

# BETHEL LUTHERAN CHURCH

*Willmar, Minnesota*



## 2024 Annual Report



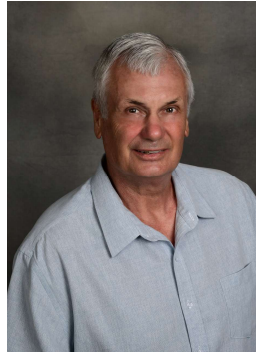
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN  
CHURCH IN AMERICA

CONGREGATIONAL MEETING  
JANUARY 26TH, 2025



## Council Members

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Dennis Pieske  
Council President



Kevin Strandberg  
Council Vice President



Lisa Ruter  
Council Secretary



Greg Brandt  
Council Treasurer



Dale Becker  
Council Member



Jason Collins  
Council Member



Melissa Danielson  
Council Member



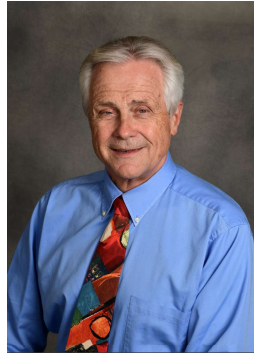
Rachel Skretvedt  
Council Member

# Staff Members

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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 26TH, 2025 - 10:30 A.M.

- 1) WELCOME AND OPENING PRAYER
- 2) ADDITIONS TO AGENDA
- 3) REPORTS
  - CHURCH COUNCIL-PRESIDENT
  - PASTOR
  - FINANCE
  - BUILDING
  - CEMETERY
- 4) RECOGNITION OF COUNCIL MEMBERS/STAFF
- 5) PROPOSAL OF 2025 BUDGET
- 6) OTHER BUSINESS
- 7) CLOSING PRAYER/ADJOURNMENT

# Annual Report Message

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## PASTOR JONATHAN DAHL

I'm not a big New Year's resolution guy. Rather, in pastor language, we talk about a pastor being "called" to serve a congregation. However, that can lead to an understanding that only a pastor has a "calling." Not true. We all have a calling.

What I appreciate about the language of calling is that I think it brings greater depth than resolution language. Resolution sounds awfully rule-oriented. Calling, at least to me, sounds spiritual and passionate and quite thoughtful. It has a bounce to it that allows for shaping and altering and shifting.

How would you define your calling? What are you being called toward? What are you being called away from? What is new? What is different? What is similar as you think about your life calling? How do the various parts of your calling mix together? Or maybe some parts of your calling do not mix at all right now! It all is part of your calling, and that makes it adventurous, challenging, and sometimes downright hard.

For instance, the way I approach pastoring is not the same as it was five years ago or 10 years ago because my kids now range in age brackets where there are many different directions to go for our family. Therefore, I have to schedule meetings at different times that I used to, and other things need to happen at alternate times than before in an effort to be pastor and dad (yes, I sometimes create sermons in the middle of the night).

The same rings true for the calling of Bethel. Bethel is not the same church to whom I accepted the call to serve as pastor back in 2008. I don't think of Bethel as necessarily being better or worse than she was in 2008 (though some of you might have an opinion on that).

Instead, I try to think of Bethel as living into her calling for this time and place as the year 2025 is encountered. To do that, some things gain greater importance, and some things receive lesser importance than perhaps they previously did. That's the only way a calling can be a calling!

To that end, then, I am excited by the calling to partner with Lutheran Social Service of MN for a new Youth Resource Center for west central Minnesota that will be housed on Bethel's 3rd floor beginning sometime in March. I am excited by the calling for passionate and communal worship on Sunday and Wednesday mornings that centers on the

## Annual Report Message

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love of God and the teaching of Jesus and the meal of Holy Communion. I am excited by the Bible studies and book studies, the Meals on Wheels, the confirmation kids and the Sunday School kids, and so many other groups and gatherings. I am excited by a desire to welcome all to this Bethel faith community, even as we misstep with this because we are human.

And that is what I love best about Bethel. We do misstep. I misstep. But I do believe we are a church that is trying to welcome all; we are trying to care and show God's love and grace; we are trying to serve and make a difference in the world. We are trying to live into the callings we each have, and we are trying to honor and help one another as we do so. You have a beloved calling. Keep at it. I hope Bethel is a help for you to keep at it. And thank you for being such a part of Bethel's calling. God bless.

# Annual Report Message

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## BISHOP DEE PEDERSON

THANK YOU for the privilege of walking with you in ministry this year. It is an honor to be entrusted with the stories of your greatest joys and hopes for the church, as well as your burdens and concerns. I "keep watch" with you as we look for what God is doing among us today and in the future. This verse from Romans 12 provides a vision of what this might look like as this synod lives as one body, in Christ, and as members one of another.



### ONE BODY

We become part of this one body in Christ in holy baptism as we are united with Christians across space and time. Today, you and I are one with Christians in the Lutheran tradition in 99 countries around the world through the Lutheran World Federation, with the other 8900 congregations of the ELCA, and the 225 congregations God planted in cities, open country, or towns, of this synod. We are people who live by grace, yield our wisdom at the foot of the cross, and look for the light and life of Christ among us. As we enter 2025, I give thanks for the abundance of gifts God is giving us:

- the rostered ministers who are on call 24/7/365 and unite us through the good news of the gospel every week;
- congregation leaders who are welcoming, supporting, respecting, and loving the rostered ministers called to lead now. We cannot grow pastors & deacons on trees. As Pr. Heather has said, "Our rostered ministers are not a renewable resource. We need to nurture the pastors we have." Inasmuch as congregations are supporting all of our pastors & deacons, this Synod will become known on the pastors' grapevine as a place people want to come and serve;
- lay leaders who have sensed the Holy Spirit leading them to pursue theological studies and lead worship in their congregations;
- call committees working hard and persevering in a time when there far more than twice as many congregations seeking first-call candidates as there are graduates;
- congregations who are talking with their neighbors about various kinds of partnerships, and are discovering how we can be and do more together than apart. Some are sharing youth ministries with congregations in the same school district, and some are rotating worship schedules.

The simple reality of demographics means that there are fewer students entering college, and there will be more rostered ministers retiring in the future. The future of our congregations will require innovations in ministries, an open heart to partner with others, and the commitment to encourage people of any age who have the faith, temperament, and gifts to consider ministry. I ask you to pray in public worship each week that God would "send forth laborers" for God's vineyard.





## IN CHRIST

Unlike the other organizations and groups to which we belong, the church is only one where we are welcomed just as we are because we are "in Christ." Christ is our Life. And it is only because we are in Christ that people as different and unique as the people of our churches could come together as one. The ministries of your congregation and of our synod exist because we are "in Christ." Jesus' great commandment to love God and neighbor and his command to go and make disciples provides the "why" of our congregation ministries, that all might have life and have it abundantly.

Churches today are discovering the importance of welcoming people not only thru our physical front door, but thru the front door of websites, FB pages, and livestream. Today we are BOTH/AND churches that extend hospitality to people who worship – in the room AND online.

And rather than only waiting for people to come to "us" Christ sends us so that wherever we go – work, school, wherever – people know they are valued, accepted and loved when they meet someone from our church in the community. Thank you for being the hands and feet and love of Christ as you do God's work with your hands. Our synod ministries exist to equip congregations to live out this mission.

This summer and fall, the synod engaged in a listening process that included both a survey (172 responses) and small group conversations. The purpose of the listening process was to:

- grow in direct communication with congregations
- build awareness of synod ministry
- expand the synod's ability to equip congregations
- build solidarity between congregations.

Discussions focused on what is going well in congregations, challenges they face, and opportunities that lie ahead. Major themes that surfaced in both the surveys and discussions were:

- Worship/Spiritual Growth
- Youth and Family Engagement
- Community Outreach and Service
- Staffing
- Volunteerism
- Finances
- Internal Relationships

# Annual Report Message

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Thanks to the team that worked to plan the survey and conversations. They will continue to share results and host gatherings of congregations with common priorities.



## MEMBERS ONE OF ANOTHER

Praise God, no one is a Christian alone! We were baptized into the body of Christ. We know the truth of the words of St. Paul, that "if one of us suffers, all suffer together, and if one rejoices, all rejoice together." As our culture and the church are changing, I give thanks for the gift of the partnerships we have as an ELCA synod. These partnerships expand our impact and include:

- colleges & seminaries, campus ministries, advocacy, tackling world hunger, and global partners like LDR & LWR;
- our Mission Developments – House of Grace in Montrose and Reborn Lao Lutheran in Waite Park, and strategic ministry Paz y Esperanza in Willmar – powerful examples of evangelism;
- the accompaniment partnership we share with our Companion Church – the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa. This past June our Synod Assembly was blessed by the presence of Presiding Bishop Nkosinathi Myaka and Diocesan Board Chair Mr. Mkhize. We have much to learn from our friends in the South Eastern Diocese. I ask you to hold our global companions in prayer as they continue to proclaim the Gospel in challenging circumstances, and yet with deep faith and always – JOY and PRAISE to God.
- our global partners of the Ev. Lutheran Church in Jordan & the Holy Land, where I was able to visit two years ago with the Conference of Bishops. I met many of our Lutheran church members and the pastors of our 6 Lutheran congregations who are proclaiming the Gospel in an impossible time. They are surviving with steadfastness and persistence – "Sumud" – and most of all, ask for your prayers for the situations in which they live today.

## Numbers together

Reports tell us how our life together is going. Even though our own congregation may not feel the effects of changes in a congregation on the other side of the synod, we are in this together "for better or worse" because we are one in Christ. I want you to have the most recent statistical summary for congregations that comes from the annual reports you completed for 2023.

# Annual Report Message

2023

Congregations	228
Congregations who completed annual reports	177
Congregations who did not send reports	51

The following summaries reflect the data those churches that filed annual reports (Form A):

	2022	2023
Baptized members:	97,689	95,600
Ave. baptized/cong.	428	419
Baptisms age 16+	24	19
Affirmation of Faith	353	377
Transfer in	1093	971
Baptized Received	2,594	2,402
Active Participants	48,875	45,488
Ave. wkly worship on-site	12,918	14,203
Ave. wkly. worship online	9,554	10,418
Ave. att. per cong. on-site	64	70
Ave. att per cong. online	70	80

Those membership figures may reflect the changed attitudes people place in the importance of "membership" in organizations and specifically, in the institutional church. Yet notice how they also represent how people are slowly emerging to attend worship in person and online as we live out being a both/and church - both in the room and online. Online worship is being accomplished by many congregations with technology as available as the phones we hold in our hands. St. Paul knew that the Good news of Jesus Christ is to be shared. Thank you for proclaiming it near and far.

When the annual report information comes to you in January, please direct the form to those who can pitch in to complete it. Talk with your Church Council about the trends you see. Return the form. And then know you have helped us reach a target of 100% responses this year! Thank you!

# Annual Report Message

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## Generosity

Thank you for the Mission Support you shared in 2024. Although current 2024 figures won't be known until after the fiscal year ends January 31, as we conclude December 2024, Mission Support, our primary source of revenue, again is lower than the previous year. Why?

- Everything costs more.
- Some of our congregations' generous givers are passing away or face high costs for care.
- The cost of health benefits continues to rise for everyone.
- There is the tendency that when faced with financial challenges, congregations choose to direct funds closer to home.

We know there is great generosity in our congregations. Nearly 88% of our congregations have no debt. I regularly hear people say that they don't talk about money in their church. But every congregation can talk about God's great blessings and begin in the announcements and newsletters by:

- thanking people for their generosity,
- telling people why your congregation's ministry is important,
- sharing information about what their generosity is making possible,
- telling inspiring stories about our ministries,
- asking people for their generosity, and always -
- thanking for those gifts.

The Synod budget for the fiscal year ending in Jan 2026 was approved at the 2024 Synod Assembly, and we are currently preparing the budget that will guide us through January 2027. There are many uncertainties between now and then! 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. We will continue to wisely steward the resources we receive and are committed to providing care and equipping for rostered ministers and congregations. Staff will continue to manage expenses conservatively and wisely, so that total expenses are lower than budget.

So often, we think about church from a perspective of scarcity: we need more pastors, people, money, just MORE..... The reality is that our God is a Giver and a Giver of abundance. As our synod statement says, "By God's grace, together we have what we need." And God continues to bless us - and often surprise us - in so many ways!



## Annual Report Message

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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 remain 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."

On a daily basis, I give thanks for the synod staff who equip and support you in being one body in Christ: Rev. Heather Culuris & Rev. Seyward Ask - Synod Ministers, 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. + SOLI DEO GLORIA! each day.

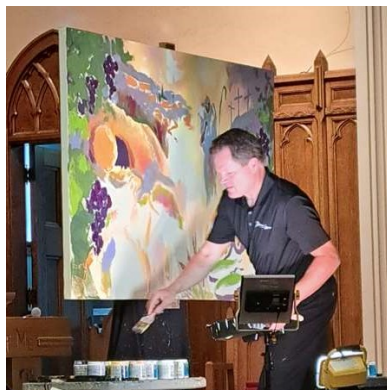
Thank you for the privilege of walking with you and living as one body in Christ and members one of another as the Southwestern Minnesota Synod, ELCA.

+ with grace, peace, and love,

Rev. Dee Pederson, D. Min

Bishop, Southwestern Minnesota Synod, ELCA

# 2024 PHOTOS





# 2024 PHOTOS



# 2024 PARISH REPORT

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## CHILD MEMBERS (baptized, not confirmed)

Total as of January 1, 2024		63
2024 Additions	Baptisms	4
	Transfers	6
2024 Losses	Confirmations	(5)
	Deaths	0
	Transfers	(2)
	Statistical Adjustment	(8)
	Net Gain (Loss)	(5)
Total as of December 31, 2024		58

## ADULT MEMBERS (confirmed)

Total as of January 1, 2024		416
2024 Additions	Baptisms	0
	Confirmations	5
	Transfers	8
2024 Losses	Deaths	(12)
	Transfers	(4)
	Statistical Reconciliation	(3)
	Net Gain (Loss)	(6)
Total as of December 31, 2024		410

## TOTAL MEMBERSHIP

	Child Members	58
	Adult Members	410
Total as of December 31, 2024		468



# 2024 PARISH REPORT

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## MEMBERSHIP

Year	Baptized	Confirmed
2021	528	461
2022	489	427
2023	479	416
2024	468	403

## WORSHIP ATTENDANCE

Year	Weekly Average	Yearly Total
2021	171	5,126 (only 30 weeks of data)
2022	186	9,460
2023	181	9,397
2024	197	10,244

## BETHEL PASTORAL ACTS

Baptisms	4
Funerals	21
Weddings	2

## 2024 FINANCIAL REPORT SUMMARY

GIVING	2024	2023
General Fund Giving (envelopes, simply giving, etc.)	\$498,608	\$ 487,721
Other General Fund Income (interest, other)	\$ 51,641	\$ 34,125
Total General Fund Income	\$550,249	\$521,845
EXPENSE		
Mission Support from Budget	\$ 49,000	\$ 49,646
SW MN Synod ELCA	\$ 24,000	\$ 24,000
Local/Global Missions	\$10,000*	\$10,000**
Community Closet	\$ 500	
ELCA World Hunger	\$ 2,000	
Habitat for Humanity	\$ 500	
Kandiyohi County Food Shelf	\$ 2,000	
National Ataxia Foundation	\$ 500	
Paz y Esperanza	\$ 1,000	
Prairie Lakes Youth Programs	\$ 1,000	
Safe Avenues	\$ 500	
United Community Action	\$ 500	
United Way	\$ 1,000	
YMCA	\$ 1,000	
Green Lake Ministries	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000
Lutheran Social Service	\$ 3,000	\$ 3,000
Family Promise	\$ 3,000	\$ 3,000
Adult/Youth Mission/Faith Trips	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,146
Food for Kidz Event	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,500
Total Clergy/Staff Compensation	\$274,434	\$274,361
Total Operating Expenses	\$176,224	\$181,613
Total Expense	\$499,567	\$505,620
DIFFERENCE	\$50,681	\$16,225

\* An extra \$500 was given from the Missions Fund which is not a budgeted line.

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

## 2024 FINANCIAL REPORT SUMMARY

### OTHER MISSION SUPPORT

2024

Family Promise, Noisy Coin Designations, Food Shelf, Family Service, Community Support, Additional Synod Support, Other	\$ 25,227
Foundation Grants	\$ 15,904
Bethel Buddy Salvation Army Angel Tree Shopping	\$ 1,500
Bethel Quilters	\$ 1,000
CentraCare Hospice-Veteran Quilts	\$ 1,000
College Scholarships	\$ 2,500
ELCA National Youth Gathering	\$ 2,000
Family Promise	\$ 2,500
Green Lake Lutheran Ministries-Camperships	\$ 1,710
Kandiyohi County Food Shelf	\$ 1,000
The Link	\$ 1,000
Lullaby Quilters	\$ 1,000
Ridgewater Lutheran Campus Ministry	\$ 694

### MAJOR FUNDS ACTIVITY REPORT

	1/1/24			12/31/24
	Balance	Received	Expended	Balance
General Fund	\$ 16,225			\$ 50,681
Capital Beautification Fund	\$ 149,214	\$ 96,107	\$ 98,269	\$ 147,052
Bethel Reserve Fund	\$ 257,258	\$ 0	\$ 26,995	\$ 230,263

## 2025 PROPOSED BUDGET

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MISSION SUPPORT	2025	2024
	(proposed)	
SW MN Synod ELCA	\$ 25,000	\$ 24,000
Lutheran Social Service	(building project)	\$ 3,000
Family Promise-Homelessness	\$ 3,500	\$ 3,000
Green Lake Lutheran Ministries	\$ 5,500	\$ 5,000
Adult/Youth Mission/Faith Trips	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000
Food for Kidz Packaging Event	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000
Global/Local Missions Team	\$ 10,000	\$ 10,000
 Total Missions Support	 \$ 48,000	 \$ 49,000

### SALARIES/BENEFITS

Clergy Salary	\$114,600	\$113,000
(Pastors Jon, Bob, & Kathy)		
Clergy Pension/Insurance	\$ 44,500	\$ 43,000
Clergy Continuing Ed	\$ 750	\$ 750
Clergy Travel/Conf/Training	\$ 750	\$ 750
Lay Attendees Travel/Conf	\$ 500	\$ 500
Staff Salaries (inc SS & Med)	\$166,300	\$160,500
Staff Pension/Ins	\$ 32,000	\$ 27,000
Staff Continuing Ed	\$ 500	\$ 500
 Total Salaries/Benefits	 \$359,900	 \$346,000



## 2025 PROPOSED BUDGET

OPERATING EXPENSES	2025	2024
	(proposed)	
Worship & Music Team	\$ 6,000	\$ 6,000
Stewardship Team	\$ 250	\$ 250
Bethel Council/Personnel	\$ 1,000	\$ 750
Christian Ed Team	\$ 3,500	\$ 3,000
Youth & Family Team	\$ 2,000	\$ 1,500
Bethel Night at the Stingers (Generations in Faith Together)	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,500
Community Outreach Team	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000
Communications	\$ 2,500	\$ 2,500
Office Supplies	\$ 3,500	\$ 4,000
Technology Equip & Maintenance	\$ 14,000	\$ 15,000
Accounting Fees	\$ 2,500	\$ 2,500
Janitorial Supplies	\$ 3,500	\$ 3,000
Building Maintenance	\$ 12,000	\$ 12,000
Building Utilities	\$ 36,000	\$ 39,500
Bethel Insurance Coverage	\$ 20,000	\$ 18,000
Mileage Reimbursement	\$ 1,000	\$ 500
 Total Operating Expenses	 \$109,750	 \$111,000
  ALL TOTAL EXPENSES	  \$517,650	  \$506,000

# BETHEL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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## 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