

Minutes
Congregational Council
St. John's Lutheran Church
March 24, 2026

Members: Pastor Pam Fickenscher, Pastor Jonathan Davis, President Paul Beck, President Elect Pam Groves-Gaggioli, Treasurer Judd Lohmann, Secretary Steve Reece; Council Members Cheryl Buck, Beth Cox, Jill Enestvedt, Chris Engstrom, Brian Evenson, Dan Hanson, Andrea Hoff, Susan Lohmann, and Ruthie Neuger.

Present: Pastor Pam Fickenscher, President Elect Pam Groves-Gaggioli, Secretary Steve Reece; Council Members Cheryl Buck, Jill Enestvedt, Chris Engstrom, Brian Evenson, Andrea Hoff, and Ruthie Neuger; Vern Koester (representing Property and Grounds Board).

Absent: Pastor Jonathan Davis, President Paul Beck, Treasurer Judd Lohmann, Council Members Beth Cox, Susan Lohmann, and Dan Hanson.

President Elect Pam Groves-Gaggioli called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

1. Devotions (15 minutes) on Walter Brueggemann's *The Prophetic Imagination*

Pastor Fickenscher led a discussion of pages 9-19.

2. Approval of February Minutes

Cheryl Buck made a motion, seconded by Chris Engstrom, for approval of the minutes of the February Council Budget Meeting. Motion carried.

3. Financial Report

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

4. Action Items

Property and Grounds Board has requested that Council approve several types of repairs to the steps on the East and South staircases (quote of \$9,640 from Top Dawg Masonry). Vern Koester provided a background to the issues posed by the deterioration of these staircases. Andrea Hoff made a motion, seconded by Jill Enestvedt, to approve the request of \$9,640, with the funds coming from the Sustaining Grace funds designated for tuck pointing. Motion carried.

St. John's WELCA is seeking funding of \$2,000 from the St. John's Foundation to support its ministry on behalf of Global Health Ministries (GHM) and Lutheran World Relief (LWR). The money will be used to purchase materials to build personal care kits, baby care kits and school kits for LWR recipients as well as for newborn kits and hospice kits distributed by GHM to those in need around the world. Jill Enestvedt made a motion, seconded by Cheryl Buck, to approve the funding. Motion carried.

Pastor Fickenscher updated the Council on several church projects whose funding has come, or will come, from Sustaining Grace, some completed, some in the pipeline, and some that still need more research. An improved security system for the church building falls between the second and third categories. There are some security concerns about the entrances to the church building and also some possible remedies. A keyless entry system is being explored, and \$21,000 has already been earmarked for the project. Ruthie Neuger made a motion, seconded by Brian Evenson, to approve up to \$25,000 for the project. Motion carried.

5. Discussion Items

Now that Council has reinstated the “Board Updates” on the monthly agenda, there was some discussion about what distinguishes a “Discussion Item” for Council from a “Board Update” by the Board chair. It was determined that a “Board Update” is a matter of information that the Board wishes to share with the Council, while a “Discussion Item” is a matter about which the Board wished to receive some feedback from Council.

Worship and Arts Board had requested that Council discuss the challenges posed by the lack of balcony space along with the related matter of the proper procedure for decommissioning musical instruments after their useful life. Ruthie Neuger provided the background of two instruments in particular that had been donated to the church but were no longer used or no longer functioning. Council determined that the decommissioning of instruments should follow the current procedure – i.e., since Worship and Arts Board is charged with maintaining musical instruments, they can make the decision no longer to maintain them as well. Several potential homes were identified for the musical instruments.

The Synod has requested that all churches incorporate their bylaws into their constitution to create one interwoven document. Secretary Steve Reece filled the Council in on his communication with the Synod office on this matter. Council members expressed the desire to keep the two documents separate for our church’s own purposes, since the procedure for making changes to the two documents is different, being rather more onerous for changes to the constitution than to the bylaws. On the other hand, the Synod insists on having a single interwoven document so that their review board can readily compare the provisions of the church’s bylaws with the corresponding provisions of the ELCA model constitution to be certain that they align. Steve will create three separate documents: our current constitution, as revised and approved at this year’s congregational meeting; our current bylaws, as revised and approved at this year’s congregational meeting; an interwoven document for the Synod’s purposes. He will provide the three documents to all Council members to review before submitting them to the Synod office in the next week or two.

January and February offerings are markedly down this year. Pastor Fickenscher suggested several reasons why this may be the case: inclement weather on Sundays, including one Sunday service that had to be cancelled; extraordinary needs from other charitable programs; a challenging economy. She suggested that we consider sending an update to the congregation beyond the usual quarterly updates but that we wait for a few more weeks before making a decision.

6. Pastors’ Report

See Addendum #2 (below) for Pastors’ Report.

7. Board Updates

8. Old Business

9. New Business

10. Future Dates

CPR/First Aid Training on April 9th, 8:30 am -12:30 pm

Board Meetings on April 14th, 7 pm

Spring Cleanup on April 25th (not on the 28th, as previously announced)

Council Meeting on April 28th, 7 pm

President Elect Pam Groves-Gaggioli adjourned the meeting at 8:50 pm.

Addendum #1: Treasurer's Financial Report for February, 2026:

Total Operating Income is (\$39k) below budget for the month of February, and (\$67k) below budget YTD through February.

- Offering:
 - February offering was (\$32k) below budget.
 - February YTD offering is (\$50k) below budget.
 - 2026 February YTD offering is about (\$25k) below 2025 YTD offering through February.

- Other Income
 - February YTD combined "Other Income" and "other Gifts" on budget.
 - February YTD Designated and Foundation Funds are (\$17k) below budget.

Total Operating Expense is (\$6k) below budget for February, and (\$33k) below budget YTD through February.

- Personnel was (\$6k) below budget for February and (\$13k) below budget YTD. 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 were (\$2k) below budget for February and (\$20k) below budget YTD.
- We are still waiting for the savings from the Solar Panels to show up on our utility bills.

Net Income/(loss)

- Net Income for February is (\$32K) below budget, and (\$33k) below budget YTD.

YTD offering is (\$50k) below budget through February. This is a concern. I think we should see what offering is through Easter and evaluate at that time if a communication to the congregation regarding the shortfall would be prudent.

St. John's received a solar tax credit check in the amount of \$59,369 from the IRS. Many, many thanks to Janell Martin for sharing her time and significant expertise in working through the arduous process of getting this done!!!

It should be noted how expenses regarding Pastor Pam's 2026 sabbatical will be met.

There are three areas of sabbatical expenses to be addressed.

1. Ongoing salary – this will be met through ongoing regular, budgeted payroll
2. Costs for additional pastoral support during Pam's sabbatical – Estimated at \$9k, these expenses will be partially met through the additional \$6k budgeted in "Educational Costs" in the 2026 budget. This leaves a \$3k shortfall to be addressed.
3. Program costs (tuition and travel) for Pastor Pam's sabbatical – estimated at \$2.5k, funding for this expense is part of the shortfall that needs to be addressed.

This total 2026 budget shortfall of about \$5.5 k will be addressed and met by an accumulated, uncommitted excess residing in the “Education” component within Designated Funds, which as of 2/28/2026, has a balance of \$13,528.

Of these funds, \$4,000 is “held” for Nathan, \$1,000 for Julie, \$1,000 for Pastor Pam, \$1,000 for Pastor Jonathan, \$500 for Kristin and \$315 for Sally (for a total of \$7,815). This leaves \$5,713 for assistance in covering the shortfall in the 2026 budget for Pastor Pam’s sabbatical.

It should also be noted that costs for covering an anticipated sabbatical for Pastor Jonathan in 2027 should be included and built into the 2027 budgeting process.

Addendum #2: Pastors’ Report for March, 2026:

Staff:

Kristin Partlo will be leaving us to do a pastoral internship at United Lutheran Church in Red Wing in August. We are recommending that a farewell and thank-you reception for her take place on Sunday July 19. The youth and stewardship boards can work together to host this time after worship.

Worship:

Lenten service attendance has been very robust – almost as much as Sunday attendance. We’re grateful to this year’s speakers: Paul Beck, Gordy Moore, Rusty Kluver, Susan Lohmann and Anky Rychner

For the first time in my tenure at St. John’s, we had to cancel all of a Sunday mornings’ activities due to the blizzard on March 15. Thanks to Dave Zdenek and KYMN for the flexibility in finding a previous broadcast to run. We were pleased with the attendance at both the Zoom Service of the Word (around 70 devices) and the Palm Sunday path forum (around 60 devices).

CYE

The job opening for our Director of Ministry with Youth and Families was posted on March 2nd. So far, we have two applicants. The hiring team will begin reviewing applications on March 30th, with interviews beginning in April.

St. John's will be partnering with Bethel Lutheran Church again on VBS this year. VBS will be in early August, which is a little later than usual. This year we will be bringing in staff from Good Earth Village to help run the program.

Sabbatical planning:

Pastor Katie Fick will be filling in an average of 15 hours/week during Pam’s sabbatical from July 26-October 16.

Stephen Ministry

Eight new Stephen Ministers will be commissioned on April 26th at second service. This brings our total number to 165 Stephen Ministers trained at St. John's since the 1980s.

Rev. Alan Storey

Rev. Alan Storey will be coming to Northfield during the week of April 20th-26th - we hope you will find an opportunity to hear him speak. There are many opportunities available!

Beyond St. John’s

The crisis mode from the ICE surge in Minnesota has abated somewhat, but the financial needs continue. A regular gathering of community leaders has been happening weekly on Zoom to assess needs, with a big focus

now being on rental assistance. We have helped with some individual needs through our pastors' emergency fund.

Pam was interviewed by two publications about the community response during the surge.

The first was on caregiving:

<https://19thnews.org/2026/02/minnesota-mutual-aid-caregiving-ice-resistance/>

The second was with a group of community leaders in Northfield meeting with a journalist from the American Prospect. We have not seen anything published from that conversation yet.

Pam and Jonathan took part in Kiara Jorgensen's St. Olaf class on Christian ecotheology on March 12, working with a group of pastors.

Pam has been on the core clergy team for Isaiah planning this year, including lots of conversations about Palm Sunday's mass procession in Saint Paul. As of this writing 88 St. John's members are signed up to ride the bus together to the Capitol on March 29, and many other Northfield churches are participating as well.

Pam presented on the Palm Sunday path at the Cannon River conference meeting on March 12. On April 16 St. John's will be hosting the conference gathering – this is all rostered leaders in our portion of the Southeastern Minnesota Synod.