

**Minutes
Congregational Council
St. John's Lutheran Church
August 26th, 2025**

Members: Pastor Pam Fickenscher, Pastor Jonathan Davis, President Michelle Kramer-Prevost, President Elect Paul Beck, Treasurer Judd Lohmann, Secretary Steve Reece; Council Members Cheryl Buck, Jill Enestvedt, Dan Hanson, Andrea Hoff, Susan Lohmann, and Maggie Odell.

Present: Pastor Jonathan Davis, President Michelle Kramer-Prevost, President Elect Paul Beck, Treasurer Judd Lohmann, Secretary Steve Reece; Council Members Cheryl Buck, Jill Enestvedt, Dan Hanson, and Maggie Odell; Mark Toov (representing the Children's Education & Ministry Board), Ron Hebensperger (representing the Worship and Arts Board), Kristin Partlo (representing the Children's Ministry and Education Board), Leah Garlie and Janell Martin (representing the Business Management Board), Jeff McLaughlin (representing the St. John's Foundation).

Absent: Pastor Pam Fickenscher; Council Members Andrea Hoff and Susan Lohmann.

President Michelle Kramer-Prevost called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

1. Devotions (15 minutes) on Chapters 9-10 of *Strength to Love*

Discussion of these chapters was postponed until next month because of the pressing business brought to the Council by a number of visitors.

2. Approval of July Minutes

Judd Lohmann made a motion, seconded by Maggie Odell, for approval of the July Council Minutes. Motion carried.

3. St. John's Foundation Update

Jeff McLaughlin updated the Council on the proceedings of the St. John's Foundation. The Council will be considering three new requests for funding from the Foundation in its Action Items (below). Jeff noted that pre-approved Foundation funds should be allocated before the end of the calendar year (preferably by November). No grant application is required in these cases; Council can simply vote on the allocations.

4. Financial Report

See addendum #1 (below) for Treasurer's Report.

5. Action Items

The Business Management Board has been evaluating the use of a new vendor for processing online contributions. The BMB is recommending that St. John's move to using PushPay instead of Vanco as our vendor for processing online contributions (see the rationale in the Board minutes). The BMB would like for Council to vote on moving to PushPay for processing online contributions, with an estimated additional cost between \$3,500 to \$4,000 per year. Leah Garlie and Janell Martin were present to advise on the matter. Judd Lohmann made a motion, seconded by Cheryl Buck, to switch to PushPay and sign a three-year contract. Motion carried.

The Property and Grounds Board seeks approval to buy and install two new bike racks. Michelle Kramer-Prevost made a motion, seconded by Jill Enestvedt, to approve this project, with the funds (up to \$2,194) taken from the Foundation pre-approved funds for building and property. Motion carried.

There are three new requests for funding from the St. John's Foundation to consider (see addendum #2 below). There is also one old request from the Benevolence & Social Concerns Board that is seeking additional funds to purchase St. John's t-shirts for the youth (\$552). Jill Enestvedt made a motion, seconded by Paul Beck, to approve all four requests for funds from the Foundation. Motion carried.

The Youth Board requests that Council vote on the distribution of ELCA college scholarships (\$500 per person for a total of \$3,000). Pastor Jonathan Davis requests that the Soli Seminary funds (\$1,395) also be dispersed. Cheryl Buck made a motion, seconded by Jill Enestvedt, to approve both requests. Motion carried.

6. Discussion Items

The Benevolence & Social Concerns Board has been reviewing congregational feedback about ways that St. John's could make a meaningful impact on the community. Themes that emerged include teen mental health, adult day care/caregiver respite services, and car and home repair for those in need. The Board designated some of its discretionary budget for Greenvale Elementary School's healthy snack program and also for Kaitlyn Larson, our mission partner in Colombia. There were some further suggestions made for additional projects (see Board minutes).

The Children's Education & Ministry Board is looking for Sunday School teachers for the Fall. If you are interested or know someone who is interested, please talk to someone on the Children's board. Mark Toov (representing the Children's Education & Ministry Board) noted that there is still a need for four or five teachers.

The Property and Grounds Board reports that the wood on the old church pews in storage at Koester Farm is delaminating and separating, and the underlying wood is not worth saving as it is not solid and has a camber to it. The Board would like to save the Trinity piece, however, and give it to someone who wants it. Council recommended that the Worship & Arts Board examine the piece and offer some suggestions for its disposition.

Revisions to the lists of Boards' responsibilities in the bylaws: please send your revisions, even if they are not finalized yet, to Secretary Steve Reece (reece@stolaf.edu), who will forward them to the Nominating Committee to assist in their search for new board members.

7. Pastors' Report

See addendum #3 below for Pastors' Report.

8. Future Dates

Board Night: Tuesday, September 9th, 7 pm

Council Meeting: Tuesday, September 23rd, 7 pm

Minutes submitted by Secretary Steve Reece

Addendum #1: St. John's July 2025 Treasurer's Financial Report:

Total Operating Income is \$13k above budget for the month of July and (\$69k) below budget YTD.

- Offering:
 - July offering was \$19k above budget.
 - YTD offering is (\$46k) below budget.
 - 2025 YTD offering actuals through July are virtually identical to 2024 offering through July.
- Other Income
 - YTD combined “Other Income” and “other Gifts” are \$17k higher than budget.
 - Very few Designated and Foundation Funds have been released so for this year, these items are (\$40k) below budget.

Total Operating Expense is \$31k above budget for the month of July and (\$37k) below budget YTD.

- Personnel is \$39k over budget YTD through July. This is due to the timing of how salaries are paid. As expected, the month of July has two pay periods and this is the reason for the overage.
- All other Board expense categories are collectively about (\$37k) under budget YTD through July, or about 15% below budget for all non personnel costs.
- We are still waiting for the savings from the Solar Panels to show up on our utility bills.

Net Income/(loss)

- The Net Income YTD through July is (\$32K) below budget. The predominant factor of this is the \$40k from Designated and Foundation Funds that have not been released.

Addendum #2: Three requests for funds from the St. John's Foundation:

1. WELCA's Mission Morning at St John's enables the building of various kits for Lutheran World Relief (Personal Care, Baby Care) and Global Health Ministries (Newborn, Hospice), the rolling of bandages and tying of several quilts. Supplies for the kits are purchased by WELCA committees from funds donated by the congregation and some Thrivent grants. With additional funds from the SJF, we will be able to build more kits and perhaps purchase white sheets for rolled bandages. WELCA members transport the completed items to LWR and GHM. \$1,000.

2. St John's WELCA work with Children's Ministry (Julie Bremer) to organize packing of school kits for children in schools around the world. WELCA purchases the items for the kits, and the children of St John's pack the kits. Lutheran World Relief (LWR) distributes the drawstring backpacks filled with notebooks, pencils, rulers, etc. The Foundation funds will be used to purchase the backpack bags and the supplies per the list provided by LWR. \$500.

3. With funding support from St. John's Foundation, the Board of Adult Ministry and Education seeks to deepen congregational engagement with Pope Francis's second encyclical, *Laudato Si'* (2015), which has been chosen because it is both accessible and comprehensive in its assessment of the human causes of environmental degradation and the consequences of that degradation on both the natural world and human society. In its sensitive appropriation of biblical and theological resources, the encyclical urgently calls for radical change in our relationships to earth and our fellow creatures. We have invited Dr. Colleen M. Carpenter to speak on *Laudato Si'* on Nov 16 as part of our fall forum series on environmental theology. As a practicing theologian with interests in environmental justice and community action, Dr. Carpenter is well suited for leading us in this study. Having received her Ph.D. in Theology in 2001 from the University of

Chicago, she has been Professor of Theology and Women's Studies at St. Catherine University (2006-2022) and, more recently, the Benedict Distinguished Visiting Professor of Environmental Studies at Carleton College (2022-2024). Funding from St John's Foundation will allow us to draw on her expertise in two additional ways. First, she will be collaborating with St. John's member Christine Engstrom in leading a 3-session online discussion of Laudato Si' in the month preceding her November 16 presentation. This discussion group will be hosted online, and we expect that we will be able to invite members of the larger Northfield community to participate in this reading and discussion. So, in addition to enriching member engagement, we also anticipate a slight contribution to the Northfield community. Second, this funding will allow us to host a lunchtime discussion following her November 16 forum presentation. This second opportunity encourages those who have not read Laudato Si' to respond to Dr. Carpenter's forum talk. Doing so in community over lunch and at greater leisure than the forum period allows should make it possible for ideas and thoughts to take root in our own minds as well as in the life of the St John's community. \$1200.

Addendum #3: August 2025 Pastors' Report:

Official Acts:

Funeral for Erik Johnson, August 11, 2025

Funeral for Jack Schwandt, August 26, 2025

Worship

All our eyes are now turning to the fall. In Sunday worship, we will be participating in **Wonders of Worship** – a children's sermon series designed to invite all of us to a deeper understanding of the parts of our worship service. This project is directed by St. Olaf's Lutheran Center for Faith, Values and Community. We're excited to see how the music, art and approach of this series engages our youngest ones.

CYF

Our summer youth programming is wrapping up. Youth report positive experiences at Christikon, and the last of our joint-venture get togethers of Northfield youth happened last week with an evening of Romans and Christians, where around 40 youth from 4 churches attended.

Throughout the summer, Kristin Partlo and Pastor Jonathan have been meeting youth for lunch on Wednesdays at Hogan brothers. There has been around 4-6 youth each week and it has been a great way to stay connected throughout the summer. Kristin has also been inviting 2 youth to join her each week to volunteer at the CAC foodshelf.

With the number new babies being baptized and new families around St. John's this past year, Pastors Pam and Jonathan and Julie hope to invite these families to a get together in September, simply for a chance to meet each other and connect and build relationships through church.

Stephen Ministry

Stephen Ministry is preparing to train a new class of Stephen Ministers. Currently there are 8 people in the class. Classes will begin in late September and go through February.

The Nominating Committee

Had its first meeting on August 18. Dan Franklin will chair the group and Sue Brockman will be serving as recorder. Their first task is to check in with each board regarding board needs in the coming year, and confirming terms. Board chairs should expect a member of the committee to contact them and/or come to

board night on September 9. Other members of the committee are Peter Skoglund, Kristy Harms, and Kibby Errington.

Churchwide:

The ELCA churchwide Assembly elected Yehiel Curry, previously Metro Chicago Bishop, to a six-year term as Presiding Bishop. Churchwide Secretary, another key role, is now Lucille Mills from North Carolina.

The Assembly also passed a number of constitutional changes, a Social Statement on Faith in Civic Life, and a strongly-worded resolution calling for a ceasefire in Gaza and justice for Palestinian people. The assembly also, for the first time, confessed the Nicene Creed without the historically-controversial *filioque* clause. This latter action follows broad ecumenical talks marking the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicea.