



2023 Annual Ministry Report

Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church

3580 North Benton Avenue

Helena, Montana 59602

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www.ourredeemerlives.org

*A congregation of the Montana Synod
of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*

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Ministry Team

Rev. Trina Johnsten	Lead Pastor
Lori Walter	Administrative Assistant
Sarah Magee	Director of Finance
Jason Callon	Director of Worship and Music
Steph Richardson	Interim Director of Youth Ministry
Liz Swenson	Director of Children and Family Ministry
Carol Will	Deacon
Linda Keim	Organist
David McHaley	Custodian

Lay Pastoral Associates

- Lori Bigwood-Pecarina
- Jan Martin
- Jeff Martin
- Kevin Mathews
- Lisa Williams-Mathews

Preschool Team

Kristine Thatcher	Interim Director
Marie Grissom	Teacher
Alenna Maw	Teacher
Wendy Vukonich	Teacher
Kristen Sapp	Lunch Bunch Assistant

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**Agenda ORLC Annual Meeting
January 28, 2024**

- Call to Order
- Opening Prayer
- Adopt Agenda as Presented
- Authorize Council to Approve Annual Meeting Minutes
- Approval of Minutes (as provided in annual report)
Annual Congregational Meeting, January 2023
2024 Ministry Plan Meeting, December 2023
- Financial Report
- Ministry Reports
- Congregational Committee Reports
- Elections
 - Congregation Council Members
 - Personnel Committee
 - Gifts and Memorials Committee
 - FLBC Representatives
 - Montana Synod Annual Meeting Voting Representatives
- Recognition of Members Concluding Service
- Closing Prayer

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Our Redeemer's Annual Meeting Sunday, January 29, 2023

Following the potluck, Lynn Voss, Council President, called the meeting to order at 12:25pm. Pastor Trina Johnsten opened the meeting with prayer. Ninety-two voting members were present, including 8 via Zoom.

Minutes

Kristy Antosh moved to accept the minutes as recorded from the January 30, 2022 Annual Meeting, the July 24, 2022 Congregational Meeting during which the Congregation called Pastor Trina to be ORLC's Lead Pastor, and the December 4, 2022 Congregational Meeting to accept the 2023 Proposed Spending Plan. Don Gilbertson seconded the motion and the motion was approved by voice vote.

Financial Report

Beth Johnson, Treasurer, presented highlights from the 2022 Annual Financial Reports (attached to the Annual Report). She thanked the congregation for attending the financial forum and the Budget meeting and encouraged members to consider extra contributions during the summer months when giving historically drops. She also noted that, although the last Capital Campaign has expired, regular giving needs to continue to the Building Fund as the Property Development Team continues its mission for affordable community housing.

Call Committee

Chair Abigail McLane reported that the Associate Pastor Call Committee has been reworking the last Ministry Site Profile. Once that is submitted they will await a roster of potential candidates from the Synod for their review.

Committee and Council Delegate Elections

Lynn presented Darbie Hess as a new member of the Perpetual Fund Committee, and Mike and Trudy Burke to serve as Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp Representatives. Jackie Bartz moved to approve those candidates. Karen Caplis seconded the motion. Motion was approved by voice vote.

Lynn called for a motion to approve the slate of new candidates for the At Large and the Council Officers:

Jennifer Colegrove - At Large
Sarah Sampson - At Large
Linda Nelson - At Large
Ed Johnson - At Large
Cody Salo - At Large

Kevin Mathews - President
Ingrid Childress - First Vice President
Tracy Moseman - Second Vice President
Tracey Tintinger - Treasurer
Lynn Voss - Past President
Secretary position is vacant at this time

Dee Dee Fisher moved to accept the slate of candidates. Lori Chase seconded the motion. A Constitutional question was raised if the Secretary position needs to be approved by the congregation. Kristi Antosh explained that an additional election/approval action is not necessary if a member of the Council agrees to step into the position. Motion was approved by voice vote.

Lynn thanked the departing Council members: Jan Martin, Tom Johnson. Clint Mingay and Carolyn Meyer.

Other

Lynnette Avery asked about the announcement in the Thursday e-news that reported on the Council's decision to reduce the position of Youth and Family Director from full-time to half-time beginning August 1, 2023. How and why was that decision made. Lynn explained that the Council considered workload issues among and between staff and determined that the position didn't merit full-time. He explained the areas of growth currently are at the younger ages and the numbers in the youth age groups aren't anticipated to grow soon. He explained that staffing may change in the future should the workload rebound.

There was extended discussion regarding the importance of the work and several individuals expressed their appreciation for the good work Jackie has done over the last 8 years.

Gary Fisher made a motion asking the Council to reconsider the Council's decision. Mark Langdorf seconded the motion. Mark further asked to amend the motion to require the Council reinstate the position to full-time.

After more discussion, Gary Fisher withdrew his motion.

Mark Langdorf then moved to charge the Council to make the position of Youth and Family Director a full-time position. Eric Spangenberg seconded that motion. Vote by paper ballot was 55 in favor of the motion, 39 against. Motion carried.

Lynn asked that the congregation close with the Lord's Prayer. Meeting adjourned at 1:45pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Ingrid Childress

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Congregational Meeting: Proposed 2024 Ministry Plan (Budget) December 17, 2023

The special Congregational Meeting was called to order at 10:00am with a quorum of 89 members present. Copies of the proposed ministry plan were distributed to all who were present. The meeting was streamed online.

Kevin Mathews, President, opened the meeting with prayer.

Treasurer Tracey Tintinger, Council Treasurer, summarized the 2024 Ministry Plan. The largest projected expense items were explained in more detail. The facilities administration increases by \$13,000 because of an increase in such items as utility costs, but it also reflects a decrease in property taxes. The largest increase is in salaries and benefits, largely because of the expectation of hiring an Associate Pastor. Clergy salaries are set by Synod guidelines.

Tracey explained that the building fund is a dedicated fund, and is not part of this proposed budget. The 2024 budget is 5.2% higher than the 2023 budget, but meeting that budget would require a 25% increase in giving relative to estimated 2023 giving.

Craig Erickson spoke on behalf of the Stewardship Committee. Craig emphasized the incredible giving for benevolence during 2023, including a lot of off-budget giving for local community services and other contributions, such as Lutheran World Relief. It is anticipated that the synod benevolence portion will be paid by the end of 2023. He emphasized the need for improvements in technology and additional support for Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp. He urged all members to increase giving in 2024. OLRC is bucking the trends by increasing its membership and involvement.

Numerous questions and comments were offered by the members. Tracey mentioned that membership has increased 9% in the past year. Kevin clarified that we have about 850 members over the age of 14. Ben Tintinger clarified the distinction between the budgeted amount and the giving amount for 2023 and 2024. Deedee Fischer spoke words of blessing and encouragement for the proposed budget. Charlene Mayala asked questions about the building fund and mortgage balance. Mortgage balance is \$1,182,455. Mortgage Reserve is \$95,150 and Horseshoe Bend account is \$196,823. Monthly mortgage payments are \$10,903. Bonner Armstrong clarified that the Horseshoe Bend reserve would probably go to creating a short connecting driveway between the new Horseshoe Bend road and our existing south parking lot. Gary Fischer, as a member of the Stewardship Committee, reminded those present to share this giving message with newer members who were not present at the meeting. Even after sale of the property, there will be continuing maintenance issues for the building and the desire to continue our amazing benevolence gifts.

A motion for approval was made by Nelson Bock. Budget was passed with two dissenting votes.

Nelson moved to adjourn at 10:35am. Motion passed.

Minutes submitted by Linda Nelson, Council Secretary

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Report of the Lead Pastor Rev. Trina Johnsten

As I write this it is day three of the deep freeze we had in mid-January. Knowing it is -30 outside, it is pretty easy to feel thankful as I sit in our cozy house, a pot of soup bubbling on the stove making it smell wonderful. And *easy to feel thankful* is where I am as I look back on 2023, *easy to feel thankful* personally and professionally.

It is no secret that personally it was a challenging year for me health-wise. I lost most of January, February, and March to the fog of illness and some strong medications. By Holy Week in mid-April I was back to weekly worship, but the severity of my illness was obvious as I struggled to stand and walk. Months of physical therapy have me almost back to normal, but it has been a long year.

But even in the midst of that it was *easy to feel thankful*, as leaders stepped up to cover funerals and memorial services, preach and lead worship on Sundays, visit those in the hospital, bring communion to the homebound, and take my place teaching confirmation and communion instruction. I hesitate to name names because so many helped keep things going during this time (and I suspect I don't know the half of it!), but I am grateful to the faithful leadership of Our Redeemer's staff, council, and LPAs. Local pastors Brad Ulgenes, Keith Weatherford and Ken Duvall all stepped in at times as well.

I've joked since that the congregation seemed to function just fine without a pastor at the helm, which may not bode well for job security. Ha! But here's the great thing: I never sensed significant anxiety in the community during this time. I know people were concerned about my health, but not for the health and vitality of the community. I take that as a sign of a very healthy organization.

Staffing

We began 2023 with some conflict over the needed decrease in hours in the Director of Youth Ministry position. Council and I learned some things about communication and staff management from that situation; it also has guided us in some needed updates to the employee handbook regarding healthy and appropriate departures for staff.

We now have three part-time program staff, all of whom are doing really good work.

Jason Callon, who is back with us after six months of trying another profession, is Director of Worship and Music. Jason took on a lot of extra responsibility

for worship planning and leading during my illness. I look forward to having him back in a permanent role as we continue to offer a creative and dynamic weekly worship experience, seek to include more people in worship leadership, and explore ways to improve our online worship.

Liz Swenson is Director of Children and Family Ministry. Liz's program has really grown in 2023, as families returned after covid and new families found us, several through the preschool. There is good attendance at her special programming (communion instruction, Walk Through the Bible, Vacation Bible School, the family Christmas offering) and look for VBS to be quite an event this summer. Liz has been so flexible in the last year, also working with the confirmation youth and helping to orient Steph.

Steph Richardson is Interim Director of Youth Ministry. Steph came into a difficult situation, displayed great grace and perseverance, and it's paid off. At her suggestion, we revamped Wednesday night for our middle and high school youth, beginning with a meal and short worship, and we have seen most of our older youth return and our younger youth are blossoming as they create a space of their own and build new relationships. I really appreciate the culture of inclusion Steph has built and the good energy she brings to the position.

Lori Walter (Administrative Assistant) keeps us all in line in the office, and has taken on several new responsibilities as **Sarah Magee** (Director of Finance) moved south. We miss Sarah's physical presence, but she's proven to be very available even though miles away. **Kris Thatcher** (Interim Director of the Preschool) has the preschool humming along and seems to be a gifted fundraiser. Our custodian, **David McHaley**, picks up after us all and doesn't seem to mind when we track in snow. Faithful **Linda Keim** is at the organ each week, willing to try anything we suggest.

We continue to be blessed by the presence of no-longer-a-seminarian-but-not-yet-an-ordained-pastor **Baird Linke**. Baird is done with his coursework for the Master of Divinity degree and is awaiting his first call, and while he waits, he is willing to continue to serve us. During these late winter and early spring months he will be helping with preaching and worship leadership (including Holy Week), assisting the Hunger Team with the all-congregation book study they will be offering during Lent, putting

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together a calendar of adult education offerings for February through May, and continuing to strengthen the new young adult fellowship so they are able to continue after he leaves. He is a product of the ministry of Our Redeemer's and what a gift he has been to us this year.

As you can see, it's *easy to feel thankful* for those who serve us on staff.

Worship

Worship is the heart of a faith community, and it is through confessing our sins, hearing God's word, sharing the Lord's Supper, singing and praying together that we are strengthened for service in this world. It takes many staff and volunteer hours to prepare for good worship each week:

- planning for seasons and themes;
- choosing music and prepping the band or musical guests;
- preparing to preach and writing prayers;
- working with those who will read, pray, and assist;
- setting up the space, including communion for 250 each week;
- preparing the bulletin, slides, and live-streaming the service.

It is no wonder that we call our worship the liturgy (a fancy word that means "the work of the people"), because it takes a lot of people working together each week to make it happen.

You will see in Jason's report that **attendance** at our two weekly services has continued to grow steadily, and we are now slightly above pre-covid numbers. This puts us in the minority of congregations in our synod; most report that attendance is about 75% of pre-pandemic numbers. Most Sundays we have several first-time visitors/guests in worship with us, and we've been mindful to make sure the language we use for prayers and preaching is accessible, and that instructive comments are made throughout the service to help those who are new feel at home.

In addition to strong attendance at weekly worship, we continue to see significant numbers accessing our **online worship** through the Our Redeemer's YouTube channel. Fall and early winter of 2023, the average was 70 views a week. The formula for calculating online viewership is that you assume there are 1.5 people per view, so that weekly average translates into 105 people a week accessing worship online. That is a lot of folks joining us from afar! Not only are we serving those who are no longer able to attend in person, but having this option is keeping our regular worshippers more connected, as many of you have told me that you watch when you're not feeling well or out of town. (As an aside, this bitter cold weekend saw very low in-person attendance at worship, 103 between the two services. But in the first 24 hours

since then, there have been 124 views of our on-line service, which translates into 186 people who joined us via technology.) Staff and the new Technology Team have been in conversation about how to upgrade this group's viewing experience and make them feel more included in the Our Redeemer's community.

As I review our worship life together, it is *easy to feel thankful* for all who participate and the opportunity to serve beyond our sanctuary.

Changes and Growth

One of the difficult decisions we made this fall was to temporarily discontinue the **Wednesday evening worship service**. There was a time when this service was the best attended of the three offered each week, but even before covid created havoc in worship patterns, this service had declined significantly. As confirmation and youth group programming was reinstated in Fall 2021 there was no rebound in worship attendance, with many weeks having 30 or fewer present, and most youth arriving after worship. We couldn't justify the amount of staff time that was being dedicated to this, as it had a different sermon and music from Sunday, had a separate paid musician (pianist), and required the altar guild to set up and clean up communion a third time in the week. We did have a handful of families who faithfully attended that service, and I am happy that most have transitioned to coming on Sunday mornings instead, but we will continue to revisit our worship offerings, particularly in light of our continued growth in membership.

We have started two new fellowship groups this year, one for **young adults** (ages 21-35) and one for **singles over 40**. Thank you to Baird Linke and Brenda Olson for taking leadership on these new offerings. Both came into being because someone in the congregation wondered aloud about the possibility of trying something new, so if you read this and think we need a fill in the blank fellowship group, I'd be happy to help facilitate your leadership!

Several committees and teams have also been reconstituted or revved up their work in 2023. The **Personnel Committee** is deep into a review and update of the employee handbook. The **Stewardship Committee** has been meeting monthly, educating themselves and us on some stewardship basics, and has formulated a plan to encourage our increased generosity in 2024. The **Long-Range Planning Committee** is engaged in a review of our history, current trends in Helena, our last strategic plan, what the Holy Cow survey revealed about us, and developments we've seen in the Our Redeemer's community since the end of covid.

An **Ad Hoc Financial Analysis Team** met for several months, reviewing past budgets and giving, history, and making recommendations to Council.

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We have a new **Technology Team** evaluating our current use and equipment and looking ahead to upgrades in the sanctuary. They have already updated our three projector carts used for Sunday School, confirmation, youth group and adult education, and worked with our internet provider to greatly improve the speed of our internet and enhance the wifi network.

Our **membership** continues to grow, and would have been more significant in 2023 had my health allowed me to offer a spring new member orientation. Take a look at the list of people who have joined our fellowship this year and challenge yourself to meet as many as you can over the next couple of months. Let Lori Walter or me know if we can help you make connections.

Looking at the ways we've changed and grown in 2023, it is *easy to feel thankful*.

Hopes for 2024

Number one on the list for me is to become fully staffed again, with the **Associate Pastor** position filled. If I am being honest that is probably also number two, number three, and number four! There are so many parts of our life together that will benefit from the input, experience, and oversight that a second pastor will provide. Pastoral care, adult education, more creativity in worship, and management of our confirmation program come to mind immediately, but we will benefit in many other ways. Hold this in prayer, people of Our Redeemer's.

Council and I are closely monitoring our three **part-time programming staff** to make sure their jobs haven't expanded beyond what we are paying them for. All three are functioning at full capacity right now.

The February *Voice* will have information about a **Lenten book study** that the Hunger Team is spearheading (*Meeting Jesus at the Table* by Cynthia M. Campbell and Christine Coy Fohr). There will be many groups offered weekly throughout the five weeks of Lent to join together in Bible study, as we look at how Jesus gathered people to himself around food. We will provide books for all who want to participate, and Baird Linke and I will be preaching on themes from this book the Sundays in Lent. I am very hopeful that this will be a blessing to us all in our annual Lenten journey.

I will be encouraging us to turn some of our focus and dollars to **housing issues in Helena**. We have been engaged in a many-year process of studying and planning for the possibility of having a portion of our current property dedicated to much needed affordable housing. If this goes the way we envision, we will have

new neighbors and a host of new ministry opportunities in our own backyard. As we prepare for this, engaging more directly and intimately with some of the housing ministries in Helena will be good preparation for us. Steph Richardson is planning some service opportunities with Habitat for Humanity in the spring, God's Love is in dire need as they work to meet the needs of the unhoused in our community, and recently a new women's shelter has been approved by the city. There is a lot of good ministry to be done in this area.

I also hope that our amazing **feeding ministries** will continue. A ton of food from the garden, another thousand pounds of food given at the holidays, Kid Packs put together three out of four weeks each month, milk overflowing into 1200 homes a week during the school year. All this in 2023, plus whatever the suggested item that is being collected each month by Helena Food Share. Wow.

I have a **short list of other things** I hope for in 2024:

- a more formal process for helping those who join us in ministry to find a place in this community to share their gifts and make connections;
- a robust adult education calendar and more fellowship activities;
- facilitating our children and youth to help more with worship leadership;
- a women's retreat (I'm already working on this one);
- incorporating more of you who are musically inclined in worship;
- figuring out who is joining us for online worship and how to include them in our community in new ways;
- more interaction with our preschool families and our two scout troops;
- an updated Facility Use Policy as we balance the needs of our congregation with many requests from the greater Helena community.

So much good work to be done that it's *easy to feel thankful* for the opportunity to be God's people in this place.

Above all, my hope for 2024 is that you, beloved of the Lord, will continue to grow in knowledge and love of the God who created you, saves you, and works in and with you every day.

Thanks be to God for the many blessing that 2023 brought and to God be the glory as we engage in ministry in this place in 2024.

Pastor Trina Johnsten

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BAPTISMS

Date	Name	Officiant
1/6/2023	Caleb Gordon Peck	Pastor Brad Ulgenes
1/6/2023	Aiden Walter Peck	Pastor Brad Ulgenes
7/5/2023	Elmer Lee Strong	Pastor Trina Johnsten
8/20/2023	Luke Steven Liston	Pastor Trina Johnsten
9/3/2023	Brady David Swenson	Pastor Trina Johnsten
10/15/2023	Julia Michele Sinel-Barr	Pastor Trina Johnsten
10/22/2023	Olivia Louise Tackett	Pastor Trina Johnsten
11/26/2023	Dillon Richard Harris	Pastor Trina Johnsten

FIRST COMMUNION

Date	Name	Officiant
4/6/2023	Lauren Ann Alberts	Pastor Trina Johnsten
4/6/2023	Abbey Begger	Pastor Trina Johnsten
4/6/2023	Hildegard Fohnagy	Pastor Trina Johnsten
4/6/2023	Tenley June Forgey	Pastor Trina Johnsten
4/6/2023	Madeline Elizabeth Richards	Pastor Trina Johnsten
4/6/2023	Bryce Patrick Sampson	Pastor Trina Johnsten
4/6/2023	Trenton Arlo Selvig	Pastor Trina Johnsten

DEATHS/FUNERALS

Funeral date	Death date	Deceased	Officiant	Member
2/4/2023	1/26/2023	Florine Dorothy Hart	~~	Yes
2/25/2023	2/15/2023	Dora May Lindner	Pastor Keith Weatherford	Yes
2/25/2023	10/23/2022	Paavo Leinonen	LPAs Jeff & Jan Martin	No
4/15/2023	4/7/2023	Luke Robert Den Herder	Pastor Brad Ulgenes	Yes
4/15/2023	4/9/2023	Debbie Lynn Bruce	~~	Yes
5/26/2023	1/13/2023	Verna Gertrude Strand	LPA Jan Martin	Yes
8/16/2023	10/5/2022	Craig Rahman	LPAs Jeff & Jan Martin	No
no service	9/26/2023	Michael Rand	~~	Yes
spring 2024	10/27/2023	Joanne Schaller	~~	No
spring 2024	11/20/2023	Mary (Molly) Protheroe	~~	Yes
1/13/2024	12/9/2023	Lloyd Douglas Teigen	~~	Yes

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New Members		
7/9/2023	Laura & Charlie Gorman	Transfer ELCA
7/9/2023	Carol & Brian Landsverk	Affirmation of Faith
7/9/2023	Brenda Olson	Transfer ELCA
7/9/2023	Claire & Jack Palmer	Affirmation of Faith
7/9/2023	Melvin Schenck	Affirmation of Faith
12/3/2023	Lowell & Joan Anderson	Transfer ELCA
12/3/2023	Tamara & Larry Crowder	Transfer ELCA
12/3/2023	Nicole Evans	Transfer ELCA
12/3/2023	Chelsea Salas, Zaiden & Landon	Transfer ELCA
12/3/2023	Krystal Smith, Harper	Transfer ELCA
12/3/2023	Julie Mehl	Affirmation of Faith
12/31/2023	Liz, Lili, & Brooklyn Swenson	Affirmation of Faith
12/31/2023	Richard & Paula Marble	Affirmation of Faith
12/31/2023	Matthew & Aleisa Selvig	Affirmation of Faith
12/31/2023	Lonnie Cook	Affirmation of Faith

Members moved to Inactive or Removed		
8.3.23	John & Anna Doran & family	Inactive since 2/2019 not removed
8.3.23	Gary & Nancy Gates	Inactive since 2/2020 not removed
7.1.23	Kayleigh & Laura O'Bryant	Moved - removed no transfer
1.31.23	Kenny, Diedra, Kellen & Brekken Murray	Moved to Malta - No Transfer - Kellen is the only member - removed
1.13.23	Verna Strand	Removed by Death
1.26.23	Florine Hart	Removed by Death
2.15.23	Dora Lindner	Removed by Death
4.7.23	Luke Den Herder	Removed by Death
4.15.23	Debbie Bruce	Removed by Death
9.26.23	Mike Rand	Removed by Death
11.20.23	Mary Protheroe	Removed by Death
12.9.23	Lloyd Teigen	Removed by Death
2.20.23	Jim & Carrie Reynolds	Removed by Request
7.31.23	Jack & Lynnette, Cody & Carter Avery	Removed by Request
9.11.23	Mike & Pam, Jacob & Heather Yaeger	Removed by Request

2023 Congregational President's Report

It has been an honor this past year to serve you all - members and friends of Our Redeemer's - as part of your Congregation Council. That is my personal perspective, but I'm sure each Council member would agree. It is incredibly rewarding to serve a group of people who are committed to serving each other and to reaching out to serve others "because our Savior lives!" (as we profess in our mission statement). It is rewarding to serve people like you who serve in the power of God's Spirit with compassion, joy, and humility.

Just as transformation is central to the mission of the Church, serving this past year as Council President has transformed me. My perception of Our Redeemer's has been transformed by witnessing the countless acts of ministry and caring that so many of you do. The "priesthood of the believers" is alive and well here. Your vital sense of ownership and agency with respect to the ministries of our church have strengthened those characteristics in my own involvement. Your prayers and support have made me feel even more a part of a community of people who care deeply for each other and for the world. You all continue to inspire me.

I wish all these blessings for each of you and for every member of the Helena community and its surrounding neighborhoods. These blessings do come at a price. For the individual, the price includes lost free time and the normal frustrations of working with people who often see things in a different way. As more people contribute their gifts, the institution is also stretched and constantly reformed, needing to adapt and relinquish control. But that is as it should be. God's Spirit is characterized as wind and breath, whose very essence is movement and change. God's essence is relational. Jesus came to restore our relationship with God and one another. We cannot grow in the likeness of Jesus on our own; relationship is an essential ingredient of the Gospel. Our faith isn't faith until we put it into practice in community.

Thank you, all, for being a community that faithfully proclaims and embodies the power and grace of Our Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

Kevin Mathews, 2023 Council President

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Report of the Director of Children and Family Ministry Liz Swenson

Although this year was a year of change, I find myself feeling refreshed in this ministry and eagerly looking forward to the upcoming year of events with our preschool, elementary and middle school age youth. I have found comfort in this Bible verse from Romans: "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God - what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:1-2) God always has a plan for us and I want our youth to see that reflected in all that we do. As always I appreciate all of the wonderful volunteers and fellow ministry staff that help make it possible to serve the youth of Our Redeemer's. It's a blessing to lead our youngest youth in their faith journey!

Here are a few highlights from 2023:

Sunday School: We are blessed with a group of kids who are always anxious to learn more about Christ. Children age 3 through 5th grade participate in a Workshop Rotation Model. In this model children learn about a new Bible story on a four week rotation. Each week the children learn more deeply about the Bible story through art, science or cooking, games, and a movie. The kids love and look forward to this activity every week. This year we read and learned about the following Bible stories: Wise Men, David and Goliath, Holy Week, Creation, Noah's Ark, and Advent.

The Sunday School crew continues to grow with 23 children currently registered and at least five more who are new to us this year. As usual, it is refreshing to have such a large group of children. We are blessed to have several wonderful volunteers who are sharing their talents with us and serving the Our Redeemer's kids during Sunday School. Laura Gorman has taken over leading our Preschool/Kindergarten class, and has been finding a lot of joy in this. We are so blessed to have her on board. Jessica Salo continues to volunteer her time, and leads our oldest Sunday School learners (3rd-5th grade) with a weekly Bible study. Finally, Gretchen Krumm is sharing her gift of guitar with our Sunday School on the 2nd and 4th Sundays of the month during our opening music time.

Average attendance numbers for Sunday School in 2023:

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
9	11	11	10	14	10	12	12

KidTime: Children age 3 through 2nd grade have the opportunity to begin worship with their family and then, if they wish, be excused for about 20 minutes of children's activities, called KidTime. The curriculum is a lectionary

curriculum which follows the lesson being used during the church service. The children return to the sanctuary for communion and the conclusion of the service. Throughout the year there were over 50 children who joined us for KidTime. Not all of these kids attend regularly but it is important to note how many we serve in a year! This program continues all year long and continues to be a very popular educational choice for families. Thank you to Mary Robertson, Kathy Olson, Lisa Williams-Mathews, Trudy Burke and Kristi Antosh for volunteering to help me lead these lessons throughout the year!

Average attendance numbers for KidTime in 2023:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
8:30 am	5	6	7	5	5	6	5	4	6	7	4	7	5
							~~9:30am~~						
11:00 pm	3	5	4	5	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	3	4	3

Nursery: Our Nursery continues to be staffed for all families with young children. It is open every Sunday from 8:15am-Noon, as well as during special events throughout the week. For the first time since before Covid, the Nursery is being used on a regular basis. In the month of November we averaged four children in the Nursery each Sunday! Our nine Nursery attendants seem to be enjoying this change, and it helps to keep them busy and helps the time pass quickly during their shift. This year, we have been working on the attendants' interpersonal skills with parents and other adults who come into the Nursery. We want them to be better about presenting themselves so that parents feel comfortable and confident in leaving their children there. Additionally, we have focused on the attendants' priority while working which is caring for and playing with the children who are in the Nursery. We have a good group of Nursery attendants, and the number only continues to grow - there is a lot of interest with our youth for serving in this way. I am grateful to each of them for devoting their time and talents to the youngest youth of our congregation. Such a blessing!

Confirmation and Middle School Youth Group:

Confirmation Electives - January was a busy month for our Confirmation crew. Jackie and I partnered to prepare and plan activities throughout the month for the middle school youth to attend. Each one of these activities was an opportunity for these youth to step outside of their comfort zone to try something new, while also making connections with other adults in our church community. We encouraged all 25 middle schoolers to attend at least three events throughout the month. Some of our events were attended by both middle and high

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schoolers, since we invited both groups to events occurring on Wednesday nights (when we typically have middle and high school programming). Below is the attendance for each event.

Macarons - 5 Blankets - 25 Pottery - 6
 Kid Packs - 25 Bowling - 15 Ice Skating - 34
 Concessions (x2) – 12 /11

We had a blast, and the middle school youth really enjoyed these activities in the month of January. Finally we want to thank Kathy Olson and Ron Pecarina for obtaining Thrivent Action Team grants for us to fund these activities! It would not have been possible without this support.

Confirmation Class - In partnership with Dennis Trotter and Steph Richardson, we lead and design curriculum, lessons and activities for the Confirmation and middle school youth group. Dennis and I lead lessons on Wednesday evenings, so I will present Confirmation average numbers for Wednesdays and Steph will present Confirmation average numbers for Sundays.

In the winter/spring during Confirmation we focused on the following themes, stories and books of the Bible; Abraham and Isaac, Joseph, Ruth, Kings, 1&2 Samuel, Exile and The Return. We finished up with a recap of the Old Testament and were surprisingly impressed at everyone's memory and knowledge!

In the fall, we welcomed a new group of 6th graders into Confirmation. We have a total of 14 middle school age children registered for Confirmation. This fall during Confirmation class we started the New Testament and focused on the following themes, stories and books of the Bible; Jesus's Birth, John the Baptist, Jesus' Baptism, The Temptation of Jesus, and the Miracles of Jesus (Lazarus, Feeding of the 5,000, Water into Wine, Healing the Blind Man.) This group of middle schoolers, are very inquisitive and they get really interested in the small details of the stories. We find that we usually have more activities then we have time for due to all of the great questions that these youth have. They are a very engaged group, anxious to learn everything they can about Jesus' life.

Average attendance numbers for Wednesday Confirmation in 2023:

Wed	Feb	Mar	Apr	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
	11	11	11	6	6	8	8

FLBC Winter Middle School Retreat - In February, we went to Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp with 11 middle schoolers, six high schoolers and six volunteers/staff for the Confirmation Retreat. We enjoyed a weekend of fun

with fellowship and service together in the outdoors. The youth enjoyed learning more about Bible stories in Exodus as well as Esther. This retreat created some great bonding relationships as was apparent when we had our first confirmation class after the retreat - everyone was so excited to see each other and talk about the lasting memories they made up at FLBC!

Confirmation Weekend - In May we Confirmed ten, 8th graders! We held a banquet the Saturday before and we had eight confirmands and their families join us. During the Confirmation services the 8th graders were involved throughout the service as lectors, greeters and ushers. We had refreshments and cake after each service to celebrate our confirmands. It was a great celebration of their confirmation. Looking forward to 2024, we plan to offer only one Confirmation service at 11:00, and will discontinue the Confirmation Banquet, and in place of it will have a luncheon after the Confirmation service.

Middle School Fall Retreat - In October we rented a house in Cascade for the Middle School Retreat. We all had a great time! We had ten middle school age students join us for this very fun filled event. We enjoyed spending time with each other as well as playing nerf wars, doing an escape room (designed by Steph), sitting around the fire for a devotional, learning more about the story of Jonah, eating good food and of course watching a Halloween themed movie as a group! Dennis, Steph and I had the pleasure of accompanying this crew. We were also very grateful to Pastor Trina who went up ahead of all of us and cooked a delicious dinner that was ready and waiting for us when we got there! We all felt like this event went very smoothly and look forward to doing something similar next year.

Wednesday Night Dinner and Devotional - In September we started offering dinner to the middle and high school youth starting at 6:30 on Wednesday evenings. Steph has done most of the organizing of this including finding help to serve and clean-up dinner. After dinner, we all gather together for a short 15 minute devotional with prayer and songs. It is such a great way for youth to find a quiet time during the week to connect with God and pray. Steph has done a great job at leading this each week. We are finding that the youth really enjoy starting our time together in this way and it's a great way to bond and create lasting relationships.

Wednesday Night Service and Fellowship Projects:

Ice-Skating Night - In January all elementary, middle and high school youth went ice-skating at the Memorial Park skating rink. It was a great time for fellowship, hot drinks and fun. I invited all kids age 3-5th grade who are involved in Children and Family Ministry. There were ten elementary aged children who joined in the fun. We are

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very grateful for our Thrivent Action Team grant that helped to fund this event!

Lutheran World Relief Personal Care Kits - In April the elementary, middle and high school youth worked together to put personal care kits together for Lutheran World Relief. We were able to assemble over 100 kits.

Family Campus Clean-Up Day - In October the elementary, middle and high school youth worked together to clean up the ORLC campus. We filled in gopher holes, picked up garbage on Green Meadow, pulled weeds and stained the Gaga Ball Pit. It was a very successful event with 15 youth and ten adults in attendance.

Baking Service Project - In November the elementary, middle and high school youth got together to bake and decorate over 80 cookies, and make cards for the older adults in our congregation. Jane Peachy and Lori Bigwood-Pecarina graciously delivered the cards and cookies. This was a well attended event with 20 youth in attendance!

Christmas Party & Game Night - In December the elementary, middle and high school youth and their families got together to celebrate the Christmas season with gingerbread houses, ugly sweaters, Christmas trivia, Christmas music bingo, cookie decorating and pizza. There were 30 youth and adults in attendance. It was a great way to celebrate the season with our older youth.

First Communion: We had seven, 2nd-4th grade students attend our Communion 101 (Fed and Forgiven) class in April. We used the same lesson outline from last year that Pastor Trina created and Dennis Trotter led the lesson (since this was during the time when Pr. Trina was sick). The kids were constantly engaged and eager to learn more about Holy Communion. We were very excited to welcome all seven of these children for their First Communion on Maundy Thursday.

Looking forward to the future, we would like to adjust when we offer the Fed and Forgiven class as well as First Communion itself. We have historically offered it during Holy Week, which in Helena is also Spring Break. Families who travel for break tend to miss the opportunity to be involved in this experience - and we want to make this accessible to all of our families.

Children's Choir: Our Children's Choir performed regularly until Jason cut his time down to quarter time. Now that Jason is back, we hope to continue performing, especially during special occasions. In December we performed for the first time since June. The children sang *Away in a Manger* and *Go Tell it on the Mountain*. We had nine children perform!

Easter Sunday: As usual Easter was a very busy day at the church, especially for our youth! We had over 50 kids participate in the Easter Parade; in fact during the 11:00am service we ran out of tassels to give out (we have 30!) There were 18 Sunday School children who joined at offering to sing two songs led by Jason Callon; *Joy Down in Your Heart* and *Allelu Allelu*. Finally, I put together 60 sticker pages for youth of all ages to take during the worship service. Overall it was a very successful Easter for our youth.

Summer Youth Activities:

Vacation Bible School - In June we held Vacation Bible school for 66 children from around Helena and our church community. The theme was *Stellar-Shine Jesus' Light* (a space theme, so fun!) We had crafts, science projects, games, rocket launches, planetariums, music and more. It was a complete success. In addition to our 66 eager campers, we also had almost 50 volunteers who all dedicated their time, gifts and talents - none of this would have been possible without them! As a VBS we raised \$310.68, which went to ELCA World Hunger to buy three goats for families in need. Finally, I want to thank Bonner and Karen Armstrong for helping us to obtain a Thrivent Grant to fund our craft and science materials during VBS - this was greatly appreciated. It was another great year with lots of energy and eager faces, it seems that everyone truly had a great week!

The week after VBS, our team met and debriefed on the week. In the future we are planning to work on advertising this camp more widely - including getting an ad in the paper, sponsoring a Facebook event, sending out a neighborhood postcard, and ordering shirts for all campers and volunteers. As a team we are really hoping that we can get at least 100 (or more) registered campers for VBS.

We are already getting excited for VBS 2024! This year we plan to use a curriculum from the same company, called *Group*. The theme will be: *Scuba - diving into friendship with God*. Vacation Bible School will take place on June 10 -14, 2024 from 9:00am-12:00pm daily. We hope that you will join us.

Splash n' Bubbles Family Swim Night - In July we had a family swim night at Last Chance Splash! We asked families to bring soap donations, and in exchange we paid for their entrance into the water park. We had 50 people join us for this event. The only problem was that everyone was so spread out around the pool, that we didn't get to interact much. In the future we plan to have some way to gather everyone into one space (maybe for popsicles or a game) just so we get some time together to connect.

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Summer Movie Matinee - In June, July and August we gathered in the Great Room with pizza and popcorn to watch a movie. We showed; *Puss in Boots*, *Coco* and *Ratatouille*. We had an average of 22 people attend throughout the summer. During each event we enjoyed each other's company as well as lots of good food. It was a blast to host these this summer, we hope that it can continue to grow and that we can continue next summer.

Blessing of the Backpacks: In August we had a blessing of the backpacks milestone event during the last Sunday worship service before school started. We had about 15 children attend and we shared a small backpack token for each child's bag as a reminder of God's love. We also made bag tags for the Preschool. During their first chapel time, Steph and I helped to distribute these and bless their backpacks as well. As always this event brings so much life back to the church after the summer break.

Trunk or Treat: Trunk or Treat took place at the end of October. This year ORLC partnered with the Boy Scouts and St. John's Lutheran church to host this event. We had over 18 people volunteer their trunks, and one family volunteer to pass out hot dogs.. There were about 300+ children who came through (~500 with parents included). What a great outreach event. We are so thankful to everyone who donated candy and volunteered their trunk for this event. Thank you for making this event possible!

Walk through the Bible: Our annual Walk Through the Bible class and distribution of Bibles for 3rd graders and their families, took place in October. They were each very excited to receive both the Good News Bible and the Action Bible (a Bible that is designed like a comic book.) We had seven kids attend the class, and eight receive their Bible during worship. There were also a few who have received their Bibles and instruction since! It was a great event. It is a blessing that we are able to provide this to our youth at Our Redeemer's. Thank you

to WELCA for providing the Bibles each year. It is always fun to have this intimate and dedicated time with these youth to discuss their new Bible.

Since the Walk Through the Bible distribution I have given out an additional 12 Action Bibles to youth who are 4th grade and older, since they did not have the opportunity to receive one during their 3rd grade Walk Through the Bible class. I have put in two more orders for these Bibles since October, in hopes of getting an Action Bible to any youth 4th grade and up who desires one. Please let me know if you would like an Action Bible for your child - I have five more waiting to be distributed!

Children's Christmas Event: This event is designed for all ages, as a way to celebrate Christmas as well as focus on the reason for the season. We decorated gingerbread houses and cookies, played games, created crafts and drank hot cocoa. The event ended with our instant Christmas program. The children love dressing up to be a part of this, almost all of the kids chose a costume to dress up in. We had 11 families, and nine volunteers/staff members join us. I am so grateful to those who volunteered their time and talents during this event. This event continues to be such a fun way to celebrate the Christmas season at Our Redeemer's with our youth and families.

Faith Chest for Baptism: Faith Chests were given to newly baptized children in 2023. Each chest includes an age-appropriate book, and a Thrivent piggy bank. This year we gave out seven faith chests to those who were baptized at Our Redeemer's!

Christ's Peace,

Liz Swenson,
Director of Children and Family Ministry

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Report of the Interim Director of Youth Ministry Steph Richardson

*"God can do anything, you know—far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! He does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us."
~ Ephesians 3:20-21 (The Message)*

For the past six months that I have been on staff, I have had the pleasure to be a part of many youth and their families' lives in beautiful ways. I have loved to see families come together for fun, service, and learning! The staff at Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church has been amazing to work with. Here are some highlights from the past six months:

Fall Planning - Throughout July and August, Pastor Trina, Liz Swenson, Dennis Trotter, and I met several times to discuss fall programming as we were and are short an Associate Pastor to lead Confirmation. Altogether, we figured out the confirmation calendar of events, what should be offered every month (fellowship, service, and learning), who would teach, and what to teach. Liz and Dennis run the confirmation class on Wednesday night while I am with the High Schoolers. Dennis and I run the confirmation class on Sunday morning. The topics are determined by Pastor Trina.

What is different about Wednesday nights this year is that we are offering dinner and a small/intimate worship service in the Youth Loft before middle schoolers head to the gathering room for Confirmation class. This idea is to gather around a meal while everyone checks in with each other. Dinners make it easier for the parents to get them to church on a school night. I plan the meals, find volunteers, grocery shop and coordinate it all with the volunteers for that night. Sometimes I cook meals too.

The worship service has a casual feel. There is a simple structure that I put together and is easy to follow. There are a few songs that the youth are getting to know very well. These songs are mellow and as we sing them for many weeks, they become songs that they know by heart. Each week I found volunteers to play guitar during the worship service. Since Jason has come back on staff for more hours, he has really stepped into this role of playing guitar and leading a lot of the songs.

During the planning sessions with Pastor Trina, Liz, and Dennis, we concluded that not all Middle Schoolers want, or may not be ready for Confirmation. So, instead

of basing everything for Middle Schoolers around Confirmation, we would rebrand some of the offerings to be 'Middle School.'

Youth Ministry Questionnaire - In August, a questionnaire was mailed and emailed to all Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church families with Middle School students and High School students. The purpose of this questionnaire was to ask important questions regarding the youth ministry here at the church. This provided a reflection of the past and the desires for the future.

Most people expressed joy and appreciation for the youth ministry here of the past and where it can go to the future. A summary of what was found in the questionnaire is generally as many would expect. Parents and youth are involved in some, but not all activities. The most popular offerings that people participate in are social opportunities. It was seen reflected in most questionnaires that youth look for 'fun' and the food that comes with all offerings. Many youth want to have fun incorporated in educational opportunities as a way to get to know other youth outside of sports and school, and having it be something that their friends outside of the church might like to participate in. In addition to 'fun' and food, another very important aspect to youth is service opportunities. Many youth that are not concerned with finding friends at church, see that service work is the most valuable offering. Volunteering in the community and fundraising for charities fosters spiritual growth by showing how much difference one can make for others.

Some great things that should not change were heard repeatedly! Sunday school and Vacation Bible School were very positive and informative programs for their children coming into Middle School and the Confirmation program. In addition, the Confirmation content helped the youth understand the Bible, religion, and their faith better through education and the activities. Along with Sunday School, Vacation Bible School and Confirmation, Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp (FLBC) was another extremely strong area where youth find spiritual growth. It was said that FLBC is a 'home away from home.' Many said that FLBC is something that kickstarted their faith again, created a desire to worship and helped develop a closer relationship with God. Another area to

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point out that is going extremely well in the congregation is that adults of the congregation express sincere interest and care for the youth of the congregation. Youth have said that it is nice to have adults come up and talk to them. These caring adults keep in touch with them and show that they care about their lives.

Some reflections regarding improvements in youth programming were comments stating that there were no offerings for Middle Schoolers outside of Confirmation. Others said the youth are going to have a very difficult time transitioning from the previous Youth Director to the new one. Others said that youth activities are weird and only suited for a few youth and not all. The church service on Wednesday evenings was not well attended and made it feel like the church group was small. Dinner was also a problem for families, and adding dinner to Wednesday nights would help both the parents and bring youth together through a shared meal.

Regarding the name 'Safehouse,' overwhelmingly people thought the name gave off the wrong meaning. It made people think of a domestic violence shelter, children seeking safety from something or simply asking the question, Safe from what...?

The timeframe for the Wednesday evening offerings was mixed. Many families did not like the split timeframe for the ending of Middle Schoolers and High Schoolers, especially in the winter months with poor driving conditions. Others suggested Sunday afternoon offerings instead of Wednesday evening.

Many of these suggestions were implemented throughout the year, starting with how Wednesday nights are framed. The ending time for Wednesday evening is now the same across the board at 8pm. This provides students with time for homework and ease for parents picking up youth. Dinners will be included for all on Wednesday evenings, starting at 6:30pm when worship used to be scheduled. Instead of a worship in the sanctuary before confirmation and high school youth group, a 15-minute worship in a smaller, more intimate setting is being offered directly after dinner in the Youth Loft. The name Safehouse has been dropped, and is simply High School Youth Group. More social offerings and service work opportunities will be offered for all ages. For example, Habitat for Humanity service work. More examples of increased social offerings are Lock Ins, Retreats, and local social events. In addition, all youth are encouraged to invite friends to any and all events.

This congregation is doing a great job of fostering spiritual growth in the younger generation and providing a space for youth to feel welcomed and supported. It is nice to see the energy and desire for youth programming here in our congregation!

Confirmation on Sunday Mornings - On average, there are 4-5 youth that attend confirmation on Sunday mornings. This is a great group of kids that like to ask questions, enjoy being checked in on and like one another's company. Dennis does a great job of presenting the information in a way that the youth want to learn more and are engaged. Liz and I both come up with activities to go with the lesson to bond the youth closer.

On a side note, it is pretty cool to see the younger siblings wander up to the loft after Sunday school is over and check in up there as well. They feel very comfortable and invited to be part of the church youth community.

Blessing of the Backpacks - We had a great turnout at the beginning of the school year as we celebrated this milestone by presenting youth with backpack tags, blessing, and praying over them. We also presented backpack tags to all the preschool students during their first chapel of the school year. Liz took the lead on this and did a great job!

Flying Giant Night with St. John's Lutheran Church - Pastor Keith Weatherford and Gretchen Munding of St. John's Lutheran Church in Helena met with Pastor Trina, Liz and I in the beginning of the school year to discuss how we can help support each other. This conversation led to offering collaborative efforts in youth activities, Trunk-Or-Treat and VBS. The Flying Giant night was the start of this effort. It was a fun way for me to get to know some of the youth in the congregation. We had a total of 6 ORLC youth come to this event. If we were to do it again, I would open this up to families and have it at an earlier time during the day.

Middle School, Slip N' Slide Kickball - In the beginning of the school year, we had a Middle School Kickoff party. We played Slip N' Slide Kickball. This event was very well received by the families of Middle Schoolers. Liz and Dennis were the other adults that came to support the event and helped me navigate all the new families. The parents were very happy with the number of kids there, along with the conversation of where the ministry is going. They overwhelmingly said that the Middle School students did not have anything outside of confirmation and social events are needed for them. There was a total of 20 youth, plus their parents at this event. What a great start to the new school year!

Middle School Fall Retreat - Last year, this was a confirmation centered retreat with High Schoolers leading it. This year, it was just a Middle School Retreat. Pr. Trina, Dennis, Liz and I led it. In total, we had 10 Middle Schoolers join us at a house in Cascade, MT. I secured the location, organized the flow and structure of the retreat, communicated with the families, figured out meals and more. I designed an Escape Room to go with

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Dennis' Noah's Ark Bible study. The youth played Nerf Wars, were led through a devotional by Liz next to a campfire, watched a movie, ate a bunch of goodies and more!

High School, Nerf Wars and Escape Room - These two activities on the first two Wednesday nights at the church were geared to be soft kick-offs for High Schoolers. There were around ten youth that came for both of those two nights. Both activities were geared towards a broad audience of different interests.

High School Youth Group, Wednesday Nights - Wednesday evenings are packed with dinner, worship, devotional and activities. All of this is packed into an hour and a half. This year, we have been diving into devotionals surrounding popular music that you would have heard on the radio. We have looked into songs like, *Numb* by Linkin Park, *Learn to Fly* by the Foo Fighters, *The Sounds of Silence* by Disturbed, *Need a Favor* by Jelly Roll, *Beer with Jesus* by Thomas Rhett and more. I enjoy music and it is always surrounding us in and outside of the church walls. It has been fun to bring everyday life into faithful conversations. The attendance on Wednesday nights has been between 4-10 youth each night, with a total of 15 registered.

High School Lock-In - The lock-in was a success with FLBC staff here to support. The youth had a wonderful time, and the middle schoolers were asking when THEIR lock-in will be. We had a ton of fun games, like hungry human hippo, and great devotionals about God's creation. Finding chaperones for an event like this is always hard. Having FLBC here to support us made it possible. There was a total of seven High Schoolers, with three cancellations.

High School Winter Retreat - This retreat was cancelled in the end due to low numbers of youth registering (2 youth in total). It is possible that it was due to being scheduled between Christmas and New Years. We had reserved a house near Maverick Ski Area where we were planning to go skiing, sledding, soaking in a hot spring and delve into meaningful devotions. Everything was planned, but inevitably had to be cancelled. Maybe next year!

Family Offerings on Wednesday Nights -

Campus Clean Up: Youth and their families of all ages of Our Redeemer's came together to assist with service projects on our own campus. We

focused on staining the Ga-Ga Ball Pit, filling in gopher holes, weeding the landscaped areas, and picking up garbage in the field. There were a total of 17 youth that helped make this possible.

Holiday Cookie Baking Service Project: 20 Youth and eight adults of the congregation got together to bake cookies for the elderly of our congregation that do not get out as much. Parents helped make this possible by baking and keeping the flour contained. These cookies were delivered by members of the congregation that went to visit them. We had about 15 youth participating.

Christmas Party: Families were invited to celebrate the upcoming Christmas season together. We played Christmas Music Bingo, Christmas Trivia and more. Both events had about 20 people in attendance.

Trunk or Treat - We were able to hold Trunk or Treat for the community this fall, keeping the event entirely outside with trunks, a scavenger hunt, and cocoa and cider for all to enjoy. We partnered with St. John's Lutheran Church and Cub Scout Troop #207. There were about 20 trunks, and the kids had a wonderful time finding all the scavenger hunt rubber ducks. Thank you to all those who decorated their trunks and donated extra candy. Special thanks to Gretchen and Blair Krumm for making hot dogs, and the youth who staffed the scavenger hunt. It was an amazing outreach, with about 500 people passing through! Liz headed up the organizational piece to this event, and as always- she did a great job!

Fundraisers - Each year, youth work together to fundraise for summer youth trips, ski trips, Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp summer camp, and more! Here are the recaps of what has been done in the past six months.

Rock Picking - This fall, Northwestern Energy asked the church if the youth would be interested in picking rocks on a neighbor's property. This was hard work, but 6 youth and 6 adults helped get it done just before the rain hit. A donation of \$1000 was given to the youth program by Northwestern Energy after seeing all the hard work that was done for our neighbor.

Carroll College Concessions - This year, since I was new right at the time Sodexo came out with the

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Carroll College Concessions sign up, I missed out on signing up for as many opportunities as offered in the past. So far, we have served at one basketball game raising \$296.14. There are a few more evenings to come. The most surprising aspect of this has been seeing how excited the youth are to have something meaningful to be a part of. It is concrete and they have a defined job. Even Our Redeemer's youth that were at the game that evening ended up hanging out in the concessions area, just to be a part of it.

Christmas Poinsettias - This year, instead of doing the Christmas Wreath Fundraiser that is based out of Kalispell, we kept it local and did a poinsettia fundraiser with High Country Growers. With the congregation's support, \$687 was raised.

National Youth Gathering - I sent out emails, put an article in The Voice, personally asked kids and put it in the bulletin to see if any High Schoolers were interested in attending the ELCA National Youth Gathering over the summer of 2024. There was no interest except for one person. This youth has connected to St. John's Lutheran Church, and she is going to go with their group. Currently, I am seeking youth interested in going on an

outdoor adventure trip through FLBC this summer. Registration is still open for that.

The next six months -

I am looking forward to gathering interested youth and adults to be a part of a Youth Ministry Steering Team. This group will be reading *Youth are either leading or leaving* by Lyle Griner.

Leading the 6th-12th grade Winter Retreat, at Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp, in February.

Bringing youth to Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp, this summer!

In Him,

Stephanie Richardson

Interim Director of Youth Ministry

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Report of the Director of Worship and Music Jason Callon

Dear Council,

It is with joy that I write this report to the council and congregation, returning to a part-time position with the church after stepping back between June and December. I have begun a master's program to become a mental health counselor and that will take about three years to complete.

This last year has been a rollercoaster of struggles and times of great joy for us. It began with the installation of acoustic panels in the sanctuary, to make improvements upon our sound reinforcement in that space. This is an ongoing effort, but we have reached a *pretty good* place. The next step would be to invest in an all-new sound system at the cost of around \$30,000. I hope the current system will last a bit longer.

Pastor Trina's illness throughout the spring was a challenge, but I feel we came together and led each other through it with grace. The LPAs, Pastor Brad Ulgenes, and many others filled in gaps as they occurred. Ash Wednesday and the season of Lent were wonderfully worshipful times that included the telling of the Judas story through a drama called *The People vs. Judas Iscariot*. That was followed by a string trio on Palm Sunday, a worshipful holy week, and a wonderful Easter Sunday celebration. Our attendance numbers were down from previous years this last Easter, but othsaw the largest attendance since 2019.

From June through December, I took another full-time erwise we are trending upward significantly in attendance, as we will see. A notable exception is Maundy Thursday, which job working remotely as a construction estimator. It was during this time that I realized what I was truly being called to next, which is to study to become a mental health counselor. I was accepted to Grand Canyon University and started in December. After about three years I will have a master's degree and begin my supervision hours (3000 in total) for licensure to practice privately. I hope to work with high school students, families, and individuals and I also hope to continue working with the church. As I develop skills in this program I can bring them into my work here.

Christmas this year was awesome! Our attendance this year was 717, which was the highest since 2019 and is trending upward significantly from last year.

Holden Evening prayer during Lent averaged about 35 attendance, which is lower than years past. In December, the Carroll College choir and John Hermanson had an array of offerings for the Advent season that were all well attended, averaging about 60-70 per week. In the fall and winter, our Wednesday evening offering has been to middle and high schoolers in the Youth Loft. This quick 15-minute prayer service has been really meaningful to a lot of youth, I think.

Our average Sunday attendance is the highest since Covid, with 94 at 8:30am, 106 at 11:00am, and 148 during the combined summer worship service. This has been bolstered by many new members joining in 2023.

In 2024, I plan to continue to bring dynamic worship to the community, through thoughtfully planned worship, guest musicians (brass, strings, soloists, folk bands, jazz bands, etc.), dramas, and more.

Thank you for the faith you put in your ministry team!

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Report of the Interim Director of Our Redeemer's Lutheran Preschool Kristine Thatcher

Looking back to 1999, our preschool program began with just 22 children. Through the years our numbers have grown and stayed strong, and we have nurtured hundreds of children. Our current enrollment is 59.

Our teachers do an excellent job in structuring their classes to provide learning through both play and instructional methods. The children get along well, learn to help and understand each other, and hear the good news of God's love.

Highlights of the Year

- The beginning of January, the preschool web page was updated with new registration information and forms for the 2023-2024 school year. The end of January brought parent/teacher conferences. This provides a valuable opportunity to connect with the parents 1:1 and share progress as well as any areas that need a little more attention. Year-end statements were printed and given to families.
- Registration for the upcoming school year began in February. Currently enrolled families, alumni preschool families and congregation members were given the opportunity to enroll beginning February 7; the following week registration was opened to the general public. Plans began for the preschool Silent Auction to be held later in the spring and a March fundraiser with Crumbl Cookie was set. We scheduled our Family Fun Day at the Carousel; we had great attendance! These are typically scheduled one Friday a month and provide a nice opportunity for our preschool families to come together for an hour or two in an informal setting.
- During the month of March plans were finalized for the preschool Silent Auction fundraiser, and it was scheduled for April. Our Crumbl Cookie fundraiser brought in \$415! Dates were determined for the Summer Preschool Fun camps; teachers and an assistant were secured. A review of registrations for the upcoming preschool year showed 44 students were preregistered. Our Family Fun Day was at Exploration Works; good attendance and a fun time!
- The month of April was busy with the Silent Auction; this was an absolutely amazing fundraiser, bringing in \$4,145! We began preparations for the preschool art show in May, along with the annual preschool singing in church. T-shirts were ordered for summer camp attendees. Our preschool team reviewed our curriculum and made minor adjustments. An online survey of our preschool program was set up and parents were encouraged to participate and give their feedback.
- May concluded the end of another successful school year. The art show was a hit, and it is always rewarding to see how much the children have advanced in their skills over the course of nine months. Preschool singing in church was fun and well received. Preregistration for fall was at 50 children. Summer camps were filling up quickly. Preschool budget for the upcoming year was approved. We received 34 survey responses, all of which were very supportive of our program and staff.
- June and July were busy with the Summer Fun Camps. Four sessions were offered, two in June and two in July. The camps provide a week each of morning indoor and outdoor play. The children enjoy crafts and activities, interacting with their friends, and meeting and making new friends. This is also an important fund raiser for our Preschool; we netted \$1,300. Preschool registration notices were posted at the Helena Library and various businesses; emails were sent to Helena area churches advising of our preschool and requesting their referral to our program for any parents looking for a preschool. An informational preschool letter along with a welcoming letter from Pastor Trina were sent to registered families.

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- August started with updating the Preschool web page and refreshing the layout. Orientation packets were mailed to the parents of the 61 registered children. Orientation meetings were scheduled and held with the parents and their child at the end of the month.
- In September classes got off to a good start; students and teachers were eager to begin the year! We took advantage of the beautiful fall weather and had a great turn out for our first Family Fun Day at Spring Meadow Park.

Many families choose to sign their child up to participate in Lunch Bunch. This extends their time at preschool a little longer and gives the children the opportunity to eat and play with their peers, including friends from other classes. It also gives parents the flexibility to pick their children up a little later in the morning or drop them off a little earlier in the afternoon. It is a popular option, offered M-Th from 11:00-12:15; volunteers to assist with the oversight are a big help!

- October was our first preschool fund raiser for the year, with Panda Express. Great support was once again given and we received \$835! The East Helena fire chief and an additional firefighter came with their fire truck and gave an informative and fun presentation to the children. As Halloween approached, the children practiced little skits. They enjoyed wearing their costumes while their parents watched their Halloween programs; a good turn out and fun! We rolled our Family Fun Day into Trunk or Treat; this worked exceptionally well.

Fire and earthquake safety drills were done by all classes this month.

- November brought opportunity for sharing; our preschool families participated in the Food Share drive here at Our Redeemer's. Their contributions averaged three items per child. We were blessed to receive a \$1,500 fundraiser donation! This came from Tracy and Mark Moseman giving a percentage of their November sales at Prestige Automotive to our preschool. The support for our preschool is so greatly appreciated. This month for Family Fun Day we brought families together to watch two Thanksgiving cartoons, *Berenstain Bears* and *Caillou*; families enjoy this "down time" together, and it grows relationships.
- The children so enjoyed December, the crafts, the stories and songs. They worked diligently at preparing for their Christmas programs and did an excellent job! Parent and family turn out for the programs was fantastic. Our Family Fun Day of Christmas caroling was led by none other than Kevin and Lisa Mathews! They did a super job and all the children had a great time singing and dancing!

We are extremely fortunate to be able to provide this service and program to our community. It is a blessing and a joy for each of us that have the opportunity to be a part of Our Redeemer's Preschool. This ministry makes a very positive influence on these children. We could not do this without the support from the Council and our congregation. **Our heartfelt thanks is extended to all.**

Peace and Blessings,

Kristine Thatcher, Interim Director

Marie Grissom, Teacher

Alenna Maw, Teacher

Wendy Vukonich, Teacher

Kristen Sapp, Lunch Bunch Assistant

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2023 Annual Report of the Women of the ELCA (WELCA)

WELCA embraces all kinds of ministries that support our mission of mobilizing women to act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ. There is a place for you in Women of the ELCA. We meet together for fellowship, growth and service. Called to discipleship in Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves to grow in faith, affirm our gifts, support one another in our callings, engage in ministry and action, and promote healing and wholeness in the church, society and the world. All women who are members of Our Redeemer's are also members of WELCA. All women are invited to attend WELCA functions and Bible studies.

Conferences and clusters are groupings of congregations within a synodical organization. While they have no legislative responsibilities, conferences and clusters provide learning opportunities through leadership development, community building, stewardship education, networks for communication and opportunities for joint ministry and action with the guidance of the SWO. The **synodical women's organizations (SWOs)** establish a partnership with units in their geographic areas and with the churchwide women's organization. **SWOs** exist to support women in congregations. Each SWO has a board whose members are elected at an annual or biennial convention by voting members from units. Our church is part of the Great Divide Cluster. The Montana SWO Newsletters are **FREE** to all women. Just email your name, physical address, phone number and email address to the newsletter editor. Valerie Van Voast, MT SWO Newsletter editor at valvoast@live.com. In addition to receiving the newsletter four times a year, email subscribers also receive *The Scoop*, which contains the latest news of the organization.

At Our Redeemer's we offer discipleship through our Bible study, which is one of our core activities. This past year there were two Bible study groups which met monthly and in the summer months the two groups joined together for fellowship and study. Last fall we voted to combine our two studies into one as our numbers were growing smaller. Our WELCA Bible study meets the third Wednesday of each month at 1:00pm at the church. There are other Bible study groups within our church also.

Our quilting group meets weekly to make quilts for Lutheran World Relief (LWR) and was very busy this past year making quilts to send off to LWR. During the year we coordinated the collection of items for Lutheran World Relief Kits and in May we sent out 200 LWR quilts, 99 Baby Care Kits, 120 Personal Care Kits and 159 School Kits. Our Sew in Love service group also meets weekly on Thursday mornings to make items for the women and children at the Friendship Center and YWCA.

Our Funeral Reception committee provides meals for funerals that are held at the church. Our funeral receptions have been on the decline due to funeral homes changing how they operate. This has definitely affected our service to our members through funerals and luncheons.

Our fundraising efforts this year involved only one event, the Holiday Bazaar & Bake Sale that happened the first weekend of December. We were blessed with great helpers for this event and realized over \$6,043 in income from that event. With this income we continue to purchase Bibles and page tabs for our third grade Sunday School students, sponsor scholarships for our youth attending Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp as well as offer a college scholarship for any student wanting to attend a church-affiliated college. We also provide financial assistance to the Our Redeemer's Emergency Assistance Fund, Lutheran World Relief and several local charities like Helena Food Share, YWCA, Family Promise, God's Love for example.

We also coordinated the "Thinking of You" packages for our two seminarians, Baird Linke and Shawn Juers through the spring of 2023.

WELCA Board meets the second Tuesday of the month at 10:30am in room AD-1 and we invite all interested women to attend any of our meetings. We currently are looking for an additional person to serve on the WELCA board to help us with planning, events and leadership. Please contact any one of these members should you be interested in serving. Our current board members are Charlene Mayala, Jan Martin, Hildegard Krumm and Kay Patterson.

In Christ's service,
Charlene Mayala, WELCA President

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2023 Annual WELCA Treasurer's Report

Beginning Balance	\$10,318.23
Income	
Circle Offering	\$444.99
Pool of Living Water	\$35.49
Thank Offering	\$463.00
Donations	\$25.00
Winter Bazaar	\$6,043.51
High School Donation	\$318.00
Interest	\$1.76
Total Income	\$7,331.75
Expenses	
Synod	
Circle Offering	\$237.49
Pool of Living Water	
Thank Offering	\$463.00
Our Redeemer's	
Bibles	\$95.92
FLBC Camperships	\$0.00
Vacation Bible School	\$400.00
Middle School Retreat	\$100.00
Quilt Supplies	\$409.81
LWR shipping & Donation	\$536.50
Sew in Love	\$568.00
Fund Raising Expenses	\$752.20
Postage and Paper	\$0.00
Donations	
Family Promise	\$400.00
Gods Love	\$400.00
Lutheran World Relief	\$400.00
FLBC	\$400.00
Total Expenses	\$5,162.92
Bank Balance 12/31/23	\$12,487.06

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2023 Perpetual Fund Committee

Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church (ORLC) established an endowment fund titled Perpetual Fund to receive and administer gifts from wills and other bequests in January 1991. Gifts are invested with income earned from the investments available for grants as approved by the Perpetual Fund trustees. Trustees are appointed by the ORLC congregational Council for a three-year term and can serve only two consecutive terms. Current Trustees are Karen Caplis, Christopher May, Darcie Hess, Jim Penner, and Lori Chase.

There are two sub-funds of the Perpetual Fund, a Facility Debt/Service Fund, and a Seminary Scholarship Fund. The Perpetual Fund trustees announce the availability of grants in the church bulletin, and Voice during the month of April. Grant applications are reviewed with approved grants funded thereafter. The funds' investment balances at the end of the year can be found in the investment category of the balance sheet in the annual financial report.

PERPETUAL FUND: SEMINARY SCHOLARSHIP FUND:

*Trustees approved grants for ORLC seminarians Baird Linke, who is nearing graduation from Wartburg Theological Seminary, and Shawn Juers, who is also attending Wartburg.

PERPETUAL FUND: ENDOWMENT FUND:

*Trustees approved a one-time grant totaling \$3,000 from Perpetual Fund's general fund to the Hunger Team for matching funds for the summer milk campaign.

*Trustees approved a \$2,000 grant from the Perpetual Fund's general fund to Pastor Trina, for two postcard mailing campaigns, which highlighted summer activities, Advent Lessons/Carols and Christmas Eve/Christmas Day services.

Respectfully submitted,

Lori Chase, Chair

2023 Gifts and Memorials Committee Report

The Gifts and Memorials Committee did not meet in 2023. The beginning balance of the Gifts and Memorials Account was \$13,931.48. At the end of the year the balance was \$12,868.71. One expenditure was made in the amount of \$2,413.30 for a new Altar Parament.

The Committee is short one member.

Respectfully submitted,

Ingrid Childress
Autumn Keller

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2023 Stewardship (formerly Generosity) Committee

The committee in March of 2022 advised the congregational council to forgo paying \$25,000 for an outside consultant to conduct another Building Fund Capital Campaign. Subsequently, the council passed on the expenditure and committee members contacted donors with a request to continue their commitment to the Building Fund. Committee members thank all building fund donors for their continued effort to help pay the monthly mortgage of \$10,903. Building Fund monies, including mortgage reserves and reserves for building Horseshoe Road, are kept separate from the Ministry Fund.

In January 2023, the Stewardship Committee brought Margie Fiedler, Executive Director at Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp to Helena to preach and update the congregation on camp activities. Also during January, the committee sponsored a three-week adult education series entitled *Fed by Ravens*, addressing the issues of stewardship and generosity.

In the spring the committee sponsored seminars on financial literacy and financial planning, and the Online Giving function at "ourredeemeralives.org" was upgraded. In August, September, and October ministry moments were presented at Sunday services explaining the "We Give" statements that we repeat after collecting the offering.

Voice articles were published during the year addressing tax efficient ways to donate and a November article talked about the positiveness at ORLC.

Jan Martin, Craig Erickson, and Ingrid Childress did a skit reminding us about recurring charges on our bills that might no longer be needed. Just in time for Christmas, a QR code was added to the bulletin. All this effort was to relate financial management principles to our relationship with stewardship and congregational giving.

The Stewardship Committee extends a very heartfelt and sincere thank you for your generosity in 2023. Your prayers, support, and participation have truly made a difference. Your stewardship has blessed this congregation, this community, and the world at large!

Your generosity has blessed this congregation by providing ministry, hope, comfort, guidance and fellowship. Sixty-five ORLC groups supported God's work in this place. Your time and talents and donations ensured that the core values of the Church were realized. In the past year, 27 new members joined, eight have been baptized, and ten have been confirmed. Your stewardship has allowed ORLC to minister to one another through worship, fellowship, children and youth education, adult education and Bible studies, caring support, and grief support.

Your commitment to the Word is evident in your generosity to the community. You have fed the hungry, provided shelter and hospitality for the unsheltered, and shown compassion and care for those who are vulnerable. You gave over 3,000 pounds of food to Helena Food Share. Two thousand pounds of that food was grown in our own garden by our own members. Donations of \$22,650 to the milk campaign provided a year's worth of milk for Kid Packs. Volunteers assembled 25,500 Kid Packs with nutritious snacks for school children who experience hunger. The Sew-in-Love group generously made personal care items, toys, hats, and gifts for the women at the Friendship Center who have experienced domestic abuse. Your donations also provided essentials, quilts, and money to God's Love. Your gifts of time and money provided shelter, food, and company to families through Family Promise and to the displaced Iron Front renters. Since our Preschool began, we have been blessed to nurture hundreds of children; learning, growing and playing at Our Redeemer's Preschool.

The world at large has also benefitted from your gifts. Through Lutheran World Relief, we provided quilts, school kits, personal care kits, and baby care kits to families around the world. More than 200 quilts were made by Our Redeemer's quilters for Lutheran World Relief. Our Redeemer's members purchased Bibles for distribution around the globe, and gave generously to the World Hunger Appeal, and ELCA Disaster Relief in 2023.

Thank you for blessing our church, our community, and the world with your time, talents, and treasures. You truly make a difference!

Blessings to you in this New Year.

Craig Erickson, co-chair

Jim Penner, co-chair

Karen Armstrong

Ingrid Childress

Gary Fischer

Pastor Trina Johnsten

Jan Martin

Kevin Mathews

Kris Thatcher

Tracey Tintinger

Dennis Trotter

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2023 Personnel Committee Report

The Personnel Committee has met frequently to amend and update the Personnel Policy Manual to ensure policies, procedures, and processes are in place to support church staff. The members of the committee are Lynda Hanson, Lori Chase, Sharon Haugen, and David Carlson. We are pleased to have the knowledge Lori brings from her many experiences at Our Redeemer's and the perspective of our newer members, Sharon and Dave. They both bring expertise from their former careers that is valuable as we incorporate necessary new policies.

As the world has changed, other areas need attention and inclusion in the Manual, i.e. technology use, document preservation, etc. The more we examine the document, the more we see areas that need attention. It is in that vein that we are working to develop the most comprehensive and effective Personnel Policy Manual that is compliant with state and federal labor laws. In years past, the Committee has reviewed and written job descriptions, advertised, interviewed and recommended hiring for certain positions, met with staff and reviewed work in relation to the job description, prepared a salary merit increase schedule, assisted the preschool board with by-law changes, and assigned a member to meet with staff throughout the year as a liaison, among other things.

Some of these duties are not the purview of the Personnel Committee as indicated in the Constitution for Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church. It is to "function as an advisory group regarding responsibilities of human resources matters." This includes, in part, the review and development of policies with submission to the Council for approval, assisting the Council in researching annual compensation and benefit recommendations for designated staff, and conducting surveys and research that affirms and promotes compassionate human resource policies enabling the recruitment and retention of highly qualified ministry leaders and staff." It is the desire of this Committee to continue our work to strengthen the "partnership role of staff and the congregation to meet ministry goals."

Lynda Hanson, chair	Dave Carlson
Lori Chase	Sharon Haugen

2023 Financial Review Committee

The Financial Review Committee is annually re-established by the Council President and met periodically in 2023. Committee members reviewed documents pertaining to the church's financial status regularly, advised the Council with respect to budget issues, advised the Council Treasurer on bookkeeping issues and proper accounting procedures, and responded to the Audit Committee's annual review. The Committee routinely reported recommendations regarding financial matters to the Church Council. The Executive Committee members Lynn Voss, Ingrid Childress, Tracy Mossman, Kevin Mathews, Linda Nelson, Tracey Tintinger, and Pastor Trina Johnsten served as the Financial Review Committee. Sarah Magee attended meetings as a non-voting member.

In Christ's Service,
Tracey Tintinger
Council Treasurer

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2023 Hunger Team

The Hunger Team expresses its gratitude to the congregation for support of its endeavors. You have given generously of your time and money to help our neighbors in the community.

Helena Food Share

When we put out the call for raising \$21,000 for the Helena Food Share summer milk campaign, you poured out your hearts and your pocketbooks for a total of \$22,591.95. That amount includes \$3000 in matching funds from the Perpetual Funds committee and \$7000 in matching funds from the Town Pump Foundation. This donation allowed us to provide all the milk for the kid packs program for the 2023-24 school year.

In addition to these dollars, dozens of you continue to assemble Kid Packs on the first three Tuesdays of each month. During the 2022-23 school year that amounted to 510 hours of time, assembling 25,592 bags and filling 3199 crates. Approximately 44,000 kid packs were distributed during that year. Just as many, and probably more, will be assembled during the present school year.

You also donated over 1000 pounds of food for the Holiday Food Drive, in addition to the many monthly donations of granola bars, fruit snacks, popcorn, and fruit cups throughout the school year. And the garden yielded 2000 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables for the Helena Food Share pantry.

Community Garden

The Hunger Team worked alongside the Boy Scouts, Carroll College students, Master Gardeners, Vacation Bible School attendees, and other members of the congregation throughout the summer and fall months. These folks helped to plant, weed, and harvest so that a bountiful supply of fresh produce could be donated to Helena Food Share. The Hunger Team is presently looking for a garden manager for the 2024 season, as Vicki Downhour will no longer be available for that task.

Family Promise

Our Redeemer's continues to host Family Promise guests each quarter. Your generous gifts of time and talents make this possible. The Sew-in-Love group donated several quilts and numerous travel bags. Others of you have prepared meals, set up and torn down rooms for our guests, and served as overnight hosts. Kathy Olson and Phyllis Michelson serve as our volunteer coordinators, and they are always in need of more hands to assist with these tasks. The Hunger Team also hosted a table of fresh watermelon for the Comfort Food Challenge. This year's Comfort Food Challenge took place at the Lewis and Clark County Fairgrounds.

God's Love

The congregation continues to respond to needs at God's Love, Helena's homeless shelter. Your generous donations of cleaning supplies, clothing, toiletry items, feminine hygiene products, quilts, and food supplies have been greatly appreciated. God's Love continues to provide emergency shelter, expanding beyond its capacity during the winter months. They could not begin to provide these services without generous contributions from folks like you.

Kendra Wilde Endowment Fund

The Kendra Wilde Hunger Endowment Fund continues to provide emergency services for our community. This year the Hunger Team donated \$589.60 to the Helena Community Foundation (assisting displaced renters at Iron Front following a fire) and also \$294.80 to God's Love. You may continue to donate to this fund by writing checks to ORLC and listing Wilde Hunger Endowment Fund on the memo line.

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Report of the Audit Committee

Dear Church Council:

The financial audit of Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church (ORLC) for calendar year 2022 was conducted by Herb Kulow, Steve Keller, Mike Burke and Ingrid Childress.

The purpose of this internal audit is intended to provide the oversight necessary to promote a strong financial control environment and to afford reasonable assurance that good stewardship is being used in handling and accounting for the assets of the congregation. It was not an audit performed by professionals in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles but rather following the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Congregational Audit Guide.

The following areas were reviewed:

- Bank reconciliations, petty cash, offering counting, fund designation, financial reporting, signature control, documentation and process controls, payment controls, vendor payment controls, purchase orders, vendor payments, governance and administration, notes payable, payroll, independent contractors, insurance, and financial reporting
- Working papers, attachments, emails, and correspondence of the auditors are available with the final audit report in the church's office

Bank Reconciliation

Reviewed bank statements for beginning and ending balances, checked monthly balances, compared book balance to trial balance, performed a balance for the month of October, reviewed signatures on October disbursements.

No material discrepancies or exceptions were found.

Recommendation

No action is necessary.

Petty Cash

A review of the petty cash funds was conducted.

Finding

As of December 31, 2022 the balance sheet of ORLC showed a balance of \$50.00 outstanding in petty cash. According to Petty Cash Fund, as of December 31, 2022 the remaining cash in the fund was \$18.08.

Recommendation

The actual unspent and outstanding cash in the Petty Cash Fund should be presented on the year-end balance sheet of ORLC or the church can bring the operating cash balance of petty cash up to \$50.00 prior to the end of the calendar year.

Offerings & Offering Counting

Reviewed the offerings taken on February 13th, April 17th, May 1st, June 12th, October 9th, and December 18th, 2022. The offerings appeared to follow the Money Counting Policy procedure with signed counting forms from the people counting the money. The offerings appeared to have been designated to the appropriate church and donor accounts.

No material discrepancies or exceptions were found.

Recommendation

No action is necessary.

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Designated Funds & Financial Reporting

Reviewed ORLC's balance sheet and dedicated accounts for 12 months of 2022.

No discrepancies or exceptions were found.

Recommendation

No action necessary.

Disbursements

ORLC's signatures and disbursement of monies for payment of various operations was conducted.

Finding

A detailed review of all disbursements for the months of March, July, and September of 2022 were reviewed for accuracy, timely payment, duplication of payment, payment authorization, and appropriate documentation for the expenditure. Also reviewed was the access to check stock, checks signed in advance, and signature authorization. The check stock is kept under lock and key with limited access by authorized personnel; there were no checks signed in advance of being issued; and the checks reviewed for signature all appeared to be in good order. Although there were no significant findings, the following items should be noted:

- Review of the paper files for each month showed on several occasions missing invoices/documentation for the expenditure listed in the detailed ledger. This included missing journal entries, as well as, check stubs for the checks that were written.
- Likewise, on occasion documentation was placed in the paper file but did not correspond to the detail ledger, i.e., there was not an entry on the detailed ledger for the invoice/check.
- Approval for each expenditure appears to be given by the person making the purchase without oversight by another person to ensure the expenditure is appropriate. This could lend itself to unintended or inappropriate purchases.

Recommendation

The supporting documentation in the paper file should match the detailed ledger with a one-to-one correlation. Missing invoices/receipts should be simply explained and accounted for by the person making the purchase with the written documentation placed in the paper file. The purchasing policy should be reviewed to ensure the ability to make unintended or inappropriate purchases is limited to the extent reasonable.

Response

Sarah Magee spoke with Steve Keller and all missing/unmatched items were found or explained so they both felt comfortable that disbursements were handled properly.

Governance and Administration

A review of Fixed Assets accounts was completed from December 31, 2021 to December 31, 2022 with both showing a balance of \$4,467,044.91. There were no authorized expenditures for the facility in the church council minutes, which substantiates no change in the Fixed Asset total.

Recommendation

No action is necessary.

Notes Payable

On November 8, 2023 a phone call was made by the Audit Committee to Devin Burg who is ORLC's account manager with Mission Investments, Chicago, IL, the holder of the note and mortgage on ORLC real property, requesting verification of the principal balance of ORLC's note as of December 31, 2022. This phone call was followed up with an email to Mr. Burg from the Audit Committee. Mr. Burg replied the same day indicating their records show an outstanding principal loan balance of \$1,246,708.95. Their note balance agrees with the Note Payable balance sheet as of December 31, 2022.

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Recommendation

No action is necessary.

Payroll

Payroll, employment tax payments, and unemployment taxes were all sampled. No material discrepancies or exceptions were found.

Recommendation

No action is necessary.

Independent Contractors

A review was done of contractors and ORLC did have one independent contractor in 2022 that cleaned the church's windows, the cost was under the IRS \$600.00 reporting floor and as a result ORLC was not required to issue a 1099.

Recommendation

No action is necessary.

Insurance

Conducted a review of insurance policies.

Finding

Review of the insurance policy for the church building, outbuildings, land, and contents of the building all appear to be adequate. The church building appears to have an insured value of \$4,205,567 with the contents of the building being insured at \$755,580 and a separate rider for the church piano of \$108,000. The policy appears to include both flood and earthquake insurance. The one change that was noted was the Unintentional Under Insurance coverage changed from 125% of the stated value to 115% of the stated value.

Recommendation

With land and property values continuing to have a rapid growth rate; the value of the church, the outbuildings, land, and the contents of the church could exceed the Unintentional Under Insurance amount with the new reduced value of 115%. Continue to monitor the overall value of the church and its appurtenances to ensure the stated value will cover the replacement costs if a catastrophic event should occur.

Future Audits

1. We recommend that a professional audit of all ORLC's financial transactions and assets be completed. The ELCA Audit Guide suggests congregations with annual receipts in excess of approximately \$400,000 should seriously consider engaging an outside auditing firm to perform an organizational audit. Per the ORLC Constitution it states that an outside audit shall be done minimally every five years.
2. If not already completed, an inventory of physical assets, and a process to track and maintain the current inventory of assets should be completed.

We thank all the staff members for their cooperation and assistance in the performance of the 2022 audit and especially recognize Sarah Magee and Lori Walter for their prompt response to the numerous requests we made while conducting this audit.

Respectfully submitted,

Herb Kulow, Steve Keller, Mike Burke, and Ingrid Childress

Property Development Team Report - 2023

The development planning process, funded through a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program, produced a Preliminary Architectural Report (PAR) in June of 2022. The full PAR is still available for reading on the church website under the "Happenings" tab and Property Development drop-down.

On January 20, 2023, Rocky Mountain Development Council (RMDC), acting as proposed lead developer for our property development project, made official application to the city for a portion of the available ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funding. RMDC was one of seven agencies who filled out Letters of Intent for ARPA funds and were invited to submit a full application. At a meeting held March 13, the Helena City Commission voted to allot \$1.58 million of their ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funding to the Our Redeemer's housing project. This was a very generous commitment by city government to our project which is encouraging and thank you letters were issued by the church council to all commission members and the mayor. While this was an encouraging start, the allotment fell short of the \$2.4 million that was being requested to cover property acquisition and the installation of Horseshoe Bend – both necessary steps in preparing the property for development. This means that Our Redeemer's and our housing partners are still seeking and assessing funding solutions for getting close to this \$2.4 million mark to kick-start the project.

It is likely that legislation passed during this latest legislative session will change the expected process for subdivision, simplifying and shortening the process required prior to sale of a portion of the ORLC property to RMDC. SB 170 allows for an administrative minor subdivision process for properties located in an area subject to and complying with zoning regulations, have a letter of commitment from the municipality to serve the property with water and sewer service, have physical access to each lot, and do not require a variance. The administrative minor subdivision is exempt from several of the requirements of a typical subdivision process, thus greatly shortening and simplifying this process. Our consulting engineer believes that the first subdivision of the ORLC property to prepare the portion of the property for sale to RMDC can comply with this simplified subdivision process. Members of the property development team have met with the city planning department about this new legislation and the planning department is developing an updated application for this administrative minor subdivision process.

Members of the property development team have met with the church's attorney who has drafted preliminary language for a buy-sell agreement, outlining each party's obligations and expectations. These documents are currently in review by the property development team before moving on to the church council for review.

Any negotiated sale of the property will require approval by congregational vote.

During the summer of 2023, Northwestern Energy replaced the high-pressure gas line that runs diagonally across the ORLC property. The new line was located 15' north of the old line and the corresponding 30' easement for the pipe was revised after installation to keep the pipe at the centerline of the easement. This will require some rework of the concept housing layout completed for the PAR (Preliminary Architectural Report) but should not negatively impact the overall concept.

We understand it is a long process that requires both patience and stamina, but the team is motivated by the future benefits the development would provide both our community and our congregation.

Property Development Team

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2023 Creation Care Team

The Creation Care Team began its work in 2023 by hosting a three-week educational series on Eco-theology on Wednesday evenings during Lent. Approximately 20 people participated in the series led by Nelson Bock.

We created and led an Earth Day Sunday worship service on April 23.

On September 1 we led the day-long prayer vigil for the congregation as part of the Global Day of Prayer for Creation initiated by Pope Francis in 2015, in conjunction with the release of his pastoral letter on care for creation, "Laudate Si"

This Fall we joined the Montana Interfaith Power and Light Green Team initiative, which will include regular Zoom meetings with MT-IPL staff and members of other congregational Green Teams from around the state to share ideas, resources, and opportunities for action and advocacy.

Two members of our Creation Care Team have also joined a new interfaith creation care group in Helena which strives also to provide mutual support, ideas and resources, and opportunities for action and advocacy within the Helena community.

Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church Creation Team convener Nelson Bock also has continued to pursue resources for retrofitting the lighting fixtures in our church building in order to switch from fluorescent bulbs to more efficient and longer-lived LEDs.

Right now our team consists of Nelson Bock, Tom Naegle, Phillis Michelson, Brad Ulgenes, Elaine Ulgenes, and Frank Gessaman. We would love to have additional members of Our Redeemer's join us. Please contact Nelson at 720-838-8914 or one of the other team members.

In Christ,

Nelson Bock, for the Creation Care Team.

Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp

2023 ANNUAL REPORT SUMMARY

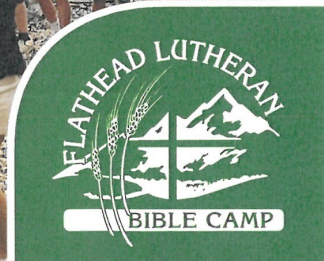
"Thank you for the incredible generosity and hospitality. We had a wonderful weekend. The sauna is lovely. Your staff is so helpful and kind. We love FLBC — it is such a sacred place." ~ Weekend Retreat Guests

2023: THE YEAR AT A GLANCE

<p>The year-round staff, led several Outreach programs, for youth at churches – only a 'few' had to cancel because of snow</p> <p>JAN '23</p>	<p>Summer staff recruitment: Karen, Program Director, & Richie, Wilderness & EE Director, visited college campuses around the country to recruit the best summer staff ever! Including 5 international staff!</p> <p>FEB '23</p>	<p>Year-round staff, travel to Lutherhaven for summer planning retreat & to learn from our counter parts in camping ministry in Idaho.</p> <p>MAR '23</p>	<p>Pastors Grant & Amanda Applehans accepted the call to serve as Co- Associate Directors, overseeing development, marketing, retreat programming, day camp, volunteers etc.!</p> <p>MAY '23</p>
<p>A wonderful summer with 2,225 campers, learning through activities, worship and Bible study, with our theme, "Holy Trinity – Wholly Love"</p> <p>Cabin #1 is now the new Sauna dedicated to God's glory in honor of Don Stadler, volunteer builder.</p> <p>SUMMER '23</p>	<p>Celebrating 80 years of ministry! Over 300 people gathered to hear retired directors Rev Gary Cockrell and Brad Abbott, share the history of the camp. Cindy Pokorny created beautiful photo presentations of the 80-year history of FLBC! All enjoyed a picnic, and concert with 'Just Move.'</p> <p>JULY 1 '23</p>		<p>A notice of \$35,000 given to the Shalom Home...construction begins with contractor Tim Rogge. Architect, Gretchen Krumm</p> <p>AUG '23</p>
<p>Goal reached to re-build the outdoor chapel, with 27 benches adopted. Construction began this fall. Amphitheatre remodel fund raising project begins. 55 benches needed, \$750 each, with a plaque for each one.</p> <p>SEPT '23</p>	<p>Program begins to engage donors in Naming an Endowment, for staff scholarships. \$25,000 per year for 5 years, for a total of \$125,000 to start generating funds for staff scholarships. To date, two funds have been established.</p> <p>Pastors Grant & Amanda Applehans installed as Associate Directors.</p> <p>FALL '23</p>	<p>We welcome new Community staff members, and plan the programs for the Harvest Festival, Grief retreat, the Bible in 24 hours, Advent retreat, young adult retreat and much more!</p> <p>WINTER '23</p>	

2023 BY THE NUMBERS!

1742 guests (retreats/events/EE Students) served during our fall, winter, & spring programs • **150** participants served in 3 communities during Fall/Winter/Spring through our outreach program • **7** weeks of regular FLBC Summer Camp for youth, families, and groups + **2** additional weeks of serving Intermountain Residential and Montana Youth Diabetes Alliance! • **815** Youth, on site campers (week-long, day campers and partial week campers) • **191** Glacier Wilderness campers • **154** Week-Long Family campers & Grand campers • **1065** Summer Retreat guests (June, July and August) • **18** weeks of Day Camps in congregations, with over **380** campers! • **50** Incredible adult volunteers • **58** Summer staff from **13** different states and **3** countries joined our **12** year-round staff to make **1 AWESOME TEAM!**



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Biographies of Council Members

Ingrid Childress

Ingrid Childress is a long-time member of Our Redeemer's. She and her husband, Don, are both retired and enjoy outdoor activities such as gardening, hiking with their dog, camping, and fishing. Ingrid is a member of the Grace Notes Handbell Choir; she enjoys making a "joyful noise" with the rest of the choir.

Tracey Tintinger

Tracey recognized the importance of a Christ-centered life, church community, and its connection to family as she and her husband, Ben, began raising kids. She and her family joined Our Redeemer's about 25 years ago. Growing up in Helena, she first attended ORLC as a fifth grader in 1978. Tracey has had the joy of teaching Sunday School and Confirmation classes at Our Redeemer's as her children were growing up. Through our church community, she discovered the Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp. Seventeen years of attending family camp at FLBC also solidified tradition, memories, and spirituality in her and her family. Through a combination of stay-at-home mom and part time office manager for Mosaic Architecture, Tracey has had a well balanced home/work life. This was particularly helpful in raising four kids. Now that those kids are adults, they deeply appreciate the family values and church communities that Tracey instilled in them.

Tracey enjoys reading, hanging out with friends, traveling, and traipsing about on the mountain trails with her husband and three dogs. She also looks forward to volunteering more time where needed in the community and helping Our Redeemer,s.

Kevin Mathews

Kevin is married to Lisa Williams-Mathews, current Altar Guild chair and former Director of Children's Ministries. He and Lisa have two married adult children, one pair in Missoula and one in Butte. They also are both Lay Pastoral Associates and have been members of Our Redeemer's since 2006. Both have lived in Helena their whole lives but for a 14-year stint in Seattle after college. Kevin likes to make music when he can: he currently sits in with the Rejoice Band, sings with the Helena Symphony Chorale, performs periodically at Benny's Bistro, and has performed in several musicals, operas, and concerts. He is a member of the Friendship Center Board of Directors and retired two years ago from a career as an environmental engineer and consultant.

Linda Nelson

Linda is a retired educator, Licensed Professional Counselor, writer, and Registered Drama Therapist. She has lived in Helena for 14 years and been a member of Our Redeemer's for 10 years. She has served on the Hunger Team since its inception and been a member of the Grace Notes handbell choir for most of her time at Our Redeemer's. Linda has also taught several adult education classes at the church on a variety of social and theological issues. Although she grew up as Presbyterian, she was attracted to Our Redeemer's because of the warm welcome she received and the strong commitment of the laity. Her family includes her daughter Gretchen Krumm, son-in-law Blair, and granddaughter, Ella. In addition to other community involvements, she is a member of the Knitters for Peace, a group that provides hand knitted times for a variety of charitable organizations both here and abroad. She also enjoys reading and gardening in her spare time.

Julie Penner

I have been a member of Our Redeemer's since 1983, when our family moved here from Washington. Having grown up in this church, I have a deep respect and love for our church, and the members who have been an important presence throughout my life. Brett and I married in 2002, and we have two children, Isaac, who is a senior at Helena High School, and Juniper, who is a junior at East Helena High. I have taught 3rd grade since 2006, and since 2010 in East Helena, which is where I'd like to stay until I retire! Throughout my life I have been a nursery attendant, Sunday school teacher, helped with VBS, helped with Sunday services, and most recently have been on our church council. I am honored to be able to serve the people who mean so much to me, and to help our church grow in a strong and healthy way.

Jennifer Colegrove

Jennifer has been a member of Our Redeemer's for 25 years and has attended Lutheran churches all her life. She played the organ for her hometown church in Idaho in high school. Jennifer taught Sunday School and Confirmation classes in the past. Currently, at Our Redeemer's, she is on the Hunger Team and plays with the Grace Notes Bell Choir. Jennifer is a Dietitian Manager at St. Pete's Health, where she has worked for 25 years. She retired from reffing and running the local recreation soccer programs. She loves cooking, gardening, skiing, hiking, biking, adventuring with friends, and hanging out with her family.

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Ed Johnson

I was born in St John's Hospital (Rodney St.) on Fathers Day 1962 and was the 10th kid out of thirteen (youngest boy). Our family grew up on a small farm outside of Helena/East Helena where my father was also a hydro-geologist for the USGS. My father transferred his church membership from St. John's Lutheran to Our Redeemer's in the late 1950s, and I was baptized at age two years by Pastor I. C. Gronneberg on December 23, 1964, at Our Redeemer's on Stuart Street. I attended church school throughout grade school years into high school. My learning years were under the direction of Pastor Lowell Anderson. I married Millie Senecal from Elliston, MT in 1988 and we moved to Elliston in 1989. We raised four children; Seth Edward, Shelby Elizabeth, Sutton Eric and Sawyer Eli within the community. Millie and the kids all attended St. Theodore's Catholic Church in Avon, MT. I graduated from MSU in 1985 with a B.S. in construction engineering and worked for Morrison-Knudsen Engineering for 1 1/2 years in NY City then spent 20 years with Tetra-Tech Consulting here in Helena. I have been with the City of Helena Building Department for the last 16 years as the Senior Plans Examiner.

Tracy Moseman

Tracy is currently the Early Childhood and Family Support administrator for the Department of Public Health and Human Services. Prior to this position she worked to start the new office, Faith and Community Based Services, at the Department of Public Health and Human Services to be the conduit between faith and community organizations and DPHHS, knowing many times the two entities serve similar populations with similar needs. Before this role, she worked for seventeen years in educational student support services at the Office of Public Instruction and Helena School District. Tracy and her husband, Mark, have two children (Haley, a junior at MSU, and Trey, a senior at Capital High). She is a lifelong Montanan and enjoys everything outdoors, including sunrise hikes over Mount Helena, camping, boating and skiing with her family.

Sarah Sampson

Sarah grew up in Shelby, MT, and came to Helena to attend and graduate from Carroll College. She works at Triple Tree Engineering here in Helena. Sarah and her husband, Pat, have three boys: Shane (13), Bryce (10), and Chase (7). All three boys attended Our Redeemer's Preschool, and during that time, Sarah also served on the Preschool Board for nine years. Now the boys participate in Confirmation and Sunday School at Our Redeemer's. They have made Our Redeemer's their church home since 2010. Their family loves to spend time outside snow skiing, hiking, fishing, and golfing. The boys also keep us very busy with all their sporting activities (football, basketball, soccer, track, & baseball). Their family is blessed to be a part of Our Redeemer's.



January 3, 2024

New Year's Greetings to you who are part of the Body of Christ in the Montana/N. Wyoming Synod, ELCA! Welcome to 2024!!

As I reviewed my annual report letters from the previous four years, I noticed a common theme – Change! Transition! Adapt! I'm guessing some of you are getting tired of all the talk about change and calls to adapt, and would just appreciate some stability right now. Others of you may be hoping and praying for more change or at least certain kinds of change to come to your lives, your congregation, your community, this nation and even the world. I know I am praying for a transformation from relentless violence and polarization to persistent peace and collaboration across all of human society.

And yet change is upon us whether we want it or not. We can't escape change because to live is to go through change, many changes in fact. So as much as we may wish for stability, our lives as individuals, church and world are changing.

One thing we often forget, though, is that we do have some choice in how things change and that God is constantly active in the change, working toward the new life given in Jesus Christ no matter how much we resist in our bondage to sin. We can choose how we approach change – in faith rather than fear – and we can choose to follow the lead of God's Spirit of Love rather than the hate-filled voices of anger that want to keep us fighting with one another.

In our gospel lesson from John for the second Sunday of Epiphany, Jesus says to Philip, "Follow me" and Philip says to Nathanael, "Come and See." What if during 2024, we as followers of Christ deliberately practiced these two phrases? What if we intentionally sought out ways of coming to see what God is up to in our churches and communities? What if we purposely sought out old and new ways to follow Jesus in our lives of faith and works of love?

What would you and your congregation do first and then next? And what are ways that we as the Synod equip each other in the ministry of the gospel as we "walk the way together" across Montana and Northern Wyoming?

One guide might be the "Vision, Calling and Values" Statement for the Synod which I introduced at the 2023 Synod Assembly. Here they are again:

Montana/N. Wyoming Synod: Vision, Calling, Values

"...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ... (Eph 4:12)

(Please see the video Bible study on this text on the Montana Synod website www.montanasynd.org)

Vision

A Montana/N Wyoming Synod who is continuously building up and equipping one another for the ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in people's lives, their communities, the synod, the wider church and God's world.

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Calling

Equipping the followers of Christ of the Montana/N Wyoming Synod for ministry of:

- 1) *Building Up the Body of Christ; AND*
- 2) *Living Christ's Love into the World*

Values

1. *Proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ's Grace and Love for All*
2. *Engaging in God's Justice for the World, especially the "least of these" (Mt 25)*
3. *"Walking Humbly with God" in all we do and say (Micah 6:8)*
4. *Pursuing "Unity in Harmony with Diversity" across church and community*
5. *Promoting Relationships and Collaboration across the synod and wider church*

How can we as individuals, congregations and a synod put these into practice in various ways in our particular contexts? How can we support one another in this work of equipping through sharing our time, prayers, energy, and resources?

Over the next 12 months there will be changes coming to the synod including opportunities to participate in equipping one another for ministry. One example is the Montana Synod Assembly, held May 31-June 1, 2024 in Billings, during which we will explore together the theme "Equipping for *Doing Justice*." Other changes will include the arrival of a new Director for Evangelical Mission, some upgrades to the LPA program, and more resources for discerning as a congregation where God may be calling you to go in the future as well as what it looks like to do a Holy Closure of a congregation in a healthy, legacy-leaving way.

As we consider what God has in mind for us in 2024, I want to take this opportunity to say "Thank You!" for the ongoing generosity many of you have shown through your mission support and other gifts you have been willing and able to share. These gifts are deeply appreciated! As you are exploring your own financial realities for the coming year, I invite you to consider increasing your support as you are able in the service of the Christ's ministry across the synod.

May God bless you with the faith, hope, and love of Christ during 2024!

In Christ's Love,



Rev. Laurie Jungling
Bishop, Montana/N. Wyoming Synod

Notes