

Minutes
Congregational Council
St. John's Lutheran Church
February 25, 2025

Members: Pastor Pam Fickenschler, 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, Maggie Odell

Present: Pastor Pam Fickenschler, Pastor Jonathan Davis, President Michelle Kramer-Prevost, Treasurer Judd Lohmann, Secretary Steve Reece, Council Members Cheryl Buck, Jill Enestvedt, Dan Hanson, Andrea Hoff, Eric Johnsrud, Susan Lohmann, Maggie Odell

Absent: President Elect Paul Beck [Chairs for the Children's Ministry and Education Board and for the Youth Ministry and Education Board were also absent, as they still need to be elected]

Meeting was called to order at 7 pm.

President Michelle Kramer-Prevost opened the meeting in prayer.

Eric Johnsrud made a motion, seconded by Judd Lohmann, for approval of the January 21st and 28th (zoom) Council Minutes. Motion passed.

1. Financial Report

Update from Treasurer Judd Lohman: Financial records for 2024 are almost set and can likely be finalized and brought to the congregation in the next two weeks. We will aim for a congregational meeting on March 16th. There will likely be a surplus of funds to bring over to 2025.

2. Council Updates & Action Items

a. The Benevolence & Social Concerns Board asked the Council to discuss and make a decision regarding recommendations from ELCA/Global Refuge/AAMPARO related to refugee/immigrant protections. Andrea Hoff reported on a webinar that she had attended by CA/Global Refuge/AAMPARO. The most critical item is to distinguish public from private spaces in the church, as the right of access for ICE agents varies accordingly. Another critical item is to designate someone to be familiar with practices regarding warrants and subpoenas.

Eric Johnsrud made a motion, seconded by Andrea Hoff, to designate pastoral offices as private spaces and to authorize staff to place appropriate signage. Motion passed.

Andrea Hoff made a motion, seconded by Cheryl Buck, to designate the two pastors and the president as authorized persons to review warrants and subpoenas in response to issuances by ICE. Motion passed.

Maggie Odell recommended that the Adult Ministry and Education Board sponsor a forum on this topic. The recommendation was received favorably by Council members.

b. Secretary Steve Reece made a motion, seconded by Jill Enestvedt, to approve the following executive committee members as signatories on the St. John's checking account: Michelle Kramer-Prevost, President; Paul Beck, President-Elect; Judd Lohmann, Treasurer. Motion passed.

c. There is a recent vacancy on the Faith and Health Board. There is a vacancy on the Children's Ministry and Education Board; also, a chair for the board has not yet been elected. Finally, a chair for the Youth Ministry and Education Board has not yet been elected. In the absence of willing candidates for these positions, a motion was tabled until the next meeting. Meanwhile, Council members were encouraged to consider, and approach, possible candidates.

d. Jill Enestvedt made a motion, seconded by Cheryl Buck, to designate the following as voting members at the Southeastern Minnesota Synod Assembly, held at the Mankato Convention Center on May 30th (and possibly 31st), 2025. Assembly fees are authorized to be paid by the congregation:

Pastor Fickenscher
Pastor Davis
Roger Van Veldhuizen
Michelle Kramer-Prevost
Kristin Partlo
(one spot remains vacant)

e. Eric Johnsrud made a motion, seconded by Judd Lohmann, that, in conformity with IRS rules, Council designate the pastors' housing allowances as follows (these amounts do not change their total compensation as passed in the 2025 budget):

Pastor Fickenscher, \$49,000
Pastor Davis: \$43,680

3. Pastors' Reports

a. Pastor Fickenscher's full report is appended at the end of these minutes.

b. Pastor Davis has selected for Council's reading and devotions a book by Martin Luther King, Jr. titled Strength to Love, a collection of sermons on the topic of nonviolence.

4. Old Business

a. Update on The Foundation: Cheryl Buck asked that chairs regularly brainstorm with their board members about good ways to use the funds from the foundation.

b. Update on Sustaining Grace: Pastor Fickenscher presented a spreadsheet of projects, divided into three categories: ones that have been finished, ones that are of next priority, and ones for which more research is needed. She also notified the Council that grants to Habitat for Humanity and for Laura Baker are ready to be distributed.

5. New Business

- a. Completed plans for providing treats and devotions for all the board meetings.
- b. Completed plans for members to assist with Lenten Soup Suppers.
- c. Cheryl Buck suggested that all boards review the responsibilities of boards in the bylaws and compare them with what the boards are actually doing, with a view to possibly revising the bylaws accordingly. Other members suggested that to maintain homogeneity in the bylaws the Council should oversee the process.
- d. President Michelle Kramer-Prevost will be writing the congregational portion of the grant application for Pastor Fickenscher's 2006 sabbatical. Pastor Fickenscher plans to spend time envisioning her next stage of ministry, including an emphasis on lay leadership.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:40 pm

6. Future Dates

Board Night: Tuesday, March 11th, 7 pm

Council Meeting: Tuesday, March 25th, 7 pm

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Pastors' Report

February 25, 2025

Official Acts:

Baptism for Valerie Kastner, February 9
Baptism for Trey Bilderback, February 16
Funeral for Iva Dodson, February 20

Staffing:

It has been a challenging time in the office since Leah Garlie's medical emergency on January 20, just before the annual meeting. I'm grateful for the Executive Committee's help in navigating what had to

happen to be ready for the annual meeting, and especially to Judd Lohmann working through assessing our finances. With the help of Judd, Janell Martin from the Business Management Board, and Derek Melby (First UCC's bookkeeper), we are on track to close out 2024 soon and also trying to not fall too far behind in 2025 recordkeeping.

Leah Garlie returned to work at 75% on Friday February 14. She is focused on office management and communication tasks right now until she is able to work full-time again.

Arturo Rosas, our new custodial associate, started work with us on February 4. He is working four afternoons a week for a total of 10 hours a week, focused on cleaning our most used spaces.

Kristin Partlo has started a new part of her seminary training – Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). She is going to be doing her hours for this at the Northfield Retirement Center. This is outside of her paid position at St. John's.

Annual Meeting follow-up:

Next steps are: 1) council will be receiving a final treasurer's report for December 2024 when that is done, 2) the Audit committee completing its review of the 4th quarter of 2024 3) amending the annual report to reflect the finances and 4) calling a brief congregational meeting (with 2 weeks notice) to share the updated information.

At the same time, the Foundation Board may wish to have a brief meeting with the congregation to correct their elections and update on their work to refine the process for determining Foundation grants.

There are a few nominations outstanding that will require Council action when they are filled:

- 1) There are two open spots for the Southeastern Minnesota Synod Assembly
- 2) There is one open position on the Children's board
- 3) The Youth Board and the Children's board both need chairpeople

Worship and Education:

We are moving into the season of Lent on March 5 with Ash Wednesday services. Lent is typically a time when we see some of our most robust attendance both on Sundays and on Wednesday evenings for Holden vespers.

Our Lenten book read selection, Bonhoeffer for Armchair Theologians, sold out quickly. More are being ordered and we are trying to adjust our capacity for small group discussion to accommodate everyone who is interested.

Communications:

A reminder that it is really helpful when each board shares their work with the congregation regularly. The Voice is not only for announcing upcoming events, but also sharing the work you've already done. Consider as you close each meeting whether there is something to share broadly, and assign a board member to submit something to the church office by the 15th of the month to include in the newsletter.

A closing word from Pastor Pam:

The stunning changes in our federal government impact all of us in our feelings of overwhelm, and impact some of us more directly in the uncertainty they put on our futures. These are the times that we feel most keenly that we need God, and we need each other. These are also times when it is easy to displace our anxieties by growing impatient with the people closest to us. In these past weeks, I have experienced some of that misplaced anxiety, and also have witnessed incredible kindness and generosity in this community. We are human, but we follow Jesus who showed us the best of humanity.

My commitment to you was stated in a sermon last fall:

It may be that in the years ahead, the world will more and more give praise and honor to people with the most money, the most weapons, and the most ambitious plans to get more power and more money. And the way of Jesus, which we see in a suffering servant who was not rich, not powerful, and not arrogant, will seem unfashionable. But we will follow Jesus anyway.

It may be that being kind and gentle and compassionate will be considered out of fashion and ineffective in our country, but we're going to do it anyway.

It may be that welcoming the stranger and giving refuge to the displaced will be considered unfashionable and even politically fraught in 2025, but as people who follow Jesus, we're going to do it anyway.

It may be that it will become unfashionable to call people by the names they want to be called, and with the pronouns they ask for, to treat others with gentleness instead of contempt. But we are going to do it anyway.

It may be that telling the truth and refusing to profit from other people's disadvantage will be unfashionable, but we're going to do it anyway.

It may be, in this age of climate change, that our small actions to help the planet will seem like a drop in the bucket, but we're going to do them anyway.

What then shall we do? We will trust that the Lord is near.