as attended the 3:30 PM service when the FaithTrekkers sang and played the Orff instruments. I also helped Sharon with the New Year's Eve noon pizza party - part of the mini VBS - on December 31.

ADULT EDUCATION COMMITTEE

BY PATRICK HAYDEN-ROY, CHAIR

Committee Members

Patrick Hayden-Roy (Chair), Sharon Hardel, Lyle Petersen, Elaine Kruse, Brian Niebuhr, Rod Johnson, Ann Johnson, Gorden Saksena and Karen Moser

The Adult Education Committee continued this year with its program of offerings during the education hour to further members understanding of our Lutheran heritage and Christian faith, as well as topics that connect that faith to the circumstances of our lives and society. Below are some highlights of this year's sessions:

- Who was Martin Luther?
- Visible and Invisible Disabilities
- The Numerical Decline of the Church
- Supernal Anthems Echoing": The Poetry of our Hymns
- Backyard Gardening with Jeff Culbertson
- Summer Bible Study with Pastors Erin and Andrew
- The Holden Village Lutheran Community of Washington State
- Justice in Action
- Welcoming Advent
- Visiting the Holy Land with Norm Kempf
- Stepping Out of the Chaos

Attendance averaged around 30-35 on a typical Sunday, which is a slight improvement over the most recent years. One change this year saw Connie Kisling step out of her long service as Chair of the Committee. Thank you, Connie (and Jim)! We also saw the addition of Karen Moser to our Committee.

We look forward to another year of engaging the congregation with spiritually and intellectually stimulating sessions. We hope to see you there!

COLUMBARIUM COMMITTEE

BY TOM TIEDGEN, CHAIR

The Columbarium Committee consists of 6 members and the Lead Pastor - Tom Tiedgen (chair), Bill Shaner (vice-chair), Kay Rockwell (secretary), Dale Bowder, Jan Modica, Dale Ripa and Pastor Erin Heidelberger.

2024 Highlights:

- The committee met twice in 2024 – April 8 and October 21.
- 109, of the 152, niches have been reserved and paid for (3 were sold this year).
- There are 53 individuals inured in the Columbarium.
- Kay Rockwell and Jan Modica were re-appointed for another three-year term. Terms end May 31, 2027.
- On Memorial Day, a *Service of Remembrance* was held to recognize all lost loved ones.
- Jeff and Linda Culbertson continue to take care of the Memorial Garden space.

First Lutheran Church's website has a [link to the Columbarium](#) where you can find documents to reserve a niche. Niches are \$1000 each which includes canister for ashes, bronze nameplate and perpetual care. Also located on the Columbarium link, is the [Book of Remembrance](#), which includes each inured individual's picture and life story.

ENDOWMENT BOARD

BY ANN CARLSON, CHAIR

Endowment Board Members

Ann Carlson, 2nd Term, 2nd Year

Karen Peppmuller, 2nd Term, 1st Year

Steve Doolittle, 1st Term, 3rd Year

Tracy Way, 1st Term, 3rd Year

Madalyn Popken, 1st Term, 1st Year

Board Highlights

The Board welcomed Madalyn Popken as a new member.

Investment Fund Activity

The purpose of the First Lutheran Church Endowment Board is to grow the portfolio such that the annual distributions do not expend any of the principal of the fund and the portfolio meets a socially responsible investment strategy. It shall be the policy of the Board to distribute up to 6% of the preceding three-year average balance, while never expending the donated principal of the fund.

In 2024, the Board elected to distribute \$21,500.00, which amounts to approximately a 3% distribution strategy. This is consistent with the strategy used in 2023.

Other than a bank balance and a certificate of deposit, the Endowment Board assets are invested with the ELCA Ministry Growth Fund.

Fund Distributions

The Board's bylaws dictate that a minimum of 10% of the fund's annual income be distributed to fulfill three areas: Education, Outreach and Missions of ELCA. This year's distributions include:

Education - \$11,000.00 (51.16%)

- Eleven scholarships at \$1,000 each to FLC Scholarship Applicants

Outreach - \$6,500.00 (30.23%)

- FLC Pastor's Discretionary Fund - \$2,500.00
- Lincoln Littles - \$2,500.00
- Tabitha Meals on Wheels - \$1,500.00

Missions of the ELCA - \$4,000.00 (18.61%)

- WELCA (quilts) - \$1,000.00 (*The funds will be used for making and shipping our Lutheran World Relief quilts.*)
- Camp Carol Joy Holling FLC Scholarships - \$1,000.00
- Nebraska Lutheran Outdoor Ministries - \$2,000.00 (*The funds will go toward the Campership program, ensuring that camp remains within the reach of every family, not just those who can afford it.*)

Concluding Remarks

The Board would like to thank our congregation for its support and contributions. Your gifts support our First Lutheran family and community to continue the ministry you believe in.

FAITH TO GO

BY TERA BEERMANN

The Faith To Go group continues to meet the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays at the early hour of 6:30 AM via Zoom. Zoom allows for members to participate from home, even when they are out of town.

This year we've heard from about 20 First Lutheran members and staff who shared a glimpse of their daily life. As you can imagine our conversations vary as we invite students, those working inside or outside the home and those enjoying retirement. Speakers share about their family, interests, faith life, involvement at First Lutheran and what drew them to First Lutheran, etc.

Small groups are a wonderful way to get to know each other and create connections. This is an invitation to join the conversation.

FELLOWSHIP COMMITTEE

BY JUDY BATTERMAN, CHAIR

Committee Members

Ann Allen, Judy Bailey, Judy Batterman, Linda Bogenreif, Linda Carlson, Pat DeWald, Carlene Falos, Karen Moser, Cindy Schuster, Carol Tesar, Gordon Wolfe and Verla Youngquist

The goal of this Committee is to provide fun and fellowship for the congregation. Many of our events revolve around food, breaking bread together and having fun. We continue to serve coffee between services on the 3rd Sunday of the month. We lost long-time committee member, Phyllis Frickel, in January. We miss her and are grateful for the many years she served with us. Our committee meets on the second Tuesday of the month at 5:30 PM and welcome newcomers.

Pastor Erin met with us in January to go over events that were scheduled for 2024 where we could be of service.

- During the seasons of Lent and Advent we facilitated and served the soup lunches and suppers with help from the congregation who made soup and baked bread. On the 5th Wednesday in Lent, we switched out to a Taco Bar. The weekly Advent attendance at the meals was between 70 and 80 people and for Lent it was 80-90. The free-will offerings from both went to the BackPack Program.
- Palm Sunday weekend, we provided an Easter Egg Hunt for 40 children in the congregation and their friends, along with a puppet show – thanks to Bev White and singing led by Laura Grauly. We sent invitation flyers home with our Las Abejitas families. It was a snowy day, so we held the event inside and provided lots of crafts and candy.
- On Easter Sunday we hosted the Easter breakfast serving over 120 people.
- During the year, we facilitated the potluck meals preceding the Town Hall Meetings (April, July and October).
- We also assisted with the serving and/or providing of refreshments for the UNL Musicians in March, the worship service in conjunction with Synod Assembly in May, helped with the Falos birthday party in April, Senior Recognition and a farewell reception for Joan Carlson in May and coffee/treats following the Christmas Pageant in December.
- In July we hosted the annual tailgate prior to a Saltdogs baseball game with 59 in attendance.
- We assisted with the October Fall Festival, handing out ice cream sandwiches and water and helped with games and crafts.

- We again hosted Thanksgiving Day Dinner for 60+ attendees and Christmas Dinner on Christmas Day, providing the turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes and gravy. The attendees always provide ample amounts of good food.
- In June, Mandy West assisted us in setting up our Realm apps.
- The Stewardship Committee asked us to submit a budget request for 2025, so we spent time evaluating our priorities and monetary commitment. As a result, we asked for a larger amount to cover expenses formerly covered by committee members.

Fellowship is a fun and giving group and we are always ready to step in and help whenever and wherever needed.

FIRST FRIDAY JAZZ

BY LEE ROCKWELL

All goes well for our monthly First Friday Jazz concerts. We are in the middle of our 13th season running from October through May of 2025. Each concert draws about 250 people from throughout Lincoln. We continue to handle the details with a small efficient committee ...Steve Janssen handles the performer bookings, Steve Lenzen and his crew cook and serve the monthly lunches and Kathleen Simley handles most of the publicity efforts.

Our concerts continue to be self-supporting. We have been fortunate that this has been the case every year since we began in 2011. Excess revenue has occasionally been used to support sound enhancements to the Activity Center. Our January concerts have traditionally been cooked and served by our church youth and their parents. Any revenue beyond our out-of-pocket costs are given to the youth account which supports their summer mission trips. Audience members are encouraged to bring non-perishable food items for the Lincoln Lutheran Food Pantry.

Please join us for one of our concerts the first Friday of each month from October through May from 11:30 a.m. To 1:00 p.m.

GIFTS OF HOPE ALTERNATIVE GIVING MARKET

BY BARB JOHNSON FRANK

2024 Planning Team

Wendy Bonaiuto, Barry Graham, Vicki Graham, Barb Johnson Frank, Pastor Andrew Kitzing, Terry Kruse and Kathleen Simley

The 2024 Gifts of Hope Market opened online on December 7 and 8 with the in-person market held on December 8. A [new online catalog](#) was designed and published allowing members and others to connect year-round with the 11 partners featured in the 2024 market.

For Gifts of Hope Alternative Giving Market, an Advent tradition at First Lutheran Church grounded in the congregation's Welcome Statement, 2024 was a year of evaluation and growth.

- Once an outreach of the congregation's Global Mission and Action Committee (no longer in existence), Gifts of Hope needed a home in the congregation's structure.
- As a follow-up to 2023 feedback, Pastor Andrew Kitzing convened a "Dream Team" of members who identified themselves on Discipleship Plans as outside-the-box, big-picture thinkers. This group, originally asked to make recommendations about Gifts of Hope, offered to serve as the 2024 Gifts of Hope planning team.
- 11 partners reflecting the congregation's commitment to welcoming were selected:
 - Border Servant Corps (demonstrating kindness and offering care at the U.S./Mexico border)
 - ECHO Collective (empowering New American women as Lincoln business owners)
 - ELCA Good Gifts/God's Global Barnyard (working world-wide to meet human needs)
 - First Lutheran Food Back Packs (partnering with The Food Bank of Lincoln in two neighborhood schools)
 - I've Got a Name (ending sex trafficking in Lincoln and southeast Nebraska)
 - Las Abejitas Bilingual Education Center (offering quality education and care for infants and children locally)
 - First Lutheran Church Quilters for Lutheran World Relief (providing volunteer-made quilts for persons experiencing disaster or conflict in the U.S. and globally)

- Matt Talbot Kitchen and Outreach (offering hunger relief and homelessness prevention in the Lincoln area, 365 days a year)
- Mission Market Place (addressing human needs locally and beyond with proceeds from handmade items)
- Nebraska Synod Partnerships with the Northern Diocese in Tanzania (funding nursing education and safe housing)
- OutNebraska (educating, advocating, celebrating the LGBTQ+ community)

The 2024 Gifts of Hope Market brought the congregation’s Welcome Statement and Mission Statement to life by:

- Making First Lutheran’s focus on welcome visible within the congregation and beyond
- Offering opportunities to more closely align holiday giving practices with the deepest meaning of the Advent and Christmas seasons
- Providing easy access to information, photos and video clips that raise awareness of local, regional and international needs and chances to connect with representatives of nonprofits working to address them.
- Involving dozens of church members in roles that matched interests and skills they identified on recent Discipleship Plans
- Planting seeds for year-round connections and collaborations in 2025.
- Sending a record \$23,539.50 (+\$1,000 donated directly to ECHO Collective) on its way to bring great hope, locally and across the globe!

NET PAYABLE AMOUNTS BY AGENCY:		
Border Servant Corps (US-Mexico Border Region)		\$1,897.76
ELCA Good Gifts/God's Global Barnyard (ELCA World Hunger)		\$2,051.79
Food Bank of Lincoln/FLC Food Backpacks (Lincoln)		\$1,783.93
I've Got a Name (Nebraska)		\$2,241.38
Las Abejitas Bilingual Education Center (Lincoln)		\$3,527.27
Matt Talbot Outreach (Lincoln)		\$1,472.53
Mission Marketplace/Support for Famine & Disaster (Lutheran Disaster Response)		\$1,257.97
Nebraska Synod Nursing/House for Health (Tanzania)		\$6,723.27
Out Nebraska (Statewide)		\$904.20
Quilters of FLC (International - Lutheran World Relief)		\$1,226.89
Olive Oil (Jerusalem - Lutheran World Federation - Augusta Victoria Hospital)		\$236.23
ECHO Collective		\$216.28
		\$23,539.50

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

BY STEVE EICHER, COMMITTEE MEMBER

Nominating Committee Members

Courtney Anderson, Les Carlson, Gene Cotter, Steve Eicher, Carlene Falos, Erin Niebuhr and Emily Sears served as the Congregational Council representative

The 2024 Nominating Committee began meeting on September 22 for an organizational meeting including a discussion of the potential reduction in Council size from 15 to 12 and to review committee positions to be filled for 2025. The committee met periodically throughout the fall to review and expand those lists and communicated frequently in person and via email. A final slate of candidates was completed in early December.

The Nominating Committee is pleased to present this year's candidates for four committees. A heartfelt thank you goes to each nominee willing to serve First Lutheran Church.

Congregational Council

Bryce Anderson, Ann Bouma, Bev White and Gordon Youngquist. The congregation will be electing two members to a three-year term.

Nominating Committee

Linda Bogenreif, Bryan Hanson, Cora Hoeft, Molly Goninan, Barb Johnson-Frank and Jan Modica. The congregation will be electing three members to a two-year term.

Endowment Board

Steve Doolittle, Marsha McKinsey, Matt Peters and Tracy Way. The congregation will be electing two members to a three-year term.

Synod Assembly Delegates

Verdell Bohling, Linda Carlson, Trish Flury, Kathy Havlicek, Amanda Heier, Craig Heier, Ryan Luckey, Fred Ohles, Rosemary Ohles and Gordon Saksena. The congregation will be electing five members to a one-year term. At least two representatives must be female and two must be male.

PROPERTY COMMITTEE

BY NORM KEMPF, CHAIR

Committee Members

Bob Batterman, Richard Draper, Les Carlson, Rod Johnson, Pastor Erin Heidelberger, Steve Lenzen, Steve Doolittle, Doug Lind-Olson, Joel Nelson, Brandon Wiebelhaus, Cole Troutman and Janis Strautkalns

2024 Highlights

- Spread mulch on beds for the preschool/daycare play yard and around church plantings
- Moved sand to play yard
- Removed Juniper shrubs
- Volunteered to do mowing and property maintenance (done by Property Committee member, Steve Lenzen)
- Continued work with Lutheran Brotherhood to resolve the roof damage and included pictures and documentation that was sent to Hair Shunnarah Trial Attorneys
- Repaired water pump in furnace room
- Assisted in setting up for the Fall Festival
- Worked with the Council to update resource needs for First Lutheran
- Started an update of the electrical controls in the church
- Replaced electric motor that drives HVAC system for church
- Repaired the flat roof on church.
- Started the replacement of all lights in the Commons because replacement parts are not available
- Provided leadership for updating of the Church Emergency Action Plan
- Continued maintenance of parking lot surface to extend its life
- Removed three trees where roots were causing sewer problems
- Started the replacement of chipped and loose vinyl tiles in Activity Center and hallways.

2025 Goals

- Replace the concrete sidewalk on the north side of church
- Monitor the condition of the parking lot
- Review and update boiler needs
- Complete update of electrical control system
- Assess controllers in heat ducts and update as needed

- Continue the replacement of vinyl tiles in church as needed
- Obtain bids for priority projects such as sidewalk on the north side of church to support Council plans for future expenses

LUTHERAN WORLD RELIEF QUILTERS

KAREN CLEMENTSON AND MARY PHELAN

The First Lutheran Church quilters' group continues to meet on the fourth Thursday of every month, from January through October. We begin at 9:00 AM and work for around three hours.

Approximately six to ten members meet each month to assemble (pin) the finished quilt tops, batting and backs. Members stitch the pinned quilts together at home and also tie the quilts at home. In addition, we make kits that are sewn by members of the congregation. In 2024, we completed 130 quilts, distributed as follows:

Completed quilts boxed and shipped to Lutheran World Relief	119
Quilts sold at Gifts of Hope	10
Quilts donated to the Camp Carol Joy Holling 2024 Quilt Auction	<u>1</u>
Total quilts completed for 2024	<u>130</u>

While we do not know at the time of shipment where our quilts will be sent, Lutheran World Relief does let us know later.

As noted above, we also donate several of the quilts we make during the year to the Camp Carol Joy Holling Quilt Auction.

The First Lutheran Church Endowment Board has graciously purchased the batting for the quilts for a number of years. Currently, the cost of a roll of batting is approximately \$175.00. We can complete approximately 22 to 25 quilts from one roll of batting. Through the Gifts of Hope campaign, we are hoping to raise monies to be used to offset the cost of some of the batting we purchase during the year. We would also like to use some of the money to reimburse the church for the cost of shipping the quilts. In addition, we often need to purchase fabric for quilt backs to use with donated fabric to complete the quilt tops. We sometimes purchase fabrics for the quilt tops when we do not receive enough donated fabric to make tops and kits.

We believe that being part of the quilting ministry is a way for us to live out Christian values of love and caring for others. Our quilts provide comfort for someone in a difficult situation. Often

when we sew a quilt top, we think of who might be receiving the quilt and that maybe this quilt will provide assurance that others in the world care about them.

SOCIAL MINISTRY TEAM

SUBMITTED BY KAREN LENZEN

Team Members

Karen Lenzen, Linda Bogenreif, Cindy Lilleoien, Sandy Latshaw, Donice Kaspar and Rebecca Pfabe

2024 Highlights

- **Food Bank: The Backpack Program**– First Lutheran funds food-filled BackPacks for Pyrtle (12) and Morley (14) elementary schools. One or two members assist each week with the distribution at Pyrtle.
- **Food Bank: Lincoln High Market** – First Lutheran has a volunteer at the monthly market to assist patrons selecting food.
- **Lincoln Lutheran Food Pantry** - Members continue to fill our food cart. Four First Lutheran members pack orders twice monthly. Several also purchase needed items in bulk quantities using designated financial donations from First members, who generously support this ministry.
- **CROP Walk** – The city-wide team organized a blended in-person and virtual walk. First Lutheran raised \$2,337. CROP funds are distributed to various food pantry organizations in Lincoln and Lancaster County. Sandy Latshaw serves on the city-wide team.
- **Matt Talbot Kitchen & Outreach** – We served an average of 170 meals each month. We provide a hearty meal the 3rd Tuesday. A dedicated group of First members does advance meal prep and the serving. Others provide fruit and dessert for each meal.
- **Tabitha Meals on Wheels** – About 20 members are involved in Meals on Wheels delivery, through regular routes or as substitutes. This has been a long-standing area of service for our members.
- **Kicks for Kids** – The 9th year of this ministry provided 272 pairs of shoes and 1360 pairs of socks for students in 10 elementary and 5 middle schools, plus Las Abejitas pre-school students. We continue to fill emergency requests as they arise, due to your generous financial contributions. The stories we hear back from our schools reinforce the importance of this ministry!
- **Summer of Serving** – We held three in-gatherings over the summer.

June – Bridges To Hope (those being released from incarceration) – Collected new underwear, towels, belts & wallets and personal care items

July – Lutheran Family Services – Collected cleaning supplies (brooms/mops, cleaners, dish & laundry soap, buckets etc) and kitchenware (dishes, glasses, silverware, utensils, towels, baking & serving bowls, pots & pans)

August – Cedars Youth Services (foster care and more) – Collected new underwear and tshirts for kids of all ages, hygiene products (deodorant, shampoo, toothpaste) and diapers for foster care and street outreach programs

2025 Goals

- Expand support of the Food Bank Backpack Program
- Kicks for Kids – Continue this ministry
- Matt Talbot - Continue serving a nutritious meal each month
- Continue supporting local agencies through service events or in-gatherings of needed items. This includes introducing First Lutheran members to the work of agencies we have not served in the past.

STEPHEN MINISTRY

BY FAYE DOOLITTLE AND AMY HARRISON, STEPHEN LEADERS

2024 Highlights

- Stephen Ministry continued to serve the congregation and the community through confidential one-to-one care as it has since 2008. During 2024, thirteen people shared their challenging life circumstances with a First Lutheran Stephen Minister.
- People who served as Stephen Ministers: Bev DeGeorge, Trish Flury, Kim Janssen, Linda Jensen, Linda Maack, Gay Sutter, Robin Westhoff, Jan Wigodsky and Gordon Wolfe. We are grateful for the care that three Ministers provided before stepping away in 2024 - Jim Bohl, Sharon Hardel and Cindy Timperley.
- Continuing Education training topics included Advanced Christian Caregiving and mental health. Pastor Heidelberger and Pastor Kitzing each shared ideas on providing supportive Christian care.
- Stephen Leaders participated in online training offered by the Stephen Ministry headquarters in St. Louis, Missouri.
- With Kathleen Simley's help, we used various media to publicize Stephen Ministry, ways to access care and invitations to be trained as Stephen Ministers.

Goals for 2025

- Continue to provide confidential care to members in our congregation and community.
- Continue to support our current Stephen Ministers.
- Train a new class starting in January 2025.

To learn more about this confidential ministry of presence, talk with a pastor or Stephen Leader or send an email to stephen.ministry@flclincoln.org

Thank you to the congregation for their continued support, for the Stephen Ministers who faithfully give of their time and presence and for the people who share their journey one-to-one with a Stephen Minister.

STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE

BY MARK WEMHOFF, CHAIR

Committee Members

Mark Wemhoff, Linda Bogenreif, John Bonaiuto and Pastor Erin Heidelberger

2024 Highlights

This year we again teamed up with other committees and put on a Fall Festival since it was such a great success last year. This was well received and all the feedback we received was positive. I think the turnout from the community was better than last year.

Overall, there were the same number of pledges as last year. About half of pledging members increased their pledge and the average increase was almost 8%. We had set a goal of \$750,000 in pledges and beat that goal by \$30,000. This is a great increase when we compare it to last year's pledge total of about \$690,000.

2021 186 pledges

2022 202 pledges

2023 192 pledges

2024 196 pledges

2025 196 pledges (As of 11/23)

2025 Goals

- Create new ways to include members and get them to sign up for ministry opportunities.
- Continue to tell our story of ministry within our church, as well as how that ministry reaches outside our church walls.
- Continue to try and increase the percentage of members who use Simply Giving for electronic automated giving.
- Continue our yearly stewardship appeal and decide if we continue the Fall Festival or go back to our traditional Stewardship meal.
- Continue to reach out to all our members, no matter their current state, to let them know they are a part of the stewardship of First Lutheran.

TANZANIA HOUSES FOR HEALTH

BY KAREN CLEMENTSON

The Nebraska Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in America has had a companion relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Churches of the Northern Diocese of Lutheran Churches in Tanzania, Africa since 1993. Further, in companionship with the Catholic Health Initiative (CHI) and the Nebraska Synod, a faith-based health ministry has operated in the Mount Kilimanjaro area of Tanzania since 2001. Together, they have major projects to help enrich the lives of the people in the area.

One project is Houses for Health, which provides small, safe, dry homes for the extreme poor, who have health conditions made worse by the substandard shelters they inhabit. This project began in 2007, and thus far 195 homes have been completed. This project is funded by donations to which First Lutheran Church members have generously contributed through Gifts of Hope and Noisy Offering. Donations for 2024 amounted to \$1,519.79.

There are many places in the Bible where Jesus asks us to love and care for each other. Our church's mission statement also asks that of us. I am honored to represent these Synod programs, which help to elevate and empower others.

TANZANIA STUDENT NURSING SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

BY KAREN CLEMENTSON

Machame Hospital School of Nursing is a faith-based program run in coordination with the Nebraska Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches and the Evangelical Lutheran Churches of the Northern Diocese of Tanzania. It was founded in 2010 to address the shortage of nursing staff at Machame Hospital, which sits at the base of Mount Kilimanjaro, Tanzania.

Tuition and room and board costs are \$1,700.00 per year for a three-year diploma program, which changes the lives of the students, their families and the surrounding society as a whole. This program relies on donations to which First Lutheran Church members have generously given through Gifts of Hope. Since 2013, First Lutheran alone has supported five students who have graduated and we are currently sponsoring two students who should graduate in 2025.

May Noisy Offering: \$506.10

December 2024 Gifts of Hope: \$5,640.84

Donations in 2024 amounted to \$6,146.90

TRANSPORTATION MINISTRY
BY LINDA MAACK AND JUDY BAILEY

Our committee has not been very active this year. We have taken only 1 person for an appointment. However, we have 4 families that have been very faithful about bringing an Eastmont resident to services regularly. What a blessing for that First Lutheran member!

We are available by calling either Linda Maack or Judy Bailey to arrange for transportation.

MINISTRY OF THE VISITATION PASTOR

BY PASTOR MARSHA C. ANDERSON

“The body of Christ broken for YOU; the blood of Christ shed for YOU.”

This is the Message, the Good News I am entrusted to share with the homebound every time I bring them communion. It is a gift; it is a humbling experience; it is pure Grace.

Every month I visit between 8-16 folks who are unable to come to worship on a weekend with us. Many of them have been long-time members of First Lutheran. All of them wish they could be with us, but medical conditions prevent them from doing so. Those who are can read and value the daily devotional books they receive. They are always thankful for visits, cards and calls from First friends, other friends and family.

I and our Eucharistic Ministers are intentionally connected to the Visitation Ministry as part of the larger Ministry of Caring. This means that the homebound receive communion once a month and sometimes twice. At this time, there are 12 active Eucharistic Ministers: Tim Maack, Bob/Carlene Falos, Carla Osberg, Terry Kruse, Trish Flury, Carolyn Benson/Jeanne Hellerich, Gay Sutter, Karen Lenzen and Kim Janssen. Altogether, they see 14 folks.

In 2024 we celebrated the lives of eight of these folks who entered fully into the resurrected life and we continue to pray for their families as they mourn their loss:

*Marge Fahrnbruch

Tom Schmitter

*Pastor Mary Jensen

Sheila Exkstrom

Iris Winkelhake

Fred Monnich

Harold Borchert

Jim Howat

*I assisted at their funeral/memorial services.

We give thanks to God for their witness to the faith they received and lived from their baptism. Each life contained amazing stories of God’s love and direction in their lives and how their lives

touched others. It is my privilege to hear some of those stories as I visit. In addition, as part of this Visitation Ministry I am occasionally called on by one of the pastors to also visit someone who has a special need (7) and I am always glad to do so.

On September 24, 2024, I suffered what has turned out to be 2 compound fractures of my lower spine and have not been able to make home visits, although I keep frequently in touch with both the homebound and the EMs by phone or e-mail or in person. All the homebound are seen by their EM once a month. I will resume home visits when the Dr. releases me. For now, I have to get used to a back brace and what means.

I continue to look forward to this continuing ministry and ask that you will pray for all the homebound, our sisters and brothers in Christ, and for me and the Eucharistic Ministers and others who visit with them and who bring God's grace every time.

WOMEN OF THE ELCA (WELCA)

BY LINDA BOGENREIF, TREASURER

Membership is open to all women of First Lutheran Church. There are currently three groups (Circles) women attend, based on what Circle meeting date/time matches individual availability.

- Esther Circle meets (weather permitting) the 3rd Thursday of each month at 10 AM at church
- Lydia Circle meets the 2nd Tuesday of each month at 2 PM in individual's homes
- Martha Circle meets the 3rd Wednesday of each month at 9:30 AM at church

WELCA's mission is to mobilize women to act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ. Each monthly meeting blends a Bible study from the WELCA magazine "*Gather*" with fellowship.

Accomplishments of 2024

Monthly Circle donations are collected with half remitted to the Nebraska WELCA for use on in-gatherings throughout Nebraska. The state WELCA publishes a quarterly newsletter, "*Expressions*", offers devotions, supports the Human Trafficking Task Force and Katie's Fund. Access to the state WELCA can be found at <https://nswowebmaster.wixsite.com>, or on Facebook (Nebraska Women of the ELCA).

The remaining half of donated funds were used recently to support our youth groups, quilters, Las Abijitas, Meals on Wheels and Pastor's Discretionary Fund.

Memorial donations, as of this report (December 1, 2024), honored members Phyllis Frickel, Iris Winkelhake and Jane Mickelson.

Circle leaders voted to use \$4,000 of savings (designated for kitchen use) to upgrade needed kitchen items. Those often using the kitchen were asked for input (Fellowship, Funeral, Property, First Friday Jazz, and Matt Talbot Kitchen committees/groups).

Goals for 2025

- Seek ways to meet the needs of younger, and indeed, all women of First Lutheran Church.
- Make the practice of Thankoffering (a coin offering of gratitude) a daily practice, annually sent on to the national WELCA, to further women's ministries. (\$221 was raised in 2024)
- Separate the funds for quilting from WELCA. Phyllis Frickel was the last member of WELCA to quilt. Funds will be moved in 2025 to a Fund 2 designation of First Lutheran.

- Use the \$4,000 kitchen disbursement for new tablecloths, dishes, silverware and other items.

Financial Report as of December 1, 2024

- WELCA Checking is \$1,282.95 (\$319.00 needs yet to be remitted to state or national WELCA)
- WELCA Kitchen Savings is \$10,148.19 (\$4,000 yet to be removed for needed items)
- Quilting Fund is \$2,757.13 (Includes \$1,000.00 Endowment Fund donation from 2024)

WORSHIP AND MUSIC COMMITTEE

BY HAROLD SUTTER, COMMITTEE CHAIR

Committee Members

Harold Sutter (Chair), Jan Christensen, Molly Goninan, Dave Pfister, Martha Tanner, Bonita Thomsen, Jan Wigodsky, Gordon Youngquist, Boyd Bacon and Masako Bacon.

A Recap of the Year and the Committee's Responsibilities

Many thanks to all the musicians, both instrumental and vocal, who stepped forward to share their talents. Also, a big thank you to the many individuals who volunteered to assist in worship services throughout the year. It takes many volunteers each week to help complete each service. All participants are greatly appreciated.

Perhaps it is time to give an inventory of the many worship roles governed by this Committee. There are quite a few and maybe unknown to some, so I will list the ones that are most important.

- Adult and youth choirs
- Bell choirs
- Recruiting worship assistants
- Recruiting and training for Altar Guild
- Preparing for worship services - Purchasing communion elements, preparing communion cups and bread for each Sunday Service, tending the baptismal font and cleaning and washing communion articles each Sunday
- Organizing and cleaning albs used by worship assistants. (This task is handled by an individual that is not a member of the committee, but is part of the committee's responsibility.)
- Midweek Advent and midweek Lenten services – Setting up candles
- Palm Sunday (palm setting), Maundy Thursday (stripping the altar), Good Friday (candles) and Easter Vigil
- Christmas and Easter worship - Recruiting additional worship volunteers, unpacking and arranging the poinsettias for Christmas and the lilies for Easter
- Advent - Hanging of the greens and assembly of the manger, followed by taking down the greens and dismantling the manger
- Pentecost Sunday -Ensuring the mobile is hung in Sanctuary

- All Saints Sunday - Setting up candles and remove for cleaning

As you can see from this list, the Worship and Music Committee has taken care of whatever the needs are for worship services. It takes a good number of folks to keep up with the multitude of actions that are required each week and throughout the year.

There are lots of items not listed that the committee handles as the need arises. They are a committed group of members and work to make each worship service and surrounding elements run as smoothly as possible