

Minutes
Congregational Council
St. John's Lutheran Church
July 22nd, 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, Eric Johnsrud, Susan Lohmann, and Maggie Odell.

Present: Pastor Pam Fickenscher, President Michelle Kramer-Prevost, President Elect Paul Beck, Treasurer Judd Lohmann, Secretary Steve Reece; Council Members Jill Enestvedt, Andrea Hoff, Eric Johnsrud, Susan Lohmann, and Maggie Odell.

Absent: Pastor Jonathan Davis, Council Member Cheryl Buck.

President Michelle Kramer-Prevost called the meeting to order at 7:05 pm.

1. Devotions

Pastor Pam Fickenscher led the group in a thoughtful discussion of Chapters 7-8 of Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Strength to Love* on the proper use of wealth (ch. 7) and on the presence of evil in the world (ch. 8).

2. Approval of June Minutes

Paul Beck made a motion, seconded by Dan Hanson, for approval of the June Council Minutes. Motion carried.

3. Financial Report

Treasurer Judd Lohman updated the Council on the June finances. He expressed some concern that offering totals are about 5% lower in 2025 than in 2024. See addendum #1 (below) for Treasurer's Report.

4. Discussion Items

a. A member of the Stewardship Board raised concerns about perceived declining membership at St John's. The Board wonders if this is an actual or perceived issue. Pastor Fickenscher noted that attendance and engagement is down, especially since the Covid pandemic. The question of membership is more slippery, as some members are not very involved, and since some very involved individuals are not members. ELCA membership generally is down quite dramatically over the last several years.

b. There are increasing funds available for benevolence, and there will apparently be more funds available in the future. How can we best involve the congregation in the work of the Benevolence & Social Concerns Board? The Board is debating whether to concentrate its efforts on many smaller projects or to commit a large amount of funds to support a single large community project (e.g., Habitat for Humanity, affordable housing generally, youth homelessness). It was observed that many already well-established charities are in need of

financial support, especially with the elimination of public funds (e.g., the CAC). The Board agreed to poll the congregation about what projects it would most like to support financially as well as actually to be involved in.

c. The IRS has relaxed its strictures on the tax status of churches that endorse political candidates. Does this affect St. John's activity in the political realm in any way? Michelle Kramer-Prevost noted that nothing has actually changed in the tax code. The IRS is merely reasserting its past position that a tax-exempt institution can take stands on political matters internally but should not express them to an external audience.

d. For informational purposes, the Council was reminded that immigration officials are now allowed to enter public spaces, including the public areas of churches and schools, without a warrant, but they do need a warrant to enter private spaces, such as private offices and storage spaces. This is the same policy that has pertained in the past. Church staff knows how to respond legally and properly.

e. Again, for informational purposes, the Council was alerted that there are a limited number of spots available in the Columbarium. Another unit will be needed in the next year or so, costing upwards of \$42,000. This cost will be covered, eventually, by those who reserve spaces in the unit.

5. Action Items

6. Pastors' Report

See addendum #2 (below) for Pastors' Report and addendum #3 (below) for an update on Sustaining Grace.

a. Pastor Fickenschler

b. Pastor Davis

7. Old Business

8. New Business

9. Future Dates

Board Night: Tuesday, August 12th, 7 pm

Council Meeting: Tuesday, August 26th, 7 pm

President Michelle Kramer-Prevost adjourned the meeting at 8:30 pm.

Minutes submitted by Secretary Steve Reece

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

Total Operating Income is (\$14k) below budget for the month of June and (\$82k) below budget YTD.

- Offering:

- o June offering was (\$9k) below budget.
- o YTD offering is (\$65k) below budget.
- o 2025 YTD offering actuals through June are about (\$24k) below 2024 offering through June.
- Other Income
 - o YTD combined “Other Income” and “other Gifts” are \$17k higher than budget.
 - o Very few Designated and Foundation Funds have been released so far this year; these items are (\$34k) below budget.

Total Operating Expense is (\$15k) below budget for the month of June, and (\$67k) below budget YTD.

- Personnel is (\$37k) below budget YTD through June. Because of the timing of how salaries are paid, there will be one month where salaries are doubled up and this should be on target by year end.
- All other Board expense categories are close to budget through six months into the year.
- 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 June is (\$14K) below budget.

There is slight concern about the trend in offering, as 2025 giving is a bit less than 2024 though the first half of the year (about 5% lower than 2024).

Addendum #2: Pastors’ report for July, 2025

Official Acts:

Funeral for Scott Quinnell, July 10

Baptism of Aidan James Thoma, July 20

Worship

We continue to hear positive feedback from the one-service schedule for the summer. It feels full and robust. Occasionally someone mentions that it’s harder to sit through the longer time frame that is inevitable in serving 200 for communion. Our total numbers are on average a little lower than last year.

2024 2025

180	174
328	184
269	203
204	237
258	242
195	197
249	189

CYF

Pastor Davis and Kristin Partlo departed on Saturday with youth from three churches for Christikon, an ELCA outdoor ministry in the mountains of Montana. Middle school youth will experience a week of wilderness “base camp,” while the high schoolers will have a full backpacking trek. The preparations are consuming for staff and we’ve had some last-minute changes to the roster, but we’re excited to offer this experience to the youth. It appears regularly in a roughly 3-year rotation for our youth.

Sustaining Grace

Now at the halfway point of our capital appeal, I’m attaching an update that could serve as a communication for the fall. I’ve asked the capital appeal fundraising team for suggestions and help formatting this into something that will get maximum reading.

Of note is that \$17,000 designated for benevolence is currently available, and by the end of the appeal in late 2026 another \$40,000 should be available for gifts to the larger community. This would be a good time for a larger community conversation about how to best use those funds, and whether the growing Foundation allocations might combine to make a larger impact on our community.

Columbarium

The St. John’s Columbarium has been around for 19 years. Columbarium policies and finances are governed by a three person committee. The designated fund in your financial report receives deposits each time a household reserves a niche. The second unit, which was added in 2016, is now approaching the 50% mark of reservations. The committee is now researching the current costs for fabrication, so that they can make recommendations about timing of a third unit and cost adjustments to fund a third unit.

Churchwide:

The ELCA will elect a new presiding bishop and new churchwide secretary next week. Both of these offices will have huge responsibilities leading the ELCA into its next chapter, with significant changes in how we train leaders, support churchwide ministries, and publicly witness to our faith.

Perhaps because of this upcoming transition, there has been less direct guidance from churchwide in recent weeks in response to the recent challenges to the separation of church and state. We will be watching this conversation closely and pondering how these changes impact the witness of “the Church” and, *our* church.

Addendum #3: Sustaining Grace Update:

Dear Friends in Christ

As we reach the halfway point of our three-year Sustaining Grace efforts, we are so grateful for this congregation’s generosity.

This letter is intended to let you know where your gifts have gone so far, and plans for future investments in St. John’s and our community’s future.

In 2024, St. John's members pledged \$1,100,000 to the three-year Sustaining Grace Campaign. Many of you were immediately generous, giving nearly \$400,000 in the first months of the appeal. To date, we have collected \$694,900.

Benevolence

St. Johns' pledged that 10% of the appeal's funds would go to help our community and global partners sustain their own vital ministries. Thanks to your early giving, we have been able to fulfill all of the grants that were pre-approved by the Benevolence Board. These include:

\$5500 to Ruth's House of Hope for new efficient air conditioning for their shelter.

\$20,000 to the Healthy Community Initiative for their mobile home weatherization fund, helping many of our lowest income neighbors keep their homes warm and affordable. *This fund has been transferred to the administration of Three Rivers.*

\$8000 To Habitat for Humanity, helping them plan for more energy efficient builds that will save their residents long-term on their energy bills.

\$20,000 to Laura Baker Services, for updating the monitoring of their heating and cooling systems in two of their group homes.

What about the rest of the 10%? The Benevolence Board continues to be in active conversation with these and other mission partners about the best ways to support their ministries in these rapidly changing times. Further grant requests will be brought forward to the Church Council as funds are available.

Capital Improvements

Thanks to your early generosity, the church was able to install our **solar array** on the roof and connect it to the grid by October of 2024 without any additional financing needed! To date, the panels have produced XXX megawatts of electricity, the equivalent of XXX trees.

We were able to complete converting our **lighting** to efficient LED's. Through an Xcel program of rebates this cost only \$7400, and at the same time some of the older LED's were replaced with newer, even more efficient ones at no cost!

In spring of this year, the downstairs classrooms had a full replacement of **tile**. The tile in the 20-year old addition was peeling and becoming a hazard, and the new flooring was installed just in time for Vacation Bible School!

A new **range** for our commercial kitchen is being purchased and installed this summer. The old range – purchased second-hand over 20 years ago – had troublesome pilot lights and was creating concerns both for energy usage and hazardous indoor air. The new unit eliminates the need for always-on pilots, saving us gas usage over time.

What's next?

After consultation with an environmental architect, we are pursuing refurbishing the **south parking lot**. We have lost one tree to ash borer disease and anticipate removal of another tree due to disease, but will be replacing those trees and expanding the islands slightly so that we can continue to enjoy shade without the heaving that mature trees produce.

Ongoing work on our **HVAC system** continues. Due to changes in what contractors are available to us, we are still examining the best options for troubleshooting our sanctuary humidity and cooling, as well as new controls that might integrate our many systems in the facility.

Tuckpointing is an ongoing concern with the brick of our facility. We are awaiting a bid on some areas of the bell tower and the steps that need repair.

We have heard your concerns for the **lighting** in St. John's Hall, which can be dim in the evening and winter hours. A light consultant has been brought in and we have a two-stage plan to test new bulbs that should cast more light downward from the high ceilings of the Hall.

This fall, as our adult education board is raising up our call to care for creation, we are grateful that you have supported these efforts to sustain our ministry, our community, and our planet. Thank you!