

ANNUAL REPORT 2023



Evangelical
Lutheran Church
in America

**CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH
MARINE ON ST. CROIX, MINNESOTA
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2024**

THE 152ND ANNUAL MEETING OF THE CONGREGATION

- ◆ **The Call to Order**
- ◆ **Opening Devotions**
- ◆ **ELCA/Saint Paul Area Synod**
- ◆ **Review of the Annual Report**
- ◆ **Conversation on Mission and Ministry of Christ Lutheran Church**
- ◆ **The Report of the Treasurer**
- ◆ **Other Matters, Questions, Concerns, Celebrations**
- ◆ **Word of Gratitude**
- ◆ **Closing Prayer**
- ◆ **The Benediction**
- ◆ **Adjournment**

CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH STAFF

Lead Pastor: Joel Martin

Pastor of Family Faith Formation: Hannah Bartos

Red Bridge Preschool 2022-23: Elizabeth Weisberg, Laura Gessler, Cynthia Wicklund, Jenna Weiss, Catie Schumann

Office Manager/RBPS Bookkeeper: Laura Langreck

Custodian: Charlie Anderson

Financial Secretary: Kathy Trombly-Ferrin

2023 CHURCH COUNCIL

Jody Nyenhuis, *President*
Leigh Delisi, *Vice President*
Christine Dettmann, *Secretary*
Suzanne Pollack

Emily Schaefer
Teri Fick
Terry Gorham
Lester Rydeen

Ann Skoglund
Steve Plummer
Andrew Schmidt
Ruth Willius (resigned 10/23)

Blessed are they who were presented in faith to celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Baptism:

Briggs Francis Waalen
Coya Marilyn Josephson
Everly Lois Pearson
Herbert Dale Coffman
Steven James Holt
Kayden Charles DeBruycker
Micah Thomas DeBruycker
Noelle Kathryn DeBruycker

Blessed are they who affirmed their baptism through the Faith Step of Confirmation:

Eloise Powell

Blessed be the memory of those who died in Christ and entered into eternal fellowship with our Lord and Savior:

Diane Johnson
Marie Becthold
Arnold Dziuban
Joyce Wayne
Jan Stull
Tom Nyman
Dave Vincent
Barb Hudson
Bill Miller
Becky Swanson

Blessed are they who shared their vows of love to each other and asked for God's blessing on their marriage:

Travis and Surelle Strike

PASTOR'S REPORT

Pastor Joel Martin

The hardest part of celebrating 150 years of Christ Lutheran Church in Marine on Saint Croix (as we did in 2022) was knowing 150 years was never the hope and the goal. We celebrated the 150th anniversary to celebrate who we were, and we celebrated the 150th anniversary because we were looking forward. 2023 marked the 151st year of Christ Lutheran being a source of hope and a reflection of the love of God made known in Jesus Christ. It was a new day and a new year of ministry in which we continued to look forward to being a place of grace and welcome, a place of inspiration and hope.

As part of the 150th celebration in September of 2022 we dedicated the new church sign with the aspirational words, "You Belong Here." In 2023, we prayerfully tried to live into these words by:

Belonging to Christ. We believe God's grace, God's unfathomable love, is available to all people as a gift through Jesus Christ. All are welcome here with their whole selves, which includes one's race, ethnic background, past wrongdoing, socio-economic status, gender identity, sexual orientation, physical ability, and legal status. Questions and doubts are welcome.

Belonging to Tradition. Who we are today is a result of those who have come before us. We belong to them, and they belong to us. While it might look different, while it might sound and act different, Christ Lutheran today continues to live out the same mission and vision that guided the Swedish immigrants who founded our church 151 years ago. We honor this tradition not by trying to be the same church year after year, but by discerning the guidance of God's Spirit while being open to the needs of our community. The ways of the world and the culture which shaped Christ Lutheran in the late 1880's was greatly different from the culture the church lived through in the 1960's and 1990's. Being the church in a post-COVID age, in the early stages of an AI world, looks a lot different than the church looked just 15-20 years ago. However, the story the church tells and lives out, remains the same. It's a story of a powerful and patient God who has boundless love for all people of the world. It's a story that brings deep meaning, comfort, and strength to a growing community of people who live in modern, often unsettling, times.

Belonging to the Community. Christ Lutheran doesn't exist in a vacuum. We are shaped by Marine on Saint Croix and the surrounding communities. In turn, being on a hill looking across the entire St. Croix River valley reminds us daily that we are a light on a hill with a calling to shine the light of Christ in all that we say and do. From free community meals, to opening our building for community organizations, to the ministry of Red Bridge Preschool, to the support we offer local food shelves and those in need, the ministry we share reflects a sense of belonging that continues to grow.

Belonging to You. The 'You' in "You Belong Here" is you, and it is also them. You is the person who drives by on Broadway every single day and never stops at the church. You is the family on their way to the cemetery to say goodbye to the person they know they can't live without. You is the new family who has recently bought a house down the street. You is the couple who met here in Confirmation class. They were married here, had their children baptized and confirmed here and are now helping to plan the wedding of their child who will also be married here. You is the person who lost their job and needs some help to pay the bills. You is the person who comes each and every week to worship and yet no one knows because no one has stopped to say hello. You is the one who is seen as different, as other, who longs to be accepted and loved and not just tolerated. You is the person who only knows about Christ Lutheran because someone told them how to join us online. You is the person who comes openly with doubts and questions and knows they somehow will still be welcomed. You is the church today. You is the church God is leading us to be in 2024.

I guess what I am trying to say is this..."You Belong Here."



PASTOR'S REPORT

Pastor Hannah Bartos

"God performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted." -Job 5:9

I love that in the midst of the book of Job, a book of profound writing and storytelling that explores human suffering, we hear those words. 2023 was marked by many difficult things in our world and in many of our lives, but through it all, God gifted wonders than cannot be fathomed and miracles that cannot be counted.

That being said, there are a few that I would like to offer and count as I reflect on this past year together.

2023 was an exciting year of growth and learning, of experiments and challenges. As your Pastor of Family Faith Formation, together we worked to identify, care, nurture, support and minister to and with children, youth, and families in this community and beyond.

Miracle #1: Worship

Worship is why we gather. We are not just another after-school program or a weekend activity; we are the body of Christ called to love and be loved. On Sundays and Wednesdays (and other holy moments when we turn to God), we are reminded who we are and whose we are.

Our worship services, offered in-person and accessible online, are dynamic and creative. They bring life to God's word and promises in relatable ways. Both worship experiences draw strong participation and welcome new people each week. Into the Deep has become many families' primary worship time.

Our staff and leaders are dedicated to find ways to reach and nourish people with the love of God. Through quality music, abundant prayers, and engaging worship series, the love of God through Christ is made known.

Special thanks to all who work each week to support Pastor Joel and I in our worship leadership, including the many musicians, weekly volunteers, and our outstanding audio/visual team. We couldn't do our work without them!

Miracle #2: Faith Learning

Our ministry is built on the premise that faith is a journey. Though our ministry incorporates a variety of ages, abilities, and interests, we believe all people need to hear about God and how we fit into God's story. This is not something to keep to ourselves; we are called to share it with kindness, compassion, and love with all we meet!

This foundation is evident in all of our learning opportunities: at Confirmation, The Deep End Kids' ministry, Bible Study, faith steps, day camp, Camp Wapo, and more! All of these ministries help us to grow as spiritual people named and claimed by God who live out our callings as Jesus' hands and feet.

One of my favorite faith learning pieces I have delved deeper into these past years is with Red Bridge Preschool. It is a thriving ministry and provides great learning for our community. I continue to lead chapel with students twice a month and do special collaborations a few times each year. It is a great joy to see the impact our school has in our community.

Miracle #3: Hospitality & Belonging

When we put the words "You belong here" on our new church sign last year, I don't think any of us fully understood the power of these words. Each and every day, Pastor Joel and I (and you!) seek to make Christ Lutheran a hospitable place where everyone feels welcomed and has a place in our community. By feeding people (figuratively... and literally on Wednesday nights with our free community meal) we are nourishing goodness in this world as we honor each other as we are. There is no need to be anything other than who God created you to be. Christ Lutheran is unique in that we don't just want to say "all are welcome," we seek to live it for all people. "You belong here" means that just as God has a place for you at God's table, we do, too. We are eager to learn from you and share life with you.

Hospitality is lived out through meals, fellowship time, informal gatherings, funerals and weddings, baptisms and other celebrations of faith steps.

Continued on next page

Miracle #4: Sabbatical Renewal

It is with great joy and appreciation that I had a time of sabbatical renewal in 2023. For much of the summer, I delved into “Holy Play” exploring God’s miracles through things that bring joy.

Where did “Holy Play” come from? I made it up. Or really, I was inspired. In 2022 after Derek’s brother Nick died by suicide, we were heartbroken. Nick’s death, compounded by other loss and hardship that year, reminded us of how precious life is.

So my hope for Holy Play was to step back from the normal day-to-day demands of life and pause: to take time to be more present with my family and friends...even myself, to find joy through travel and rest, to cultivate hobbies, and to be astonished by the renewal that play can offer us every day.

Truthfully, twelve weeks went by in the blink of an eye. Our first adventures took us to Vancouver to explore the beautiful, diverse city. From there we took an Alaskan cruise exploring the Inside Passage and Glacier Bay. Another highlight was spending time in Hayward with my side of the family...uncles, aunts, and cousins included. Hayward is a favorite place where we would vacation when I was growing up, and it was so special to bring everyone there again. Plus, I fulfilled my lifelong dream: to learn how to waterski! Another trip took us to Colorado to spend time with Derek’s side of the family, to be where his brother Nick used to live. It was special to be in the place Nick last walked on this earth.

But do you know my favorite place that we were? Home. It’s not lost on me how fortunate I am to be able to say that. Yes, our house is comfortable, but it’s my family that is so special and good. Together we savored life and each other.

Holy Play isn’t just for pastors, or for those privileged to travel, or receive a grant, or take a break from work. It’s for all of us. Amidst our work and responsibilities, we can see Jesus every day through: the people who love us unconditionally, the places that shine beauty, doing things that make us smile.

Holy Play isn’t just fun. It’s an act of living our faith in Christ. He didn’t come for us to be miserable. He came so that we may have life and have it abundantly...love and joy is waiting for us. And if we don’t see it, maybe we can create it...It’s not just a nice thought from one of your pastors. It’s part of what God dreams for each of us...not just some day but today.

Miracle #5: You

Our weekly bulletin includes the words “Ministers: All God’s People,” in other words: YOU! You, CLC, live out the ministry of this vibrant church on the hill, and it is miraculous how light and love are shared because of you. We have many people to be grateful for: for our dedicated staff who provides daily support for the ministry of this church; for the council who works to lead a church that is welcoming, financially stable, and growing; for lay leaders and volunteers who are the heart and soul of our community, who work alongside the staff to dream, design, and implement quality programming; for the children and youth who make this area of ministry vibrant and exciting; and for you, this congregation, who takes seriously God’s work in the lives of all members and friends.

I hold deep gratitude for each and every one of you. God’s faithfulness through Jesus Christ has been shown again and again in your presence, your generosity, your commitment to our ministry together.

It is an honor to serve as one of your pastors and to first-hand witness the wonders and miracles of this place. God is alive and at work...in all of what has been and all of what is to come.

I look forward to 2024 with you!

With joy,

Pastor Hannah

2023 CHURCH COUNCIL PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Submitted by Jodi Nyenhuis

Celebrating God's Abundance within our Christ Lutheran Church Community

On behalf of the 2023 Church Council, thanks be to God for each and everyone of you! Post a wonderful 150th anniversary year-long celebration in 2022, we lived into the vision our founders set before us with a "Here for Good" proclamation that had opportunity to be affirmed in 2023 when we faced a significant financial challenge. This congregation, community members, and faith followers from all over the states stepped up to meet and surpass the challenge to keep all our vibrant ministries going.

Together, we can do hard things that help build our faith and trust in a God. We love and serve a God of abundance who works through us to share light and love in this world. How much joy I feel in recognizing the positive and loving impact the ministry of the only church in the village of Marine on St. Croix has made and will be able to continue to make in the year ahead.

What a privilege it has been to be your church council President these past two years. Our pastoral leadership is such a Dynamic Duo, we are blessed to have such a team to call on as our Pastors. The council is strong and will continue to work hard on your behalf moving into 2024 as faith-filled servant leaders. Pray for the leadership of this church to listen to God's guidance and discern faithful practices in the year ahead. God has gifted each of us as part of the body of Christ, lean into your giftedness and find a way to serve here. You belong here, dear one!

RED BRIDGE PRESCHOOL

Elizabeth Weisberg, RBPS Director/Lead Teacher

We are having a wonderful year at Red Bridge Preschool. We have not yet regained our pre-Covid numbers, but we have one more student this year than we had last year. We currently have 19 students. We have 14 preschoolers and 5 two-year-old students. A majority of our students graduated from Red Bridge last year to enter Kindergarten. This year, most of our preschoolers are three-year-olds. We are hopeful they will all stay with us next year. Ruth Willius has joined us again this year to offer Spanish to our Wednesday preschool students. Our students look forward to her visits each week as we learn a new language with the aid of her fun puppets and books. Señorita Ruth is traveling this month, but we very much look forward to her return. All teachers have returned this year. I teach preschool classes with Cynthia Wicklund on Mondays and Wednesdays. Catie Schumann and Laura Gessler teach preschool on Tuesdays, and Laura and I teach together on Thursdays. Catie and Jenna Weiss lead Wednesday's two-year-old class. I am unbelievably lucky to work with such dedicated ladies who make our preschool function like a well-oiled machine. As last year, we will have an evening February fundraiser: "Pizza Party for a Cause" Wednesday evening, February 21st at Christ Lutheran. We hope many of our parents, students, and congregants of Christ Lutheran will join us for dinner on this happy occasion as we raise funds to keep our amazing school going. As always, we are grateful for the amazing support we receive from Christ Lutheran and the families we serve. We are truly blessed to be a part of the community of Marine on St. Croix.

REPORT OF THE TREASURER

Christ Lutheran Church financial report for the year ended December 31, 2023, and the proposed 2024 budget are attached. For the 2023 year, we have a net operating surplus for the General Fund of \$76,889. General Fund Income was above budget by \$69,673. General Fund Expense was favorable to budget by \$7,216. We contributed the budgeted amount of \$20,000 to the support of the St. Paul Area Synod.

Givings-Benevolence Pass Through of \$78,439 were received by the General Fund and contributed to a variety of ministries outside of our church, including Mission Tanzania scholarships, Mission Tanzania trip and Mission Jamaica.

Cash held by the General Fund on December 31, 2023, was \$178,206. During the year, the General Fund may borrow funds from the Contingency Fund to balance the fluctuation of givings during the year and to cover any cumulative operating deficit. At December 31, 2023, the General Fund had no borrowings from the Contingency Fund.

The Capital Campaign Fund had expenditures of \$95,045 for the endowment loan repayment, the security system installation and the completion of the Nyman Center Restoration. The Capital Campaign balance is \$54,676. This balance has been transferred to the Contingency Fund for anticipated air handler updates in the sanctuary.

The Contingency Fund received interest income of \$7,718, net insurance proceeds for rental \$6,943 and Capital Campaign Funds of \$54,676. The Contingency Fund had expenditures of \$9,114. The Contingency Fund balance is \$348,785.

It has truly been my honor to serve as the Treasurer of Christ Lutheran Church for 22 years. As I retire, I look forward to the continued support of the pastors, staff and ministries and the individuals assuming my role.

Cheryl Reinitz
Council Treasurer
January 14, 2024

CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH
BALANCE SHEET
For Periods Ending December 31, 2022 & December 31, 2023

	<i>31 Dec 2022 Balance</i>	<i>31 Dec 2023 Balance</i>	<i>Increase/ (Decrease)</i>
ASSETS			
General Fund	236,103	178,206	(57,897)
Contingency Fund	338,283	348,785	10,502
Total Cash	574,386	526,991	(47,395)
Accounts Receivable	5,670	9,968	4,298
Accounts Receivable (Cont from GF)	0	0	0
Total Accounts Receivable	5,670	9,968	4,298
Building	1,050,942	1,050,942	0
Rental Property	224,900	224,900	0
Welcoming Place	232,134	232,134	0
Furnishings	121,754	121,754	0
Land & Improvements	54,000	54,000	0
Total Other Assets	1,683,730	1,683,730	0
TOTAL ASSETS	2,263,786	2,220,689	(43,097)
LIABILITIES			
Payroll Taxes	4,575	5,412	837
Accounts Payable	52,815	21,490	(31,325)
Accounts Payable (GF to Cont)	0	0	0
Total Current Liabilities	57,390	26,902	(30,488)
Legacy Fund Loan	75,000	0	(75,000)
Total Long Term Liabilities	75,000	0	(75,000)
TOTAL LIABILITIES	132,390	26,902	(105,488)
EQUITY	2,131,396	2,193,787	62,391
TOTAL LIABILITIES & EQUITY	2,263,786	2,220,689	(43,097)

CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH – GENERAL FUND OPERATING STATEMENT
2023 Actual to Budget (unaudited) & 2024 Proposed Budget

GENERAL FUND INCOME	<i>2023 Actual</i>	<i>2023 Budget</i>	<i>Better/ (Worse)</i>	<i>2024 Budget</i>
Givings	614,499	538,250	76,249	567,500
Benevolence – 2023 Surplus				25,000
Benevolence Pass Through	78,439		78,439	
Red Bridge Income	23,424	30,000	(6,576)	30,000
Total General Fund Income	<u>716,362</u>	<u>568,250</u>	<u>148,112</u>	<u>622,500</u>
 GENERAL FUND EXPENSES				
Salaries & Benefits				
Senior Pastor	105,215	105,215	0	108,898
Associate Pastor	84,824	84,824	0	87,793
Administration	68,924	68,829	(95)	71,358
Music	6,700	10,358	3,658	4,218
Retirement & Health Care Benefits	81,959	75,671	(6,288)	90,708
Payroll Taxes	5,785	6,058	273	5,782
Workers Compensation Insurance	3,094	3,372	278	3,426
Other	8,058	9,323	1,265	6,817
Salaries & Benefits	<u>364,559</u>	<u>363,650</u>	<u>(909)</u>	<u>379,000</u>
 Other Expenditures				
Admin/Office Supplies & Expenses	9,568	9,000	(568)	9,100
Benevolence – Budget	25,789	26,000	211	26,000
Benevolence – 2023 Surplus				25,000
Benevolence – Pass Through	78,439		(78,439)	
Bus	1,421	2,000	579	2,000
Christian Education	2,189	3,500	1,311	3,500
Church Council	679	1,000	321	1,000
Congregational Life	5,727	4,000	(1,727)	5,200
Insurance	11,215	10,750	(465)	14,000
Property Tax	4,204	4,300	96	4,300
Property Maintenance	13,783	15,950	2,167	16,000
Red Bridge Expense	28,803	30,000	1,197	30,000
Utilities	29,252	29,800	548	30,600
Into the Deep Community Meals	13,926	15,000	1,074	19,500
Into the Deep Musicians	32,025	31,500	(525)	34,500
Worship & Music	17,894	21,800	3,906	22,800
Subtotal General Fund Expenses	<u>639,473</u>	<u>568,250</u>	<u>(71,223)</u>	<u>622,500</u>
 Net Operating Balance	 <u>76,889</u>	 <u>0</u>	 <u>76,889</u>	 <u>0</u>

CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH
CONTINGENCY FUND
For Periods Ending December 31, 2022 & December 31, 2023

	<i>31 Dec</i> 2022 <i>Balance</i>	<i>31 Dec</i> 2023 <i>Balance</i>	<i>Increase/ (Decrease)</i>
CONTINGENCY FUND			
Contingency Fund	338,283	141,785	(196,498)
Certificate of Deposit		207,000	207,000
A/R General Fund			
Total Assets	<u>338,283</u>	<u>348,785</u>	<u>10,502</u>
Beginning Equity	417,448	338,283	(79,165)
Givings, Income & GF Transfers	81,892	118,669	36,777
Projects	(161,057)	(108,167)	52,890
Total Liabilities & Equity	<u>338,283</u>	<u>348,785</u>	<u>10,502</u>

Capital Campaign Beginning Balance	\$149,721
Endowment Loan Repayment	(75,025)
Security System	(13,939)
Nyman Center Restoration	(6,081)
Capital Campaign Remaining Balance (Air Handlers)	<u>\$54,676</u>
Contingency Fund Beginning Balance	\$188,562
Capital Campaign Remaining Balance (Air Handlers)	54,676
Transfer from General Fund Surplus	100,000
Interest Income	7,718
Rental Insurance Recovery	6,943
150 th Anniversary	(764)
Mini Bus Repair	(1,046)
Boiler Repair	(1,375)
Stump Grinding	(900)
Employee Retention Credit Claim	(5,029)
Contingency Fund Ending Balance	<u>\$348,785</u>

MINISTRY REPORTS

Worship

Our worship schedule in 2023 included offering a worship service at 9:30 a.m. on Sunday mornings and an alternative worship service at 6:30 p.m. on Wednesdays. Throughout the course of the year both services experienced a growth in those who joined us in worship in-person and online. Combined, the average in person weekly worship attendance is getting closer to where we were prior to COVID. And this doesn't even count those who are choosing to join us in worship online.

Our Sunday morning worship service continues to be somewhat traditional using a more liturgical format that includes Holy Communion every week. The Wednesday "Into the Deep" worship service offers a different worship experience using different music, offering a different message and formatted to be 30 minutes or less. A highlight each year is continuing the tradition of offering the Sunday worship service outside, weather permitting, from Memorial Day through the first Sunday of October.

As we look forward, we have a favor to ask. Whether you join us in worship on Sundays or Wednesdays, we ask you to help welcome some of the new people and new families joining us. If you see someone you don't know sitting near you in our sanctuary, or someone you might know but you have never seen them in worship at CLC, make a point of simply welcoming them by introducing yourself to them or letting them know how good it is to see them. If you want to be really brave, you could even share a little bit about yourself and why you are part of CLC.

Whether it be Sundays or Wednesdays, inside or outside, our worship services are dependent on volunteers who step up to help. Each week we need ushers, communion servers, fellowship hosts, readers, people to help set up and take down chairs outside, and volunteers willing to help with our audio and video needs. New volunteers are always welcome. You can sign up online or contact the church office and we can help connect you.

Music Ministry

While they differ in style and format, one area of unity between the Sunday morning worship and the "Into the Deep" midweek Wednesday worship is the centrality of music. The music in each service serves as an invitation to welcome people together in worship. It's a way of offering praise and thanksgiving. It's a way of integrating the words from Scripture and the messages from our pastors with the day to day lives we are all living. In 2023, we said goodbye to our organist Bob Waedekin. Bob had served as organist and music director at Christ Lutheran for over 20 years. We give thanks to God for the many years of service Bob provided the ministry of Christ Lutheran and wish him and his family well as he enters into his retirement near La Crosse, Wisconsin. Since his retirement we have handled the Sunday morning music duties by committee. We thank Nancy Viebrock, Kris Simonson, and Melinda Hoke for their gifts of leadership in worship. We will continue in this format for at least the first few months of 2024. The midweek "Into the Deep" worship service offers a totally different style of music. We continue to be blessed by a group of musicians who are willing to lead the music on Wednesdays.

We continued to grow in understanding post-COVID how to move forward with choir. In 2023, we offered a "pop-up" style of choir with the choir gathering and singing in March and April and again in December under the direction of Laura Langreck and accompanied by Nancy Viebrock and Carol Maurer. The plan is to perhaps grow this to more times in 2024 based on interest and the availability of people willing to lead. In addition, the sanctuary was used a few times during 2023 for groups to offer concerts and recitals. Each time, we welcomed many people into the church who had no connection to CLC. Each time helped create stronger ties to our neighbors and community. In December, we co-hosted a concert by Peter Mayer which raised \$1,000 for Hope House in Stillwater – another way in which music brings us together and allows us to live out the mission of Christ Lutheran.

Local Social Missions

Belonging is a relationship. Belonging is a two-way street. Belonging isn't primarily about getting people inside our building – rather, growing an understanding of Belonging is about getting people inside our building to live out lives of faith reflecting the presence and love of Christ in our daily lives. We Belong to each other. This core understanding is reflected in our Local Social Mission effort. While we are listing some of the ways we as a congregation do to reach out and connect us with the needs of our community, in truth it is impossible for us to measure and name all that the people of Christ Lutheran do every day in bringing love, hope and a deep understanding of belonging into the world.

Here are just a few of the ways we as a congregation in 2023 worked together to grow in the ways we belong to each other: We continued our support of the food shelves in Scandia and Stillwater. We continued our partnership with the St. Andrew's Family Shelter in Hugo by taking responsibility for providing meals and volunteers for 3-4 weeks over the course of the year. We increased the number of families for which we provided Christmas gifts through Community Threads "Holiday Hope" program. The Annual Service Sunday in September gave us the opportunity to connect with Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota. We made sandwiches for local shelters in the Twin Cities. We made emergency "Blizzard Bags" for Meals-on-Wheels. And we made blankets for a youth shelter in St. Paul. Each month in 2023 a devoted group from CLC continued a 30+ year tradition of providing a meal on the first Tuesday of the month at the Ramsey County Family Shelter in Maplewood. In December, we co-sponsored a Peter Mayer concert in the sanctuary which helped support the work of Hope House in Stillwater. And let's not forget the work of the quilting group that meets twice a month to put together quilts which are all donated to local organizations and missions, and the free weekly community dinners we provide every Wednesday.

As a congregation we are committed to live out the love of God made known in Jesus Christ and to grow a deeper understanding of belonging. Your support of the ministry of Christ Lutheran continues to allow this to happen. Everything listed above is accomplished only through your time and dedication. We are always looking for people to become more involved. If you interested in learning about ways to be part of any of our local mission opportunities see Pastor Joel or Pastor Hannah, and they will help direct you to the right people.

Community Bread Oven

In 2022, Christ Lutheran received a grant from the St. Paul Area Synod of the ELCA to help with the cost of building a portable bread oven which we hoped would become a way to connect us with the community. In 2023, we started to see the first stages of this becoming a reality.

While we are still learning the "ins and outs" and the "hows and whys" of how our unique oven operates, 2023 provided many opportunities to use CLC's Community Bread Oven. At the Swedish Dinner in January, the bread oven was used to bake over 70 loaves of bread which were sold as part of the bake sale that accompanies the dinner. In addition, the oven was used for larger community bakes during the Folk School Festival in September and the Marine "Enchanting Forest" tree decorating at the end of November. Besides the bigger events, the oven was transported for smaller events in Jackson Meadows and at the Marine Community School. In addition, the oven was used by the Marine Folk School in 2023 for bread baking and pizza making classes they held in the church's kitchen. Each time the oven was used, people gathered to learn more about the oven and its goal of bringing the community together.

Interested in learning more about the community bread oven? Contact Kevin Nyenhuis or John Goodfellow or call the church office. We are always looking for people who want to learn how to fire up and use the bread oven. Looking ahead in 2024, there are more opportunities planned to expand our knowledge and to expand our outreach into the community. Especially as the weather warms up, look for announcements for bread bakes and pizza bakes coming this year.

Bega Kwa Bega/Tanzania Partnership

Submitted by Suzanne Pollack and Matt Smith

Bega Kwa Bega(BKB) means Shoulder to Shoulder in Swahili, the primary language spoken in Tanzania. The ELCA St.Paul Synod has 70 partnership congregations with a Tanzanian partner church. Christ Lutheran has had this partnership for about 20 years. The partnership is built on the 3 foundational P's: Prayer, Projects and Presence. You probably notice we pray for our Ugesa parish every Sunday and they pray for us. We fund projects to support them to have a better life and based on what they assess is needed. We have funded motorbikes, roofs, pews, helped with evangelist's or pastor's homes. We also provide educational scholarships for students in our congregation and preaching points.

During the 2023 school year, CLC provided scholarship funds to enable 11 students from Ugesa parish to attend boarding schools operated by the Iringa Diocese. These schools provide a good education, as shown by the very high pass rates on the standardized national exams all Tanzanian students must take in order to continue their studies. Thanks to the generosity of individual donors as well as gifts from WELCA, we are making a positive difference in the lives of students, their families, and the Ugesa community.

Lastly, we practice " Presence" with our Ugesa partnership church. We were so blessed to plan a trip October 20 - November 5, 2023 to Tanzania and stayed at Ugesa for 2 nights and 3 days. Nine people went from Christ Lutheran, including four new people: Jerry Getchell, Matt Smith, Marj Hagen, Linda Tibbetts, Teri Fick, Mary Ru-deen, Terry and Colleen Gorham, and Suzanne Pollack. (3 Council Members) As a part of our trip, we were fortunate to visit 8 of our students at two schools, Image and Pommern. Everywhere we went, we were welcomed with singing and dancing and such incredible positive energy. It was truly a spiritually inspiring trip for all. We, who have so much, to see the sheer joy of our presence to those who have so little, humbling.

Our fellow Christ Lutheran members, Tom and Beth Hansen have continued their legacy and presence in Iringa, Tanzania as well. They have been so committed to our partnership and planted the seed to go to Tanzania for many of us. They are responsible for Day of Grace's (support and respite for Pastors and Evangelists) beginning and success. Tom and Beth are truly a blessing to CLC and all the BKB partners in the Iringa region, Tanzania. If you are interested in learning more about future trips (probably 2025), please connect with any of us or Pastor Hannah.

Mission Jamaica

In February, a group of 12 represented Christ Lutheran by being part of Mission Jamaica 2023. For 7 of the 12, 2023 was their first experience with being part of the mission trip to Garland Hall Children's Home in the hill country about an hour out of Montego Bay. As in previous years, the week was spent doing "habitat" type projects around the children's home while also spending time with the children and staff. Some of the projects included restoring their chicken coops, fixing holes in their roof, building new shelving and storage cabinets, along with painting and smaller projects.

For the past few years, the week of Mission Jamaica has been set around the date of Ash Wednesday. In Jamaica, Ash Wednesday is a national holiday. And it is a special day every year for our mission team. The day begins with a short Ash Wednesday service held at the home. We then take all the children along with most of the staff to the ocean for a few hours of fun. Following swimming and playing at the beach, we treat everyone to a lunch of fried chicken (at the busiest KFC in the world). The ride back up to Garland Hall is usually quiet and subdued. Not only is everyone a little tired from the day at the beach, but reality also begins to set in that we will soon be saying good-bye for another year. The week always goes by so quickly.

Not including the two-year hiatus for COVID, 2023 marked the 25th anniversary of Christ Lutheran's involvement with Garland Hall Children's Home in Jamaica. (CLC has a longer relationship with Mission Jamaica, but the first few years were mission work being done at other children's homes throughout Jamaica.) During our week of mission work in February, representatives from the Baptist Women's Alliance presented a plaque to our group celebrating Christ Lutheran's 25 years of work and ministry.

Thank you for your continued support of Mission Jamaica. This year we have a group of 14 from CLC taking part during the week of February 10-17. Even if you couldn't join us this year, you can still be part of Mission Jamaica. In addition to the projects, each year we try to fill their food cabinets and freezers with basic food supplies and sources of protein. We are also hoping to buy a new washing machine, and fix (or replace) their solar hot water tanks as they haven't had hot water available for almost 2 years. You can donate money towards Mission Jamaica by writing a check to CLC and putting Mission Jamaica in the memo line. For more information about this year's mission trip, or to learn more about being part of the mission trip in 2025, talk to Dan Froiland, Teri Fick, or Pastor Joel.

Building/Grounds

After several years in which there were a multitude of improvements in and around the building and grounds of Christ Lutheran (mainly due to the Capital Campaign), 2023 brought only a few changes/improvements/additions. First, the replacement of the drinking fountains, both upstairs and downstairs. Using money from a Washington County “BizRecycling” grant the church received, the old fountains were replaced with new ones which 1) have the capabilities to filter the water (little to no well water taste) and 2) include the ability to fill/refill personal water containers. They both are now used on a regular basis after many years in which the previous water fountains were hardly ever used due to a strong iron/well water taste.

The second main improvement was the installation of a camera security system outside each entrance leading into the church property. Each camera records all the activity of people coming in and leaving the building as well as a view of the parking lot. While not eliminating all concerns, the cameras provide an extra layer of security, especially considering the ministry of Red Bridge Preschool.

And finally, we continued to replace the lighting fixtures in the hallways with new LED lighting. Torgeson Hall (downstairs fellowship space) will hopefully have its fixtures changed over this coming year. We are in the early stages of replacing/upgrading the lighting in the Nyman Center (upstairs fellowship area).

Moving forward, there are some possible issues on the horizon. According to those who are providing maintenance to the elevator, some of the main components are nearing/or exceeding the time in which they would normally need to be replaced. In addition, the main boiler and HVAC blowers of the church may need some upgrades. Though for now, recent fixes are holding things steady.

Online/Digital Ministry

Starting as an emergency fix during the early months of COVID in 2020, online/digital ministry has become an essential part of the ministry of Christ Lutheran. From the ability to use projectors in the sanctuary allowing us to project images, videos and liturgies, to the use of Facebook and other social media sites as a way of improving communication and outreach into the community, to the ability we now have to offer every worship online, the online/digital capabilities of our ministry continues to grow. And this trend shows no sign of slowing down.

The advancements in 2023 included setting up a regular weekly schedule of live streaming the 9:30 a.m. Sunday service. The service is available through a link sent out via email and available on our website. In addition, the live stream of the Sunday service is available each Sunday live via Facebook. Within minutes of the service ending, the entire recorded service can be accessed at any time. The Wednesday “Into the Deep” worship service is recorded live each week. The recording is then processed to improve the video and audio quality and is then available online, usually by Thursday early evening. Throughout this year we have had a steady increase in the number of people who are interacting with our congregation through watching one or both of our worship services.

The expansion of our digital ministry has also at times taxed our internet connections which has meant issues with both the live streaming and recordings. The increase in demand and the ever-advancing changes in technology have meant there will continue to be the need for additional equipment and updates to the equipment we already have.

All of this has only been possible through the dedication and hard work of a group of volunteers. It is pretty much unheard of a church of our size being able to what we do every week. And their commitment continues to allow us to improve and expand the online and digital ministry of Christ Lutheran. Specifically, it is the time, dedication, and work of: Gene Di Lorenzo, Micah Johnson, Steve Plummer, Steve Delisi, Derek Bartos, and Jeremy McDearmon. We are always looking for more people to learn and help with this aspect of our ministry. No previous experience needed. Anyone middle-school aged and older is welcome.

One improvement recently implemented is the ability to help those who are hard of hearing to more clearly hear while they are worshipping in the sanctuary. Assistive Listening Devices are available as well as the option to download an app that can be used in conjunction with a hearing aid. Please talk to Gene D. or Steve D. if you are interested.

Audit Committee

Vikki Getchell, Fred Remund

The Audit Committee's annual report is respectfully submitted below:

The audit committee has reviewed the 2022 financial documents for Christ Lutheran Church. All income and expenses are reconciled with appropriate and independent documentation including bank statements, canceled checks, vendor invoices, credit card statements, deposit and withdrawal slips, and payroll records.

Our Revitalize, Restore, and Renew Capital Campaign successfully concluded in 2022 and the fund was zeroed out in 2023. With increasing certificate of deposit (CD) rates, savings account funds were transferred into two CDs with October 2023 maturity dates.

CLC's enduring Christian ministry is made possible by the generous financial support from our members. The audit committee thanks and continues to encourage our members to engage in regular giving, especially during the first half of the calendar year. This enables CLC to better financially plan for the future and minimize or eliminate the need to address a recurring fourth-quarter deficit.

The financial statements referred to above provided a complete and accurate representation of the assets, liabilities, and financial position of Christ Lutheran Church. We would like to acknowledge the service and dedication of CLC's treasurer, Cheryl Reinitz, for her many years of accurate, thorough, and diligent financial oversight and reporting.

Women of the ELCA (WELCA)

Submitted by Lorelee DiLorenzo and Lori Peterson

WELCA made a change to the fall Bazaar and Grandma's Attic sale in 2023. We moved the date to coincide with Marine Mills Folk School's Fall Festival on September 16th, rather than our first weekend in November tradition. We also minimized the creative goods aspect of the bazaar, as the climate for such events has evolved over time. We had to accept the impact of the prevalence of Etsy and other maker sales opportunities, the decline in creative output in general and decreased consumer desire for classic bazaar items. We maintained the luncheon, bake sale and Grandma's Attic. It was a trial year, and by all accounts, a success.

WELCA supports the Swedish Dinner, though it is led by a congregation-wide committee. It was a resounding success in 2023 as a capstone to our 150th anniversary celebration.

Due to these fundraising efforts, WELCA was able to offer financial gifts in numerous areas. Our global mission support was tuition for 4 students attending school in Tanzania. Locally, we supported the church quilters, the church remodeling project, mostly in the Fireside Room in 2023, and the food shelf. Regionally, we contributed to Camp Wapogasset, St Croix Chaplaincy, Valley Outreach, Community Thread, and Family Means.

WELCA Officers:
Lorelee Di Lorenzo, Sherri Clysdale, Sandy Mondor,
Lori Peterson (treasurer)

2023 Reconciliation	Amount
Beginning Balance	\$26,271
Swedish Dinner Net Proceeds	7,655
Grandma's Attic Net Proceeds	3,331
Quilters & Kitchen	(1,303)
Contributions	(2,700)
Ending Balance	\$33,254



Lake Wapogasset
LUTHERAN BIBLE CAMP, INC.



Camp Wapo



Ox Lake



**Wilderness
Canoe Base**

715.268.8434
lakewapo.org

Congregational Report 2023

Thank you for being a Partner Congregation! We are grateful and inspired by the work and support of so many congregations who've continued to partner with camp so that thousands of people each year can experience fellowship in community and come to know Jesus at Camp Wapo, Ox Lake, and Wilderness Canoe Base. We are grateful for a year filled with campers and retreat guests, for our donors, prayer warriors, and YOU - our partner congregations.

Summer 2023 This summer we welcomed nearly 4000 campers and families to Camp Wapo, Ox Lake and Wilderness Canoe Base, including 90 guided canoe trips into the BWCAW. This year's summer staff was excellent. They were required to be flexible, resilient, and filled some important leadership roles. They rose to that challenge full of energy, grace and servant hearts. We are always looking for young adults to work at camp so if you know someone who would be perfect, please send them our way! It's the perfect resume builder for any future career path.

Strategic Plan Initiative We continue to work on Strategic Initiative focusing on three main Strategic areas: Identity, Inclusivity, and Generosity/Engagement. In 2023, a task force of talented theologians and pastors created a theology framework document that will serve as guardrails for the good of our campers/guests and overall ministry. The Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, Inclusion (DEAI) committee has been created and secured funding for a DEAI assessment to happen in 2024. A development audit has been completed highlighting strengths and areas of growth. We continue the work on comprehensive site plans that will help us provide meaningful and transformative outdoor ministry experiences for all.

Welcome! At Wilderness Canoe Base we welcomed **Stephanie Carpenter**, Wilderness Canoe Base Director, **Megan Meyer**, Food & Hospitality, Spencer Garness, Property, and Sarah Garness, Office. Their previous WCB experience and a deep love and understanding for the ministry has resulted in a seamless leadership transition.

At Wapo we welcomed **Eric Golberg**, Director of Administration, **Mari Shumaker**, Wapo Program Director, **Joe Mara**, Maintenance, and **Nick Meziere**, Hospitality and Guest Services. Starting January 1, 2024 **Joel Abenth** will begin serving as the Director of Donor Engagement. With his vast experience working with donors and outdoor ministry, he is ready to work with congregations, individuals and families who wish to support camp in all sorts of ways. Please reach out to him if you want to learn more about opportunities to support camp (joela@campwapo.org).

Retreats and Events in 2023 Retreats at Wapo and Wilderness are definitely building back to capacity. Reach out to Ryan (ryanb@campwapo.org) to schedule your retreat at Wapo or Wilderness. We celebrated 75 years of ministry at Camp Wapo on Aug 6th with a bluegrass worship and celebration lunch. We welcomed over 400 people for our Memorial Day Pancake Extravaganza. We had our 21st year of the Wapo Golf Tournament, and hosted over 1200 guests and volunteers in Advent with 8 performances of the 34th annual Christmas Dinner Theater "For the Love of Christmas Lefse".

Mission Support Fund This year we had 2 matching gift challenges to inspire new donors. One generous friend of camp offered a \$50,000 summer giving challenge and Wilderness Canoe Base received a \$20,000 gift match for GiveMN's Give to the Max day. Our donors rose to the challenge, responding with \$70,000 in gifts. Overall, we also had a tremendous response to our Mission Support Fund appeal to support operating and camper scholarships, raising well over \$500,000. Every gift has a life changing impact on thousands of lives each year.

Our theme for 2024 is "Always" Hebrews 13:8 "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever" and 1Thessalonians 5:16-18 "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances." In a world marked by constant change, this theme serves as a powerful reminder of the unchanging nature of God's love. With our campers, we will discover how to live out this promise in a camp experience and at home.

We look ahead with eager anticipation and a sure sense of hope. See you at camp in 2024!

• ANNUAL REPORT FROM GUSTAVUS CHURCH RELATIONS — DECEMBER 2023 •

Greetings to you from your partners in ministry at Gustavus Adolphus College! The definition of community at Gustavus has always included the wider ELCA community. The network of institutions and relationships which holds our Lutheran congregations, synods, camps, colleges, seminaries, and social agencies together plays a vital role in nourishing and advancing our collective and important contribution to the world. We all make a greater impact because of this diverse network to which we belong.

Through the Gustavus Association of Congregations, the Office of Church Relations at Gustavus is connected to over 500 congregations from across the country. These relationships are an important source of Christian faith inspiration and ministry encouragement for the college. We have so very much to be grateful for and always look forward to our time together at the annual Gustavus Association of Congregations business meeting in April 2024.

As you gather for congregation annual meetings and synod assemblies, we would like you to know our gratitude for your ministry and hope you are inspired by the reminder of the many others who walk alongside you in mission. The Office of Church Relations at Gustavus exists because as a college we live from our Christian faith and desire to be in service to the wider community within which we are rooted. We seek to be a place you might consider as a ministry partner and resource for your congregation's educational goals and growth.

MARK YOUR 2024 CALENDARS AND JOIN US FOR THESE SPECIAL EVENTS:

• **Annual Gustavus Association of Congregations Business Meeting Luncheon — APRIL 27, 2024**

The Annual Business Meeting of the Gustavus Adolphus College Association of Congregations will gather for a luncheon meeting and feature updates from the Gustavus President and Chair of the Board of Trustees as well as inspiration from Gustavus students. For more information: gustavus.edu/businessmeeting.

• **The Gustavus Academy for Faith, Science, and Ethics — JUNE 15-21, 2024**, is an exciting resource for high school youth interested in exploring creative alliances between faith and science. The theme for the 2024 Academy is *"How and Why We Sleep, Revelations in Rest."* For more information and to nominate a high school student: gustavus.edu/chaplain/academy.

• **Annual Nobel Conference® — OCTOBER 1-2, 2024** *"Sleep Unraveled."*

Sleep is a universal human experience and yet its importance is often overlooked. Nobel 60 — Sleep Unraveled brings together an interdisciplinary panel of experts to explore the centrality of sleep for human health and mental well-being. In addition to its role in physical rejuvenation, sufficient high-quality sleep is crucial for cognition, memory, learning, and general health. Sleep loss — whether triggered by noise or light pollution, stress, overwork or conflict with circadian rhythms — has been associated with high blood pressure, weight gain, diabetes and a plethora of other medical conditions. The conference will also delve into the neurological and psychological processes of sleep, the cultural evolution of sleep practices and the social justice implications of a twenty-four hour convenience society that condemns workers to permanent sleep deprivation. More details can be found at: gustavus.edu/events/nobelconference.

• **Christmas in Christ Chapel — DECEMBER 6-8, 2024** This annual tradition in Christ Chapel celebrates and reflects upon the birth of Jesus Christ through worship that features music, dance, spoken word, and the visual arts. Ticket information and archived live stream services can found at: gustavus.edu/events/cc.

For more information about these events and the many resources we offer congregations, please contact the Office of Church Relations or visit us on-line at: gustavus.edu/churchrelations. Thank you for your partnership and prayers!

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr. Grady St. Dennis
Associate Vice President of Mission/Executive Chaplain

A MESSAGE FROM PRESIDING BISHOP
ELIZABETH EATON



Dear friends in Christ,

Over the past year we have continued to experience changes in the world around us. Even as our church finds ways to adapt to this changing world, we find hope in the unchanging and always present promise of God's love through Jesus Christ. We change and adapt not to conform to the world but because we believe that the gift of God's Son is for the world, and that our congregations and worshiping communities are places to gather and be sent into the world, where we will tell the story of God's love in word and deed.

The ministries of our congregations, our synods and the churchwide organization provide ways for the church to move beyond the boundaries of structures and geography and to share God's love with people in our neighborhoods, our cities, our country and beyond. We engage in this ministry knowing that our church walks by faith, trusting in God's promise in the gospel, and that we exist by and for the proclamation of this gospel word. In John 15:5, Jesus reminds us, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." We are connected by the promise that we do all through Christ and can do nothing apart from him.

God gives the Holy Spirit, who uses gospel proclamation — in preaching and sacraments, in forgiveness and in healing conversations — to create and sustain this faith. Just as we rely on God to sustain our faith, we rely on each other to sustain the ministries that offer God's love to the world. Through your generosity to each expression

of this church — your congregation, your synod and your churchwide organization — you add to our collective voice proclaiming God's love for all.

I am grateful for your generosity over this last year. My gratitude spreads far beyond your generous financial gifts. You've shared your gifts of time through countless hours of volunteering, serving and accompanying. You've shared the gifts of your voices as we've tried to discover and learn how God is calling us to be the church now and into the future. And, finally, dear church, you have shared the gift of the realness of God's love with the world around you. Be well, dear church, and stand steadfast in the promise of God's love and grace as you take that promise with you into the world.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elizabeth A. Eaton".

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

“I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.” —John 15:5



*You crown the year with your goodness, and your paths overflow with plenty.
Psalm 65:11 (ELW)*

The year 2023 brought us again to in-person worship and events after the long disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. What we did not do as a synod was to return to everything as it had been before. Recognizing that God always calls us forward into a new future, congregations discovered myriad ways to build on the lessons and new practices learned during the pandemic. Likewise, the synod embraced new ways of doing familiar things and experimented with new ideas and programs.

Here are some highlights of the investment of time and energy by the synod office during 2023. All these are made possible because of the generous financial support that passes from congregations to the synod. Thank you for helping us be a church together as we all find ways to be faithful to our callings in a changing and complex world.

An undeniable highlight was the presentation of a check for \$1,000,000 to Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota during Synod Assembly last May. The check is for renovations to a building that will house the Families Together East Side Preschool on the lower level of Grace Lutheran Church in St. Paul. This partnership is one of the pillars of The Planting Hope Campaign, which has raised \$1,473,861 to date at the end of December 2023. This is one half of our overall campaign goal.

In addition to this transformational work with LSS-MN, in 2023 we also launched the first summer of paid internships, funded through The Planting Hope Campaign. From June through August, nine young adults served in a variety of congregations and Lutheran agencies. We are grateful for the work of Pastor Bristol Reading (St. Luke, St. Paul) in overseeing this project. Also, we gave significant financial support to congregational vitality through the campaign. Those investments are detailed later in this report.

Alongside the work of The Planting Hope Campaign, congregations like yours continue to contribute toward our budget of \$1,885,000 in mission support. Fiscal Year 2023 ends on January 31, 2024 and we hope to be at the goal by then. Again, thank you for seeing how your congregation's work is supported and expanded through our common funding of synod and ELCA churchwide ministries. Despite needing to navigate new realities in a post-pandemic world, God continues to crown our efforts with God's abundance. The synod's financial work is guided by David Roinas.

During 2023 there were 28 persons in the candidacy process, preparing to serve the wider church as pastors or deacons. Currently, 22 persons are serving their first call in the Saint Paul Area Synod. They also participate in a structured program of First Call Theological Education (FCTE). Both candidacy work and FCTE are led by Deacon Krista Lind. This past year two candidates received calls in other synods. As you might imagine, this work is important for the church today and for the church in the coming years.

Candidates ordained in 2023 include Pastor Jennifer Luong, Pastor Jua Jay Her, Pastor Carrie Stiles, Pastor Amy Vigesaa, Pastor Reed Fowler, Deacon Katherine Lindberg. We also received Pastor Stanley Ayashim, recently ordained in the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria, as a first call pastor through our partnership with the Lutheran World Federation. We welcome these seven new rostered ministers.

In addition to first call candidates, the synod staff works with call committees in more than two dozen congregations each year. In addition, the call manual was revised this past year and new protocols were developed to assist congregations to be open and ready to receive candidates who are persons of color or from the LGBTQIA community. As a synod, we know how important the gifts of all leaders are to the work of God's church.

During times of transition, the synod finds pastors and deacons to serve in interim roles. Those serving in interim ministry meet monthly for prayer, mutual support and learning and are directed by Rolf Lowenberg-DeBoer. With Rachel Holsten, front office administrator and registrar, Rolf coordinated the Tool Kit for Congregational Leaders in February, which brought together 165 participants from 52 congregations. The two most attended workshops addressed issues of racism and implicit bias, issues which matter to all of us in this synod. In 2023, the synod also inaugurated the Deeper Dive series, a Zoom gathering for presidents and vice presidents. Twenty-four congregations participated in this inaugural series of monthly leadership training and support.

The synod also provides other initiatives to address congregational vitality. These workshops, which include Tools for the Church, Spiritual Gifts, Stewardship for All Seasons, Building a Culture of Generosity, and Liberating Structures, are led by Pastor Justin Grimm and members of the vitality team. In 2023, participants numbered more than 300.

Serving as mission developers and redevelopers during 2023 were Pastor Liz Eide, Lutheran Church of Peace; Pastor Jon Yurk, Christ the Servant; Pastor Thomas Tsen, Minnesota Faith Chinese; Pastor Dale Stiles, St. Paul in Wyoming; Pastor William Siong and Pastor Jua Jay Her at Eternal Flame; Pastor Gilo Agwa, Foundation of Life; Pastor Jodi Houge, Humble Walk; Deacon Kari Olson, Shobi's Table; and Pastor Ana Becerra, Cristo Rey. Pastors Ben and Kristen Eisele (Farmington Lutheran) completed an exploration for mission possibilities in Rosemount. When asked what is new (or renewed) in this synod, it's easy to see fresh ideas in all these settings.

During 2023 church groups were again able to travel to our partner churches in Guatemala and Tanzania. Five congregational groups were hosted by the Iglesia Luterana Agustina de Guatemala (ILAG). Two members of the Guatemala Committee, Janet Metcalfe and Jennifer Reinhardt, participated in an ELCA Global Mission international consultation in November. In 2023, 200 individuals from 16 congregations, nine affiliate organizations and two colleges traveled to the Iringa Diocese. As bishop, I was also thankful to be with our partners in Tanzania this past November.

The generosity of members of the synod supports our global companions with scholarships, emergency aid, congregation-to-congregation partnerships, and through prayer. Staff members Kirsten Levorson and Susan Seidel oversee the work of Bega Kwa Bega, which we undertake with our siblings in Tanzania.

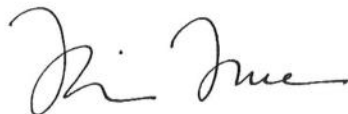
A grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. allowed additional opportunities for pastors to be well equipped for today's challenges. Synod pastors of color and the synod program staff participated in a facilitated retreat in Sedona, Ariz., in February. In addition, this past year 19 pastors, deacons, mentors, and a facilitator were a part of the Second Act cohort for rostered ministers in their fourth through tenth years of service. Our Lilly grant programs are directed by Leslie Ortiz.

Behind the scenes, Mary Smith oversaw the launch of our new website (spas-elca.org), along with 51 editions of the weekly *News and Events* newsletter, 40 companion synod newsletters, 300 social media posts, and other essential communication from the synod. (You can sign up to receive our newsletters at spas-elca.org/subscribe-to-synod-news.)

With all this creative work of the synod staff, you may wonder what the bishop does. As bishop, I work on governance with the Synod Council and Executive Committee, as well as meeting with the finance committee. I ordain new pastors and deacons and preach regularly (29 times in congregations, synod and churchwide events in 2023). I help plan the Bishop's Theological Conference and gatherings of the ministerium. I represent the synod on institutional boards and at ecumenical and inter-religious gatherings. I am a member of the Conference of Bishops and through 2023 served as a liaison bishop on the ELCA Church Council, as well as co-chairing the Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue. I work with congregations in times of conflict and oversee the discipline of rostered ministers, when needed. Best of all, I serve as a pastor for the pastors and deacons in this synod, meeting regularly with individual leaders.

If you have visited the synod office, you know that we are not a large-scale operation; but if you think about the range of ministry we do together in this synod, you know our collective impact is mighty. We can do so much because of the dedicated talent of the individuals on the synod staff. I am grateful for all that Rachel, Mary, David, Kirsten, Susan, Rolf, Justin, Krista and Leslie have accomplished this past year. I am also grateful for the work Ryan and Astine Bose did in the first half of the year as our short-term volunteers in Iringa. I hope you will join me in thanking the synod staff when you see or speak to them.

Yours in God's service,



Bishop Patricia Lull



105 University Avenue West, St. Paul MN 55103
651-224-4313 | www.spas-elca.org

Notes, Questions, Concerns, Ponderings...

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

