

BETHEL LUTHERAN CHURCH

Willmar, Minnesota



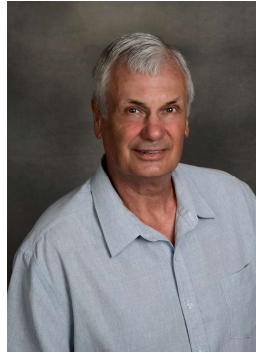
2023 Annual Report



EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN
CHURCH IN AMERICA
God's work. Our hands.

CONGREGATIONAL MEETING
January 28th, 2024
10:30 a.m.

COUNCIL MEMBERS



Dennis Pieske
Council President



Jason Collins
Council Vice President



Melissa Danielson
Council Secretary



Dale Becker
Council Member



Karen Ochsendorf
Council Member



Lisa Ruter
Council Member



Rachel Skretvedt
Council Member

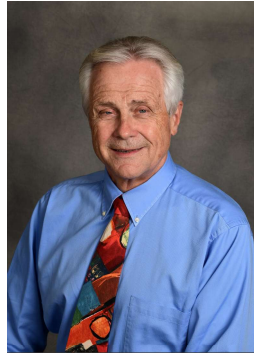


Kevin Strandberg
Council Member

STAFF MEMBERS



Jonathan Dahl
Pastor



Bob Dahl
Pastor



Kathy Hartley
Pastor



Beverly Baseman
Deacon



Barb Blomquist
Servant Coordinator



Sarah Dahl
Youth Ministry/Music



Elizabeth Dimler
Administrator



Rick Klavetter
Custodian



Sue Klavetter
Custodian



Dwayne Ninow
Custodian

ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING AGENDA

JANUARY 28, 2024 - 10:30 A.M.

- 1) WELCOME AND OPENING PRAYER
- 2) ADDITIONS TO AGENDA
- 3) REPORTS
 - CHURCH COUNCIL-PRESIDENT
 - PASTOR
 - COMMUNITY OUTREACH
 - YOUTH/CHRISTIAN ED
 - FINANCE
 - BUILDING
 - CEMETERY
- 4) RECOGNITION OF COUNCIL MEMBERS/STAFF
- 5) PROPOSAL OF 2024 BUDGET
- 6) OTHER BUSINESS
- 7) CLOSING PRAYER/ADJOURNMENT

PASTOR JONATHAN DAHL

We live in a DIY world. DIY = Do It Yourself. Much of this is very good. We learn things by doing. We explore things by doing. We adventure in life by doing. Doing things on our own has always been part of our human existence.

In 2023 at Bethel, there was new landscaping. There was new carpeting. There was new roofing. There was pipe fixing. There was room updating. Some of the work was done by us. Much of it was done by others - people we brought in to lead the way because they have a better know-how. By bringing them in and joining with the resources we had to offer, there was a greater capacity to work at making it the best it could be.

Do we look at our faith and spiritual lives in the same way? Faith and spirituality go a long way about how we feel, think, and believe toward ourselves, others, and the world as a whole. Some of it can be DIY = Do It Yourself. That is great. But overall, I tend to believe that being our best selves, being our best community, being our best world comes about when we join together. That seems to be God's theme throughout history.

You don't get the mix of people anywhere else like you do at church. I am grateful for what I learn and discover and receive from others every week through worship and conversations and interactions. It helps me to be a better me. I believe it can help you to be a better you.

The reality of the current trend is that people are participating and interacting less. To that end, as we move into 2024, I invite you to come and be a part of what is happening at Bethel. Keep coming. Come a little more than you did in these past few years. Come again if you have not for quite a while. Come so that we can work together on fresh hearts and renewed spirits and growing minds and capable bodies.

I believe God sees a void in these areas as God looks at the moods and temperaments and opinions and actions of people nowadays. DIY can do a lot, but it does leave a void. DIT can do a lot, too. DIT = Do It Together. All of it falls under DIWG = Do It With God. Let this be an invitation for continued and renewed participation in the life of Bethel. Bethel is better with you a part of it! Godspeed and onward into 2024!

ANNUAL REPORT MESSAGE

BISHOP DEE PEDERSON

One of the great joys of my call is to visit the congregations across this synod. Our territory includes vast plains, rich agricultural land, hilly vistas, quiet lakes, and powerful rivers. God planted our congregations in cities, open farmland, and towns. We are very different from each other; yet in Jesus Christ, we all are one.

As we've journeyed together this year, we have been united by focusing on the WORD: Jesus - the Word-made-flesh, and the word of Scripture - as the source and center of our lives.

Embody the Word. Synod Assembly 2023 brought over 365 voting members together in-person for the first time in 4 years! We rejoiced to sing again in Christ Chapel, passed the 2025 budget, and elected new leaders. And plenary speaker Matt Bloom helped us consider wholistic wellness in daily life.

Serving the Word Today. Rostered ministers gathered for the Fall Theological Conference and considered how the Word is served (our calling to serve Christ) and how we deliver or serve-up the Word to people in our presiding and preaching. Presenter Jason Moore provided insights that can transfer in some way to all of our congregations, as we serve the Word both in-person and online in our both/and world today.

Living the Word Today. Equipping Congregations Day 2023 gathered participants at Vinje Lutheran in Willmar to discover ministry resources - from stewardship to hospitality - to take back home. Luther Seminary Professor Rolf Jacobson led participants to look for the gifts of the Holy Spirit who is at loose in our world today.

Those actions - Embody, Serving, and Living the Word Today - provide the framework for reviewing this year and leaning into the next.

Embody the Word

Thank you for the way you, as beloved children of God, embody the word in your congregations and daily callings. You are engaging in ministry that is vital to the lives of your participants and the larger community. Although many of us are still exhausted from pandemic adaptations, congregations are emerging from these difficult years with a clearer sense of who we are and what God is calling us to be and do today. The dedication of our church leaders to ministries of word and sacrament and serving, to compassion, mercy, and justice - has never been greater.

As we review the past year, one place to turn is the numbers. No, it's not all about the numbers, but trends do tell a

story, whether in our households, businesses, or congregations. A synod's responsibility is to note the trends occurring among our congregations because these numbers represent real people, hearing the story of God's love in Jesus Christ.

The most recent statistical summary for congregations comes from the annual reports you completed for 2022. Of the 229 congregations in the SW MN Synod in 2022, 166 filed an annual report; 63 filed no report. When the annual report information comes to you in January, please direct the info to others in your congregation who can assist. Talk with your Church Council about the trends you are seeing. Return the form. And then know you have helped us reach a target of 100% responses this year! Thank you!

For numbers-lovers

	2021	2022
Baptized members:	100,421	97,689
Ave. baptized/cong.	439	428
Baptisms age 16+	13	24
Affirmation of Faith	290	353
Transfer in	862	1093
Baptized Received	2,207	2,594
Active Participants	48,944	48,875
Ave. wkly worship on-site	10,662	12,918
Ave. wkly. worship online	14,326	9,554
Ave. att. per cong. on-site	55	64
Ave. att per cong. online	103	70

What stories do those figures tell? There is the cultural trend of fewer people connecting with a faith community. But these numbers also represent stories of outreach as adults are welcomed through Holy Baptism as hospitality is extended and new members are received, and as people are drawn to worshipping together both in the room and online.

ANNUAL REPORT MESSAGE

Generosity

We know there is great generosity in our congregations! Although earned income for congregations was challenged last year everywhere, regular giving and other receipts increased. Over the pandemic years, many congregations held special appeals to upgrade technology - what a gift!

You have an impact on human lives every day. Each week in the announcements, try telling a brief story about one of your ministries. Share a photo on a screen. Thank people for their generosity and the difference they are making. If you are looking for resources to help affirm your people's generosity, check out the synod website under the "Generosity" tab!

Thank you for the generous Mission Support you shared in 2022. Although current 2023 figures won't be known until after the fiscal year ends January 31, we have seen a significant decrease in Mission Support this year. Why? We know that the cushion of PPP money is used up. Everything costs more. Some of our congregations' most generous givers are passing away or face high costs for elder care. And there is the tendency that when faced with financial challenges, congregations choose to direct funds close to home. Whatever the reason, we will continue to wisely steward the resources we receive and are committed to prioritizing providing pastoral care of congregations and rostered ministers. Like you, we know that challenges can also lead to doing things in new ways, and we trust in God's creative Spirit as we plan for the future. Thank you for your generosity.

If you have not yet sent in a Mission Support contribution for this year, will you please consider a gift yet in January? And if you have not yet returned a Mission Support Intent form for 2024, please do so. We are deep in planning the 2026 budget that will be presented at the 2024 Synod Assembly, and your planning will help us do our best planning, as well. Thank you!

Serving the Word Today

Thanks be to God for all the Lay and Rostered Ministers leading our congregations today. They are serving Jesus and serving the Visible and Spoken Word to people in worship in this synod and far beyond. Our synod includes 300 rostered ministers, half of whom hold active calls in congregations, specialized calls, and synod calls.

This year, we celebrated the ordination of 5 new pastors: Rev. Chad Duffy, Rev. Mort Meyenberg, Rev. Stefan Swanson, Rev. Bob Ossefoort, and Rev. Sarah Zender. We consistently welcome more rostered ministers to this great

synod than we see move away.

One of the greatest challenges for congregations and synods today is securing rostered minister leaders who can "serve the Word" in their context. Today, seminaries are seeing approximately half the number of enrollments they did 15 years ago. The good news is that congregations are embracing the gifts of their people and becoming less pastor-dependent than we were. The other piece of good news is that more lay leaders are sensing the Holy Spirit nudging them to consider part- or full-time ministry - often as a second career; and they are bringing incredible skills and life experiences into these new callings today.

TODAY, I pray that God will "send laborers" into this new and changing vineyard of ministry. My mentor, Rev. Dick Vangerud, often spoke of an initiative of our predecessor church body (The American Lutheran Church) called, "Men for the Ministry." Yes, back in the 1960s, the initiative was only about "men" for the ministry! But back then, congregations prayed that God would raise up new leaders. Pastors encouraged those they knew to consider ministry as a life calling. Since we can't grow pastors on trees, this is what I ask you to do:

Pray in weekly worship and in your own devotions that the Holy Spirit would move hearts for people to consider part- or full-time ministry.

Notice the people of any age in your church who might have the faith, temperament, and gifts for ministry.

Affirm their strengths. Ask them if they might pray about and consider ministry in their future.

We are grateful for the ministry of Gifts of Grace that helps rostered ministers reduce the debt from their seminary training, and for the scholarships that are available from so many sources - including this synod, our seminaries, and the ELCA churchwide. Thank you!

For congregations who have rostered ministers leading you, please take care of them by providing appropriate compensation (see our synod compensation guidelines) and benefits. Encourage them to take sabbath time away from work and make use of continuing education growth. Got a concern? Talk to them, not about them. Give them a word of thanks for their ministry, which they serve 24/7.

Whether there are lay or rostered leaders serving the word with you today, strive to live together as the body of Christ. Nothing is more draining of leadership or destructive of Christian community than behaviors which tear apart the body of Christ. At the end of chapter 12, St. Paul tells the Corinthians, "And I will show you a still more excellent way." And that is the way of love - the way of Jesus.

ANNUAL REPORT MESSAGE

Living the Word Today

These are interesting times to be called and sent by the Triune God to live the Word today! The territory of our synod is described by the state demographer as including areas that are entirely Rural, Town/Rural Mix, Urban/Town/Rural Mix, and Entirely Urban. "Cities, farms, and towns together." As demographic trends continue, the report asks, and we as the church can ask:

How will we support the many older adults who are part of our communities who may live farther from services and family support?

How will we respond to labor force shortages as more Boomers move into retirement?

How can our churches help our distinct communities to be more attractive to new residents?

How can churches make a difference in communities with growing racial and cultural diversity, and create connections and belonging?

Those gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12) will lead the way as God continues to reform us to live the Word today.

This fall we celebrated the reactivation of our relationships with our friends in the South Eastern Diocese of Southern Africa. Four guests came to be with us here in Sept. -Oct., and then five leaders from SW MN made the journey to South Africa and were blessed by warm hospitality, joy in our friendships, and new opportunities to accompany one another in Christ. Another gift!

I am grateful for the leadership of our Synod Council, taking seriously its responsibility to be faithful stewards of our resources of staffing, facility, and funding. I am excited to work together with them on the Council's commitment to "empower Christian communities to join in God's mission of reconciliation: listening intentionally, loving unconditionally, serving others authentically, and faithfully healing creation." They have been focusing on the strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results they see in this commitment, and are eager to live out this vision with you in the coming year.

I conclude this report by expressing my sincere thanks and gratitude to the synod staff who embody, serve, and live the Word each day: Rev. Heather Culuris - Synod Minister, Tammy Schacher - Executive Assistant, Kristin Bakeberg - Communications Coordinator, Maggie Berggren - Administrative Assistant, and Rev. Dr. Troy Pflibsen - Director for Evangelical Mission. They walk beside you in ministry with wisdom and joy. We are grateful for the ministry of Youth Ministry Coordinator Rev. Nikoli Falenscheck, who served with us for the past year. And we continue to grieve the

passing of our colleague and friend, Pr. Naomi Mahler, who brought energy, courage, and faith to her many ministries and lived out + SOLI DEO GLORIA! each day.

Thank you for the privilege of embodying, serving, and living the Word together with you as the Southwestern Minnesota Synod, ELCA.

Holy God, we praise you for calling diverse people into your church and its ministries. Uphold all leaders with your strong and loving arms. Empower ministers to serve your people with the word of scripture, the water of life, the meal of grace, and deeds of love and mercy and justice. Equip them with both beloved traditions and fresh ideas; grant them joy in their tasks; and renew them daily by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the Word among us, now and forever. Amen. (adapted from ACS, p. 46).

+ with grace, peace, and love,

Rev. Dee Pederson, D. Min

Bishop, Southwestern Minnesota Synod, ELCA

2023 PHOTOS



2023 PHOTOS



2023 PARISH REPORT

CHILD MEMBERS (baptized, not confirmed)

Total as of January 1, 2023		62
2023 Additions	Baptisms	3
	Transfers	3
2023 Losses	Confirmations	(7)
	Deaths	0
	Transfers	0
	Statistical Adjustment	2
	Net Gain (Loss)	1
Total as of December 31, 2023		63

ADULT MEMBERS (confirmed)

Total as of January 1, 2023		427
2023 Additions	Baptisms	0
	Confirmations	7
	Transfers	5
2023 Losses	Deaths	(10)
	Transfers	(4)
	Statistical Reconciliation	(9)
	Net Gain (Loss)	(11)
Total as of December 31, 2023		416

TOTAL MEMBERSHIP

	Child Members	63
	Adult Members	416
Total as of December 31, 2023		479

MEMBERSHIP

Year	Baptized	Confirmed
2020	564	484
2021	528	461
2022	489	427
2023	479	416

WORSHIP ATTENDANCE

Year	Weekly Average	Yearly Total
2020	data unavailable	data unavailable
2021	171	5,126 (only 30 weeks of data)
2022	186	9,460
2023	181	9,397

BETHEL PASTORAL ACTS

Baptisms	3
Funerals	17
Weddings	4

2023 FINANCIAL REPORT SUMMARY

GIVING	2023	2022
General Fund Giving (envelopes, simply giving, etc.)	\$ 487,721	\$ 489,830
Other General Fund Income (interest, other)	\$ 34,125	\$ 25,156
Total General Fund Income	\$ 521,845	\$ 514,986
EXPENSE		
Mission Support from Budget	\$ 49,646	\$ 52,000
SW MN Synod ELCA	\$ 24,000	\$ 25,000
Local/Global Missions	\$ 10,000*	\$ 10,500
ELCA World Hunger	\$ 1,000	
The Fortress	\$ 500	
Foster Stitches	\$ 500	
Kandiyohi County Food Shelf	\$ 2,000	
National Ataxia Foundation	\$ 500	
Paz y Esperanza	\$ 1,500	
Project Turnabout	\$ 1,000	
Safe Avenues	\$ 1,000	
Salvation Army	\$ 500	
United Way	\$ 1,000	
Willmar School Child Guides	\$ 500	
YMCA	\$ 1,000	
Green Lake Ministries	\$ 5,000	\$ 4,500
Lutheran Social Service	\$ 3,000	\$ 3,000
Family Promise	\$ 3,000	\$ 3,000
Adult/Youth Mission/Faith Trips	\$ 2,146	\$ 4,000
Food for Kidz Event	\$ 2,500	\$ 2,000
Total Clergy/Staff Compensation	\$ 274,361	\$ 247,984
Total Operating Expenses	\$ 181,613	\$ 158,502
Total Expense	\$ 505,620	\$ 458,486
DIFFERENCE	\$ 16,225	\$ 56,500

* An extra \$1,000 was given from the Missions Fund which is not a budgeted line.

2023 FINANCIAL REPORT SUMMARY

OTHER MISSION SUPPORT	2023
Family Promise, Noisy Coin Designations, Seminary Support, Food Shelf, Community Support, Additional Synod Support, Other	\$ 14,004
Foundation Grants	\$ 14,054
Bethel Buddy Salvation Army Angel Tree Shopping	\$ 1,500
Bethel Cemetery Paving Project	\$ 2,500
Bethel Night at the Stingers	\$ 700
Bethel Quilters	\$ 1,000
College Scholarships	\$ 2,500
Food for Kidz Event	\$ 1,500
Green Lake Lutheran Ministries-Camperships	\$ 1,810
Green Lake Lutheran Ministries-Christmas Dinner Fundraiser	\$ 1,000
Green Lake Lutheran Ministries-Counselor Search/Promotion	\$ 1,544

MAJOR FUNDS ACTIVITY REPORT

	1/1/23			12/31/23
	Balance	Received	Expended	Balance
General Fund	\$ 56,500			\$ 16,225
Capital Beautification Fund	\$ 140,002	\$ 57,348	\$ 48,136	\$ 149,214
Bethel Reserve Fund	\$ 263,903	\$ 5,000	\$ 11,645	\$ 257,258
Bethel Foundation Principal	\$ 353,060	\$ 26,079	\$ 0	\$ 379,139
Bethel Memorials	\$ 61,845	\$ 16,675	\$ 8,787	\$ 69,733
Land, Buildings & Equipment	\$ 5,509,814	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 5,509,814

2024 PROPOSED BUDGET

MISSION SUPPORT	2024	2023
	(proposed)	
SW MN Synod ELCA	\$ 24,000	\$ 24,000
Lutheran Social Service	\$ 3,000	\$ 3,000
Family Promise-Homelessness	\$ 3,000	\$ 3,000
Green Lake Lutheran Ministries	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000
Adult/Youth Mission/Faith Trips	\$ 2,000	\$ 3,000
Food for Kidz Packaging Event	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,500
Global/Local Missions Team	\$ 10,000	\$ 10,000
Total Missions Support	\$ 49,000	\$ 50,500

SALARIES/BENEFITS

Clergy Salary	\$113,000	\$115,100
(Pastors Jon, Bob, & Kathy)		
Clergy Pension/Insurance	\$ 43,000	\$ 42,000
Clergy Continuing Ed	\$ 750	\$ 1,000
Clergy Travel/Conf/Training	\$ 750	\$ 750
Lay Attendees Travel/Conf	\$ 500	\$ 750
Staff Salaries (inc SS & Med)	\$160,500	\$162,500
Staff Pension/Ins	\$ 27,000	\$ 13,900
Staff Continuing Ed	\$ 500	\$ 500
Total Salaries/Benefits	\$346,000	\$336,500

OPERATING EXPENSES	2024	2023
	(proposed)	
Worship & Music Team	\$ 6,000	\$ 5,500
Stewardship Team	\$ 250	\$ 400
Bethel Council/Personnel	\$ 750	\$ 750
Christian Ed Team	\$ 3,000	\$ 3,000
Youth & Family Team	\$ 1,500	\$ 2,000
GiFT Events	\$ 1,500	\$ 2,000
(Generations in Faith Together)		
Community Outreach Team	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000
Communications	\$ 2,500	\$ 3,000
Office Supplies	\$ 4,000	\$ 4,000
Technology Equip & Maintenance	\$ 15,000	\$ 13,500
Accounting Fees	\$ 2,500	\$ 2,000
Janitorial Supplies	\$ 3,000	\$ 3,000
Building Maintenance	\$ 12,000	\$ 13,500
Building Utilities	\$ 39,500	\$ 38,500
Bethel Insurance Coverage	\$ 18,000	\$ 17,000
Mileage Reimbursement	\$ 500	\$ 700
Total Operating Expenses	\$111,000	\$109,850
ALL TOTAL EXPENSES	\$506,000	\$496,850

BETHEL LUTHERAN CHURCH

BETHEL'S MISSION STATEMENT

Rooted in Christ. Loving people to life.

BETHEL'S VISION

Don't just go to church. Be the church.

Celebrating the image of God in every person, we strive to live out our faith with urgency and relevance. Led by the Spirit, we seek to challenge and transform the world, beginning with ourselves and moving in the wider community. We are an ever-growing people of prayer, worship and service, welcoming all who long for a Christ-centered community of love.

BETHEL'S SPIRITUAL VALUES

Generous Hospitality
Passionate Worship
Diverse Music
Faithful Prayer
Lifelong Learning
Adventurous Outreach
Abundant Grace