

**Minutes
Congregational Council
St. John's Lutheran Church
September 23rd, 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 Pam Fickenscher, Pastor Jonathan Davis, President Elect Paul Beck, Secretary Steve Reece; Council Members Cheryl Buck, Jill Enestvedt, Dan Hanson, Andrea Hoff, and Maggie Odell; Melissa Pellinen (representing the Youth Education & Ministry Board), Brenda Nelson (representing the Worship and Arts Board), and Brian Evenson (representing the Children's Ministry and Education Board).

Absent: President Michelle Kramer-Prevost, Treasurer Judd Lohmann, Council Member Susan Lohmann.

President Elect Paul Beck called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

1. Devotions (15 minutes) on Chapters 9-10 of Martin Luther King Jr's *Strength to Love*

Pastor Davis led a lively discussion on King's encouragement to face unwanted and unfortunate circumstances with radiant hope.

2. Approval of August Minutes

Brian Evenson made a motion, seconded by Cheryl Buck, for approval of the August Council Minutes (with a correction in a name from Evenson to Brockman). Motion carried.

3. Financial Report

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

4. Action Items

Naming of Budget Committee: Council members Andrea Hoff and Cheryl Buck graciously volunteered to fill the two rotating positions on the Budget Committee. The Council gladly accepted their offers.

Maggie Odell made a motion, seconded by Cheryl Buck, to approve the LED lighting project for St. John's Hall presented by the Property and Ground Board. Motion carried.

Andrea Hoff made a motion, seconded by Cheryl Buck, to accept Pastor Davis's recommendation that Youth Foundation Funds (\$1,400) be used for challenges posed by neurodiversity as well as for a new TV on wheels in the lower level of the church building.

5. Discussion Items

The Property and Grounds Board sought guidance from Council about whether St John's should install a chairlift to the choir loft. Dan Hanson provided details, and, on behalf of the Board, he recommended a particular type of chairlift (Bruno) that has already received preliminary approval from the City and State (re. fire code, etc.). The total cost would be \$30,000. The Council as a whole agreed that it would be ideal to be

able to accommodate anyone who wishes to be in the choir. There were several concerns raised, however. It would be a five-minute round trip, so four users, for example, would take a total of twenty minutes to access, as well as to leave, the choir loft. The chair and the rails upon which the chair is mounted might present an obstruction to those walking up and down the stairs (walkers could use the other staircase, of course, but that would deposit basses and sopranos on the wrong end of the choir loft). A chair lift would not entirely solve the challenge, since once someone arrives at the top of the stairs there are still up to three levels to negotiate in the choir loft itself. A more holistic approach would require additional improvements (addition of bannisters, removal of impediments, etc.) in the choir loft itself. The Council recommended further that St. John's insurance carrier should be consulted about possible liability issues.

Revisions to the lists of Boards' responsibilities in the bylaws: please continue to send final revisions to Steve Reece (reece@stolaf.edu), who is compiling them into one document to be presented to the congregation at the next annual meeting. Revisions have now been received from all but two Boards. The Council will want to determine at some point how homogeneous these statements should be (style, structure, etc.).

Update on Sustaining Grace projects. Pastor Fickenscher updated Council on several of the projects that have been completed as well as those in process. Solar paneling, kitchen range, and new flooring have all been completed. Work is continuing on LED lighting for St. John's Hall (see Action Items above for results of the Council's vote). The HVAC is being monitored. Tuck pointing can proceed on the bell tower without any structural improvements. A bid has been received for resurfacing the parking lot, but cement curbing needs to precede the asphaltting; it is still possible to complete this project before winter. The church building as a whole needs to be made more secure, especially with respect to its many and various types of doors.

Update of the activities of the Isaiah Project. Pastor Fickenscher updated Council on the current activities of this inter-faith coalition. It is concentrating on the social safety net for Minnesotans (Medicaid, SNAP) and on civil rights for all.

Discussion about the challenges of recruiting and maintaining board members and chairs. This has been a long-term challenge. It would be better for communication purposes to have a permanent chair for each board (currently three boards have rotating chairs). Why is it so difficult for many to commit to a three-year term? Should membership on boards be reduced from six to five? Should three-year terms be replaced by two-year terms? If so, should a member be able to re-up for an additional two years (currently this is not permitted unless the member becomes a chair)? This topic will need to be revisited with a view to possibly adjusting the bylaws at the next annual meeting.

How should the St. John's Constitution be revised to accommodate the changes required and recommended by the ELCA at the recent Churchwide Assembly? Many sections of the constitution approved at the Churchwide Assembly will need to be included verbatim in St. John's Constitution. Such changes simply require a thirty-day notice and a vote by the congregation at its annual meeting. Other sections are presented as suggestions rather than requirements. Where St. John's chooses to deviate from these recommendations, there is a more onerous two-year process.

7. Pastors' Report

See addendum #2 (below) for Pastors' Report.

a. Pastor Fickenscher

b. Pastor Davis

8. Old Business

none

9. New Business

Pastor Davis recommended that Youth Foundation Funds (\$1,400) be used for challenges posed by neurodiversity as well as for a new TV on wheels in the lower level of the church building (see Action Items above for results of the Council's vote).

10. Future Dates

Board Night: Tuesday, October 14th, 7 pm

Council Meeting: Tuesday, October 28th, 7 pm

Fall Cleanup: Saturday, October 25th, 8 am to 12 pm

President Elect Paul Beck adjourned the meeting at 8:55 pm.

Minutes submitted by Secretary Steve Reece

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

Total Operating Income is (\$10k) below budget for the month of August and (\$79k) below budget YTD.

- Offering:
 - o August offering was (\$3k) below budget.
 - o YTD offering is (\$49k) below budget.
 - o 2025 YTD offering actuals through August are virtually identical to 2025 offering through August.
- Other Income
 - o YTD combined "Other Income" and "other Gifts" are \$16k higher than budget.
 - o Few Designated and Foundation Funds have been released so for this year, these items are (\$46k) below budget.

Total Operating Expense is (\$39k) lower than budget for the month of August and (\$56k) lower than budget YTD.

- Personnel is (\$5k) below budget YTD through August.
- All other Board expense categories are collectively about (\$51k) under budget YTD through August.
- 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 August is (\$23K) below budget. The predominant factor of this is the \$46k from Designated and Foundation Funds that have not been released.

Addendum #2: September 2025 Pastors' Report:

Worship

The two service schedule resumed with the start of Sunday School on September 14. We are happy to have a very full balcony with the Chorale having 40-50 singers each week. There are six St. Olaf church music interns joining us as well, five singing with Chorale and one working with the Rejoice Ringers.

CYF

Children, Youth, and Family ministries have had a number of gatherings to get people oriented to the start of the year – *6th grade Confirmation Orientation* for new 6th graders and their parents, and then *Connections Night* for both Children and Youth Programming. *Connections Night* is feeling less and less effective in getting families together for an orientation meeting, especially those with young families. We will brainstorm a new approach for next year.

On September 17th, we had a great start to the program year! Children's ministry helped packed School Kits with other St. John's Adult volunteers through WELCA. Confirmation and Youth Group had about 31 youth gather for the first night, which is a great start to the year.

Pastor Jonathan has established a taskforce for our youth position that will be open a year from now. Eden Kaiser, Suzy Taggart, Alyssa Toov, and Peter Becker Nelson have agreed to serve on this ad hoc committee to help vision and plan for filling this position next year. We will hopefully have our first gathering in October.

Sustaining Grace

It has been a slow summer getting bids for SG projects but we have made some progress:

- The new range and oven was delivered this morning! While it looks like a simple 1-1 replacement, the new model has safer and more energy efficient pilots that will save energy over the old model.
- Our lighting test last week was successful. New LED's will be many times brighter than our current fixtures, and more energy efficient as well.
- We should be receiving a second bid for the parking lot soon. It's unclear whether this project can be completed before asphalt plants close November 1.
- The bell tower inspection showed some need for tuckpointing but no serious structural concerns (whew!)

Admin:

The new Pushpay link is up and running on our website. There will be a general announcement about it to the congregation next week, and we hope to get our current Vanco givers converted to the new platform in about a month. The company has provided a lot of customer support to Leah for the process and things are going well.

The Nominating Committee is beginning its work, first identifying a President-Elect and six board chairs for next year. Dan Franklin will chair the group and Sue Brockman will be serving as recorder. They will be meeting weekly and are happy to hear suggestions for asks (but please let *them* do the asking!) Other members of the committee are Peter Skoglund, Kristy Harms, and Christy Hall-Holt.

Advocacy

In response to recent events, Bishop Eaton has urged people of the ELCA to engage in 'active civic engagement'. Bishop Eaton writes, "In this moment, I urge all of us in this church to embrace God's call, to hear and embody the good news of Jesus Christ and to fulfill our roles as peacemakers through active civic engagement." (*A Message from Bishop Eaton on Political Violence*) and "To meet this moment, God calls us to advocacy." (*ELCA Statement on Supreme Court Ruling That Allows Racial Profiling in Immigration Enforcement.*)

St. John's has gathered up postcards through the Amparro program that will be sent to the ELCA advocacy offices in support of immigrants in this moment. Thanks to Jane Rinehart and other WELCA leaders for spearheading this effort.

We took part in the ringing of Northfield church bells for eight minutes on September 16 to memorialize the 84,000 persons killed in Gaza since the war began nearly two years ago. This effort was modeled on a similar event in Scandinavia a few months ago. Thanks to Doug Johnson and Rick Hillert for sharing in the long ring.

Isaiah, a coalition of Protestant Christian and Muslim faith communities, is organizing to encourage our state and federal lawmakers to defend civil and human rights and protect our social safety nets. A statewide clergy gathering this Thursday and a meeting with Governor Walz is the start of planning a path forward to speak together out of our faith values. While Isaiah has been active for many years in this state, more clergy and lay leaders are engaging this year because of the rise of Christian nationalism and the assault on constitutional rights. Todd Lippert has been organizing small town clergy this year. Bishop Hassanally is taking part in Thursday's meeting with the governor as well.