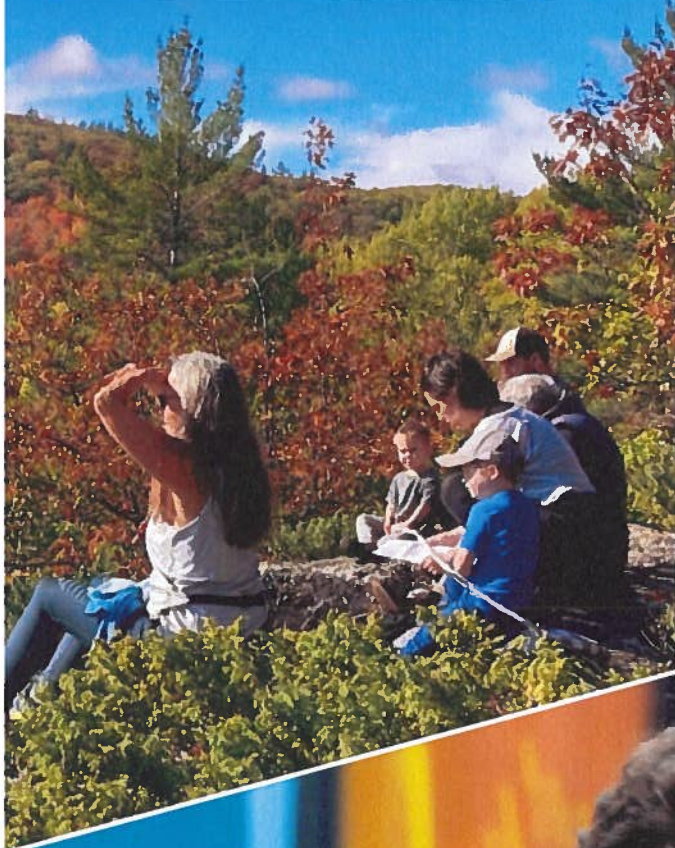




Evangelical
Lutheran Church
in America



ANNUAL REPORT
2024

A MESSAGE FROM PRESIDING BISHOP ELIZABETH EATON



Dear friends in Christ,

All around us, we see signs of God's love and goodness. A person who has stepped away from church for many years steps back into a congregation, feeling the call of the Holy Spirit. Young adults feeling isolated in a digital-first world start gathering in person in a small group, enjoying the warmth of a hug and a new friend asking about their week. A mother plants a garden, and it yields fruits and vegetables, giving her nutritious food for her kids and extra produce to sell at the local market. Everywhere we look, we see signs of Christ's love. In Psalm 93, we read: "More majestic than the thunders of mighty waters, more majestic than the waves of the sea, majestic on high is the Lord! Your decrees are very sure; holiness befits your house, O Lord, forevermore" (4-5).

God's love is a majestic thing, and it moves us to share it in word and deed. The ministries of our congregations, our synods and the ELCA churchwide organization are all working together to share God's love with people in our neighborhoods, across our country and around the world.

I am so grateful for you, dear church. Your generosity to each of these three expressions of the church — your congregation, your synod and the churchwide organization — has bolstered the church's ability to share the message of God's love to people who are longing for it. Through your

**"More majestic than the thunders
of mighty waters, more majestic
than the waves of the sea,
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—Psalm 93:4-5

financial resources, your time volunteering and accompanying others, and your voices, you've helped carry this message of God's majestic love. Thank you, dear church. As we look ahead to the coming year, I encourage you to stand steadfast in God's promises, sure of God's love and goodness.

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Agenda for the 2024 Annual Meeting of Bethlehem Lutheran Church

January 19, 2025

Call to Order: Mark Reynolds, Council President. A quorum of 10% of Voting Members is required to conduct the Annual Meeting. As of the end of 2024, Bethlehem has 410 Voting Members; a quorum is 41.

Opening Prayer: Pastor Laura Ziehl

Motion to Approve Minutes from the 2023 Annual Meeting: A motion is needed to approve the minutes of the Annual Meeting held on January 21, 2024. Second the motion, discussion, and vote.

Lead Pastor's Report: Pastor Laura Ziehl

Associate Pastor's Report: Pastor Sam Nelson

Recognition of Departing Council Members: Pastor Laura Ziehl

Election of New Congregation Council Members: Presented by Carolin Meinhardt. See the report from the Nominating Committee. If there are no additional nominations from the floor, then a member may "move election of the slate as presented." Second the motion, discussion, and vote.

Election of Nominating Committee: Presented by Carolin Meinhardt. See the report from the Nominating Committee. If there are no additional nominations from the floor, then a member may "move election of the slate as presented." Second the motion, discussion, and vote.

Report of the Mission Endowment Fund: Presented by Mark Stauffer. See the report from the Mission Endowment Fund Committee.

Election of Mission Endowment Fund Committee Members: Presented by Mark Stauffer. A motion is needed to "move election of the slate as presented." Second the motion, discussion, and vote.

Employee Retention Credit (ERC) Allocation Report: Presented by council members Jessica Oien and Aaron Criner.

Treasurer's Report: Presented by Mark Stauffer, Assistant Treasurer, and Wes Westlake, Council Treasurer.

Approval of 2025 Budget: Request a motion that "we adopt the 2025 budget (or approve as amended)." Second the motion, discussion, and vote.

Reports: The printed reports from Council and staff of the congregation are received as presented unless there are questions or comments.

Closing Prayer: Pastor Sam Nelson

Adjournment: If there is no other business, the chair will entertain a motion to adjourn.

Bethlehem Lutheran Church

2023 Annual Meeting Minutes

January 21, 2024

- **Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order at 10:15 am by Steve Fritsch, Council President. A 10% quorum of the total Confirmed Members was confirmed with a total signed in attendance of 89. (51 needed for quorum)
- **Opening Prayer:** Pastor Sam Nelson
- **Motion to Approve Minutes from Three Congregational Meetings - The 2022 Annual Meeting, the Special Meeting to Call Deacon Mindy Bugaj, and the Special Meeting to approve the ERC Funding Allocation:** A **MOTION** was made by Dan Halvorson to approve the minutes en bloc from these three meetings held respectively on January 22nd, June 4th, and October 8th. **SECONDED** by Melanie Hunter . All in favor. **Motion approved.**
- **Lead Pastor's Report:** Pastor Laura Ziehl (See Packet)
- **Associate Pastor's Report:** Pastor Sam Nelson
- **Recognition of Departing Council Members:** Pastor Sam Nelson
 - Thanks given to Steve Fritsch, Jana Hegg, Tricia Storey, George Orness and Solimar Schmidt as departing council members.
- **Election of New Congregation Council Members:** Suzi Westmoreland presented the report of the nominating committee. The following members are being presented for election.
 - Lisa Adlam, Aaron Criner, Linda Inskeep, Jessica Oien, Emily Higginbotham (Youth Representative)
 - See Report for continuing members

There were no additional nominations from the floor. Suzi Westmoreland made a **MOTION** to accept the slate of nominees as presented. **SECONDED** by Julie Draskovic. All in favor. **Motion approved.**

- **Election of Nominating Committee:** Suzi Westmoreland presented the new nominees for the nominating committee. The following members are being presented for election.
 - Steve Fritsch, Dan Halvorson, Jana Hegg, Carolin Meinhart, George Orness and Tricia Storey

There were no additional nominations from the floor. Sandy Lakey made a **MOTION** to accept the slate of nominees as presented. **SECONDED** by Bill Dabbs. All in favor. **Motion approved.**

- **Report of the Mission Endowment Fund:** Mark Stauffer presented the report of the Mission Endowment Fund.
- **Election of Mission Endowment Fund Committee Members:** Mark Stauffer presented the slate of nominees for the Mission Endowment Committee. The following members are being presented for election.
 - Steve Fritsch, Carole Orness
 - Beth Nelson and Karen Saake are continuing members of the Endowment Committee

There were no additional nominations from the floor. Mark Reynolds made a **MOTION** to accept the slate of nominees as presented. **SECONDED** by Carolin Meinhart. All in favor. **Motion approved.**

- **Employee Retention Credit (ERC) Report:** Mark Stauffer presented the report on the ERC funds.
- **Treasurer's Report:**
 - Mark Stauffer, Assistant Treasurer and George Orness, Council Treasurer gave a report on the current budget. Members were given an opportunity to ask questions regarding the Treasurer's Report.
 - The proposed budget for 2024 was presented. Members were given an opportunity to ask questions regarding the Proposed Budget.
- **Approval of 2024 Budget:** Suzi Westmoreland made a **MOTION** to accept the 2024 budget as presented. **SECONDED** by Tricia Storey. All in favor. **Motion approved.**
- **Reports:** The printed reports from Council and staff of the congregation are received as presented. There were no further questions or comments.
- **New Business:** None
- **Closing Prayer:** Pastor Sam Nelson
- **Adjournment:** Mike Lyons made a **MOTION** to adjourn the meeting at 11:03 am. **SECONDED** by Art Schmidt. All in favor. **Motion approved.**

Respectfully Submitted by:
Jana Hegg, Council Secretary

LEAD PASTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2024

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined. . . For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:2ff

Dear people of Bethlehem, this text from Isaiah is read every Christmas Eve. It is a prophetic and defiant word of hope and promise. We are indeed such people. In a world of increasing division and deep wounds in need of healing, we are here. In a world in need of justice and an end to violence, we are here. Bethlehem is a congregation of indefatigable hope, defiant joy and determined service. In this past year we have gathered faithfully in worship and opened our doors in welcome. Our students have travelled to the Navajo Nation, we have begun a new ministry to immigrant students and their families, we continue to host Congregation B'nai Tikvah and the Tremble Clefs, and so much more. But most importantly, we are a thriving church in a world in need of our energy and gifts. When so many churches are in decline, and when our voice of welcome is so needed in this world, I am proud and honored to be in this ministry with you. We have work to do — and the capacity to do it. We have joy and hope to spread — and the capacity to do so. Thanks be to God for you. I am grateful and honored to serve as the lead pastor of Bethlehem.

Worship and Music

- As a faith community, we are centered in worship. We gather once a week in joy and hope. Worship attendance varies from week to week, but is consistent year to year.
- Many of our services this year were particularly powerful including: Ash Wednesday, the Palm Sunday Cantata, Holy Week, Pentecost and Confirmation Sunday.
- My thanks to Jamie Newcomb and Ursula Meyer for continuing to gift us with “A Christmas Carol”.
- All Saint’s Sunday was an opportunity to light candles and provide space for our hearts, given all that is happening in our nation. Christmas Eve was a particularly warm and beautiful night. So many young adults returned to worship with us, affirming the place of this community in their adult lives. In person attendance was close to 450. The Advent liturgy was a gift, as was the Christmas concert.
- Visitors and new members remark often on the warmth and welcome Bethlehem provides.
- We are gifted to have three organists leading worship. All have updated contracts this year. My gratitude to Judy Collier, Natasha Riobova and Tanya Funk, for their gifts and dedication.
- We continue to be known for our exceptional music ministry program, thanks to Mona Goetsch who directs both choirs, and oversees all that lifts us in worship. For her expertise, faith and immeasurable heart, I thank her.
- My thanks to Mark Weed for directing not only the bells so capably, but the Band of Bethlehem as well. Marilyn Stenoien continues to faithfully lead Second Sabbath.
- A stained glass bowl was added to the baptismal font this year, made by glass artist Jonathan Rosenberg. The living fountain is unfortunately beyond repair. Yet, we have the added joy of a Jewish glass artist creating a piece for a Lutheran baptismal font. Its first use was at our Easter Vigil this year.

Adult education

- Lenten education focused on a book entitled “Why? Hard questions of Faith”. Forty people attended this powerful discussion. Holden Evening Prayer, and our shared meal together, made for a wonderful Lenten season.
- Vicar Keegan, assisted by Laure Reynolds, taught a Spiritual Gifts Class that was well attended.
- This fall, Pastor Sam and I taught a class entitled “Sunday School Stories: Revisited”. There was lively conversation and much learning, with 25-30 people in attendance.

Youth and Family Ministry

- Deacon Mindy Bugaj faithfully and expertly oversees our middle and high school ministry. This fall, we began a combined middle school ministry with St. Andrew's Episcopal, in addition to our current confirmation program. Deacon Mindy also taught 2 classes this year for students and parents, one of which was entitled "Faith in an Anxious World". 80 people attended the lip synch competition, raising \$4000 that night alone. Middle school and high school students meet jointly mid week, yet regularly attendance is difficult for many students. We are considering the best ways to meet the needs and schedules of busy students.
- Summer trip took 11 students and 5 adults to Flagstaff and the Navajo Nation. Both pastors were present and there was deep learning for us all. This trip gave us the opportunity to deepen our ongoing relationship with the Navajo Lutheran Mission in Rock Point.
- Summer trip in 2025 will be on Maui. Deacon Mindy applied for, and received, \$4000 in grants from the synod. We are excited for this cross cultural experience and opportunity to learn of aloha a'ina.
- We confirmed 3 students this year and the current confirmation class is going well.
- Jana Hegg continues to faithfully oversee our children's ministry. The Christmas Program this year was wonderful. 1st communion class went well, as did a night for families, and the Easter Egg Hunt. Sporadic Learning Circle attendance is challenging, but the program is consistent, the teachers highly skilled and the students engaged. Jana is an exceptional children's ministry director. We are blessed.
- We have a number of neurodivergent students and have intentionally created a ministry that welcomes them. Yet another way for Bethlehem to live into our capacity to be an All are Welcome church.
- "Scuba" VBS was held in June with over 60 students in attendance, plus many volunteers, and a 40 foot whale. My thanks to all those who made the week such a success. Bethlehem has the staffing and capacity to support a large VBS, and 3 area congregations sent students and volunteers. I am pleased that we are able to run a VBS program that supports smaller congregations in their children's ministry.
- Sally von Zirngibl continues to work with the community library and reading program with our preschool students.

Preschool Ministry

- The Bethlehem Early Childhood Center, and its stellar reputation, continues to be an ambassador for Bethlehem in the community. My gratitude to our two exceptional directors, Debi Carr and Kelly Perez. Both programs are operating at capacity and the full day program has a wait list. Both directors continue to adjust the programs to meet the changing needs of families in our community. The part day program in particular, continues to expand programming for the sake of working parents.
- I hold Preschool Chapel every month with the children, as well as attend as many of the family events as possible. This creates a wonderful connection with the children and their families. When preschool events happen on campus, we are filled with the laughter of children and the presence of the more than 150 young families we serve.

Ministry and Congregational Life

- We welcomed 12 new members into the life of the congregation this fall. They bring their gifts and grace to add to ours.
- The long anticipated expansion of our columbarium is underway and will be completed this spring, as we honor the commitment we made to those who have chosen to spend eternity here at Bethlehem. The new columbarium will be wood construction adjacent to the existing niches in the altar space. Two additional hidden doors will be added for access. In total we will have 48 additional niches available. My thanks to Dennis Astroth and George Orness for their faithful work. This ends our has been a journey, and we are pleased to have found an elegant solution within existing columbarium funds.
- The strongest joy in the columbarium project has been the addition of the beautiful mosaic art as a focal point for all who enter our doors. My abiding thanks to Jane Wheeler, our mosaic artist.

- I attended all Women of Welcome (WOW) events. Under our new model, we continue to expand the numbers of those involved.
- I attended several of the Bethlehem Adventure ministry (BAM) events, most notably the Maritime Museum trip led by Bill Dabbs. My thanks to Suzi Westmoreland, Eileen Lajimodiere, Lori Wolf and Dennis Astroth for their leadership.
- We completed a Pictorial Directory this year, thanks to Cynthia Heigold and her remarkable gifts overseeing the project. 125 families are included, and we have used the opportunity to update our database as well.
- My thanks to all who run sound and who make our livestream presence possible: Marian Singletary, Suzi Westmoreland, Herb Chin, Ron Hegg and Darrel Westmoreland. We continue to provide outdoor worship and live streaming every week.
- Thanks to Ron Hegg for oversight of our website and eblasts, and Pastor Sam for managing our social media presence.
- We rebuilt a new computer system this year to run our complex tech needs.
- Stephen Ministry continues to be a vital ministry of care in our congregation. Nearly all of our Stephen ministers have care receivers. Stephen ministry leaders meet weekly with the pastors to address the needs of members of the congregation. My thanks to Laure Reynolds, Molly Hall and Suzi Westmoreland for their leadership.
- Rose Moldenhauer does the work of parish nursing in our congregation. She is regularly in touch with anyone facing surgery or other medical need.
- Scraps and Prayers, PJ Project, and Prayer Shawl ministry continue to bless so many. Our quilts reached as far as Ukraine this year. My thanks to all those who faithfully lead these ministries.
- I had the joy of 4 baptisms this year, 2 weddings, and the privilege of 2 services of celebration of life.

Service and Outreach 2024

- One of my deepest joys this year has been the creation of our newest ministry, the Learning Education Assistance Program (LEAP). At the closure of E4E who originally began the tutoring program, this program has become a ministry of the congregation, now serving 40 immigrant students and their families in our community. In our current political climate, as issues of immigration, and the welfare of families is paramount, we are positioned to be able to help. My thanks to Jana Hegg for her work in this ministry. We have recently added a hospitality ministry for parents who are waiting outside in the cold, during their child's tutoring. Thanks to Linda Inskeep we are offering warmth, coffee and conversation as we build relationships with our neighbors. In the coming year, we will explore further ways to help families who regularly face housing and food insecurity, as well as safety concerns. The Holy Spirit at work in this ministry. When resources appear, and volunteers step forward, and the path opens before us, it is clear God is leading us.
- We have a renewed ministry with Ocean Knoll this year, thanks to new staffing at the school and Jana Hegg's efforts to build those relationships. We have provided snacks, backpacks and other resources for students and families.
- The ELCA ministry AMMPARO, works with unaccompanied minors and issues of immigration. Cha Cha Pinilla and Steve Grady joined the board this year. Patricia Sinay joins them in this work.
- I have been to Border Church twice this year. At the second gathering, there were 80 people from around the synod gathered at the Whiskey 8 gate, overseen by border patrol. We gather to provide food support and spiritual support for asylum seekers on the other side of the wall.
- Bethlehem Serves was a wonderful success again this year. 130 people came to serve. In addition to our usual service projects, we One Safe Place. My deep thanks to Mona Goetsch and Jana Hegg for their consistent and capable leadership.
- In June, I was on the planning committee for and participated in "Light up with Pride" in Oceanside. Several people from Bethlehem attended the worship service. As a congregation, we plan to participate in Oceanside Pride this year.
- In July, we marched once again in the San Diego Pride Parade.

- Many of us on staff toured One Safe Place, a domestic violence inclusive service provider in Vista. We are building relationships for ongoing work together.
- In March, through the Interfaith Shelter Network, we hosted 11 of our neighbors in need of temporary housing for 2 weeks. My thanks to Diane Langager, Blair Lindberg and Cynthia Heigold for their tireless work. This year, Bethlehem was also able to assist a shelter guest in securing permanent housing. What a tangible expression of our mission. Next year we will partner with SDUMC in this work.
- We continue to partner with St. Andrew's feeding ministry, providing breakfast the 4th Saturday of the month. My thanks to Naida Malchiodi who leads this ministry with love and grace, and to all those who have volunteered.
- We are blessed to host a neighborhood Hispanic ministry headed by Carlos Hernandez. There are close to 100 people involved in his ministry. We continue to be grateful for this deep partnership. Carlos' contracting skills have assisted the congregation in many of our smaller building projects. We are deeply grateful.
- Congregation B'nai Tikvah under the leadership of Cantor Larry Kornit continues to be nested at Bethlehem. I was able to join them for Yom Kippur this year. It was a powerful worship experience.
- We host Tremble Clefs, a Parkinson's therapeutic singing group. They meet at Bethlehem weekly and are a gracious group of people. Three pastors who are also musicians provided a benefit concert and raised over \$1,600 for Tremble Clefs.

Employee Retention Credit (ERC) Allocation Update

- Thanks to congregational giving and ERC contributions, we were able to complete and install solar this year! Many have worked for years to make this possible. My particular thanks to George Orness, Dennis Astroth and Mark Stauffer for exceptional work. We are seeing savings of nearly \$18,000 this year, in addition to an opportunity to be good stewards of the creation. We anticipate a substantial solar rebate in 2025.
- Eco-narthex repairs are complete. The shade structure was replaced and strengthened for the future. We were able to paint the exterior of the sanctuary and repair damaged stucco in order to protect the building against water damage.

Administration and Finance

- The Endowment Committee approved a comprehensive Gifts Policy this year and has offered several grants for ministry within and beyond the congregation. One of those grants, intended for the Navajo Lutheran Mission, made it possible for that ministry to fully pay staff this summer.
- Church Mutual cancelled our insurance policy this year, a decision that is becoming common in CA. An Insurance Committee was quickly called together. Thanks to those on the committee, we were able, in a difficult market, to secure insurance for the congregation from Church and Casualty through Philadelphia at a competitive rate very near past insurance costs. My thanks to all involved.
- The fall stewardship focus in October was "Giving Matters: Both Here and Away". It was a wonderful way to discern the reach of our ministry. The people of Bethlehem support more than 125 good causes in addition to their faithful support of Bethlehem. My thanks to Mark Stauffer, Dick Dubois and Carolin Meinhardt who serve on the stewardship committee.
- My deep gratitude to the council for their faithful, accomplished service to the congregation. We are blessed with a great deal of wisdom at the table. My particular thanks to outgoing leaders: Wes Westlake, Julie Draskovic, Karen Olsen and Emily Higginbotham. I am so grateful for your commitment and leadership.
- My thanks to the finance committee for their work on this year's budget. My gratitude to Mark Stauffer for his partnership with Wes Westlake, and the council, in the role of assistant treasurer.

Pacifica Synod and Interfaith Work

- Vicar Keegan completed her internship with us in June. I thank her for the many gifts she brings to the congregation. She continues her work at the VA this year in chaplaincy. Keegan is working towards ordination as a chaplain in the ELCA. Our thanks to call committee members: Linda Inskeep, Bob Michelet and Sandy Lakey.
- In my role as Regional Assistant to the Bishop (RAB), I was responsible for oversight of the 4 regional gatherings in the synod, as well as the Azoombly this past year. Bethlehem hosted one of the regional gathering in May as well as the Azoombly on June 15th. In my role in mobility for the San Diego area, I am working with 7 congregations in transition, and was privileged to participate in the installation and ordination of 3 new pastors to our synod.
- To offer clarity on the nature of this work, my call to Bethlehem is full time. In addition, I work 10 hours a week for the synod in the areas of mobility for the San Diego area and Assembly planning.
- I attended the Day of Theological Reflection, Theoasis, Dean's Retreat and Synod Council. I regularly attend SDIMA, North County Clergy, Dean's meetings, synod staff/RAB meetings, the Harvest Conference and serve on the Resolutions Committee for the synod.
- I offered the land acknowledgment at the Mayor's Prayer Breakfast this year, and was part of the planning team for the Interfaith Thanksgiving Service.

Staff

- We have a hardworking, collegial, dedicated and faithful staff. They bring abundant gifts and grace to our ministry. The work is hard in these times, and the need is great. I thank them for their generous hearts and commitment to the work we share together. I recognize with gratitude: Deacon Mindy Bugaj, Debi Carr, Judy Collier, Judy Foland, Tanya Funk, Mona Goetsch, Molly Hall, Jana Hegg, Rose Moldenhauer, Kelly Perez, Laure Reynolds, Natasha Riobova, Marilyn Stenoin, Mark Weed and Karen Wise.
- My thanks to Pastor Sam Nelson for his partnership in the Gospel, and for his excellence in ministry. This year we were overjoyed to welcome baby Zachary into this congregation. My thanks to Pastor Sam and Alissa for their grace with us, as we exuberantly shared in their joy. Pastor Sam's parental leave will be divided over then next few months, ending in June. I am proud of this congregation's commitment to offering him this important leave time.

Final thoughts

We have accomplished much this year, both in the particularity of the work we have done, and in the grace with which we have accomplished it. Such is the journey of this faith we share. As in any year in this nation, but particularly in this one, we do not know what lies ahead. We approach this time with resiliency, some fear, enthusiasm and hope. We come to this time with confidence and joy in the certainty that God will equip us for the ministry to which we are called. May the Holy Spirit bless us, empower us, and send us, that we might be light to the nations, hope in any season of despair, and assist the Spirit in the work of justice and love for this world. I look forward to the journey. I cannot imagine any better companions on the way. It is an honor to serve as your pastor.

In Christ,
Pastor Laura

Associate Pastor's Annual Report 2024

"Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly now. Love mercy now. Walk humbly now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it." ~ The Talmud

It's safe to say that 2024 was a somewhat tumultuous year. From the numerous global conflicts, to the rising political tensions both abroad as well as in our own nation, to the increased sense that folks are becoming more divided and isolated from one another, there was a great deal about which to be anxious and much for people to grieve. At the same time, however, the everyday joys that life always brings persisted – new life, new hope, and new beginnings. Through it all, Bethlehem did what it always does – it continued to provide a space for us to come together as a people of faith, where we can support and love one another through the difficult parts, and also celebrate and rejoice with each other in response to the blessings. This is a place where we can not only receive blessings, and experience healing, but also where we can begin to see more clearly how we can help bless and heal the world around us. It can be quite a daunting task to look at the world's problems and consider how we might go about solving them. The above quote from the Talmud reminds us that we are not responsible for curing all that ails our world, while at the same time we are charged with doing what we can while we can – a call that Bethlehem continues to answer again and again. The work of this church over the past year has been an honor and a blessing to witness and participate in, and here is a brief snapshot of some of that incredible ministry.

Worship

- We continued to offer two worship services at 9 & 10:30 am with indoor/outdoor seating and livestream.
- Our midweek Lenten gatherings included Holden Evening Prayer, adult education, and community suppers.
- Holy Week services included Maundy Thursday foot-washing/handwashing, Good Friday with prayer stations, Easter Vigil (no new fire due to weather conditions), and an entirely indoor Easter Sunday.
- Special Events included blessing of the animals, VBS Sunday, service of blessing and thanksgiving for Vicar Keegan, multi-lingual Pentecost worship (including flash paper, and a kite shaped like a dove!), high school senior blessing, teacher appreciation Sunday, a hymn request Sunday, *ABCs of Christmas* Children's Christmas Program, *A Christmas Carol* by Jamie Newcomb and Ursula Meyer, and the Comfort at Christmas service.
- Christmas Eve had four services (Candlelit – 10 am, 7 & 9 pm; Children's – 4:30 pm)
- I continued my production of the weekly bulletins.
- We introduced a new announcements half-sheet halfway through the year to share upcoming events and provide transparency around congregational giving.

Congregational Life

- *New Members* – We welcomed 12 new members to the congregation in November.
- *Music Ministry* – We had an amazing summer concert in June, and a packed house for the Christmas concert in December. Tanya Funk filled in while our part-time organist Natasha Riabova was on medical leave and proved to be an incredible addition to the congregation. Judy Collier reduced her Sunday morning accompaniment role, and Tanya and Natasha have split the remaining Sundays, with Tanya taking over as the choir accompanist. Mark Weed continued his direction of the JuBellation Ringers, and the Band of Bethlehem (BoB) of which I am a proud member. Thank you to all those who share their musical gifts and talents with the congregation, and especially to Mona Goetsch for her tireless dedication to the music ministry here at Bethlehem.
- *Lip Sync Competition*: Deacon Mindy organized an incredible dinner and lip sync event to fundraise for the summer youth trip. Bethlehem took home the coveted gold microphone thanks to the Whalies!
- *SD Pride* – BLC joined with other San Diego area Lutheran congregations to march in the SD Pride parade.
- *Bethlehem Serves* - We had over 130 participants and 12 different projects both on and off campus.
- *Christmas on the Coast: Come to Bethlehem and Sea* – Christmas market and crafting/food event.
- *Men of Bethlehem (MOB)* – Events included a History of Navigation presentation, March Madness Bracket, BBQ & work party, a brewery trip, and a joint trivia night with the Women of Welcome (WOW).

- *Adventure Ministry (BAM)* – Events included Encinitas walking tour, pickleball, Antique Gas and Steam Engine Museum, and SD Maritime Museum.
- *Pastoral Acts* – I performed three baptisms, helped with two remembrance of life celebrations, and presided over one funeral service at Miramar National Cemetery.
- *Interfaith Shelter* – BLC hosted 11 individuals over two weeks as a part of the Interfaith Shelter Network. Thanks to Diane Langager and Blair Lindberg for their organizing work. We plan to partner with San Dieguito United Methodist this coming year, and they will host on their campus.
- *Golf Tournament* – We had 30 people participate in this year's golf tournament in January.
- *Young Families Trivia Night* – We had an inaugural event for a new ministry aimed at connecting the young families in the congregation, and plan to do more in the coming year.
- *Directory* – Thank you to Cynthia Heigold for her work in organizing the creation of a (much overdue) new church photo directory.

Pastoral Intern

- Bethlehem was delighted and honored to serve as the internship congregation for Vicar Keegan Chin-Cheleden. The majority of her internship hours were completed via her chaplaincy residency program at the San Diego VA Hospital, and her involvement here at church was more project-based. And while I officially served as her supervisor, Pastor Laura was also heavily involved in the process as well.
- Vicar Keegan's work included helping plan and lead worship, revamping and teaching a spiritual gifts class, participating in council meetings, leading the teaching portion of several Stephen Ministry bi-monthly gatherings, organizing a young adults event, and more.
- Vicar Keegan was approved for ordination in the ELCA by her candidacy committee and is currently in a second year of residency work at the VA where she serves as a Mental Health Chaplain Fellow with emphasis in palliative care.
- Thank you to the members of her internship committee Sandy Lakey (chair), Bob Michelet, and Linda Inskeep.
- Keegan has been an incredible addition to the congregation ever since she joined a few years ago, and that blessing only grew once she assumed this more formal leadership role in the congregation. I am so excited to see what the future holds for her and know that she will be an amazing pastoral presence in the world.

Congregational Educational Opportunities

- *Why? – Making Sense of God's Will* by Adam Hamilton – Lenten education covering deep theological subjects like the problem of evil, prayer, and understanding God's plan for our lives
- *Sunday School Stories Revisited* – A three-week Bible study course this fall covering classic stories from Sunday School (Moses, Noah, and Abraham).

Youth and Family Ministry

- Pastor Laura, Jana, and I taught a first communion class.
- I led the Imagination Station for VBS this year, along with doing the opening skits with Rachel Line.
- *Confirmation* – Deacon Mindy, Pastor Laura, and I continued to rotate as teachers for confirmation classes. The 2024 confirmation class had 3 confirmands, and there are 7 students in our current class.
- I served as one of the chaperones for the summer youth mission trip. We traveled to Flagstaff and the Navajo Nation to engage in service, learning, and building relationships. The trip was incredibly impactful, especially because we were able to engage with the community at Rock Point in ways that we were unable to two years ago. My thanks to Deacon Mindy for all of her work in organizing the trip and encouraging the youth of Bethlehem and St. Andrew's.

Continuing Education Events

- *Day of Theological Reflection: "Peace at Last"* – Synod led professional development event.
- *Seminex: Experience the Legacy* – Virtual conference at LSTC on the history and legacy of Seminex.

- *Stewardship Kaleidoscope Conference* – 3-day stewardship conference in Portland, OR
- *Theoasis: A Weary World Rejoices: Advent and Christmas Themes in an Election Year* – Synod led professional development conference.

Community Engagement

- I was honored to be asked to give the invocation at the Encinitas State of the City event.
- I was elected to serve as a Convocator for my alma mater California Lutheran University.
- Members of Bethlehem Staff participated in an online domestic violence training course put on by the SDDVC (San Diego Domestic Violence Council) and visited One Safe Place in San Marcos.
- *Tutoring Program* – With E4E shutting down, our congregation decided to absorb the tutoring program now known as LEAP Tutoring (Learning & Education Assistance Program) under our organizational umbrella. Many thanks to Jana Hegg for her willingness to take on a leadership role with this group. And to Linda Inskeep who is heading up the hospitality ministry for the parents. We look forward to the new ministry opportunities that this connection with our near neighbors will afford us.

Sharing Our Space

- In addition to the tutoring program, Bethlehem continues to host and welcome a number of outside organizations on our campus including a Parkison's choir group known as *The Tremble Clefs*, the Jewish Congregation B'nai Tikvah, small groups for a local Hispanic community congregation, as well as a Saturday morning Japanese language school.

Stewardship

- This year's stewardship emphasis, *Giving Matters: Here & Away*, highlighted the wide-spread generosity of this congregation. People were invited to write down names of organizations that they support on sticky-notes and on their pledge cards and there were over 125 different ones named which we turned into word maps.
- Thanks to the stewardship committee (Dick Dubois, Carolin Meinhardt, & Mark Stauffer) for their amazing work both on the emphasis, and in their year-round efforts. And for Dick Dubois and Jennifer Neelsen for their temple talks.

Technology

- *Calendar* – I created a new online campus calendar to manage building/room use for different groups.
- *Instagram & Facebook* – I have sought to keep up Bethlehem's digital footprint on social media through posts and pictures
- *Website* – Thank you to Ron Hegg and Chris LaClair for their work in helping to recreate the website after a near catastrophic crash. We have made a concerted effort to keep it updated with new pictures and the event graphics that I create.
- Marian Singletary and Grant Meinhardt rebuilt and redesigned the computer system in the sound booth to make livestreaming worship easier.
- Thank you to the worship tech team (Marian Singletary, Darrel Westmoreland, Herb Chin, Suzi Westmoreland, and Ron Hegg) for their work providing livestream and sound support.

Interfaith and Ecumenical Work

- *SDIMA* – I regularly participated in the San Dieguito Interfaith Ministerial Association monthly meetings, attended the Mayor's Prayer Breakfast, and led the opening litany at the Thanksgiving Worship Service.
- *North County Clergy* – I participated in monthly meetings of the North County Clergy Group and helped lead a portion the group's Night of Prayer for Christian Unity.
- *North County: Light Up with Pride* – I was on the planning team for this North County Pride worship service. The theme was "Stories of Defiant Joy." I helped plan worship, create pre-worship interactive opportunities, and offered a prayer during the service.

Property

- *Solar* – After numerous attempts over the years, we were finally able to fund and install solar! The panels were all installed on the sanctuary roof, and thanks to net metering 2.0 reimbursement they are able to cover nearly all the power usage for the church and both preschool programs.
- *Columbarium* – After many different potential configurations and proposals, we have contracted with a local carpenter to create two new columbarium spaces next to the existing ones in the sanctuary. Construction of the niches has already begun, and each unit will have 24 niches for a total of 48.
- *Mosaic Art* – The mosaic panels that were created by local artist Jane Wheeler that were originally intended to hang above the outdoor columbarium have been hung above the entry to the sanctuary.
- *Continued Purging/Organizing* – The campus clean-out continued this year with work on the Multi Use (thanks to Mary Tigue-Valardi and Jana Hegg), the banner closet, and preschool attic spaces.
- *Eco-Narthex Repair* – The eco-narthex wooden beams were all replaced with new wood as well as enhanced weather protection elements.
- *Sanctuary Painting* – We contracted with a company to paint the entire sanctuary building and do stucco repair in select areas.
- *Family Center Roof* – The shingled portion of the Family Center roof was replaced.
- *Property Manual* – Dennis and I collaborated to create a property manual for the campus including the location of equipment, regular inspections, and a vendor contact list.
- My thanks to Dennis Astroth, Carl Johnson, and all of the members who do so much to regularly support the physical infrastructure of this congregation.

Concluding Remarks

In addition to all of the incredible things that happened at Bethlehem this past year, it was a really big year for me on a personal level. My wife Alissa and I welcomed our first child – Zachary (Zachy) Feniuk Nelson – into the world on December 23rd. We have felt so blessed by the people of this congregation. Your love, support, care, advice, and generosity to us as we begin this next chapter of our lives together has been awe-inspiring. From the incredible Baby Shower that was thrown in September (thank you to Cynthia, Jana, Pastor Laura, Naida, and so many more for all of their work on that) to the daily prayers and love that you showed to us – we are eternally grateful. My parental leave will be split into two parts. The first will be during Lent from March 10th – April 5th after which I'll be back for Palm Sunday, Holy Week, and Easter. And then the second half of my parental leave will be from April 21st – June 15th.

On the whole, I think that the past year has seen us make numerous decisions that help to ensure the longevity of our congregation and the positive impact that we are able to have in our community and in the wider world. Bethlehem continues to be a place of radical welcome and hospitality, a place of healing, a place where people can wrestle with the big questions of life, and a place that is committed to serving and loving our neighbors. I cannot wait to see what this next year holds for us as a people united in faith and purpose.

Your Sibling in Christ – Pastor Sam Nelson

Bethlehem Nominating Committee

2024 Annual Report

Congregational Council

Twelve members of the congregation and our Pastors comprise the Congregational Council of Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Encinitas CA. Their terms are staggered to maintain continuity in the experience and work of the Council. Typically, three to four members join the Council each year to replace departing members. A youth member is also chosen in consultation with the Pastors and Youth Director. The youth representative serves on the Council for a one-year term.

The recommendations of the 2023 Nominating Committee are:

1. These members will continue to serve on Council:
 - a. Through 2025: Melanie Hunter, Mark Reynolds, Art Schmidt, and Audrey Weed.
 - b. Through 2026: Lisa Adlam, Aaron Criner, Linda Inskeep, and Jessica Oien.
2. The following nominated members will begin to serve a three-year term on the Council:
 - a. Through 2027: Doug Carsten, Mary Tigue Velarti, and Faustine Ross
3. The nominated youth member of the Council is Amelia Martin.
4. We thank the following departing Council members for their service:
 - a. Julie Draskovic
 - b. Karen Olsen
 - c. Wes Westlake
 - d. Emily Higginbotham (youth member)

2024 Nominating Committee

The Nominating Committee is also charged with filling next year's Nominating Committee, which will propose church members interested in serving the Congregational Council starting in 2026. The following members have agreed to serve on the 2025 Nominating Committee: Julie Draskovic, Kris Ensberg, Louise Julig, Karen Olsen, Wes Westlake, and Lori Wolf.

Respectfully submitted,

2024 Nominating Committee

Carolyn Meinhardt, Chair

Bethlehem Lutheran Church Mission Endowment Fund

Annual Report for 2024

Background

The Mission Endowment Fund (Fund) was established to further the work of God by supporting and expanding the ministry of Bethlehem Lutheran Church (Bethlehem or the Church). The Fund exists to receive gifts from members and others, invest and manage those gifts, and disperse a portion of the fund in support of the Fund's purpose.

The purpose of the Fund is to complement and supplement the mission of Bethlehem through grants that enhance the ongoing ministry of the congregation or develop new ministries. While the congregation is expected to meet the Church's operating budget with regular giving, the Fund offers another channel through which members can support ongoing ministries as well as encourage the development of new ministries. Members are encouraged to submit a grant application (see the Church's website blcenc.org/contribute/endowment for consideration of a grant. The Fund is not intended to be used for the Church's annual operating budget or for capital improvements or land acquisition.

Assets of the Fund are invested with Thrivent Charitable Impact & Investing (Thrivent Charitable), an affiliate of Thrivent Financial, a Fortune 500 holistic financial services organization. Investment gains accrue in the Fund while investment losses and administrative fees reduce the value of the Fund, as do grants made with the approval of the Mission Endowment Fund Committee (Committee) and the Congregation Council.

2024 Activity

The Fund bylaws, as amended, govern the amount of the Fund that is available to be granted (or expended). In summary, annual expendable funds include net earnings of the Fund plus up to 5% of assets, excluding those which carry restrictions.

The Mission Endowment Fund Committee was pleased to receive and approve the following grant requests during 2024:

- \$5,000 to support the Navajo Evangelical Lutheran Mission, the hosts of the Bethlehem summer Youth trip.
- \$8,050 scholarships (total) for three students in the Bethlehem Part-Day Preschool program with financial need.
- \$3,537 to support updates to Bethlehem's hybrid ministry.

The Committee is thrilled to be able to put these monies to work for the glory of God through these various ministries that are complementary to Bethlehem's mission. To date, the Fund has made grants of over \$135,000!

The Fund received a single anonymous contribution in 2024.

2024 Financial Information

There are two funds in the Fund: the General Fund, which holds funds that were received without use restrictions; and the Bill and Patty Harman Vision Fund, which supports initiatives as identified by the current pastor of Bethlehem.

Below is a summary of the activity, performance and balances of the Fund from December 31, 2023 to November 30, 2024 - the most recent statement received before assembly of this annual report.

Mission Endowment Fund activity 11 months ended November 30, 2024:						
	Balances 12/31/2023	Contri- butions	Grants	Investment Performance (net of fees)	Balances 11/30/2024	
General Fund	\$ 433,648	\$ 2,000	\$ (16,587)	\$ 62,984	\$ 482,045	
Harman Fund	\$ 12,329	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 1,818	\$ 14,147	
Totals	<u>\$ 445,977</u>	<u>\$ 2,000</u>	<u>\$ (16,587)</u>	<u>\$ 64,803</u>	<u>\$ 496,192</u>	

Effective April 1, 2024, Thrivent restructured the funds available to the Committee and, as a result, the Committee chose two new offerings. The Moderately Aggressive Allocation Fund

Thrivent Charitable account information as of November 30, 2024:					
				Return from 4/1 through 11/30/2024	Balances 11/30/2024
	Thrivent Moderately Aggressive Allocation			11.0%	\$ 254,811
	Thrivent Charitable Impact Fund			5.2%	\$ 241,381
					<u>\$ 496,192</u>

We are grateful for the diligent service of these Committee members. THANK YOU!

Bethlehem's 2024 Treasurer Report

As a result of the faithfulness and generosity of the people of Bethlehem, 2024 was a financially strong year. Though the 2024 budget approved at last year's Annual Meeting was balanced, our actual income exceeded expenses by over \$40,000. What a blessing to our mission in our communities!

2024 Financial Report

The following summarizes the church's 2024 financial results vs. the budget:

2024 Actual vs Budget		2024 Actual	2024 Budget	Favorable / (Unfavorable)	%
1]	Offerings	\$ 711,466	\$ 674,980	\$ 36,486	5%
2]	Other Income	25,941	13,530	12,411	92%
*	Shared cost reimbursement	207,864	207,862	2	0%
	Income	\$ 945,272	\$ 896,372	\$ 48,900	5%
*	Staffing	515,644	511,451	(4,193)	-1%
*	Music	8,581	8,400	(181)	-2%
*	Education / Library	4,603	4,039	(564)	-14%
3]	Youth Ministry	1,818	7,529	5,711	76%
*	Worship	6,059	4,796	(1,263)	-26%
*	Outreach	57,372	57,820	448	1%
*	Office / Administrative	37,583	39,112	1,529	4%
	Maintenance Services	87,867	85,301	(2,566)	-3%
4]	Other Property Expenses	38,249	31,100	(7,149)	-23%
5]	Mortgage and Utilities	100,375	96,843	(3,532)	-4%
	Insurance and Misc. Operating Expenses	46,606	49,981	3,375	7%
	Total Expense	\$ 904,757	\$ 896,372	\$ (8,385)	-1%
	Net surplus	\$ 40,514	\$ -	\$ 40,514	N/M
1]	Significantly favorable offerings due to large special offerings, new members, and faithful fulfillment of pledges.				
2]	Interest income exceeded budgeted amounts due to higher rates for a longer period of time.				
3]	Youth ministry under budget due to successful 2024 fundraising to cover youth summer trip costs.				
4]	Replacement of multi-use building HVAC unit early in 2024 resulted in over budget.				
5]	Utilities exceeded budget due to aggregate metering benefit of solar implementation was not yet effected by SDGE.				
*	Relatively minor differences vs. budget.				

For additional context, below are the church's financial results for the past 4 years.

		2021 Actual	2022 Actual	2023 Actual	2024 Actual	2025 Budget
Offerings		\$ 648,817	\$ 671,635	\$ 690,048	\$ 711,466	\$ 690,914
Year-over-Year Change		N/A	4%	3%	3%	-3%
Other Income		4,251	4,383	8,425	25,941	21,364
Shared Cost Reimbursement		169,704	185,004	197,964	207,864	216,179
Income		\$822,772	\$861,022	\$896,437	\$945,272	\$928,457
Staffing		453,941	484,293	463,294 ¹	515,644 ²	546,378
Music		11,900	14,238	14,229	8,581 ²	6,851
Education / Library		2,308	3,122	3,717	4,603	3,291
Youth Ministry		5,874	4,789	2,936	1,818	5,000
Worship		9,569	6,103	4,280	6,059	6,367
Outreach		55,185	55,055	55,517	57,372	59,009
Office / Administrative		84,047	84,223	37,193 ¹	37,583	37,913
Property and Maintenance		112,258	102,400	116,969	126,116	123,130
Mortgage, Utilities, Insurance, other		101,341	96,314	156,441	146,981	140,518
Total Expense		\$836,423	\$850,537	\$854,576	\$904,757	\$928,457
Year-over-Year Change		N/A	2%	0%	6%	3%
Net surplus (shortfall)		\$ (13,651)	\$ 10,485	\$ 41,861	\$ 40,514	\$ -
¹ In 2023, the Council requested that Office staff be reported along with other staffing, thus the reduction.						
² In 2024, the Council requested that certain musicians be reported with other staffing, thus the reduction.						

Our 2024 offerings exceeded the budget by 5% and were 3% higher than 2023. We continue to have broad stewardship participation by and generosity from our members, a key to the vitality of our congregation. Expenses exceeded our 2024 budget by just 1% which was mostly attributable to the replacement of a preschool HVAC unit. Our staff are consistently mindful of their spending.

Special Funds

The following summarizes the Employee Retention Credit (ERC) fund financial activities:

Tithe	Approved Distribution	December 31, 2023 Balance	2024 Activity		December 31, 2024 Balance
			Receipts	Disbursements	
CRC	\$ 20,000	\$ -			\$ -
Pacifica Synod	10,000	-			-
North County LGBTQ Resource Center	10,000	-			-
	<u>\$ 40,000</u>	<u>\$ -</u>			<u>\$ -</u>
Family Center/Eco Narthex Repairs/Property Reserve					
Family Center HVAC	49,000	-			-
Family Center Drainage	30,000	13,927		5,510	8,417
Eco-narthex	35,000	35,000		50,688	(15,688)
Future projects	26,000	65,091		36,064	29,027
¹ Property reserve	-	-	23,596		23,596
	<u>\$ 140,000</u>	<u>\$ 114,018</u>			<u>\$ 45,353</u>
² Pastoral Housing	\$ 200,000	\$ 207,996	10,544		\$ 218,540
² Solar	50,000	54,660	101	54,761	-
Other	(909)	-			-
Grand Totals	<u>\$ 429,091</u>	<u>\$ 376,674</u>	<u>\$ 34,241</u>	<u>\$ 147,022</u>	<u>\$ 263,892</u>
¹ Bethlehem received the final ERC of \$23,596 in November. Consistent the distributions approved by the Congregation, the Council has designated this amount as a Property Reserve.					
² 2024 Pastoral Housing and Solar receipts represents interest attributed to the account balances.					

The following summarizes the Columbarium fund financial activities. Note that receipts are either niche purchases or donations.

Receipts:	
Pre-2023 Columbarium receipts	\$ 14,226
2023	\$ 52,782
2024	\$ 8,306
Total receipts	<u>\$ 75,314</u>
Disbursements:	
Design	\$ 33,228
Other	\$ 2,300
Total disbursements	<u>\$ 35,528</u>
Available Columbarium Funds	<u>\$ 39,787</u>

2025 Budget

The Council recommends that the Congregation approve the following balanced budget for 2025.

2025 Budget vs. 2024 Actual	2025 Budget	2024 Actual	Increase / (Decrease)	%
Offerings	\$ 690,914	\$ 711,466	\$ (20,552)	-3%
Other Income	21,364	25,941	(4,577)	-18%
Shared cost reimbursement	216,179	207,864	8,315	4%
Income	\$ 928,457	\$ 945,272	\$ (16,815)	-2%
Staffing	546,378	515,644	30,734	6%
Music	6,851	8,581	(1,730)	-20%
Education / Library	3,291	4,603	(1,312)	-29%
Youth Ministry	5,000	1,818	3,182	175%
Worship	6,367	6,059	308	5%
Outreach	59,009	57,372	1,637	3%
Office / Administrative	37,913	37,583	330	1%
Maintenance services	93,630	87,867	5,763	7%
Other Property Expenses	29,500	38,249	(8,749)	-23%
Mortgage and Utilities	91,652	100,375	(8,723)	-9%
Insurance and Misc. Operating Expenses	48,866	46,606	2,260	5%
Total Expense	\$ 928,457	\$ 904,757	\$ 23,700	3%
Net Surplus	\$ -	\$ 40,514	\$ (40,514)	-100%

Offerings

By its nature, developing an estimate for budgeted offerings is subjective. The Council has relied on the pledge results from this fall, consideration of membership changes and historical giving trends in developing the \$21k decrease in offerings.

Shared Cost Reimbursement

The preschools reimburse the church for a variety of expenses that are initially incurred by the church on behalf of the preschools (e.g., mortgage, janitorial, etc.). The preschools have agreed to a 4% increase in this reimbursement.

Expenses

Expense budgets were established in consultation with staff and volunteer project leaders. Total Expense is budgeted to increase by 3%. Generally, though, non-employee inflation was assumed to be 4%.

After due consideration, raises of 4% for staff were approved by the Council. Employee benefit costs are expected to increase by more than that.

The Youth Ministry budget increase restores the balance to prior levels of expenses.

Maintenance Services budget increases 7% after a year of flat rate increases with our service providers.

The Other Property Expenses budget is decreasing in the expectation that any major property project will be covered by the separate property reserve or other funds.

The Mortgage and Utilities budget decreases primarily due to solar benefit for the full year plus the ultimate receipt of aggregate billing catch-up payments from SDGE.

All other individual expense budget changes vs. 2024 are less than \$2,500.

Preschool Financial Report

The following presents the combined Full Day and Part Day Preschool 2021 through 2024 financial results and 2025 budgets.

	2021 Actual	2022 Actual	2023 Actual	2024 Actual	2025 Budget
Tuition	\$ 1,234,881	\$ 1,344,537	\$ 1,417,566	\$ 1,528,906	\$ 1,551,202
Year-over-Year Change	N/A	9%	5%	8%	1%
Other Income	6,528	55	20,387	32,708	17,000
Total Income	\$ 1,241,409	\$ 1,344,592	\$ 1,437,953	\$ 1,561,614	\$ 1,568,202
Staffing	924,794	973,076	1,061,236	1,115,214	1,166,299
Direct Costs	53,972	56,024	78,536	68,080	80,519
Shared Costs	169,704	185,004	197,964	207,864	216,178
Total Expense	\$ 1,148,470	\$ 1,214,104	\$ 1,337,736	\$ 1,391,158	\$ 1,462,996
Year-over-Year Change	N/A	6%	10%	4%	5%
Net Surplus	\$ 92,939	\$ 130,488	\$ 100,217	\$ 170,456	\$ 105,206

BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH

2024 PASTORAL ACTS

Baptisms = 6
Confirmations = 3
Funerals = 0

2023 – 2024 STATISTICAL SUMMARY

Membership at the end of 2023
Baptized (Includes Children) = 863
Confirmed (Teenage & Adult) = 511

Baptized Members received in 2024 = 19
By Transfer, Affirmation & Restoration = 13
By Baptism = 6

Baptized Members removed in 2024 = 181
By Death = 0
By Transfer = 1
Inactive/Removed/Moved = 180

Confirmed Members received in 2024 = 19
By Transfer, Affirmation & Restoration = 15
By Baptism = 1
Confirmed = 3

Confirmed Members removed in 2024 = 120
By Death = 0
By Transfer = 1
Inactive/Removed/Moved = 119

Membership at the end of 2024
Baptized (Includes Children) = 701
Confirmed (Teenage & Adult) = 410

PLEDGE/ESTIMATE REPORT FOR 2025

<u>CATEGORY/AMOUNT OF PLEDGE PER YEAR</u>	<u>NUMBER OF FAMILY UNITS</u>
AS ABLE	1
ESTIMATE	8
\$0.01 - \$500.00	8
\$501.00 - \$2,000.00	18
\$2,001.00 - \$5,000.00	29
\$5,001.00 - \$10,000.00	21
\$10,001.00 - \$21,000.00	14

TOTAL FAMILY UNITS PLEDGE/ESTIMATE GIVEN FOR 2025 = 99

TOTAL FAMILY UNITS THAT ARE MEMBERS OF BETHLEHEM FOR 2025 = 229

PLEDGE/ESTIMATE REPORT FOR 2024

<u>CATEGORY/AMOUNT OF PLEDGE PER YEAR</u>	<u>NUMBER OF FAMILY UNITS</u>
AS ABLE	2
ESTIMATE	4
\$0.01 - \$500.00	8
\$501.00 - \$2,000.00	21
\$2,001.00 - \$5,000.00	36
\$5,001.00 - \$10,000.00	19
\$10,001.00 - \$20,000.00	14

TOTAL FAMILY UNITS PLEDGE/ESTIMATE GIVEN FOR 2024 = 104

TOTAL FAMILY UNITS THAT ARE MEMBERS OF BETHLEHEM FOR 2024 = 241

JANUARY 2025

Congregation Council

2024 Annual Report

It's been an honor and a privilege to serve again as your council president this past year, and it continues to amaze me how much we've grown together as a congregation since I last served over 12 years ago. Highlights for me included witnessing the enduring partnership in ministry created by Pastor Laura and Pastor Sam, which extends well beyond Sunday worship, the implementation of allocated ERC funds for much needed repairs to the Family Center and Eco-Narthex, the completion of our Solar Panel project, and the donation of allocated ERC funds to the Community Resource Center, Pacifica Synod, and North County LGBTQ Resource Center. Having survived the pandemic, we now enjoy a resurgence of in-person worship along with online options. We continue to enjoy the improvements to our digital audio and sound equipment which has greatly enhanced the music and worship experience. And, having transitioned largely to online giving, our budget has become increasingly easier to navigate as we approve needed expenditures throughout the year.

Our council is a diverse body of members with different gifts and life experiences. Throughout the year, we worked together prayerfully and trustfully to administer the needs of the church, including the renewal of our church liability and property insurance, the approval of grant requests, property and other expenditures, and investing a portion of our cash reserves in interest-bearing money market accounts with Thrivent Financial. We also engaged in long-term visioning, including the creation of a new committee for pastoral housing led by Jessica Oien and Aaron Criner. Many of these activities are described in other reports and I encourage you to review them.

This year's Fall Stewardship campaign was our most successful yet, and we begin the new year on strong financial footing. Thanks be to God! That said, our Budget Committee worked hard to ensure that our proposed budget for 2025 is sound, reasonable, and responsible. I encourage you to review the financial report for details.

I want to thank the following out-going council members: Karen Olsen, Wes Westlake, Julie Drascovic, and our youth representative Emily Higginbotham. Their talents and leadership were much appreciated! I also want to thank the members of our 2024 council who will continue to serve in 2025: Audrey Weed, Melanie Hunter, Art Schmidt, Linda Inskeep, Lisa Adlam, Aaron Criner, Jessica Oien, and Mark Reynolds. Without the combined gifts of this fine body, our work for the church would not be possible. We look forward to welcoming new council members and conducting the business of the Church in the coming year, always remembering to be good stewards of our congregation's gifts.

Respectfully submitted by Mark Reynolds, Council President

BETHLEHEM COMMUNITY EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

2024

It's the goal of Bethlehem's Early Childhood programs to provide a safe, nurturing environment for the children and families we serve. We strive to create a program in which children grow both socially and emotional in a positive Christian environment. Where they can learn the skills they will need to be productive member of the community.

We can report that both programs, as of January 2025, are operating at capacity with wait lists for the coming school year. We are continuing to make improvements where necessary. This year we are going to replace (add to) sand on the playground to stay with in Community Care licensing requirements. We would like to do some landscaping improvements as well.

We are grateful for the wonderful partnership with the church in helping the pre-school programs. It is a blessing for the community and all the young lives that Bethlehem has touched. We look forward to continuing our mission with Bethlehem Lutheran Church to remain dedicated to the joyful discovery of each child's innate capabilities and potential. The programs and the church, in partnership, inspires and nurtures children to become global citizens, all people everywhere, and the earth itself.

Debi Carr, Kelly Perez

Program Directors

Annual Report
Youth Ministry 2024

The youth ministry at Bethlehem includes students from grades 6-12. The students are involved in various opportunities to serve, learn, and grow in their faith and friendships. You may see them helping with worship responsibilities and mingling in the courtyard after worship.

Our students participate in weekly evening meetings. The middle school and high school students meet together for a meal, devotions, and fellowship. Occasional service projects, (i.e., lunch packing and quilt layouts) were also successfully completed in 2024.

The annual week-long summer service trip included learning and service in two locations. Students worked to paint the Hogan at the Navajo Lutheran Mission in Rock Point, AZ. One evening the group was invited to the local back-to-school celebration where students joined the drum circle and learned traditional Navajo dances. It was a terrific cultural experience. Time was also spent in Flagstaff where students worked on trail maintenance in Picture Canyon Cultural Preserve. The volunteer leader happily told our group that we accomplished more trail work in two days than most groups accomplish in a week.

Confirmation classes began in September under the direction of Pastor Laura and Pastor Sam. It is a privilege for me to team with them in teaching the students. In October, three students were confirmed and celebrated by the Bethlehem community. Their messages of faith were inspiring.

The involvement of our youth continues to bring hope and joy to this congregation. We thank everyone who supported the youth ministry through prayers and donations.

With gratitude,
Deacon Mindy Bugaj

Bethlehem Lutheran Church Children's Ministry Annual Report 2024

The Children's Ministry at Bethlehem Lutheran Church continues to grow as we live into our mission that all are welcome at Bethlehem. We have a core group of children and families who love to share their excitement for the Gospel in a variety of ways:

Learning Circles continue to meet weekly during the 10:30 Service. We continue to use the Spark ALL Kids curriculum, which is a multi-aged curriculum based on the lectionary. The focus of this curriculum is pairing younger kids and older kids together as buddies. It works well with the vast age range we currently have during Learning Circles. We are also so blessed to have our monthly "Music with Mona" time. The kids love to get together with Mona to sing and play instruments.

Vacation Bible School (VBS): Our 2024 SCUBA themed Vacation Bible School was a huge success! We spent the week "diving into friendship with God" and building community with the children who spent the week in rotations that included Bible Stories, the Imagination Station, Music and Games. Here are some impressive facts about SCUBA VBS 2024:

- 57 children ages 4 – 6th grade were in attendance
- 54 volunteers from both BLC and St. Andrews led the way
- The children in attendance were from 14 different churches
- Chris LaClair built a life-sized, 40 ft sperm whale that the children named Fruit Loops
- We collected \$170 dollars in offering for Bethlehem Serves

Seasonal Celebrations: Our annual Christmas Program was such a blessing during the busy Christmas season! The 2024 program, "The ABC's of Christmas", included over 25 children and adults telling the Christmas Story using each letter of the alphabet. Our youngest participant, 1 year old Emma, did a great job of playing the Star! The sanctuary was filled with such joy and wonder.

Approximately 35 children participated in our Easter Egg Hunt in March and we were helped immensely by our Youth, who filled all of the eggs and helped to hide them on Easter morning.

First Communion Class/Bibles - We offered a First Communion Class for all children grades Kdg. - 5th Grade. Using Daniel Erlanders book, "A Place for You", we had four of our children and parents engage in wonderful and lively conversation about community and communion. We are excited to once again be handing out Bibles to all children in 3rd grade beginning in February.

After-School Tutoring Program: The Learning Education Advancement Program (LEAP) is a thriving after school tutoring program, completely with volunteer support, serving approximately 35 students from grades 2 through high school. Meeting on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays in the Multi-Use Building, LEAP provides academic support for students in our community. Now operating under the umbrella of Bethlehem Lutheran, we are also offering a welcoming hospitality space for parents while they wait. Thanks to Linda Inskeep for helping with the hospitality time.

Children Ministry Volunteers: We extend heartfelt gratitude to all of our Learning Circle teachers and volunteers who help add to the success of our Children's Ministry. Your dedication ensures the continued spiritual growth of our children. Thanks to: Tricia Story, Audrey and Sarah Weed, Laura Johnson, Kelly and Noa Simcoe, Amanda, Emily and Sarah Higginbotham, Jennifer Hird, Mona Goetsch and Mary Teague Velarde.

Submitted by:

Jana Hegg, Children's Ministry Director

BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH

MUSIC ANNUAL REPORT 2024

*All the music sung and played here is a gift, O God, from you.
For as long as we have prayed here, we've been blessed by music, too.
By your Spirit, each musician finds new depths of faith to share.
Music is a gift you've given and becomes our thankful prayer.*

These words by Pastor Carolyn Winfrey Gillette could well be the mission statement of music at Bethlehem. Congregational members are able to share their musical talents in various ways. From children's choir, handbells, adult choir, cantors, ensembles, soloists and band, we offer a place for all to participate. This year I was happy to see many adults pull out their instruments from high school and join the Band of Bethlehem for Christmas! It warmed my heart to see the Children's Choir signing and singing "Happy Birthday, Jesus" at our concert. Finally, I felt a sense of pride as Children's Choir alumni girls led the 7 p.m. Christmas Eve service and provided special music for all. Each musician found new depths of faith to share.

We have been blessed with talented musicians. After Kim Froke retired in June 2023, Judy Collier continued as full time organist through the summer. In September 2023, we hired Natasha Riabova as part time organist and choir accompanist. Natasha was the choir accompanist from September through February 2024. Unfortunately in February, Natasha had a medical emergency which took her out of the rotation through June. With Natasha's help, we were able to hire Tanya Funk to substitute for her. Tanya joined our music team in February 2024. We enjoyed having Tanya and decided to work out a plan to keep all three! At this point, Judy is playing with the World Music Ensemble, Second Sabbath and VBS Band. In addition, as a member of our worship team, Judy attends and submits weekly copyright information for all services at Bethlehem. Natasha and Tanya share the rest of the organist position and Tanya is the choir accompanist. In October, Mark Weed, Director of the JuBellation Ringers, offered two handbell workshops for our ringers to work on technique which has made a difference in their presentations. He also encouraged adults to join the Band of Bethlehem increasing the size of the band. Marilyn Stenoien continues to offer contemporary Christian music with the Second Sabbath ensemble on a quarterly basis. World Music Ensemble provides exceptional music offerings from many countries with outstanding musicians. Finally, special thanks goes to the Children's Choir, Good News Singers and JuBellation Ringers who faithfully attend weekly rehearsals to prepare their special music for services and concerts..

I also want to thank those who are cantors and those providing special music for our worship services. These individuals learn additional music on their own, often meeting separately with the organist to prepare for two services on a Sunday morning. We've had both singers and instrumentalists willing to share their musical gifts. I love the variety they offer.

Finally, our tech team of Darryl & Suzie Westmoreland, Ron Hegg, Marian Singletary, and Herb Chin make our worship services and concerts run smoothly with excellent sound production and visual beauty. Thank you, Tech Team. We are appreciative of your service!

I thank God for the gift of leading music at Bethlehem. Mona Goetsch, Director of Music.



The Stephen Ministers of Bethlehem Lutheran Church are lay volunteers who have been trained to provide high-quality, confidential care and support to people who are facing changes in their lives. We provide support to members of the Bethlehem congregation as well as members of the community.

In 2024:

- We had 10 active Stephen Ministers, three who served as Stephen Leaders.
- Our Stephen Ministers made 394 contacts with care receivers and provided 115 hours of care to individual care receivers.
- Our Grief Ministry program provided 38 Stephen Ministry Grief Series books to members of the congregation.
- Our Stephen Ministers met twice monthly for Supervision and Continuing Education. For Continuing Ed, we studied the book *The Gift of Empathy: Helping Others Feel Valued, Cared For, and Understood* by Joel Bretscher and Kenneth C Haugk. With Vicar Keegan we also studied the topics of Spiritual Assessment, End of Life, PTSD Issues, and LGBTQ Care.
- Stephen Ministers conducted Prayer Stations once a month during church services. Stephen Ministers assisted in funeral services and the Comfort at Christmas service.
- Stephen Leaders participated regularly in the Bethlehem Health Ministry team.

Thank you for your continued support of the Stephen Ministry program.

Laure Reynolds

Stephen Ministry Team Coordinator

BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH

MISSION STATEMENT

**The mission of Bethlehem Lutheran Church
is to announce boldly the love of God through Christ.**

We do this because we are:

- *Included through baptism**
- *Nourished by Word and Sacrament**
- *Rooted in the Gospel**

We do this by:

- *Celebrating our faith in worship**
- *Listening and responding to needs and concerns**
- *Including children and youth in all aspects of our ministry**
- *Applying our faith in loving, caring actions in our community and throughout the world**

VISION STATEMENT

We see Worship as a means by which we are continually called and drawn into renewed relationship with God through Christ.

We are called by God through Baptism and reach out through Word and Sacrament-centered worship. We believe that through worship we experience anew the healing power of the Gospel in our lives and God's redeeming love for our broken world. We acknowledge God's abiding grace with prayer, praise and thanksgiving for all that God has done for us, most especially the gift of salvation through God's son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We are sustained and nourished by the Holy Spirit. We encourage our pastors to boldly preach the Gospel, keeping its message alive and meaningful to the diverse needs of our congregation and the larger community of God's people. We celebrate the Eucharist as being the real presence of Christ for all people embodying God's renewing and sustaining love and forgiveness. We value diversity of worship styles, in an environment of openness and acceptance which expresses God's love for people of every age and background.

The spiritual well-being of our members is a responsibility shared by everyone in the congregation. We provide an environment that promotes ongoing spiritual self-examination and maturity. We support each other on our faith journeys, and seek to strengthen everyone facing the challenges life brings. We are a congregation willing to take risks and to act on faith as reconcilers, care-givers and missionaries through a ministry of witness, service and evangelism.

There is a gladness in service, in reaching out to people in need, both in our community and throughout the world. We see outreach as a response to the Gospel, and believe that in touching the lives of others we make known God's love for all people. We see our congregation and our community as interdependent. We invest human and financial resources in our society, and take an active role in addressing unmet community needs.

Christian Education is essential to the life and growth of our congregation. Through education God develops an enriching relationship with us through Jesus Christ. We provide a wide range of educational programs and each person is encouraged to participate in ongoing experiences designed to be meaningful to every age.

We view stewardship as an act of worship which is a natural outgrowth of the Gospel. Stewardship is a biblical imperative, and begins with the recognition that all we have is a gift from a loving God. It involves how we use all the resources God has given us – our lives, our time and our possessions. It includes the money we give that is necessary to meet the financial needs of the congregation, its mission, and social responsibilities throughout the world. But, good stewardship goes well beyond just gifts of money. It recognizes each individual's opportunity and responsibility of daily managing God's gifts of time and talents. Growth in stewardship goes hand in hand with growth in the Gospel as stewardship is a practical expression of an individual's faith.

Our Christian Faith is encouraged through fellowship with one another. We are committed to witnessing joyfully to our Christian faith in ways that will draw others into our caring community. We encourage the formation of small groups to preserve our sense of family. We promote a sense of intimacy that facilitates that healing of brokenness. We assist one another to discover, sustain, and nurture the use of our inherent talents. We seek opportunities to gather in fellowship and are strengthened through our communion with fellow believers. We see ourselves as a center for cultural and community events.

We are called by God to go forward with courage to share the message of the Gospel. We recognize that our lives can be a living illustration of God's love in Christ. It is the privilege of our entire congregation to share the love of God in a broken world. We are willing to experience rejection in order to announce justice, peace and God's love.

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS PAGE

**Please offer any suggestions, comments, or questions that are on your mind.
We will refer them to the appropriate leader or staff person.**

I have a question:

I have a suggestion:

I have a comment:

I have an idea:
