

**Hunger, Justice, & Rural Life Committee
Northeastern Minnesota Synod
2026 Report**

The Hunger, Justice, & Rural Life Committee of the Northeastern Minnesota Synod includes active and retired clergy, lay people, and a synod staff person. We typically meet once per month via zoom. This past year, we discerned God's purpose for us:

Called and equipped by God, our mission is to educate, invite, and empower the people and congregations of the NE MN Synod to advocate and act for the sake of a hungry nation and world afflicted by injustice.

To this end, from May 2025 through April 2026, we:

- Set a goal of raising \$313,669 across our synod for ELCA World Hunger in 2025, \$50,000 more than we raised in 2024
- Encouraged congregations to organize walk-bike-run events to raise money for ELCA World Hunger, with a total of 3 events in summer 2025
- Organized a US-Mexico border trip in February 2026
- Worked with a past Hunger Fellow to create a digital poverty simulation that will soon be available to the whole church as an educational tool
- Wrote and advocated for a Synod Hunger Fund Resolution to be considered at the 2026 conference assemblies and synod assembly
- Sent 1 adult, 1 young adult, and 1 youth to the ELCA World Hunger Leaders Gathering in Columbus, Ohio in September 2025
- Encouraged congregations to observe Hunger Sunday on one of the Sundays bookending World Food Day – October 16 – and to utilize Hunger Sunday liturgies written by Region 3 collaborators
- Organized the Quilt Auction which benefitted ELCA World Hunger for both the 2025 and 2026 synod assembly
- Helped plan a Global Refuge bike ride that raised \$22,000 in September 2025 and another fundraiser in May
- Received and acted on monthly advocacy updates from Tammy Wolhoff, director of Lutheran Advocacy-Minnesota
- Met with staff from US Representative Pete Stauber's office regarding SNAP funding during the government shutdown
- Facilitated poverty simulations at the 2025 synod assembly
- Communicated regularly through the synod newsletter, website, and Facebook regarding ELCA Domestic Hunger Grants, Daily Bread grants, stories of hunger ministries, ideas for raising money for ELCA World Hunger, and how to utilize Thrivent Action dollars
- Connected food shelf coordinators from congregational food shelves to discuss best practices and learn from one another
- Convened and participated in a Region 3 Hunger & Justice Leaders Retreat in March 2025
- Awarded the Holy Cow award and honorable mentions to congregations giving generously to ELCA World Hunger at the 2025 synod assembly

If you are passionate about ending hunger, helping create a more just world, have ideas that would help us fulfill God's purpose for us, or are interested in learning more about hunger and justice, you would be most welcome to join our team! To get connected, reach out to Pastor Sarah Stadler, chair, at sarahleestadler@gmail.com or 602-318-6876.

Greetings Northeastern Minnesota Synod!

At the 2025 Synod Assembly, those gathered voted to approve the following statement of welcome, making us a Reconciling in Christ Synod:



“The Northeastern Minnesota Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is committed to the inclusive hospitality of God which welcomes all people into the work of the church to proclaim Christ, serve the neighbor, and strive for justice and peace in the world. We embody this hospitality in our life together as synod through unapologetic welcome and affirmation of people of all sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, races and ethnicities, ages and abilities, and socio-economic or citizenship statuses. We embrace the calling to work for welcome and reconciliation through our commitment to antiracism and inclusion.”

This year, the NEMN Synod Welcome and Reconciling Team has been exploring how we can assist the Synod and congregations in living into these commitments. We have done this primarily in two ways. Our team has engaged congregations, councils, and call committees in conversation around welcome and the Reconciling in Christ process through 2x2 visits. If your congregation is interested in initiating a conversation about your faith community’s posture of welcome or if you have begun the process of becoming an RIC congregation, but are wondering what to do next, these visits can aid you in your discernment and planning. Our team also planned and held a *Building an Inclusive Church* training event with leaders from a number of congregations across the Synod. A representative from *Reconciling Works* served as a guide and resource for these congregations. This event was subsidized by the NEMN Synod and we are thankful for their support and encouragement!

Looking ahead to 2026-27, we are eager to continue this work. We are also aware that there are ever-increasing societal challenges toward the good news of welcome and reconciliation in Christ proclaimed by the Church. Our team is hopeful that our NEMN Synod leadership will continue to embody our welcome statement through prophetic public witness and advocacy on behalf of our congregants and community members who are experiencing the distress of being targeted, having health care options limited, and being slandered.

We give thanks to God for our partnership in this Gospel work!

Rev. Jeffery Davis and the NEMN Synod Welcome and Reconciling Team



The Northeastern Minnesota Synod EcoFaith Network

Since 2008

*Nurturing a GROWING NETWORK of congregations and others to live out God's call
to be stewards of the earth for the sake of the whole creation*

Earth is crying out to us.

God is calling us to ignite communities of bold hope for a planet in peril.

**The NE-MN Synod's EcoFaith Network,
With Your Congregations, Camps, Campuses, and Communities, are responding:**

**Engaging, Equipping, and Accompanying YOU,
your congregation, camp, or campus through**

- EcoFaith Summit of the Upper Midwest
- Pollinator Plot Share and Learn events
- The Green Blades Rising Newsletter
- Green Blades Preaching Roundtable
- Active website www.ecofaithnetwork.org
- Micro-Grants for Care of Creation
- Lenten Advocacy Circles
- Monthly EcoFaith Actions

**Growing Partnerships of Support and Action
with Congregations**

- EcoFaith Network Partner Congregations support the care of Creation by praying for the Creation, practicing creation care, and contributing financially.
- Granting, mentoring, and accompanying new initiatives in the care of Creation
- EcoFaith Micro-Grants: funds of \$100 - \$2,000 available toward new care of Creation initiatives.



The 2026 EcoFaith Summit of the Upper Midwest
Gathering and equipping communities of faith and conscience

From Fear to Fire: Igniting Community for a Planet in Peril

In person at First Lutheran, Duluth, and online
April 18, 2026

Partnerships: Creating Community for a Planet in Peril

- Lutheran Advocacy-Minnesota
- Other Upper Midwest Synods
- Minnesota Interfaith Power and Light
- And through collaboration in the EcoFaith Summit of the Upper Midwest

Connecting at synod gatherings

- Conference assemblies
- Walking Together
- Synod Assembly
- WELCA Gathering
- LYO Leadership Training

 www.ecofaithnetwork.org

 ecofaith@nemnsynod.org

 EcoFaith Network NE Minnesota Synod

Co-chairs: Rev. David Carlson and Rev. Kristin Foster

Communication Coordinator: Rev. Beth Pottratz

 Green Blades Rising Newsletter: ecofaithnetwork.org/green-blades

*Earth is crying out to us.
God is calling us to be ministers of hope for the healing of Creation.*

Coming Events:

Synod Pollinator Sunday – June 7

Leadership Retreat – August 30-September 1

Spring and Fall Pollinator Share and Learn Zoom events - April 30 and late September

Annual Team Planning Retreat – November

NEW! Lenten Advocacy Circles Pilot Project

Six congregations in the NE MN Synod gathered at tables at their churches to share information regarding legislation affecting our communities and environment. People were invited to write cards and make calls to representatives. Information on the five issues was provided by Lutheran Advocacy-MN and MN Interfaith Power and Light. Weekly check-ins provided ongoing support.

Stay tuned! This pilot project will help us learn how to support each other both within and between congregations in advocating for our neighbors and Creation.

NEW! EcoFaith Actions:

Creation matters. The EcoFaith Network launches a new initiative in 2026! Each month you will receive a brief EcoFaith reflection encouraging Climate Care Action based in our shared calling to care for God's world. Look for these in the mid-month edition of Green Blades Rising. Share in your announcements & newsletter and with your church leadership.

Find practical ideas and inspiration for how you and your faith community can take action for Creation!

Pollinating the Care of Creation, Protecting Pollinators The Synod Pollinator Plot

NE MN is a Pollinator Synod with 53 Pollinator Sanctuary Congregations and Growing!



Our active Pollinator Plot Steering Committee supports your participation through a

- *View from the Pollinator Plot* a monthly newsletter story
- Spring and Fall Share and Learn zoom events – for sharing and new information
- EcoFaith Summit – table exhibit, engagement session participation, action station
- Pollinator Plot slideshow – featuring images from many of our synod's plots

**Jump start your Creation Care ministry with an
EcoFaith Micro Grant ecofaithnetwork.org/grants**

 www.ecofaithnetwork.org

 ecofaith@nemnsynod.org

 EcoFaith Network NE Minnesota Synod

 Green Blades Rising Newsletter: ecofaithnetwork.org/green-blades

Co-chairs: Rev. David Carlson and Rev. Kristin Foster

Communication Coordinator: Rev. Beth Pottratz

Russian Companion Synod Task Force

The mission of the Northeastern Minnesota Synod, ELCA/Russian Lutheran Church Companion Synod Task Force is to facilitate the support and encouragement of the RLC and its programs and to foster mutually supporting relationships between RLC churches and Lutheran churches in North America.

In line with this year's synod assembly theme, "A New Creation is Everything!", our task force gives thanks for many ways in which the Spirit of God's new creation in Jesus Christ is renewing the ministry of our companion synod and our ongoing relationship of accompaniment.

Companion Updates – Since December 2024, our task force has met twice via Zoom with Bishop Ivan Laptev and Pastor Konstantin Subbotin, director of the seminary near St. Petersburg. Here are some highlights and updates from our most recent online gathering:

+ The 2025 Synod (like our Churchwide Assembly) made a historic decision to change its name, the 7th time it has done so during its history (it was established in 1611). Formerly the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria in Russia, the new name is the Russian Lutheran Church (Rossijskaja Ljuteranskaja Cerkov'), which, along with a new church constitution, is awaiting recognition by the state. The main goal is to enable missionary work, as well as to better reflect reality, as the percentage of church members who are ethnic Ingrians is very small. With this change, the RLC is working on a common liturgy and a new hymnal.

+ The RLC currently has 122 congregations and religious groups. They include three new congregations formed during the last year in Penza (in central European Russia), Tula (near Moscow), and Krasnopereprobsk (in the Crimea). There are 167 pastors in the RLC, about 40 of whom live in Finland. Some of these pastors are also retired but continue to serve. Some also have secular jobs and are not able to serve full-time as pastors.

+ Current seminary enrollment includes 12 on-campus students, 30 distance learners, and an additional 60 people taking a pre-seminary course. Lay education is also a major focus of the RLC, which organizes conferences, equips congregations to offer a basic course on Christianity, and is working on a new textbook for confirmation.

+ In the area of diaconal work, the RLC opened a new nursing home last year and continues to develop ministry relationships with orphanages. A first course for training deaconesses has also begun, for diaconal work in congregations or in nursing homes.

+ The RLC has designated 2026 as a Year of Prayer. When times are hard, they are seeing a lot of people coming to churches and offering many, many prayers. Churches have boxes where people can place written prayer needs, and these boxes get filled by churchgoers and visitors. The RLC is organizing the training of leaders to be on hand to pray with people at church events when they submit their prayer requests.

Accompaniment is about listening, sharing, and walking together with Christ who is present as we talk about joys and challenges. These are some specific prayer requests from our recent meeting: For peace, that the war would end... For church leadership and the ongoing structural reforms in the RLC... For the overall economic health of the church including financing for the

new RLC hymnal... A need for new pastors, especially in rural areas in Karelia and Siberia... For our NE MN Synod's election process for a new bishop... For openness among congregations to work together, share resources with each other, and be strengthened in community outreach.

Synod Updates – During the past year, the task force completed a 20-page history of our companion synod 2002-25 tracing the development of our companion synod relationship from early visits stretching back to the 1980s to the formalizing of our relationship in 2002, to subsequent exchange visits, correspondence, support, and prayers through the years. Many thanks to Paul Anderson, who not only played a major role in putting this history document together and adding pictures, but has also embodied the continuity and spirit of our companion relationship with the Russian Lutheran Church throughout these years, including long before it was formalized, through his organizing of exchange visits, dedicated correspondence, and faithful vision that has helped inspire generosity and relationship building with companions and supporters in and beyond our synod.

Thank you for the ways in which you also accompany our siblings in Christ through your prayers and financial support. In 2025, the synod transferred funds totaling \$14,130 to *Vision Petrozavodsk* (ministry and salary support for the RLC church in Petrozavodsk); additionally, \$1,989.33 will be transferred to support congregational ministries in the Karelian and Ural Deaneries when it becomes possible to do so. Of the \$16,102.33 total contributions, 22% came from beyond our synod.

With our companions, the task force also finalized a renewed covenant between our synod and the RLC, which will be signed the next time leaders from both church bodies can meet in person. It contains verses from Ephesians that were in the minutes of our 2002 synod assembly when the relationship became official: *“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us”* (2:13-14).

Amid very real challenges in ministry there and here, the renewing Spirit of God continues to be at work. Thank you for joining me in giving thanks for and praying for our companions in Christ. If you have an interest in Russian or Finnish culture, global mission, or learning more about accompanying the Russian Lutheran Church, please contact me and consider becoming part of our synod task force. Even – or perhaps especially – during difficult times, times of war and political strain, accompanying one another in our companion relationships is both a calling and a joy. For what we share is something deeper: unity in the body of Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Pastor David Carlson, Chair dcarlson001@luthersem.edu | 218-722-3381

Task Force Members: Paul Anderson, Pat Becker, Pastor Rollie Bockbrader, Stephanie Carlson, Pastor Brendan Johnston, Patti Maguire, Bishop Amy Odgren *ex officio*

EMAIL TO THE SYNOD:

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.” – Ephesians 2:13-14

Dear partners in ministry,

In September 2024, when Bishop Amy and my wife Stephanie and I had the opportunity to meet in person with Lutheran church leaders from Russia, at a consultation organized by the ELCA in Serbia, one of the goals we made was to create a short history of the development of our companion synod. On behalf of our task force, I am happy to say that goal has been reached!

This January, we completed a 20-page history of our companion synod 2002-25 ([link](#)), tracing the development of our companion synod relationship from early visits stretching back to the 1980s to the formalizing of our relationship at synod assembly in 2002, to subsequent exchange visits, correspondence, support, and prayers through the years. We commend it to you and your congregation, especially your council, global mission and evangelism committee members, Sunday School and young adult groups. It contains pictures and names of people from our synod who have traveled to Russia, companions we have received and congregations they visited here, and special developments, projects, and ministries of our Russian companions which God has enabled our participation, financial support, and prayers to accompany.

We are blessed to have task force members with many years of experience accompanying our companions, including Paul Anderson, who has been cultivating relationships with Lutherans in Russia since long before our companion synod relationship was formalized. Many thanks to Paul, not only for his major role in putting this history document together and adding pictures, but also for embodying the continuity and spirit of accompaniment throughout these years, through his organizing of exchange visits, dedicated correspondence, and faithful vision that has helped inspire generosity and relationship building with companions and supporters in and beyond our synod.

Another goal we made at our in-person meeting was to meet regularly via Zoom with our companions, to share joys and challenges, and pray for each other. Here are a couple of updates from the most recent Zoom gathering with Bishop Ivan Laptev and Pastor Konstantin Subbotin, director of the seminary near St. Petersburg:

- 1) Our companion synod in Russia has a new name! Formerly the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria in Russia, the new name is the Russian Lutheran Church (Rossijskaja Ljuteranskaja Cerkov'), which, along with a new church constitution, is awaiting recognition by the state. This historic decision took place at our companions' most recent Synod (like our Churchwide Assembly) in 2025 and was the 7th time that church has had a name change during its history (it was established in 1611). The main goal is to enable missionary work, as well as to better reflect reality, as the percentage of church members who are ethnic Ingrians is very small. With this change, the RLC is working on a common liturgy and a new hymnal.

- 2) The RLC has designated 2026 as a Year of Prayer. When times are hard, they are seeing a lot of people coming to churches and offering many, many prayers. Churches have boxes where people can place written prayer needs, and these boxes get filled by churchgoers and visitors. The RLC is organizing the training of leaders to be on hand to pray with people at church events when they submit their prayer requests.

Accompaniment is about listening, sharing, and walking together with Christ who is present as we share and pray. These are some specific prayer requests from our recent meeting:

- + For peace, that the war would end...
- + For church leadership and the ongoing structural reforms in the RLC...
- + For the overall economic health of the church including financing for the new RLC hymnal...
- + A need for new pastors, especially in rural areas in Karelia and Siberia...
- + For our NE MN Synod's election process for a new bishop...
- + For openness among congregations to work together, share resources with each other, and be strengthened in community outreach.

With our companions, the task force also finalized a renewed covenant between our synod and the RLC, which will be signed the next time leaders from both church bodies can meet in person. It contains verses from Ephesians that are at the top of this email and were in the minutes of our 2002 synod assembly when the relationship became official: *"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us"* (2:13-14).

Amid very real challenges in ministry there and here, God is faithful and continues to be at work. Thank you for joining me in giving thanks for and praying for our siblings in Christ. If you have an interest in Russian or Finnish culture, global mission, or learning more about accompanying the Russian Lutheran Church, please contact me and consider becoming part of our synod task force. Even – or perhaps especially – during difficult times, times of war and political strain, accompanying one another in our companion synod relationships is both a calling and a joy. For what we share is something deeper: unity in the body of Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Grace and peace,

Pastor David Carlson, Chair
Russian Companion Synod Task Force

Honduras Mission and Ministry
Companion Synod Report
NE MN Synod Assembly 2026

It is personal. The drama being played out on the streets of our country and our Synod is also happening in Honduras. Our Companion Synod relationship with Iglesia Cristiana Luterana de Honduras makes personal the fundamental dignity of every person and leads us to live out the values of the kingdom of God today. We are in a *kairos* moment with our brothers and sisters in Honduras: deeply challenged by powerful forces that deny the fundamental dignity of every human being, while also experiencing “God with us” in our mutual accompaniment.

The Northeastern Minnesota Synod became an official Companion Synod with ICLH when Bishop Tom Aitken and Pastor-President Martin Giron signed the agreement of accompaniment initially at Tegucigalpa (October, 2010), then at the NE MN Synod Assembly (May, 2011). From the very beginning our collaboration has been expressed in two specific areas: 1) a commitment to mutually equip pastors and lay leaders in spirituality and ministry leadership, and 2) to collaborate in developing the ministry of the Kinder Dr. Martin Lutero. Exciting new possibilities of accompaniment are emerging. As we share some highlights of the past year, we invite you as individuals, congregations, mission committees and conferences to be part of the story!

Spiritual Retreat for Pastoral Leadership of Lutheran Church in Honduras: September 19-21, 2025

At the heart of our accompaniment with ICLH is an annual spiritual retreat for the pastors and lay leaders of the 12 worshipping communities. Ailie Davidson and Dave Mesner collaborated with Pastors Julio Caballero and Rolando Ortiz in leading the participants through an exercise of *lectio divina* (spiritual reading) of the Gospel of Matthew. We entered the three key lectionary texts of Matthew (Mt. 1-2; Mt. 5-7; and Mt 25) through a process of reading, personal meditation, small group discussion, and large group sharing.

It was an incredible blessing to experience the group come together in sharing their stories of “God with us” at the heart level. Half of the participants in this year’s retreat were attending for the first time. In the past year, a significant number of leaders were lost through death, migration, and economic factors. One of the new leaders asked, “Will we cry in the sharing?” The answer was a resounding “yes!” It was so powerful to experience this new group of leaders come together on a deep spiritual level. “God is with us!”

Visit to Kinder Dr. Martin Lutero, La Cañada, September 18, 2025

The Kinder at La Cañada is a kindergarten providing education, and much more. Families receive training in hygiene and healthy nutrition. Children receive cultural education and vocational vision. And all of this happens as an extension of the mission of Luz del Mundo, “Light of the World” Lutheran worshiping community. Our Synod has been the primary financial (and spiritual!) sponsor of this ministry since 2010. Many of the mothers assisting in the program are themselves graduates of the kindergarten.

Sofia Barrientos is the current teacher, following her mother Leticia. Sofia and her assistant Leny run an amazing classroom, which this year consists of 15 students, one who is autistic and two with special needs. Kinder Marin Lutero is an invaluable educational, social and spiritual resource for the entire surrounding area.

Honduras Fiesta, Our Savior’s Lutheran Church, Duluth, January 17, 2026

The Fiesta was a celebration of 15 years of official Companion Synod relationship between ICLH and our Synod. We thank Eduardo Sandoval, a member of Grace Lutheran Church in Hermantown, and the owner/operator of *Oasis del Norte* food truck and restaurant in Duluth. Eduardo and his family prepared and served an authentic latino *almuerzo*, which was enjoyed by all. For the program Michael Wittcamper shared highlights of our earliest trips to Honduras, and Rollie Bockbrader brought greetings from Bishop Amy Odgren. Ailie Davidson and Dave Mesner shared the spiritual development of our companionship with ICLH through the years, lifting up the visits to all of the communities, the joint celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017, the adjustments we made during COVID, our special focus on migration and pastoral spirituality, and the significance of the spiritual retreats of the last two years. Gary Loberg gave an invitation to join in our Companion Synod ministry through prayer, financial support, and becoming part of a trip to Honduras.

Thanks to all who have been part of our ministry in the past, and welcome to all who would like to join us moving forward.

ICLH Mesa Redonda (Round Table), Comayagua, Honduras, April 16-20, 2026

Every three years ICLH shares its updated Strategic Ministry Plan with its worldwide ministry partners. The Mesa Redonda is a fabulous opportunity for mission vision and planning. Participating are representatives from the Lutheran World Federation and the ELCA; Lutheran Church bodies in Germany, Sweden and Brazil; and ELCA Companion Synods of Northeastern

Minnesota, New England, and Northwest Lower Michigan. This year Michael Wittkamper and Ailie Davidson will be representing our Synod.

Foundational priorities in the mission of ICLH are: Development of Communities of Faith (spiritual formation of pastors, leaders and communities); Service (Kinder and health); and Administration (leadership, coordination and sustainability). The new Strategic Plan calls for these focus areas, which will provide wonderful possibilities for NE MN increased accompaniment:

- 2007 Climate Justice and Gender Justice
- 2008 Freedom Through the Grace of God
- 2009 Creation Is Not For Sale!

Invitation

We invite individuals, congregations, mission committees and Synod conferences to become official partners in our Companion Synod accompaniment with the Lutheran Church in Honduras. Members of our Honduras Leadership Team are available to share this ministry in whatever way would be helpful in your setting. Following the Liberation Theology principle of the just redistribution of resources, we have committed to fund the spiritual retreats (\$5,000/yr) and the Salary/Administration costs for the Kinder (\$14,000). We are currently experiencing the fruitful results of our years of accompaniment in these ministries. At a recent trip debrief the General Secretary of ICLH stated that NE MN is the “foundational pillar” of ICLH.

We are honored to be walking together in this significant ministry. We also are aware of tremendous strengths and expertise in our Synod in the areas of climate and gender justice. If these causes are important to you, please consider expressing them with our brothers and sisters in Honduras. Please feel free to contact me (david.mesner513@gmail.com) or any members of our Honduras Leadership Team for information or suggestions.

In this year of Matthew, let us celebrate that “God is with us” as we live out our calling to make disciples of all nations!

Dave Mesner, for the NE MN Synod Honduras Leadership Team

Bishop Amy Odgren, Rollie Bockbrader, Ailie Davidson, Gary Loberg, Joyce Piper,
Mark and Brenda Wagner, Michael Wittkamper

Northeastern Minnesota Synod

Women of the ELCA

Assembly

“And there are ways of working, but it is the same God who produces all things in all believers. But to each one is given the manifestation of the spirit for the common good.”

Our women continue to be very active in serving a variety of ministries and missions. Last June we gathered at Zion Lutheran in Grand Rapids for our Synod Convention. Over 120 women attended with several first-time attendees. The theme was “Living Water” based on Isaiah 44:3 “For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.”

Our schedule for the convention began on Monday with worship lead by Pastor Brenda Wickland. Merrily Burmeister, our church wide representative, brought us messages from church wide. During our Plenary sessions, we had several options for those non voting members. Topics for our Monday Discovery Times included the basics of groundwater and the protection needed, invasive species in clean water, care for creation in our synod by Eco-Faith. Many exhibits as well as assembly projects such as the newborn kits were available throughout the day. Monday evening, we enjoyed a concert of organ and violin music by Patty Dorn. After Tuesday’s Bible study, Bishop Amy Odgren shared the Synod Update. Additional Discovery Times ensued; restorative rest, historical trauma, and Global Health impact. Resolution 2025-1a, Clean Water for the People of Kuwaa Land in Liberia, West Africa, was presented and adopted to educate others and raise funds for wells.

In response to world need 1,451 quilts, 723 school kits, 461 personal care kits, 41 baby kits, 85 fabric kits and \$1,335 for shipping were donated to Lutheran World Relief. 1, 925 newborn kits (771 assembled at convention), 117 Hospice kits, 5,815 rolled bandages, 66 baby kits, 52 pounds of soap and \$118 for shipping donated to Global Health Ministries.

Penny offerings are directed by each conference to a mission or organization that serves the needs of Women and Children.

Upcoming events are:

Summer Convention/Gathering, June 15-16 with the theme of “Love Thy Neighbor.” Location is Zion Lutheran in Grand Rapids.

Triennial Gathering, July 16-19 with the theme “I am Worthy.” Location is Des Moines Iowa at the Iowa Events Center. The business meeting is to be held virtually prior to the Gathering.

Thank you for your support of our women’s ministries and various services .
“And there are varieties of ministries and service, but it is the same Lord . . .”

Rebecca Romosz, SWO President.

April 2026

ELCA Region 3 Archives Report to 2026 Synod Assemblies

Introduction

2026 marks the 38th year of the ELCA Region 3 Archives. While the ELCA Region 3 Archives continues to be housed at Luther Seminary and serve the church across Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota, it has entered a period of significant transition. This time of change will have its challenges, but it will also include meaningful opportunities for deepening the engagement between the archives and congregations.

A Time of Transition

- In June 2025, Paul Daniels retired from the role of archivist, after 42 years of service. We give thanks for Paul's faithful commitment to preserving and promoting the stories of Lutheran communities with curiosity and care. The new archivist for ELCA Region 3 and Luther Seminary, Caleb Rollins, began full-time in July 2025. As a student in the MA program in History of Christianity at Luther Seminary, Caleb volunteered in the archives for several years and had a months-long apprenticeship with Paul before taking over full-time.
- In June 2025, Luther Seminary announced that they would sell their campus and move to a new location in the Twin Cities. Luther Seminary has indicated their intention to continue serving as the physical home of the ELCA Region 3 Archives. Luther Seminary anticipates remaining on its current campus through the 2026-2027 school year, and has formed a working group focused on finding their new location. As of the submission of this report, the process of finding a new location is still ongoing.
- Preparing for any kind of move takes time, especially when that move requires you to carefully transport over 175 years of Lutheran history! In order to properly execute this move, the archives will have to close to most researchers for a few extended periods of time to allow staff to focus on this monumental task. While this move will take time and energy, it will also provide an opportunity to improve the organization and arrangement of ELCA Region 3 records so that they can be more accessible to synod staff, congregations, and other researchers.

Personal Gratitude

As I finish my first eight months as archivist for ELCA Region 3, I also wanted to express my gratitude to all of the synod staff and congregation members I have met so far. You have been incredibly hospitable and patient as we navigate this period of transition together. Thank you! I look forward to meeting more of you in the coming months and years and collaborating on projects that help congregations preserve and promote stories from the past that propel them into a faithful future.

**Respectfully submitted 3.11.26 by Caleb Rollins, ELCA Region 3 Archivist and Luther Seminary Archivist
crollins002@luthersem.edu**



Mission Investment Fund

The Mission Investment Fund: Helping ELCA congregations bring ministry to life



The Mission Investment Fund (MIF), a *financial services ministry of the ELCA*, has been a **steady and reliable financial partner** for congregations, ministries and individuals for more than 150 years. Through times of growth and uncertainty alike, MIF has remained committed to strengthening ELCA ministries and communities — delivering customer-first support backed by flexible financing solutions.

In 2025, MIF continued to support ministry growth across the ELCA. Your investments helped expand worship spaces, rebuild congregations after fires and natural disasters, provide spaces for people to age with dignity, start green projects and support accessibility remodeling for community spaces. Each project strengthens ELCA ministries, ensuring that they stay vibrant, inclusive and fully prepared to support the communities they serve.

By the numbers:

- **Total Loans Outstanding:** \$614,967,000
- **Total Investment Obligations:** \$551,452,000
- **Total Assets:** \$779,189,000
- **Net Assets & Capital Ratio:** 27.4%

What makes MIF unique?

- **Proven stability:** With more than a century and a half of experience, MIF has weathered changing economic and political landscapes, maintaining financial strength for ELCA ministries.
- **Deep expertise in church and ministry financing:** We understand the unique needs of faith communities and have longstanding experience in congregation and ministry building projects.
- **Competitive rates and terms:** Our financial offerings are structured to support ministries of all sizes.
- **A full suite of financial services:** In partnership with the ELCA Federal Credit Union, we provide a range of financial solutions for congregations, ministries and individuals.
- **Faithful stewardship:** Investments in MIF directly support loans that fund hundreds of capital projects across the church.

MIF continues to enhance our tools and financial services to better support ELCA ministries. And even as we look ahead with fresh vision and innovation, our foundation remains the same: enduring trust, time-tested stability and commitment woven through generations. In every chapter, we journey with ELCA members and ministries, united in faith — a steadfast partner supporting God's work in the world.

MIF at work in the Northeastern Minnesota Synod (as of December 31, 2025):

- 9 Mission Investment Fund loans, with a balance of \$2,657,979
- \$4,364,488 in Mission Investment Fund investment obligations.

For more information about MIF capabilities, please visit our website, mif.elca.org or contact Dan Schwiesow, Senior Director, Sales and Consulting Services: 773-682-5284 dan.schwiesow@elca.org



ELCA Federal Credit Union

ELCA Federal Credit Union

Faithful financial services for ELCA members and ministries



The ELCA Federal Credit Union (ELCA FCU) provides a full range of financial products and services to members, congregations and ministries of the ELCA. **As the first of the ELCA's financial ministries to offer loans to individuals**, the Credit Union offers savings and checking accounts, CDs, loans and lines of credit, credit cards, home mortgage loans for purchases or refinances, as well as home equity loans and lines of credit.

The ELCA FCU serves ministries through federally insured deposit accounts, a flexible corporate credit card program, auto loans and unsecured ministry loans up to \$100,000 to support smaller projects such as building repairs and purchases. In addition, the Workplace Banking program allows ministry organizations and congregations to offer ELCA FCU Credit Union products and services, along with other exclusive perks, to their employees.

A new cohort joined the ELCA's Resourceful Servants program, **designed to improve financial wellness and assist rostered leaders in building emergency savings funds**. Through this matching program, ELCA rostered leaders make ongoing deposits to their Credit Union emergency savings accounts. The Mission Investment Fund of the ELCA matches those deposits up to an established amount. Together, more **than 700 rostered ministers** have been served, collectively depositing more than \$1 million in emergency savings.

A **strong online presence** means members have access to funds with an ELCA Federal Credit Union Mastercard Debit Card at more than 30,000 surcharge-free ATMs. The ELCA FCU also offers account-to-account (A2A) transfers, person-to-person (P2P) payments (similar to Venmo and Zelle), remote deposit, bill pay and more.

Why choose the ELCA Federal Credit Union?

- **The ELCA Federal Credit Union supports the ELCA's mission of good stewardship.** We provide full services to all ELCA members, congregations and related ministries.
- **As a not-for-profit financial cooperative chartered to serve our church, we offer socially responsible banking solutions often priced more competitively** than traditional banks. We have demonstrated success in providing savings to our members.
- **With the church as our sponsor, we operate in ways that are consistent with the church's values.**

Membership is open to every ELCA member, synod, congregation and ministry—and their employees.

For more information about the products and services of the ELCA Federal Credit Union, please visit our website, elcafcu.org or call us toll-free at 877-715-1111.

Your Calling + Our Benefits

Portico Benefit Services' Report to 2026 Synod Assemblies

Your calling is to serve. Ours is to support you. As the ELCA's benefit ministry, Portico provides benefits that nurture holistic health, so you can live out your calling and serve with confidence and grace. Here's a visual recap of what our community of more than 52,000 plan members experienced in 2025.

52K
Members Served by Portico



2,829
Text/Virtual Health Care Visits
to 98point6®, with an estimated cost savings of \$263 per visit.



205
Births & Adoptions

11th
Consecutive Year
of our Customer Care Center being named a Center of Excellence by Benchmark Portal.



619
*Changes of Call**

1,702
Sword Health Enrollments
and nearly 42K total sessions in their Thrive, Move, and Bloom digital physical therapy and mobility programs.

\$157K
Debt Paid Off
by members via LSS of Minnesota Financial Counseling, with over \$2.6M paid off since 2008.

16%
of Member Income
saved for retirement, on average, by members sponsored in the Traditional Benefits Program, thanks to employer and member contributions.*

\$232M
Made in Annuity Payments
and 533 retirements.

4,214
Members Worked with a Portico Financial Planner,
with a cumulative 95.5% satisfaction rate.*



32
Beginning Disability Benefits

Nearly 10% of Our 10K ELCA Medicare-Primary Plan Members
participated in the SilverSneakers fitness program.*



1,927
Members Made Roth After-tax Contributions
to their retirement plans.

We design our benefits to align with the needs of the church, pooling resources through a community benefits plan to deliver stable, sustainable support that enhances everyday life and brings value to those who serve. Follow us on social media @PorticoBenefits.

*Source: Traditional Benefits Program. All other numbers and percentages are drawn from across Portico's benefit programs.



Updates from the ELCA Foundation

Synod Assemblies 2026



We are the ELCA Foundation, a financial ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. We walk alongside faithful people and organizations – helping them turn generosity into legacy, and legacy into ministry.

We believe generosity is more than a financial act; it is a testimony of faith, gratitude and hope. With \$1.5 billion in donor-designated gifts and invested assets entrusted to our care, we partner with individuals and organizations to thoughtfully steward these resources and maximize their impact.

We serve as a bridge between individual generosity and the shared mission of the ELCA – from congregations and synods to seminaries, outdoor ministries, and churchwide ministries such as ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response. Every planned gift we steward is an investment in the church's life – now and into the future.

What we do

We offer guidance that is both spiritually grounded and financially sound, ensuring every gift reflects the heart of the giver and the needs of the church.

- **Gift Planning Services:** Our regional gift planners accompany individuals and families through faithful, personalized planning – helping them create charitable legacies through bequests, trusts, charitable gift annuities, real estate, retirement assets and more.
- **Ministry Growth Fund:** A socially responsible investment option that supports endowments and ministries across the ELCA, balancing fiduciary excellence with faithful stewardship.
- **Resources and Tools:** From our online Planning Library and free Personal Estate Planning Kit to our partnership with Giving Docs, we provide easy, trustworthy ways to start planning today.
- **Ministry Partnership:** We help ELCA ministry leaders grow a culture of generosity without adding more to their workload, offering training, templates and direct support to strengthen local ministry.



Our vision

is to support and sustain ELCA ministries by enhancing gifting capacity and stewarding resources.

Our mission

is to be a thriving ministry that develops a culture of intentional generosity and financial stewardship to expand the work of the ELCA.

Updates from the ELCA Foundation

Synod Assemblies 2026



2025 At a Glance ✨

In 2025, the ELCA Foundation's gift planning network walked alongside **190 donors/families** in developing faith-focused gift plans that reflect their passion and purpose.

\$79.9M

in future planned-gift commitments

\$6.9M

in currently funded gifts

\$34.4M

in direct support to individual congregations

\$105.4M

in existing gifts to ministry stewarded

In total, the network generated **\$205.4 million** in gifts and investment assets, which includes **\$118.5 million** in new assets invested in the Ministry Growth Fund.

Let's continue the conversation

The ELCA Foundation has gift planning tools for every situation and professional staff throughout the U.S. ready to walk with you every step of the way. All of our gift planning services are made available to individuals and congregations without obligation. Contact your gift planner to get started:

Tharan Leopold

Tharan.Leopold@elca.org

507-838-1980



Dear Partners in welcome,

Grace and peace to you this synod assembly season. **At Global Refugee we remain committed to the work of welcome, no matter the challenges.** For more than 85 years, Global Refugee (formerly known as Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service) has championed the work of welcome by providing support to immigrants and refugees as they rebuild their lives in the United States. Founded by heartbroken Lutherans in the United States who felt called to provide a home for those fleeing violence during the World Wars, Global Refugee has continued this good work welcoming more than 850,000 newcomers since 1939.

Our mission states, "As a witness to God's love for all people, we stand with and advocate for migrants and refugees, transforming communities through ministries of service and justice." With help from Global Refugee, families are welcomed into their new homes with support from our case managers who ensure that adults are enrolled in English language classes, children are enrolled in school, and Global Refugee partners guide newly arrived refugees in using public transportation and accessing community resources.

In early 2025, Global Refugee and the 9 other national resettlement agencies received a **stop-work order** from the U.S. Department of State as it relates to our funding for the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, effectively cutting off vital support to families who have already lawfully resettled in the United States. In the time since then, we have witnessed an incredible increase in the amount of support we receive from faith communities and individuals. This additional financial support and volunteer support has enabled Global Refugee to continue services to our immigrant neighbors that would have otherwise been stopped. We are thrilled to say we continue serving immigrants through nearly all of the programs we had before, albeit at a smaller scale in some cases. Support from faith communities more than doubled in 2025, and new congregations from around the country are responding to the call to welcome. This support has not only enabled us to continue services as mentioned above, but it has also made us less vulnerable to shifts in government funding.

With the support of these new partners and Lutheran communities like yours, in 2025 we were able to...

- Serve **171** people through our new **Post-Arrival Stability and Empowerment (PASE) program** in Baltimore to fill urgent gaps left by stop-work orders and funding freezes.



- Empower and support **55 Clients** and **44 Businesses** through personal and business loans, with a total of **\$1.086 million dollars** funded.
- Serve **3,099** participants through the Camino A Casa program through training, case management, mental health services, and educational opportunities.
- Write and distribute **11,000 Hope for the Holidays cards** that provided messages of welcome and hope to newcomers.
- Mobilize the public to pack and ship **1,000 Neighbor Kits** to our clients, totaling a fair market value of **\$17,500**

In a political season rife with anti-immigrant rhetoric and messages that villainize newcomers, we have a unique opportunity to change this narrative and refocus on all the gifts newcomers bring to community. We invite you to join us in this work! [It is needed now more than ever.](#)

- **Join the Faith Alliance** – Global Refuge is proud to offer a new training for communities of faith who seek to safely welcome and embrace immigrants and refugees. This four-module series allows your faith community to learn together and make a commitment to welcome newcomers in your community <https://www.globalrefuge.org/faith-alliance/>
- **Hold a Vigil** – The new Vigil For the Taken resource offers an opportunity to name, recognize, and remember members of the community that are disappeared, detained, or deported. Whenever we lose precious members of our communities, we must stand together and affirm that every person deserves dignity and our support, and that no one should be forgotten. <https://www.globalrefuge.org/vigil-for-taken/>
- **Sing For Your Neighborhood** – *Here I Stand* is an original song written for the Vigil for the Taken mentioned above. It reads “Here I stand where my neighbor stood, holding peace for my neighborhood.” Written as a Taizé-like offering for the times we’re in, it is meant to equip neighbors with a song to “hold a candle” for those who have been harmed or removed from our communities. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1TeFtjoSQ_FWNd7rQu4UHkELeMpY7e66e/view?fbclid=IwY2xjawQ5BUlleHRuA2FlbQlxMABicmlkETF4NlZ2Smp6Y2NCRllsS1N6c3J0YwZhchHBfaWQQMjlyMDM5MTc0ODIwMDg5MgABHljJ3lWmE8EYtDcfE8ozQcoHVvyl5OPYjCxRZSfl4BnKP0vKH7Qk_LFCxxa8_aem_XBFK4jpbwWWU6JnTBkeIlw
- **Support Refugees with a gift** – If you or communities you’re connected with are willing to support financially, please use and share this link: www.globalrefuge.org/give
- **Learn more and Advocate** – Explore resources with more information about executive orders and accompanying actions: www.globalrefuge.org/advocate



- **Know Your Rights** – Our partners at AMMPARO have a great resource for communities to read about their rights and those of immigrants in their care. <https://resources.elca.org/ammparo/know-your-rights-2025/>
- **Explore Resources** – Visit our Congregational Resources page to explore all the resources available to you: www.globalrefuge.org/congregations
- **Sign up for our Monthly E-newsletters** – Get the latest updates for faith leaders by emailing outreach@globalrefuge.org.

Thank you so very much for your support, we look forward to another year of partnership in welcome.

Go in peace. Welcome the stranger.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dan Beirne", written over a circular scribble.

Pastor Dan Beirne

Director for Mobilization and Faith Relations
outreach@globalrefuge.org

Sumud Northland - For Justice in Palestine and Israel

This year we thought it would be beneficial to do a book study in connection with our meetings. Due to the book study, we decided to go back to meeting monthly, in the afternoon of the third Sunday each month. Prior to each meeting members would read a chapter of the book *Christ in the Rubble: Faith, the Bible, and the Genocide in Gaza*, by Munther Isaac. At the meeting we discuss the chapter: things that stood out to us, dissecting paragraphs, talking about what we can take and share with people in our own social networks. Included in each meeting we do an Artist Focus which showcases the work of Palestinian artists whether that be through music, dance, or visual art. We also then show short clips of podcasts and other forms of media interviews as they pertain to the chapter we are studying in Munther Isaac's book.

Here are some links to various artist connections and interviews we have listened to this year:

- Sounds of Palestine - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fyMHSDDekDM&list=RDfyMHSDDekDM&index=2>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OwD3tQ6KKhQ>
- Is Israel a Settler Colonial State? - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fd-bnP9CDQU>
- Christians in Gaza, Ecclesiocide, and Kairos Palestine II - <https://fmep.org/resource/christians-in-gaza-ecclesiocide-and-the-new-kairos-initiative/>
- Arise, Shine O Bethlehem - the lighting of the Christmas tree in Bethlehem 2025 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fkaDZEDlZcY&list=RDfkaDZEDlZcY&start_radio=1
- Kairos Palestine - The Palestinian Christian Initiative - https://kairospalestine.ps/images/Final_Kairos_document_II_English.pdf
- Coloniality, Racism & Ideologies of Supremacy - Bishop Zac Niringye - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JATSFTARHfo>
- Christ in the Rubble: Faith, the Bible, and the Genocide in Gaza - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LWkodMBtVjU>
- Revisualize Palestine Before Nakba - <https://vrjpalestine.com/>
- Visual Palestinian Artist Focus - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vmhVbBdhH1s>

We also had the joy of being able to purchase, as well as sell, some very lovely hand embroidered items from Palestine. All money collected from these sales went directly to a local shop owner in the West Bank. Thank you to our member, Kristi, for this connection.

Members of our leadership team are open to present/lead discussions with groups. For more information please visit our website at <https://nemnsynod.org/northland-peace-not-walls/> or email us at TPPNW@nemnsynod.org. If you are interested in joining our leadership team, please contact us at this email as well.

2025

ANNUAL REPORT



The Luther Seminary board in May 2025 voted unanimously to divest from our current physical campus and seek a new location that will provide us with a smaller footprint while providing the larger spaces needed for the evolution of teaching and learning. This decision is the result of many faithful and strategic conversations about how to amplify and sustain our mission of educating leaders for Christian communities over the long term.

Our mission is enduring, but how we deliver it has been changing for a long time. Divesting from the seminary's current campus is one part of an ongoing process to embrace more flexible models of education that meet the needs of our mission, the needs of the church, new forms of Christian community, and today's students. Over 70% of our current students engage primarily online from all over the U.S. Those who live away from campus serve in their local communities while engaging in coursework, then join us in the Twin Cities several times a year for intensive in-person classes. Students are learning in their church communities, not apart from them. Even as we rethink and maintain creative forms of residential learning, we have learned to deliver our mission in many new ways. Alongside our changing student body, we have been deeply engaged in the work of reimagining theological education for years. Having physical spaces configured for the seminary we are today and in the future is paramount to our educational mission.

We are in a strong position to navigate through these changes. The significant institutional shifts Luther Seminary must traverse are not easy, but we believe these changes will help us steward our resources more effectively for the sake of our students and the ministries they serve. Thanks to the generosity of many donors, we are able to offer a tuition-free education to all Luther Seminary students. The percentage of our students graduating without seminary debt continues to increase year over year, with 65% of our 2025 graduates leaving commencement without any seminary debt. This

spring, both the Higher Learning Commission and the Association of Theological Schools voted to fully accredit us for another 10 years, giving us strong affirmation after reviewing our finances, curriculum, student services, ethics and integrity, welcome, and mission. This fall, we were delighted to welcome one of our largest entering classes at Luther Seminary in nearly a decade. Our overall financial position is the strongest it has been in years. Since 2010, we have reduced operating costs, improved our cash balance and line of credit, and grown the seminary's endowment.

We are expanding on our mission, not shrinking it. Trusting the Holy Spirit, we have a tremendous opportunity not only to fulfill our mission but also to live into a more expansive vision of that mission. We continue to think of both our rootedness in a Lutheran theological witness and our outreach to new communities yearning for meaning and purpose. We are committed to change and adaptation for the sake of our mission and will continue to be open to new transformations and to meaningful collaborations with our many partners—maintaining deep, networked relationships locally, nationally, and globally. Together, we are making theological education accessible for a new generation of leaders and learners.

Please continue your remarkable and prayerful support for Luther Seminary as we move forward into a hopeful future.



Peace and blessings,

Robin J. Steinke
President

MEET VIOLETA

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

DURING THE 2024–25 FISCAL YEAR

- 65% of students **graduated without seminary debt**. For the others, median debt was \$25,141*.
- **98 students graduated** during the 2024–25 academic year.
- Donor sources made up 94% of Luther Seminary's operating revenue, including individual donor support, the endowment, and church and synod appropriations.
- 39 international students enrolled from 18 countries.

BY THE NUMBERS

- **410 students** enrolled at Luther Seminary during the 2024–25 academic year.
- ELCA members accounted for 70% of the student body. 34 denominations made up the remaining 30% of students.
- Tuition, student fees, books, and on-campus living expenses cost approximately \$40,538 for full-time students.

*Last year's annual report incorrectly stated that the median debt was \$2,774. It was \$27,174.



Aura Violeta Siguenza '27 M.A. already has a seminary education and more than 20 years of ministry experience, but God was calling her to further theological education. Concerned about how to pay for a master's degree, she prayed about it. The Jubilee Scholarship was the answer to her prayers. That blessing has enabled her to pursue her calling at Luther Seminary, but it was the faculty and the ABIDE framework (Accountability, Belonging, Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity) that attracted her to Luther. "Other institutions talk about it but do too little to change," she said. "In order to change, the institution, its vision, its mission, its faculty, and its staff need to reflect an openness to transformation."

A AND DANNY

2024-25 AT A GLANCE

- The seminary awarded **417 scholarships** in 2024-25.
- Master of Arts students like Violeta made up 52% of enrolled students.
- Scholarship recipients like Violeta and Danny received part of the \$6.97 million awarded during the 2024-25 academic year. On average, students received **\$14,535 in scholarships** and grants from Luther Seminary.
- Master of Divinity students like Danny made up 28% of students in 2024-25.
- Financial aid covered **100% of the cost of tuition** for all M.A., M.Div., and graduate certificate students.

As the son of a Luther Seminary alumnus, **Danny Reinschmidt '29 M.Div.** calls attending Luther "a bit of a 'no brainer'" for himself. Called to serve God's people in a gospel-centered, neighbor-oriented way, he appreciates Luther's renowned faculty, longstanding tradition of spiritual and pastoral formation, and welcoming and beloved community. The one challenge he foresaw in pursuing a seminary education was cost and how the pressure of debt would impact his career. "I am so thankful that Luther provides a way for those answering God's call to do so without the anxiety and stress of financial barriers," he said.

Finances 2024–25

Luther Seminary and Foundation consolidated balance sheets
as of June 30, 2025, and June 30, 2024.

ASSETS

	2025	2024
Current Assets		
Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$8,551,125	\$11,951,995
Other Current Assets	306,158	648,317
Total Current Assets	\$8,857,283	\$12,600,312
Non-Current Assets		
Other Assets	\$1,901,520	\$1,996,675
Investments	143,877,825	135,495,744
Student Notes Receivable, Net	1,822,113	1,887,948
Land, Buildings, and Equipment, Net	7,348,926	7,751,070
Total Other Assets	\$154,950,384	\$147,131,437
Total Assets	\$163,807,667	\$159,731,749

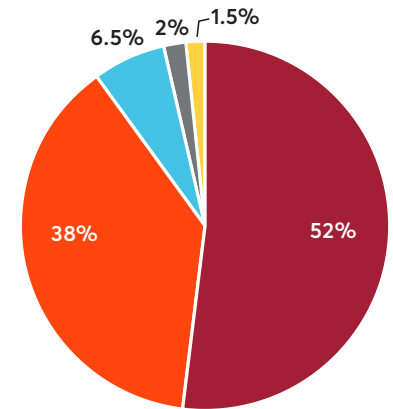
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

Current Liabilities		
Other Current Liabilities	\$3,081,563	\$3,774,453
Notes Payable, Current Portion	166,233	159,726
Total Current Liabilities	\$3,247,796	\$3,934,179
Long-Term Liabilities		
Other Long-Term Liabilities	\$5,840,955	\$6,453,499
Notes Payable, Net of Current Portion	3,905,781	4,072,014
Total Long-Term Liabilities	\$9,746,736	\$10,525,513
Total Liabilities	\$12,994,532	\$14,459,692
Net Assets		
Without Donor Restrictions	\$3,443,146	\$4,626,230
With Donor Restrictions	147,369,989	140,645,827
Total Net Assets	\$150,813,135	\$145,272,057
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$163,807,667	\$159,731,749

ENDOWMENT

Total Market Value (as of June 30, 2025)	\$142 million
Investment Returns	
1-year	9.6%
3-year	9.3%
5-year	8.5%

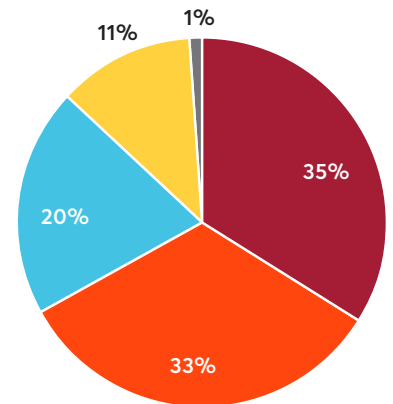
Luther Seminary's annual report numbers are also available at luthersem.edu/annual-report.
Learn more about giving to support future church leaders at luthersem.edu/giving.



Unrestricted Operating Income

Donor Support	\$9,385,552
Endowment Draw	6,835,092
Churchwide and Synod Support	1,173,488
Auxiliary Enterprises and Other Income	322,604
Net Tuition and Fees	275,413

Total **\$17,992,149**



Unrestricted Operating Expenses

Student Instruction and Support	\$7,011,863
Institutional Support	6,539,922
Innovation and Faith+Lead	4,064,774
Physical Plant and Maintenance	2,177,158
Auxiliary Enterprises and Other Income	322,604

Total* **\$19,922,955**

*Includes depreciation



PATRICK THUESON, PRESIDENT

POWERING POSSIBILITIES

In September, Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota celebrated its 160th anniversary at the annual Celebration for Changing Lives gala. I was happy to report then, and now, that LSS is a VERY healthy 160-year-old.

I am also pleased to share that in 2025, LSS exceeded our annual goal for the number of individuals and families we served while achieving our budget for the seventeenth consecutive year.

LSS is thriving because of the people who embrace the organization's mission – team members, volunteers, donors, funders, and the people we serve and support.

Across Minnesota, LSS team members focus on being trustworthy and delivering high-quality services – factors that we can control. In a world of uncertainty, these commitments form the foundation for our team members and volunteers who provide a broad array of services.

Wherever they serve, they follow a simple but powerful approach: First, they listen deeply to understand how each person wants to change their life; then, they work to remove barriers to independence, self-sufficiency, and resilience.

This process may be simple, but it's not easy. LSS team members and volunteers do difficult work – as do the



**Lutheran
Social Service**
of Minnesota

individuals we serve, who dare to dream bigger for themselves and their families. Seeking help takes strength and courage, and helping someone reach their full potential is a profound honor. We are grateful for the inspiration and determination they bring to the LSS mission.

Likewise, we are grateful to LSS' donors, funders, and supporters who trust us to be mindful stewards of their investments to support individuals in communities across Minnesota, North Dakota, and elsewhere. For 160 years – ten generations – Minnesotans have come together with LSS to dream bigger dreams for our neighbors.

Meaningful Work, Welcoming Workplace

In 2025, LSS was honored once again as a Star Tribune Top Workplace, based on feedback from our team members. This year, LSS also received a new distinction from them – the Cultural Excellence Award – recognizing our commitment to a positive, welcoming environment.

When asked to describe LSS, the two most common words were “welcoming” and “innovative.” These qualities shine through in the way our team members support one another and serve our communities every day. Their dedication makes LSS not only a great place to work but a place where meaningful change happens.

Empowering Our Next Chapter

One of LSS' enduring strengths has been universal and unwavering since the beginning – our ability to understand both the “how” of changing lives and the “why.” It is our mission, which remains vibrant, compelling, and vigilant: To share the love of Christ for ALL people.

The heart of this mission is seen in everyday moments across our 25-plus lines of service, as well as at the core of our recently launched comprehensive campaign, Empower What's Possible. From infrastructure projects to pilot service projects to an emphasis on sustainable funding, Empower What's Possible is kicking off LSS' next chapter of powering possibilities, big and small, for our neighbors.

Thank you for the important role you play in making that durable, ever-fresh mission a reality in so many lives today. And thank you for the special place you make in your heart for Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota. Because of you, we can imagine the possibilities of an even brighter future.

With great gratitude,

Patrick Thueson
President

STORIES OF NEW POSSIBILITIES

DENISE AND HER FAMILY



“

Everyone works together as a team for the child. We have a monthly meeting that includes social workers, a child advocate, and other service providers as needed from LSS and the county.

”

DENISE

“

It's been a big weight lifted off my shoulders having LSS assume guardianship responsibilities. This allows me to focus on loving my uncle.

”

MARK

MARK AND HIS UNCLE



“

Just having people that can relate to me, that I don't have to explain things to, it's helped with the mental-emotional healing that I'm still going through.

”

RIDER

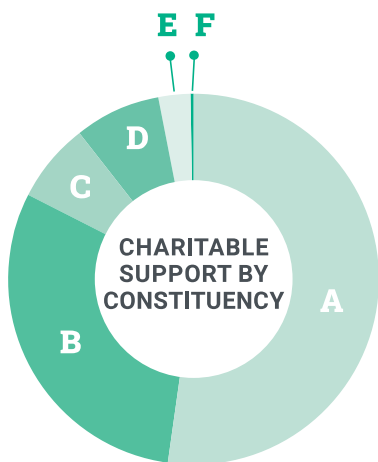


RIDER

Consolidated Financial Report Fiscal Year Ending September 2025

AUDITED

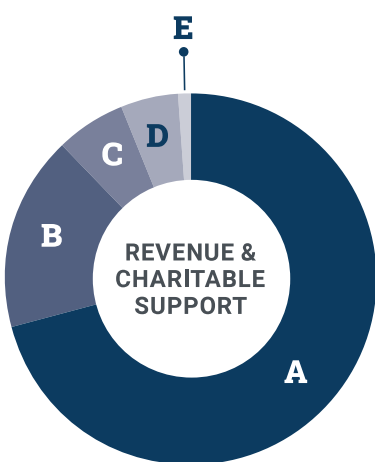
CHARITABLE SUPPORT BY CONSTITUENCY



- A \$9,125,327**
Individuals
- B \$5,292,445**
Foundation/Trust
- C \$1,196,250**
Churches & Congregations
- D \$1,335,754**
Businesses & Corporations
- E \$453,389**
Organizations
- F \$34,876**
Other

Total Charitable Support.....\$17,438,041

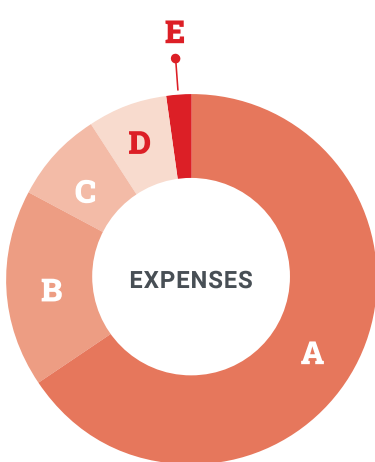
REVENUE & CHARITABLE SUPPORT



- A \$201,486,950**
Client-Directed Waivers
- B \$44,481,652**
Grants & Contracts*
- C \$17,438,041**
Charitable Support
- D \$13,581,198**
Client Fees
- E \$3,069,881**
Investment & Other Income

Total Revenues & Charitable Support.....\$280,057,722
Total Expenses.....\$272,158,612
Change in Net Assets – Operations.....\$7,899,110

EXPENSES



- A \$176,396,352**
Services for People with Identified Needs
- B \$45,395,411**
Services for Children / Youth / Families / CFCL
- C \$19,005,312**
Services for Older Adults
- D \$25,385,531**
General & Administrative Costs
- E \$5,976,006**
Fundraising Expenses

[90% services | 8% administration | 2% fundraising]

*Grants and contracts are earned through a competitive bidding process



Lutheran Advocacy - Minnesota

The 2026 Lutheran Letter Campaign

The state legislative session runs from January – May, and we need Lutherans to take action throughout on our issues of hunger, poverty, care of creation, & love of neighbor.

While participation in our annual Letter-Writing Campaigns continues to grow, we still face challenges in raising awareness of the campaign and its issues among congregations and their related committees. Would you consider doing an Offering of Letters during Lent next year? Or what about starting an Advocacy Circle at your church?



This fall we hope to encourage regular advocacy participation on Federal issues with monthly or bi-monthly check-in/issue update sessions over lunch. During Lent and beyond we would like your participation on our state issues. (Lent is the best timing for letter campaigns to state legislators, while action alerts could occur at any time during session).

Take a moment to check out this year's campaign resources. Since it usually takes at least 2-3 years (and often more) to pass specific legislation, it is likely that many of this year's issues will be back in some form next year. You can find the 2026 downloadable resources under "Current Campaigns" in the dropdown menu under "Get Involved" at www.lutheranadvocacymn.org

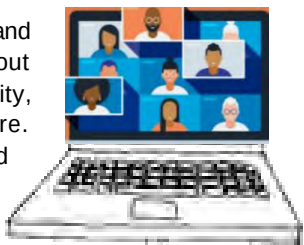
POLITICAL VIOLENCE & EXTREMISM

We have a new section on our website addressing Political Violence, Division, and Extremism. If you scroll all the way to the bottom of the page, you will find our statement on Political Violence, put out after the assassination & shooting of some of our state lawmakers and their spouses. There is also a devotion available there which was led by Rev. Rebel Hurd (Northwestern Minnesota Synod) for our Policy Council following the violence. More resources and links will be added in the months to come.

[Available Under "Resources" at www.lutheranadvocacymn.org]

WEBINARS / EVENTS

Watch our Facebook page, website, and synod newsletters for information about upcoming Webinars on Election Integrity, Democracy, Civic Engagement, and more. We will also have some advocacy-focused events coming up and we'd love to have you participate.



2025 LEGISLATIVE RESULTS

The 2025 Minnesota Legislative Session came to its official close with much work left undone.

Overall Budget Negotiations – House and Senate landed in very different places in nearly every budget area. Weeks of negotiations by the leaders and governor finally resulted in a controversial agreement. The deal came so late that the House & Senate adjourned without the usual flurry of last day activity. Negotiations continued behind closed doors on the details within various budget areas, and in June the governor called a one-day Special Session to pass what was negotiated.

Affordable Housing – Thanks to lots of letters from Lutherans, steadfast advocacy by many Homes for All partners, and great bipartisan collaboration by House legislators, the House passed a housing package increasing funding by \$75 million and focused on four pillars of housing stability. Despite persistent advocacy, the Senate only passed an additional \$3 million. Final Conference Committee negotiations added \$18 million, primarily for rental help and homeownership support, with \$50 million in bonding to build or rehab more housing.



Tammy, Lutheran Advocacy-MN Director, testifies for a Senate Environment Committee hearing. Next to her is Sen. Rob Kupec, lead senate author on the electronic waste bill. Most bills must go through multiple committees.

Electronic Waste Recycling – We heard from bill author Sen. Kupec that our Lutheran advocacy was making a meaningful difference. The proposal gained broad bipartisan support after shifting to a manufacturer stewardship model with modest costs based on sales (similar to other waste and emissions programs). Many legislators across the political spectrum were interested and supportive of the bill. However, as concerns were raised by some manufacturers, messaging also began circulating in a few districts that framed the bill in partisan terms, creating concerns for some constituents who in turn put pressure on their legislators. In response, some key co-authors ultimately withdrew their support, while remaining interested in the policy itself. We continue to work with coalition partners and stakeholders on the bill.

Threats – It was clear throughout session that both Republicans and Democrats were getting threats of harm, with some legislators indicating they had increased exponentially in 2025. Following the June 14 assassination and shooting of colleagues and the spouses, many wondered if they were putting their families at risk by serving.



Twin Ports Ministry to Seafarers

PO Box 16360 Duluth, MN 55816
Contact us: tel: 218-727-5897 cell: 218-343-8801
Email: seafarersduluth@yahoo.com
web address: www.seafarerstwinports.org



Seafarers International House

Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the mighty waters.

Psalm 107:23

The 2025 Oceangoing Shipping Season

The 2025 oceangoing shipping season at the Duluth/Superior Harbor commenced with the arrival of the Federal Yoshino on April 8 and concluded with the departure of the Miedwie on December 23.

Ministry of Hospitality

The Seafarers Center played a vital role throughout the season by offering hospitality and support to the crews of the 44 ships that visited the harbor. Crew members who crossed the seas received a warm welcome and assistance from the Center.

Welcoming and Supporting Crews

Representatives from the Seafarers Center visit each ship to greet the crew and inform them about the services available. The Center provides a means for crews to contact them for transportation or any other needs. When crew members are not on duty many make use of the ministry's free transportation to shop or explore the area. Occasionally, the Center assists with shopping for food provisions when supplies run low, utilizing the van to deliver needed items.

As the season draws to a close, Christmas tote bags containing knit hats, scarves, and ditty bags of toiletries and other items are given to crew members.

Listening and Caring

A significant part of the Center's ministry is simply listening—creating space for seafarers to share stories about their families back home. Extended separation, often stretching nine or ten months at a time, weighs heavily on many of them. Crew members frequently speak about the young children they've had to leave behind in order to provide for their families through their work at sea. These conversations are more than casual exchanges. The stories seafarers entrust to us are holy ground—moments where vulnerability, longing, and love surface in ways that remind us of the sacredness of human connection.

Gratitude for Support

Heartfelt thanks are extended to the Northeastern Minnesota Synod for their vital Ministry Partner support, as well as to the many congregations, women's organizations, and individuals whose financial contributions are invaluable. We are deeply grateful for the volunteers who visit ships, knit hats and scarves, sew ditty bags, and collect items that bring comfort and care to seafarers from around the world. Special appreciation is also given to the Seafarers International House in New York City for their significant financial support of the Twin Ports Ministry to Seafarers.

May we, together, continue to welcome and care for seafarers from across the world who come to the western most tip of the Great Lakes.

Rev. Doug Paulson, Executive Director
Twin Ports Ministry to Seafarers



Crew members showing their shore passes to Security in order to go ashore



Picking up crew members who are anxious to get off the ship



Transporting crew member who need to purchasing food provisions for the next leg of their journey



Visiting with crew members on board their vessel



Dropping off Christmas tote bags

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

Seafarers International House

MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: A Homecoming for Prisoners of Hope

Return to your fortress, you prisoners of hope; even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you.

Zechariah 9:12

Dear friends of Seafarers International House (SIH):

In February 2024, a report released by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found that refugees and asylees have generated tens of billions of dollars more in local, state, and federal tax revenues over the last 15 years than they have cost in direct government services — ultimately representing a net fiscal gain at all levels of government. (See text box for details.)*

And yet, throughout 2025 and especially today, many refugees and asylum seekers are being threatened with deportation and imprisonment. As SIH board member Ralie Deffenbaugh reminds us, in September 2025, the Council of Churches in Namibia convened an event titled “we are prisoners of hope,” which drew parallels between Namibia’s historical struggle for liberation and the current plight of refugees and asylum seekers. The phrase is based on Zechariah 9:12 and has historically been used by leaders like Bishop Zephania Kameeta and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. What a powerful connotation.

Here at SIH, we have been charting a course toward a grand Homecoming — a return to a new home through the purchase of a property in downtown Manhattan. Just a stone’s throw from our original site in 1873, this new space will become a true home away from

home for asylum seekers and seafarers, many of whom are “prisoners of hope.” Within these walls, our guests will find safety, welcome, and the assurance that they have reached a secure harbor.

During 2026, we will begin renovating this right-sized mission building, creating 16 guest rooms and community space to accommodate both small asylum-seeking families and individuals, as well as visiting seafarers. With these improvements underway, we are looking ahead to opening our doors in early 2027, ready to offer refuge and rest to all who arrive.

Parallel, we will be launching a comprehensive campaign to pay for the renovations, reduce the burden of a loan for the new building, and strengthen our services to seafarers and asylum seekers. We will keep you posted in the months to come.

In April 2025, we had a most successful Setting the Course reception thanks to the generosity of our honorees Susan Winfree, Willie Barrere, and notably Robert Sappio, - and their friends. The boost in event support enabled us to expand our services through a partnership with the Houston International Seafarers Center with our port chaplain Pastor Tammy Sharp in that busy port in the Lone Star State.

Thus, we continued a robust port mission in now six ports with nine port chaplains and ship visitors, and a fleet of six vans that we use to visit ships and to transport seafarers. In the summer and fall, volunteers from the Propeller Club, congregations, board members,

MISSION

Seafarers International House (SIH) is the Lutheran response to the urgent needs of vulnerable seafarers and immigrants.

SIH offers hospitality, social assistance, and advocacy to a multi-national and multi-faith community in the Ports of Albany, Baltimore, Duluth, Houston, New Haven, and New York & New Jersey, and in New York City.

and individuals helped us assemble satchels. These efforts paid off with 3,405 Christmas-at-Sea satchels delivered to seafarers connecting donors with seafaring “prisoners of hope” who experienced the joy of Christmas.

In 2025, we served 19,519 people including 19 asylum seekers we welcomed providing them with shelter, food, and social work assistance; a far cry from the 33 and 49 in 2024 and 2023 respectively because asylum seekers are fearful of coming out of the shadows. Obviously, the curtailment on asylum seekers has had its effect.

With these positive 2025 highlights in mind, perhaps we are all “prisoners of hope” in that as we are bound together in despair, we are also bound together in hope that will not leave us imprisoned.

“For I know the plans I have for you” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Jeremiah 29:11

Peace,



Marsh Luther Drage
Pastor and Executive Director

* From 2005 to 2019, refugees and asylees paid a total of \$123.8 billion more in taxes than they cost in government services, for a net fiscal gain of \$31.5 billion to the federal government and \$92.3 billion to state and local governments combined. Refugees and asylees paid an estimated \$363 billion to the federal government through payroll, income, and excise taxes, and \$218 billion to state and local governments through income, sales, and property taxes. Even when factoring in their spouses and children under 18, many of whom are U.S. citizens, refugees and asylees still provided a net fiscal gain, costing \$723.4 billion in government services yet paying \$739.4 billion in tax revenue, for a net gain of \$16 billion.

2025 Program Impact

19,519 immigrants and seafarers directly benefited from SIH's services (up from 19,066)

2,351 lodging nights (up from 2,225) provided to 139 seafarers in Manhattan.

14,078 seafarers were visited and counseled (up from 13,556) on 1,347 vessels, receiving essentials they requested.

1,878 seafarers were transported to a mall or medical facilities.

3,405 seafarers, regardless of faith, received Christmas-at-Sea satchels filled with warm clothing and holiday greetings to spread joy beyond borders and oceans.

19 asylum seekers received free lodging for a total of 1,328 nights. They hailed from Angola, Cameroon, Chile, Cuba (3), Haiti (5), Nigeria, Peru, Ukraine, and Venezuela (5). See map below.



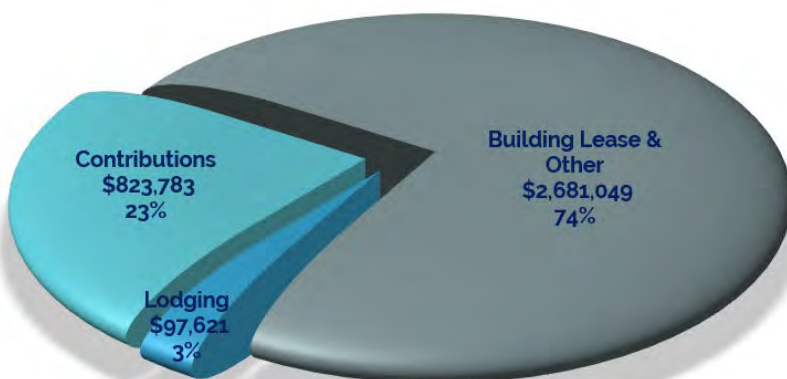
2025 FINANCIAL REPORT

In accordance with our 2024 - 2028 strategic plan, operating gains continued to help build reserves for the purchase of the new right-sized mission headquarters (\$1M). These gains also allow for capital repairs on the guesthouse (\$324,806), which is leased to Breaking Ground, a NYC-based non-profit which provides transitional housing to the community.

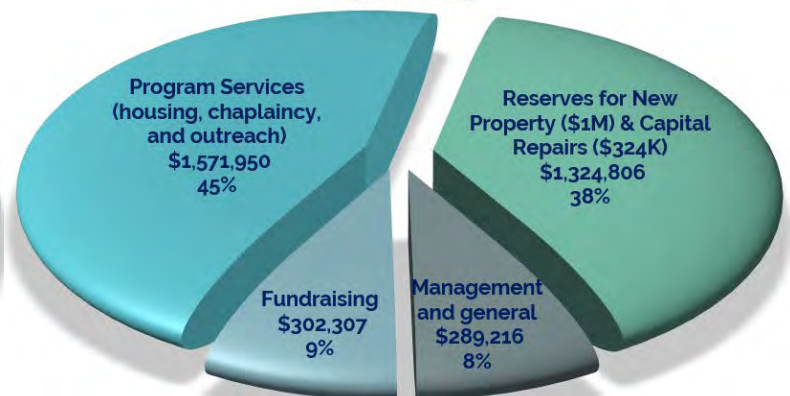
Lease revenue needs to be augmented by donations to support our services and the purchase and renovation of our new home starting in 2026. Program services and reserves accounted for 83% of expenses with only 17% spent on management and fundraising. These figures reflect unaudited revenue and expenses and are subject to change.

To request the audited 2025 financial statements please send an email to henryk@sihnyc.org. 

Operating Revenue 2025 (pre-audit) \$3,602,453



Operating Expenses & Reserves for New Property 2025 (pre-audit) \$3,488,279



GIFTS IN MEMORY OF

Zoia K. Foster † by Bishop Rev. Dr. Katrina D. Foster and Pamela Kallimanis

Jacob Henry † by Don Henry

Billie Lee Kober † by Kathryn Edgecomb

Rich Roberts † by Captain Emil Muccini

Anton E. Salvesen † by Lynn R. Salvesen Wirth

Captain Dennis Schroeder †
by Catherine S. and Dr. John A. Fegley

Morton Silver †
by Ian Silver

Marcia Stulbaum †
by Vanessa Costanza
International Seaways, Inc.



Rev. Dr. Dennis Anderson †
by Mary Ann and Gary Anderson

James Alex Bishop †
by Sterling Gilreath and Henryk Behnke



Elaine "Laine" Lykes Brown †
by Sterling Gilreath and Henryk Behnke



Thomas Catero †
by Lynne and Jeff Weinlandt



Arthur William Clark †
by Virginia Clark

Helen Geraldine "Gerri" Day †
by Sterling Gilreath and Henryk Behnke



Giuseppe De Matola †
by an anonymous supporter



Charles "Charlie" Albin Erickson †
by Dr. Ann Siegle Drege and Rev. Marsh Drege
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by Christine A. Segerhammar & Rev. Paul Kempton Segerhammar

Einar B. Knudtsen †
by Joan E. Worrall



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by Bettina and Gerhard Winklmeier

Michael G. Mann †
by Marcia Kaplan-Mann



Marilyn Burke Maurstad †
by Nellie and David Jarvis



Rev. Martha L. McCracken †
by Sheila and Frank Giglio



Andrew "Drew" Melvin †
by Sterling Gilreath and Henryk Behnke



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by Gail Wagner
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Sterling Gilreath and Henryk Behnke



Stanley Wyatt and Joan Moore †
by Theresa Moore



Captain C. Michael "Mike" Murray †
by Gwen and Captain Donald Marcus



Avis and Dennis Oeltjenbruns †
by Dr. Ann Siegle Drege and Rev. Marsh Drege
Steve and Stacey Siegle



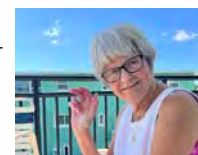
Panagiota "Toula" Panousopoulos †
by Angeliki and Anastasia Panousopoulos



Ralph Urban Price †
by Carole and Rev. Amandus J. Derr
Dr. Ann Siegle Drege and Rev. Marsh Drege



Ruth and Rev. Ray Siegle †
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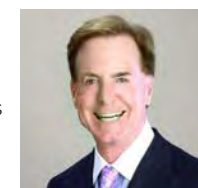
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Gail Swanson Frost and Paul Frost



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Franz Unterreiner †
by Marlene Brankovic



Douglas D. Wheat †
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Hans Peter Wiedemann †
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Kristina and Brian McVeigh
Howard Ross
Ouliana and Ralf D. Wiedemann



Robert Paul Wilkinson †
by Kevin Gowen



Rev. William Eugene Zimmermann †
by Cindy Zimmermann

GIFTS IN HONOR OF

All the Kind Folks Who Work At Seafarers International House and Leaders and Volunteers

by Karen Skullerud
Rev. Jeanne Rineer Warfield
and Sheldon P. Warfield

Asylum Seekers

by Michael Edward Declement

Henryk Behnke

by Dayna and Conor P. Brooks

Susan Smyth Bell

by Edward and Carolyn Wagner

Watson Bosler

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Arnd Braun-Storck

by Aylett and J. Nicholas Suhr, Esq.

Dr. Ann Siegle Drege & Rev. Marsh Luther Drege

by Betsy and Berniece Debertin

Rev. Marsh Luther Drege and His 40th Anniversary Of Ordination

by Henryk Behnke

& Sterling Gilreath

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Blythe C. Miller, Esq. & Tim Rothang

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Damaris Ruza

Sharon and Captain Richard

J. Schoenlank

Rev. Susan E. Tjornehoj

& Rev. David Wangaard

C. Harry Forse

by Kari Nielsen

Shea Fumagali

by Cullen Kavoussi

Captain Tom Larkin

by Henryk Behnke

Lois and Jeffrey Leonardis

by Jill Cassels

Rev. Vitalii Guz

by Grace Ann Planalp

Jennifer "Jeni" Janis

by Henryk Behnke

Kathryn and Erik Hanson

by Edward and Carolyn Wagner

Lisa Mages and

Richard McCandless

by Melinda James

Rev. Roy Riley

by Aiesha and Andrew Steele

Ruth Setaro

by Susan and Rev. Mark

Christoffersen

John Swedberg

by John David Crews

Womenwearingthepants.org

by Robert Carroll



LIGHTHOUSE KEEPERS

Lighthouse Keepers make recurring donations that provide a reliable income stream to support vulnerable people in need.

- Barbara Anderson
- Susan Smyth Bell
- Henryk Behnke & Sterling Gilreath
- Stephen Bennett and Brooke Badley
- Frederick Bindel
- Joy and Dennis Blazak
- Sandra Brandt
- Dayna and Conor P. Brooks
- Ute Brinkmann
- Rev. Serge A. Castigliano and Rev. Susan L. Lunning
- Wendy and David Cegelka
- Robert Carroll
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- Sharon and Captain Richard J. Schoenlank
- Aiesha and Andrew Steele
- Joan E. Worrall
- Guan Yang



HOMEPORT SOCIETY

Members of the Homeport Society have included Seafarers International House (SIH) in their retirement and legacy plan by listing SIH in their will or making SIH a beneficiary of a life insurance policy or a qualified retirement plan. They leave a legacy of care for the stranger.

- Barbara Anderson
- Henryk Behnke & Sterling Gilreath
- Susan Smyth Bell
- Paul K. Erbes
- Dr. Ann Siegle Drege and Rev. Marsh Luther Drege
- Pauline and Harry Forse
- Caryl M. and Rev. Mark A. Gorud
- Matthew O'Rear
- Ralph Urban Price (1931 - 2025)
- Betsy and Rev. E. Roy Riley
- Patricia and Christopher V. Roehrer, Esq.
- Jill and John Scibilia
- Rev. Susan E. Tjornehoj and Rev. David Wangaard
- Laura and Hans Vogel
- Carolyn and Edward Wagner
- Rev. Margay Jo Whitlock



Because of privacy concern, we cannot publish a photo of asylum seekers. Instead we share this image of people who might have been guests long ago: Immigrants on a steamer passing the Statue of Liberty. From Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, July 2, 1887. US National Parks Service.

CHRISTMAS-AT-SEA: A HOLIDAY INITIATIVE

3,405 seafarers received Christmas at Sea satchels filled with warm clothing and holiday cheer. On their behalf, thank you to all participants, donors, Amazon Wish List contributors, and knitters. (If you are not listed here, please check the donor list on the following pages):

Cheryl Acker
 Mariline S. and Miguel A. Alicea
 All Saints Lutheran Church, Piscataway, NJ
 Amazing Grace Lutheran Church, Florham Park, NJ
 American Maritime Officers
 The American P&I Club
 Ruben Anderson
 Anonymous
 Henryk Behnke
 Susan Smyth Bell
 Bensalem Senior Citizens Center
 Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Fairport, NY
 Botschaft (Grubb) Luth. Ch., Mount Pleasant Mills, PA
 Michael Bradford
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 Ryan J. Byrnes, Esq.
 Calvary Lutheran Church, Allendale, NJ
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 Gethsemane Lutheran Church, Keyport, NJ
 Sarah C. Gioe & Robert W. Neel
 Gloria Dei! Lutheran Church, Arnold, MD
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 Grace Lutheran Church, Stratford, CT
 Grace Lutheran Church, West Springfield, MA
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 George C. Herrmann
 Holy Trinity Lutheran Church (Women's Group), East Orange, NJ
 Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Hasbrouck Heights, NJ
 Immanuel Lutheran Church, Kingston, NY
 Immanuel Lutheran Church, Oxford, CT
 Immanuel Lutheran Church, Philadelphia, PA
 Immanuel Lutheran Church, Staten Island, NY
 International Seaways
 Louanne and Rev. Glen Isernhagen
 Melinda James
 Jennifer "Jeni" and Jordan Janis
 Katherine Jankowski
 Janet and Kenneth Janzen
 Jerusalem Evangelical Lutheran Church, Lititz, PA
 Stephanie Klien
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 Edward and Carolyn Wagner
 Keira Walsh
 Lynn and Jeff Weinlandt
 Margay Whitlock and friends
 Peter John Wirth
 Woman's Seamen's Friend Society of CT
 Joan Worrall
 Hanne Wulp
 Zion Lutheran Church, Baltimore, MD
 Zion Lutheran Church (WELCA), Renovo, PA
 Zion Lutheran Church, Saddle River, NJ



We are grateful to all volunteers and donors including this group with Pastor Sarah Garrett Krey (on the right) from Gloria Dei! Lutheran Church in Arnold, MD.
 Photo by SIH's port chaplain Rev. Vitalii Guz, December 2025.

2025 DONORS List of supporters including soft credits and Facebook donations

Thank you for welcoming
19,519 strangers and helping
them in their need.

\$50,000 and over

Metropolitan New York Synod, ELCA
New York Community Trust
SeaCube Container Leasing Ltd.

\$25,000 to \$49,999

American Maritime Officers
Susan and Rev. Mark Christoffersen
German Society of the City of New York
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2025 ANNUAL REPORT

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I am especially grateful for this year's peer ministers—Matthias Bergstrom, Zada Cardinal, Julia Gwash, and Gabriel Mann—whose leadership in worship and hospitality has strengthened our ministry and welcomed many students into community.

Thank you to the Northeastern Minnesota Synod and to the congregations of the synod for your faithful support of Lutheran Campus Ministry. Your generosity makes this vital ministry with and for students possible.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Doug Paulson
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Northeastern Minnesota Synod – Young Adult Ministry Report

Written by: Julia Gwash, Young Adult Leader

Executive Summary

Young adult ministry in the Northeastern Minnesota Synod continues to demonstrate growth, depth, and meaningful impact through programs centered on discernment, community-building, and leadership development.

The Beloved You initiative remains a cornerstone of this work, with 17 participants across two cohorts. The program is effectively guiding young adults in identifying and pursuing their vocational call, with several participants taking concrete steps toward seminary education and candidacy for ordained or lay ministry.

Gather ministries across the synod provide consistent opportunities for relational connection, faith exploration, and service. The Gather Mille Lacs community maintains strong engagement through regular gatherings, service experiences, and shared life together. At the same time, Gather Twin Ports is emerging as a growing and dynamic ministry, expanding its reach through community presence, intentional outreach, and leadership development. Together, these communities reflect a relational and adaptive model of young adult ministry that meets people where they are.

Statewide and national Gather events continue to deepen connections, inspire new approaches to ministry, and strengthen leadership across communities.

Participation in churchwide events—including the Festival of Discernment, the ELCA World Hunger Leadership Gathering, regional and synodical leadership gatherings, and the Justice and Joy Conference—has further expanded leadership capacity and strengthened connections between the synod and the wider church.

Across all initiatives, a consistent theme emerges: young adult ministry is most impactful when rooted in authentic relationships, intentional space for discernment, and opportunities for shared leadership. These efforts are equipping young adults to actively shape the present and future of the church.

Overview

Young adult ministry across the Northeastern Minnesota Synod continues to grow through intentional relationships, vocational discernment, and leadership development. Key initiatives, including Beloved You, Gather communities, and participation in churchwide events, provide meaningful opportunities for connection, spiritual formation, and exploration of call.

This ministry reflects a shift toward relational and participatory models of engagement, where young adults are not only participants but also leaders and co-creators of ministry. Through a combination of local gatherings, retreats, and wider church experiences, young adults are being equipped to explore their faith, articulate their sense of purpose, and engage more deeply in the life of the church.

This report summarizes participation, major activities, and outcomes from the past program year.

Beloved You

Participation:

- 2024–2025 Cohort: 13 participants
- 2025–2026 Cohort: 4 participants

The Beloved You initiative remains a vital component of the synod’s vocational discernment efforts. Participants engage in a structured process that integrates spiritual practice, theological reflection, and community accompaniment as they explore potential calls to ministry and leadership.

Through guided conversations, retreats, and small group engagement, participants are invited to listen deeply to their experiences, gifts, and sense of call. Program elements—including reflective reading, personality and spiritual assessment tools, and peer discussion—support a holistic approach to discernment that honors both individual identity and communal wisdom.

The impact of Beloved You is evident in several key ways:

- Participants gain clarity and confidence in naming their vocational direction
- The program fosters a supportive environment for honest exploration and growth
- It serves as a bridge toward next steps, including seminary enrollment and candidacy

Several participants have already taken significant steps forward, including enrolling in seminary, entering candidacy processes, and discerning roles in both rostered and lay ministry. The program continues to serve as an important entry point for young adults exploring how their faith intersects with their sense of purpose.

Gather Ministry

Gather Mille Lacs

The Gather Mille Lacs community has maintained consistent engagement over the past year, with approximately 9–10 regularly active participants. The group continues to cultivate a strong sense of belonging through rhythms of shared meals, conversation, and mutual support.

Regular practices include:

- Monthly gatherings focused on relationship-building and faith reflection
- Opportunities for participants to share life updates and support one another
- Bi-monthly social and recreational activities that foster connection in informal settings

Service and experiential learning are also central to this community. This year, participants traveled to New Orleans for a mission experience that included both hunger relief work and hands-on home restoration. These opportunities not only addressed immediate needs but also encouraged reflection on justice, service, and vocation.

Looking ahead, the group is actively planning a future mission trip, continuing its commitment to service as an expression of faith in action. Gather Mille Lacs remains a strong example of how consistency, hospitality, and shared experience can sustain meaningful young adult ministry.

Gather Twin Ports

The Gather Twin Ports community continues to grow as an emerging and relationally grounded young adult ministry in the Twin Ports area. While still developing in size, the group has demonstrated a strong commitment to intentional connection, outreach, and leadership formation.

Gatherings have typically included 5–8 participants, creating space for meaningful conversation, relationship-building, and spiritual reflection. This smaller group dynamic has allowed for deeper engagement through practices such as small group discussions, informal coffee meetups, and shared time centered on faith and daily life.

Outreach has been a key area of growth over the past year. The community has made effective use of social media platforms to increase visibility and connect with new individuals. In addition, Gather Twin Ports participated in the Twin Ports Pride Festival in Duluth, expanding its presence in the broader community and fostering relationships with individuals seeking inclusive and affirming faith spaces. Ongoing efforts include maintaining connections formed through this event and strengthening ecumenical partnerships with other congregations in the area.

The ministry has also received tangible support from local partners. A recent gift of \$2,500 from a congregational endowment fund reflects both affirmation and investment in the continued growth of Gather Twin Ports. This funding supports expanded outreach efforts and strengthens core aspects of the ministry, including hospitality, shared meals, and accessible programming.

Leadership development remains a significant strength of this community. Leaders have actively participated in both state and national gatherings, bringing back insights, practices, and renewed energy to support the local ministry. Their engagement beyond the local context helps ensure that Gather Twin Ports remains connected to the wider church while adapting ideas to fit the needs of their community.

Overall, Gather Twin Ports reflects a model of young adult ministry that prioritizes authenticity, inclusion, and relationship-centered growth. While still emerging, it shows strong potential for continued expansion and impact within the synod.

Minnesota Gather Retreat

Synod Participation: 4 young adults

Young adults from across Minnesota gathered for a retreat centered on community, spiritual reflection, and shared learning. The structure of the retreat intentionally balanced worship and facilitated conversation with unstructured time, allowing relationships to develop naturally and authentically.

Young adults from this synod contributed to leadership by offering both a devotional and an evening worship service, reflecting the collaborative and peer-led nature of the Gather network.

The retreat fostered:

- Deeper relationships among participants across the state
- Opportunities to share experiences and learn from diverse ministry contexts
- Space for honest conversation about faith, challenges, and hopes for ministry

Participants returned with renewed energy, practical ideas for local ministry, and a stronger sense of connection to the broader Gather network. The experience reinforced the value of creating space for presence, listening, and shared leadership.

Churchwide and Synodical Events

Festival of Discernment with the Forum for Theological Exploration (FTE)

Participants: 5 young adults

Participants attended this national discernment event focused on exploring theological education and vocational call. Through worship, small group conversation, and engagement with ministry leaders, young adults were invited to consider how their gifts and passions might align with various forms of ministry.

The experience provided:

- Exposure to diverse pathways within theological education
- Opportunities to ask meaningful questions about vocation and identity
- Connections with peers from across the country engaged in similar discernment

For many, this event served as a significant step in deepening their understanding of call and exploring potential next steps.

ELCA World Hunger Leadership Gathering

Participants: 1 young adult (+ 1 adult and 1 youth from the synod)**

Representation at this gathering connected the synod to broader efforts addressing hunger and justice. Participants engaged with leaders from across the ELCA through workshops, service-learning opportunities, and collaborative discussions.

The gathering included participation in advocacy-related initiatives and engagement with storytelling and media highlighting justice ministries in partnership contexts.

This experience:

- Strengthened understanding of systemic hunger and justice issues
- Equipped participants with tools for advocacy and local engagement
- Fostered connections across synods and ministry contexts

Participants returned with renewed commitment to addressing hunger and a broader vision for how local ministry connects to churchwide efforts.

Justice and Joy: Ecumenical Campus and Young Adult Ministry Conference

Participants: 2 young adults

Two young adults represented the synod at this national gathering focused on campus and young adult ministry in ecumenical contexts. The conference included worship, workshops, experiential learning, and opportunities to engage with ministry leaders from across denominations.

Participants explored innovative approaches to ministry, shared best practices, and reflected on the evolving needs of young adults in faith communities. Time was also spent building relationships and learning from ministries in different regional contexts.

Outcomes included:

- Increased awareness of creative and adaptive ministry models
- Strengthened leadership skills and confidence
- Expanded networks within the ELCA and ecumenical partners

Their participation contributes to the continued growth and adaptability of young adult ministry within the synod.

Conclusion

Young adult ministry in the Northeastern Minnesota Synod continues to be shaped by intentional relationships, authentic community, and opportunities for discernment and leadership. Programs such as Beloved You and Gather are equipping young adults to explore their vocation, deepen their faith, and engage meaningfully in the life of the church.

As participants move into leadership roles, seminary, and various forms of ministry, these initiatives remain essential to nurturing the next generation of leaders within the ELCA. Continued investment in these ministries will ensure that young adults are not only welcomed into the life of the church but are empowered to help lead it into the future.

Lutheran Youth Organization (LYO) Report

Written by Trevor Ranisate

Hello, my name is Trevor Ranisate, I come from Virginia, Minnesota. I am a member of the LYO Leadership Team, as well as Gethsemane Lutheran Church.

I'm glad to say that 2025 was a great year for LYO. We saw many new members, put on a few amazing events, and had a ton of fun during it!

We started the year off with our LYO Leadership Camp in June. We had around 20-30 kids attend, it was a 4-day camp where we learned how to be leaders, expand on our leadership skills, and grow as people together. We had different sessions across the days where we learned many new things including how to plan a worship service, how to create a welcoming environment, how to lead a bible study, and many more things.

A few of us stayed behind an extra two days, leaving Friday instead of Wednesday so we could put on and lead a day camp for youth at Trinity Lutheran Church in Cook, MN – near Camp Vermilion. We put our skills to use and created an amazing experience for all the kids in attendance and even ourselves who took part in leading it.

Further down the line, the full leadership team came back together to plan the All Youth Gathering (AYG) - planning the theme, the games, the schedule, and everything else that needed planning. For two days at Camp Onomia, we planned what needed to get done, who was going to do it, and how it was going to be done.

This rolls us perfectly into the AYG at Cragun's Resort in November. Our team gathered once again to finally put on the big show we'd been preparing for all year. And personally, I think it was our best one yet! For the three days we were there, and I don't think I saw anyone *not* smiling, from all the games we played, the large group sessions singing songs and hearing stories from many amazing people - it was an incredible experience and exactly what we had hoped for when we started planning.

Those are the main things our team did over 2025.

Looking ahead now through 2026, we have another LYO Leadership Camp in June, which we hope can be just as good if not better than last year. We have All Youth Gathering at Cragun's again in November, and I'm sure many more things to come for the year.

We are all looking forward to this incredible year to come and thank all of you for supporting us and our mission with LYO. Thanks very much!



Congregational Report

Camp Onomia enters 2026 with renewed energy and a strengthened team ready to lead our ministry into its next chapter. This year, your outdoor ministry welcomed a new full-time Maintenance Manager, Todd Hirsch; expanded the Kitchen Manager role with Anna Ferguson; added a part-time Office and Events Manager, Deanne Kampa; and installed our new Executive Director, Deacon Stephanie Engel. With this gifted staff—alongside Sari, Program Director, and Kristal, Head of Housekeeping—Onomia is poised to grow, serve, and continue offering a place set apart for community and renewal on the shores of Lake Shakopee.



Springing Forward in Renewal - 2025 Highlights and What's Ahead



Camp Onomia continues to serve as a place where people of all ages step away from daily routines, form community, and encounter God's presence in creation. Whether you partnered with this ministry for decades or are learning about Onomia for the first time, we are grateful for your connection.

Program

- Another safe and meaningful summer of Christian outdoor ministry, rooted in faith, friendships, and time in creation.
- Three new summer programs debuting in 2026—Art Camp, Sprint Camp, and Adventure Camp—to reach more youth with varied interests and schedules.
- Expanded year-round ministry, including new retreats and events such as an adult Maker's Retreat for rest, creativity, and renewal.



Property

- Full-time staff on site are strengthening daily caretaking and enabling timely repairs.
- A facilities map and long-term maintenance plan are in development to steward buildings and grounds more sustainably.
- Improved systems will support a stronger volunteer experience and a welcoming campus for congregations and guest groups.



Partnership

- Renewed commitment to walking alongside congregations, synods, and our surrounding community. This included a Community Day Camp on-site in Summer 2025.
- Increased communication tools and shareable resources to help you tell the story of Onomia where you are. See more at: <https://www.camponomia.org/resources>
- Growing staff presence in our member congregations and offering continuing-education offerings to strengthen ministry connections and nurture leaders.

Since 1949, Camp Onomia has offered a life-changing experience which invites all to encounter Christ through Creation and Community. Visit us online: www.CampOnomia.org



If you want to help young people....

understand grace

discover their strengths

connect with nature

experience God's presence

build community

find peace

bond deeply

grow

...send them camping.



Amnicon Adventures & Retreats
is just 30 minutes outside of Duluth, but when
you're here you feel like you're deep in the
heart of creation.

2025 was one for the ages!



23 Guided
Canoe Trips



428 Personal
Retreats



27 Retreat
Groups



1,754 People
Served

One thing we kept being reminded of in 2025 was how truly timeless and deeply human it is to sit around a campfire, under a blanket of stars, beside the water. As always, our campers and guests got to dig deep into life and connect meaningfully with God and each other in the wilderness. What a thing of beauty.



You're Invited...

There are LOTS of ways to connect! We'd love to have you here. Consider this your personal invitation!

Volunteer Events



Join us May 15-17, Sept 11-13, or Nov 13-15... or contact us to schedule a service weekend just for your group!

Bring a Group!



Get away, together! We offer guided trips and rustic-yet-comfortable retreats near Lake Superior.

Solo Getaway



It's ok to need a break! Take some time for yourself in a personal retreat cabin.

www.amnicon.org



2025 Annual Report to the Synods

Wartburg College is dedicated to challenging and nurturing students for lives of leadership and service as a spirited expression of their faith and learning.

Guided by our vision, we are answering the call to prepare resilient leaders of positive change for service in a complex world. This will be realized by building on our distinctives and embracing new opportunities to be the leading institution in educating the whole person.

Enrollment and Student Success

- Fall 2025 undergraduate enrollment was 1,371 students from 32 U.S. states and 34 countries, which includes 200 U.S. students of color and 58 international students. More than 20 Christian denominations and several world religions are represented. Nineteen students are enrolled in the online Master of Arts in Leadership.
- The five majors with the highest enrollment are business administration, biology, exercise science, elementary education, and music education.
- To amplify focus on the first-year experience as a key indicator in student persistence and success, Wartburg is partnering with Credo, a higher education consulting firm, to participate in a five-year initiative called Moving the Needle. This work is a campus-wide, collaborative effort to improve student retention. A new Director of First Year Experience & Retention serves as a strategic leader responsible for designing, implementing, and overseeing comprehensive programming that supports students through their first year at Wartburg.
- A newly formed Global Engagement Team co-locates professionals from Student Life, Academic Affairs, and Strategic Recruitment along shared space in Student Life offices and adjacent to the newly relocated student food pantry. Team staff are positioned to better respond and support international and multicultural students.

Strategic Positioning

- “Called Together,” a process to build Wartburg’s next strategic plan, commenced in fall 2025. The planning effort featured six working groups: Empowering Academic Adaptation, Envisioning a Residential Campus Within a Virtual World, Redesigning Campus for Student Success, Creating Technological Infrastructure and Possibility, Transforming Service, and Integrating Wellness, Well-Being, and Belonging. Nearly 100 faculty, staff, students, alumni, and friends of the college researched topics and made recommendations to inform a new strategic plan. Campus and key constituent engagement occurred throughout the fall term to obtain input and feedback. Our next strategic plan will launch at Homecoming 2026.
- In spring 2025, Wartburg launched Our Brightest Days – The Campaign for Realizing Purpose and Leading Change, a three-year \$36 million focused fundraising initiative. Priorities include increased scholarship funding, growing the Knight’s Experience Fund to increase access to experiential learning, and better equipping students for success through enhancements to alumni and career connections, classroom technology, wellness and recreation, and infrastructure. In 2025 Wartburg received a \$1 million gift from the Salzwedel Family Fund, founded by Jack and Sarah Salzwedel, in support of student scholarships and experiential learning.
- Wartburg’s Senior Leadership Team welcomed two new members: Kelly Flege, Vice President for Financial Innovation, and Lindsey Leonard, Vice President for Student Life and Dean of Students.

Academic and Co-Curricular Programs

- Wartburg was the recipient of the 2025 Pharos Lighthouse Award – Institution of the Year from Pharos Resources, an organization dedicated to enhancing student success and well-being in educational institutions. The Lighthouse Award recognizes the exceptional effort and achievements of individuals and institutions in advancing student support, engagement, and success.
- Dynamic Campus, Wartburg’s strategic partner for information technology, guided efforts to strengthen the college’s technological infrastructure, enhance cybersecurity, and align IT capabilities with the rapidly evolving



LUTHER CREST

ANNUAL REPORT

2024-2025

Celebrating
80 years
of ministry!



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ALEXANDRIA, MN 56308



WWW.LUTHERCREST.ORG



(320) 846-2431



LCBC@LUTHERCREST.ORG



LUTHER CREST BIBLE CAMP

October 11, 2025

Luther Crest Annual Meeting
Luther Crest Bible Camp -Chapel

Luther Crest Vision: For everyone to experience the love of Christ

Luther Crest Philosophy: Passionate Authentic Accommodating

Mission: To Inspire Faith, stewardship, and community in God's Creation

Luther Crest Purpose: To Strengthen the faith of all people and equip them with spiritual

armor and inspire them with new courage to live for Christ as stewards in God's creation and community

10am

1. Welcome & Introductions – Rev. Megan Clapp
2. Opening Devotions – Henri Santelman
3. Call to Order
4. Adopt Agenda
5. Review & Approve 2024-25 Minutes
6. Review and Approve Mission through Ministry Plan for 2024-25 Reports
 - a. Programs – Henri Santelman
 - b. Retreats – Dr. Maureen Wieland and Tammie Sinibaldo
 - c. Development – Rev. Geoff Sinibaldo and Dr. Maureen Wieland
 - d. Executive & Treasurer's Report - from Rev. Maddie Elliott and Rev. Anthony Christoffels
7. Review and Approve Mission through Ministry Plan for 2025-2026
 - a. Budget
 - b. Board of Directors
8. Other Business
 - a. Luther Crest Strategic Plan- Rev. Hans Dahl
 - b. Thank you, Melanie and Amy!
 - c. Happy 80th Anniversary, Luther Crest!
9. Adjournment

WELCOME
WE'RE SO GLAD YOU'VE JOINED US!



This year at Luther Crest has been one of incredible growth, joy, and gratitude. This summer especially was nothing short of extraordinary—echoing with laughter across the lake, songs and cheers rising from campfires, and the joy of discovering faith and friendship in the beauty of God’s creation. Every day was bursting with adventure, games, worship, and connection, wrapping campers and staff alike in a spirit of joy and love.

In 2025, all of this was made even more meaningful as we celebrated Luther Crest’s 80th anniversary—eight decades of ministry that have touched and transformed the lives of over 500,000 people. It was a summer to remember, filled with the beauty of tradition and the excitement of new beginnings, where God’s presence was felt in every moment.

On a personal note, this summer was especially meaningful as my son, Soren, attended camp for the first time. Watching him experience the wonder, laughter, and faith-forming moments of camp reminded me why this ministry matters so deeply. Having him request songs from the summer musical while we drove around town and bring up Bible dive topics at random throughout the day was magical to experience as a camp director.

In September, our family also welcomed our daughter, Mabel. I am deeply thankful to the Luther Crest board and staff for their care and support during this season. It is a privilege to serve alongside such a dedicated team as we continue building a strong and faithful ministry together.



-Rev. Maddie Elliott- Executive Director

PROGRAM REPORT

If there were ever any questions about who our church is, they were answered loudly and proudly this summer at Luther Crest as hundreds of kids, staff, and adults each week emphatically reminded us that **“We Are the Church!”** This was our 80th anniversary theme, and we embraced it fully, exploring what it means to be called to be God’s church for each other and in the world. In the unplugged, participatory, and relational way that camp does best, we explored our call to Gather, Love, Forgive, Challenge, and Praise together as the church, knowing that *“All things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to God’s purpose!”* (Romans 8:28)



We served almost 2500 campers this summer through our Onsite, Residential, and Offsite Day Camp programs, averaging over 350 campers per week all summer long! Each camp season for the last 5 years we’ve seen these numbers increase, and we celebrate as the influence of Luther Crest’s summer programming spreads the Gospel of Christ to more youth

each year. But not only do we celebrate the width of our reach, we celebrate the depth of our relationships with all of these campers, and in the quality of faith formation work that we do together. One result of this depth is the incredible amount of our campers who return for many summers, choosing over and over again to prioritize their faith and this community.

This includes many campers who eventually come back to serve on staff at Luther Crest. **Out of our 46 full time summer staff this summer, over half of them were previous campers at Luther Crest - wow!**

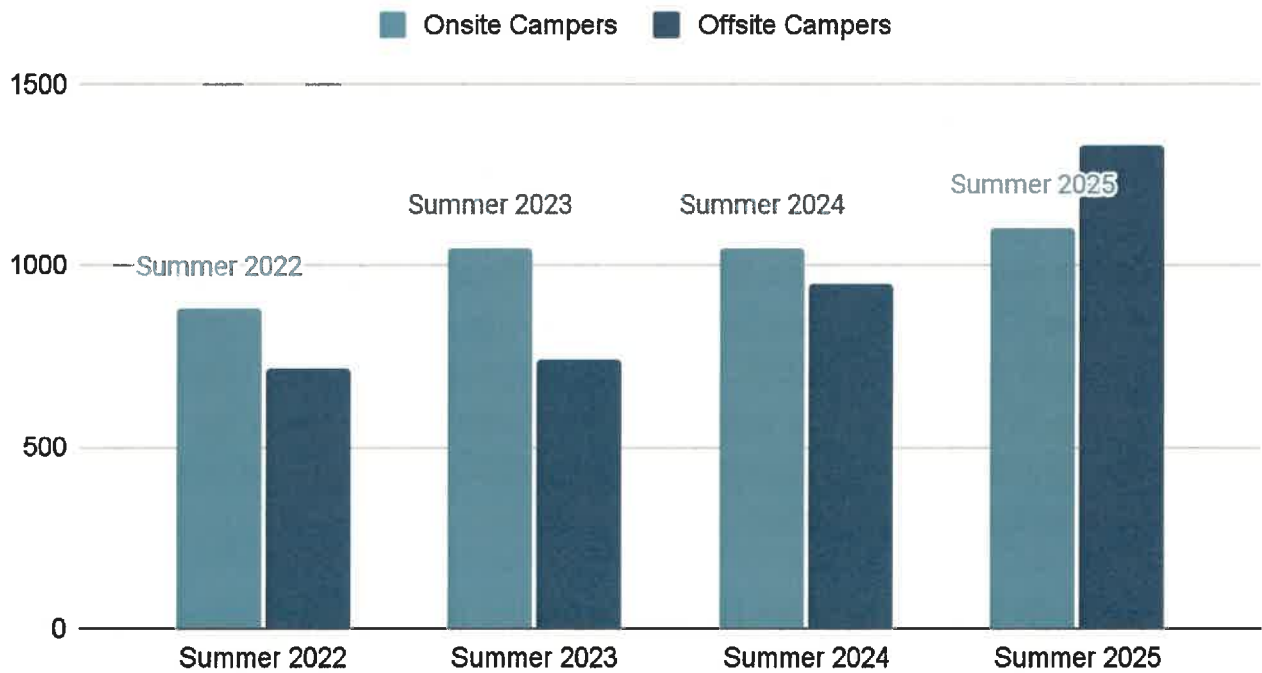
An important aspect of being the church together, is being the church *in the world* together. Our Offsite Day Camp programs are a great example of how we can live this out. We traveled to communities all over Minnesota this summer to bring the joy of camp right into the home congregations of hundreds of kids each week! **This summer we sent out 24 offsite teams, 3 more than last summer, and partnered with around 32 congregations in the process.** Just as the walls of any church building don't contain the church, neither do the property lines of Luther Crest Bible Camp. We are all in this together, and as Luther Crest grows our relationships with partner congregations from all over the state and beyond, we are grateful to do this work together!

Celebrating 80 years of impactful outdoor ministry this summer reminded us that we are not alone in the work we do. Our 46 phenomenal summer staff were joined by 14 different staff alumni who came back to camp to work a week or more throughout this summer season. That's 14 leaders formed by this place and sent into the world to do a whole spectrum of beautiful ministries who felt the call to come back to camp this summer, if only for a week, to serve this important mission. These sorts of partnerships mean the world to us, to the staff, and to our campers. This is just one way that the relationships made here at camp live on for lifetimes to come. **Thank you to everyone who partners with us in ministry - you are Luther Crest, and together We Are the Church!**

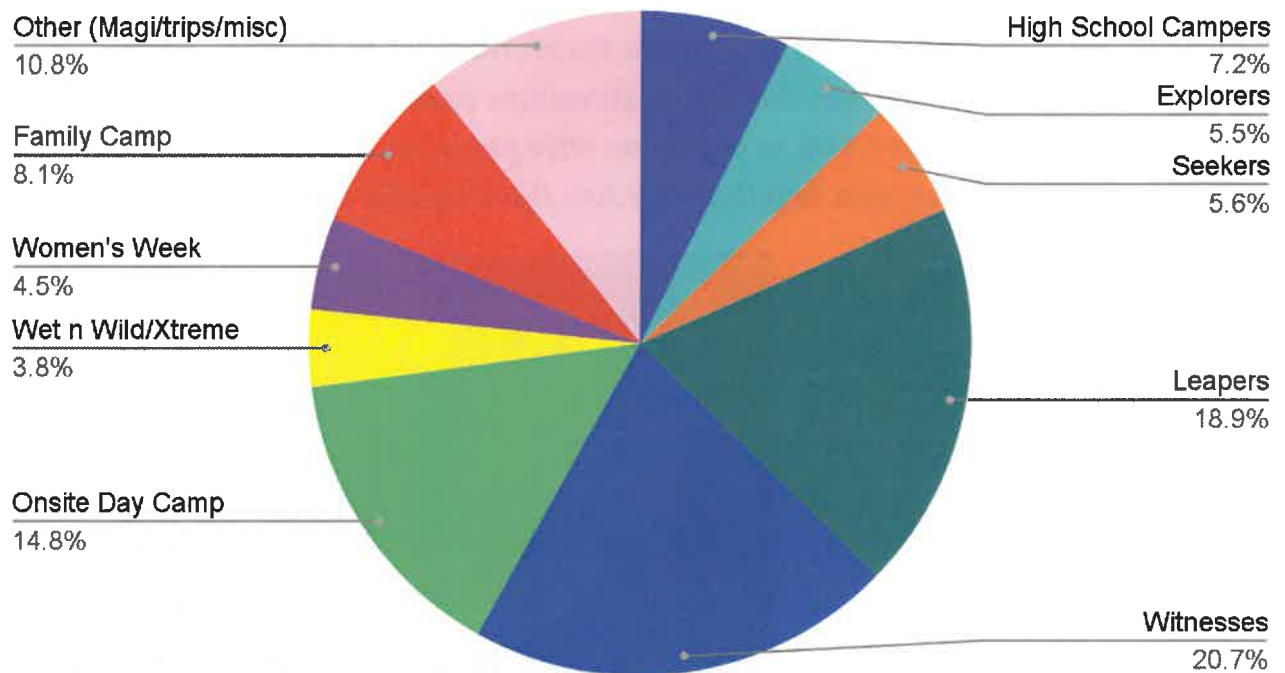
Henri Santelman -
Program Director
henris@luthercrest.org



LCBC Camper Numbers



Onsite Program Registrations



INTRODUCING MASON

Luther Crest has hired Mason Stukey as the newest member of our team!



Meet Mason:

Mason Stukey is a long time member of the Luther Crest community. Beginning as a Camp Counselor in 2016, Mason has held various roles these last 10 years, serving Luther Crest and its many wonderful guests as a member of the Year Round staff from 2019-2022. These days Mason enjoys podcasts, comics and game nights with his friends, and at camp he can't get enough time outside and particularly looks forward to taco nights in the Luther Crest kitchen.

Now rejoining the team as our Site and Operations Coordinator, Mason's goals at camp include maintaining the grounds and facilities, preparing for and hosting guests for their retreats and events and assisting in developing programming for Summer Camp and similar winter events.

Welcome to the team Mason!
masons@luthercrest.org

RETREATS REPORT

The past year has been a wonderful reminder of the gift of community that gathers at Luther Crest with folks from all walks of life. Our overnight retreats have continued to thrive while welcoming confirmation groups, women's and men's retreats, weddings and reunions, and more. Each group that comes through our doors experience not only comfortable lodging and delicious food, but also the beauty of God's creation and a sense of belonging. **Throughout this year of celebration, we have hosted nearly 10,000 retreat guests!**

Overnight retreat guest numbers: 2084 guests

Day event guest numbers: 818 guests

Calvary at the Lake attendees: 7,553 (up from 1,250 total in 2012, the first summer Calvary held their services at Luther Crest)

Pickleball groups: 8 different groups each week



We also host a variety of day groups from sports and activity banquets, staff and council meetings, service projects, outdoor education and day of camp experiences. The shorter events still carry the same spirit of welcome but guests from schools, congregations and community groups can participate in ways that fit their schedules.

A key part of our ministry is to listen to those we serve. Every group that attends LCBC receives an evaluation of their time with us- starting from the first call or email connection. The feedback and reflections we receive are invaluable and often

celebrate the hospitality and faith centered care our staff provides and also offer helpful suggestions as guidance for improvement and continual growth at camp. Here are a few examples pulled from a variety of events at Luther Crest this past year:

***Weekend retreat with no LCBC Programming/Meals:** Fantastic gathering place for families. Very helpful, pleasant, and providing special requests. The lodging was very pleasant and clean. Thanks for everything.*

Week Long Family Camp: We felt very welcomed by Henri and Madeline, our counselor. She walked around with me to see that every room met our needs. The Retreat Center is very clean and homey. I love the quilts and the use of the meeting room was fantastic. I have always been impressed with Tammie. She gets back to me immediately and is welcoming and flexible. Can't say enough good about the meals. I loved the fresh fruit, the lettuce salads, large portions and family friendly options. Fit our family great (even my vegetarian granddaughter). The content and energy of the program was great. Madeline, our counselor, always gave us a 'heads up' about what was happening for the day and my family could choose. She also gave us great Bible Dives just for us which was a great time of family bonding. We appreciated the attention Henri and Madeline, and all the Staff gave us. The younger grandchildren felt very cared for as we were treated to unexpected hospitality allowing Family Camp to line up first for meals. We would love to return based on our present and past positive experiences. If we don't it would only be because grandchildren are getting older and are working etc. We'll see!!

High School Sports Banquet: Everything was communicated very clearly via Tammie...everything was excellent! Everything was set up and ready to go when we arrived! The meal was fantastic! The staff was super accommodating! We got there a little earlier than planned and they were very helpful with everything and very friendly! Luther Crest is a perfect place to hold a banquet event-reasonable pricing, excellent food, and fantastic hosts. We loved it!

Evening event: As the Adult Ministry Coordinator for First Lutheran Church, I have the privilege of gathering people together for spiritual growth and building relationships. Luther Crest was the perfect setting for our recent event, Sips & Scripture! The space provided us with plenty of room to come together and enjoy an evening learning about Jesus' turning water into wine. We had the opportunity to explore and taste various types of wine in a relaxed, welcoming atmosphere, while sharing hors d'oeuvres and engaging in great conversation. It was truly a blessing to grow in faith and community in such a beautiful place.

Women's Weekend: I really appreciated the timely communication and especially the room list help so I could sort out how many beds were in each room. That was super helpful. We always appreciate how careful and caring the kitchen staff are regarding our dietary needs. I know some of them are strange but the care they are given makes all the difference and one of the main reasons we keep coming back. So grateful for clean and wonderful buildings, amazing food, and supportive staff. We did have one little issue with the heat being up high and not being able to figure it out and the hosts were on top of it right away. So grateful for them!



***Youth Retreat:** Hi Tammie –Just wanted to let you know, Henri was FABULOUS!!!! He always has a smile on his face and is sooooo welcoming, kind, and such a super role model to our youth. I especially wanted to thank Henri and team for the excited welcome they gave us all when our school bus pulled into the parking lot. It really set the tone for our whole stay. I really really really appreciated the help from Henri and the team unpacking the bus and bringing all the food to the kitchen. Seriously!!! This was sooooo nice because for a good chunk of the bus ride, I was feeling overwhelmed thinking about how I was going to get all the food to the cafeteria and still have time to set up camp, get to worship, and then prep the meals. **THE TEAM WAS AWESOME** and them being there right from the start helping in any way they could, lifted my anxiety immediately and gave me a sense of God's peace....the team shared God's love with me and all of us!!!!!! I also appreciated how willing Henri was to help out when I told him about forgetting the cardboard for our art project. Turns out, the supplies were on the bus and we didn't need Henri's help, but him being willing to do whatever he could to help in the moment was so kind!!!!*



As the retreat coordinator, I am so grateful for the staff and volunteers as well as the support of many congregations, groups and individuals who make this ministry possible. Together we can ensure Luther Crest to be a continued place of retreat, renewal and joy where people can connect with God, with one another and with creation.

Tammie Sinibaldo- Retreats and Day Camps Coordinator
retreats@luthercrest.org

DEVELOPMENT REPORT

Thank you all for being a part of making a difference and making an impact on every child, every youth, every family, every volunteer, every individual who is a part of our mission. **Through the amazing generosity of our supporters throughout this year of celebration, we were able to raise just over 550,000 for our 2024-2025 Annual Fund.**



Fundraising Events: The 80th Anniversary Summer Festival and Auction and the 24th Annual Golf Scramble were all a great success and **raised a total of over \$95,000!** With our goal of raising \$80,000 for our 80th Anniversary year, we were blown away by the generosity of our donors and supporters! Our auction, with over 130 bidders, raised over \$75,000 through the online and live auctions as well as ticket sales for the festival.



During this auction weekend, we also hosted the 80th Anniversary Alumni Reunion with nearly 100 alumni in attendance throughout the weekend! It was such a joyous weekend having so many camp enthusiasts on site. Our 24th Annual Golf Scramble was also a success and raised over \$20,000 with 22 teams attending at the Lake Miltona Golf Course. Thank you to everyone who helps make these fun, purposeful events happen each year! A special thank you to the volunteers and committee members for these fundraising events!





We are also excited to be offering our Christmas Bake Sale again this winter season! Orders will begin Nov. 1 with the pick up days at Luther Crest being Dec. 12 and 13. Keep an eye out for emails, socials, and mailings regarding the bake sale coming up soon!

Strategic Goals

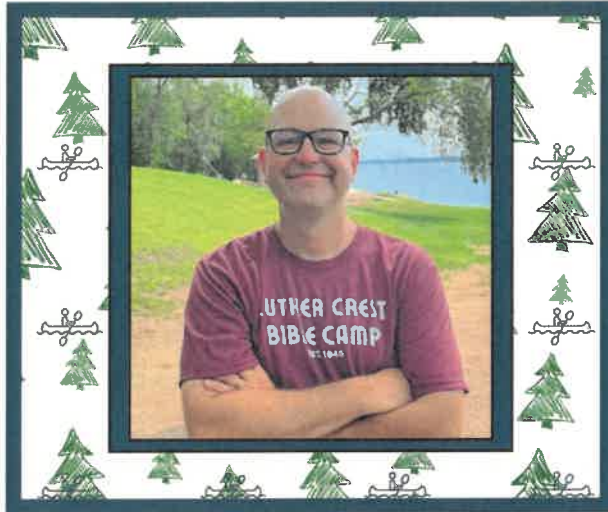
- 350 new donors added since 2021.
- 16 new monthly sustained givers added since 2021.
- With over 51 new donors at the \$1,000 Builder Level added since 2021, we have reached our goal of 50 new Builders by 2025!
- We are on our way to increasing our Legacy gifts from 5 to 30 by 2025. With 17 Legacy Givers who have a giving plan in place or who are working on their future gifts to Luther Crest, we are half-way to our Legacy goals by 2025.

Making an Impact: As we enter the fall season of thanksgiving, we are extremely grateful for every gift that enables us to carry out our ministry with passion & joy. Your support also encourages us to embrace future opportunities with hope and excitement. Through our church partnerships, individual gifts, sustained monthly givers, volunteers and in-kind donations, as well as planned legacy gifts, your generosity sustains us through the various challenges we face, and supports our mission of instilling enduring faith to all who experience our programs each year. Thank you!

Dr. Maureen Wieland, Director of Communication & Events
maureenw@luthercrest.org

INTRODUCING GEOFF

Luther Crest has hired Geoff Sinibaldo as the newest member of our Development Team!



Meet Geoff:

The Rev. “G-Geoff” Sinibaldo is eager to connect stories, gratitude and generosity to the ministry of Luther Crest. Ordained in the ELCA in 2002, he brings over twenty years of pastoral parish ministry experience and stewardship efforts to the development team. G-Geoff has been a friend of Luther Crest since 2008, participating in family camps, helping with staff training and doing on site work projects. In addition to joining the staff, he teaches freshman religion and serves on the campus ministry team at Notre Dame High School in West Haven, CT and is a volunteer firefighter and chaplain with the Old Saybrook Fire Department. G-Geoff lives in Old Saybrook, CT with his wife Tammie (who is the Luther Crest Retreats and Day Camps Coordinator), two young adult children and their family dog, Bear.

Welcome to the team Geoff!

geoffs@luthercrest.org

Executive Director's Report

Dear Friends of Luther Crest,

I am filled with deep gratitude for the ways God's Spirit continues to move through this place. Luther Crest has always been a place where lives are transformed by the bold love of Christ, and this year we saw that more clearly than ever.

Growing Ministry Through Camp and Programs

- **Camper Numbers:** We saw an increase in the number of campers who came to Luther Crest this summer, a sign of renewed energy and excitement for our ministry.
- **Day Camps:** Our offsite Day Camp program continues to expand, reaching more congregations and children in their home communities.
- **Trips & Travel:** New trip and travel opportunities gave individuals and groups the chance to experience adventure and spiritual growth beyond our site.

Retreats and Year-Round Ministry

- **Retreat Rentals:** We hosted more retreat groups this year, strengthening partnerships and opening our doors to new communities.
- **Programmed Retreats:** Our programmed retreats also grew, providing faith-filled opportunities throughout the year for youth, adults, and families.



Fundraising and Development

- **Special Events:** This was a record-setting year for fundraising. Together, our Summer Fest & Auction and our Golf Scramble raised nearly **\$95,000**, exceeding our \$80,000 goal and marking a milestone in celebrating **80 years of ministry** at Luther Crest.
- **Donor Support:** These events, combined with the generous support of our donors, show that the Luther Crest story continues to matter deeply to so many.

Celebrating 80 Years of Ministry

This year we celebrated Luther Crest's **80th anniversary**—eight decades of campers, staff, congregations, and families being shaped by God's promises in this place. We give thanks for those who had the vision to start this ministry and for those who have sustained it through every generation.



Looking to the Future

- **Strategic Planning:** We are currently in the process of developing a new **3–5 year strategic plan**, which will help us clarify priorities, strengthen partnerships, and continue building momentum for the future.
- **Accreditation:** We also successfully completed our **American Camp Association (ACA) accreditation visit**, which occurs every six years, affirming our commitment to the highest standards of safety and excellence.

Closing Gratitude

As I reflect on this year, I am struck by how God has blessed Luther Crest with growth, renewal, and vision. We are moving forward with strong camper numbers, expanding ministry opportunities, increasing financial support, and a bold future ahead.

Thank you for your prayers, your generosity, and your presence in this ministry. Together, we carry forward the covenant of God's promises from generation to generation.

Rev. Maddie Elliott- Executive Director- maddiee@luthercrest.org

BOARD PRESIDENT REPORT

Hello Luther Crest Association!!

On behalf of the Luther Crest Board of Directors, I want to thank you for all the ways you have helped Luther Crest be a significant part of the faith landscape for people of all ages! As you know, we have been celebrating our 80th anniversary throughout the year and it has been such a joyful way to be the church in all its forms.

We Are The Church was this year's summer camp theme and once again, lives were changed as the staff and campers lived out what it means to be passionate, authentic, and accommodating as members of the Body of Christ. My own family was transformed this summer by this work. My daughter spent her second summer as a Leaper and my son and husband joined camp for the Explorer program. As a family with both parents being pastors, we strive to get other faith examples into our kids' lives and camp is the perfect place for those connections! My son still talks about his counselor Josh and how much fun they had together. But more than just having fun, my husband was so impressed with how Josh made sure that everyone was included and cared for. Josh made Milo feel like an important part of the camp community, so much so that he's already planning on coming back next year. And my daughter has found such joy in being surrounded by new friends at camp and comes back each year with a deeper, stronger faith. She is a counselor in the making and can't wait until she can return to lead a cabin as a young adult. As parents, we relish the opportunity for our kids to not be "pastor's kids" for the week. They get to be their free, authentic, and passionate selves at Luther Crest. I long for more kids to be able to experience the love of God in this way.

My congregation also hosted Luther Crest VBS this year. It was another beautiful reminder of the many ways We Are the Church. VBS brought camp to church and allowed even more kids to experience the movement of the Holy Spirit through the music, games, and fun of Luther Crest programming.

The ministry that happens during VBS, on-site camp, retreats and events is a reminder that no matter what form camp or church may take, God is at work and transforming lives. Thank you for being part of that work! We look forward to all the ways we will continue to be the church together in the years to come.

God's peace and love,
Rev. Megan Clapp



2025-2026 Budget Proposal

Luther Crest

Passionate. Authentic. Accomodating.

	2024-2025 Actual <i>As of 8/31/25</i>	2024-2025 Budget Approved	Difference	2025-2026 Budget Proposed
Camp Programs				
4000 Program Revenue	\$ 548,145	\$ 546,937	\$ 1,208	\$ 565,000
5100 Program Expenses	\$ 200,919	\$ 151,800	\$ (49,119)	\$ 199,750
5600 Wages and Salaries	\$ 380,586	\$ 363,404	\$ (17,182)	\$ 367,860
Total Camp Programs	\$ (33,360)	\$ 31,733	\$ (65,093)	\$ (2,610)
Camp Reservations				
4100 Reservation Revenue	\$ 252,982	\$ 314,000	\$ (61,018)	\$ 311,750
5100 Reservation Expenses	\$ 64,408	\$ 86,131		\$ 87,329
Total Camp Reservations	\$ 188,574	\$ 227,869	\$ (39,295)	\$ 224,421
Fundraising				
4200 Fundraising Revenue	\$ 143,997	\$ 143,179		\$ 161,000
5000 Fundraising Expenses	\$ 24,859	\$ 30,275	\$ 5,416	\$ 25,500
Total Fundraising	\$ 119,139	\$ 112,904	\$ 6,235	\$ 135,500
Donations				
4510 Individual Donors	\$ 230,051	\$ 203,000		\$ 235,000
4520 Memorials	\$ 8,313	\$ 11,000		\$ 8,000
4530 Organizations	\$ 26,540	\$ 40,000		\$ 30,000
4540 Congregations	\$ 160,075	\$ 145,000		\$ 162,500
4550 WELCA	\$ 8,525	\$ 7,000		\$ 8,500
Total Donations	\$ 433,505	\$ 406,000	\$ 27,505	\$ 444,000
Camp Store				
4600 Store Sales	\$ 15,181	\$ 21,000	\$ (5,819)	\$ 21,000
5160 Store Purchases	\$ 19,996	\$ 19,589	\$ (407)	\$ 20,000
Total Camp Store	\$ (4,815)	\$ 1,411	\$ (6,226)	\$ 1,000
Total Gross Income	\$ 703,043	\$ 779,917	\$ (76,874)	\$ 802,311
Overhead Expenses				
6000 Administrative Expenses	\$ 266,720	\$ 270,774	\$ 4,054	\$ 311,750
6100 Insurance	\$ 91,493	\$ 95,000	\$ 3,507	\$ 124,500
6150 Interest Expense	\$ 55,544	\$ 50,000	\$ (5,544)	\$ 52,700
6270 Vehicle Expenses	\$ 24,518	\$ 23,200	\$ (1,318)	\$ 16,750
6500 Administrative Salaries	\$ 325,239	\$ 388,825	\$ 63,586	\$ 332,249
Total Overhead Expenses	\$ 763,514	\$ 827,799	\$ 64,285	\$ 837,949
Total Other Income	\$ 62,739	\$ 48,000	\$ 14,739	\$ 65,600
Net Operating Income	\$ 2,268	\$ 118	\$ 2,150	\$ 29,962



2025-2026 Budget Proposal

Luther Crest

Passionate. Authentic. Accommodating

	2024-2025 Actual <i>As of 8/31/25</i>	2024-2025 Budget Approved	<i>Difference</i>	2025-2026 Budget Proposed
Net Operating Income	\$ 2,268	\$ 118	\$ 2,150	\$ 29,962
Debt Service				
2050 Line of Credit	\$ 75,564			\$ 7,500
2700 Mortgage	\$ 5,959			\$ 7,000
2710 Car	\$ 4,017			\$ 4,405
2720 Tractor	\$ 3,389			\$ 3,697
2730 Van 1	\$ -			\$ 3,635
2740 Van 2	\$ -			\$ 3,635
Total Debt Service	\$ 88,930			\$ 29,872
Total (including Debt Payments)	\$ (86,662)	\$ 118	\$ 2,150	\$ 89

Respectfully Submitted,
Pastor Anthony D. Christoffels
Luther Crest Treasurer



FY2425 Balance Sheet

Luther Crest

Passionate. Authentic. Accommodating.

	2024-2025 As of 8/31/25	2023-2024 As of 8/31/24	Notes
Assets			
Cash Assets			
Checking	\$ 52,670	\$ 68,398	
Money Market	\$ 38,014	\$ 25,746	
Money Market-Insurance	\$ 31,071	\$ 38,806	
Mission Investment Fund	\$ 29,679	\$ 29,502	
Petty Cash	\$ 496	\$ 870	
Total Cash Assets	\$ 151,929	\$ 163,322	
Investment Assets			
Ameriprise One Financial	\$ -	\$ 74,376	
Endowment - Counselor	\$ 39,332	\$ 38,056	
Endowment - Campership	\$ 227,932	\$ 220,535	
ELCA Endowment	\$ 31,401	\$ 28,116	
Total Investment Assets	\$ 298,665	\$ 361,083	
Accounts Receivable	\$ 38,853	\$ 27,148	
Other Cash Assets	\$ 15,706	\$ 14,857	
Fixed Assets	\$ 3,250,142	\$ 3,384,474	
Total Assets	\$ 3,755,295	\$ 3,950,884	
Liabilities			
Current Liabilities			
Accounts Payable	\$ 56,973	\$ 36,057	
Credit Cards	\$ 7,331	\$ 23,658	
Line of Credit	\$ 54,436	\$ 100,000	
Payroll	\$ (262)	\$ 7,190	
Accrued Interest	\$ -	\$ -	
Accrued Payroll	\$ -	\$ -	
Deferred Revenue	\$ 26,622	\$ 27,800	
Deferred Revenue - Prog.	\$ -	\$ -	
Total Current Liabilities	\$ 145,099	\$ 194,705	
Long-Term Liabilities			
Glenwood State Bank	\$ 599,751	\$ 605,710	
Glenwood State Bank	\$ 11,776	\$ 15,793	
Kubota	\$ 8,011	\$ 11,708	
Total Long-Term Liabilities	\$ 619,538	\$ 633,212	
Total Liabilities	\$ 764,637	\$ 827,917	
Total Assets and Liabilities	\$ 2,990,658	\$ 3,122,967	

Respectfully Submitted,
Pastor Anthony D. Christoffels
Luther Crest Treasurer

digital landscape that future students will navigate. A five-year process to transform technology in more than 60 classrooms began in summer 2025, thanks in part to a \$185,000 grant from the Roy J. Carver Charitable Trust.

- The Busche Hanson Pavilion, a new home for cross country and clay target sports, was dedicated October 4.

Spiritual Life and Campus Ministry

- Spiritual Life and Campus Ministry supports students in their journey to find connection, presence, and purpose in their life at college. We seek to meet the spiritual and religious needs of our diverse campus community while also building bridges of compassion and understanding through interfaith/ecumenical engagement. Spiritual Life and Campus Ministry oversees over 19 student groups and programs.
- Joe Davis, artist, author, scholar, and educator, is the recipient of the 2025-26 Graven Award. The annual award for Christian vocation highlights the powerful and positive effect of a strong sense of Christian vocation as it interfaces with service to the community, the church, and the world.
- A full cohort of students participated in an interfaith immersion experience in Minneapolis during winter term break, exploring how religious communities are working together for the common good. The experience was made possible by a grant from the Northeast Iowa Synod-ELCA.
- Chaplain Maggie Falenschek was invited to be a 2025-26 cohort member of the Council of Independent College's Senior Leadership Academy. She also was named a Bridging Differences fellow through the Greater Good Science Center of the University of California-Berkeley.
- Wartburg College was selected to create the national shared liturgy for the 2025 WELCA (Women of the ELCA) Thankoffering. In conjunction with this honor, Wartburg hosted an in-person Thankoffering service which included special music from the St. Elizabeth Chorale and a message from Wartburg student Zarah Van Dyk.

Recognition

- Kristin Roberts '00 was named to the Board of Regents. Roberts of Cedar Rapids, who serves as the president-elect of the Wartburg Alumni Board, is president and CEO of the United Way of East Central Iowa.
- Milagros Toribio '25 and Boboya Gabu '26, Davis United World College Scholars from Peru and South Sudan respectively, each received a \$10,000 Projects for Peace grant to carry out summer humanitarian efforts in their home countries. Toribio helped young women in Peru gain peace and prosperity through financial literacy while Gabu addressed the issue of maternal health.
- Kylie Buchholz '27 received the Presidents' Student Leadership Award from the Seed Coalition for her positive spirit that inspires those around her. Also honored was the Wartburg College Baldwin Leadership Fellows program, which received the Presidents' Civic Engagement Leadership Award.
- Three students were awarded Gilman International Scholarships that helped offset costs while studying abroad. McKenna Schaufenbuel and Allison Taylor spent May Term in the Netherlands and Germany, and Mikaela Kime studied in the Bahamas.
- Dr. Michael Bechtel '94, associate professor of science education, was one of seven educators selected to serve in the first cohort of the National Center for Science Education's Sound Science Fellowship program. During his two-year term, Bechtel will help the NCSE develop new approaches to resolving misconceptions about topics that are seen as controversial to the public and conduct research to develop best practices for teaching and learning.
- Dr. Ethan Blass, assistant professor of German, is the inaugural holder of the Herbert and Mildred Kleinfeld Distinguished Professorship in German Language and Culture, newly elevated through a \$1 million gift from Gerald Kleinfeld in honor of his parents.
- Wartburg was the recipient of the Grow Cedar Valley's John Deere Economic Impact Award, recognizing significant contributions to the Cedar Valley's economy through strategic investments, infrastructure development, and transformative initiatives.

At Wartburg, we are called together for a purpose greater than ourselves. We envision a community where every individual finds their calling while contributing to our collective mission of transformative education rooted in leadership, service, faith, and learning. Together, we are building a college embodied by values where the call to live, serve, learn, succeed, and thrive resonates in all we do. Thank you for your prayerful support of our efforts to strengthen Lutheran higher education.

Dr. Rebecca Ehretsman, President



Luther College inspires and equips students to courageously serve the common good through a holistic education in the liberal arts.

Greetings and prayers from Luther College and from our home here in Decorah, Iowa. We are pleased to again share with you some reflections about our campus life and work from this past year.

Last summer, after an intentional period of reflection and discernment, we adopted a new mission statement (included above), an accompanying constellation of vision and identity statements, and a foundational set of core values: Community, Curiosity, Excellence, Inclusivity, Sustainability. We remain in a season of re-engaging our campus, alumni, and community with the essential and profound pieces of our identity as a liberal arts college, founded by Norwegian immigrants, in the Lutheran Christian tradition, with a vocation to serve the common good.

We hosted a series of high-profile events on campus in this past year, each of which connected us in particular ways to our identity and mission. In April 2025, we welcomed travel author and historian Rick Steves to campus for an address that highlighted themes of global citizenship, lifelong learning, and bridge-building through curiosity, compassion, and the value of human dignity.

Homecoming Weekend in October was bookended by two significant campus gatherings. First, a presidential inauguration, themed "For the Common Good" to honor the intersections of faith, learning, and vocation that define our college's identity. Just a few days later, we hosted a celebration convocation to welcome the visit of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Haakon of Norway. His remarks highlighted our Norwegian relationships and emphasized the immense value and power of education to shape societies.

This January, we were thrilled to welcome Presiding Bishop Yehiel Curry as our annual Martin Luther King, Jr. day lecturer, and were blessed by his remarks encouraging us to lean into our faith to find the courage to seek justice and to stand with the vulnerable.

We feel blessed and enriched by this year of learning from these key figures in our nation, church, and world. In addition to these significant visits, we continue to take joy and pride in our students, staff, faculty, alumni, and local partners—both for their accomplishments and for their character.

Luther College has been awarded the 2026 Senator Paul Simon Award for Comprehensive Internationalization from the National Association of International Educators (NAFSA), honoring our long-standing commitment to making global learning opportunities accessible and impactful to students.

The Luther College Concert Band traveled to Japan for a series of performances last June, Luther College Symphony Orchestra alumni and friends gathered for the inaugural Dorian Orchestra Reunion weekend in July, and the Luther College Nordic Choir traveled the Midwest and Southeastern United States for their annual concert tour in early 2026.

The Office for College Ministries received a two-year, \$40,000 grant from the Network for Vocation in Higher Education to establish a new student internship program in fall 2025 entitled *Called Outward: Exploring Skills for Faith-Based Leadership*. This program connects students with area congregations for focused discernment, exploration, and experiential learning around core skills and topics in ministry.

We continue to give thanks for the immense generosity of our Luther College community, across the nation and world. Our 2026 annual Giving Day raised nearly \$1.4 million to support and enhance the Luther experience at the college through the Luther Fund, Luther's unrestricted current fund that supports all students, faculty, staff and community endeavors on campus. This is in addition to our annual One Team day, which raised nearly \$600,000 in a 24-hour span to support student-athletes, as well as all of the donors who have contributed to our \$24 million Gerdin Fieldhouse renovation project, which is in its final stages.

This past year for Luther College has been a time to lean deeply into our calling to seek, serve, and nurture the common good, both in our campus life and in the world beyond. It is a privilege to serve on behalf of this campus community. Together, we share a vision for the power of learning, faith, and service to shape and heal the world.

Soli Deo Gloria!

President Brad Chamberlain

Pastor Melissa Bills



Report to the ELCA Synod Assemblies - April 2026

Founded in 1874, the mission of St. Olaf College is to challenge students to excel in the liberal arts, examine faith and values, and explore meaningful vocation in an inclusive, globally engaged community nourished by Lutheran tradition. St. Olaf's current student population of approximately 3050 degree-seeking undergraduates represents 49 states and 100 countries. 21% are first-generation college students, 22% identify as domestic students of color, 11% are international students, and 22% are income-eligible for Pell grants. St. Olaf continues to be one of only a handful of higher education institutions nation-wide that meets the full demonstrated need of all admitted students through a variety of financial assistance programs, [including a new study abroad affordability commitment to be launched in 2027, thanks to the generosity of Louis and Mary Kay Smith](#). Approximately half of our students indicate that they are affiliated with a Christian denomination, with 15% self-identifying as Lutheran and another 5% as members of a denomination in full communion with the ELCA.

St. Olaf's core curriculum engages students with the full array of liberal arts disciplines, including one required course examining Religion, Faith, and Values, one on Christian Theology in Dialogue, and one on Ethical Reasoning in Context. Among our class of 2025 graduates, 97% had participated in a "high-impact educational practice," such as a mentored research experience, a learning community, study abroad/away, or an academic civic engagement course. Over the past three years, an average of 94% of our recent graduates were working, pursuing further education, or engaged in full-time military or other service programs within seven months of graduation.

Under the leadership of president Dr. Susan Rundell Singer, the college is now implementing a six-year strategic plan, focused on elevating vocation, expanding innovation, and sustaining community. Leading the implementation of the strategic plan are three implementation teams and the President's Leadership Team, including our new vice president for academic affairs and provost Dr. Tarshia Stanley and chief of staff Kathryn Lohre '99. Dr. Stanley comes to St. Olaf from Wagner College on Staten Island where she served as Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs. Ms. Lohre comes to St. Olaf after serving for fifteen years in the Presiding Bishop's Office as the Executive for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations and Theological Discernment.

St. Olaf continues to offer [daily Chapel services and Sunday worship](#) throughout the academic year, led by College Pastor, the Rev. Dr. Matthew Marohl, and featuring members and friends of the St. Olaf community as speakers and musicians. Consistent with St. Olaf's identity as a "rooted and open" ELCA institution, the College Ministry team also includes an Associate Chaplain for Jewish Life and an Associate Chaplain for Muslim Life. This year, St. Olaf was ranked #4 on Niche's [Best Christian Colleges in America](#) list, recognizing St. Olaf as an academically strong, faith-based institution.

In the fall of 2025, the College named [Dr. Kiara Jorgenson, Associate Professor of Religion and Environmental Studies, as the Martin E. Marty Chair in Religion and the Academy](#). The [Marty](#)

[Chair](#) fosters ongoing dialogue that explores the intersection between significant religious and cultural issues and St. Olaf's role as a liberal arts college of the church.

The [Lutheran Center for Faith, Values, and Community](#) continues to advance a compelling vision for Lutheranism in the 21st century, foster interreligious engagement, nurture vocational discernment, and provide thought leadership on campus and in the community. A key part of the Lutheran Center's work is to help all the college's constituencies understand the role of Lutheran tradition in supporting the things they value most about St. Olaf. The Center has recently completed or is nearing completion on two projects made possible by grants from the [Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education](#). The Life on Purpose project infused vocational exploration in St. Olaf students' experiences by supporting shifts in advising, classroom projects, and faculty and staff capacity building around vocation. The Honest Storytelling project engaged twenty staff and faculty and one student to research and tell untold and undertold stories from the college's first 150 years, and will result in the publication of a volume in honor of the college's sesquicentennial due out through Fortress Press this fall.

In 2025, grants from [Lilly Endowment Inc.](#) continued to support two complementary initiatives—the [Nourishing Vocation Project](#) and the [Nourishing Vocation with Children Project](#)—advancing congregational leadership, vocational discernment, and intergenerational, arts-enriched worship. The Nourishing Vocation Project, part of the Thriving Congregations Initiative, strengthened congregations and ecclesiastical partners by fostering peer leadership, deepening vocational discernment, and expanding practical ministry tools. Pastoral coaching pilots and adaptable resources enhanced leaders' capacity for contextually grounded discernment, while integration with broader institutional and interfaith efforts extended the initiative's reach and sustainability.

The Nourishing Vocation with Children Project advanced child-attentive, arts-enriched worship through the Nurturing Children through Worship and Prayer Initiative. Resources were refined and expanded, engaging congregations across multiple states and denominational contexts. New liturgies and participatory art experiences nurtured children's faith while strengthening congregational life.

We look forward to an exciting summer 2026 at St. Olaf as we welcome back [Lutheran Summer Music](#) to campus for the first time since 1994 and the national conference of the [Association of Lutheran Church Musicians](#).

We invite lay, professional, and rostered church leaders to the [2026 Conference on Worship, Theology, and the Arts](#), July 20–22, 2026, at St. Olaf College, under the theme “Nourishing Vocation: Every Time + Every Age + Every Place.” We encourage you to take advantage of the many opportunities and resources St. Olaf provides for education, artistic engagement, and spiritual enrichment. We look forward to welcoming you to campus, and to welcoming the prospective students you introduce to St. Olaf.



2026

ANNUAL REPORT

Prepared By:

Cory Newman
Executive Director

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As I reflect on 2025, I am filled with gratitude — for the work accomplished, the relationships deepened, and the unwavering commitment of the people who make the ELEA what it is. Special thanks to Melanie Bicket, our dedicated Membership Director, Gabby Frohrip, our energetic Communications Manager, and Tom McGinnes, our devoted accountant. Without their support and devotion to ELEA's work, we would not be where we are. I also want to thank our passionate board of directors for engaging with the association's mission in ways that advance our vision and create opportunities to better support all the ELCA schools and learning centers across the country.

This was a year that reminded me, again and again, why our ELCA schools and centers matter and why this work is worth every ounce of energy we pour into it.

Some of my most treasured moments this year were the ones that took me out of the office and into the schools and centers where our mission comes to life. Our Lunch & Learn events in St. Louis and Houston were simply extraordinary. Sitting across from school and church leaders, listening to them tell their stories with such passion and conviction — that is the greatest blessing of this work. It is in those moments that I am reminded that the ELEA is a vital part of what makes these ministries thrive.

That spirit of connection was on full display throughout 2025. OH25, our National Conference in Cleveland, brought together leaders from Churchwide, Synods, congregations, schools, centers, and related organizations in a way that was energizing and deeply inspiring. It was also the birthplace of an exciting emerging relationship with the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities (NECU), opening new pathways for connection between higher education and the schools and centers within their greater communities across the ELCA.

Our partnership with the ELCA continued to bear fruit through the Nurturing Faith Study Series, and our communications reach grew significantly — evidence that our message is resonating far beyond our immediate community. People are paying attention, and they are hungry for what ELEA offers. I'm honored to have been invited to serve on the board of the Curious Christian Children Initiative, a Lilly Grant-funded effort whose board first convened in Chicago in September 2025. Looking ahead, our continued partnership with the National Association of Episcopal Schools (NAES) promises to strengthen and enrich our future national events in exciting ways.

Everything we do flows from three simple but powerful words — Connect, Develop, Inspire. In 2025, we connected educators across the country, developed resources to strengthen our schools and centers, and inspired a community of leaders passionate about faith-filled education. To our incredible members — thank you for living those words every single day. It is an honor to serve alongside you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cory Newman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Cory" being more prominent than the last name "Newman".

ELEA Executive Director

IT STARTS WITH CONNECTION

Prepared by Melanie Bicket

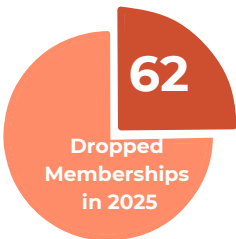
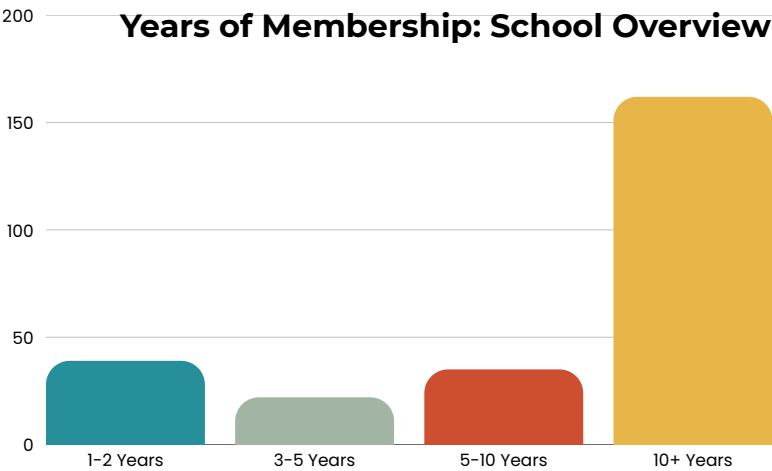
Highlights

- ELEA travel visits included Child Life Ministries (Wausau, WI) and Grace Lutheran Preschool (Rockford, IL). Janelle Hooper, ELEA Board Liaison to the ELCA, and Gabby Frohrip, ELEA Communications Manager, visited several schools in the Minneapolis area. Cory Newman, ELEA Executive Director, also visited schools in the Seattle/Tacoma area. Janelle Hooper and past board member, Paul Waterman, were onsite in Valparaiso, IN, and Waverly, IA to award our Rostered Leaders and Educational Leader of 2025.
- Represented ELEA at the Central/Southern Illinois Synod Assembly, participated in an ELEA Lunch & Learn in St. Louis, MO, and celebrated ELEA Leaders at the 2025 National Conference in Cleveland, Ohio.
- Cory, Gabby, and I launched Community, ELEA’s new one-stop hub for benefits, resources, and connection.
- Completed the 2025 ELCA Schools & Centers Survey (results available upon request).
- Approved a Tiered Membership Fee Structure in 2025 for implementation in 2026.

Challenges

School and center closures continue to impact membership numbers. Maintaining current leadership information for accurate data and communication remains an ongoing need.

ELEA remains committed to strengthening connections, improving communication, and enhancing member value in the year ahead.



Membership by the Numbers

ELEA's network shows strong loyalty: nearly two-thirds of our 265 organizational member schools have been with us for more than a decade, and 39 schools joined in the last two years. This past year also brought loss — 62 member organizations left the network due to circumstances beyond their control, including permanent closures, financial hardship, and the lasting effects of natural disasters. ELEA remains committed to strengthening connections with current members and re-engaging those who have stepped away, ensuring no school feels alone in facing these challenges.

In 2025, our communications efforts continued to gain momentum across both Facebook and Instagram, showing steady growth in engagement and overall visibility. On Facebook, our most influential page, we recorded 112.3K views, along with 4.1K content interactions, 353 link clicks, and 4K page visits. We are more than pleased to see the clear signs of increased interest in ELEA resources and updates. We also welcomed 123 new followers, expanding our ability to share stories, resources, and ministry highlights with a broader audience!

Instagram remained an important space for connecting with both educators and ministry leaders. The platform generated 6.6K views and reached 1.5K people. Engagement stayed strong with 479 content interactions, 290 profile visits, and 42 new followers, reinforcing Instagram's role in extending ELEA's visibility and strengthening our storytelling reach.

Strategic timing and meaningful storytelling helped drive engagement spikes throughout the year, particularly during Lutheran Schools Week and National Conferences.

Email communications remained an important outlet in 2025, maintaining an above-average open rate of 45% while delivering timely updates, professional resources, and ministry news. We strive to continue to use these communications intentionally to build deeper connections, strengthen engagement, and pursue an increasing desire for collaboration across our network.

As ELEA continues its focus on connecting, developing, and inspiring leaders and staff of schools and centers, clear and timely communication remains essential. Keeping leadership updates current and sharing information ministry-wide strengthens our collective impact. The stats we've seen this past year affirm that our mission-centered communications approach is resonating and provides a strong foundation for continued growth and engagement.

COMMUNICATING WITH PURPOSE

Prepared by Gabrielle Frohrip

Growth

Over 114K views across Facebook and Instagram — ELEA's story is being seen far and wide!

Engagement

A 45% email open rate — well above the nonprofit industry average of 28% — proves our community wants to hear from us!



FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Greetings ELEA members and friends.

All of us at ELEA, both board members and staff, hope that 2025 was a year of joy for you. Our hope is that your schools and learning centers were blessed with continued growth, supportive communities, and happy children. Your dedication to your ministries and your commitment to nurturing a strong ELCA-based faith formation education are gifts to those you serve.

2025 was a busy year for the ELEA as we continued to lean into our role of encouraging professional growth and fostering community among our ELCA education leaders. OH25!, our national conference in Cleveland, OH, in November, was an exciting opportunity for our school leaders to gather and connect with one another. Thank you to everyone who was able to attend.

Not only did we gather nationally, but we are also creating more opportunities to gather regionally. We have begun hosting Lunch & Learn luncheons in our various regions. If you have not had an opportunity to attend one close to you yet, please know we have big plans on the horizon. Keep an eye on our newsletter and social media for ways to gather locally in 2026. Upcoming locations include western Washington and southern California.

In 2024, we first partnered with the National Association of Episcopal Schools (NAES), and we are thrilled to say that partnership is continuing. In November 2026, we will gather with NAES during their Biennial Conference in Los Angeles, CA. Episcopal and Lutheran leaders will once again share several days of learning, fellowship, and fun! There will be many enriching activities and workshops available to participants, along with ample opportunities to network with other faith-based educators. Please mark your calendars now for November 18-20. Registration information will be available soon.

There are over 17,000 dedicated educators serving over 140,000 children in ELCA schools and learning centers. ELEA is honored to support and advocate for each and every one! We understand the important and sometimes challenging work that is done each day. We pray daily that you feel loved and supported in your work and feel the grace of God in all moments.

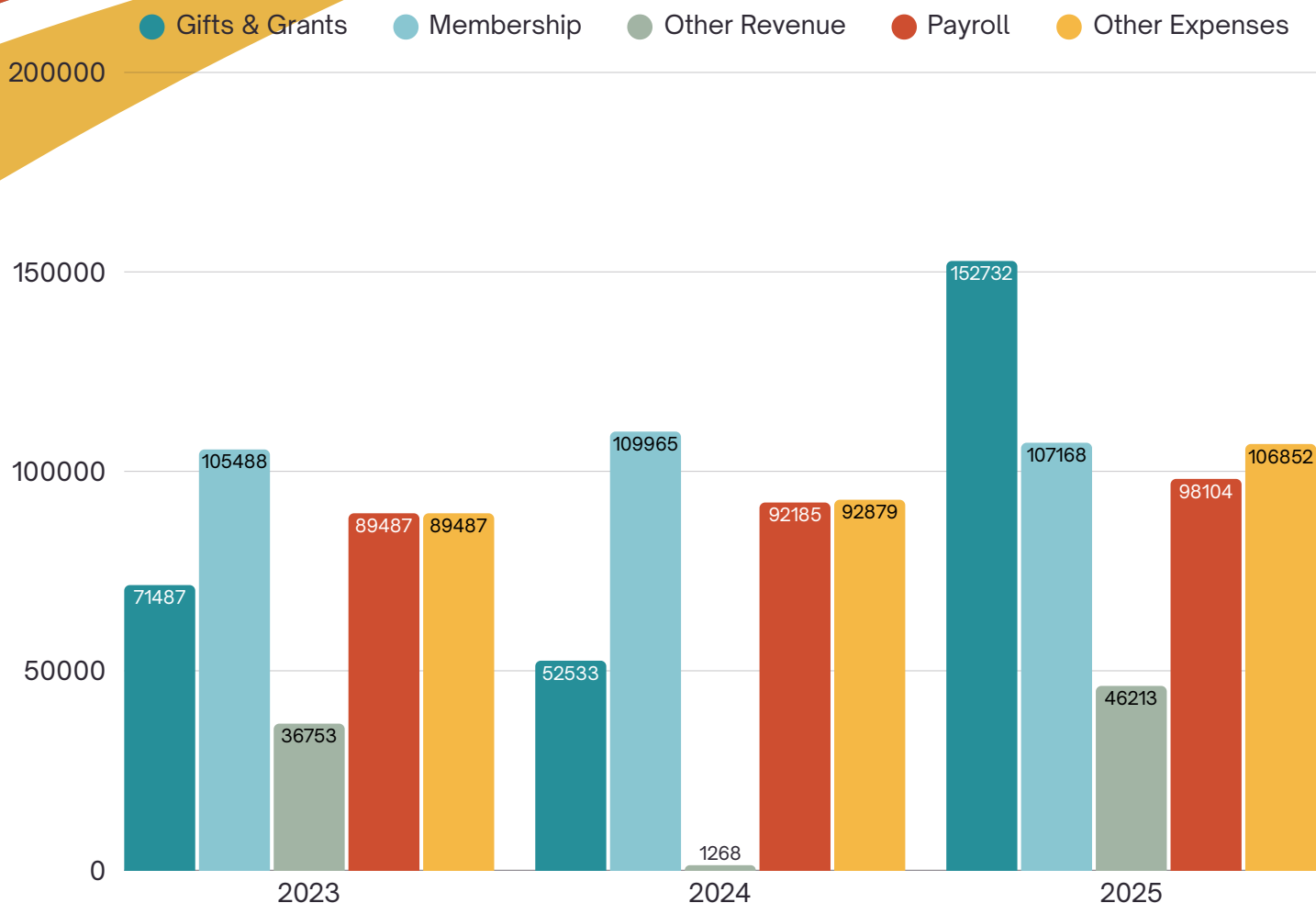
Blessings to you and your ministries in 2026.

With gratitude,

Katie Jones
ELEA Board President



St. Mark's Lutheran Church by
the Narrows, Tacoma, WA



Financial Growth and Stewardship

We are pleased to report a year of significant financial progress and strategic investment. Highlighting our fiscal successes was the receipt of a \$100,000 grant, which is designated to enhance future programming that will have a long-term impact on our members. In total, our revenue for the year included \$9,000 in corporate support, \$9,220 in individual donations, and \$134,511 in total grant funding.

Endowment and Community Impact

The ELEA Endowment Fund continues its upward trajectory, reaching a year-end market value of \$57,486.44. We remain committed to reinvesting in our community, having awarded nine grants totaling \$3,600.00 throughout 2025. This growth was helped by \$1,333.00 in new contributions to the fund.

Fiscal Responsibility and 2026 Outlook

Our commitment to disciplined financial management resulted in a strong year-end position. Excluding the one-time \$100,000 grant — which has been set aside for its dedicated purpose — revenue exceeded budget by \$19,826, while expenditures were \$19,317 under budget. After reserving the grant funds, this left us with a realized operational surplus of \$1,157. As we move into the 2026 fiscal year, the Board is actively exploring our revenue streams to align with 2025 performance levels while maintaining efficient expenditures.

EXPANDING IMPACT

Prepared by ELEA Board Treasurer Michael Rottmann

ANNUAL GIVING

Every gift given to the ELEA is an investment in the future of Lutheran education. We are deeply grateful for the generosity of those who believe in our mission to Connect, Develop, and Inspire.

Champions

- Adventure Place
- Calvary Lutheran Church, Solana Beach, CA
- Gayle Denny
- Katie Jones*
- Michael Rottmann
- Melanie Bicket
- Cory Newman*

Advocates

- Shirley Becker
- Lynn Hockenberger*
- David Behling
- Sara Kantorik*
- Jonathan Vehar
- St. James Lutheran Church, Verona, WI

Friends

- Janelle Hooper
- Kate Elkins
- Andrew Larsen
- Diana Smith
- Chris Comella
- April Mosier
- Sandra Nelson
- Carlos Ham
- Karen Beasley
- April Blahut
- Marguerite Jeffers
- Geniene Hankey
- Gabrielle Frohrip
- Christ Lutheran Preschool, Avon Lake, OH
- Daniel Flucke
- Robert & Ellie Federwitz

We are grateful for every gift, big and small. Additionally, we wish to honor those who gave anonymously – your generosity is known to God and deeply felt by all.

(- denotes a portion given was in-kind)*



 info@elcaschools.org

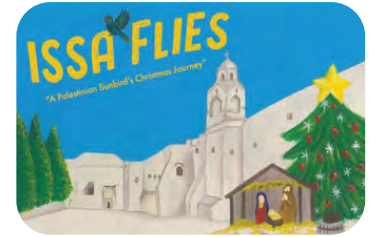
 elcaschools.org

ENTRUSTED TO SERVE

The ELCA values our partnership with the ELEA. Let me tell you why! This past year has been a testament to what we can accomplish together. From resource development to advocacy, research to relationship-building, our collaboration continues to strengthen Lutheran education and ministry across the country.

Expanding Lutheran Identity Resources Our joint support of congregations, schools, and early learning centers remains central to our shared ministry. This year, we expanded our [Lutheran Identity resource series](#) – building on the foundational brochure to add three new titles: Children's Spirituality, Language for God and People, and DEIJ. These resources equip communities to live out their Lutheran identity throughout the week.

SUMUD: Justice in Israel and Palestine. Together, we supported [SUMUD](#), the ELCA's work for Justice in Israel and Palestine. We hosted an informational webinar and read-aloud of the flipbook [Issa Flies](#), which follows a Palestinian Sunbird through Palestine on the eve of Christmas. The resource was warmly received for use in chapel services, classrooms, and Christmas Eve services.



Federal Chaplaincy Conference & Congressional Advocacy Cory Newman and I attended the ELCA Federal Chaplaincy Conference in Virginia, where we shared ministry resources for children and connected with chaplains serving every branch of the armed forces – including National Guard members active in congregations and schools. While in the D.C. area, ELCA Senior Director Ed Kay and I joined our [ELCA Advocacy](#) colleagues to visit senators, engaging in conversation around public and private education, support for those on the margins, and the proposed defunding of the Department of Education. We were honored to bring student artwork from [St. Mark's by the Narrows Preschool](#), which was gratefully received in every office we visited.

Nurturing Faith Research Project: Cory Newman, Ed Kay, and I continued advancing our joint research initiative, [Nurturing Faith](#). This year, we authored a companion study series and piloted the resources with four congregations through intensive educational sessions and ongoing coaching. We also hosted an ELEA webinar on the topic, drawing more than 35 attendees – a meaningful sign of the interest and energy surrounding this work.

Bridging Lutheran Education-Lower Ed to Higher Ed: Cory and I met with Lamont Wells, Executive Director of the [Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities \(NECU\)](#), to explore ways to intentionally grow mutual support for Lutheran education across all ages. We have identified five potential synods with strong college relationships and dense ELCA schools in the area to begin a pilot for connection and communication.

Partnering with the "Future Church" Initiative, Cory and I met with Churchwide's "Future Church" team, which is working to implement research using the ["God's Love Made Real"](#) framework. We presented numerous ways the ELEA is currently – and could further – provide ministry in neighborhoods that deepen the ELCA's commitment to welcome and belonging. These conversations affirm the vital role ELEA schools and early learning centers play in the future of the Church.



Together in Christ, Rev. Janelle Rozek Hooper, Program Manager for Ministry with Children, ELCA & ELEA Board Member

REIMAGINED, RENEWED, ENGAGED

Prepared by Sara Kantorik

In 2025, the ELEA made a thoughtful, strategic decision to reimagine its approach to member engagement — and with that evolution came an exciting shift in my role and focus. Having previously served as National Ambassador, I was instrumental in asking hard questions about sustainability, impact, and how board service could be deployed most strategically. Rather than simply stepping away from the Ambassador role, I helped shape what would replace it—a process that ultimately led to the creation of the Member Engagement Director role, designed to build the internal systems and relationships that fuel long-term growth.

This was not a year of waiting — it was a year of doing. One of the most visible expressions of that was the ELEA National Conference, OH25. From the energy in the room to the carefully curated swag to the cultivation of a meaningful relationship with our keynote speaker, Elec Simon, the conference reflected intentional care and connection at every level. When people feel genuinely welcomed and celebrated, engagement follows naturally.

Synod relationship-building was equally central to my work in 2025. Through consistent, careful cultivation of relationships with the Northeast Ohio Synod — including synod staff and Bishop Barbins — we have laid a solid foundation for greater visibility and connection. These are genuine partnerships rooted in shared ministry, not transactional interactions.

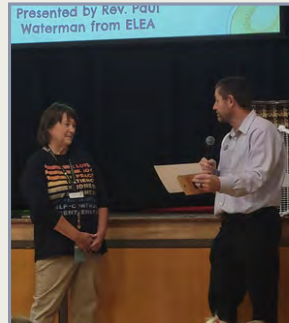
Throughout the year, I also initiated conversations with school leaders and synod partners about what they valued most in ELEA, where they saw gaps, and what would make membership more meaningful in their local context. Those conversations reinforced what I have come to believe most deeply — that engagement is strongest when it feels personal, supported, and mission-aligned. Ultimately, 2025 allowed me to move from representing the organization externally to strengthening it from within, strengthening partnerships, and relationships that ensure ELEA's mission continues to thrive through an engaged and growing membership community.

Being part of shaping the new Member Engagement role was exciting! It involved reflecting on what the Ambassador role had been and imagining what ELEA would need in the next five to ten years. I took part in discussions on setting goals, defining responsibilities, and ensuring the role was strategic. For me, it was about building trust, helping the organization evolve, respecting its history, and preparing for future growth.

In the end, this transition allowed me to focus on strengthening ELEA from the inside by building systems, partnerships, and relationships that ensure the organization's mission continues through a dedicated and growing membership, and I am really looking forward to seeing this position evolve.



Photo from the 2025
ELEA National
Conference: Bishop
Laura Barbins, Sara
Kantorik, Genience
Hankey, Rev. Duane
Jesse



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